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Trustee Line for July 2017

A PDF version of this issue to distribute to your rooms, or to print out for easier reading, will be available after 7/31/17.

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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BOR Reset

7/3/17 - 9:00 AM

Yes, it is that time once again. July 1st of the odd years begins the new term for the BOT Executive Board and the Board of Regents. The only change on the BOT Executive Board, is that André G. decided not to run for another term, and was replaced by Mitch L. André deserves the heartfelt thanks of the BOT for being of service and being part of this 3-legged stool called the Executive Board, that leads the Board of Trustees. As far as Mitch, he faces an uphill battle, as nothing can prepare anyone for the difficulties of being a first-time BOT Co-Chair, except for stepping into the batter's box and getting hit by some fast balls.

However, this posting is not about the Executive Board. It is about the semi- new Board of Regents. Two-thirds of the 9 members were replaced with different members. That's a good thing, although I would have hoped for a complete change of all 9 members. I say that because it is time for a new approach and new attitude to work its way down from the top. Bob W. has extensive experience as BOR Chair, so he will set the tone for what happens.

For all the years I have been active with the BOT, I have always questioned what would happen if the BOT voted for something that involved the BOR and the BOR voting against it. What I understand is that it becomes a stalemate. To me, this is an untenable outcome that can't endure. Which only points to a solution where one board is the surviving decision.

Such a discussion apparently has previously stepped on the egos of the members of the BOR. The first response by the BOR members is to tell the BOT to stay out of the BOR's business. They don't want the BOT making the financial decisions. With everyone's hackles up over this issue, the BOR members are quick to dig in and defend this position. The strange thing is that few issues voted on by the BOT that affect the BOR, get passed. The BOT respects the job responsibilities of the BOR and is not, by experience, interested in micromanaging the BOR.

We all know that Andy R, BOT Chair, is a good salesman. So is Bob W. from the BOR. Let's get the 2 of them together and have them roll up their sleeves to figure out a solution to present to both boards.

The Trustees have progressed from dealing with 30 agenda items over 2 days in Montreal of 2000. To an agenda of 134 items in Vancouver of 2013. Surely, the BOT can deal with any deliberative situation at a Trustee meeting. What would help is not to have these one-sided combative discussions independent of the other board about this subject, but to have common ground of understanding for each board to discuss a solution - finally.

I'm encouraged that Bob W. has some good ideas to present to the BOR. Hopefully, the BOR agrees and those initiatives are approved, because it is about access and transparency. I can speak from personal experience, if you have something to say to the BOR, call Bob, he is always open to a discussion about any issue.

You might not like what he has to say, but he will listen and tell you why he doesn't agree. If you make your case, he might change his opinion. Yes, I have experienced that myself.

To all the BOR members, newly elected and those returning...All the best on the start of your new term. While you are making your changes, makes sure you figure out how to carry the message of exactly what the BOR is and does. Although I suck at handicapping, I'm of the belief that over 90% of the Fellowship has no clue as to 1) what the BOR is, 2) what the BOR does, and 3) who most of the BOR members are. Wouldn't it be appropriate to put a BOR Public Relations Committee together to accomplish this?

Remember, you can't bitch about things with the BOR, if you don't care enough to dial into the monthly telephone conference calls. A reminder email is sent on the Friday before the Saturday with all the details. Don't just delete it - dial in and hear what goes on. Silence is consent.

David M. - Area 12, New Jersey

7/4/17 - 1:02 PM

As David already mentioned, July 1st, 2017 begins the new 2-year term for the BOT executive board and I decided not to run again for another term, for very personal reasons. I have been around the Board of Trustees since San Diego in 1999, where I attended my first BOT meeting as a trustee and serving my fellowship as a member of the Executive Board was a logical suite to all my years on the Board of Trustees.

It was a learning experience that I will remember for the rest of my life. The required qualities for a member of the executive board are patience, tolerance and good judgement. That could explain why I did not run again, who knows... Most of all, I hope I helped my Brothers and Sisters in Area 5B (French Quebec) understand that they can be of service at that level of the Fellowship, even though English is not their primary language.

As part of my service on the executive board over the last 2 years, I believed that listening to the BOR meetings was part of my responsibilities and I did so regularly on the third Saturday of the month. During these meetings, I have heard several discussions about the BOR/BOT relations, following agenda items implying both Boards. Some members of the previous BOR would express their opinion vehemently, seeing the BOT as "the Board which wanted to control everything". Their main argument was that the BOR reports to the members of GA, not to the BOT.

Well, guess what...the BOT is the group conscience of the members. The trustees are elected by the members to represent them and, should a situation arise between our two service Boards where there is a difference of opinion, the voice of the members should prevail, and that voice is carried by the Board of Trustees. I

really don't suggest that the BOT should control or supervise the BOR, that is not the way I think. Instead, I encourage the dialogue and, in my opinion, this dialogue should be extended far beyond their respective chairs. I have never been shy or afraid to speak with a BOR member to express my concerns or get an explanation on an agenda item. I was never turned down!

Finally, I wish to thank the BOT for trusting me to be a co-chair back in Cherry Hill in 2015. However, I am not done with the BOT. I am on two BOT committees and I plan to keep on attending trustee meetings, maybe not all of them but certainly the next one in Ontario CA. for the 60th anniversary of Gamblers Anonymous.

André G. - Past trustee, Area 5B (French Quebec)

Let's Deal With Anonymity - Finally
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7/15/17 - 10:58 AM

I have anxiously been waiting for responses to Andy's topic just above. Based on what Paul and Jack have submitted, it became clear to me that it's time for the Fellowship to take away the ambiguity regarding the subject of anonymity. Discussions have been raging on for as long as the Unity Steps have been in existence.

I'm a bit worn out from hearing the attitude of people who want to take back their will, in defiance of Recovery Step 3, and do what they want regarding anonymity. The biggest problem we face as Trustees, is trying to bring rooms and members into compliance with anonymity issues. If people feel that anonymity is completely in their control and interpretation, then we might as well not have it as part of our core principles. Part of the problem is that I could go on a major TV network and say my full name and that I am a member of Gamblers Anonymous, and the world would not stop rotating on its axis.

This behavior has been accelerated on an exponential scale with the advent of the Internet, more specifically social media. The typical phrases are liberally thrown around..."Who is it really hurting?" and better still..."If it helps just one person."

5 years ago, I tried to force this issue of anonymity and make the BOT accountable for exactly how the issues of anonymity should be approached by members and groups. There were 9 items that I tried to introduce as a new article of the Guidance Code. Maybe it's time to tackle this in Ontario.

Article XXI – Internet, electronic media and public appearances

Section 1:

Personal publicity is always shunned, and anonymity is carefully preserved because the Fellowship of Gamblers Anonymous is

more important than any one member. By maintaining this policy, any problems that accrue to an individual member cannot harm the Fellowship.

Anonymity is not an option of any member of Gamblers Anonymous, including when dealing with the Internet or electronic media. In the meaning of Unity Step 11, it is not breaking anonymity if we choose to relate to family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, that we are members of Gamblers Anonymous.

Section 2:

Broadcasting audio, pictures, videos of any Gamblers Anonymous members are not allowed during any Gamblers Anonymous meetings, workshops or business meetings, whether local, regional or international. Members who meet outside of the aforementioned GA functions, may take pictures and/or videos for their private use, providing they do not identify anyone in the pictures and/or videos as members of Gamblers Anonymous.

Section 3:

With the exception of Gamblers Anonymous Board of Trustee meetings, no recording devices of any type may be utilized at any time. In Board of Trustee meetings, only the International Executive Secretary, or other designated person, may use a voice recording device, and only for the purpose of historical archiving of the proceedings of the meetings. Such recordings contain matters that affect Gamblers Anonymous as a whole.

Local and regional area business meetings are not exempt from using recording devices. In such cases a Recording Secretary should be utilized to capture the minutes of any business meeting.

Section 4:

When involved in any online venture, either business or personal, a member is not allowed to show any pictures and/or videos in which the member makes any statement of association with Gamblers Anonymous, past, present or future. This includes anything in print.

Section 5:

Social media applications may not always be private or secure. Gamblers Anonymous members should always be aware that anonymity issues also apply equally to these situations, as per Unity Step 11.

Section 6:

When using email or any platform that carries the identity of the sender for Gamblers Anonymous correspondence, the account name cannot disregard anonymity issues. Use of last names and domain names that breach anonymity are not allowed.

Section 7:

Speaking engagements, involving any groups in which GA members will identify themselves as members of Gamblers

Anonymous, are to be considered an extension of an open-meeting. All parties participating in such engagements must ensure that these events are not recorded via audio or video in any way.

Section 8:

Any type of radio or Internet voice interviews in which GA members will identify themselves as members of Gamblers Anonymous require the GA member(s) to use a different name than their own.

Section 9:

Any type of video interviews in which GA members will identify themselves as members of Gamblers Anonymous are not allowed for display of any distinguishable facial features. The recording entity must find the means to hide or obscure the members' faces. The members cannot use their own names. An anonymity release form must be signed by the recording entity.

I'm asking for individual thoughts on each section, as I am considering submitting this as an agenda item for Ontario.

David M. - Area 12, New Jersey

7/15/17 - 4:40 PM

David, that is a lot of "grist for the mill" so to speak but let's call this what it really is; the concept that the way an individual member handles their personal anonymity is now proprietary to the fellowship as a whole. That's about as edgy as it gets but OK, in all fairness, I think Sections 2 through 6, 8 and 9 are entirely reasonable, with or without tweaking, and should not provoke much in the way of pushback (although I know they will because that's what we do). On balance, I believe they would be good for the fellowship. However, Section 1 might be a little overbroad and Section 7, in my opinion, crosses the line.

In healthcare, especially behavioral healthcare in which I worked for a number of years, it is common practice for a medical professional who is a member of a 12-Step program to identify themselves as such when addressing patients in a didactic setting. If I am reading Section 7 correctly, that practice would now be precluded, or at the very least, logistically encumbered. That helps neither the patient (who needs to see a living example of the value of the fellowship) nor the fellowship (whose mission is to help the compulsive gambler who still suffers). To me, if that medical professional has no problem blowing their anonymity and are clear they are speaking for themselves and not for the fellowship, why should that matter to us? I know the same holds true for attorneys who are members of 12-Step programs and speak to other impaired attorneys in a formal setting because I currently teach with one who does this regularly. Whatever we choose to do with this issue, let's try to be reasonable and color within the lines.

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

Yet Another Sad Day For This Fellowship

7/15/17 - 10:10 PM

I listened in to a good amount of the most recent BOR meeting. It was decided that this access would no longer be available to non BOR members.

The vote was 5 – 4 in favor of the motion to return to the secret dark ages. The manner in which the item was presented and discussed was more like something out of a Laurel and Hardy film.

When the question was asked, mid-vote, whether people understood the item and what supporting it meant, when it was already clear at least two people did not have an iota what a yes or no meant, the Chairman announced “They know.” This despite the fact the chair indicated he was against the motion, didn’t seem to me like he was in favor of a fair hearing for the item.

There were many goings on that concerned me, not least the way that a number of items were described by the Chair as a waste of time and hence there were repeated attempts by the chair to dismiss items, have no discussion, no decision on whether to table, just items which were deemed a waste of time and let's move on.

One item where the Chairman, having announced he thought the item was a waste of time, was then duly informed the item was passed by the BOT. The Chairman's response was – I know, let's move on, at least one member present ensured an update was discussed.

There were a number of items where the Chair decided unilaterally and without discussion what happened next, not one member of the BOR voiced concern at the railroading of items or at the several instances where the BOT, the group conscience of the membership, was derided, usually by the Chair.

There was more there to concern me, similar railroading of pre-determined expenditure without due process, scheming to embarrass Trustees into becoming lifeliners, to name a few.

Lots of pats on the back by the BOR for the BOR old and new for a supposed \$70k turnaround, not a word about the BOT or Trustee Line that ensured the greater part by dealing with the Bulletin which accounted for 70% of the turnaround.

Anyone else listen in to this disgraceful meeting ?

Personally, I think the Chairman should resign without delay and the other members should take a long, hard look at what they allowed pass as a democratic meeting.

Yours in sadness,
Odie B. - Area 36, South/East Ireland

7/16/17 - 1:45 AM

Odie,

I saw your posting and could only bring myself to a deep sigh. It's obvious that the divide between the Fellowship and the Board of Regents is as wide as ever. When will the BOR stop this incessant paranoid attitude that the BOT wants to control the BOR?

I hung up from the call after the 5-4 vote to shutdown access to the conference call to all but the BOR members. The Chair said the access would be disconnected, so I hung up. I later heard from others that the conference call continued as it was, so I missed the other items that came after the vote to shutdown access.

Here is what is really disturbing. It was said that the BOR should be fearful of someone using their words against them. I had to shake my head in disbelief. Was this an extension of what goes on in Washington?

We elect the BOR members for all the wrong reasons. It's always been a popularity contest rather than a gauge of someone's business experience. How are we to really understand if our BOR members understand the issues and how they think? We do it by being observers and listening to the nuances of how each member presents, him/herself. So yes, words matter, and if that's a problem for the BOR members, then my advice is to pay attention to what comes out of your mouth.

In keeping with that thought, I also couldn't believe my ears when it was said that the BOT Chair could be sued and subpoenaed for something that made the BOR think that a previous meeting was recorded. Did we all imagine this statement?

Another reason someone gave was that the minutes reflect what happens in the BOR meeting. Nobody needs to know what each one of us say, so there is no need to have a conference call. If you believe that, then I've got a red bridge for sale in San Francisco. I know I suck at handicapping, but the minutes will be their usual abbreviated form and not give the details or the process of what actually was discussed, pros and cons.

There was also concern that anyone could be dialing into the system and nobody would know who they are. Well, that's completely wrong. I can say that for a fact, because the BOR Conference Calls use the same platform as the BOT Weekly Telephone Conference Call Meeting. I'm 1 of 5 admins for that conference call meeting, so I speak from experience. Someone has to have a laptop at the meeting and login to the portal that is part of the conference call account, to be able assign a GA name to a phone number. If a person doesn't acknowledge who they are, they can be dropped from the call. Then the question is whether or not the BOR will be worried about any GA member who may decide to record the BOR meetings, and if they are considering doing something nefarious with the recordings.

There is also another item that will test the resolve of the BOR to be transparent. Yes, that's another phrase that was thrown around as nothing more than window dressing. There's a feature on the system portal to record the call. Anyone who dials in would hear an announcement that the call is being recorded. Maybe then, there might be some discretion used before the BOR members make any statements. The recordings could then be downloaded by the IES and Recording Secretary for precision minutes and archived references.

I had many other things that I felt were not handled well, such as the opinion from counsel on improving language on our Pressure Relief Forms. It's interesting how there was a sense of urgency not to do anything but send the recommended changes to the Pressure Relief Committee. Out of all the BOR members, did anyone bother to see that the committee's mission statement has nothing to do with that? No. Also, it was interesting that another publication was previously reviewed by the BOR and it decided to no longer sell this other piece of approved literature. Why did the BOR not do the same for these PRGM forms? But it was important to rush this process and vote to allocate additional monies to make the necessary changes to the publications. Where is the deliberative process for the guardians of the Corporation of Gamblers Anonymous?

It looks like you said in your posting Odie, we are now plunged, once again, back into the dark ages of previous BOR secrecy. The members elect the BOT and the BOT elect the BOR. The BOR acts for itself and does not show any representation of the membership. I fear that this new BOR is a new chapter from the same book. My optimism from my first posting this month, appears to have been shredded today. I see the divide between the 2 boards growing wider.

People may not like some of the things I say, but they know exactly where I stand on whatever I say. If I were a BOR member, then I would have no problem recording the meetings, for accuracy and accountability, which appears to be just a concept with the BOR.

Yes, today was indeed a sad day for the Fellowship.

David M. – Area 12, New Jersey

7/23/17 - 1:35 PM

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

While there is chatter about the BOR closing the board meetings. I see little talk about what caused this decision.

I believe in transparency but I also believe in trust. This trust was broken when somebody recorded a prior Trustee meeting without permission.

For those of you that don't know this is a serious crime both in the state of California and a federal crime. Now I was not a member of the board at that time. If I had I can assure you I would have filed a case and we would have been able to find out who did that.

I remember David going crazy over the fact a phone meeting was recorded. My anonymity is important to me. Just like the trustees don't want people recording their meetings. The BOT could have their meetings open to people listening on the phone. But when that was suggested just like having them on face time the BOT said it violated anonymity.

This is my first post on here in over 5 years. If you ask why? Simple this platform is nothing but a bitch session for a very limited and I mean very limited amount of our members.

Sometimes we all forget our only real purpose is to help the compulsive gambler who still suffers.

I would not be opposed to members listening to the BOR meetings if the person who recorded it came forward and made their 10Th step. Along with a caveat that no meeting would be recorded again in the future.

In Serenity

Tom M. - Past Trustee, Area 2, Northern California

7/24/17 - 10:42 AM

What this issue lacks is critical thinking and problem solving on everyone's part. I think everyone is in agreement that telephone recording of meetings could "potentially" (and even that might be too strong of a word) backfire. But the real question is, why does someone feel the need to telephonically record the meeting in the first place? To blow a Regent's anonymity? To embarrass a Regent? To impeach a Regent? For some other nefarious purpose? Please!

There is one, and only one, reason to record a Board of Regents meeting and that is because we all know that what is said at those meetings and the minutes that are supposed to memorialize what is said at those meetings are often so brief and inarticulate, they serve no practical purpose. What about a compromise and hire a professional to take the minutes? I came from the hospital sector in a previous life. We had important meetings every day of the week and because of the legal significance of what we did, we NEVER took our own minutes. Instead, we used a professional to do it. I'm not saying we need something as fancy and expensive as a court reporter but there are surely people out there who do this for a living who could be "rented" for two hours once a month. If we agree that nothing will be off the record, we meet the goals everyone desires, transparency and privacy. Also, if the people in the room know what they say will be reduced to writing by a professional, they might think twice before putting something stupid on the record.

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