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## Trustee Line for June 2017

A PDF version of this issue to distribute to your rooms, or to print out for easier reading, will be available after 6/30/17.

### Thoughts From The Trustees - Current and Past

**Disclaimer - The Trustee Line is a function of the Board of Trustees of Gamblers Anonymous. It is intended solely as a forum for members of the Board of Trustees to share opinions on issues related to Gamblers Anonymous. Any postings in this or any other edition of the Trustee Line are not to be construed as the opinion of Gamblers Anonymous, as a whole. The publication of any items on the Trustee Line do not constitute an endorsement or statement of approval or acknowledgement by Gamblers Anonymous of what the contents are.**

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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### Keep It Simple

6/2/17 - 5:16 PM

I wish people would stop reading something simply put and then interpreting it their own way. I believe they mean well, but many times they give the impression that they are quoting the Guidance Code or some other GA material, when they're not.

Example: I can't count how many times I've heard 'senior' members say at a meeting that the only requirement for GA membership is a "sincere desire" or an "honest desire" to stop gambling. Within a short time, we begin to hear a 'newer' member say the same thing. (This is just one example; I'm sure you can think of quite a few others.)

What prompted this diatribe is the discussion in the May issue of the Trustee Line regarding one's "Date of Abstinence", originated by Zeny K. (Thank you, Zeny) In it a member's 'understanding' of our date of abstinence is "the first meeting 24 hours after a person's last bet." As Zeny points out, Article VII, Section 4 is clear.

Apparently, the birthday list committee chair, whose responsibilities include determining a member's eligibility to celebrate an anniversary/birthday, doesn't have a copy of our Guidance Code. If she had one, she would not have had to ask the question.

Also, where would someone come up with "the first meeting 24 hours after a person's last bet"? This sounds like the question was asked of a 'senior' member, who feels his time gives him/her that option of adding their own words to the definition, rather than just answering the question simply quoting the Guidance Code.

Why do people feel the need to muddy the waters by miss-quoting something, or adding or changing the wording that's already there? As an example, I must take issue with Odie's statement that "If the last line of Article VII section 4 was written as follows, for example ( Date of abstinence starts on the date of your first meeting on a date after the date of your last bet.) it would be a lot clearer to anyone in doubt." Really, Odie? Clearer? Personally, I think not.

Lastly, as David indicates, there is no time window dictating how long after you made your last bet one must wait before coming to a GA meeting. On February 7, 2001, I played some scratch-offs. Later that day, my wife asked me to attend my first GA meeting, and I did. I haven't gambled since. Is my date of abstinence to be my second meeting after my last bet? No one would consider that Wednesday in 2001 to be a "day of abstinence" for me, but I remind you the Guidance Code doesn't use the word "day", just "date", and it is both the date of my last bet and my first meeting.

Let's stop blah, blah, blahing over what we think a word should or shouldn't mean, and stick with the basics. A Wednesday will always be a Wednesday, and a date will always be a date.

John B. - Area 13, Pennsylvania

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6/3/17 - 9:45 AM

I love the keep it simple idea, I really do.

So many times I have heard we have a simple program for complicated people, or, as I like to also say, a simple program for a complicated disease.

Of course, even though they are or may be essentials in their own right, I find the ideas of H.O.W. ( Honesty, open mindedness and willingness ) and Principles over Personalities to be very useful adjuncts when searching for and vigilantly maintaining this simplicity.

John, I'm happy for you to disagree with the suggestion I made to encourage debate and I am happy you have a platform to express that, but it was just a suggestion to encourage or support another member if they choose to put forward an agenda item for consideration and due process.

How do you translate that positive, encouraging suggestion to enable you to accuse me of making a statement and misstating the guidance code ? Seems to me you are taking issue with someone's right to make a positive suggestion and doing so in a very personalized, direct and deliberately demeaning way.

A suggestion for an agenda item to change wording in the Guidance Code is not a statement or misstatement, it's just a suggestion, therefore you are taking issue with a statement that was never made and personalizing the object of your distaste, simple as that, really John.

You yourself used the word diatribe to describe your post, I rest my case on that point anyway.

Further on the issues, abstinence and simplicity, if I am asked to name my "Date of abstinence" for example for inclusion in the confidential trustee listing, I would and did name a date during which I did not gamble in any way. If somebody else decides their "Date of abstinence" is also a day on which they gambled, I don't have an opinion on that. For me it would be delusion and dishonesty for me to do that but that is for myself, what other people do, by their own admission, is their business. I set my own compass for myself, with no desire to judge others.

As I suggested previously, if there are people who struggle with what their abstinence day or date is and who wish to use the guidance code as a guide or something more, then it may be helpful if it was clarified that a day including a gamble is not a day or date of abstinence, we can't be a little bit pregnant, a day at a time. Alternatively, if the majority so desires, it could be clarified that a day including gambling can be a day or date of abstinence.

Neither position is an issue for me but I would support anybody's right to put an agenda item in to help avoid confusion. Everyone is entitled to choose their own brand of 'covfefe' if they so choose.

A suggestion is just a suggestion, it's as simple as that, today or any other date, simple.

Odie B. - Area 36, Ireland

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6/5/17 - 5:50 PM

I never expected anything like this in a GA room: a miniature slot machine (about 12 inches high) was sitting on top of a corner table in a Spanish meeting room.

It was a 5-yr GA birthday that I attended 2 days ago. I asked "What's that thing doing here," from one of the meeting coordinators (Sec/chair) . She said that - --- --- brought it in. She, then, asked me if I read what the sign said beside it (written in Spanish ). I said no. I speak and understand Spanish a little. Anyway, it read: "I'm not the problem, the problem is your mind".

At the break, aided by a bi-lingual member, I talked to the guy who brought apparently brought it in, and told him that having that toy slot machine in a GA room is not appropriate because it could be a trigger to some people, like me. I know it's not the problem, it's my thinking and living that's the problem, but I don't need to be reminded. This would send mixed signals to a newcomer.

Anyway, he said he's willing to get rid of that toy.

I talked to the other Trustee who has jurisdiction over that area (we divided up all our area meetings). He said he'll follow up on it.

FYI, this same member has been reported in the past as not following the Unity Steps. As they say, some people are sicker than others . I'll pray for him.

Zeny K. - Area 3, Las Vegas

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6/5/17 - 8:24 PM

Zeny – I’m horrified and profoundly sad. I’ve been in the program 4 months shy of 30 years and I have NEVER heard of a situation where someone brought gambling paraphernalia, even REPLICA paraphernalia, into a GA room. To me, that would be like having a symbolic killing at a meeting to illustrate the concept of “prison, insanity, or death”. Still and yet, deep down in that part of my brain that tosses around implausible scenarios, I can see where someone might feel empowered to do something that stupid and disrespectful IF that someone (and we all know a “someone” like that) takes the position that this scenario is not covered in either the Guidance Code or the Group Handbook. Just like we took the time to examine and define newer forms of gambling, perhaps it’s time we take a serious look at what can be brought into a GA room aside from GA-approved literature. It’s not about the trigger; it’s about respect.

Jack R. - Area 1A, Orange County, California

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6/6/17 - 12:35 PM

Zeny,

I wish I could feel the same emotions as Jack R. cited in his response, but I’m really not surprised. I don’t mean this as a statement that I’m not surprised because it happened in Area 3, as I am not surprised because this is a systemic problem for the Fellowship, as a whole. People want to do 2 things. They want to go to meetings and not gamble. The will to follow the Guidance Code and all decisions of the BOT, is of no interest to the members of the rooms (as a generalization) and especially not to those who become Trusted Servants in the rooms. Sounds a lot like apathy, our old ever-present nemesis.

So, my take on this event will be from a different perspective. It will be from the point of view of what our responsibilities are, as Trustees. Item #3 from the Responsibilities for International Trustees, states the following: “Uphold the Guidance Code, and all decisions made by the Board of Trustees (not fulfilling this affects G.A. as a whole).”

Item #5 says the following: “Be available to all members and groups in your Trustee area for advice and guidance. Work with the trusted servants to correct the issues that do not conform with the Guidance Code and all decisions of the Board of Trustees (not fulfilling this affects G.A. as a whole).”

But more important is the Guidance Code, Article VII, Section 1, which states: “Whenever two or more persons with a desire to stop gambling meet together on a regular, weekly scheduled basis to discuss their gambling problem, they will be known as a group, only if they commit themselves to follow Gamblers Anonymous’ Guidance Code and limit their use, display and distribution to only approved and appropriate Gamblers Anonymous literature. They are also to notify the International Service Office (I.S.O.) of their existence.”

I will assume that the Secretary allowed this slot machine replica to be placed in the room. That violates the Guidance Code. The sign is yet another violation of the same section of the Guidance Code. I don’t care what message it said, it can’t be brought into the room. There is no debate on these issues. As a Trustee, you should have made sure to enforce this and had the items immediately removed

from the room. What I'm not sure of is whether the Secretary is even aware of the Guidance Code item I listed above? As far as the person who brought it in and said to you that he was 'willing to get rid of that toy.' That is not an option. It should never have been brought in – period, the end.

All your points about trigger issues and reminders, are all valid, but if the Guidance Code would have been followed, the Secretary would have taken charge and done the right thing. Then we wouldn't be talking about this issue right now. I hope you spoke to the Trusted Servants and the members of the room about why such similar situations can't ever happen again. If you didn't, then make sure you and your fellow Trustees mount a campaign to enlighten the rooms about such situations.

As far as that member having committed other infractions of the Unity Steps, you'll have to articulate what you meant by that statement, before any of us can jump in with our opinions to help you with some ideas on how to correct those problems.

Lastly, our members are all at various stages in their recoveries. As it relates to that, we can only share our experience, strength and hope with them, to help them overcome their personal obstacles. However, in matters such as what you covered with your posting, it's not about respect. It is about what defines a Gamblers Anonymous room. It's about understanding the way things are in this Fellowship. Ignorance of the Guidance Code and all the decisions of the Board of Trustees, is part of what the Trustees are supposed to correct (a seemingly never ending task). Let's give special attention to item #5 from the Trustee Responsibilities, which is about the Trustees working with the rooms to overcome that areas in which the rooms are not conforming to what should be done.

Turn this very upsetting situation into an ongoing learning experience for your area's Trustees and all the rooms you cover.

David M. – Area 12, New Jersey

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6/9/17 - 10:50 AM

I received a text message a few days ago from a meeting secretary of the aforementioned meeting room which stated, "the toy slot machine was taken out of the meeting room as soon as you gave us the notice regarding it. We apologize for the event but as you know we are a new group and we are learning to run a successful GA group. We are happy to be part of the GA family and we will continue learning about all the policies and rules of GA. We really appreciate your help and I invite you to visit us more frequently to help us to be in compliance with GA."

It shows we, as trustees (myself and those in our area) have a lot more work to do educating members of our GA community, particularly special groups, different cultures/languages. I have talked to my fellow area trustees about this, reminded each one to go out to the different meetings we agreed to cover, find out any concerns or issues they have and bring those to the table when we meet each month. The number of meetings we have (115 each week) necessitated us to divide them among us, four trustees.

GA has no rules but a guidance code. I'd like to see a few additions to the guidance code with regards to the subject matter I submitted even though that was rarely expected. After all people still have egos even if we're in an ego-crushing program.

Zeny K. - Area 3, Las Vegas

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**We Shouldn't Have To Count Our Fingers After Shaking Hands**

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6/5/17 - 10:35 PM

For those of you who have been reading the Trustee Line for many years, you know there was a period where I had many posts regarding various objections over how the Board of Regents was not a transparent entity. It got to the point where there were some 'less than cordial' threads between Trustees and Regents.

All the procedures were part of the plan to keep others out of the BOR's business. Let's talk about the minutes and agendas. The meetings happen on the 3rd Saturday of the month. The BOR agendas close for the next month's meeting on the first Friday of the following month, which coincides with the release of the minutes from last month's meeting. I asked years ago to have the BOR agenda close a week after the minutes come out. I was told that wouldn't

happen, because the Regents needed 2 full weeks to review the agenda. Really? So, let me show how this timing process thwarts participation by the rest of the Fellowship without the ability to listen in on the BOR meetings.

The minutes from the May BOR meeting were distributed this weekend, along with the June agenda that was closed, as of the release of the minutes.

Take any new item from any agenda and consider that it was introduced, discussed and voted on. Who represents your voice and thoughts on this item? NOBODY. These are 9 people who are voted in by the members of the Fellowship and then they go on with a pathway on each item that doesn't take into consideration anything that the members want.

6 of the 9 members of the current BOR are from Southern California. The remaining 3 members are from South Florida, Louisiana and Pennsylvania. I don't know about anyone else, but that's not a geographic distribution of Regents that represents the Fellowship. It used to be worse, with only 2 Regents being allowed to be seated from outside the 200-mile radius. The new BOR has 4 members outside the 200-mile radius. Progress? Superficial, at best.

Back to the chronology example. So, an item is raised in May and we don't find out about it until the minutes come out in June. If someone doesn't like what has transpired and wants the item discussed again, that item won't be heard until the July meeting. Great continuity, right? Oh, did I forget? The item will only be heard if the Chair wants to hear it. I've been the victim of that 'inspired' rule of BOR meeting procedure.

With the advent of BOR telephone conference calls, which goes back many years, interested members could hear the entire conference call each month with the BOR. If something doesn't sit right with a listener, they can put an agenda item up for the next meeting, way in advance of the agenda deadline. Continuity prevails. Unfortunately, no one is allowed to make their own argument about their items, because as one Regent insisted, 'the BOR is not that type of body.' That's another thread for the Trustee Line.

But now I have begun to shake my head in disbelief, because of the pending move to a complete lack of transparency. There is an item on the agenda to end the conference calls. Such an action will shut down access to these monthly meetings by any member of the Fellowship. This turns us right back to the BOR meetings being secretive. People who are elected by the membership would be prohibited from hearing what everyone has to say about every item. Instead, we will be force fed minutes that do not have the detail of what was said on each of these items. Watch how fast people from the BOR run with a response to this posting to point out the fact that the BOT minutes do not provide any detailed minutes.

For those who think that everyone can find out what happens at a BOR meeting by reading the minutes, you're lying to yourselves and to the members of the Fellowship. If anyone wants some specifics about what happens in the BOR meetings that never makes it into the minutes, give me a call. I'm one of the people who dial into every monthly BOR telephone conference call.

Evidently, trying to disconnect the rest of the members from the goings on of the BOR and going back to the secret society status of previous Boards, is more important than being accountable for their words. Evidently, the BOR feels they are above being accountable for their actions.

So often I have heard from BOR members about the egos of the Board of Trustees. That is very ironic. The BOT appears to have more of a tie-in to our members. Our BOT meetings are open to anyone. Our BOT meetings allow for non-Trustees to present their own items. Our BOT meetings allow for anyone to hear all that is said on any item.

One final thing. There are very few members who dial into the monthly BOR telephone conference call, even though an email continues to be sent out to all the Trustees before the monthly BOR meetings. To those who don't listen in, shame on you. The fact that only a handful of Trustees do, shame on all of us.

Obviously, we as Trustees, take on a responsibility to be the Guardians of the Recovery and Unity programs. What about taking that extra step and seeing exactly what the Board of Regents does that affects much of what we as Trustees do for the members we represent.

Silence is consent. By not dialing into these meetings, we are saying through our inactions that we just don't give a \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank). Maybe it's time to change that, because if the BOR members have their way, our connection to what REALLY happens with the BOR, will be lost. The BOR is looking to take away the only tool that allows for some semblance of transparency – the monthly telephone conference call.

You may not like to write and therefore you don't send anything into the Trustee Line. It doesn't have to be anything long. Let it just say how you feel.

David M. – Area 12, New Jersey

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6/6/17 - 11:59 AM

David, you asked so here's how I feel. You can no more fix this than you can remodel a house that has already burned to the ground which is why I expend no energy even thinking about it (OK, shame on me). This is about neither principles nor personalities. This is, pure and simple, about an anomalous organizational structure. How many organizations like ours do you know of that have a two-headed governance structure (Trustees and Regents) operating from completely different perspectives? You have one arm that is responsible for the vision and mission of the organization (Trustees). You have another that is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the organization (Regents). One can't operate without the other but neither seems to want to do so without first poking fingers in each other's eyes. The Regents aren't bad people and neither are the Trustees. What they lack is an infrastructure where they can work together seamlessly.

So how about this for outside the box thinking down the road? Disincorporate and reincorporate with a single governance structure like they do in the real world. I am adjunct faculty at a local private university and they certainly don't one set of Trustees that deals with the vision and mission of the university and another that deals with its finances and day-to-day operations. They do everything and they do it together. We don't need nine Regents and over a hundred Trustees (many of whom can't afford to show their faces at meetings and hence, cannot hear the discussions and arguments and vote rationally) to change the proverbial light bulb. We could easily accomplish everything we need to accomplish with a third to a half of what we have now. Then nobody needs to dial in to a Saturday conference call they have no influence over anyway (and apparently no longer even welcome to do so if the Regents have their way).

And why, for that matter, do we need to be based in California other than for historic reasons? I'm a native of Southern California and if I had to base an international organization somewhere, this is the last place where I would do it simply because of the cost of doing business and the regulatory complexity. Incorporate elsewhere and base the ISO somewhere more central (and less expensive) and do away with this nonsense that X number of Trustees/Regents/Whatever needs to be within a Y-mile radius of wherever. Simply elect your best people and go from there. Then it can be truly representative of everyone's needs.

Jack R. - Area 1A, Orange County, California

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