

A Study of Tradition 11 in AA

When dealing with the media, the traditions of the 12 step programs request that members maintain anonymity, not so much for their protection, but for the good of the fellowship as a whole.

Tradition 11 of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) says, "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." Al-Anon includes the addition, "We need guard with special care the anonymity of all AA members."

Not Using Full Names or Naming Groups

When discussing their personal recovery with the media, members who are identified by their full names—such as the case of those who are already well known in the media—should not also identify the specific name of their 12-step recovery group. If members wish to discuss the benefits of membership in a specific 12-step group, such as Al-Anon or Alcoholics Anonymous, they then should not identify themselves except by first name only.

For example, if John Doe uses his full name in an interview, he should not name his recovery group. He might simply say he is in "a recovery group." If he wants to discuss Al-Anon or AA by name, he should identify himself only as John D.

This anonymity is for the good of the fellowship rather than protecting the identity of the member. The example is given of a famous athlete or television personality—a role model for youth—who gets into recovery and announces to the entire world that AA has saved his life. What happens if that person relapses? The kids would think AA is useless and be less likely to seek it when they need to seek sobriety.

But Tradition 11 was also developed by the founders of the 12 step programs in order to avoid other potentially damaging situations.

Promotion Not Needed

AA member Alethea notes that promotion allows outsiders to change the message, so much so that insiders now hear a different message. The original message of "we get better" has become "things get better." Outside institutions say that it does not matter which 12-step program you go to they are all the same. Yet the support a drug addict would get at an AA meeting from alcoholics is not the same as he would get at a Narcotics Anonymous meeting with other addicts.

Attraction, Not Promotion

The purpose of 12-step groups is for one member to help another and to be responsible for being the attraction to the program. A member does not cede this responsibility to a spokesperson or promotion campaign.

Althea notes, "By changing our appearance, how we communicate, dress, and conduct ourselves in and out of the rooms of AA—that's part of carrying the message also, to let people see the difference that this design for a living we were given has worked in our life. When people see the four changes in our life—mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual—they are attracted. They need no promotion. This is a program for people who want it. Let's not let others tell us what they think we are about. Let's just be ready when the suffering alcoholic is ready to open the door and show him what we are."

Protecting the Anonymity of AA Members

Al-Anon member Lin notes that anonymity is what makes people feel safe to speak what's in their hearts and on their minds. "The fact that it's based on attraction to me means people can see the outward change of you due to an inward change in you." She values the part added to the Al-Anon tradition of protecting the anonymity of the AA member. "If you know a particular person drinks because their relative is at a meeting you don't need to tell it. That's why the anonymity works."

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