

## QUESTIONS

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY "WE ARE GOING TO ENGAGE IN AN INVENTORY PROCESS?"

SPECIFICALLY, WHAT IS AN INVENTORY PROCESS?

WHY ARE WE GOING TO TAKE AN INVENTORY?

WHAT PURPOSE WILL IT SERVE?

HOW WILL WE TAKE IT?

WHO  
WHEN  
WHERE  
COST

WHAT IS WORKING AND WHY?

WHAT ISN'T WORKING AND WHY?

HOW DO WE SET PRIORITIES

WHAT RESULTS DO WE WANT?

HOW WILL WE KNOW WHEN WE HAVE THEM?

## WORLD SERVICES INVENTORY

In the fifteen years since we first met as a conference, incredible growth has taken place. While our system for doing service at the world level has not changed in the last ten years, the volume of the work has increased tremendously and continues to increase every year. We continue to ask our trusted servant at the World level, at times, to abandon their families, their jobs in some sense their lives, for the sake of doing service. We continue to take on new projects, commit to fulfill new responsibilities, and rarely, if ever, look at the consequences of such decisions on ourselves as trusted servants or upon the groups to whom we are accountable.

We believe that it is time to look at what we are doing and why we are doing it. It is time for us to examine the processes we use in our service efforts. It is time to find out what our groups' needs are from us and how we can fulfill those needs. It is time for us to examine if we are, in fact, serving our groups or a bureaucrac that has taken on a life of its own. In short, we believe that it is time for us to engage in an inventory--a process by which we can find out what works and what doesn't work.

Through engaging in such an inventory, we can find out if our current mission statement, as listed in the *Temporary Working Guide to our Service Structure*, is still valid or needs to be changed. We can establish clearly defined goals and objectives which can be easily measured. We can establish standards by which we can evaluate our effectiveness. We can evaluate our communications with our groups and each other and make the necessary improvements. We can look at the fund flow and determine if changes are needed to allow for consistent funding of vital tasks and services. We can set up those processes by which we can be more responsive to the groups' needs and desires and truly help fulfill our fellowship's primary purpose.

## A.A. Takes Its Inventory

The theme of the 1993 General Service Conference is "A.A. Takes Its Inventory—the General Service Conference Structure," and at all levels throughout the Fellowship, groups, districts, areas, the General Service Office and Grapevine, the two corporate boards of A.A.W.S. and Grapevine, and the board of trustees have begun an examination of their assets and liabilities.

While the inventories of each of these elements of the General Service Conference structure will necessarily turn up separate and distinct problems and concerns, each inventory undoubtedly will have at its core the questions, "How well are we carrying the message of Alcoholics Anonymous?" and, "What could we be doing better?" Though each element of the Conference structure is linked through our primary purpose, when taken together these inventories will offer a profound vision of just where Alcoholics Anonymous is, where it has come from, and where it is heading.

In the Big Book, on page 64, Bill W. notes that "A business which takes no regular inventory usually goes broke. Taking a commercial inventory is a fact-finding and a fact-facing process. It is an effort to discover the truth about the stock-in-trade. One object is to disclose damaged or unsalable goods, to get rid of them promptly and without regret. If the owner of the business is to be successful, he cannot fool himself about values."

In addition to establishing the overall theme of the 1993 Conference, the Conference Agenda Committee also put forward a number of presentation/discussion topics which will be taken up by the entire Conference body. In five different presentations under the general topic, "A.A. Takes Its Inventory," the Conference will consider a number of related areas, such as the purpose of the General Service Conference, the Conference relation to A.A., the General Service Conference and its general procedures. It will also look at the Conference relation to the General Service Board and its corporate services, the composition, jurisdiction, and responsibilities of the General Service Board; the general Warranties of the Conference Charter; finance; and the A.A. Grapevine.

Whether it be an individual inventory or the inventory

of an entire organizational structure, the question of exactly how and by what means such an inventory can be accomplished must be addressed. As Bill W. noted in the Twelve and Twelve on the topic of the Tenth Step, "Although all inventories are alike in principle, the time factor does distinguish one from another."

Even though, as with any inventory-taking procedure, there may be a temptation to "wander morbidly around in the past," Bill explains that "when our inventory is carefully taken, and we have made peace with ourselves, the conviction follows that tomorrow's challenges can be met as they come."

In the September/October 1992 issue of the Southern California Area Assembly newsletter, alternate delegate Ken R. of the California Northern Coastal Area had this to say about the inventory process: "We need to proceed in a spirit of openness, putting principles before personalities, especially our own. On the other hand, we will sometimes need to discuss actions of individuals, committees, Conferences, and boards and do so in a way that is principled without shrinking from the inventory just because what happened, happens, or may happen involves particular individuals. This, too, is putting principles before personalities."

While any thorough inventory must be intensely subjective and personal, a considerable amount of work has gone into the development of some objective means of collecting these inventories and reporting them. Many groups and districts use the model discussed in the pamphlet, "The A.A. Group," and different area structures have developed formats which work especially well for them. (These are available from G.S.O.'s Conference coordinator.) At the General Service Board level, general service trustee Harold G. has been largely responsible for putting together a series of questions which can be adapted as desired by the trustees and the two corporate boards in order to provide a framework for their respective inventories. Essentially, the questions, aimed at stimulating both reflection and discussion, divide naturally into two different areas: an inventory of the individual as a member of the board, and an inventory of the effectiveness of the board as a whole.

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As many who are familiar with the Conference process note, the spiritual and material work of the Conference is not confined to the week-long gathering each spring, but rather reverberates and echoes throughout the year. Doubtless, in that spirit, this Fellowship-wide inventory will carry well beyond the seven Conference days in April of 1993 and will continue to benefit the Fellowship for years to come.

NOTE: If your group, district or area wishes to share the results of their inventory process, the Conference coordinator will be pleased to receive them for use as background material for the Conference.

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## ***SERVICES AT G.S.O.*** **An Ongoing A.A. Challenge: Public Information**

If there's one person on the G.S.O. staff who never doubts that the period we live in could well go by the name of the Age of Communication, it's the one who sits at the Public Information desk. Through television, newspapers, films, fax machines, telephones, books, magazines and computers, there's a public out there, seeking information. And whenever questions about A.A. filter through any one of those channels, they fall into the lap of the current Public Information staff person, Joanie M.

"The purpose of public information is to carry the A.A. message to the alcoholic who still suffers," Joanie says. "This is achieved through informing the general public about what A.A. is and who we serve.

"It seemed overwhelming at first," Joanie says, referring to the varied responsibilities the assignment carries, particularly the 450 pieces of mail that cross her desk each month, not to mention the equivalent number of telephone calls she gets in the same amount of time.

Letters and phone calls come from local P.I. committees asking for shared experience and guidance so that

they may better reach the public, which includes, or is, in contact with, the alcoholic who still suffers. Joanie is aware that the work of these committees is the heart of A.A. public information—what better way to demonstrate what A.A. is about than to have P.I. committees invited to speak anonymously at schools, staff booths and give out information at health fairs, or visit local media people to share A.A. information?

A day at the P.I. desk may begin with a call from an A.A. member who is concerned about what appears to be criticism of their beloved Fellowship in a local newspaper. Joanie's response in each case is based on Bill W.'s writings in Warranty Five of Concept XII: "For much the same reason we cannot and should not enter into public controversy, even in self-defense. . . . Nothing could be more damaging to our unity and to the worldwide good will which A.A. enjoys, than public contention, no matter how promising the immediate dividends might appear.

"Almost without exception it can be confidently estimated that our best defense in those situations would be no defense whatsoever—namely, complete silence at the public level. . . . But, under no conditions should we exhibit anger or any punitive or aggressive intent. Surely this should be our inflexible policy."

Another call is from an A.A. member upset by learning of another A.A. identified by full name or picture in the media. Joanie explains that information on anonymity breaks are sent to the area delegate for follow up. G.S.O. seldom comments on anonymity breaks directly to the media involved because of the understanding that it is up to individual members and groups to preserve and protect our Traditions.

In addition, there's the coordinating of press feature stories and radio and television public service announcements and sending out the annual Anonymity Letter to the media. The 1992 letter went out to 6,900 media contacts.

The staff member on the P.I. assignment serves as secretary to the trustees' and Conference Public Information Committees. Additionally, there are four subcommittees which periodically meet, then report to the trustees' P.I. Committee. In effect, all of the members of these committees are striving to live up to Bill W.'s urging that, to reach the millions of alcoholics still out there, ". . . We need . . . the increasing good will of editors, writers, television and radio channels. . . . These publicity outlets . . . should be opened wider and wider. . . ." (Concept XI, *The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Service*, p. 51)

"It is a critical assignment," she says, "a single large public blunder could cost many lives and much suffering, because it would turn new prospects away. Conversely, every real public relations success brings alcoholics in our direction."

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