

THEY WON'T LET ME SPEAK

Many people, over the years, have come to me for guidance concerning choosing speakers at a speaker meeting. The guidance that I provide to them is that the consistency of the message carried from the podium is the most important element of a speaker meeting. Choose speakers whose message is similar to the message that the group has identified as its primary purpose. In order to have a speaker who is sharing from his heart, it should also be someone who is "currently" active, regardless as to how long they have been sober.

Very often, many of us have received complaints from people who want to speak at our groups and have been denied. The following is my response to a man who complained that his sponsor would not let him speak for his anniversary at his group...a group which happened to be posted on IntoAction.org and the complaint was sent to me...interestingly enough. In his complaint, his argument was that he had been active with bringing meetings to institutions and goes to a lot of meetings. He also stated that his sponsor told him that the message he carries is not in-line with the group's message. He could not understand why his sponsor would not let him speak.

Each group is autonomous and should have a primary purpose which is to carry "its" message to the alcoholic who still suffers. The word "its" suggests that an effective group should have "its" message identified. The groups that we specifically support on IntoAction.org have one thing in common...they have identified their message to be "hope is available through helping others with God dependence with the focus on one alcoholic sharing with another".

In these groups, speaking from the podium or sharing your story from the podium is not a reward for all your good efforts. It is the one responsibility that is going to set the tone for the whole meeting in order to attract those who might be attracted to "this" message. This is not to say that other group's messages are not important. It's not to say that this message is better or worse than anyone else's. However, all group decisions are made based on asking one question...is this going to enhance our "identified" primary purpose or at least not distract us from it?

When we consider who is an "active" member or not, the action that these groups are focused on is not how many meetings we go to or how many commitments to institutions we make. It is how much time do we spend sitting down, sharing spiritual principles of God-dependence and service to others, one-on-one with another alcoholic.

There are thousands of meetings in Alcoholics Anonymous where people can share whatever kind of message they want to share. This, in my opinion, is because over the decades, out of simple politeness, people have been unwilling to stand up for "primary purpose". This is fine with me. It appears that AA as a whole prefers it that way. However, we want "one" meeting

where we do respect primary purpose...just one. People, like myself, who are suffering from an untreated "spiritual malady" ...not a drinking problem...have been dying for decades because there have been no AA groups who are standing up for this particular primary purpose. If this approach to helping others is not something that you're attracted to, the question I have is why do you want to be a part of this particular group when you have so many others to choose from? The other question that is glaring to me is why do you have this particular person for a sponsor if you don't want to take what he has to say with deep regard? What is the purpose of a sponsor? To tell you what you want to hear or to tell you what he believes to be in your best interest and the best interest of the sick and suffering alcoholic sitting in that room with no hope?

The man or woman, sitting in that meeting who is still suffering, may not be obvious to us. Many people know how to put on a good show, but are truly dying inside. We need to ensure that the message that the sick and suffering may have come there for is preserved. Our focus is on the person that has no hope yet, not on the person that has hope and wants a captive audience to talk about themselves and what they think they know. One way to ensure that you will never speak at my home group is to "request to speak"...there is absolutely no humility in that act. If what you're doing in AA really is attractive, you don't need to ask to speak...people will be asking you to speak. If no one is asking you to speak, there might be a reason that you need to look at. I know this sounds harsh, but sometimes the truth is hard to swallow. If you find these comments offensive, then most likely, they have struck some kind of truth deep down within yourself.

Please hear these words with the loving intent that they are expressed. I'm not trying to scold you or harm you...I just don't want to sugar-coat these words and have you miss the point when the consequence may be your life. Compromising the truth out of misguided politeness, in my opinion, is how AA has got into the condition that it is in. I'm not willing to compromise your life. I wish you all the best.