

Overeaters Anonymous

WSBC 2018 Ask-It Basket

5/25/2018

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ANONYMITY—PHOTOGRAPHY AT PUBLIC INFORMATION EVENTS

Recently, at two wellness fairs, our pictures were taken at our well-identified OA booth. At one of the fairs, we were asked about being photographed, but not at the other. We assume the photos were taken on behalf of the organizations running the fairs. We were not asked for our names, nor did we furnish them, but we have no knowledge about how those photographs might be used. I am beginning to feel uneasy as I feel we might be in direct contradiction of Tradition Twelve.

Here's the good news: you were not identified by name. So you are anonymous in the media if the sponsor of the Health Fair publishes the photo in a newsletter or uses it in any promotional material. If they were to send the photo to a newspaper to publish, the newspaper would most likely contact you before going to print: most newspapers will not print a photo without knowing the names of the people in the picture.

In future, you may want to talk about what it means to be anonymous with the photographer ahead of time and try to take a picture with your faces turned away. As with everything in life, "progress, not perfection." We learn as we go. It seems to me that, because you withheld your names, your anonymity is good. Also, thank you for your wonderful service carrying the message! Way to go!

ASK-IT BASKET—MOVED FROM *LIFELINE* TO *A STEP AHEAD*

Why was the Ask-It Basket section taken out of Lifeline? That was my favorite part. I loved reading trustee responses. Going to the website is not as fun for me.

I also enjoyed reading the [Ask-it Basket](#) section in [Lifeline](#), and I asked the same question. In 2016, the Ask-it Basket section was moved from *Lifeline* to appear in OA's newsletter, *A Step Ahead*, instead.

In an effort to bolster *Lifeline* subscriptions, our WSO Publications Department staff suggested adding more engaging content, such as the "Bits and Bites" and "What Works for Me" features. It was felt that members, especially newcomers, wanted to hear specifics about how members work their program. In order to make room for these columns, the Publications Staff suggested moving Ask-it Basket to *A Step Ahead*. It was felt that the material in *Lifeline* focuses more on individual recovery, whereas the material in *A Step Ahead* is more of a business newsletter; many Ask-It Basket questions relate to service bodies and group conscience issues. So *A Step Ahead* would appear to be a more appropriate place for this column. This change was also approved by the Internal Information Committee, a committee of Trustees who oversee the publication of *Lifeline* with the help of the staff.

One could argue that many of the questions relate to our Traditions and how to practice the principles of the Traditions in our relationships and in all our affairs. So in this respect, these questions and answers are also about recovery, but in the broader sense.

Thank you for your question. Keep subscribing to *Lifeline* and reading *A Step Ahead*!

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GROUP CONSCIENCE—ABSTINENCE REQUIREMENT—VOTING

If an OA group does not allow non-abstinent members to vote at group conscience meetings, does this violate any OA Traditions or Concepts of Service (namely, Tradition Three and/or Concepts Three, Four, and Twelve)?

The Third Tradition, whose spiritual Principle is Identity, relates only to requirements for membership. It does not refer to additional requirements that a group may develop for the effective transaction of group business.

Many groups institute attendance and/or abstinence requirements for participation in group conscience meetings and serving the group. For instance, the appointment of a group Treasurer who offered to do the service at their first or second meeting might not be a good choice for fulfilling this service. This may extend to participation in, and the right to vote at, scheduled group conscience meetings.

This doesn't apply to on-the-fly group votes such as opening a window or turning on air conditioning when it's too warm in the room. This refers to groups who have monthly or quarterly scheduled group conscience meetings to handle issues affecting the group; elections of trusted servants, changes to the meeting format, and other significant changes. It also works best when a group holds a separate business meeting rather than one in the midst of a recovery meeting.

Concept Three, "The right of decision, based on trust, makes effective leadership possible," allows the delegation of these decisions to the group, as long as doing so doesn't affect OA as a whole. This concept allows a group of interested members (who fulfill any previously adopted requirements for attendance or abstinence) to make decisions for the group as a whole. If every decision had to be brought to a general meeting, very few decisions would be made.

Concept Four, "The right of participation ensures equality of opportunity for all in the decision-making process," allows all members to participate *as long as they fulfill any requirements that may have been set by the group*. For example, a group may decide ahead of time that members who wish to participate in a group conscience meeting must have attended the meeting for more than a month and have at least sixty days of abstinence. What cannot be added is any requirement that they must go to some number of *specific* meetings (other than the one holding the group conscience); nor can there be any requirement that their abstinence be defined by using a specific food plan.

Concept Twelve (e) states: "No service action shall ever be personally punitive or an incitement to public controversy." This has nothing to do with participation in a group conscience vote unless a group determined to "ban" a person from group conscience decisions forever. People make mistakes—in life as well as within Overeaters Anonymous. When this happens, a person may be removed from a position, but gossip regarding the removal, or deciding that the person can no longer participate at all due to their mistake, would exceed the guidance of this concept.

So, a group may implement guidelines and requirements for participation in that group's decisions; just be aware that these requirements cannot be used to exclude members for any non-recovery-related issue, nor can they be specific to the exclusion of an individual.

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LITERATURE—NEWCOMER PACKET

Has any thought been given to simplifying the Newcomer Packet? Newcomers can be overwhelmed just by meeting jargon. In my area, we find that if we don't open the packets and explain the contents they are not even looked at. Many meetings have pamphlets available for free anyway, simplifying the Packet would also reduce the cost.

The [Newcomer Packet](#) was designed to give newcomers in our meetings materials to help them get started. The fact that we sell close to 31,000 Newcomer Packets each year shows how critically important this piece of literature is for our Fellowship. Your question reflects concerns shared by both the Board of Trustees and the delegates of the World Service Business Conference. Both fronts are moving toward consolidating and simplifying our literature. This update will include the Newcomer Packet. We hope to have exciting news on this project within the year. So watch for *WSO News Bulletin* announcements in your email! (To receive these complimentary *Bulletins*, click the News Bulletin Signup button at the bottom of the homepage at oa.org.)

LITERATURE—IN SPANISH

If a group needs OA literature in Spanish, how will they get it after all the Spanish literature at the WSO has been given away?

The WSO has stopped offering printed literature in Spanish because it was not selling, and after ten years of sitting in the WSO warehouse was becoming dated. There just isn't a large-enough demand for printed literature in Spanish within the USA and shipping it to our Spanish speaking members outside the USA was expensive.

A Spanish Language Service Board (SLSB) has been in operation for some time: they are now registered with the WSO as a virtual service board to serve the entire Spanish speaking Fellowship. Members of the SLSB will work together to translate literature and materials. They will supply electronic files of translated literature to individual Spanish language service boards worldwide. It is these service boards, in individual Spanish speaking countries, that will publish and distribute OA literature in Spanish. Groups can then obtain literature in Spanish from their local service board. Spanish speaking members from the USA will be able to purchase literature from these service boards as well.

LITERATURE—ONLINE RETAILERS

When the OA Twelve and Twelve, Second Edition is sold from Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Apple, or other businesses, is there a concern about not adhering to Tradition Six?

Tradition Six states, "An OA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the OA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose."

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OA doesn't own printing presses, package delivery services, or meeting spaces. We depend on business, churches, hospitals, and other public and private entities for a range of services that help OA members carry our message of recovery. These are not endorsements, but rather the use of special workers (as referred to in Tradition Eight). Special workers help us do the things we cannot do or choose not to do, so that we can focus on carrying the message—because carrying the message is the only job that must be done by OA members and not special workers.

When we ship a package via the US Postal Service, it is not an endorsement. It is a practical acceptance that we need our “special worker” postal service to get a package to a member. Online booksellers are really just the same. Using these services is acceptance of the need for the services these special workers offer.

MEMBERS—SHARING—NAMING RELIGIOUS LEADERS

At some face-to-face and phone meetings, members sometimes share enthusiastically and at length about their religious leaders by specific names other than “God” and “HP.” Is this a breach of any Tradition? How might a moderator discourage this sharing, if indeed it is inappropriate?

I looked through the Traditions and could not find one that applied. I like to think of our members as loving and tolerant as it says in the [Big Book](#). If the member is not quoting some outside literature but just enthusiastically describing their own Higher Power, they are not dishonoring any OA Tradition. If you find a problem with their content or their enthusiasm, ask for a group conscience and see what other members think.

MEETINGS—NUMBER OF ATTENDEES WORLDWIDE

How do we know the number of individuals attending face-to-face meetings and virtual meetings?

It is difficult, if not impossible, to accurately say at any given time the number of people attending OA meetings: face-to-face and virtual. The most recent count of OA meetings shows about 6800 regular meetings, about 600 of those virtual.

There are no comprehensive statistics on the numbers of people attending individual meetings regularly. OA does not have the resources to conduct ongoing research on this. We know from experience that numbers of attendees at all meetings vary. Using an average of twelve to twenty members per meeting, we could project between 80,000 and 100,000 members attending meetings worldwide. This approximation has no statistical value and can serve only as a very rough estimate.

While statistics on eating disorders vary widely regionally and in reliability, there seems to be agreement that in general populations around the world, between 2 and 3 percent suffer from binge eating disorder; in the range of 1 percent for anorexia (generally more prevalent among females) and bulimia directly affects about 1.5 percent of women and 0.5 percent of men, in the US. A reasonable conclusion would be that at present only a tiny percentage of those suffering from eating disorders become part of OA and attend meetings regularly.

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MEETINGS—REGISTRATION—HYBRID GROUPS

Is the board planning to look into whether meetings such as hybrid groups can be registered twice? Is that legal?

This is a new type of meeting, and there will have to be time and thought given to how it will be managed within our bylaws. The Board of Trustees will be discussing this issue at subsequent meetings, but the BOT cannot decide for all of OA about how to handle such meetings and their representation. You are welcome to introduce a motion for next year's WSBC to bring this to the group conscience of OA as a whole.

MEMBERS—OA BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION COINS—APPROVAL FOR CHANGES

Was there ever a coin celebrating ten minutes of OA abstinence? A fellow in our Region Two intergroup said she got one about thirty-six years ago (1982) that had the OA logo on it. So, if one was approved then, does there need to be another approval process now? I ask because a fellow in our intergroup is all excited about updating (modernizing) the "wow factor" of our coins by acknowledging specific lengths of abstinence. Is there someone she can contact? What is the process?

Hello—thank you for asking questions regarding recovery coins. No, there has never been an OA-approved 10-minute coin. As you indicated in your question, in about 1982 there was a locally produced 10-minute coin that had an unauthorized use of the OA logo on it. A few years ago, an OA member in Region Two produced some similar 10-minute coins, but approval to use the OA logo was not requested. Instead, the local source chose to print the Serenity Prayer on the back of the coin.

You asked if there needs to be another approval process now. The answer is that any use of the OA logo does have to be approved through the WSO, and any registered group or service body can apply to customize and use a version of the logo. Essentially, you create a customized logo by including the name of the requesting service body under the existing OA logo, then seek approval to use it. Please see oa.org/site-map and click "[Copyright Requests](#)" to visit the page that has all the necessary details and the [permission form](#).

OA does produce specific recovery [coins](#) for each of these years: 1-20, 25, 30, 35, and 40 (Business Policy Manual 2008f). Please know that OA has a solution for your member's interest in being able to acknowledge any length of abstinence. The OA bookstore has a [Recovery Medallion](#) in a nickel silver antiqued finish. It has "Overeaters Anonymous" engraved on one side and the Serenity Prayer on the other, and best of all, it has space to engrave any time of abstinence or any other OA Birthday. Look for [#480](#) at bookstore.oa.org.

Please also be aware that OA has a document called [Guidelines for Locally Produced Literature](#) that contains detailed information on how to produce literature and other products that meet the needs of your group or service body. Find it at oa.org/documents under "Guidelines."

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SEVENTH TRADITION—MAXIMUM DONATIONS

We have raised the suggested Seventh Tradition at meetings to US\$3 but kept the maximum amount that can be donated to OA the same. Given that we will be encouraging Automatic Recurring Contributions (ARCs) as a budget strategy, is it time to revise the maximum donation?

According to our [Seventh Tradition of OA](#) pamphlet (#802), the suggested contribution for members is \$3 for each meeting attended. This is only a suggestion; some may give less, others may give more. The maximum donation of US\$5,000/year also refers to individual members. The pamphlet states that any member may contribute up to US\$5,000 per year to the general fund as well as US\$5,000 to any special fund, and may contribute the same amount to honor the memory of a deceased OA member. There is no maximum stated in the pamphlet that limits contributions from any group or service body.

SPONSORS—WHEN A SPONSEE IS NOT WORKING THE STEPS

In what ways can I better serve a sponsee who is not working the Steps? Should I continue working with them no matter what? Or let them go with love and tell them to come back when they're ready? Or take another approach?

There are, of course, many approaches to sponsoring in Overeaters Anonymous. Some of us are very structured in working with sponsees. Others of us vary the tools we use based on the particular needs of the person we are sponsoring. It is not a secret that working the Twelve Steps is key to long-term abstinence and recovery in OA. Without the Steps, we would just be another “diet with fellowship,” and there are those who use OA that way—at first.

Overeaters Anonymous offers many wonderful resources for understanding and support in sponsoring. Hopefully, one or more of these will help you find the answers you are looking for. The first and most readily available resource is your own sponsor, who likely has more experience than you have. And, knowing you, your sponsor will be a good sounding board for your specific concerns.

The OA bookstore (bookstore.aa.org) carries a [Sponsorship Kit](#) (#210), which includes the pamphlets [The Tools of Recovery](#) (#160), [Sponsoring Through the Twelve Steps](#) (# 220), [A Guide For Sponsors](#) (#200), the [Strong Abstinence Checklist and Writing Exercises](#) (#415), a list of other abstinence resource materials, a packet of [Lifeline](#) stories about sponsorship, and the wallet card [Twelve Stepping a Problem](#) (#420). The wallet card might be the tool to use first when reviewing the situation with your own sponsor and also as a way to approach your sponsee. You might ask them if they would like to use the wallet card with you to help clarify the obstacles they're up against in working the Steps.

Other wonderful resources are also available at aa.org/documents. Look under “Twelfth Step Within” for more supportive resources and ideas for both you and your sponsee.

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Every sponsoring relationship can be an opportunity for emotional and spiritual growth for both sponsor and sponsee. Hopefully, these suggestions will help guide you to understanding, clarity, and a decision that works for both of you.

VIRTUAL FELLOWSHIP—ISOLATION AND PHYSICAL RECOVERY CONCERNS

As the virtual Fellowship grows, how do we avoid enabling our fellows with regards to physical recovery? In the virtual world it is much easier to hide and be in denial about really working toward or maintaining a healthy body weight. Also, how do we guard against isolation?

When I go to a meeting I love receiving hugs. I love seeing people, but most important for me is to hear the message of faith, strength, and hope. And these three things, so important to my recovery, I receive at both virtual and face-to-face meetings: faith, strength, and hope.

Tradition Three says: “The only requirement for OA membership is a desire to stop eating compulsively.” Whether abstinent or not, a person is always welcome at any OA meeting. If a person is eating, it is difficult for them to keep coming back! If a member in relapse feels more welcome at a virtual meeting, we are grateful and remember that we all have this disease and we all want to feel accepted. In a meeting I feel accepted and know that nobody will judge me—this helps me.

Tradition Five says: “Each group has but one primary purpose, to carry its message to the compulsive overeater who still suffers.” Whether virtual or face-to-face, any meeting’s primary purpose is to carry the message. I understand that it’s better for a person to be at a virtual meeting, receiving their medicine and working on their recovery, than not to be at a meeting at all.

My first exposure to OA was in virtual meetings. Virtual meetings may make the program feel more available and less fearsome to members who otherwise would never come to OA.

Also, this is a program of honesty. It isn’t always true that when a person is thin, they are also abstinent. We are not only overeaters. We may have other manifestations of the disease. Monitoring others’ physical recovery is not my work in OA.

There are many members who only have virtual meetings and who found recovery. They have a fellowship and ways to connect after meetings to help prevent isolation. In the chapter on Tradition Five in [*The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous, Second Edition*](#), we read: “OA members have the ability to help our fellow compulsive eaters in ways that no normal eater can” (p. 120). This truth can be found in both virtual and face-to-face meetings.

Using the [Tools](#) helps to support recovery in all types of meetings. Having a sponsor helps a member stay accountable with food and work the Steps. Attending meetings allows the member to hear the message of recovery and find a sponsor. Literature provides the basis for recovery and helps the member identify with others. Writing assists with working the Steps. The phone (and other methods of electronic communication) helps members avoid isolation and get support.

Both virtual and face-to-face connections give our fellows an opportunity to recover.

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WORKSHOPS—TOPICS—MINDFULNESS

Is it permissible for an intergroup to present a workshop or other program on “mindfulness,” even though mindfulness is not a Tool and not otherwise referenced in OA literature?

Using Step Nine and Tradition Four can help us improve our programs, and mindfulness could be thought of as part of these. Working Step Nine takes a lot of careful consideration (“mindfulness”); when we make amends we must be mindful that the situation is handled in an appropriate and kind way. We need to carefully consider how this should be approached and be aware of it.

The question of whether it is appropriate to use mindfulness as a workshop topic can be answered by applying Tradition Four. Each group is autonomous and may do things in different ways, e.g. having different meeting formats, yet we need to be mindful and aware so that we do not contradict this Tradition and harm our program by bringing outside issues into the meetings. I believe that mindfulness would make a good workshop topic as long as the workshop does not state that mindfulness is one of the nine OA [Tools](#), since it is not.

WSBC—PROCEDURE—QUESTIONS AND DEBATE ON THE FLOOR

How do we make clear to delegates that engaging in debate during the question period is not in the spirit of honesty and arriving at a good group conscience? There are three pros and three cons, and we work very hard to make that fair. Other forms of questioning/ debating are a kind of bullying.

A better question is, how do we educate the board of trustees chair to recognize debate from the center mic? People are allowed to ask their questions. It is the chair’s job to only answer those questions that are really about information and not about opinion. I also wonder if some delegates even recognize that they are practicing debate when trying to get their point heard.

Perhaps some role-playing exercises during the All About Conference workshop would help. It has been a goal of the members planning this workshop to do some procedural education prior to delegates’ arrival at Conference. To that end, there are now a series of brief videos available on the WSBC page: oa.org/site-map; click “[World Service Business Conference](#).” These videos will be modified as necessary and delegates will be encouraged to review them prior to WSBC, so that at the All About Conference workshop less time will need to be spent on repetitive information giving and more time can be used to apply the knowledge by doing exercises such role-playing.