

TRADITION SIX

ENTHUSIASM UNBOUNDED

I was a little over a year sober when I began answering phones with my sponsor at our local intergroup. During one shift, he overheard a conversation in which I waxed poetic about the virtues of AA and then tried to help the caller with other problems. After the call, he calmly asked, "Have you ever read the Traditions in the 'Twelve and Twelve?'"

My only exposure to the Traditions had been grumbling attendance at a few Traditions meetings.

"No," I answered.

"Well, if you are going to do more service," he said, "you might want to read about them. They're kind of . . . important."

Although I was insulted and defensive--my first reaction to many of his suggestions--I realized that he had about twenty more years of experience than I, so I'd better take the suggestion

I'm so glad I did. I loved reading about the trials, errors, and misadventures that the early AAs had while developing the Traditions that guide our Fellowship today. I realized that early AAs were just as fallible and, occasionally, as misguided as anyone else. But, by returning to a primary purpose, obstacles could be overcome, and the Fellowship would survive.

As I've continued to do service at the group level and beyond, I've witnessed how our Traditions help the Fellowship navigate through all sorts of situations. It's not always pretty, either, so I really started to appreciate the wisdom that came from the experience of those in the early days.

One Tradition that I've grown grateful for is the Sixth Tradition. At first, it took me a while to see how a Tradition that deals with specific issues--money, endorsement, lending out the AA name--could apply to my own recovery. But the more service I've done over the years, the more I've come to realize how this Tradition really helps our Fellowship to keep it simple.

For a number of years, I took an AA meeting into a detox every other Friday night. The detox is part of a hospital and is run, like many hospital detoxes, by a trained, professional staff.

Early on in my commitment, a patient showed up after the meeting started. She apologized profusely and began telling me why she was late. I realized that because I was leading the meeting, some detox patients might assume that I work for the hospital.

I told her that I appreciated the apology, but it wasn't necessary. From that point on, I made sure I explained, at the beginning of each meeting, that I was neither a member of the hospital staff, nor a professional in the field of alcoholism treatment. I told them that I was simply a drunk, just like them, who found a solution in Alcoholics Anonymous. The speaker and I were there to share our experience in the hopes that it might help another alcoholic--we wanted to give back what had been so freely given to us. We had nothing to do with the hospital, we weren't there to enforce any rules, make money, or sell anything. I found it helpful to make this clear from the beginning, both for the patients and for myself. It helped define the meeting's primary purpose, and it also, perhaps, made it easier for the patients in the detox to see me as a peer, not as a counselor or a doctor.

In my own recovery, Tradition Six reminds me not to overstep my bounds. As my sponsor witnessed that day at intergroup, there are times I get excited and try to fix things I have no business fixing. Whether I'm answering phones, talking to a newcomer at a meeting, or working with a sponsee, my only purpose is to share my experience, strength, and hope, and to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers. There are plenty of competent professionals, more qualified than I, who can handle everything else

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