

# Trustee Line – Current Issue

## October 2020

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### Thoughts From The Trustees – Current and Past

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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.

Item	Subject	Last Entry	Entries
1.	<a href="#"><u>McDonalds vs. Chinese Food</u></a>	10/15/20	2
2.	<a href="#"><u>The Wild Wild West</u></a>	10/18/20	1
3.	<a href="#"><u>Vote to Approve Online Meetings</u></a>	10/22/20	2
4.	<a href="#"><u>Vote to NOT APPROVE ONLINE MEETINGS</u></a>	10/23/20	2

5.	<u>Quick Response Vote – yes or no</u>	10/24/20	2
6.	=	-	-
7.	=	-	-
8.	=	-	-

## 1. McDonalds vs. Chinese Food

10/15/2020 – 1:30 PM

This is really more of a philosophical rant than a cogent argument. On our recent Board of Trustees phone meeting on Tuesday, I was struck by how a few trustees described the current state of GA Zoom meetings as “the Wild West” suggesting there was a lack of order and consistency from meeting to meeting. The implication is that this lawlessness is dangerous and we need the sheriff (i.e. BOT) to ride into town and restore order.

I prefer to think of this current situation as simply a free market of ideas that I believe is a wonderful thing.

Consider as an analogy, McDonald’s as compared to all of the small family run Chinese restaurants. McDonald’s is safe, predictable, affordable, and clean. If you like McDonald’s food, you should be pretty satisfied – I think they even offer delivery options now. On the other hand, if you really dislike McDonald’s food, you probably will never go there in spite of their amenities.

On the other hand, with Chinese restaurants you have lots of choices – Mandarin, Cantonese, Hunan, Szechuan, Fusion etc. Some have amazing fresh food – some not so much. Prices vary. Some are crowded. If a new Chinese restaurant opens and it is not very good, it usually closes pretty quickly. If it becomes popular, imitators follow or other restaurants copy menu items. The point is that the consumer benefits by the competition of food, prices, convenience etc. and the options and quality improve over time. Chinese food is so much better than when I was a kid.

Interestingly nobody worries too much about Chinese restaurants all having to need the same menu and prices. People aren’t generally fearful that someone who had never tried Chinese food might go into a bad restaurant and then never eat Chinese food again. Beyond the basic requirements of a business license and health inspections, there just aren’t a whole lot of regulations.

In my over 40 years in GA (38 clean), I have observed a strong tendency towards authoritarian control that I don’t really believe is as prevalent in other 12 step programs. Perhaps this has to do with the psychology of compulsive gamblers who need to control the

uncontrollable – such as laws of probability. Maybe it's just our enormous egos that we always think we know what is best for everyone. I honestly don't know.

For us, it's not enough to say "I think I'll start a meeting where we'll require people to attend 39 meetings a year before they can collect a chip". Rather there is a need to apply this to the entire program. It's not enough to say "We took a vote at our meeting and decided to not allow any non GA approved literature be read at our step meeting". Rather, there is a need to apply this to all meetings everywhere.

Many other 12 step programs don't have these kind of rules for all of their meetings and they are doing fine. Some meetings with new formats flourish and unsuccessful meetings close. That is how a program grows and evolves and stays relevant to new generations of addicts.

My biggest fear about the pending approval of virtual meetings is that we are going to have a bunch of requirements on these meetings as to their Zoom settings, security protocols, meeting formats, warnings to be read at every meeting etc. I have no problem with any "suggestions based on best practices" that are shared with our membership. However, if we start pushing these into our guidance code and start non-approving meetings that don't adhere, I think our fellowship will suffer tremendous damage.

By the way, if you hadn't guessed – I love Chinese food and can't stand McDonalds.

Chris N. – Trustee – Area 2 – California

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10/15/20 – 9:30 PM

I could not agree with Chris more. There are enough control freaks that have been in BOT for too long. I have been saying that you can not put a compulsive addict in a refrigerator box and expect him/her to recovery. We must learn to follow our own journey and path we take. How can we grow when instructed on how to recover from the handful of so-called boys that control our outcome.

What happened over the last dozen years is a small group of trustees built on the GC and then turned it into LAW. The trustees are supposed to be the guardian of the 12 steps. Not the GA police, GA prosecutor, A GA jury, trustees and not from their own room, A GA judge, and a sentence. We are heading to the point of a GA member being kicked out of our fellowship. If this sounds alien to you, think again. Our GC was built to the degree that every trustee MUST follow it or, if not, affects GA as a whole.

A meeting is a meeting, and there should be no difference, whether physical, phone, or Zoom. I can hear the roar of the small number of trustees yelling anonymity is being broken. Those trustees are in the 1930s and not in today's world. The BOT has been

holding back our fellowship for over a decade. Where would GA be if not for the ZOOM meetings and with a phone system using moss code? I am not condemning the people on the committee. I am criticizing the trustees that feel we need a body to control the phone meeting. Before COVID, they just had 2 maybe 3 sessions due to the pamphlet that reads like IBM procedural book. Actually, in 2019 for 5 years prior it only had one meeting. When the rest of the GA world had over 15+.

Chris N Chinese food example is perfect. We don't need a burger to get it just one way, even you ask for it differently. McDonald's is a production line that does not allow for broad thinking. Apple and Microsoft are successful cause they encourage thinking. Our fellowship does not allow any consideration outside of the BOT. Again, think about the items on any agenda. The agenda goal is overwhelming to add more control factors.

I say GA should have more Chinese food that does not clog the arteries of our fellowship like McDonald's. We need healthy thinking and action.

Thank you, Chris, for your love of food.

Gary S. – Past Trustee – Area 12 – New Jersey

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## 2. The Wild Wild West

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10/18/20 – 12:06pm

In fairness and keeping an open mind. I am wondering if those that believe if the BOT accepts the Zoom meetings in its current form would be a "Wild Wild West". What would be an acceptable Zoom Meeting?

The Zoom meetings are not going away and we will need to accept them.

I truly would like to know.

Gary S. – Past Trustee – Area 12 – New Jersey

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### 3. Vote to Approve Online Meetings

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10/22/20 - 12:55pm

I'm voting "Yes" to temporarily approve online meetings.

There is much to not like in the "Temporary Guidelines for Video Meetings". In my opinion we should simply allow the individual groups to sort out all these issues as is successfully done in other 12 step programs and has been working fine in GA for 7 month. Also, I seriously doubt whether many of the meetings will actually be able or willing to adhere to all of these guidelines.

Hopefully, we won't have any self appointed GA police visiting meetings and threatening to disapprove meetings for not rigorously following the guidelines.

Nonetheless, the advantage of having a primary purpose is that it clarifies decision making. I simply have to ask myself, "Will posting the online meetings on the ISO website help to carry the message to the suffering compulsive gambler?" The answer is clearly "yes" and nothing else matters.

So regardless of my reservations about the unnecessary guidelines, I will be voting in favor of the proposal. I don't believe in having the perfect being the enemy of the good.

Chris N. - Trustee - Area 2 - California

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10/22/20 - 1:25pm

Chris,

I agree that a "Yes" vote is needed to keep GA growing. I think a good point was brought up previously that looking back at the last months and other groups using similar platforms, the fears of being exposed have not come to fruition. That is not to say it will never happen, but a lot of meetings have already taken place in the world where it could have and didn't.

That said, I interpret these guidelines as only a suggestion and that each group still has the ability to sort out their own issues. The only document a group agrees to follow to be considered a group is the Guidance Code, per Guidance Code: Article VII, Section 1. Every other document is a strong suggestion based on experiences.

Voting "Yes" here simply makes the zoom platform a sanctioned GA meeting, and allows the meeting to be mentioned on the ISO Website as well as gives groups a firm set of guidelines upon which to grow their groups and spread the message of hope to the compulsive gambler that still suffers.

I am not sure if the intention was to make these set in stone that each group MUST use, but to do that, it would need to be added to the Guidance Code with a 2/3rds vote across two meetings. This may be why it was described as a “temporary” solution, although with how many things change during a Trustee Meeting, either everything should be called temporary or we should just consider it permanent until it isn’t!

Mike R. – Trustee – Area 6A – North/Central Florida

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#### 4. Vote to NOT APPROVE ONLINE MEETINGS

10/23/20 – 12:26am

ARTICLE:

My response may surprise a lot of people. I would NOT vote for this in its present form and see no need for it at this time. A meeting is a meeting; if this passes, the next steps would be to have the same physical forum laws. Don’t take this attempt to give this as a temporary solution. It is not a solution that is merely more control.

THIS IS AN OUTSIDE ISSUE, THEREFORE IS AGAINST OUR GC. THEREFORE I CALL THIS MOTION OUT OF ORDER.

I BEG EVERY TRUSTEE NOT TO LET THIS AGENDA PASS. We need time to think about this and not rush it for the only reason other than the executive board says so.

VOTE THIS DOWN – SAY NO.

Sorry for the length of this. It is an essential item that will affect GA as a whole for a very long time.

Let me go into the reasons.

Who is the author of this policy?

Why at this time is it coming up? I had asked Andy R to do this back in March, and he saw no reason at that time.

Why is this even stricter than the phone meetings laws?

These Zoom meetings are not part of GA and can not be controlled by the BOT.

The Zoom meetings are an outside issue. They are not run or control by the BOT or GA as a whole.

Let us look at what it is asking for and try to put it in the real world and not a paranoid controlling author(s).

#### Section A – 1.

Waiting room who will know if a person is a GA member from Scotland, UK, or even the next state. This would mean that we now have GA Police at every door in GA.

What kind of questions will that member be asked? I thought all a member must have a desire to stop gambling. Do we ask that question as soon as a new member comes into a room? What will a new member think when they are grilled with questions?

Two facilitators per room? Are these questions asked at the GA phone meeting?

#### Section A – 2

“facilitator must assume the duty of identifying all attendees before the meeting begins as well as any attendee who arrives after the meeting has begun.”

Look at the controlling wording MUST and ALL. If you think this is a temporary solution, it is not. IT IS a platform that will be built on with even more Laws. Again these ZOOM meetings are NOT sanctioned by GA or BOT.

#### Section A – 3

“Attendees who are not known to the waiting room facilitator should be further questioned as to the reason for their attendance. If they identify themselves as compulsive gamblers in need of a meeting or new members, they should be taken at their word and admitted to the meeting. The nature of the meeting (open or closed) will also determine the admission of those other than compulsive gamblers, and the final say on admission will rest with the waiting room facilitator.

The first two sentences lead up to someone in control, and what would be the penalty if this is not followed to the authors’ letter? Will the BOT come in and kick out that room, like they police the phone meetings?

#### Section A – 4

If anyone refuses to identify themselves to the waiting room facilitator, they should immediately be dropped from the waiting room.

Dictator wording again. If they should refuse to identify themselves?? Think of the paranoia what this statement is suggesting. If someone is not a gambler and wants to get in the room – they will lie.

Next Control Issue – the GA Gatekeeper facilitator should “immediately be dropped.” What if the person is very nervous and does not know about these questioning laws? Are we helping the compulsive gambler?

#### Section A – 5

“The meeting, through a group conscience, may elect to have all attendees turn their cameras off.”

The author does not understand that the ZOOM meetings are members around the world. The reason the Zoom meeting is so much more successful is that people can see one another. Just like in a physical forum. If a person chooses not to be viewed, they turn off

their video.

Section A – 6

. If #5 above does not occur, attendees should still be given the option of turning off their cameras and appearing on screen as a “placeholder” or avatar.

Again the author does not know, understand, or have been in many ZOOM meetings. These Zoom meetings run so well because there are not these GA Laws.

Section A – 7

Attendees should caption their pictures, “placeholders”, or avatars with their first name and last initial only or any other caption that masks their true identity.

Here is another example of more paranoia and concern about his or her own anonymity. The GREAT part of the ZOOM meetings is to greet and meet someone from halfway around the world. It has taken a member out of the same room that they have been going to for the entire time in the fellowship.

Section A – 8

Virtual backgrounds that may camouflage others who are sharing the member’s meeting space should not be used.

It is not possible. One member can NOT camouflage the other member. More proof that the author has not been in many ZOOM meetings.

Section B – 1 and 2

I answered these GA LAWS in Section A. Again, does a phone member get kicked out of the Phone meetings? God, I pray not.

Section 2:

It is the same paranoid messages that the author has been stating from the very beginning—no need to revisit it.

I have been stating this for years again. GA is not growing cause of it BOT LAWS and what they have created in the GA POLICE.

I ask some fundamental questions for each of you to think about before voting for this. WHO ARE WE TRYING TO CONTROL WHEN THESE MEETINGS ARE OUTSIDE GA CONTROL? GA did NOT create the Zoom meetings. Some of its founders are not even in the North America GA realm. THIS IS AN OUTSIDE ISSUE, THEREFORE IS AGAINST OUR GC. WHAT ARE WE SO AFRAID OF? Thew Zoom meetings are growth that has not been seen in decades.

Why is the executive board attempting to control ZOOM meetings at this time? Why not wait for the San Diego meeting? Why was this not done seven months ago? This is not an emergency unless there is a fear factor that they feel needs to be controlled.

If this passes now, the author will tighten up the loopholes in San Diego.

What happens if San Diego does not occur due to Covid? Then we are stuck with this?



I BEG EVERY TRUSTEE NOT TO LET THIS AGENDA PASS. We need time to think about this and not rush it for the only reason other than the executive board says so.

VOTE THIS DOWN – SAY NO.

Sorry for the length of this. It is an essential item that will affect GA as a whole for a very long time.

Gary S. – Past Trustee – Area 12 – New Jersey

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10/23/20 – 8:49am

Gary,

I think your submission is overreaching a little. This vote is in NO WAY a means to try and take control over already existing zoom meetings that refer to Gambling Help. This is a means to give clarity for all current groups that if they so choose to, they can now create a Recognized GA Group that uses video conferencing platforms. This has nothing to do with outside groups, but rather opens the door for the addition of new GA groups, if they so choose to Follow the Guidance Code and notify ISO of their existence, and for existing groups that wish to be recognized while not meeting in a physical location.

As I mentioned above, whether it was the intention of the “author”, which was explained to be a committee effort, to make “laws” or not, this is not what a “Yes” vote would do. Currently the ONLY things a group has to do is outlined in Guidance Code, Article VII, Section 1:

In part, “... 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.”

This does not make any meeting guidelines LAW, but rather STRONG SUGGESTION based on the experiences of the Board of Trustees. Although the guidelines use words like “MUST”, they are within the context of what a group might ask of the members in their meeting, which would be decided on their group conscious, not the BOT telling a group. The only way something like this could be binding is if it was put in the Guidance Code, itself, which would take two separate votes approved by a 2/3 majority. This is NOT a law.

This item DOES need to pass. It needs to pass so that GA can grow. This item will allow new groups to form that are not bound by geographic restriction. It will create new issues that BOT will have to deal with, like representation, if any, in intergroups and the BOT, but that can wait.

Should we have had to do this in the first place, probably not. It would have been great if the BOT already accepted the future or was less restrictive in what is allowed to be a group, but that can only be done with Trustee Meeting Agenda Items and discussion on the floor. Maybe that needs to happen. I look forward to seeing some great Agenda Items on the topic.

Hindsight, like everything else going on right now, is 2020 and while we should have probably started on a path to online meetings years ago, this Quick Response Meeting, if passed, will mark a very positive end to the year for GA as a whole and will bring about inclusion and growth for it's members, many of whom, even with physical meetings open, will not attend for safety, myself included. This may not be the way any of us wanted, but this IS the first step in paving the road for the successful future of GA.

Mike R. – Trustee – Area 6A – North/Central Florida

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5. Quick Response Vote – yes or no

10/23/20 – 8:45pm

I attended the trustee conference call regarding virtual meeting. Most Trustee's wanted to allow virtual meetings ASAP. The majority thought we should have these meetings be aloud temporarily until the BOT can meet again. Some were against virtual meetings. Some members thought a committee should be formed and others did not. There was some concern that a committee would take to long or have have too many restrictions. Andy R decided to establish a committee based on the members opinions. He also asked the committee to put something together quickly. The committee did their work quickly.

The problem is the confusion of what we're voting on. Should we vote yes so virtual meetings can be approved meetings or no so they won't be approved meetings? But now we have guidelines as well for how to have virtual meetings. This is were I was torn on my decision. I agree with virtual meetings but I wasn't happy with the guidelines. The words should and must don't sit well with me. They sound more like orders than recommendations. Most virtual meeting handle them the same way they conduct their physical meetings. And follow our Guidance code. Let's not make our decision based on the committee guideline how they are written if that happens temporary virtual meetings won't be sanctioned meeting. Above all these are temporary and they can be updated or changed.

The real decision is do we want virtual meetings are not. Let's keep this simple and not get hung up with the wording.

If we were able to have a BOT meeting we would first vote whether or not to have virtual meetings. Then a committee would be formed to put together the guidelines and we would have a chance to agree or make decisions on any changes. We can't do that because of the pandemic. We've already wasted too much time and we have to remember our primary purpose of helping the gambler who is still suffering. Whether they have never attended a meeting or have been in the program for years. Meeting are what saved all of us. Whatever meetings we attend, physical, conference calls or virtual meetings, that's what we need for ourselves and new people.

Jo K. – Trustee – Area 8D – Missouri

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10/24/20 – 12:24pm

You are correct. The voting order should be in the same way as a regular motion. The subject was bought and whoever is this committee should come up and present all of its members. Then there should be a discussion on the guidelines. That is the crucial part that is being forced upon the trustees. The trustees have not has an opportunity to discuss it with their area.

Also, I thought any agenda must have actually where this is going in the GC? This item is out of order in so many ways.

I can tell you that I have gotten several emails stating they are not for it and none stating they are in favor of it. I would glad to share them with anyone but I am not allowed to post them on this site – it is against the law.

Thank you for your input on a very important matter. Those that have been around long enough know that the word temporary is just a segway to make it permanent.

Gary S. – Past Trustee – Area 12 – New Jersey