

CONCEPTS

Volume XLIII, No. 3

Northern Illinois Area, LTD. Area 20 Service Letter

Fall 2020

In his last talk, Dr. Bob said A.A.'s Twelve Steps can be summarized by two words, love and service. Both of these words are pretty simple and easy enough to understand, however, when I came to A.A. neither of them had any real presence or practical application in my life.

If you are an alcoholic like I am, your natural default is to be in constant thought of self, driven by fear, and have a big, giant chip on your shoulder. While those things can and do still happen to me, my life looks and feels a lot different than that today.

So, what happened? Well, really two things happened. The first was I had to become broken and desperate enough to ask for help. I did a pretty good job of driving my life into the ground to get to that point. The second thing that happened was I received the help. Sounds logical if not obvious, right?

Well, it didn't seem at all logical to me. You see, the help that was offered seemed to have absolutely nothing to do with what I thought my problem was. In fact, the solution that was offered to me by the folks I met in A.A., particularly the guy that I asked to be my sponsor, seemed to be a "flimsy reed" as Bill writes in our Big Book. My first sponsor, Marty, seemed to always push me into doing something for someone else in A.A. He would ask me to give other guys rides to and from the meeting. When I came to the meeting hoping to corner Marty so he would say something to make me feel better, he would tell me to go talk to someone new and that we could talk later. When I was about a year sober Marty "made" me and another one of his pigeons take a meeting into the state mental hospital in Madison, Wisconsin every Tuesday night. None of these things that he asked me to do felt like they would help me when I was asked to do them.

Today, I believe that's one of the beautiful gifts we get in A.A., the ability to get better in spite of ourselves. In other words, I don't have to understand or believe in the help being offered, I just have to be willing to take it. As I look back at the 32 years I have been sober in A.A., most of the changes in my life occurred without my full understanding. I just became willing enough, generally through pain, to ask for help and then take it, even if I did it begrudgingly. Again, most of that help offered to me was to direct and push me to be helpful to someone else. Being helpful to someone else is really the definition of service.

So to be of service is really the way in which I am able to receive the help that I need. I've heard it said that A.A. is not a self-help program, rather it is a helping-others program. In my experience, beginning to be of service to others made me feel a part of A.A. and allowed me to begin to feel love for other people in A.A. So I learned to serve and then learned to love in A.A.

We are blessed in A.A. to really have an infinite amount of opportunity to be helpful, or be of service, to others. That is, there is infinite amount of help that we can receive through being of service. Service can take many forms and we all have the ability to do it. The fundamental means of service is to give our time and attention to someone else, particularly someone newer in A.A., and we can all do that regardless of our circumstances.

The magic in A.A., as we know, is the ability of one alcoholic to talk to and relate to another. We can all do that. There is also a lot of work that needs to get done to make sure every alcoholic has the opportunity to find A.A. and receive the same gift that we have. Some work needs to get done to keep A.A. intact and to allow our A.A. groups to stay connected with each other. All of that work, or stuff that has to get done, is what we label service work. Whether it's in your own group, in your District, or in our Area, there are jobs that need to get done to help the new alcoholic find A.A., and to help A.A. groups stay connected. In fact, there are open service positions today waiting for someone in A.A. to take so that job can get done.

Again, we are truly lucky in A.A. that we have limitless opportunities to give and receive help. There is plenty of work to do and I seem to need a lot of help! So the next time you talk to your sponsor, you might ask - "am I doing enough to be of service in A.A.?" Or, "what can I do to help?"

Erik L. Alt Area Chair

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Working With Others

I want to thank our Concepts Newsletter team for asking me to write on this important topic. Working with Others- Especially Newcomers in 500 words. First off, I must admit, most of the men that I work with are not newcomers. They are men like me, sober a number of years, who kind of lost their way, their spark for Alcoholics Anonymous, possibly not doing very well with sobriety, and/or life, yet knew that Alcoholics Anonymous had much more to offer.

As for me, I was sober a number of years, suffering from most of the difficulties described in the bedevilments on page 52. I had a Home Group, I was involved in General Service, but it had been a while since I had guided anybody to Recovery through our Big Book. I met a man who years before went through the same thing. This man took me on a journey, guided by our Big Book and his experiences with his journey. And that is exactly what I try to do today, with anybody that asks of me to do so.

I used to believe it was my job as a sponsor to get people sober, and for them to do the same as I was doing. Some were getting it, and some were not. But I always felt like there was something missing. After my new journey into this work, and our Big Book, it seemed my job was to help these people become members of Alcoholics Anonymous and to feel as though they are a member. Page 18 describes what a person could look for as someone to guide them on this journey. So, it then also tells me about how I should be as this guide.

The Chapter, Working with Others, describes the new person as a “prospect”. So, my job is to teach them what A.A. is. We begin, possibly, on our way to their first meeting, letting them know what is going to happen and why. Then as I did with a 3rd Edition on the cover page with the Circle and Triangle, and describing how a member is equally involved in Recovery, Unity and Service, and described what that is and what it might look like.

Get them to meetings (Zoom today), and to call people daily, so they can meet us, and we get to know them, helping them to feel that they belong. Then moving to the current edition, which is what they probably have, we continue to show them who we are, by reading the Preface and Forewords. Then going through the Dr.’s Opinion to discuss and learn what alcoholism is. And how this may look in their lives. Now giving this “prospect” the opportunity to look at themselves, and us to decide if alcoholism is this person’s problem and if they believe we can help them. And if they want to move forward. I try to be as open as possible, letting this person into my life. To show them who I am, and what it is I do to get through life. As we go through the Twelve Steps together, I share with them my journey.

All of this with the purpose to guide this person to carrying this message with still others.

A MEMBER OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

Printed without edits by request of the author

NIA 20

Open Positions

There are currently a number of Area positions that are open. If you or someone you know is interested, please contact the Area Chair, Carmela R at: chairperson@aa-nia.org.



Area Secretary Alternate (2-3 hours per week):

Responsible person with a reasonable period of continuous sobriety. • Computer literate, MS Office applications. (Primarily Outlook, Excel, and Word) • General office background: taking notes, typing, editing, and report writing. Perform all duties as outlined in the Officers Responsibilities section of this document. • At Assemblies and Committee Meetings make available copies of the Area Roster and the District meeting list. • Assist to compile and distribute minutes of Area meetings, including but not limited to, Assemblies and Committee meetings. • Create and maintain recordings of each Area meeting. • Work distribution list • Attend meetings of the N.I.A., Ltd., Board of Directors (Secretary and Alternate Secretary). • Provide Pre-General Service Conference Workshop support.

Answering Service Chair, Archives Alternate, BTG Chair, BTG Alternate, & Grapevine Alternate

Recommended Qualifications • Service as a G.S.R. • Service as a District Service Committee Chair or Alternate or • Service as a District Officer or Alternate. • Familiarity with the A.A. Service Manual, the A.A. Service Structure, and the Twelve Traditions are very helpful.

Responsibilities • Encourage participation in your Area Service Committee comprised of all District Chairpersons and their alternates and other A.A.'s interested in service work. • Attend all N.I.A. Assemblies and Committee meetings each year. Northern Illinois Area 20 Service Manual, version 06/2019 Page 39 of 49 • Attend the Pre-Conference Workshop. • Attend the N.I.A. Spring Assembly Conference. • Attend the Illinois State Conference when N.I.A. hosts the State Conference. • Participate in the Spring and/or State Conference as requested by the Spring or State Conference Committee. • Coordinate regular communications with members of the Area Service Committee. • Be available to attend District meetings upon request. • Be accessible to the Fellowship. • Report on Area Service Committee activities at Area Committee Meetings. Committee Chairs or their Alternates must submit a written report at Assemblies and committee meetings. • Have a working familiarity with the A.A. Service Manual, N.I.A. Service Structure Guidelines, and the Service Committee Workbook. • Hold Workshops on carrying the message through your Service Committee. • Have available a limited supply of Service Committee related Conference Approved literature and/or service pieces from GSO at Assemblies and Committee Meetings. • Chair Assembly Service Committee meetings. • Chair committee meetings at the Pre-Conference Workshop (See Pre-General Service Conference Workshop Guidelines). o Report at the Assembly to include: o Committee activities since the last Assembly. o Discussions at your Committee breakout session. o Progress of activity on applicable Primary Purpose Motions, to include details regarding costs to date. • Share ways to carry the message through your Service Committee at Assemblies and Conferences. • Develop a forum for the discussion of District concerns regarding related service opportunities. • Foster a committee atmosphere among the District Committee Chairs. • Formulate an informed group conscience regarding Area-wide service opportunities and issues with an emphasis on General Service Conference agenda items. • Be a resource and consultant to District Committee Chairs and other volunteers regarding service activities in their communities including the assessment of service opportunities and the development of projects. • Develop guidelines for activities and services within the responsibilities of your Service Committee. • Mentor the Alternate Service Committee Chairperson in order to prepare him or her to become Chairperson in a future rotation.



6 + 3 = 11

Tradition 11 of Alcoholics Anonymous says, "Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films. There are two parts to this tradition (as evidenced by the semi colon) and much has been said about both parts. Today though, I'm going to focus on the latter.

"...we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films."

Succinctly, this means that at the PUBLIC level, we ought never affiliate ourselves with Alcoholics Anonymous, meaning we shouldn't advocate our membership in print form (including last names on reports posted on the web), nor should we go on TV or radio and state that we are members of AA. Of course, the internet and other social media platforms bring up more relevant concerns about anonymity, but that's not what I want to discuss today. Today I write to express my thankfulness about what we CAN do, meaning we can "affiliate" at levels BELOW the public level. So, what does this mean?

Well what we can do is put "membership affiliation" symbols on our body or property. We can wear tee shirts that "affiliate" with AA or conventions and can get tattoos. We can place bumper stickers on our cars AND we can sew a SOBER patch (or a circle and triangle) on our leather motorcycle vests! And for this I am thankful.

Thus, the patch was how I was able to spot Jesse during a recent trip to Sturgis among 500 other people while stranded at a Harley dealer in the desolate plains of Sundance Wyoming! Amid the normal rally activities, the beer tents and other "upbeat" goings on at such an event, I saw a large tattooed "typical" biker, a Native American Indian (who I would later learn was from California) with his "AA" colors clearly visible from across the parking lot. I approached him mentioning that I noticed the patch and soon the introductions began. We had six in our group including my sponsor and his wife, my girlfriend and another couple and he had 3. Soon six became nine, chairs were rearranged and as if by providence the AA circular formation was created with all of us acting "as if" we'd known each other much longer than 10 minutes. The events that had brought us together, both in our struggles with alcoholism as well as the events of the day were remarkably the same, surprise?? On this particular day members of both of our groups had mechanical problems on our bikes that required immediate maintenance and we had all found this safe haven and had lots of time to kill.

It was hot, August Wyoming hot, and we were all feeling a bit restless and irritable because of the delay and were still looking at a 2-hour ride once we were able to get back on the road. It was Jesse that suggested we all "check in". Knowing exactly what he meant we all exchanged glances, nodding our consent then seamlessly opened with a quiet serenity prayer. If there were looks from others among us, I didn't notice. Jesse pulled out his phone, set a 5-minute timer (this must be a thing in CA.) and we were immediately transported into a state of acceptance and calm. As we all "checked in", among the loud roar of motorcycles and boisterous activity (with nary a mask to be seen) it was just like old times, face to face, no COVID-19, just fellowship. In a moment, the annoyances of the day were replaced with a profound serenity, a oneness with God and gratitude that we were all safe and exactly where we were supposed to be. You all know how the rest went and when we closed with the Lord's Prayer we certainly weren't as muffled as when we'd begun, and as if on cue Marcia's bike was done!

Chis D, Area Alternate Delegate

GRAPEVINE CORNER

How do you use the Grapevine? After I read my copy, I pass it on to a newcomer. Our district also orders back issues in bulk to distribute at the jails, treatment centers, hospitals and doctors' offices. Our local library, now open in a COVID safe fashion, currently employs a social worker, and I have provided her with back issues and directories - that reminds me I need to check with her! Tell us how you use the Grapevines in meetings or in your community!

WE'RE SELF-SUPPORTING The AA Grapevine is entirely self-supporting through the sale of the magazine and related items. It receives none of the group contributions sent to the General Service Office. An important part of self-support at all levels (individual, group, district, area) is to subscribe and purchase other materials to assure the Grapevine and La Viña continue to carry the message of Alcoholics Anonymous.

As stated in the AA Service Manual 2018-2020 Edition, Pg. S79 "AA Grapevine Inc.'s goal is to be supported by revenues from the purchase of subscriptions and other content related items. In contrast to G.S.O., where group contributions are applied to support group services, AA Grapevine, Inc., does not accept contributions from individuals or groups. Nor does it accept revenue from ads or membership fees. AA Grapevine, Inc. relies on A.A. groups, committees, and individual members who value Grapevine and La Viña in their recovery and in their Twelfth Step work to purchase subscriptions. "After all," as Bill W. once wrote, "the Grapevine is to be their Voice — their newspaper. I am quite sure they will support it."



" WE'RE CONFERENCE APPROVED Early AA groups adopted the AA Grapevine as the international journal of Alcoholics Anonymous in 1946. The General Service Conference reaffirmed this designation in 1986. EACH ISSUE of Grapevine typically offers between 18 and 20 stories written by members of AA and, on occasion, by one of AA's dedicated friends. The stories are direct and personal, and as varied as the fellowship itself. Grapevine writers come from all walks of life and every generation and geographic area. Each month we offer an ongoing picture of our beloved fellowship! TAKE ME TO YOUR SPONSOR Best Jokes & Cartoons from AA Grapevine Visit us at www.aagrapevine.org
Heard it through the GRAPEVINE.



More Than Just Not Drinking

My only thought when I took my first seat in the rooms of Alcoholic Anonymous was “I have got to stop drinking and stop drinking NOW.” By that time, my drinking had become a series of painful, agonizing, uncomfortable, and difficult experiences for me and for most everyone around me. I had recently “graduated” from a treatment program and while I was there, had learned quite a bit about alcoholism. By the time I was discharged from that program and walked out the door, my mind said “you know what to do” yet in my heart I wasn’t completely convinced I was actually done.



All I knew was drinking. Even at its most awful, my drinking was familiar. When I wasn’t actually drinking, all I thought about was my next drink. If I didn’t have a drink in my hand, I always seemed to have a drink in my head. Since I was a teen, alcohol had both ruled and ruined my life. Sure, there had been times throughout the years when I had given thought to quitting. Usually after some event, situation, or circumstance where alcohol had either taken everything from me, beaten me down, or nearly left me for dead. But given enough time, things would turn around and I would start drinking again, feeling good and full of plans for how to do things better *next time*. Ultimately, there came a point where things did-

n’t turn around, and I didn’t feel better, and that “*next time*” landed me in treatment and fresh out of plans. And into the rooms of A.A.

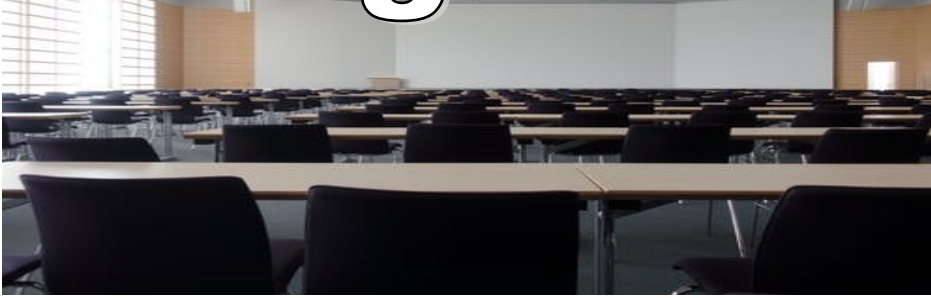
I knew that once I stopped drinking everything would be okay. That was also when I realized I knew a lot about drinking and nothing about sobriety. Turns out I had a lot to learn but fortunately, lots of people to help me learn. And what I learned was there was more to being sober than just not drinking. What I learned was how to be a decent human being. A caring and trusted family member. An honest, hard-working employee. A good friend, a loving wife. I learned this from our steps, traditions, concepts, three legacies, and thirty-six principles. I learned this from watching members of the fellowship live life through its joy and hardship, victory and heartache. I learned this from service to others at all levels in Alcoholics Anonymous and that service naturally spilled over into other areas of my life.

All I wanted when I got here was to stop drinking, and that happened. But if not drinking was ALL I had done, I would not be blessed with the life I have today – which is all I need.

Lisa S.



Delegate's Corner



HOW ARE ALCOHOLICS BEING HELPED BY A.A.

The employees at the General Service Office (GSO) work on “desks”. The Literature desk does the work of the Literature Committee and so on and so forth.

The employees at GSO will work on a “desk” for two years and then they will rotate to a different desk. It is like cross training. They get to know and understand the work that is done at GSO.

At the General Service Conference there are thirteen committees:

1. Agenda Committee
2. Cooperation with the Professional Committee
3. Corrections Committee
4. Finance Committee
5. Grapevine Committee
6. Literature Committee
7. Policy / Admissions Committee
8. Public Information Committee
9. Report and Charter
10. Treatment and Accessibilities
11. Trustees Committee
12. Archives Committee
13. International Conventions – Regional Forums Committee

That being said, there isn't a “DESK” for Bridging the Gap (BTG). We in Area 20 do have a Bridging the Gap Committee. However we don't currently have anyone volunteering to be the Chair or Alternate Chair for this important committee.

At the 70th General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous I was on the Treatment and Accessibilities Committee. When I was reading the material to prepare for the conference, I was surprised that there was so much about Bridging the Gap and Corrections. Then I realized that the Treatment Committee was probably one of the best places to put this information.

Here are a few excerpts from the background material:

The PURPOSE:

“The purpose is to bridge the gap between A.A. members inside a treatment or correctional setting and their first A.A. meeting (s) outside in the home community.”

“Try to take the newly released A.A. member to an A.A. meeting with 24 to 48 hours of their release. It is suggested that the first meeting be viewed as a regular Twelfth Step call and that you take another A.A. member with you. Share your experience, strength and hope with the newly released A.A., just as you would with any other person new to A.A. in your community.”

“It is important that newly released A.A.'s attend their first A.A. meeting as soon as they are released. Our primary purpose is to carry the A.A. message. You are not responsible for the member's attitude or actions in or out of A.A. meetings. It is suggested that you do not loan money or anything of value or become a personal taxi service. Introduce newly released alcoholics to other A.A. members, just as you would any newcomer. We are not to act in any reporting or communication capacity regarding the A.A. member and the justice system.”

“As you know, one of the more “slippery” places in the journey to sobriety is between the door of correctional, therapeutic or treatment settings and the nearest A.A. group or meeting. Some of us can tell you that, even though we heard of A.A. inside one of these settings, we were too fearful to make a meeting in our community once we were released.”

“Thousands of alcoholics are confined in prisons and many have no A.A. meetings at all.”

On August 1, 2020 I attended the NIA 20 Corrections Workshop. I thought that it was great. There were two inmates, still in prison, that were able to share their experience, strength and hope with us on the outside.

For many years I brought a meeting into a county jail. It was very rewarding. But for the grace of God, there go I. I could have been incarcerated but I wasn't.

Just my thoughts on BTG.

In Service,

Marilyn F.



Is A.A. For You

Only you can decide whether you want to give Alcoholics Anonymous a try—whether you think it can help you. We who are in A.A. came because we finally gave up trying to control our drinking. We still hated to admit that we could never drink safely. Then we heard from other A.A. members that we were sick. (We thought so for years!) We found out that many people suffered from the same feelings of guilt and loneliness and hopelessness that we did. We found out that we had these feelings because we had the disease of alcoholism. We decided to try to face up to what alcohol had done to us. There are some of questions we tried to answer *honestly* (www.aa.org, search “Is A.A. for you”). If we answered YES to four or more questions, we were in deep trouble with our drinking. See how you do. Remember, there is no disgrace in facing up to the fact that you have a problem.

What is NIA?

The principal function of Northern Illinois service Area 20 is to be a forum for effective communication between the Groups and the General Service Conference through its Delegate. In addition to counseling its Delegate about the collective Group Conscience of the Fellowship in Northern Illinois, NIA will assist its Districts, Groups and members to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers in a broad variety of ways, including but not restricted to conducting workshops, sharing sessions and seminars in all fields of general service.

NIA Statement on Self-Support

Our Seventh Tradition states that “Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.” Northern Illinois Area 20 wants our fellowship to endure, and be ready for the still-suffering alcoholic to come. NIA makes this possible by taking care of its essential services such as website. The groups and districts in Area 20 fund this website thru their continued contributions and support. For additional information see the A.A. pamphlet regarding self-support.

NIA Statement on Singleness of Purpose

Our Third and Fifth Traditions state that “The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking.” “Each Group has but one primary purpose – to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers. And as a Fellowship we do one thing only: “- share our program of recovery.”



2020 Events

Sep 11-13 Bridging the Gap Weekend Workshop - Rock Island, IL <https://aa-nia.org/wp-content/uploads/btg-2020-flyer.pdf>

Sep 19 Summer Assembly - Hosted by District 22, Elgin, IL <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/64811234567>

Oct 17 Fall Committee Meeting - Hosted by District 40 @ Lord of Life Lutheran Church - 40W605 IL Route 38, Elburn, IL 60119

Oct 24 Big Book Conference - Hosted by District 10 & 12, Grayslake, IL <https://aa-nia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020-big-book.pdf>

Dec 12 Winter Assembly - TBD

For more information or directions to the events, please check the NIA website for details.

Please Note: At this time, all events are subject to be cancelled, postponed, or attended through a virtual format such as Zoom, Skype, etc. Please check the Area Website before attempting to attend an event.

Concepts is published quarterly by the Northern Illinois Area of Alcoholics Anonymous. It is intended as a form of communication between Northern IL Area, Districts, and GSRs. Subscription is free but generally limited to A.A. members within the NIA geographical area. All publication costs are paid by A.A. members through their contributions to NIA. Opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the thinking of Alcoholics Anonymous, NIA or the Editor. Comments, suggestions, subscription requests, and experience, strength and hope, should be directed to the editor: Concepts@aa-nia.org. All A.A. members are encouraged to see Concepts on-line at: <http://www.aa-nia.org>. "CONCEPTS" is a confidential document. It should be used and distributed within the Fellowship.

Send articles for submission to the Concepts Editor by November 14th for the Winter Edition.

