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Trustee Line for March 2015

A PDF version of this issue to distribute to your rooms, or to print out for easier reading, will be available after 3/31/15.

Thoughts From The Trustees - Current and Past

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

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Outside Issues

3/1/15 - 12:01 AM

A discussion at our Intergroup last month regarding the proliferation of the 'Self-Exclusion' provision in the GA rooms, yielded some rather disturbing responses. It would appear that Unity Step 10 is being ignored by 2 major veins of thinking. The first one is – If it helps just one person, then it's worth it. The second is from GA members who need to see something in writing before they stop doing something.

There is an item on the Cherry Hill agenda to discuss this exact thing. Hopefully, what will become clear is that GA rooms are being dominated by the 'long-timers' who do not pay attention to the Guidance Code and group conscience, if they even allow it.

When we are in the rooms, we can't give comments to people similar to these:
 1) - You're never going to make it in this program unless you put yourself on the Self-Exclusion list
 2) - You need a therapist because you don't have your head on straight
 3) - There's no hope for you because you continue to go back to the bet. You need to check yourself into a rehab.

I'm sure there are many more wonderful non-GA statements made to members who are new and/or struggling with the urge to gamble. Obviously, we can't help what the members say in their therapies, but the overt pushing of non-GA services, even though they may seem to make sense to some, is not at all appropriate and doesn't belong in the room. If this is not stopped, then we spawn a new generation of GA members who think all this is ok, because someone with 'X' number of years said it to them or others.

Time and time again, we are told to stop trying to find shortcuts in the program and just do what is part of our Fellowship. Using these outside issues in the room, especially from members who should know better is just about taking back one's will. Is GA now a program of 'do whatever you think is right'?

David M. – Area 12, New Jersey

3/2/15 - 9:50 AM

Dear David:

The items included in your post, unfortunately, are not the only statements made ignorantly in GA meetings. One classic is: Unless your spouse attends Gamanon, you have no chance of succeeding in the program. There are those who mean well, but miss the point of our program being based on "self-help". God bless all those who help compulsive gamblers outside of the program.

Doctor Robert Custer was a pioneer in the treatment of compulsive gamblers throughout his years working in the Veterans Administration. He cautioned everyone to keep in mind that GA is the first place and the primary place for recovery to take place.

Our fellowship is a miracle taking place daily in our lives.

Vinny B. - Past Trustee, Area 12 - New Jersey

3/5/15 - 8:34 AM

This topic falls right in line with the promotion versus attraction statement in our unity steps. If a chronic relapser is told they 'must' self-exclude' or use any outside resource in order to recover - that's an example of promotion. On the other hand, if a member with long term abstinence tells their story of self-exclusion and how it finally prevented them from repeated relapse - that's an example of attraction.

Before anyone goes off on a tangent, I know that Unity Step 11 is for our public relations policy, and not internal dialog such as this. But it is the same principle, we cannot tell someone they must come to GA, we can only share our experience and they will seek us out if they are attracted by the message they hear in our personal stories.

Back to my first paragraph, the first example is trying to promote one person's view of what must be done to attain long term abstinence. It is a judgment that one person knows exactly what the other person needs. But what works for me may not work for another person, I cannot tell anyone what they "must" do for their recovery.

In my second example, the member with some time is telling the story of what worked for their own recovery. If the relapser hears something in that member's story that they can relate to or identify with, they may explore self-exclusion as an option.

The same logic applies to outside therapists or organizations that help compulsive gamblers. If I hear someone in a meeting talk about their therapist or treatment center and refer to them by name, after the meeting I pull the member aside and ask them to not identify them by name. I point out the unity steps that support this policy.

I personally feel it is acceptable to talk about the things that help you recover, but at no time identify any outside resource by name. GA is the best opportunity that a compulsive gambler has to recover, but I do not think for a minute that it is the only way or that it cannot be augmented successfully with outside help.

Finally, self-exclusion is an outside issue. Therefore, in the spirit of Unity step 10, GA should have no opinion on this issue. So I would hope that there would be no formal vote on this topic or mandate coming from the Board of Trustees discussion, but I do look forward to hearing member's personal experience on the topic.

Paul S. - Area 17, Connecticut, Current Trustee

3/13/15 - 8:17 PM

On the subject of self exclusion, I'm torn. On the one hand, GA has no written literature demanding this be part of our program of recovery but, on the other, can we deny that it is a wise and prudent act for most?

My story: at the time of my first coming into GA, one of my most dominant character defects was (and I still fight it today) " tell me not to do something, I'm going to do it! ". With this self awareness and the knowledge that I would have to go to the gambling venue to do it, I chose not to self- exclude. And though I have not had a relapse, I do believe, now, that it was risky behavior!

Suggesting self-exclusion along with deleting gaming programs and games from our electronic devices, changing our routes and hundreds of other things that will help the new GA members abstain from gambling as they explore the path to recovery is definitely the job of our Trusted Servants and Sponsors but needs to be just that; suggestion!

And Groups Are Flourishing Throughout The World

3/6/15 - 3:00 PM

A number of things have happened over the last 2 months in this Fellowship that have caused me to scratch my head and wonder how we survive. First of all, the topic comes from the Combo Book, the last 7 words on page 1. My opinion is that this statement is anything but the truth.

Look around you. Gambling is the only thing flourishing, not our Fellowship. In the last 10 years, think about how many gambling venues have been legalized and how many new locations have sprouted up, like weeds on the front lawn. Contrast that with how many new people have come into the Fellowship. Yes, the first thought is that we are failing with our Unity Step 5. No doubt that is true, but I'm going after something much more insidious. I'm asking everyone to look at the apathy that has more power than anything I've witnessed in recovery. I'm also asking everyone to look at how this Fellowship has blossomed with members who don't abide by the Guidance Code and all decisions of the Board of Trustees, and strangely enough defend their actions.

Why don't I start with the unfilled Trustee positions in the US and Canadian areas. 37% of the areas have either not filled their Trustee positions or are not complete with filling in the positions allocated to the areas. 16% of the areas don't have any representation at all. What's that about? Yes, apathy. I'm not talking about sending everyone to the conferences and funding all of that. It's about just having members in the position to represent the area(s).

We've spent the last 10+ years in the BOT meetings trying to push into the international markets. I've always maintained that we are doing a disservice to these countries because we lack the infrastructure to support this move. To this day, little has changed. No disrespect intended toward the International Relations Committee. Now the international Trustee component represents an even bigger problem. 55% of the areas have either not filled their Trustee positions or are not complete with filling in the positions allocated to the areas. 36% of the areas don't have any representation at all. What's that about? Yes, apathy. We also make no financial demands on these areas for their Trustees to attend the Trustee meetings, because they are allowed to post absentee ballots that actually count as attendance.

Intergroups are generally staging grounds for people who unleash their character defects. Those who create the drama and controversies are first in line for these shows and make others wonder if these people ever heard of GA. People who rebut them with facts, are discredited and accused of creating disunity. Seldom do the people who create the issues ever acknowledge the errors of their ways. Spectators in the room quickly question why they even came to the meeting. This is the best way to assure that any positive results of an Intergroup meeting, never get out to the individual rooms, because fewer and fewer people are attending Intergroups because of the theatrics.

Moving inward a bit, rooms are still being dominated by individual members who chair every meeting and don't let the members of the room have their opportunity to chair. I've been to rooms where only 1 person gets to give comments every week and he also is the permanent chair for the room. Others have one person dictating what happens in the room, without a shred of group conscience being considered. Let's look at all this and more, and how low our retention rate is for new members. Carrying the message is great, but let's not forget what is in the Red Book, about how the suffering compulsive gambler may be sitting right next to us. What are we doing as members in the room? How many rooms use non-GA approved literature, in complete defiance of the Guidance Code? How many times has the opposing argument incorporated one or more of these pearls of wisdom.. "Who cares?" or "If it helps just one person..." or "We've been doing this for years, why is it suddenly a problem?" or "Who is it really hurting – where's the pain?". The list goes on.

As my time in this program expands, I am seeing and hearing more bizarre things about what is happening to this Fellowship. I maintain that we are allowing members to take liberties that directly defy all that the Fellowship stands for. Liberties that dilute the effectiveness of the program. Rooms that were we to attend, we would ask ourselves if it was actually a GA room. Apathy acts like a corrosive acid, eating away the foundations of what Gamblers Anonymous really is about. Get involved and be of service. These are words that are empty for most even though they are generally read at every meeting from page 17 of the Combo Book.

Members are constantly dying and a great percentage of them were Lifeliners. We are not increasing the new Lifeliners on a scale big enough to fund the

efforts and activities of this Fellowship. All of us are not doing enough, and enough of the right things, not what we think we should be doing. It has to be the GA way or the highway. As a result of what I have written about in this posting, plus a lot more, this Fellowship is NOT flourishing around the world, contrary to what was written in the Combo book decades ago. To say that GA is flourishing with any level of conviction is hypocritical. Gamblers Anonymous is crumbling beneath our feet.

To close, I am reminded of someone from my area whose pat answer to assertions such as I have made in this posting, is to say... "Gamblers Anonymous was here before (what ever the problem is) and will be here after (the same problem)." Saying that doesn't make it true. Maybe we should figure out how to do a Recovery Step 4 for the Fellowship, from top to bottom? This is the part where all you optimists who are offended by my posting, get a chance to set the record straight. I'm most interested in how others present this rosy scenario. Saying that we have to take a negative and make it into a positive is the Pollyanna approach. Who among us all, are going to stop wearing the rose-colored glasses and actually make a difference regarding the real problems we face in the Fellowship? I await the thoughts of those who wish to step up and really make a difference, rather than pontificate about all the things we should do. Let's get some motivated people, with some solid plans to change all this, and as Larry the cable guy says... "Git er done".

David M. – Area 12, Jew Jersey

3/7/15 - 5:55 PM

David:

When I first read your post, my first thought (and I can say this because I love you as a brother) was that you had lost your mind. You were clearly overreacting. Our program could not possibly be in that much trouble. However, after attending a meeting last night that I used to go to regularly and have not been to in several years, I am just as concerned as you are about the health of our program, maybe even more so...

I walked into the meeting and I did not recognize most of the people. A lot of the old regulars were gone. There were so many new people who were obviously suffering, it was overwhelming. What the heck had happened, I asked myself? I know the guys who run the meeting and they are wonderful people so I cannot blame them personally and I won't. We are all in this together and I refuse to point fingers. But it really struck me that something was terribly wrong. There was a sense that no one was in charge and that everyone was more or less on their own when it came to recovery. There was a strong lack of structure in the meeting. There was a kind of "do what makes you feel better and it will all work out" attitude.

In my experience, this attitude does not work. I have learned over the years that we as compulsive gamblers, need bright lines. A lot of people think that anything that might potentially help even one suffering compulsive gambler is acceptable in a GA room. Unfortunately that is just true. Honestly I wish it were true and that we could all be counted on to always do the right thing, but it just doesn't work that way. There has to be bright lines. Sitting there with all of those suffering compulsive gamblers who are not getting what I got when I came into the program 20 years ago, made me sick. I am not talking about "tough love". I am just talking about adherence to certain rules so that the meeting runs smoothly and that recovery can take place in a safe, nurturing environment.

For example, in our area, a local private therapist (non GA member) is putting on a retreat for women compulsive gamblers. I don't have a problem with that, but she has asked some of her patients (current female GA members) to distribute flyers to the other women in the GA rooms after the meeting is over. Unfortunately I think there has been some miscommunication about what that means because some flyers are being distributed when people are still in the physical room even though the meeting is technically over. It now appears that some newer members think that this is a GA sponsored event. I have had to explain to several women that it has nothing to do with GA, and that there is a good reason why GA does not endorse or sponsor events run by therapists. We just don't have the time or energy to review all of the credentials of all of the therapists who might put on retreats for women gamblers, and then have to debate the merits with other GA members and if we approve (after hours and hours of debate -yes, I was a trustee at one time) we allow the flyer to be distributed. Or worse, we just let anyone distribute whatever they want without doing any investigation at all and then later find out that the "therapist" was really someone from the gaming industry fishing for new customers.

Instead we have a simple solution - no flyers in the room about non-GA events.

Thank you for your post and for all your hard work as a trustee.

Your GA sister,
Mary S. - Area 12, New Jersey

3/7/15 - 6:48 PM

Tampering with the 12 steps and then deviating from those tampered 12 steps impeded GA in my humble opinion.

Joe T. - Area 2, Northern CA

Unity? Where Did It Go?

3/14/15 - 12:59 PM

Dear Brothers and Sisters

It has taken much thought and consideration to decide to write this letter of thoughts to the Trustee Line. See I am one who feels the Trustee Line is nothing more than a place for Pontification of the Administrator. How can anyone person have so much to say on every letter placed on the Trustee Line? Many people fear putting something on here because they don't want to have to read the caustic comments that are then posted.

So lets start with the premise I hope we all adhere too...."The primary purpose of Gamblers Anonymous is to help the Compulsive Gambler who still suffers" We have no real other purpose in recovery. Do we?

If we believe that premise then why do we do so much to impede the recovery of others. We have bogged ourselves down with rules and procedures and spend more time arguing about them then carrying the message of hope to the Compulsive Gambler.

I always felt when I was the Chairman of the Board of Trustees and the Chairman of the Board of Regents my job was to build bridges to help people in their recovery. Do the right thing be willing to take the harder right when faced with tough decisions.

This brings me to my first issue.

In Gamblers Anonymous anyone can start a group meeting. They don't even have to have abstained from gambling to start a meeting. Yet we have a Committee who determines who can start a phone meeting. Where does this make any sense? In Northern Calif a member started a phone meeting and he starts it out by saying the meeting is not an approved G.A. meeting. What it really has become is a place for people to recover.

That being said, the approved G.A. phone meeting to me is nothing more than a place for some leaders to again do nothing but pontificate and comment in everything someone says, Wow if so few people have all the answers we don't need meetings just the ability to call those individuals and have them solve all your problems.

Anyone should have the right to have a phone meeting without having to have approval from any committee or every room in G.A. should have to run their meetings exactly the same way with no deviation. Makes sense to me. What is our Primary Purpose again? Oh yes, To help the compulsive Gambler who still suffers.

There was recently a BOT meeting help where there was not a conference. I feel it is the duty of the Chairman to contact areas and ask them to host a conference, I did it many times and guess what it was great for their unity. But if you follow that premise you need a Chairperson who really wants to do their job, take on the responsibility of what a bridge builder does and not be a wall maker.

I had a conversation at one time with the Chairman when I decided to step down for the second time as Chairman and told him I would support him but on of the things I felt was lacking was that he did not take the time at a Conference to stand up and than all the people who worked to hard to put the conference together. I realize the Chairman had never put any large event together in GA and maybe did not realize just how much work it takes. It also give the members a chance to see and meet the Chairman. Well one time since he became Chairman in Florida did he stand up and say anything about the committee and I feel it was only because his friend was the committee chair.

So what is the real reason for this letter? I feel our Unity is becoming more fractured by all these rules and regulations that are voted in. The largest companies in America are run by Roberts Rules of Order and maybe it is time to get back to the basics of Helping the Compulsive Gambler who still suffers. Bring

people back together. The Chairman should be constantly in contact with areas asking them to bid conferences, giving them encouragement and assistance. Leaders do the right things even when nobody is looking. They key in that phrase is leaders.

As we go to Cherry Hill it will be time for election of the Chair and Co-Chairs and instead of complaining about the things they don't do like happens with congress and the senate I think it is time to elect a slate of officers who understand the big picture.

The primary purpose of Gamblers Anonymous is to help the compulsive gambler who still suffers.

As many who know me, I don't write things very often but when I see a program I love spiraling out of control at the hands of a few people it is time for us to step up and make some changes. Changes in leadership will help make changes in helping not hindering the Compulsive Gambler who still suffers.

Nothing changes if nothing changes.

In peace and serenity;

Tom M - Area 2, Northern California
Past Trustee
Past Chairman of the Board of Trustees
Past Chairman of the Board of Regents
Most of all a member of GA who cares

3/14/15 - 5:51 PM

Tom,

I don't believe we've met. I'm a little perplexed about a topic called Unity that begins with personal attack, continues with more personality issues and electioneering and ends with a seemingly egotistical listing of your personal achievements.

I'm a relatively new Trustee and I fear that that is exactly how your posting would look to a new member, exactly the people who, by your admission, deserve better from those of us that should know better.

I can safely say this to you, the way things used to be done is not where we should be heading, it is the way things are being done and improved, most importantly transparency and accountability, that is the future of this fellowship.

I have no doubt that you have given great service to this fellowship, but I am saying clearly here that I see none of the unity program in your post.

The guidance code I read says that the sole primary purpose of the fellowship is to carry "its" message to the compulsive gambler that still suffers, so the suggestion that any one or two people can come along and wing it, spreading any old message that comes to mind and call that "The message of gamblers anonymous" well : I'm sure when you see that written in black and white you'll agree how ridiculous that would be.

I'm looking forward to your future posts Tom, I know you have a lot more to offer this fellowship.

Odie. B. - Area 36 Trustee, Ireland S - East

3/14/15 - 7:03 PM

Tom,

First let me say I agree wholeheartedly about bringing our Fellowship back together. I also understand where you are coming from in the statements you make about the Chair needing to be a "bridge builder". And yes, our primary purpose is to help the compulsive gambler who still suffers. However, we need to do it together. We can't have individuals putting their own "spin" on things that were passed by the Board of Trustees. There are those out there who say we have too many rules. This may be true. But each and every one of them was passed by the BOT. And I've learned long ago in this Fellowship that group conscience rules the day. In fact Unity Step 1 states that group conscience is the Ultimate authority. I'm good with that. I hope you are as well. If someone doesn't like what is out there, then that person can come before the BOT and have it changed or even deleted from our literature. To substitute our own ideas as to how something is done without a group vote by the BOT is tantamount to disunity. I will never allow myself to substitute my way for what a group elected by the individuals of the Fellowship have to say about a subject.

That brings me to my second point. The phone meeting. As chair of the

Telephone Conference Committee, the "rules" as you say, were put into place to protect our Fellowship, not to "pontificate and comment in everything someone says", as you put it. To that end, as a committee of the BOT, we felt it important that admins have the same abstinence as anyone who can serve on a BOT committee, that being 2 years. At the time the procedures for phone meetings passed, I'm not sure if you were present, but a rationale was given for everything that was passed by the BOT. These meetings are not like physical meetings, therefore the need for different rules and procedures. For instance, the need for 5 administrators. The committee chose that number because we wanted to be sure the lines were manned that night. If only one or two people ran the meeting, if they were unable to be there for whatever reason, the meeting would not take place. I think that's worse for our membership than having people available to run the meeting. I can go on and on with everything that was passed if you would like. Also, we protect the anonymity of our members as best as possible. That's why we insist meetings can't be recorded, and insist that if members need assistance between meetings they submit their request to a secure email address. Again, I can go on and on. We have to respect the anonymity of those calling in. Our goal was to simulate, as best as possible, what one would encounter at a physical meeting. And I don't know of any physical meeting that records the meetings. Let's not forget the bigger picture here. Once 5 people come together and have the training on the platform, they can start their own approved conference call meeting without interference from the committee as long as they follow what the BOT approved. This means that they can have whatever type of meeting they want. From a comment meeting, a step meeting, or anything else they may deem appropriate. This committee doesn't care, as long as, again, the procedures put forth by the BOT are met.

One thing I will also agree with is the need for unity. But the way to achieve unity isn't by doing things our own way. But by the way the BOT has passed and will continue to do so in the future.

Pete K. - Area 13B, South Jersey

3/14/15 - 7:57 PM

Dear Odie and Pete,

Everyone is entitled to their opinions. Odie, no, you don't know me and I was not at all trying to show my accomplishments merely showing I have some knowledge of this program. How it started and how now it is diminishing. More rooms are closing more people leaving, retention is not at a good level. How come other programs have better retention than G.A.? Possibly because they try harder to carry the message of hope to those afflicted.

I will continue on my journey to assist the compulsive gambler who still suffers. If that means calling them on the phone everyday. What I do know is that the Unity in this program is suffering and while I understand Pete's comment about the Board Passing all the rules, I also understand that all of us at times have made mistake and many times in business you learn to go back to the basics.

The basic premise is to help the Compulsive Gambler who still suffers and while you are entitled to your view on how that should be done so is everyone else.

In Peace and Serenity,

Tom M. - Area 2, Northern California

3/15/15 - 12:17 AM

Tom, I agree with you 100% the problem also has been growing for years. I served as a Trustee several years until I just got tired of all the BS. We have meetings in area 6C that have never even had a Trustee in attendance. I always attended the meetings in my area. The BOT meetings for the past several years have been more concerned with procedural rules and adding Guidance Code rules and regulations.

I have always believed that helping a person suffering to discover a better way of life is more important than treating adults like children in grade school. Suggestions are more appreciated when a dose of castor oil is not forced down your throat. If I were entering GA today I would never come back.

Tom thanks for your service those were the best years I ever served on the BOT.

Thank You

Gary G. - Area 6C, North Carolina/South Carolina

3/15/15 - 12:30 PM

C'mon guys, are we seriously going to have a stream of good old buddies from

past service using a topic called "Unity" to take Nod, Nod, Wink, Wink, potshots that only they really understand? On a topic called unity? Really?

Is that the past we should return to?

All to try and "Convince" the vulnerable new trustees how good the old days, the 2003's where if Roberts rules were not sufficient we used "Tom's rules" (Read the minutes from Toronto 2003, bottom of the first page)

I think if that's what's going on here, or about to go on it will be a serious mis-judgement of the current Trustees who, to my mind, have shown they understand the real meaning of "Unity" and are not about to be dragged back to the days of fear, secrecy, anarchy and cow-towing to outside influences, no sirs, the current process where the members decide what happens will prevail and the old days of personalities ganging up to hold the members to ransom will surely be left where it belongs.

Note the minutes from the 1970's where the executive board and members worried about poor retention. Efforts to pin that problem on today's executive board are ridiculous and I have no doubt that the current trustees will not fall for this Dis - unifying carry on.

This blatant personality driven carry on and the refusal of the author of this topic to submit to the ultimate authority is the furthest approach from unity you could wish for.

C'mon guys, get on the unity program, cut the funny business, the transparency and accountability of the way things are done today will never be replaced by the good old boys attitude, however well meaning it may be, it's just plain misguided.

Point of astonishment.

Odie B. - Trustee Area 36, Ireland S -East

3/15/15 - 5:15 PM

Hi Odie,

We have met and talked and I know you are from Ireland but I am not sure Unity has the same meaning in Ireland as it does in the U.S.A. Unity to me is all united with a common goal. Unfortunately on GA we have 2 factions. One fraction that believes we must follow the Guidance Code word for word and that we need lots of rules and over cite committees. When will we have an Over cite committee to oversee the over cite committees? The other fraction believes we have too many rules and regulations. With these big differences things are not working. There is disunity and GA is not working and not growing. Too many are not following our Principles before Personalities. What do companies weather profit or non-profit do when things aren't working? They look for new leadership. In our case leaders that will be trusted servants and will not govern. Many of those that believe the Guidance Code is absolute law have violated it at one time or another. Sometimes knowingly and sometimes unknowably. We need to Unify and get one train of thought. Right now I believe the answer is new Trusted Servants.

Bob W. - Area 1C, Inland Empire, California

3/15/15 - 7:32 PM

I am positive that not many members, besides the 4 or five people that write on the trusteeline and/or always crucifies any trustee that has the slightest difference in opinion, truly reads the trusteeline.

Yet those same 4 or 5, questions why the new or past trustees don't use this so called GREAT TOOL to voice one's opinion. In this regard, the trusteeline or self-serving, ego driven, SOAPBOX is a total FAILURE. Instead of inspiring members and trustee to voice their opinion, they break done unity and silence ANY voice of opposition. Just go back and see that every month this is proven out from the very beginning.

With that said, this is my little words of wisdom and experience.

Everyone has an opinion and this is important for the growth, but when that opinion is used to change or direct another's opinion, or "choice" to agree with another then that ceases to be an opinion but rather an act of control. Then that opinion turns into an act of manipulation and this cannot be in any fellowship. Unity will always be lost.

In Tom's wisdom, experience and leadership, he has bought this out to address. I hope that some people understand the meaning of what a discussion is, rather than, to try to perform an act of control and manipulation.

Gary S - Area 12, New Jersey
Current Area 12 trustee
Past Area 12 trustee
Past BOR board member

3/16/15 - 1:19 PM

I am following this months trustee line with great interest. I am reading the posts of some of my friends and fellow members who are very passionate about, and truly love Gamblers Anonymous. Having been a trustee for the last 12 years and currently serving on the executive board of the Board of Trustees I am reminded of one of the principle responsibilities and functions of a Trustee. That is to uphold the decisions of the Board of Trustees at all times and to uphold the guidance code. If I am not happy with anything that is transpiring at the Trustee level I always have the option of presenting my ideas and suggestions with an agenda item for the board to discuss and vote to decide if they agree or not. This is our democratic process and has always worked at the Trustee meetings. I always try to respect the opinions of members, whether I agree or not and I think it is vital that we have these healthy debates without making them personal, attacking and hurtful. Although only a few trustees submit to the trustee line, I know that most trustees and also past trustees read all the posts and we are not setting a good example by posting insults, inuendos and personal assaults. I know all the members who are posting thoughts and ideas and I know we can all do this in a constructive and loving way. I feel strongly that this would be the best way for us to make the needed changes and thus improve one of the main principals of Gamblers Anonymous, which is to carry the message to the compulsive gamblers who are still suffering. Come on everybody, lets respect each, other and show the fellowship and each other that we are all on the same page.

Herb B. - Trustee Area 5
2nd Co-chair of the BOT.

3/16/15 - 1:46 PM

I agree with Bob's sentiment that we need to bring the Fellowship together. Unfortunately, he is correct when he says there are these two opposing views. My view is that we need to follow the Guidance Code and all past decisions of the BOT. Why? Because it states just that in the Trustee Responsibilities. Further to that end, I remember back to when I was young in this Program of Recovery. I was told countless times by the "old timers" of my area that they tried things their way and it didn't work. But when they did things the GA way, it worked. That still resonates with me today. I'll be the first to admit this works for me because it provides structure. The structure I lacked in my life when I was gambling. To me, to do it any other way, is not what I learned so early on. I was thrown down countless times when I was seen to do things differently than the way they should be done. And I am forever grateful that I was. It taught me a lot about recovering from this disease. At the same time, it showed me that maybe some rules and regulations and guidelines isn't such a bad way to live. Without some of these guidelines, each person can work the program however they see fit. New members would be getting different advice from different members. To be on the same page as each other, to me, isn't such a bad thing.

Last month I wrote about unity on the Trustee Line. The only reason I did was because I was tired of hearing people say that if you call someone out on not following the Guidance Code or any other measure passed by the BOT, you were the one affecting unity. Without a reason why. This bothered me because, again, it goes to the structure that I was lacking but now have.

All of that being said, I admit I don't have all the answers. Again, the "old timers" of my area make sure to keep my ego in check, while at the same time making sure I keep an open mind about things. Staying open minded is one thing I pride myself on, because again, I know I don't have all the answers and am continuing to grow, both as a person and Trustee. I welcome debate. Looking at someone else's point of view, and why they feel that way, is a way to grow. They may tell me something that I haven't thought of. I invite people to share their views and why they feel that way. We won't all agree, but if you tell me why you feel a certain way and can back that up, not only will I not criticize you, I'll respect you. It's the people that say they feel a certain way and then say, "because that's how I feel", or look down on you for having a different point of view that I can't respect. We're all entitled to our own opinions. And you have it from me, in writing, that I will not criticize anyone who disagrees with me, if you can explain your reasoning. If we can come together, even through our differences, than maybe there is hope after all. When we're all on the same page, we, as a Fellowship win. When we don't do what we're supposed to, we lose. I look forward to any response to this, whether it is here, in an email, or phone call.

Pete K. - Trustee Area 13B, South Jersey

3/16/15 - 8:14 PM

Well Tom, it's great to see you come out of hibernation and put forth a posting on your views regarding so many things. At first thought, it seems that you haven't been to Trustee meetings lately to understand the real issues behind what you have brought forth, certainly not when the subjects you chose to mention were discussed during those Trustee meetings. I see that in addition to 'going after' me, you've set your sights on our Chair of the BOT, Denis M. and Pete K, who is, by proxy, responsible as the Chair of the Telephone committee. I suppose all in the pursuit of correcting disunity and helping to improve our attention to Unity Step 5. However, you have come out of the chute, swinging for some members and that sets the tone and demeanor for what could be a very aggressive series of responses. This is exactly what the BOT didn't want in the Orlando Conference and was quite clear about that. Since I am the default gatekeeper for the Trustee Line, if submissions are going to be viewed as inappropriate, I have the responsibility to get the Trustee Website committee involved for a determination as to whether or not these questionable submissions should be restricted from posting. That also goes for my postings. The procedure is outlined on the committee page of the website.

After reading your post, I had a long, detailed, line-by-line response prepared to rebut the numerous incorrect things you wrote, liberties you took and opinions that border on flammable statements appearing to be designed to incite equally opposing comments, but I decided not to submit it, as people who read the postings are not hearing whatever message you are trying to get across - they only see another war of words approaching, a senseless event, to say the least. The readers need to isolate these writings and question the sources and motivations of their origin.

You chose to dispatch Odie's response by patronizing his statements with an 'everyone is entitled to their opinion' remark. Although that is true, it is also true that people are not entitled to their own set of facts. If the desire is to debate a point, a view or a situation, then do so and make it an environment for exposing problems and expanding perspectives. That's what this platform is for. The crushing responses that some have stated that supposedly come if anyone dares to have an opposing opinion, are a moot point, since Orlando and before. It always reminds me of the manner in which some people sharpen their knives and call people all kinds of names, rather than address the problem directly, without the drama. Trying to breathe life into those old situations, is nothing more than casting aspersions on the Trustee Line for situations that no longer exist. This Fellowship is slowly being fixed, as a result of many procedural contradictions and people who ignore the Guidance Code, Unity Steps and the decisions of the Board of Trustees. Let's expose those problems and collectively figure out a way to fix them. Showering us with misinformation and unsubstantiated comments is not what wins people over to anyone's way of thinking.

I also want to say that disagreements on issues are not about disunity, and any statements to that effect are made by people trying to shock others into thinking they are doing something wrong. In that vein of thinking, it's an easy step to suppose differing opinions make the BOT Trustee meetings about disunity, because people speak against agenda items and some times, those items are defeated. Disunity is much more clearly visible when members do things the way they want, without regard for group conscience, the Guidance Code and all decision of the Board of Trustees. When those people get tagged, they try to divert attention away from what they continue to do and then make the people who point out the problems, to be the people creating disunity. I've been the target of such a tactic more times than I care to count. It's happening more and more, and the Trustees and area trusted servants are beginning to see this. More and more are rejecting this manner of those who insist on taking back their will and then trying to blame others.

My faith is put into group conscience at the Trustee level, the place where you seem to have so many issues with so many people, based on your posting. Make your case and if it makes sense, the Trustees will act accordingly. If your items get voted down, you can either obsess about it for the next 2 years until you can resubmit your changes to the BOT, or do something constructive to change other things for the better, right now. The prevalent position is about talking the talk with items to change what people don't like, and not walking the walk when it comes to doing something about it. What's worse is those who complain the most then do nothing but sit on their hands. Well maybe not literally, because they need them to type out these postings.

I'm certainly amazed how anyone could truly believe that changing the Executive Board members in Cherry Hill, will make a difference in how the Board of Trustees approaches Unity Step 5. Speeches by anyone at the front desk about that topic are people talking the talk...oh wait, I just addressed that. It all reverts back to the members of the Fellowship. They are the ones to submit the agenda items. That's the only time the talk is valuable, because the BOT evaluates each item for its merit, not this undisclosed 'controlling few' but the entire Board of

Trustees.

The Fellowship is changing in so many ways. Our membership profile and demographics continue to change, as has technology and our ability to reach more people. The BOT has been responsive to this in recent years due to the encouragement of the Executive Board and the entire Board of Trustees. Going back to the old ways makes no sense, unless you are advocating anarchy. Speaking for myself, I certainly know people who are doing things their way, because their sole driver in the program is carrying the message. It sounds like it doesn't matter what we ignore in our program for these people, as long as they carry the message. Sorry to say, that dog don't hunt.

Something else, all those who are so fearful that a few 'controlling people' are destroying the Fellowship should put their anger and vitriol to better use and do that 'put up or shut up' thing. Too many rules and procedures? Back up that bellowing and mud slinging with agenda items to change it. And by the way, if I were a Trustee who is not one of the controlling few, I would be really pissed that you are suggesting that the Trustees don't have a say in what is happening on each and every vote on the BOT agendas. Group conscience prevails Tom, as it should. If you don't like what is happening, change it or accept it.

It also might help if anyone endorsing this new telephone conference call meeting in Northern California and certainly those who started it, to take a look at the December 2013 Trustee Line, because it deals very directly with the dangers of unrestricted usage of this technology for telephone conference calls. The BOT approved telephone conference call platform is about carrying the message AND protecting the Fellowship and its members. It's great that people are recovering in that other meeting. I suppose that means it's okay to record it also, because that can easily happen and is going on with other telephone meetings. Call me forgetful, but is that what we do in physical meetings? Carrying the message without regard for the process doesn't make it right and advocating such a meeting weakens anyone's argument for too many rules and procedures. That December posting might take off some of the sharp edges with this righteous indignation that people express about recorded meetings, wherever they exist.

Oh, yes...there is one final thing. I started a new topic after this one, inviting all the people who are so alarmed at the path of destruction we are on, to post items that need to change that directly focus on Unity Step 5 - carrying the message. I'm still waiting for those items, and as time goes on, so will more people. If we want unity in the program? Let's do it the right way and you'll see the entire Board of Trustees rally around those ideas. As that new topic outlines below, 'And the Answer is...!'

David M. - Area 12, New Jersey

3/16/15 - 9:22 PM

One of the most important and positive experiences in program is that I became teachable. I continue to have defects of character and continue to be a work in progress. Am grateful and thankful of the results of those who came before and after me in carrying the message to those who still suffer.

At times, my 2 most difficult character defects come to the forefront, control & ego.

Today I would like to share something that another 12-step program had visited in the past that is similar to our own Gamblers Anonymous current look at Unity.

Our members (as their members did) not pulling the rope together to bring Unity, instead we are battling among ourselves.

We are in this program together, "I" does not work but "WE" works fine for everyone.

Yes, Gamblers Anonymous needs rules & regulations in order to avoid chaos. Yes, we need leaders, yes we need participation. But, we need to continue to be human (not perfect) and humane and strive for progress.

Dialog is something that can offer teachable moments if we have respect for all.

I suggest that we offer an olive branch and a white flag to each other, right now.

Would it be fruitful to leave our own EGO & CONTROL needs at the door? Ego & Control will be waiting off stage for all of us if we wish to awaken them...

Bill B. - Area 6, Boynton Beach Florida

3/17/15 - 8:49 PM

Paul N. here, past trustee and my clean date is 07/27/85, I am the member who started the Northern California GA phone meeting. I am happy to report that I had to call someone to get the website information; I do my service in Northern California where I am loved and respected by GA, not reviled and accused of insanity like I was the last time I wrote into this line. My experience in national service is this: In my first trustee meeting, the BOT sanctioned my area for something that was never investigated, nor was it explained what our error was. Our inter-group was then sent a letter by the BOT to follow our own procedures, that I was obligated to reply in detail was exactly what had happened. A year later, I placed the only item that I submitted in my time as a trustee on the agenda. In the discussion, I was personally attacked from the podium because I dared to submit an item that would limit the chairman's power. This is my experience; I don't write this as sour grapes, and I will not respond to any attacks that are generated by it. I just want to articulate why I am happy to let the BOT do whatever it wants, as long as it pays some semblance to the limits on power that are articulated in the unity program, and lets me carry the message of hope to the compulsive gambler who still suffers. Now to my topic: Our phone meeting does not, will not, nor ever will tape the meetings. If anyone wants to make that assertion to me, my phone number (Paul's phone number omitted). We chose to be a state phone meeting instead of a national phone meeting for the simple reason that we have a GA speaker once a month, and we have a birthday meeting once a month. If this is an example of the overregulation that some are writing about, so be it. It was my understanding that the national committee did not allow these formats; Pete, you know me, if what you say is true, and your committee does not preclude GA speakers or birthday meetings, we would be happy to apply as a national phone meeting. Our meeting has been averaging over 20 members a week from all over Northern California, from Eureka to Stockton; we have three new members calling in from areas that have no GA meetings. Our meeting is open; according to guidance code rules, persons not identifying themselves as compulsive gamblers are not allowed to speak. A disclaimer is read at the beginning of every meeting that states, "This meeting does not have physical location, and therefore cannot be registered with the ISO; therefore, it does not count for attendance requirements." The disclaimer goes on to describe how to participate in Unity Step 7, and how to be included on or receive, the group telephone list. The meeting lasts for one hour and all are welcome to attend; we have already had callers from out of state. We meet at 6:pm PST at (Telephone meeting number omitted) with access code (Code omitted). Please investigate before you condemn us.

Paul N. - Past Trustee Area 2, Northern California

[Note from the Trustee Website Admin: Paul sent in his submission with numbers that are not allowed to be posted. Telephone numbers are not permitted because this is a public site. Details on non-GA approved meetings, telephone or otherwise, are also not permitted.](#)

3/17/15 - 10:27 PM

TOM ITS ABOUT TIME SOMEONE HAS TAKEN THIS ON I TOUGHT OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS I WAS THE ONLY ONE WHO SAW WHAT WAS GOING ON I GUESS THAT WAS NOT THE CASE.

."The primary purpose of Gamblers Anonymous is to help the Compulsive Gambler who still suffers"

IT SEEMS TO ME THAT OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS WE ARE DOING EVERYTHING TO NOT CARRY THE MESSAGE !!

IF YOU TOOK A SURVEY OF ALL THE G A MEMBERS IN G A IN NJ THAT CAME INTO G A FROM 1980 ON YOU WILL FIND THAT MOST HAVE FOUND OUT ABOUT G A BY MAKING A CALL TO 800 GAMBLER THE COUNCIL ON COMPULSIVE GAMBLING OF N J . MY GUESS IS YOU WILL FIND THAT 2 BE TRUE IN ALL THE STATES THAT HAVE A COUNCIL.

IF YOU GO TO ANY MALL IN AMERICA AND ASK PEOPLE DO YOU KNOW HOW AND WHERE 2 GET HELP FOR DRINKING PROBLEM OR DRUG PROBLEMS 90% + KNOW

ASK THE SAME ABOUT GAMBLING ADDICTION YOU WILL FIND THE # VERY VERY SMALL TRY IT AND YOU WILL SEE WHAT I AM SAYING.

TOM THANKS FOR STEPPING UP AND TRYING THE STOP THE FEW PEOPLE IN G A WHO HAVE HIJACKED THE G A PROGRAM TO MAKE IT A PROGRAM TO THERE LIKING AND A PROGRAM OF NOT CARRYING THE MESSAGE OF HOPE AND RECOVERY TO SO MANY OUT THERE WHO NEED IT.

THIS SICKNESS IS ABOUT EGO CONTROL AND LYING SEEMS LIKE SOME

MEMBERS CANT GET PAST THAT !

ARNIE W. - Area 6, LAKE WORTH FLORIDA
PAST TRUSTEE

3/18/15 - 5:46 PM

Today, March 18th, I read the March issue of the Trustee Line. WOW! Lots of stuff. But is it 'good' stuff, 'bad' stuff, or just stuff?

I want to address the point made that if we don't agree with a rule or procedure in GA, we can bring it to the BOT and change it. The reality is its not good enough to just want to change something, one has to convince about 100 voting members of the BOT that the CHANGE, or, for that matter ANY CHANGE is a good thing. I've personally had some experience with this. Twice, at the behest of my intergroup, I've placed items on the BOT agenda. Both items, in my opinion, should have been a shoo-in, since both would have improved Unity at the Intergroup level. Also, NEITHER item REQUIRED anyone to do anything. Both items were SUGGESTIONS, even containing the actual word 'suggestion'. The arguments (heated at times) against both items were examples of the trustees, at least those who chose to go to the microphones, not listening to the entire proposal, and instead just reacting to the very idea of 'change'. (Admittedly, one of the items had to do with an intergroup being permitted, not required, to limit the terms its trustees could serve; and we know how the very idea scares the hell out of most of us.)

Unfortunately, the few trustees who choose to speak up at the microphones, or as I call them, our 'loudest members', usually prevail in their arguments. Are the rest easily led, just don't care, or not paying attention? The answer is probably 'yes'.

The point of this submission, believe it or not, is not to scold those trustees who either can't grasp a concept, or can't stay awake during the meetings. The point is that no matter how hard we try, and even with our best efforts, its very difficult to always place principles before personalities. My personality, as part of me, goes everywhere I go. It doesn't get left at the door. Consequently, if I feel strongly about something, It takes real effort for me to accept a decision of the BOT that does not agree with me. BUT, as a member of GA and especially as a Trustee, I must abide by the decision of the BOT (Group Conscience). In other words, as a member of a group, on behalf of a group, and for the good of the whole, I have to remind myself that it's really not all about me. As a trustee, it does not serve GA for me to constantly complain about a decision once its made.

New item: Our Trustee Line administrator takes a lot of flak for voicing his opinions on many matters sent into this blog. Personally, I admire his courage to speak up on matters important to our program. We have probably 140 or more trustees who all have access to this site. How many use it? Ever? At least David, who, by the way, I don't always agree with, isn't afraid to tell us what he thinks, even though by doing so he often earns the wrath of dissenters. Are the rest of us, seeing this, afraid that if we give our opinions we'll get beat up? Possibly. Or do the rest of us not even really care? Also possible. "Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern." True, but I believe we, when elected by our members, are being asked to lead. I don't know about everyone else, but I want my leaders to have an intelligent thought on serious topics, and I want to know those thoughts. The members who write to the Trustee Line, including David, are telling us what they think, and by doing so, giving us something to think about. Let's encourage them, not criticize them. David is correct when he says that people complain about unity problems, but don't voice suggestions about remedying the situation. 'Decisions are made by those who show up'. To those who just want to throw stones and complain rather than actually thinking about and suggesting possible solutions, I say "show up, or shut up".

There are three kinds of people in this world: those who watch what happens, those who make things happen, and those who wonder what happened. As elected 'leaders/trustees' we have a responsibility to care enough to make things happen. We asked for the job and got it. Now, let's do it.

Finally, a shameless plug: I'm involved in the upcoming Spring 2015 International Conference in Cherry Hill, NJ. Are you? Have you sent in a short submission for the conference book? Have you volunteered to help out in any way? Have you booked your room with the hotel? Have you even registered yet? If the answer to these questions is 'yes', God bless you. You're being responsible and setting a great example.

If the answer is 'no', why not? Do it now. Lead!

See you in Cherry Hill.
Your friend in recovery,

3/20/15 - 7:28 PM

My Dear Brother Tom,

As you know, I have a great deal of admiration, respect and affection for you. I truly appreciate your service to our program and how you have impacted my own recovery. A couple of things you hit on in your entry to the Trustee Line have resonated with me.

As regards phone meetings and the Telephone Conference Call Committee: In a regular GA Area, if a meeting is not following the principles of the GA program, using outside literature, not abiding by the Guidance Code, allowing harassing behavior, etc., the membership has recourse by engaging the Area Trustees or going to its Intergroup for assistance. A telephone meeting has no such oversight and no recourse to correct inappropriate usage or behavior because it is not affiliated with any Area and is not represented by a Trustee; nor does it have an Intergroup connection.

It only makes sense that such a meeting be bound by some pretty clear guidelines and the GA program protected within the meeting by protocols and by having a committee of strong members in recovery to lead the meeting.

I am baffled by your characterization of the meeting as “nothing more than a place for some leaders to again do nothing but pontificate and comment in everything someone says”.

The 5 moderators actually speak very little. It is the job of the moderators to call on attendees for reading, to introduce the topic, to call on members to speak and to keep time. With the attendance and participation at the meeting, it's actually quite rare for one of us to make a comment.

I believe that the committee has created a very safe place for GA members—new and old—to practice and enhance their recovery. This is evidenced by the solid group of “new” members who began attending the meeting when it first started who continue to come back every week, as well as by the faithful attendance of members with many years of recovery.

I have been amazed and humbled by the sharing of experience, strength and hope during the phone meetings. The ability of strangers to come together—sight unseen!—and share their recovery has been awesome, in the truest sense of the word. I can tell you that it has impacted my own recovery in very positive ways. I would definitely invite you to attend a meeting or two.

Another issue that you brought up that resonated with me is the idea that a BOT business meeting without an attendant International Conference is a bad idea. Area 8A firmly believes that GA should have one International Conference annually and, that if the BOT truly needs to meet twice a year, one of those meetings SHOULD be a business meeting. I am not going to delineate all the reasons why this option is so supported by our Area (I'd be happy to do so if you are curious), but I am aware that we are not the only Area to feel this way. The business meeting model was welcomed by our Area as a possible model of future International Conference/Business meeting rotations.

I know that our program faces many challenges and that Unity is something that we need to constantly examine, cherish and uphold. I am sharing my views—and the views of our Area-- in order to let you know that there are different lenses through which we may see things. Those different points of view do not necessarily indicate a lack of interest in Unity or a degradation of it.

Your Grateful Sister in Recovery,
Jeannie B. - Past Trustee, Area 8A

3/30/15 - 2:06 PM

Everyone is entitled to her or his opinion.

The response should not be that this is what's wrong with your opinion. A much more respectful response could be that this is how I feel about the subject.

We should all take a deep breath. I suggest that we symbolically join hands and say the Serenity Prayer like we do at the end of every Trustees Meeting and every Gamblers Anonymous Meeting.

If these personal attacks continue on the answer is to shutdown the Trustee Line Home Page.

This program works if we work it! So work it as we are worth it!

Ronny W. - Current Trustee Area 17, Connecticut

And The Answer Is.....?

3/15/15 - 12:22 PM

Evidently, we have finally hit upon a topic that shows some galvanizing effect to get others to respond to the Trustee Line. It would appear that my attempts to get this done every month have not been successful.

I read with great interest the posting of Tom in the above topic, and although he presents a very tainted view of how things are, I caught the resounding theme in his posting. It seems that GA has abandoned Unity Step 5, about carrying the message to the compulsive gambler who still suffers. It is the representation that he made about getting bogged down with rules and procedure instead of carrying the message. Evidently, the Board of Trustees does little if anything to follow the path of Unity Step 5.

Hopefully, he's aware that our Rules and Procedures manual is only for the Trustee meeting and related functions of the Trustees regarding ancillary issues. As far as the other rules and procedures for the Fellowship, I could only see one reference in his posting, which was the complaint about a telephone meeting that was started in his area. These meetings present clear and present danger to the Fellowship, if they do not have restrictions on how they operate. This can't be about getting rid of the rules that prevent violations of the the Unity Steps, in favor of just carrying the message, with no regard for the process. Much of the rest of Tom's posting was a glorified shot at me, the telephone conference call platform and our Chair of the Board of Trustees. Surely, a person of Tom's pedigree in GA, should not resort to things like that, but that's not where I intended this topic to go.

Tom's posting may end up getting more support than what was sent in, as I started this topic. My question is, why do people complain that the BOT is destroying Unity and that we don't carry the message, when each person with that belief appears to be sitting on their hands and not doing the slightest thing to accomplish carry the message themselves, as it relates to the BOT? Anyone is GA has the ability to put items on the agenda for any reason, or with any intention. Why is the current state of the BOT so objectionable to so many, yet they only complain about it rather than come up with the ideas how to accomplish such things? Where are all the past agenda items from these people to make this happen? I'm still looking for them.

So let me challenge the 'masses' who believe the Trustees have to do more to carry the message. Use this posting as your platform to spread your wings and enlighten the BOT about how to accomplish this. We have many current Trustees, but many times more past Trustees. Here's your opportunity to make something happen. Putt down your ideas on how to improve Unity Step 5. Tell us all what the BOT should do. The Cherry Hill agenda closes on March 29th.

David M. - Area 12, New Jersey

3/15/15 - 1:01 PM

Hi Fellow GA members

I like Tom M am a former Chairman of both the BOR and BOT. I have been very involved in GA for over 30 years missing only 2 Trustee meetings during those years. GA saved my life but a few years ago I almost left this wonderful program due to to many rules and regulations as well as too many personality issues. When I first came on the program a member that has now passed away explained to me that the Program is a Program of suggestion. The primary purpose is to help the compulsive gambler that still suffers.The Guidance Code is a guide and at times common sense should prevail. The politics of GA has gone too far. There is too much personalities over principles and if the program is to survive something must be done. An example would be the Conference Over cite committee that was set up a few years ago by the current BOT chair. I volenteered for that committee but was not appointed due to my conflicts with the BOT chair. I have chaired 4 International Conferences and assisted on several others and all were very successful and made good profits for the ISO.. I have also run several successful businesses over the past 40 years and am a graduate of UCLA executive Program in business in their graduate school.My credentials which the chairman knew made me very qualified for this committee.I have since been asked to run another conference but I have refused. Makes no sense to me to have to be overseen by a committee with less experience and less knowledge than myself. This committee is not even needed.We got by for years with just a co-chair overseeing it. As for the Tom M letter. I am in total agreement with him.Lets get an openminded chair and co-chairs that do not try to sway votes by giving their opinions on too many items. The Chairs are supposed to run the Trustee Meeting not voice their opinions on items. This letter will probably make me unpopular with some but it's just the way I feel.

3/17/15 - 8:49 PM

Dear Bob W,

I have read your latest posting on the Trustee line with great interest, especially the line on the Conference Oversight & Assistance committee which states that «This committee is not even needed». You also stated that you were asked to run another conference but declined to do so because it «Makes no sense to me to have to be overseen by a committee with less experience and less knowledge than myself».

While I appreciate and respect your long experience as a businessman and your dedication and service to the Fellowship, allow me to disagree with your statement. Unfortunately, all Conference Chairs are not created equal. Some do not need any oversight, but others do. Some do not need help, but others beg for it. The committee has not been created to run your or any conference, but to help whenever asked to. We are a committee of suggestion; we do not decide anything for a Conference committee.

The full name of the committee is Conference Oversight & ASSISTANCE Committee and its mission statement is «To oversee all processes dealing with International Conferences and to encourage and provide assistance to Areas seeking to host an International Conference as well as to provide advice and assistance after a Conference has been awarded». Our role goes much farther than just “overseeing” a conference.

You also said that conferences used to be overseen by a co-chair and that it worked just fine. Let me tell you that we have been very lucky that nothing major happened. How many of these oversight co-chairs had never been involved with a conference committee before and had no clue what it was all about? How many had never seen a hotel contract before with all its subtleties and traps? Are we comfortable that a co-chair with no experience of any conference committee could have spotted a problem early enough to prevent a financial disaster?

Speaking of hotel contracts, how many times, before the Committee was formed, was the chairman of the Board handed a hotel contract from a bidding area a few minutes before the start of the trustee meeting? What if this contract made no sense or was detrimental to the Fellowship? The committee created a procedure to avoid that, which procedure was approved by the Board of Trustees. I could go on and on but I think you get the point.

The committee has created a wealth of information for the bidding areas to consult, including a very helpful Past Conferences Database. ANY area can now bid to be awarded a conference; there is plenty of information in the “Hosting an International Conference” pamphlet and on the trustee website, under the Committee’s heading. No more need to absolutely have an “experienced” member to rely on, although it will definitely help having one.

The 4 committee members all have experience on a Conference Organizing Committee. One of them has even made a career in the Hospitality and Events business. We have overseen and helped 5 conferences so far, we have analyzed dozens of hotel contracts, we have read a multitude of committee reports, we are revamping the brochure on International conferences and we are working on creating an accounting template. I think we, as a committee, have collectively a lot of experience and we can HELP. That is the main purpose of our committee, not just overseeing for the mere pleasure of controlling things.

Finally, help me understand. You stated that «This committee is not even needed», so why did you volunteer to be on it in the first place? I think that, deep inside, you know that our committee was long needed.

André G. - Past trustee, Area 5B Québec
Chair, Conference Oversight & Assistance Committee

Please Read

3/16/15 - 8:52 AM

Thanks to all the esteemed trusted servants for their recent posts on the Trustee Line. I would like to tell you what is going on in my corner of the world and how your posts are affecting it. About a year ago, I wanted to walk away from GA after 20 years. I couldn't separate the personalities from the principles and honestly, I had had enough. But fortunately I had a second spiritual awakening and I stayed. Now I am sharing my experience, strength and hope with a number of new women members in New Jersey. Yes, I did say women in

New Jersey. We do exist, and we are growing. What a wonderful program this really is.

Anyway, I recently told a newer member (about a year in) that she will understand the program better when she is a trustee and that she will make a good one. When it is her time, I would like her to be as enthusiastic about the opportunity to serve the program as I was 20 years ago. And then I read these posts. And I shake my head and sigh. Honestly guys, you are not making my job any easier. It just reminds me about why I almost walked away. How can I encourage a newer member to serve the program if I believe that the people they encounter along the way might be harmful to their recovery because of the negative attitudes and personal attacks. Whether you believe it or not, what you write here in this Trustee Line, trickles down. If you say kind things, kindness will trickle down. If you continue to bash each other, then negativity and unpleasantness will trickle down. You are having a real impact on people, whether you know it or not. I'm not saying that you all need to hold hands. I firmly believe that we all need to express our point of view, no matter how unpopular and "out there" it might be. But, please, consider how you do it. Think about it. I love you all and you know that. You are my brothers. You are the strong ones but your negative attitudes and personal attacks are drawing the focus away from all of the good things each and every one of you has done for the program. Please don't let that happen.

Once again, thank you all for your service to the program.

Thanks

Mary S. - Area 12, New Jersey

3/17/15 - 12:56 PM

As the troops seem to have paused to regroup and possibly enter into round 2 of 'Ask me why I'm so pissed off.', it takes a posting, such as yours Mary, to offer a different and enlightened point of view. And that is the trickle down effect. I believe you are right with how this vitriol spreads like weeds on the front lawn. But I can't help but question if it was a full moon or the pent up level of rage that brought about that initial thread. I know that over the years, I have brought issues to the Trustee Line about things that are wrong with the Fellowship, the BOT, the BOR, Intergroups, the Trustees, the rooms, and just about everything else. For some, that is considered controlling, manipulating and dare I say it, pontificating. This is all done to make others aware that we may have a problem that should be aired out and discussed. It's my way of trying to stir the pot for others to voice their opinions. The biggest critic I have is Joe T, from Northern California. He and I differ on many items. Why is it that he and I get along just fine on the Trustee Line? If I respond in opposition to his statements, I'm not looking to excoriate him, yet I am cast in that shadow by who knows how many. I suppose my visibility with these postings, just makes me a natural target for such characterizations. Life goes on, as I consider the source from which all that comes.

Days later, the nature of the accusations in this month's first posting regarding Unity...Where did it go?, now has me laughing at the entire situation. Debate, yes. Difference of opinions, yes. Laying out a minefield of unsupported, inaccurate and partial statements, no doubt shook the trees of many members. I ask myself why. How easy was it to draw many of us into this trap? My prior postings get right to the point about what I feel needs attention. Things get swept under the rug, actions aren't taken, trusted servants take back their will, violations of the Unity Steps and the Guidance Code, etc. These things need to be aired. But for some to come back with some of the things we have seen in the past as a rebuttal, just naturally brings out a protective veil of irritation, anger and rage in the responses. The Trustee website committee has stopped such escalations over time, and unfortunately, nobody knows it's happening in the background, other than the committee and those who would turn the Trustee Line into a war zone, again. Evidently, in hindsight, the initial posting should never have been posted. That plays to a different task the committee faces. To let the members exercise their feelings without parsing out each word. To give them the latitude to vent. Do we now have analyze everything for a potential negative reaction from others that escalates into what we have witnessed in a few short days? I sure hope not.

We all need to manage our suppressed levels of negative tendencies better, including myself. But hey everyone, I'm not the one who tossed the hand grenades into the flowerbed. My initial reaction to that posting was to take every line and point out what was wrong with it - in detail. I chose not to do so, but to address some of the issues raised. The real positive from this is that the responses from those who disagreed with the author, were more in line with the debate and discussion mode that the Trustee Line is now supposed to be. Those in support were there with their shotguns and ropes for the various lynchings. The issue before us is that it is truly unfortunate that the Trustee Line has yet another unnecessary blemish. For well over a year, it has operated much more

calmly than in prior years. That's thanks to the discussions from the Trustees in Orlando.

So I get the theme of your topic Mary, and can tell you that the acrimony extends back to the Intergroups and that is another breeding ground for irritation, resentment, anger and rage. It's strange how similar the behaviors are at the Intergroup levels, as few if any members read the Trustee Line when someone tries to pull the wheels off the tracks, yet they react in the same manner. Sounds like a predictable behavioral pattern that we call character defects. We all have to sharpen our understanding of the dynamics that happen here and locally. We must isolate the catalysts of the problems and not vilify those who identify these problems, point them out and look for the collective conscience to remedy the problems. That's not being done. In fact, the opposite happens. It's time for a change in that area, which may be difficult for many, because few people want to really get involved these days, because of this acrimony. Most only want to be GA members for 2 hours a week. I can't say I blame them, but look at the cesspools we allow to exist by these behaviors. If we can eliminate this leakage that dilutes our actions, then more time is created for recovery. The run and hide thing is not how it's done. Most of these problems don't just go away, and they just become more detrimental to GA as a whole. I have 2 words for this posting - civilized discourse.

David M. - Area 12, New Jersey

Page One

3/17/15 - 10:38 AM

I guess I am working on getting my "contributing to the Trustee Line" badge. There has been a lot of talk here about the Unity Steps and the Guidance Code and a lot of talk about our primary purpose being to help the compulsive gambler who still suffers.

I always like to start at the beginning, and that goes back to Page 1 of the yellow book. Page 1 tells us that the history of GA is based on two men who got together and concluded that in order to achieve recovery they utilized certain spiritual principles including "kindness, generosity, honesty and humility." They also felt that in order to maintain abstinence, it was important to carry the message of hope to other compulsive gamblers. My understanding is that they first worked on their own spiritual recovery and then carried the message. One comes before the other. Step 12 tells us the exact same thing. So from this I conclude that kindness, generosity, honesty and humility come first, before anything else.

I actually want to add the word "love" to this list, so that it reads "kindness, generosity, honesty, humility and love." I don't know if this has ever been proposed. I will have to research it. Also, I can't seem to find the word "love" anywhere in the yellow book.

One of the tools I am now using when relating to other GA members and the program as a whole, is before I do anything, I ask myself "what is the "loving" thing to do?". This is often extremely difficult. As an addict, I want to do what I think is best for me. Always. That is my nature. But I think that the book is telling me that in order to recover, I have to think and act differently from what comes naturally to me. This is hard work. To be loving is to put myself in the shoes of the other person. This is really really hard for me. However, my life depends on it. I imagine myself completely incapacitated and my life depends on the person who is caring for me. Would I treat this person harshly or would I treat them with respect? The reality is that I am an addict lying in my own bed of self-pity and self-loathing. If someone comes along to help me, my first impulse is to lash out at them because I don't want to change. Change is hard. But over time, I have realized that I can't get up by myself and it is much easier if I'm considerate and loving to the people who are lending me a hand and helping me up.

Of course I'm talking about real recovery here, not just abstinence. Sooner or later, science will cure the urge to gamble. I know that. And staying abstinent will be a breeze. But recovery will always be hard work, and for me, this is what being in this program is all about.

As always, thanks to the trustees for their service on behalf of the program.
Mary S. - Area 12, New Jersey

Skipping The Process

3/20/15 - 10:36 PM

I saw a question posed on the trustee line recently, to the effect of whether one

small Nation perhaps had a different view on a particular goal (Unity) than another abundantly larger Nation. Shocker Eh ?

Once I stepped back from the horrors of my initial Nano – Second counter productive thought process and allowed my program to kick in (far superior process) it struck me instinctively that, if the goal in question is an honourable one with a common theme, then it mattered little whether or not there may be two or even 102 different views on what that goal actually is or comprises.

What matters more and would be mutually beneficial and most productive is the actual process by which that goal would be attained or moved towards.

Now there's a situation, a goal the composition of which we can discuss and argue about forever, a minefield of opportunities for counter – productive and dis –unifying personality battles or alternatively a process which is undeniably more likely to produce a principled approach which must, in and of itself, lead to an advanced position on the journey towards that goal, regardless of any difference of opinion on what that goal comprises or looks like.

I have always maintained that skipping the process is a favourite weapon of a compulsive gambler when in action and, in my experience and observations in recovery, skipping the process is a prolific sign above the exit door.

What is this thing called “ The process “ ?

Is it perhaps the way we do things and see things, the actions we take to move towards our goal ?

Here's the conundrum, the goal itself “ Unity “ is a perfection in and of itself that we will never reach 100% and by focussing more on the goal, we naturally fall into the trap of allowing personality battles to seem like the answer, which they never will be. Doing that the goal moves farther away, whereas the process is something we can use right now in a principled manner which, even though we will still fall short of the perfection of unity we will be a lot closer to it.

After all, none of us expect perfection.

We don't own this fellowship, it belongs equally to the Tom's, Dick's and Harry's (and Bob's) that came before us and travel with us, those of us here now and those still to come, in reality it is merely entrusted to us to use and preserve, perhaps even improve, but we're just passing through.

So yes, let's keep to basics, the real process, just not by doing what we did before in the way we did it, let's leave the past behind and learn from the mistakes.

We have a Unity program, it's how we approach it and apply it that matters.

In reality, we can't actually skip the process, we can avoid it and go round in ever decreasing circles until we are in that darkest of places or we can go into the process and through it, preserving what we have, improving it and creeping closer to the goal.

We dare not skip the process and I suggest we focus more on what we can improve through the process rather than the goal, principles rather than personalities.

OOPS, Sorry. Someone else thought of that way back near the start.

That involves continuing and building on the transparency and accountability of recent years, following the guidance code and the ultimate authority, the group conscience of the members at large. Anything else is anarchy.

Thoughts welcome, criticisms equally welcome.

Odie. B. Trustee - Area 36, Ireland South East

3/22/15 - 11:09 AM
Odie,

Your posting sounds like a post mortem for the March issue of the Trustee Line. Yes, the process is not dealt with in much of our Fellowship, but it can be associated with how much of what goes on in Gamblers Anonymous just simply goes off the rails. When I came into this Fellowship on my knees, a broken, shattered person, I was looking for the something that would stitch me back together. I was told don't gamble and come to meetings. To me, that is not how things work in recovery, maybe in abstinence, but that's a different topic for a different time. The foundation for me was structure. The very thing that I was lacking for so long.

Structure requires rules, guidelines and procedures. Evidently, from this month's postings, that appears to be the root cause of GA not being able to carry the message. Well, the reality is that we can't be all things to all people. One person quoted how AA retains people and other wonderful things. I put it to those people who believe other Fellowships do all the right things and we do not, to put some of the controversial things that some of our GA members do or wish to do, side by side with what AA does. I'm sure the contrast will show that the GA people looking to do what they think is what needs to be done, is nowhere near what is being done in GA. Could it be that the universe of people who are having problems with their drinking are a much greater universe than compulsive gamblers? Again, a topic for another time.

Unity does not mean we all have to agree on everything. But the core of what keeps us together in the Fellowship and the common goal of survival of the one, is essential and only happens when the group is the embracing entity upon which the recovery we all seek is formed. Strengthening that core with structure, may not be appealing to those who wish to conduct their own version of the Gamblers Anonymous program, and it would be my statement that going outside that core is what is detrimental to GA as a whole. Those who do what they want and defy boundaries of what this program is about, are the threats to Unity, similar to moisture over time and the negative it effects it has on a wooden post in the ground. While we try to keep those wooden posts in the ground, there are those who would try to build a pond around them, for what they believe is the right thing to do. Trying to make sure that person knows they can't do that, now characterizes the ones trying to strengthen the core as those who are creating disunity. This is the perverseness of this process. It is those who step outside our core under the veil of carrying the message, without consideration of the process, who create the disunity.

The bottom line on this is we all should be doing a better job of carrying the message. I put a posting on this month's issue, challenging all those who would throw stones at those who are looking to plug the holes of structure in our Fellowship, to come up with ideas and/or real solutions in order to carry that out. There was one posting, which didn't deal with the issue, because changing the BOT Executive Board, is that the answer. So all the noise created this month, is apparently just that - noise. The agenda is closing on the 29th and nothing is has been submitted to that end. Again, evidently no one has any concrete ideas. I suppose there is a week left - anything can happen. There is also a saying - live in hope, die in despair.

Lastly, let me address the turmoil this month on the Trustee Line for the purpose of how it has evolved and the good it provides. The Trustee Line was a mailed publication in the past. None of this back and forth style we see today, was even remotely possible. The Trustee Line has been a live document for a decade. That allows for instant reactions to postings that can carry a very strong head of steam. We had a submission sent in by Tom M. this month that certainly moved the needle off boring. Tom, like everyone else, is entitled to his opinion. Whether you found his posting to be not so charming or something that hit you as something that should have been said a long time ago, is immaterial. His posting was his opinion. I personally did not agree with his characterization of many things and my posting (late in the cycle) was my opportunity to refute that. Was it necessary to defend myself or was it necessary for anyone else to speak up? Yes, whether or not it was found to make sense to anyone, it was my freedom to respond to something that I believed to be incorrectly stated, that makes the Trustee Line invaluable. Others exercised their same freedom to submit rebuttals. Unfortunately, the irritation of some came out in the subsequent postings, but the point is that there were many people engaged in the dialogue. I don't know about anyone else, but I got numerous ideas from the various postings.

Something in this issue was quite a remarkable and different situation from that past problems that the Trustee Line faced. We used to see people (yes that includes me) submit a topic that was 'edgy'. Any initial submission should be to motivate others to respond. Some of the responses prior to the Orlando Trustee meeting discussions about restraint on the Trustee Line, were really off the reservation, many of which had to be rejected by the Trustee Website Committee. That's a process few people even know happens behind the scenes. The point is that a topic would have been met by responses that were of an attacking nature with personal statements that were derogatory. What we saw this month, was an edgy posting that was meant by firm responses to question the statement, articulate opposing opinions and a call for a more honest appraisal of what was being said. Many may not appreciate that, but the Trustee Line has clearly evolved with its emotional content and a strong level of looking for more granularity into what is being brought forth in various postings.

To close this posting, let me say this. The Trustee Line is a good example of a modified version of Unity Step 4. The Trustee Line is truly self-governing, because the people who submit items, set the tone. True, the wheels can come

off the rails on any topic or posting. It can come from some who don't like the author, or that the author posts too many items, or the author's postings are too long, etc. It may even be for the content of the posting itself. What has happened is that after a flurry of activity from a controversial posting, the Trustee Line always manages to come back down to earth and center itself. The contributors either respond to a topic or when they have had enough of it, they just don't and the topic comes to a grinding halt. For those who say we are setting a bad example for others who read it, I say maybe they should be reading the postings in the Lifeliner Bulletin. You can get all the rainbows you want there. For those who are looking for a debate on how to make things better and evoke new ideas on how to improve this Fellowship, the Trustee Line is doing it's job. Who knows, the miracle may yet happen. We might actually have those with the ideas for GA to carry the message more effectively than we have, come up with solutions for us all to approve, via group conscience, the ultimate authority.

David M. - Area 12, New Jersey

3/22/15 - 1:22 PM

Hi David,

This is my reply to your last posting.

I fully agree with your opinions and suggestions. We had a string of postings by a group of very passionate and caring people and we always manage to clear the air even if we don't always agree. Most of us are very sensitive and sometimes tend to take others opinions in a personal manner. Some of us also seem to be pushing others buttons, however all this banter is mostly healthy for our fellowship and will create positive and healthy changes that are necessary. We need the wisdom and experience of the members who have been around for a while as well as the fresh ideas of members who are newer to the fellowship. Change for the sake of change is ridiculous and dangerous, however, change for the betterment of our process and our desire to continue to help the compulsive gamblers still suffering is essential. I strongly feel that our dialogue on the trustee line is proving to be effective and constructive for our betterment and, as long as we remember to respect and love each other at the same time, we will continue to make progress and improve.

Please send us your ideas to improve Gamblers Anonymous and the process of our labor of love and keep in mind that the wisdom of the body will usually prevail.

Herb B. - Area 5, Montreal
