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Delegate's Message

The 69th General Service Conference...One Alcoholic Reaching out to Another

Jeff G. Area 93 Delegate, Panel 69

I always make it a point in my talks and discussions to emphasize that, although my current commitment in A.A. is being the Delegate of Area 93, I am just another drunk. Well, I gathered together with 134 other drunks to conduct the business of the General Service Conference this past May 19th. One of the responsibilities of the Delegate, as outlined in our Service Manual, is to report back to their Area about the Conference. I am currently in the middle of doing that by visiting our Districts, and in August I'll give my report back at the Area Assembly. But, I wanted to spend some time talking about a couple of things that I experienced around and outside the Conference.

First, let me expand on the comment, "...I gathered together with 134 other drunks to conduct the business of the General Service Conference." Indeed, there were times when at the Conference it was clear that the person speaking at the microphone or talking in a conversation was an alcoholic. I would never identify anyone specifically, but things are said, actions are taken, and discussions occur amongst conference members. We are selfish, self-centered people, and many of us are very sensitive. Gee, we can also *don't pay attention*. One of Area 93's past delegates has a line about having to tell an alcoholic something 12 times before it gets through. These traits, tendencies, and behaviors occurred at the Conference as well. It doesn't matter what position you hold, you're still an alcoholic.

Another fascinating part of my experience was learning something about myself. When I left to go to the Conference, I felt I was mentally ready. Maybe I could have prepared more, read more, talked to more people, and gathered more opinions. But, I felt my head was in the right place. Well, when the conference started, I found myself several times in a brief daze, having to shake myself to get back to the business in front of me. And I did. These fleeting feelings lasted for 2 days. Don't get me wrong. I was present and participating, yet there were those moments where I had to concentrate more than I would have expected.

I think it is important for us to remember to not look at the positions people hold, particularly our officers in A.A., and only see the title and what the job entails.

Getting back to where I found myself on those first 2 days, I want to share how I got

Another fascinating part of my experience (as delegate) was learning about myself.

We need to look at the individual performing that position and remember: they are an A.A. member, a drunk--an alcoholic--just like all of us.

Getting back to where I found myself on those first 2 days, I want to share how I got through those feelings, and what eventually happened with me. The story is a testament to our program as well. On the Monday night of the Conference (day 2), I had a conversation with an A.A. member that was not part of the Conference. He wasn't even at the Conference. It was a man my sponsor asked me to contact since he lived in New York: another sponsee of his. We played phone tag a few times and then connected after the Monday sessions of the Conference were over. My initial intention was to meet him and maybe go to a New York meeting together. As we talked, it became obvious to me that he was struggling with something as well. It doesn't matter what it was, but we ended up talking for more than an hour. I told him about my struggles of the last two days, and he shared his current concerns about his sobriety. I felt so much better after that conversation. I went into my committee meeting the next morning with a renewed sense of purpose and feeling great about what I was a part of and the role I was playing.

This gentleman and I talked again on Thursday and he told me how much our talk had helped *him*. It was amazing. Two people who had never met or even ever spoken, yet we were impacted by that "language of the heart," the healing language of A.A. I ended up having the pleasure of attending a meeting with this gentleman Saturday night after the conference. He and his wife had dinner with my wife and me. We walked afterwards, and they showed us parts of Manhattan we had not seen yet. It was a magical evening I'll never forget, and I wanted to share it with you all.

There is the "Conference", and it is big in many ways. It can seem bigger than life when you first get there. But, there is the underlying fact that this is A.A., and amazing things can happen if you just let them. In the Conference, around the conference, wherever we find ourselves, we just must remember who we are, and that we're not in charge.

Message from the Secretary

Review Suggested Area Delegate Conference Expense Contribution By Kevin D. Area 93 Panel 69 Secretary

So, what exactly does that mean? Each year as we all know, well most of us know, we hold a General Service Conference in New York. The location of the Conference is either in Rye Brook, New York or New York City itself (Manhattan). Usually the Conference alternates between these two venues but there are exceptions caused by availability and expenses. This Conference costs in the neighborhood of \$800,000 to \$1,100,000 depending on location, with New York City being the pricier of the two venues. The Conference has asked all of the Areas to make a minimum contribution by March 1st of \$1800 to help offset the cost. Additionally, Areas are encouraged to consider making additional voluntary contributions to help cover Conference costs. Two years ago the 67th General Service Conference made the recommendation that we review this figure biannually and, voila, it is now a permanent item on the Conference Agenda (unless of course another Conference recommends removing it).

So let's look at this \$1800 figure. Does this represent the actual cost of sending a voting Member to the Conference? No, it does not. Simply dividing the cost of the Conference, I believe last years was estimated at \$1,100,000, by the number of voting members, 136 last year, gives us a total approximate cost of almost \$8100. In fact, the cost over the last seven Conferences per member according to the GSO is: 2018: Estimated \$8300 (in Manhattan); 2017 \$5,500 (in Rye Brook); 2016: \$7,400 (in Manhattan); 2015: \$7,800 (in Manhattan); 2014: \$5,800 (in Rye Brook); 2013: \$6,800 (in Manhattan); 2012: \$5,400 (in Rye Brook). Wow, those are some big numbers. Why so much?

Well the Conference lasts a week. That means the General Service Office is responsible for housing and feeding all of the Delegates, Trustees, AAWS and Grapevines non Trustee Directors and staff, and the General Service Office staff members that make up the voting membership of the Conference. The Conference also provides travel expenses such as airfare, mileage, parking, etc. There are other hotel expenses like conference rooms and banquet costs. While there, the Delegates are given a tour of the General Service Office and sometimes Stepping Stones (the residence of Bill and Lois). There are also costs to the General Service office for the printing and the labor needed to produce the back-ground materials and other things such as draft pamphlets for everyone to review, so an informed group conscience can be obtained. Remember, we have entrusted the Group Conscience of the entire Fellowship unto these individuals and we would not be doing our part if we didn't make sure they are receiving all the necessary information. I believe they also have other major expenses such as translating all the documents into three different languages--English, Spanish and French--as well as providing French and Spanish interpretation. Just recently that expense was almost \$200,000 to translate everything, but hopefully that cost will come down henceforth as the number of older documents needing to be translated diminishes over time. There are also the guests that are invited to the Conference, specific Agenda Committee Members who provide a specific point of view or expertise for the Conference. The Conference also hosts members from Service Conferences in other countries as observers, so we can share our Experience, Strength and Hope with them to assist them in their own efforts to spread our message of Hope. All in all, this is a tremendous undertaking which costs a considerable amount of time, money and energy to pull off successfully.

The next question may be – why aren't we charging more? Let us start with a little history. The first Conference to ask for this Contribution was the 20th General Service Conference in 1970, following a recommendation by the 19th General Service Conference. The amount? \$150 dollars. Since that time the Delegate Fee has been increased 8 times. In 1974 it was recommended that it be increased to \$200. In 1978 they recommended an increase to \$300. In 1984 the recommendation was \$400. In 1989 they changed it to \$600. 1997 saw them ask for a raise to \$800 for the following year. \$1200 in 2005, \$1600 in 2012, and in 2017 the recommendation was to make the minimum contribution \$1800, the number it sits at presently. That was also the year they advised making a review of the Fee a biannual Agenda topic.

I still haven't addressed the question have I? There are several viewpoints on this subject: 1) Our Groups through contributions and purchases of AA literature are already contributing to our Delegates expenses, 2) not all Areas are in the same situation financially and not all have the same population base to draw on for funding. This is a complex topic because of how each Area finances itself and how they view this issue. These items and others are the things the Conference will be discussing during this panel when they do their review.

Here in Area 93 we budget a special extra contribution to GSO each year to help cover the cost of fully funding our Delegate's Conference expenses as directed by our Guidelines. Most years we also ascertain the final cost of each Conference and go to the Assembly to discuss sending another contribution to cover any differences.

Since this is something I like to follow closely, I would not be surprised to see this item on the May Assembly Agenda as it pertains to last year's 68th General Service Conference.

I hope this was a helpful explanation of this topic and look forward to hearing some discussion from you.

News from the Districts

NEWS FROM DISTRICT 1

Last year District 1 initiated a Member Survey in response of the 2017 Final Report of the General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous. That report provided a series of presentations on issues affecting the growth of AA and identified three key factors: 1) Communication, 2) Safety, and 3) Diversity. To prioritize our actions at the local level, we sought the opinions about these factors by taking a survey of members who were willing to participate.

We made the following statements based on the three key factors and provided the scale response from 4 to 0: (Strongly Agree--4, Agree--3, Disagree--2, Strongly Disagree--1, Don't Know--0)

Communication

1. My groups GSR does a good job of bringing back information about decisions that are made at the District or Area level.
2. My group's GSR does a good job of publicizing opportunities to participate in AA events happening in my local area.
3. I am concerned about preserving anonymity in the age of internet and social media.

Safety

1. AA should do more to address personal safety (i.e. physical threats, violence, inappropriate or unwanted acts, gestures, jokes, touching, and 13th stepping).
2. Please let us know if you have any other concerns about personal safety: (open response)

Diversity

1. My District and Area do a good job of reaching out, attracting, and representing people of all types to our program.
2. Please specify or elaborate: (open response)

Finally, space was given to those who wished to express any other concerns about General Service, our District, or our Area.

An optional section allowed the survey takers to identify their gender and years of sobriety.

Over a period of about 4 months, the District 1 GSRs distributed the surveys to any AA groups in District 1 that they attended, and collected responses. The survey was also available online with a link at the bottom of the survey.

When the survey was concluded, Mike G, a GSR from District 1, provide us with his analysis of the data at our June 2019 District meeting.

Below is a tally of all responses:

There were 117 total responses: 56% of men and 44% of women.

Response rates by length of sobriety:

Less than 1 year	-	14%
1-4 years	-	25%
5-9 years	-	21%
10-19 years	-	16%
20+ years	-	25%

Communication

1. My groups GSR does a good job of bringing back information about decisions that are made at the District or Area level. 68% of responders strongly agreed and 30% agreed.
2. My group's GSR does a good job of publicizing opportunities to participate in AA events happening in my local area. 64% of respondents strongly agree and 29% agree.
3. I am concerned about preserving anonymity in the age of internet and social media. 39% of respondents strongly agree, most them were women. 26% of respondents agreed and 19% disagreed.

Safety

1. AA should do more to address personal safety (i.e. physical threats, violence, inappropriate or unwanted acts, gestures, jokes, touching, and 13th stepping). 18% strongly agreed, more men than women. 27% agreed, which was split evenly among men and women. 27% disagreed.
2. Please let us know if you have any other concerns about personal safety: (open response) Some people suggested that safety could be addressed in the preamble at meetings. Another comment stated that people who are continually disruptive should be kicked out of the meeting

Diversity

1. My District and Area do a good job of reaching out, attracting, and representing people of all types to our program. 41% strongly agreed, 34% agreed, and 17% don't know.
2. Please specify or elaborate: (open response) This was the only question where people didn't understand or felt they needed more information on the question. One comment stated that we are a program of attraction, not promotion. Another comment spoke to the need of outreach to Hispanic and Latino women who may feel intimidated.

There was quite a discussion about these results during the District 1 meeting, especially regarding safety and diversity. One GSR reminded us about Tradition 3, stating that there is a history of disruptive people becoming valuable members. These issues are addressed on the General Service Office website. Among them are "Safety in AA: Our Common Welfare" which is available on the GSO website. We all agreed that these survey responses will drive our district agendas during panel 69, and even further.

If you're interested in surveying your district, please feel free to contact the District 1 DCM, Lou T., any GSR in District 1, or Maria C, editor of this newsletter.

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