

A.A.® Guidelines **For A.A. Members Employed in the Alcoholism Field**

from GSO, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163

A.A. Guidelines are compiled from the shared experience of A.A. members in various service areas. They also reflect guidance given through the Twelve Traditions and the General Service Conference (U.S. and Canada). In keeping with our Tradition of autonomy, except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole, most decisions are made by the group conscience of the members involved. The purpose of these Guidelines is to assist in reaching an *informed* group conscience.

These Guidelines are for A.A. members who are employed in the field of alcoholism. This can cover a variety of jobs in the alcoholism world: social workers, nurses, counselors and those who head national or local programs. A.A. contributors to these Guidelines overwhelmingly agreed that it is professional skill and experience, not A.A. membership, which qualifies one for professional positions.

WHAT KINDS OF A.A. EXPERIENCE CAN BE HELPFUL IN THE ALCOHOLISM FIELD?

1. Several years of good, uninterrupted A.A. sobriety would be important in tackling any paid alcoholism job, or enrolling in an alcoholism training program. Five years was mentioned most frequently, but a couple of people suggested three.
2. Some A.A.s have held positions as “trusted servants” in A.A., and at the same time worked for alcoholism agencies. The General Service Conference has affirmed that an A.A. employed in the alcoholism field could be eligible for service within the Fellowship provided he or she has the necessary A.A. qualifications.
3. Understanding of A.A. Traditions and how they developed out of experience is “absolutely indispensable” for A.A.s employed in the alcoholism field. “To deepen my understanding, I read the books *Alcoholics Anonymous*, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, and *A.A. Comes of Age* over and over,” one man wrote.
4. For information about education, prevention or alcoholism in general, you may wish to contact the following agency: National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), www.niaaa.nih.gov.
5. Some have found it helpful to have a sponsor who does not work in the alcoholism field.

HOW CAN ONE FULFILL BOTH ROLES SUCCESSFULLY?

Keep it perfectly clear in your own mind which context you are functioning in and stick to one role at a time.

One way to do this, several program directors noted, is to be sure that job titles never contain the initials “A.A.” Members working in the field of alcoholism tell us that professional agencies save themselves lots of grief by using the term “alcoholism counselor,” *never* “A.A. counselor.”

Other shared experience points out that it is important to maintain, outside or in addition to your job, a personal A.A. life. Also, to participate regularly to A.A. meetings — not as a “guest expert,” but as an A.A. member trying to stay sober.

Some A.A.s refuse to discuss their job with other A.A. members or at an A.A. meeting. At the other extreme, there are those who talk easily about both in all settings. As one person put it, “From nine to five on my job, I am a paid professional. But after hours, I turn into just another alcoholic trying to improve the quality of my sober life.”

A recommendation of the 1978 A.A. General Service Conference, dealing with A.A. groups in treatment facilities, concluded: “It was felt that A.A.s employed by the facility should not run the A.A. groups at the facility.”

A majority of A.A. members seemed to feel that what is needed most is good common sense. Keep it simple. Approach each situation on its own merits. Be sure you are deeply acquainted with A.A. Traditions and their application. Be sensitive to keep professional terminology separate from A.A. language.

“I never sponsor or Twelfth Step the clients I meet on my job,” one counselor wrote. “I counsel them and arrange for other A.A.s to do the Twelfth Stepping. But at my A.A. meetings, I Twelfth Step newcomers like everyone else — being careful, of course, not to confuse my sponsees and my clients. And in A.A., I am careful to avoid all professional-sounding jargon.” Another professional said, “I cannot afford to start mistaking my professional work with alcoholics for the healing process provided me by the A.A. Steps and meetings.”

ANONYMITY

Tradition Eleven: *Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.*

Tradition Twelve: *Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.*

The values of these Traditions for individual recovery, as well as protection of our Fellowship, are clearly spelled out in *A.A. Comes of Age*, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, and the pamphlets “A.A. Tradition — How it Developed” and “Understanding Anonymity.”

Practically no one recommends setting up a rigid policy for yourself and never deviating from it no matter what the circumstances. “Speaking to troubled alcoholic clients,” one man wrote, “maybe you could help them with your own story — but it is also possible this might hinder their own affiliation with A.A. They may not understand your motive.

“Remember that what you do can affect yourself, your listeners, and A.A. as a whole,” he advised. “To sum up, I’d say examine your conscience fearlessly, then pray for guidance in each case.”

ONE HAT — EVEN AT PUBLIC LEVEL

Keeping the “one hat” in mind is especially important at the public level of print, radio, films, the internet, or other public media.

A.A. members employed in the field who communicate about recovery from a professional point of view — through blogging and other public media — find it helpful to stick to “the hat” of the professional, and not that of the A.A. member. This avoids confusion as to the non-professional nature of A.A. and also honors our Eleventh and Twelfth Traditions — A.A. has no spokesperson.

IT CAN BE DONE

For many years, A.A. members have been working professionally in the field of alcoholism. In 1944 Marty M., one of the first women in A.A., started to educate the public about alcoholism, with the full support of Dr. Bob, Bill W., and other early A.A.s. They saw then that the organizing and fund raising necessary for public education on alcoholism were outside A.A.’s ability and primary purpose.

By 1957, as Bill W. pointed out in *A.A. Comes of Age*, many A.A.s were already successfully employed to work on alcoholism problems by non-A.A. organizations in such capacities as social workers, researchers, educators, nurses, personnel advisers, counselors, and other professionals.

“We see that we have no right or need to discourage A.A.s who

wish to work as individuals in these wider fields,” wrote Bill W. “It would be actually antisocial were we to discourage them.” (*A.A. Comes of Age*, p. 117).

Many A.A.s have made remarkable professional contributions to the world’s knowledge and understanding of alcoholism, while acting fully within both the letter and the spirit of the A.A. Traditions. It can be done; it has been done.

RESOURCES

There is a service piece available from GSO: “Memo on Participation of A.A. Members in Research and Other non-A.A. Surveys.” It is helpful to read if you may be involved in a research project.

Some professionals refer to alcoholism and drug addiction as “substance abuse” or “chemical dependency.” The pamphlet “Problems Other Than Alcohol” and the essay on Tradition Five in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* are good sources for clarity on this issue.

GSO’s A.A. website, www.aa.org, is a valuable resource for both A.A. members and professionals who may come into contact with alcoholics.

Additionally, you can direct inquiries to the Cooperation with the Professional Community assignment at GSO by calling (212) 870-3400 or emailing cpc@aa.org

www.aa.org