

Trustee Line – Current Issue

January 2019

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Thoughts From The Trustees – Current and Past

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The subjects listed below are themes that have been submitted by other Trustees. You may respond to any of them, or start an entirely new subject

Subjects that receive submissions from at least 13 different people, will trigger an email blast to all the current and past Trustees, signifying a 'Hot Topic Alert' on the Trustee Line.

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1/1/19 – 11:00 AM

Room Key

What is the required clean-time a GA member must have to become responsible for opening a room and having the key.

Glenn N. – Area 2A – British Columbia

Good question about the key issue!

I don't believe Gamblers anonymous has any issues with this matter because this is a matter between the facility and the groups needing a key to open the room up for their meeting. The group may put it in their meeting rules as to when a person can carry keys. Also note that a new meeting person may have under 30 days of abstinence when they start out a new group. I would say have a group conscious decision as how much abstinence should a member have to hold keys and open up the meeting.

Jim G. – Trustee – Area 7C – Oklahoma

1/3/19 – 12:15 PM

August 2016 – Is It That Some Trustees Don't Care About the Guidance Code?

In the spirit of the New Year which often brings about new beginnings, I wanted to revisit a post from the past. The post is from August 2016 Titled "Is It That Some Trustees Don't Care About the Guidance Code?". (please go back and read under Trustee Line Archives)

Given the responses from the Trustees at the time, it would appear that all that responded were in fact in agreement with the interpretation of the Guidance Code.

My questions are simple..

1. What's your interpretation?
2. If you agree, do you think we are too stringent and need to make changes?
3. Do you think changes to our Guidance Code aren't necessary and the rooms/Intergroups have the right to make these changes at the room/intergroup level?
4. If you agree, what happens to those rooms/Intergroups that openly violate the Guidance Code?
5. If you disagree, do you then have the right to disregard portions of the Guidance Code that don't fit in with your beliefs?

Anything else pertaining to this topic you care to share would be appreciated.

Looking forward to your responses and wishing you the happiest and healthiest in the New Year!

Andy R. – Past Trustee, Area 13B – New Jersey

1/12/19 – 2:30 PM

First and foremost, happy new year to everyone!

As a past trustee, and a past Board of Regents member and Chairman, I try to stay connected to the program, in all areas, and on all levels. This includes but is not limited to, making sure I know what the Guidance Code says, since we frequently make changes to it, familiarize myself with literature, and uphold decisions made by the Board of Trustees. Some may ask, why do I need to do that, I'm no longer a Trustee, or for that matter serving on the Board of Regents? However, I am still a G.A. member, and do not consider myself higher or lower than anyone else. I still need to uphold the decisions made by the Guidance Code, or any other piece of Literature for that matter. Personally, I'm not fond of certain changes or updates, but it is my responsibility to continue to uphold the core foundations of our fellowship. There is a process in place, and the only way to see something change is to submit an Agenda Item at a Trustee Meeting, whether I like it or not. It's not up to me to make the rules, as I see fit, just because I think that's the way it should be.

I was recently at a birthday celebration, for my own sponsor, and co-chairing with another person who was a senior member. We had guests in attendance. When we began reading our format, which states that "guests are welcome, but we ask that they listen only, until after the meeting", I was put on the spot by that particular senior member who said, "you're not going to let them share"? My reply was simply, "No, not at this meeting". He was very disappointed and said they, (my sponsor) would not be celebrating again at our meeting location. This was clearly the right decision to make. We don't throw out all the rules just because we're celebrating an anniversary, which makes me think, how many people are actually doing that around the world. I stood firm, and while it may not have been the popular opinion, it was the definitely the right decision to not let guests share at a G.A. meeting.

So, in response to my good friend Andy R.'s questions. I know that there are some parts of the Guidance Code that are too strict, or need to be modified, but until I'm ready to sit down and submit changes, I need to follow it as it stands. I would be willing to be on a committee to work on those changes. An example is using G.A. approved or appropriate literature at meetings. Our Guidance Code states in Article VII – Groups, Section 7: Gamblers Anonymous approved literature is any publication or item that has been approved by the Board of Trustees and is sold or distributed by the International Service Office (I.S.O) and/or any Regional Service Office (R.S.O.), and/or any Intergroup. Foreign language translations of Gamblers Anonymous approved literature are deemed to

be approved if the final product has followed the necessary steps outlined by the Board of Trustees.

I've attended many groups that are still using yellow combo books that are no longer being sold by the I.S.O., dated from 2010, 2013, and so on. If you use the thought process of not using literature that is currently sold, how many groups are "not following the Guidance Code"? Probably more than we could imagine. I know that this would not be feasible, but if we truly wanted every group to adhere to the principles of the Guidance Code, then perhaps the I.S.O. should send out current copies of the Combo Book, or new literature for that matter to all rooms, every time they are updated, to make sure they are in compliance with the Guidance Code. Understanding from a business perspective, the thought of that would not even be possible, so the alternative is to adjust our Guidance Code to say something like "being intentional", since most groups that have the combo book and are using it, are truly "trying" to be in compliance, even though the I.S.O., no longer sells that version.

The fellowship belongs to the members of Gamblers Anonymous, who are represented by the Trustees. I believe that Intergroups and Meetings DO NOT have the right make changes at that level, as it bypasses every process we have in place. I've seen many current and past trustees, as well as senior members try and "interpret" their version of what the Guidance Code states, and usually to their benefit. I once attended a meeting with (3) current trustees, which was my home meeting, who decided to interpret outside literature, to allow someone to read from their phone and/or journal. My comments were brief and simple to them. I said, "I'm very disappointed in you, as a trustee, it's your responsibility to uphold the Guidance Code, not try and interpret what it really says". As an addict, I want to look for loopholes, anything that will benefit me.

Lastly, there are definite repercussions for rooms that don't abide by the Guidance Code, and continue to use "non approved" literature, or violate in other ways. They can be removed from the meeting directory, and the I.S.O. website, and will not be considered a G.A. meeting. This is always the recourse of what can happen, at the very least. It's been my experience, that my duty as a past trustee, current trustee, or B.O.R. member, is to notify the rooms of what can happen, should they wish to go against decisions of the Board of Trustees, and then to notify my local trustee's. It perplexes me that other past trustees or trusted servants just stay quiet in those situations. It comes down to this, do I care more about the G.A. fellowship, which has saved my life, or what other people think of me?

As I'm writing this, how do you differentiate between a room that doesn't use up to date combo books (which is not complying with the Guidance Code), and a room that is displaying outside literature, or a room that is using a piece of literature that was sold in the year 2000. Using these examples, it appears that we all start "interpreting" what is a violation and what isn't. Perhaps we need to look at our Guidance Code, and see what we can do to fix this problem.

I believe my integrity, and service to G.A. has always been from the heart, and never for personal gain or acknowledgement. Anytime I am putting myself ahead of the program, I need to take a step back and reconsider my actions. Thank you Andy for re-posting this on the Trustee Line, and allowing me to share some thoughts.

Steve F.
Grateful recovering compulsive gambler
Past Trustee, Area 1 – California

1/17/19 – 12:15 PM

Steve,

It's good to see you back at the keyboard with your thoughts on 'things'. Let me insert my 2 cents on some of the things you wrote.

Regarding the anniversary celebration. You quoted your room's format. As long as items in that format don't violate the Guidance Code or past decisions of the Board of Trustees, then the group conscience is what happens in the room. A hard dose of Unity Step 4. I question why you were the one put on the spot, rather than how that complaining member could justify violating group conscience? If that person wants to pout and act like a toddler by not celebrating in that room, then I think it is his problem, not yours.

Your issue about outdated approved literature is just a bridge too far. The Board of Trustees doesn't invalidate older literature when a newer version comes out. Of course we want all groups to use the most current literature, to utilize all the approved changes, but the older books were sold by ISO. In the case of Combo books, we approved the initial Combo Book and subsequent issues are updates to existing approved items. Bill B. from Area 15, New York, once sent me a Combo Book from 1988, the year I came into GA. Are you actually saying that is not GA-Approved literature? This sounds like you are trying to make a distinction with a difference, when there is none. What happens when a room just doesn't have the money to buy new literature? Are you saying that using an older version is grounds for removing that room as a recognized GA meeting, because they are not using GA approved material? We have had Board of Trustees approval removed from other older publications. Even though those items had the GA seal, there was a specific order to remove their approval.

Bravo to your steadfast conviction regarding the Trustees in your area attempting to legislate decisions that conflict with the Guidance Code or past decisions of the Trustees. Being disappointed with them and verbalizing that may not be enough, unless their abidance to the Guidance Code is heard, understood and changes the attitudes of those Trustees involved. If things like that persist without correction, you have the option to move to having the offending Trustees removed. If they are not going to do the job and their decisions affect GA as a whole, then institute the proper remedies, which is the right of every member of GA.

Your problem with intransigent past Trustees is symptomatic of much of what happens in our Fellowship. I've witnessed this in many areas of my travels to different states and countries. People who become past Trustees, generally have less intensity about what can and cannot be done within the confines of our Guidance Code and past Trustee decisions. I personally have grown to being accustomed to many such members just being in attendance without the desire to maintain the vigil and appropriate awareness of what much be done. It is a fact of life in GA that we can't expect others to have the same level of interest and intensity that you and others share.

Unfortunately, it's often times a problem with current Trustees who would rather sidestep confrontations in order to help ensure their re-election as Trustees.

David M. – Area 12
New Jersey

1/3/19 – 9:15 PM

Definition of Gambling

Some discussion took place, at the last Trustee Meeting, about whether a National Park entry thing was gambling. that made me start to think about the definition of Gambling, as presented in the Combo Book.

Current Version: Gambling, for the compulsive gambler is defined as follows: Any betting or wagering, for self or others, whether for money or not, no matter how slight or insignificant, where the outcome is uncertain or depends upon chance or "skill" constitutes gambling.

I wanted to toss around an idea on the trustee line, before making a submission to the agenda. Perhaps this definition could use slight tweaking. Maybe even just one word:

Intentional

Gambling is an intentional action. A purchase of a scratch ticket, playing a slot at a casino, buying bingo cards, entering the office sport pool, these are intentional actions. The gambler is choosing to make these bets and wagers, whether for money or not, some of the actions may even be slight or insignificant, but the idea is the same, these are actions with the intention to get the fix or high, the adrenaline pumping.

Under the current definition, one might argue driving a car is gambling, as you are relying on your skill not to get into an accident. Yes that is a stretch, but i think using the word intentional would take a lot of gray area out of the equation and not have need for discussions about trying to purchase National Park Tickets, where there is no intention to gamble.

I would propose the definition of gambling, in the Combo Book, be rewritten as:

Gambling, for the compulsive gambler is defined as follows: Any intentional betting or wagering, for self or others, whether for money or not, no matter how slight or insignificant, where the outcome is uncertain or depends upon chance or “skill” constitutes gambling.

Please give me some thoughts.

Mike R. – Area 6A – North/Central Florida

1/7/19 – 11:15 AM

I agree with Mike. I think adding the word “intentional” would allow for a “normal way of thinking and living”. Nobody besides compulsive gamblers would think entering a lottery for a park permit is gambling. Another thing that this would “allow” is entering a “lottery” for a chance to buy tickets to a show. For some people the only way to afford certain shows is buy entering a drawing for the option to purchase \$10 or \$20 tickets. Many cannot afford the \$500 per ticket to see a “hot” Broadway show such as Hamilton.

Stuart B – Area 14 – Long Island, NY

1/8/19 – 10:30 AM

The definition of gambling is always an interesting topic of conversation. The real problem with our fellowship’s current definition of gambling is that the actual meaning of the phrase “betting or wagering” is NEVER addressed, only the series of qualifiers that follow. Because of this, many of our members spend an inordinate amount of time wondering whether simple acts of daily living may really be gambling in disguise while at the same time ignoring obvious acts of gambling that might be right under their noses.

According to the Learners Dictionary from Merriam Webster, a bet is defined as “...an agreement in which people try to guess what will happen and the person who guesses wrong has to GIVE SOMETHING (such as money) to the person who guesses right...”. According to The Free Dictionary by Farlex, a bet is defined as “...an agreement usually between two parties that the one who has made an incorrect prediction about an uncertain outcome will FORFEIT SOMETHING stipulated to the other; a wager...”. While I don’t endorse the concept of any type of true BET for a compulsive gambler, I do think some in the fellowship construe as “gambling” certain activities that go well against the definitions of betting listed above. For example, organizations with limited resources such as national parks, and entertainment and sports ticket offices often institute “lotteries” (I wish they wouldn’t call them that) in in order to distribute these resources. These are not lotteries in the sense that

anything is going to be forfeited by the person who is unsuccessful; they are more or less refundable down payments for these limited resources. Nothing is given up or forfeited if the person is unsuccessful. IMHO, throwing the word “intentional” into the mix simply confuses the issue more than it is already confused.

Jack R. – Area 1A – California

1/10/19 – 3:50 PM

My thoughts on adding the word, intentional, to the definition of gambling, is, its not necessary. The definition has been the same for me for the last 21 years, I don't need or want wiggle room to reinterpret the meaning. I know how my mind works, as a past gambler, give me an inch and I am going to take the whole field. I have been learning how not to overthink things, twist and turn them to my liking. Simply put if something comes in front of me, I know, what is and is not gambling. If I have to really look at an issue its because I am trying to make it not gambling, intentional adds an unneeded option. I have seen issues come to rooms that have no place being there, that's what we have sponsors for, to run it by them if I am troubled. There is absolutely no reason to change the definition. Can you honestly say, if my friend gives me a ride and they decide to stop at the casino for a little gambling and I gamble, I had no intention of gambling but my friend drove me there so it wasn't my fault.

Slippery slope, leave it be.

Betty S. – Past Trustee – Area 12 – Louisiana

1/17/19 – 11:30 AM

Although there always seems to be significant chatter about tweaking the definition of gambling, it is somewhat of a monolith in our Fellowship. I sometimes believe it would be easier to completely rewrite one of the Recovery Steps than change the definition of gambling.

In looking back at numerous attempts to change the definition over the history of GA, there have been too many attempts to reshape the definition to someone's idea of how to excuse something that is clearly gambling. For me, the definition is a wake-up call for those who would use it as a roadmap by members to get around taking responsibility for actually gambling.

Take this previous attempt, for an example. “Gambling for the compulsive gambler is defined as follows: Any betting or wagering for self or others, whether for money or not, no matter how slight or insignificant, where the outcome is uncertain or depends upon chance or skill, or any actions that involve the possibility of winning or acceptance of any prizes or money, constitutes gambling.

The item failed 4 to 86 and was put forth by someone with a lot of time in program. Essentially, this person thought that you can make a bet or wager in the form of an entry fee for an event, but as long as you didn't accept any prizes or money, it wouldn't be gambling. I know I was born at night, but it wasn't last night.

Here is the harsh reality of the definition. The first 4 words are the essence of the definition. "Any betting or wagering..." the rest of the 41 words are qualifying conditions to help people with a list of situations what would further ensure a gambling situation. These words are not meant to be taken out of sequence and context for others to weaponize against members who are unsure if they are gambling. That means being involved is an outcome that is uncertain is not gambling. It also means making a decision involving chance or skill, in and of itself does not mean you are gambling. The question that needs to be asked first is, "Did you make a bet or a wager?"

To insert the word 'intentional' is about not taking responsibility for one's actions. We are told to be ever vigilant. Gambling is gambling, we don't have shades or degrees of how severe it is. All actions of gambling are a choice. If we want to excuse ourselves or others, then we cross the line of hypocrisy and create more victims in the Fellowship. If gambling is by one's own admission and the member chooses to put excluding conditions on their 'unintentional' gambling, then we make a mockery of recovery and all that we stand for. If someone wants to gamble and say they would caught off guard and that it was not intentional, then that's going to be their demon that they have to deal with. What are we worried about? Is abstinence more of a priority that recovery? This discussion sounds like those who gamble don't want to give up their time because their gambling situation wasn't really significant.

As a closing statement, I ask everything to answer these 2 questions. Is an unintentional bet or wager simply not a bet? Is an unintentional bet or wager not a bet unless you are a compulsive gambler?

David M. – Area 12
New Jersey

1/16/19 – 2:20 PM

Online Meetings

Has any inter-group set up an on-line meeting? We are thinking of doing this and are looking for experience and advice to help us think about this and plan ahead.

Terry D. – Area 3C – Nevada