

Reading Literature Aloud at OA Meetings

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OA's group conscience has decided we should display, sell, use and read aloud only OA-approved literature at OA meetings. This includes OA Conference- and board-approved literature and AA conference-approved literature.*

Although OA has not reviewed and approved AA literature, we deem their group conscience approved its contents. When we read AA literature and change the words, neither OA nor AA has approved that literature.

At OA's founding, members asked permission from AA to modify its Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions for use in OA. AA graciously granted that permission. Those are the only things we have the authority to change. At OA's inception, no OA literature existed, so the Fellowship used AA's Big Book and *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. To better understand how the AA concepts could apply to compulsive eating, members would often change the words when reading aloud from AA literature during meetings.

Today AA World Service asks that we respect their literature and group conscience by reading their literature, such as the Big Book, as written, without changing the words. AA also asks that we read excerpts from their literature in context, which means to read it from the actual literature as printed, not from a typed sheet of paper. Of course, when we share in meetings about the passages we read, we are free to share our experience, strength and hope in our own terms related to compulsive eating. If we want to read only literature that uses terms related to food and compulsive eating, we have a wealth of OA literature from which to choose that doesn't require changing the words.

It is also a common practice in OA meetings to change the words of OA's Twelve Steps when reading them aloud. People replace "God" with "Higher Power" and "him" with gender-neutral terms, and they add "we" at the beginning of all the Steps. When we make those changes, we are amending the Steps. Our OA, Inc. Bylaws, Subpart B, Article XIV, Section 1 clearly spell out the amendment process. Amendments to the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions must be adopted by two-thirds of the delegates at the World Service Business Conference, and that vote must be ratified by three-fourths of the registered Overeaters Anonymous groups responding within six months of notification, provided at least 55 percent of the registered groups have responded.

Clearly, no individual member, group or OA service body can amend the Twelve Steps or Twelve Traditions by themselves because the Steps and Traditions "belong" to all of us. One could argue Tradition Four allows each group to do what it wants, as long as it doesn't affect other groups or OA as a whole. True, but we also have Tradition One: "Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon OA unity." We have Tradition Two: "For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern."

Concept Two states, in part, “World Service Business Conference is the voice, authority and effective conscience of OA as a whole.” If I insist upon changing the wording of OA or AA literature to suit myself, I am displaying the same selfishness and self-will that landed me in OA in the first place! As one trustee wrote, “From my vantage point and experience, there is a tendency to mold the OA program of recovery to the molds of individual members and their ways of doing things. I am reminded that if my way worked, I would not be in OA or need to be. Obviously, my way did not work. So I am quite willing to work on changing me, which is a challenge, and not try to revamp OA or AA to suit me. When a physician gives me a prescription for treatment of an illness, I am well advised not to make any attempts to rewrite it.”

If I believe OA’s literature needs to be amended, I am encouraged to participate in our collective group conscience by serving as a delegate to the World Service Business Conference. Service bodies may submit motions to amend OA, Inc. Bylaws, change our policies, or revise our literature. Failing that, I am committed to respecting the group conscience of both OA and AA by reading the literature as it is written, from the original source, without any creative editing on my part.

Yours in service,

Teresa K., Region IV Trustee and Chair of the Board of Trustees

*Editor’s Note: The 2012 World Service Business Conference adopted a policy that OA-approved literature includes AA books and booklets with original copyright of 2010 and earlier.