

Today

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Tradition Four: Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or OA as a whole.

The first three traditions lay a foundation of unity, leadership and membership. Unity is priority, Higher Power leads, and those with a desire to stop eating compulsively are members. I remember my initial reaction to reading Tradition 4 was, “Finally--I was afraid this program was rigidly rule-driven.” With this tradition comes permission for members to break out, be creative and “do their own thing” within limits.

Autonomy is a powerful word – it means self-governing and independent. One of my biggest fears of belonging to any kind of group, including OA, has been that my needs will be lost as everyone else’s needs are met. The first group I ever belonged to was my family of origin. It was quite unique, but fueled by chaos and autocracy. The family as a whole was forgotten in favor of one person’s influence. New ideas were not encouraged or supported, and trial and error was rejected. Our family’s coat of arms could have declared, “Never make mistakes.”

In OA, however, I was exposed for the first time to groups that were run an entirely different way. Some meetings had speakers, others focused on readings. Some ran an hour and a half, some for an hour. Some meetings several years ago had a coffee break, others didn’t. In meetings that I attend today, some have a sharing time limit, others don’t. One is an all-women’s group; two are mixed. Every once in awhile, I hear about a suggested

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abstinence requirement for speakers or service positions. I love newcomer meetings where the cycle of topics repeats regularly. There is a different aura to each one. As long as the 12 steps and 12 traditions are alive and well in meetings, I thrive when I attend them.

I have also experienced groups that have tried different ways to express autonomy and have found themselves stuck in that second clause of the tradition: “except in matters affecting other groups or OA as a whole.” A friend and I started an OA meeting many years ago, and when we needed to move locations, we found a meeting room that came with its own set of rules. We needed to conform to them, which didn’t seem like a problem at first. Meetings had to be open, for example, so we made ours an open meeting. The meeting’s undoing, I believe, was the organization’s requirements about money. No money could be collected on the premises and rent was not required. We tried to get around these issues by giving people pre-stamped envelopes with the Office’s address and to donate to the institution. Not much 7th tradition collecting ever happened, however. It amazes me to this day that we didn’t recognize sooner that these rules and our traditions were incompatible. We thought that dwindling membership caused the meeting to fold. In hindsight, I see that a break in traditions was the culprit.

I’m not great at asserting when I see tradition breaks. Courage to bring up difficult issues and an open discussion about them, however, will safeguard our unity. Autonomy is a beautiful freedom, and it comes with the price tag of responsibility.

~Anonymous in St. Louis

Step 4: Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

As a compulsive overeater with the dynamic duo character defects of perfectionism and procrastination/avoidance, doing my 4th Step was a challenge.

The first time I did one, I read every OA book or piece of literature I could find, looked at every web site that came up in a search engine, and tried to figure out “on my own” what was the very best way I could take Step 4. I was not working with a sponsor at that time. In fact, in all honesty, I was skirting around the edges of the OA program. If I were doubly honest, I’d say that I had not really taken the Third Step to give my will and my life over to my Higher Power.

What I ended up writing was a lot of disjointed thoughts, remembrances and pieces of information that didn’t really help me with the purpose of Step 4. I’ve since learned that, for me at least, the purpose of Step 4 is to identify the anger, fear, and guilt that I hold onto which keeps me in my addiction, and keeps me away from my Higher Power and other people. In addition, Step 4 helps me to own my own part in the situation – where was I dishonest, selfish, self-seeking, frightened, and inconsiderate (and all the other ways in which my character defects affected my relationships) which I ultimately shared in Step 5.

So my next 4th Step, which occurred after I had really done my Third Step and was working with a sponsor, was very different. I went back to the Big Book and another book based upon AA’s 12 and 12. That was it. No more insane searching outside myself. I sanely and fearlessly searched inside. That 4th step was one of the most significant turning points in my recovery journey.

I discovered the places where I was still holding onto anger and resentment towards family, friends, former significant others, co-workers, etc. They were encounters that I had often eaten over to push down the anger. With my Higher Power’s help I looked at my part in those interactions, so that I could acknowledge where I needed to be healed. It was very freeing as my Higher Power helped me to release those that I believed had done me harm.

Next, I looked at what I feared – the people, places, things, events – all the ways in which I withdrew from being all that I can be. I found the pain of the little child, the awkward adolescent, and the adult in me. So many times I had gone to the false comfort of food to calm my fears. For the first time, I was able to be honest with myself and see where my own defects had even been instrumental in keeping my fears alive.

Finally, I started the process of looking at those people that I’d harmed. It was the beginning of what would be dealt with in more detail in Steps 8 and 9. Here, I was getting in touch with the areas

where I carried guilt around. In many cases I learned that it’s been “unearned” guilt. It wasn’t my responsibility, but I had let someone else’s actions and behaviors reflect on me, and then I felt the need to apologize.

There were some places where I had not done something that I had said I would or did something that I shouldn’t have done. In so many of the cases, especially where I had not followed through on my responsibilities, I often “ran away” from the situation and the person. I withdrew from any contact, certain that the person was angry with me and thought I was bad. I would binge and purge to punish myself. My guilt, and lack of taking responsibility and making amends for the situation, kept me in my addiction. As I wrote down all those names and situations, I got honest with myself about what I had done and what was at the root. I was not a bad person, but I had made mistakes and had not taken care of them well. The good news was that, with my Higher Power’s help, I could do it differently.

Doing the 4th step has been so necessary to my recovery. In fact the Big Book says that Step 3 has no permanent effect unless we follow it at once by removing the things that block us from God (p. 64). As I said earlier, for me it was a turning point for which I will be forever grateful to the OA Program, my sponsor, and my Higher Power. It works when you work it...and you’re worth it.

~Dawn S.

This Has Helped Me

When she answered the phone, I blurted out my dilemma. I assumed she would ask a barrage of questions about the situation at hand so she could tell me what to do. Instead she asked just one riveting question: "What is your relationship with God?"

I was stunned, I guess, and didn't respond. The question was repeated. I began to explain how my relationship with my Higher Power had evolved from a tentative acquaintance-ship into a trusting partnership. As I spoke, I realized my complete dependence on God for the first time.

The solution this woman offered for dealing with the crisis at hand was spiritual. She suggested I talk to God, share my fears and ask for relief. Affirmations, writing, reading OA and other spiritual literature, meetings, deep-breathing exercises—these are the things she suggested as a way to contact and receive help from my Higher Power.

Throughout that evening, whenever negative and fearful thoughts returned, I remembered her gentle reminder to give it all to God.

I tried every one of her suggestions. And they worked. My negative thoughts, fears and anxieties were replaced with the loving assurance that I am in God's hands.

Simple!

~Submitted by Dolores F.

Service with a Smile

"I think I will let someone else do it. I really have better things to do. Honestly. I will let the people who have nothing better to do go to Intergroup. Besides, they're doing it because OA is their life. Plus, I have to work on myself a lot more before I can give service at that level. I am not (fill in the blank) _____ smart, thin.... enough yet. I will do it later, when I am not so busy or have more recovery."

I used those excuses not to give service at the Intergroup level. Sure, I would speak or talk to the newcomer, but go to a business meeting once a month on a Sunday -- Get real. The biggest thing that kept me away was fear. Fear of not knowing anyone; fear of not knowing what to do; fear of the unknown, fear that no one really wanted me there; fear that I had nothing to offer; fear that I wouldn't find time, and more fear. You know, I certainly hadn't become perfect yet. But honestly, I thought I would get there soon enough, and then I would help.

I am still not perfect, but I am living the promises of the 12 steps. I decided to take a risk and not listen to the lies of the disease. I went to Intergroup and served. OA has given me my life back, literally. I was dying physically, spiritually, and emotionally before I walked in the doors of OA. Now, I am free and abstinent, one day at a time. To keep it, we have to give it away. I really wanted to keep it, so I went to Intergroup to give it away.

So yes, I go to Intergroup one Sunday a month for a few hours. I get to connect with others and keep OA alive. Going to Intergroup is a way for me to work the steps too. It is great 12 step work. Plus, I get to live a promise; I feel useful.

For me, the most amazing part is the support and acceptance. I can honestly say that I have had no clue about my service positions (scary, huh?), but other OAers, as usual, share their experience, hope, and strength with me. I don't have to do it alone. Currently, I have been in my service position for six months. I am just starting to understand my role. People help me every single month. I don't have to do it alone. Ever. And -- I can totally screw up, and no one gets mad. They just roll with it and help me. I am learning so much. My fellow OAers are teaching me to believe in myself, take risks, and let go.

So, going to Intergroup is not about doing it perfectly. It's about hanging out with fellow compulsive overeaters, once a month, so that we can keep OA alive. There are many service positions open. We cannot do it alone. We need help. We are all OA. Are you willing to pass it on?

~A grateful compulsive overeater recovering one day at a time

Service is Slimming - How Will You Serve?

One of our tools for recovery is Service. There are a number of positions vacant at the Intergroup, Board of Trustees, Region, and World Service Organization level. It's a great way to give service, and a wonderful way to get to know others in OA as you help OA as a whole. Here are a few of the open position descriptions:

Intergroup Secretary

- Prepares minutes of all Intergroup meetings and forwards them to the office two weeks in advance of the next meeting for printing.
- Serves as a resource for the Board Secretary in preparing minutes of the annual local conference.

Cassettes

- Brings Intergroup tape collection to Intergroup meetings for check-in/out by Intergroup Reps on behalf of themselves or their groups.
- Maintains records of loaned tapes and follows up with last person borrowing tapes if not returned at the following meeting.
- Publicizes availability of tapes.
- Repairs or arranges for repair of tapes when necessary.
- Orders new WSO tapes when funds are available.
- Coordinates mailing of tapes to outlying areas or upon request.
- Coordinates attendance of a back-up person to bring tapes in case of absence.
- Develops procedures for tape check-out.
- Develop proposed annual budget for committee.

Public Information

- Coordinates responses to requests for information from the local professional community.
- Distributes information including "Where and Whens" to local professionals (eg. doctors, hospitals, health organizations, etc.) regarding the OA program of recovery and compatibility with the medical approach.
- Volunteers for and responds to requests by local media for OA representatives bearing in mind the requirements of anonymity at the level of media.
- Coordinates publicity for Super Saturdays and Open Meetings with sponsors of such events.
- Maintains media list for use in publicizing local OA events.
- Prepares and maintains sample press release based upon WSO guidelines.
- Encourages use of OA films at OA events or public/professional outreach activities.
- Coordinates OA presence at health fairs, including provision of literature and volunteers to speak from experience with recovery in OA.
- Notifies OA office in advance of any media publicity so requests to OA office and Answering Service can anticipate additional calls.
- Develop proposed annual budget for committee.

Where Are Meetings Held?....How Do I Get There?

All Intergroup, Board of Trustees, and Delegate and Region Advisory Committee meetings are held at **St. Alexis Hospital, 3933 South Broadway, St. Louis, MO 63118**. The hospital is north of 55, near the intersection of Broadway and Gasconade. **Meetings are held in the Peterson Auditorium**. As you enter the hospital, make a left and go to the south side of the building, where you'll then make a right. You will find parking on the south and west side of the hospital. Peterson Auditorium is on the Southwest side of the building. There are steps going downstairs from the sidewalk to reach the entrance.

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 ~Sue E.

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Service Vacancies

- 1 BOT Trustee
- 2 Region Reps
- 2 World Service Delegates
- Intergroup Secretary
- 2005 Retreat
- Cassette
- Public Information
- Twelve Step Within

Reminder

Where & Whens will be published monthly. Each meeting is responsible for making sure there are enough copies at the meetings. If you need a copy, stop by the office or email the office, & we'll send you one.

WANTED

Guest Newsletter Editors

If you are interested in being a guest newsletter editor, please contact Dawn S (see back of Where & When for trusted servant phone numbers) or send an email to the newsletter address.

Writing experience not necessary. Access to a computer is a must!

New Meetings

No New Meetings



Contacting OA Electronically

Bi-State Fax number:

(314) 638-6071

Intergroup Newsletter E-mail:

StlouisOAtoday@hotmail.com

St. Louis Bi-State Website: www.stlouisoa.org

WSO Website: www.overeatersanonymous.org

Region IV website: www.oaregion4.org

Upcoming Events & Business Info

April: Convention
April 8-10, 2005

May 21: 9:30-3:00
Esic Baptist Church
1000 Esic Dr., Edwardsville
Sponsored by Sunshine Group
Edwardsville

June: Open

July 16: 9:30-3:30
St. Joseph Hospital
St. Charles
Sponsored by "Steps to Recovery"
Thursday Night Big Book Mtg.

August: Open

September: Open

October: Open

November: Open

To schedule a Super Saturday or other event, contact Ginnie H at (636) 723-0658. Any flyers for OA events submitted for dissemination to meetings or for publication in the newsletter must have received approval by the St. Louis Bi-State Area BOT (ask any BOT member).

Editorial Policy

As suggested by WSO guidelines, newsletters are to be a forum for experience, strength and hope. We encourage and give top priority to original material written by members of this Intergroup.

We reserve the right to edit any and all articles submitted for publication. Submission of article or flyers does not necessarily guarantee publication.

Opinions expressed are those of the writer and not necessarily that of the St. Louis Bi-State Area Intergroup or OA as a whole.