

September 2020

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Thoughts From The Trustees - Current and Past

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

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1. GAISO

Sept. 6, 2020 - 6:08pm

I hope everyone is doing as well as they can during the pandemic. You are all in my thoughts and prayers and I look forward to the day we can go back to some semblance of normalcy. I am grateful I learned the expression of one day at a time in this program. Needless to say, that and the Serenity prayer have been at the top of my thoughts lately. As well as my GA brothers and sisters and their safety.

I read the email sent out regarding GAISO and the financial difficulty that GAISO is currently having. I like GAISO, our room bought some things from them recently to celebrate a new member's entry into GA and when I was a Trustee I would encourage rooms to donate because if we didn't, ISO would not be in existence as we know it anymore. I also spoke on the floor of the Trustee meetings many times supporting GAISO and how valuable it is to our organization. A few years ago, our area, NY Area 15, held a fundraiser for GAISO. Although I contributed to the fundraiser on multiple occasions as they were handing out an envelope in rooms, I would state in "good and welfare" that although a fundraiser was thoughtful and nice, GAISO needed a steady stream of income coming from the rooms that have the ability to donate; a fixed monthly donation if you will to cover their monthly expenses. To me that would make much more sense in lieu of these "the house is burning down; GAISO needs money yesterday" pleas that occur every few years.

This will probably not be a popular thing to suggest, to avoid all of this, maybe GAISO needs to have a pressure relief group meeting. It states on page 17 of the Combo (yellow) book "A pressure relief group meeting may help alleviate legal, financial, employment and personal pressures. Adherence to it will aid in your recovery". Like I stated, I like GAISO but how can we tell our membership to live within their means when our business organization is not doing the same? To me it is complete hypocrisy. Just like doing a pressure relief meeting with (new) members can be very difficult, I believe we should do the same for GAISO. Tough choices and decisions have to be made at a pressure relief group meeting for our members, I believe that we should hold GAISO to the same standard as the membership it serves. Did I just suggest the unthinkable and unspeakable? I did. A comprehensive review and possible reorganization of GAISO as we currently know it. It can be a phased in plan over time but something needs to change. The world as we know it has changed in the last six months, I would suggest that as an organization that we update GAISO to change with the times as well. We took "mink coats" out

of the combo book to "get with the times"; I suggest that we do the same with our business organization. As it is inevitable, If not now, when? I would suggest that now is the time.

Stay safe and be well.

Best,

Tom Z. - Past Trustee - Area 15 - New York

2. BOT Emergency Vote

Sept. 8, 2020 - 3:27pm

Quarantined greetings, Fellow Trustees,

I'm sure that many trustees received an email from Chris N today. Chris N's solution to our temporary problem is to "bend the rules", temporarily allowing any meeting that wants to identify itself as a G. A. meeting, to be "approved". His rationale is since "most of us are now attending" non-approved G. A. meetings, we should just completely disregard our Unity Steps and approve these 'rogue' meetings for the sake of money. He proposes this as a "simple solution". In other words, "since many of us are doing the wrong thing anyway, let's just OK it". Doing whatever we want to do, even knowing it's wrong, rationalizing that its good, is what got most of us in trouble to begin with.

The truth is that ISO can accept contributions from any recognized G. A. "group". Meetings don't contribute, groups do. Whether the group meets under the approved format or another, is of no consequence where contributions are concerned.

The true solution to the unapproved meetings problem is to remind those groups using the various formats that they are "gambling" with their own recovery. Gamblers Anonymous not only has started "International" phone meetings, but wants to train anyone who is willing to learn how to conduct those approved meetings locally. I believe that once we get enough "approved format" meetings, ISO might be inclined to list them on the web site.

To Brian I say using the word "extraordinary" 3 times in a sentence doesn't make it an emergency. Your idea, worded correctly, could be worthy of serious discussion at our Spring BOT meeting, so if you're still a member of G. A. and not your own program, submit it to the agenda and we'll talk about it. In the meantime, send ISO a check.

Finally, I'm not going to respond by forwarding the email to Karen H with a 'yes' or 'no'. (I wonder if she even ok'd that.)

I look forward to joining all my brothers and sisters in San Diego, where we might give this problem its 15 minutes.

Your friend in recovery,

John B - Trustee - Area 13 - Pennsylvania

Sept. 8, 2020 - 6:53pm

This morning, I received a most interesting email from Chris N, a Trustee from Area 2 in the San Francisco Bay area. The first paragraph opens with an acknowledgment of the dire financial circumstances our ISO is experiencing because of COVID and the corresponding shut down of most face-to-face meetings throughout the world. No arguments there. It then goes on to say that the virtual meetings most of us are now attending are non-approved GA meetings. Again, he states the obvious, but at that point, he should have stopped because what follows is an illogical interpretation of Unity Step 7 followed by an even more illogical remedies to address that interpretation. To begin with, no reasonable person is going to say that a group of GA members meeting unofficially and taking up a collection for the ISO constitutes an outside donation in the same way as a donation from a church or the Rotary Club (his example). Where can that logic possibly come from? The fellowship is the fellowship whether we are meeting face-to-face or on the telephone or on a computer screen, and as long as that universe of money is coming from bonafide GA members and not their friends, families, or the various services that host these get-togethers, that is clean money. Period.

But here is where the logic (or lack thereof) really gets interesting. His remedy is to grant these virtual meetings temporary status as "approved" meetings with listing on the ISO website provided they commit to abide by our Unity Program and Guidance Code; this despite the fact that the Guidance Code does not provide for non-face-to-face meetings WHICH IS PRECISELY WHY THESE MEETINGS WERE DEEMED "NOT APPROVED" IN THE FIRST PLACE! If it's about changing the Guidance Code, let's do it as a group, but trying to "backdoor" ISO donations by giving a meeting a contrived status reminds me of how we, as gamblers, used to contrive scenarios by which we could justify our gambling.

But the clincher is that he, as a Trustee, is calling for an emergency vote, the results of which are to be forwarded to Karen H for a tally. Since when can a Trustee call for an emergency vote of the other Trustees FOR ANY REASON? He invokes Andy's name in the very first sentence of the email but then excludes him and the rest of the Executive Committee from the discussion altogether. Is this the new paradigm of how our governance works because if so, I never got the memo.

Respectfully,

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

Sept. 9, 2020 - 5:06pm

When I received the email, my first thought was "huh"? I then thought about calling Karen H to verify. Realizing it was probably too early, I reached out to Andy R. Not getting him, I spoke with several other current and past trustees to discuss the contents of the email. All of us had the same opinion...the email was out of order! Only the Chair of the BOT can call for an emergency or quick response vote.

Chris, if you want to discuss the merits of your proposal, do it the proper way. Put it on the agenda!

Stuart B. - Trustee - Area 14 - New York

Sept. 9, 2020 - 7:08pm

I think Chris N has a good idea (about approving virtual meetings). Even if his method is questionable. This is a subject that needs to be addressed whether in San Diego or sooner (by an Emergency Vote called for by the BOT Chair).

Rob P. - Trustee - Area 3 - Nevada

Sept. 25, 2020 - 2:34pm

My Fellow Trustees,

Well I guess I'm responsible for initiating this acrimony so maybe I should weigh in and see if I can help diffuse it.

First of all I am grateful for the service of all of my fellow trustees. I understand that we may have honest disagreements about issues, but I respect all of you and honor your service to our fellowship.

I would like to make three points. In the first place, I know that I have been accused of being a bit obsessive about our 5th Unity Step. "Gamblers Anonymous has but one primary purpose – to carry its message to the compulsive gambler who still suffers." To this accusation, I do plead "guilty".

We have many rules and "guidelines" and processes. These are all important to any well functioning organization and I certainly would never suggest that these should all be routinely ignored. However, we only have one "primary purpose". In my view a primary purpose

represents a basis for existence. The rules and guidelines and processes should all be created to serve our primary purpose.

Having a primary purpose should be clarifying. Every single issue that we ever consider should be subject to this simple test, “Does it help carry the message to the suffering gambler or not?” If we have some rule that prohibits our ability to carry the message, then we need to modify that rule or vote to make an exception. In my view that is what it means to have a primary purpose.

With respect to recognizing Zoom meetings, we simply have to ask ourselves “Will helping to connect suffering gamblers to these meetings (especially in the middle of a pandemic) further our primary purpose or not”. It should really be no more complicated than that.

Reasonable people might disagree about the wisdom of my initiative as just one trustee calling for a vote on this issue. For those who have criticized it though, I ask you to suggest an alternative that will allow the trustees to vote now on this issue. If we have to wait until the next in-person board meeting (which may or may not be San Diego in the spring), there likely will be thousands of suffering gamblers who are not able to get help. Many of them however could benefit from the Zoom meetings that are happening daily in many time zones throughout the world.

I just think that taking no action now and not finding a creative way to call for a vote via e-mail on this issue is simply contrary to our primary purpose. I have seen many gamblers who are now recovering in Zoom meetings. Many have never been to a live meeting. I am sponsoring several of them throughout the country. I just find it baffling that as an organization we are not trying to connect suffering gamblers to these meetings.

The second issue that I would like to address is one of anonymity. This is obviously a foundational principle of our fellowship. The principle lives in our Unity Program as well as in the very name of our organization. Nothing we should ever do should undermine this principle.

This is why I find the resistance to Zoom meetings so perplexing. Every time a member attends a live meeting in their hometown, they run the risk of someone recognizing them there and potentially breaking their anonymity. On the other hand, if they are especially concerned about their anonymity, with Zoom meetings they have the option to a) attend only meetings based far away from where they live, b) turning off their camera and c) even changing their names. It seems to me that Zoom meetings can protect anonymity far more than traditional in-person meetings. I must admit I am at a loss for people who oppose approving Zoom meetings on the basis of protecting anonymity.

The final point I want to make is that these virtual meetings are here to stay. While they may not be for everyone, many in our fellowship are attending them. This is especially true for younger members who grew up in an online world. For many reasons, it is difficult for some of our members to attend in-person meetings or perhaps only one per week. With the Zoom options, we now have members who are attending meetings every day!

The reality is that most of our members simply don't care whether these meetings get approved or not. They see this as some weird issue and a board of trustees that is completely out of touch with what is happening in the world. They are connecting to meetings through local GA websites, Facebook, Gamblers in Recovery etc.

For us to think that we can dictate the nature of or the future of these meetings is simple hubris. The only thing that we can do is to help the suffering gambler connect to these meetings that are happening regardless of what we do. I call on all of my fellow trustees and officers to join me in finding a way in the middle of this pandemic to make this happen now.

Yours in Recovery,

Chris N. - Trustee - Area 2

3. Meeting and Hotline Updates

Sept. 15, 2020 - 8:59pm

As the Hotline coordinator for the Board of Trustees and a volunteer for the Hotline, I am asking for help from all of the trustees. Tonight I received a call from someone who needed a meeting for the first time. He went the ISO website and found a meeting in his area but once there he found no meeting taking place. He then called ISO and was given a contact number for someone in an area about an hour away from him. That number was no longer in service. I ended up sending him an email with the list of all the phone conference meetings for GA. He was very appreciative. I hope he found his way to a call in meeting.

GA has one primary purpose and that is to help the gambler who is suffering. Please, please, if any of your meetings are temporarily closed because of the pandemic or if the meetings have changed locations, contact ISO with the update ASAP. Also if your hotline coordinators or hotline phone numbers have changed please contact me through the Trustee Website via the Hotline Committee email address. The Hotline committee will be meeting this week and this is on our agenda to address.

We have all made many changes in our lives through GA and recovery and we need to always help the gambler who is suffering!

Jo K. - Trustee and Hotline Chair - Area 8D - Missouri

4. GA's Primary Purpose

Sept. 15, 2020 - 9:51pm

I hope this finds everyone safe and healthy during the pandemic. I've thought about writing something to all of you for several months. Not having any BOT meetings in 2020 has been difficult for me. I miss everyone!

Thank goodness for my home group and others in the program that I have stayed in contact with. We all have experienced something we never thought would happen. Families are not able to get together, most of our meetings are temporarily closed, some have lost their jobs and the list goes on and on.

During the last six months I have had a lot of time on my hands and I've done a lot of soul searching regarding my recovery, GA, people who can't get to a meeting, especially new gamblers trying to get help, our goals and how our organization is doing and what it has done in the past and where we go from here. To begin with we don't have any idea when this pandemic will end and whether our lives will be back to any normalcy.

What I'd like to present to all of you is many of my questions and concerns I have about Gamblers Anonymous. I am not going to blame anyone or in any way intentionally hurt anyone's feelings. I'm just a gal from Missouri where our motto is that of the Show Me State. Show me the way folks and help me to understand.

Is our purpose still to help the gambler who is still suffering? If so, are we really making them a priority? Are we really doing everything we can to get them to a meeting? Why aren't virtual meetings a way to do so? Are we so hung up with our rules and quoting the Guidance Code, and letting our ego turn our backs on doing the right thing instead? We've spent so much time over the years updating our literature or focusing on how we interact with other twelve step programs that it's embarrassing. Instead of bolding words on page 17 we should be spending at least half of our agenda time on items regarding our primary purpose. I've learned so much from the contact I've had from members than I have reading the Combo Book especially when I came in the program. Don't get me wrong the Combo is a great resource but let's stop focusing on so many changes.

We've been living in a terrible time the last six months and I do not want to wait until our next BOT meeting to solve this problem. The problem is now. And by May we may still not be able to have a trustee meeting, not only because of the pandemic but with few meetings taking place our Intergroups aren't getting money from our groups and there won't be enough money to help pay the cost for trustees to attend the next meeting. The time is now.

As a trustee I can't make any decision alone, nor do I want to, but if enough of us speak up and work together we can move mountains. Let us all use our voices for the gambler who is still suffering to ask the executive Board of Trustees to listen to us. We need their guidance and help to make our organization the best it can be.

Your sister in recovery,

Jo K. - Trustee - Area 8D - Missouri

Sept. 16, 2020 - 4:43pm

First, I want to thank Jo K for her contributions and dedication to our program, and especially our hotline. As hotline administrator for my area, I understand its not always an easy job.

I'd like to respond to Jo's submission regarding GA's "primary purpose". First, it sounds like she's been talking to Chris N, who suggests that because we are in the midst of a pandemic, we should just suspend any rules we have and do whatever we want. But Jo adds that we should do it in the interest of helping the compulsive gambler who is still suffering. My primary question is: as long as we are available to talk with the suffering person, what's the difference whether he/she can see us?

I talk to people every day, as I'm sure Jo does, and I don't believe the fact that I can't see their faces diminishes that help and support I give and they receive. (In fact, it could be argued that since I can't see them, I'm less likely to be distracted by their appearance, concentrating instead totally on what they're saying.)

I'm no expert, but I've been told that some of these companies that host "virtual" meetings collect personal data on everyone using their site for a meeting, and sell that data (personal information) for profit. I find that logical: otherwise how could they afford to let us use their site for "free"?

Possibly the only thing worse than gathering someone's personal information without them knowing it is being able to actually put a face to that information, making it even more valuable. (and less anonymous)

Our BOT has approved a format for conference calls to make them "recognized as GA meetings", and is willing to train anyone who wishes to use the format for their group's benefit. We all know that utilizing the approved format is the right thing to do, and would put everybody on the same page. Its time to put on our big boy pants and just do it.

Your friend in recovery,

John B - Trustee - Area 13 - Pennsylvania

Sept. 16, 2020 - 6:59pm

Jo K makes a very good case that we are forgetting what our primary purpose is and I can envision a lot of robust discussions in San Diego regarding this issue. One of her statements,

however, did give me some pause: "Why aren't virtual meetings a way to do so? Are we so hung up with our rules and quoting the Guidance Code, and letting our ego turn our backs on doing the right thing instead? "

To me, this is less a Guidance Code issue or an ego issue than it is an issue of security and anonymity. We are called Gamblers Anonymous and not Compulsive Gamblers Loud and Proud for a reason, and that is because anonymity is the spiritual foundation of the program; our program simply doesn't work without the protections that anonymity allows us. I often wonder how many of these so-called "virtual meetings" that are going on right now are using the few built-in security features in the software to make sure that our groups are not being violated. For example, if someone dials in to one of these meetings and is not willing to identify themselves, are they automatically dropped from the call? Are our meeting chairs and moderators making use of the waiting room feature on both Zoom and WebEx that actually allows them to eyeball the person trying to get into the meeting? Are admonitions given not to share anything you wouldn't want the public to know? Do people realize there is software out there that will allow recording of the meetings without the host's permission? I grant you these are not likely scenarios but all the program needs is ONE violation with consequences for a member(s) to undo all the good things these meetings accomplish. If virtual meetings are the future of the fellowship, let's at least be proactive in building in as many choke points as humanly possible so we don't end up losing this thing of ours.

Everyone stay safe...

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

Sept. 16, 2020 - 8:35pm

Thank you John B. for your response to my post. It's okay that we don't agree. I'm just glad you shared your opinion. I do want you to know that I have not been talking to Chris N., I don't know if I ever met him. His email to all the trustees did not cause me to write my post. I just wanted to get the conversation going due to the unprecedented situation we have with the pandemic. None of us know where we will be tomorrow or by May 2021.

Thank you Jack R for your response as well. I understand what you're saying about anonymity. But I never knew, if someone whom entered a meeting I attended, was a gambler looking for help or not. The person was always asked and the group took them for their word.

Jo K. - Trustee - Area 8D - Missouri

Sept. 20, 2020 - 11:38am

After reading a few comments posted regarding Gamblers Anonymous primary purpose I appreciate all the posts. The views do express and further exposes the reason I put an agenda item # 48 up for discussion on the Seattle agenda. Unfortunately, we couldn't meet and now have to wait until San Diego to vote if what is OUR PRIMARY PURPOSE, is Step 5 in the Unity program valid or not. As a trustee, we should take our own inventory on this question? Am I fulling my personal purpose or am I fulling the fellowships' primary purpose? As I take my own inventory as I serve my area intergroup, my groups the only mission I have is to be an example of performing GA's primary purpose. Yet as a member of the Board of Trustees I'm being handcuffed in performing Gamblers Anonymous PRIMARY PURPOSE. No matter where you or I serve as a trusted servant, whether it is a group secretary, treasurer, an intergroup rep, a trustee or any other trusted servant position in our fellowship, we all should have but one primary purpose. **OUR PRIMARY PURPOSE IS TO STOP GAMBLING AND TO HELP OTHER COMPULSIVE GAMBLERS DO THE SAME.**

My Gamblers Anonymous trustee experience seems to point to these alternatives to control other Compulsive Gamblers risking progressive deterioration of the fellowship or **TO STOP GAMBLING AND TO HELP OTHER COMPULSIVE GAMBLERS DO THE SAME.**

It is sad and painful for me to say but being a trustee going into my second term, seeing what our fellowships Board of Trustees have and are allowing to happen by compromising **OUR PRIMARY PURPOSE.**

Free Conference call Platform > is not anonymous to the moderators **THEY AREN'T.** Is an In-Person meeting anonymous > the person that walks through that door may know you or you may know of them < **THEY AREN'T.**

When we talk about personal anonymity in Step 11 in the Unity Program at the level of press, films, tv and internet. This step is a reminder that personal ambition has no place within the Fellowship's Public Relations. However, in this Unity step, it is not breaking anonymity if YOU choose to relate to family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, etc. In our 12 Steps of Unity we grow and develop our understanding, it is about our humility, we give up our personal desires for the common good. Members willingly sacrifice personal identity in order to preserve the collective reputation of the Fellowship and the group.

As for meetings not in-person whether it is on a free conference call platform, ZOOM, WEBEX, My meeting they are also not anonymous. We need to look at giving up our personal desires for the common good of our Fellowship. If it looks like a GA GROUP meeting if it sounds like a GA GROUP meeting if it walks like a GA GROUP meeting. Well, it must be a GA GROUP meeting. **NOW Let's make them a RECOGNIZED GA GROUP MEETING.**

Let's stop kidding our selves and telling members who are working a program, their due diligence in their recovery by of attending a phone or virtual GA meeting isn't recognized. We as leaders need to be trusted servants serving our members and not be governing telling our Fellowship their recovery is not important, we don't recognize their recovery. We are failing our Fellowship and our body is not in alignment with Step 2 in our **UNITY PROGRAM.** The

Pandemic should remind each of us to remember that we serve for the good of all, without authority over anyone.

Celebrating another Day,

Walter G. - Trustee - Area 12 - New Jersey, Eastern Pennsylvania

5. Anonymity

Sept. 21, 2020 - 6:30pm

Anonymity is not an abstract notion. In our fellowship, it means, in the simplest possible terms, that recovering compulsive gamblers are entitled to the PRESUMPTION of being able to fly below the radar SHOULD THEY CHOOSE TO DO SO whenever they are participating in any GA group, whether it is an actual "sanctioned" room, a "virtual" room, or on the telephone.

Walter G made a couple of statements in the last thread entitled GA's Primary Purpose that have me perplexed. His first statement, "...members willingly sacrifice personal identity in order to preserve the collective reputation of the Fellowship and the group...", might be true to some extent and to some people but does that statement accurately reflect the current thinking of the Board of Trustees or even the fellowship as a whole? Does that mean that NO Trusted Servant is entitled to some level of anonymity when carrying out their functions? Does that mean as a Trustee, I am no longer entitled to have some level of anonymity when carrying out my functions? While it's true my last name and other contact information is available on the Confidential Trustee Listing, there is a reason why it is called "Confidential", right?

Also within the context of his meetings not being anonymous, he then goes on to say "...we need to look at giving up our personal desires for the common good of our Fellowship..". In this case, is he saying personal desires equal anonymity or does it mean something else? I've been around the fellowship long enough to know we cannot control anonymity to an absolute degree. Both Walter and Jo accurately point out that when someone walks into a face-to-face meeting, we take them at their word, as we should, that they are a compulsive gambler in need of the fellowship. But unless they are using a concealed phone with a high level of amplification, it will soon become obvious if they are attending the meeting, not for their recovery, but for the purposes of obtaining information to out someone to a creditor, employer, spouse, or bookie. We also know, or should know, that telephone and virtual meetings do not have that protection because you can't see what people are doing. A company, EaseUS, actually advertises proprietary software that will allow the recording of a Zoom meeting with or without the host's permission! How's that for instilling confidence in the principle of anonymity?

Does this mean we shouldn't, as a Board, look into using telephone or virtual meetings as officially sanctioned GA meetings? Absolutely not, but it does mean that if we go ahead with them, they better be accompanied by both safeguards (i.e. <https://it.cornell.edu/zoom/zoom-security-features-reduce-odds-zoombombing>) and robust disclaimers before the meeting begins.

My best...

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