

Intergroup / Central Service Office Controversy

Some Intergroups and/or Central Service Offices have collectively voted to remove groups from the meeting lists who have their groups posted on the IntoAction.org website. My purpose for this writing is not to incite controversy but only to explain my personal position on this issue.

Service Structure

The service structure was designed to employ “trusted servants”, not “leaders”. The service structure is charged with utilizing the twelve concepts for their guidance. The twelfth concept advises service structure participants that their actions should never be personally punitive nor an incitement to public controversy, that they never perform acts of government. In particular, published approved AA literature restricts anyone from taking punitive action upon a group for lack of adherence to tradition. I suspect that some, if not most, people in these particular offices, as well as other parts of AA’s service structure, are not aware of this principle of “no punitive action”. I personally believe that we collectively and routinely vote AA members to these positions who are not familiar with most principles adopted by Alcoholics Anonymous, including the twelve traditions. As they seem to throw out daggers stating that particular groups or people are not adhering to tradition, the good well-intended, but uninformed or ill-informed people in the service structure seemingly are far worse violators of tradition than the people they are attacking.

It is my hope that this writing might be read by some of these individuals, causing them to rethink their positions in all of their actions while serving in these positions and ideally educate those amongst them. I do not believe these people to be anything short of good natured and well-intended for the most part. This writing is specifically intended to incite an interest in these people’s hearts to pursue more experience and information with regard to AA tradition, particularly where historic cases are discussed in AA’s literature.

Tradition Purpose

All human beings have varying opinions and experiences, however the bottom line is that without each other, in other words...our “Unity”, there is no personal recovery for any of us. The traditions are clear that the intent is to preserve unity. Division in AA is not the intent of the IntoAction.org website.

There are many message “flavors” in Alcoholics Anonymous today. IntoAction is only designed as an informative tool for those who are attracted to a “God Dependence through Service to Others” message. IntoAction does not intend to imply that this message is better than anyone elses.

The website clearly states that it is not affiliated with any particular organization. However, the attempt to excommunicate groups who, by group conscience, choose to participate and cooperate with this website, being excommunicated by their local

Intergroup seems to have a divisive intent. The groups that participate in this website are no more affiliated with the website than they are with the churches they meet in.

Non-Compliance

Any group in Alcoholics Anonymous can be observed and found to be non-compliant in spirit with one or more traditions. We are not perfect nor will we ever be. Whenever an issue has been brought to our attention of implication of non-compliance with the spirit of a tradition, that issue has been and will be addressed and modified immediately, provided we agree with the person's opinion.

Are the Intergroups taking this kind of action against anyone else for not adhering to tradition? If not, then could it be possible that the problem really has nothing to do with adhering to tradition at all? Maybe the real dilemma is that someone has a personal issue with something else and the real issue is going unaddressed.

Traditions, Not Rules

The traditions were intentionally adopted as "traditions" and not "rules", so another consideration that I would offer the reader is that it is virtually impossible to "violate" a tradition, since there are no rules. A tradition is a continuing pattern of cultural belief or practice. I cannot find a definition of the word that even hints that it is a rule. Rule 62 is the only rule Alcoholics Anonymous has adopted. This rule states "Don't take yourself too seriously". 61 rules for membership were submitted for adoption and had all of them been adopted at once, no one could be a member, including Dr. Bob or Bill Wilson. Someone submitted Rule 62 and subsequently it was the only rule Alcoholics Anonymous has ever adopted.

Enforcement

Alcoholics Anonymous does not require police action, due to the fact that if an individual or an AA group does not adhere to spiritual principle (the traditions), the group will pay spiritual consequences that could destroy their primary purpose, long before any police activity could get to them. If the spiritual consequence is not painful enough, then the inevitable drink will most likely humble them. Whenever there is a dilemma, all you have to do is look to see who is suffering spiritual consequence and you will see where the problem lies. The fact that the groups that are being questioned are at peace and living joyfully, but the individuals at the intergroup are disturbed, should give evidence as to who is adhering to tradition and who is not.

Affiliation

The intergroup's responsibility, in my opinion, is not to police AA groups and definitely is not to invoke punitive action, such as removing a group name from a meeting directory. They have a specific service to provide and one of their services is publishing this directory of groups. However the definition of a group in the third tradition clearly states that the group should have no other affiliation. So let's address affiliation.

Are we actually to look at face-value of the wording of these traditions? If so, then shouldn't all AA groups who are listed in church event logs also be removed from the directory? Or any group that has an event where a flier is developed with the church name is considered affiliating and should therefore be subject to punitive action? How ridiculous is this? As far as inferring affiliation, what could we possibly do more? We have Sunbeam Coffee Pots at our group meetings. Does this mean our group is endorsing Sunbeam products? What about the meetings we bring to half-way houses or rehabs? What about the courts sending people to us against their will? What about the people that are recording AA sponsored conferences and then selling the recordings for a profit? Aren't we affiliating with them? Is it just me or is this madness?

We can't take these traditions for their face-value alone. We need to look for the spirit of the tradition. What is the spirit of the tradition?

The spirit of the "no affiliation" tradition, like all of the traditions, is to maximize the chances that our unity will not be compromised.

IntoAction's target audience is those who are suffering from a spiritual malady and found hope through God dependence and service to others through the practice of the twelve steps. It doesn't tolerate any criticism of anyone else's opinions or any other group's flavor of message. There is no division introduced into this dilemma except on the part of those at the intergroups that want to exclude or outcast these individual groups for reasons still unidentified.

The Message

Tradition 5 clearly states that each group carries "Its" message, not "The" message. There is not a "The message" of Alcoholics Anonymous. The closest thing is in the short form of the twelfth step which states that "*Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and practice these principles in all our affairs*". Should we go out and remove from the meeting directory any groups that are not talking about the spiritual awakening through the practice of the twelve steps? This would save a lot of paper and ink.

IntoAction Website

Some clarification that might be in order concerning the IntoAction.org website:

- IntoAction does not have members. Nowhere on the website does it state that IntoAction has members, let alone that these members are also AA members. All affiliation, actual or implied, has been avoided and/or removed to the best of our ability, when these issues have been brought to the attention of the webmaster.
- All groups, without exception, requested to be listed on the website. No listings were posted without the consent of the individual group. Any group requesting removal will be removed immediately.

The groups that are carrying a message of hope through the continuous practice of the twelve steps based on service to others believe that this message was the intent of the

founders of AA and is in complete compliance with the literature. Their experience is that in AA today, few groups are truly practicing those principles and therefore genuine “hope” is not available at all AA meetings. The IntoAction website is an informative “tool” to help people who are experiencing similar results from the majority of AA meetings find each other and realize that they are not alone. We do not wish a division from or within AA. We believe that in the spirit of autonomy this is not only allowed, but encouraged and celebrated.

The IntoAction website is informative. It does not publicize or advertise. It is not selling product, it’s actually giving free speaker download recordings. It is completely self-supporting by the CD’s sold at conferences and events where they are invited. In the spirit of the seventh tradition, if it ever ceases to be self-supporting, we will consider that it has outlived its purpose and we will dissolve the project.

I agree that everyone concerned with IntoAction should be aware of its impact and how it affects AA as a whole. I am very interested in other’s opinions as to what impact or what affect the website might be having which could be negative. I’m not seeing it. All I’m seeing is the website enhancing AA as a whole and working in cooperation with other groups who have a different approach to carrying their message. The website enjoys over 2,000 visitors a month and is less than two years old.

I definitely agree that no one group is “better” than any other, but there are some differences in approach and I believe these should be respected in both directions.

My Suggestions

The groups that are targeted by the Intergroup for removal from the meeting directory are faced with a choice. My suggestion to those groups would be as follows:

The fact that the people in the intergroup don’t understand and maybe are not trying to understand is not within our control. We cannot negotiate with people who are not looking to negotiate. You cannot inform people that believe they already have all the answers. Fighting with them will only cause more division and is very unattractive. They are our brothers and sisters and our primary purpose is to nudge them in the direction of spiritual principle, not away from it. At the very least, we want to stay in position to nudge them in the direction of spiritual principle, if we get the opportunity to.

If the intergroups insist on removing your group from the meeting directory, revert back to your group’s primary purpose. The group’s primary purpose is to carry its message. What is the message your group wants to carry? What will most likely enhance this purpose or least likely distract us from it?

Is being listed in this meeting directory going to enhance that primary purpose? Is being listed on the IntoAction.org website going to enhance it? Obviously both could enhance it, but which will enhance it more? How many people that support your group found your group as a result of being listed in either place? My experience is that most found your group through word of mouth.

Do you want to allow uninformed or misinformed people to direct, or even bully you? Do you want to compromise your primary purpose out of some misguided sense of politeness to people who are barely paying attention? Is this helping you? Is it helping them? Is this being God-dependant or is this reliance upon things human? Remember that these people are our brothers and sisters and we want to be in position to help them if the circumstances allow that. Allowing them to disrespect us will not enhance that primary purpose and disrespecting them will not either.

Go into your hearts and find guidance from God, as you understand God. As Bill Wilson once said, what would the Maker do?

Any comments or questions, please feel free to contact me:

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