

Life-Line Bulletin

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Trustee Line for August 2016

A PDF version of this issue to distribute to your rooms, or to print out for easier reading, will be available after 8/31/16.

**Questions and Answers Involving
Individual BOT Committees**

Any GA member can contact the Chairs of the Committees listed below with any questions or concerns they might have. The Chairs will answer the emails and the resulting issues will be posted under each committee involved in the email. This will serve as help for other members, Intergroups or areas, who may be going through the same situations. The emails will not breach anonymity and will be redacted to make sure names and areas are not included in this section. You are also invited to click the individual committee links on the left margin, for more information.

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**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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And The Answer Is...

8/2/16 - 12:25 PM

I'm sorry that I did not respond in July to the issue David raised but here is my observation.

It is not the Trustees fault ,the Intergroup's fault or ISOs fault. It's APATHY.

Every area of our fellowship has a group of members that " don't care "- "do not feel that it is important " " that's not my job " etc etc

Look at the Group Handbook and you will see many things that a GROUP should do.

So now, to improve things we are going to change the book.

Look at the number of absentee ballots that we had at the last BOR meeting. Trustees were voting on items that they did not hear any discussion- so why don't we do away with physical meetings ?

Bill B. - Area 15, New York

Where Is The Procedure For This?

8/6/16 - 1:59 PM

Greetings, Fellow Trustees,

Today, 8/6/16, I submitted an item for the agenda of our upcoming Trustee meeting in October. The item has to do with procedures for starting a new meeting.

Recently, I was informed that our area has a meeting in Lancaster, Pa. Neither I nor either of my 2 fellow Trustees knew anything about this meeting. A check of the ISO site shows the meeting listed. When did it start? Who started it? Was anyone sent a starter kit? None of us have a clue! When, if ever was ISO going to inform the area Trustees? One of our Trustee responsibilities is to visit each group in our area. This is difficult if we don't know about a new group. (I will visit this meeting soon, but since it is 75 miles away, not today.)

This laissez faire attitude is not new. Personally, I submitted this identical item for the 2010 Louisville agenda, shortly after my area learned of a group that had been in existence for about 3 months. That meeting had been started by a Council, and was receiving its materials directly from ISO. The discussion of the item in Louisville got rather heated, mostly because some of the Trustees read it as being too restrictive. Frankly, it is only restrictive to ISO. For everyone else it is suggestive.

Please, before we beat this item to death, read it carefully.

Looking forward to seeing you all in San Diego;

Your friend in recovery,
John B. - Trustee, Area 13, Philadelphia

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

8/6/16 - 5:27 PM

With the political market speaking about a potential 'constitutional crisis', I would submit that GA is going through a 'Fellowship crisis'. Yes, those are stiff words, but most of the GA members, only go to 1 meeting a week and everything is peaches and cream in their environment. Let me give a first hand example of what happened to me this past week.

I attended one of the 47 rooms in my area that I usually don't go to. In walking in, I saw that there was a full sheet of information regarding the subject of "The Lies We Tell Ourselves." Of course this is not an approved piece of literature, yet there was a copy of this document in front of everyone in attendance that night. I was polite and waited until it was my turn to give therapy, and before I started, I made everyone aware that I was one of 6 Trustees for the area and that I wanted to specifically speak to the room about the document. I was clear about mentioning that it was not approved literature and could not be used, displayed or distributed in any room. I was also sure to say that it was probably composed with the best of intentions, it was nevertheless a violation of the Guidance Code.

I knew I was in for a headwind because 2 of the senior members in the room looked at each other and rolled their eyes. Nothing like telegraphing your thoughts to others in the room, including me.

After the meeting, the Chair of the meeting came up to me and began to explain where the document came from. What I had indicated to the room, that such non-approved documents could be distributed to other rooms and be perceived to be fine for use in any room, actually happened. The document came from another room from an adjacent area to us. The person cited a long list of program 'long-timers' who were in that meeting, and they didn't seem to have a problem with it, so why should I have a problem with it. Really, is this where this is going?

So, 5 paragraphs into this posting, I can get to the meat of this issue. In that list of 'distinguished' members were at least 4 either current or past Trustees. Not one of them objected, so naturally, why wouldn't anyone in the room think it's okay to use anything in any room? I was made aware of another area earlier this year in which all the area Trustees were in a meeting where non-approved literature was being used, and none of those Trustees said anything. This is but 2 situations, which leads me to think that this cavalier attitude is rampant throughout the Fellowship.

Let me point out something very basic with what constitutes a GA room:

Guidance Code, Article 7, Section 1:

"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."

We have a very detailed process to approve literature, yet rooms seem to be unaware of what is or is not approved literature. They don't seem to understand that the use, display and distribution of such literature is a violation of the Guidance Code. If that is the case, then it is also clear that the Trustees are not doing their job, as it relates telling rooms what they can and cannot do, vis-à-vis the Guidance Code and all decisions of the Board of Trustees. By the way, look at the Trustee Responsibilities inside the Information Booklet, items 3 and 5.

If nobody gives a damn about upholding the Guidance Code, then maybe we should get rid of it. Maybe we should examine why we have such stringent rules about how the Guidance Code gets changed, yet we collectively don't pay attention to them. Maybe we should give our Guidance Code to another Fellowship, because we don't seem to be using it.

I'm anxious to see the disposition of the new Trustees in San Diego. If there isn't a discernable movement to abide by the Guidance Code and strengthen the structure of what this Fellowship is about, then I fear that this is an affirmation of the beginning of the Board of Trustees unraveling, followed by the Guidance Code and a total splintering of the Fellowship.

What's really upsetting is the quantity of members who only live GA by a few things. 1) – Who is it hurting? 2) If it helps just one person... and maybe best of all 3) Our only purpose is to carry the message. Of course that last one is done without any regard to the precepts of the Program; no regard to the process.

So let's see who has something to say on this subject. Let's see if anyone is bold enough to say they have witnessed the same ignorance of use of outside literature in their area. Let's see who can offer a substantive set of procedures on how they dealt with this issue. If we don't talk about these problems, how are we to come up with procedures to fix them?

I've used the phrase: Live in hope – die in despair. I came into this Fellowship with an understanding of hope being part of my recovery. It took me becoming involved as a Trusted Servant in my Intergroup and then Trustee, to see that hope is turning into despair.

David M. – Area 12, New Jersey

8/9/16 - 8:16 PM

The Guidance Code is a blueprint for our Fellowship. I, as an "old-timer" have no right to violate the GC. If I believe there is a change needed, a new item added or an item to be removed, I'll abide by the rules and procedures and live with the decision of the BOT. That's like a democracy, wow.

I've been to meetings and removed non-approved literature, reprints of articles along with any item that is not approved but endorsed by the group or its members, even if it is my first time in that room. I've done this at rooms here in Southern Florida and in other states.

Sometimes I'm told where I should go and sometimes the members actually remove the item. I do not know if it reappears the following week. I also explain why I did it.

Bill B (NYC) is on point with an earlier post this month regarding apathy.

Combining apathy and a disregard for the GC leads to a disaster.

When coupling the know-it-all attitude with apathy and disregard for the GC, GA will worse off. The Trustees need to awaken and live by and share that important base of the GC with all GA members. It is your duty.

I've always been outspoken in the Fellowship and, at times, embroiled in controversy. Sometime during 2013 I decided to retire from the debating society and allow others to take the lead. I even kept quiet at my home meeting where items were distributed that were not approved literature.

Yes, it did bother me and yes, I was wrong in not mentioning the violation. But my Higher Power works in strange ways and I was elected to the BOR with the term beginning July 1, 2015. I said to myself that I really could not be a good standing member of the BOR without advising the room of the GC violation and explain how they could start the process of approval.

The next business meeting was the second week in September and I prepared a typewritten explanation and presented to the room and advised that it is not a votable item and we need to cease distribution and abide by the process.

The chairperson decided to have the room vote, in spite of his knowledge of the GC. The room voted 30-3 to continue to do what they were doing and thumbing their collective noses to the GC.

My principals kicked in immediately and when I went home I sent the chairperson my immediate resignation as treasurer and requested to be removed from the phone list. I will not compromise my principals especially as I realized that I cannot step back when an egregious act takes place. Shame on me for not acting sooner.

I do not know if the situation has ever been resolved to be in compliance with the GC as the matter is with the Trustees.

For the good of GA there is much work to be started at the leadership level of the Trustees.

For me the most important word in the Fellowship is "WE." We can do the work together but individuals cannot accomplish as much as a group of us.

I care. Can I change "I care" to "We care?"

Bill B. - Area 6, South Florida

8/10/16 - 12:37 PM

Sometimes it takes a village. Our village has trusted servants, and sometimes our trusted servants have to become involved in room issues. The situation Bill B (Florida) discussed has been resolved; not without difficulty, and not without a significant amount of time and effort on the part of Area 6 Trustees. But ... it has been resolved.

The issue, however, is the reluctance to adhere to the Guidance Code and the active resentment against the Trustees and the Intergroup by room members who have served as Trustees and members of the Board of Regents. This is not apathy, this is "my way is the right way, not the GA way". Way beyond apathy. In order for our fellowship to prosper and grow, it is imperative the "old-timers" set the standard for the newcomers. Follow the guidelines set forth in the Guidance Code, have a copy of the Guidance Code available in the room, don't allow non-approved GA material in the room.

Jim G. - Trustee, Area 6, South Florida

8/10/16 - 1:17 PM

Two and a half years ago I attended a member's five-year anniversary at a San Francisco Bay Area group meeting, where I was surprised by the use of a Recovery Step study booklet that might have been sourced from somewhere other than Gamblers Anonymous. The booklet was not offensive, and it was clearly well-intentioned. Yet, as a longstanding GA member, my expectation of uniformity among GA groups -- in terms of the use, display, and distribution of literature -- was not met. ▽

I did a bit of research and, sure enough, ascertained that the booklet in question was unapproved literature. I discussed this matter with two Trustees who had first suspected the use of the unapproved booklet more than a year earlier, and with another Trustee just a few weeks later, along with two trusted servants of this particular Bay Area group. Disappointingly for me, their response to my concerns was noncommittal. Furthermore, subsequent to those discussions, I was given to understand that the group I had visited was still using the unapproved booklet at their meetings, in defiance of and disregard for the Guidance Code.

It wasn't until I took the issue to Intergroup as an agenda item that some extensive discussion on the matter finally occurred. I made a motion to have the Trustees conduct their own research about whether unapproved literature was being used and to take the necessary action based on their findings. However, my motion was defeated. Various reasons were cited, from "the Trustees are not the GA police," to "this matter does not concern the individual member (me) who raised the issue, and therefore it was out of line for him (me) to bring the matter to Intergroup" to "this is not Intergroup's matter to resolve; rather it is for individual groups to decide." I argued that a violation of the Guidance Code, no matter how seemingly "small" or benign, was a serious lapse, but this line of reasoning seemed to fall on deaf ears.

Nonetheless, as I learned about a month later from one of the trusted servants, the group in question did, in fact, stop using the unapproved literature. I don't know whether or not the Trustees took action to compel the group to stop using it, because I did not follow up with Intergroup. But regardless, the situation should not have required a regular GA member to make a motion at Intergroup in order to prompt the Trustees to do their job. And frankly, I would take the point a bit further. In my opinion, passivity and recalcitrance in fulfilling a vested responsibility could indicate a similar passivity and emotional laziness vis-à-vis the ongoing work of personal recovery.

Per the Responsibilities for International Trustees of Gamblers Anonymous, Trustees are to "uphold the Guidance Code, and all decisions made by the Board of Trustees." The Trustees act as guardians of the Twelve Step Unity Program, and are, essentially, the stewards of Gamblers Anonymous as a whole. Individual GA groups and members depend on the Trustees to help sustain our unity, and to emblemize that unity through their actions and decision-making. When they fail to do so, or assume a casual attitude toward this responsibility, they put the Fellowship at risk.

To be sure, individual groups should be self-governing, except in matters that affect other groups and Gamblers Anonymous as a whole. As Unity Step 4 explains, "Each Gamblers Anonymous group has great latitude to conduct its affairs within the framework of the Fellowship. This preserves the freedom of choice that is so important to the group conscience. The conduct of each group is limited only to the extent that its actions would conflict with the Guidance Code of Gamblers Anonymous."

Our Guidance Code is unambiguous regarding what literature is acceptable at GA group meetings. As per Article VII, Section 1, a GA group is required to "limit their use, display, and distribution [of literature] to only approved and appropriate Gamblers Anonymous literature."

Of course, a group is free to disregard the above principle and distribute whatever they wish, but then they should not call themselves a GA group, nor should they be listed as one in GA meeting lists and directories, or registered with the International Service Office. Period.

The Literature Committee of the Board of Trustees provides a clear, step-by-step procedure for getting new literature approved, beginning with detailed directions for submitting the literature to the Board. The entire approval process cannot exactly be characterized as "quick," but it is simple and easy to follow. And, in my view, it is extremely important.

It is important because the use of unapproved literature does not merely impact one group; it affects Gamblers Anonymous as a whole. It disrupts our coherence and breaches our unity. As Unity Step 1 states, "Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon group unity."

This is not merely an abstract ideal. On the one hand, obviously, if groups can disseminate any literature they want, then a group leader could choose to distribute some unrelated thing for "comic relief" or what-have-you, which might provide enjoyment for some group members while confusing or alienating others. But even more to the point -- and more pertinent to the example at hand -- if a given relevant piece of literature contains religious overtones or interpretations of the Recovery Steps which are particular and perhaps not resonant for all group members, this too can have a discouraging and distancing effect, and could result in real harm to some individuals' recovery.

Everything has its time and place. There is no rule prohibiting GA members from sharing whatever materials they wish outside of the meeting context. Within meetings, however, the guidelines are crystal clear, and a complete list of GA-approved literature is provided each month at the back of the ISO Bulletin.

I believe it is essential to remember that thousands of other men and women have come through the doors before us -- and have voted as Trustees the way they have to help shape the Guidance Code. They have demonstrated through their experience, strength, and hope that their lives have improved, and that ours can too. In keeping faith and trust with them, and with the Guidance Code that they have bequeathed us (and which continues to evolve), we also ensure faith and trust with each other and with those still to come through those doors.

8/10/16 - 3:52 PM

The operative word in Ed E's response to this topic lies at the end of the second paragraph of his post, "defiance". In my experience, people tend to "defy" things they are easily able to defy (just like they are ABLE to do things because they are ENABLED to do things). Historically, what has happened when groups deliberately defy the Guidance Code with regard to unapproved literature? The first thing that happens is that one or more past or present Trustees (individuals, not the "Board") rail against the injustice to the fellowship. Of course they are absolutely correct, each and every one of them. But then what? Does the "Board" (collective) take a stand? Do they formally notice a recalcitrant meeting or meetings to cease and desist using unapproved literature or they will not be considered part of the fellowship? Everyone knows the answer to that. If that happened, there would be one less "can" that the ISO gets the benefit of and if the ISO loses enough "cans", we/they go out of business. So the question really should be, "Do Trustees as a BODY care enough about a Guidance Code THEY wrote to actually enforce the part about unapproved literature no matter what the cost to the fellowship is?" If the answer is "no", which I suspect it will be, we need to give some serious thought to either doing away with the Guidance Code, the Trustees, or both, and just let the groups wing it with whatever literature they can purchase from Hazeldon or Amazon.

Jack R. - Trustee Area 1A, Orange County, Ca.

Guidance Code

8/11/16 - 11:30 PM

This afternoon I attended the noon meeting at the (room name omitted). During a member's share, the member referred to actual names of various dating services and that the member was looking for a date. As he continued, I interrupted the member and said, "that is out of order and it is an outside issue", no other member joined in even though I asked "does anyone agree with me?" Silence followed and the member continued.

At lunch, after the meeting, I asked the members at the table if I was wrong. A past Trustee who was active in the local Intergroup stated "I was wrong"; "it was not important"; the member chairing the meeting said, "I was thinking to say something but did not know what to say"; and the balance of the members said nothing.

Very rarely do members want to get involved, enter discussions, offend others and they let situations like this slide. How many members have ever touched the Group Handbook?

Would you consider this an outside issue?

Am I wrong to open my mouth?

Bill B. - Area 6, South Florida

8/12/16 - 10:15 PM

Bill,

I waited for others to chime in on this subject. It is a sore subject for me, and I'm not going to wait any longer to respond.

I am appalled at how meetings throughout GA never have a topic for the meetings. This is a throwback to how AA runs their open, closed and discussion meetings. No doubt that will anger some of our AA members. GA seems to have defaulted to this 'sit there until someone speaks, about whatever' type of meeting. Without the meeting Chair choosing a topic, people wander with their therapies. I come to the meetings because of what we read on page 2 of the Combo Book

Gamblers Anonymous is a Fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recovery from a gambling problem.

When I go to a GA meeting, I don't want to hear about someone trying out a dating service, what movie they saw, politics at work, spending the weekend with the in-laws, how much it cost to replace 4 tires on the car, etc. If you've not going to tie any of this with gambling or recovery, then save it for your friends.

Topics are the meeting thread that binds all of us in the rooms. It reinforces what Gamblers Anonymous is about. I want to be part of solving my problems and those of everyone else in that room. I put in the time to make these meetings to deal with my addiction. Talking about all those other issues and not tying them into compulsive gambling is a waste of my time and those of the others.

When people give therapy, they should think about what they are saying, and put it in perspective of what would a new member would think if they heard all this non-gambling related crap. Subjects like that are issues for that person and their

sponsor(s) or through a series of phone calls, outside the meetings. I've heard all the arguments of how people might find those issues creating difficulty with their ability to stop gambling. My answer is, then let them link those experiences with sharing experience, strength and hope. You want to talk about dating services, then tie in how your personal life has dissolved because of gambling and you struggle with being alone, or something like that. I'm on board with that. Without that tie in, keep it out of the room.

Having said that Bill, I think you acted inappropriately by interrupting the member. Members who shares their experiences during therapy, can make it about anything in the world. Yes, you might not care for the topic, but this is their personal experiences. Where you have the right to bring up Unity Step 10, is when people give comments after someone's therapy and makes recommendations about anything other than what is part of our program.

Case in point. A person talks about putting himself on the Self-Exclusion list for the casinos, when he gives therapy. That warrants a statement of clarification by the Chair or the Secretary after the person has finished his therapy, saying that Self- Exclusion is an outside issue and is not part of Gamblers Anonymous. Someone who gives a comment that this person should put himself on the Self-Exclusion List, should be interrupted and quoting of Unity Step 10 should be invoked.

The problem we run into, is people in the rooms don't understand what Unity Step 10 encompasses. People recommend retreats, rehabs, therapists and a whole host of situations and non-approved literature. The people in the room to which you referred do not want to follow any parts of the Guidance Code or decisions of the Board of Trustees. They want to be GA members for 2 hours a week and don't want to get involved in any structure, other than what takes the least effort possible.

It's sad, but this room you cited is like the vast majority of GA rooms. My test is that so few people even know what color covers are used for the Guidance Code and more so for the Group Handbook. To expect that people have actually read them, is what I would call a reach.

Long story short, it is an outside issue, but incorporating it into a member's therapy is not a violation of Unity Step 10, unless there is an outright recommendation to others to join, buy or do whatever it is. Should you have interrupted – no. Should you have made a comment – only if the person didn't tie it into compulsive gambling or some aspect of the program and his recovery.

The problem I see is that maybe the room would react in the future about this, but only if you are there. Otherwise, they will go back to what they have been doing for many years – taking the path of least resistance and letting the member say whatever they want.

My homeroom has a statement we read every meeting as part of our opening announcements: "We are here to share our experience, strength and hope with each other that we may solve our common problem and help others to recovery from a gambling problem. Please try to limit your therapy to issues relating to gambling."

Have a business meeting and get the room focused on things like this. Maybe then the quality of therapies may improve, and the time everyone invests in a meeting there, will be very well spent.

David M. – Area 12, New Jersey

8/16/16 - 12:06 PM

Bill,

I sympathize with you but this is only tangentially connected to the Guidance Code. What this is really about is having a meeting secretary (or chair) that either does not know how to take charge of a meeting or simply wants to be everybody's friend. If I had a dime for every time I've sat in a meeting where one or more people shared about their last MRI or the fact that they are no longer allowed visitation rights to their step grandchildren, I'd be a billionaire! When I came into the program in 1987, the secretary RAN the meeting like a quarterback in a huddle. The ground rules were set in stone and you violated them at your own peril. In nearly 29 years, I have walked out of many a meeting when I got the sense the secretary or meeting chair has lost control of the room. In fact, I have actually changed home meetings because of this very issue and even told the secretaries (some of whom I have known for years and truly like) exactly why I was doing so. No secretary likes to hear they run a bad meeting and more often than not, they used our conversation as a teachable moment to clean things up for the future. No meeting got interrupted and in a lot of cases, the offenders (every meeting has them) picked a different meeting to annoy.

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



San Diego Agenda Item #33

8/22/16 - 4:19 PM

Hamid,

Approximately 18 years ago a member embezzled over \$30,000 from a GA Conference checking account. At that time I was a member of the BOR. The BOR repaid the outstanding invoice to the host hotel after the invoice was reviewed and determined that it was correct.

The BOR had (and continues to have) a fiduciary responsibility to the owners of GA, its members, to prosecute if a crime takes place. An attorney was engaged in the State where the felony happened and the attorney was successful in having the party prosecuted.

Fortunately, the full amount was eventually repaid and restitution was completed by the member, including an apology at a BOT meeting.

The BOR fulfilled their fiduciary responsibility and the matter was closed. All groups and Intergroups have an ongoing fiduciary responsibility too.

Your current discussion item is relevant but, if there is a theft, the amount taken needs to be discussed too before legal proceedings are instituted.

From a practical standpoint my guess is that an attorney would not be interested in pursuing a minor amount (a guess, under \$1,000, or even \$2,500) as the hourly fee could be \$200 plus expenses.

Certain deterrents can go a long way to avoid a problem. Common sense is not to allow the group or intergroup treasury to have a sizable balance. Have the bank statement of the Intergroup or group opened and reconciled by a non-signatory on the checking account. We need to have the group treasurer present the weekly deposit slip to be initialed by a trusted servant and all trusted servants need to be vigilant too.

Hope this is helpful.

Bill B. - Area 6, South Florida

San Diego Agenda Item #27

8/25/16 - 9:46 PM

I have been researching as to why & how the By-Laws became approved literature.

Does any member have any idea as to how this legal document was listed for sale as approved literature that was and is distributed by the International Service Office?

Thanks,

Bill B. - Area 6, South Florida