

How About a Group Inventory?

Step Four and Step Ten have to do with personal inventory. All twelve of AA's suggested Steps are personal in that they deal with the individual. They constitute his charter of freedom. The Twelve Traditions, On the other hand, relate to AA as a whole and to AA in its various parts, particularly the groups. They constitute AA's guide to unity. Now if the individual should take periodic inventory, why not the group? (And, incidentally, why not the local club, Intergroup, and General Service Headquarters?)

A GROUP is not an inanimate thing. You hear references made to "the spirit of this group. . . ." A group has personality and so groups differ one from another as do individuals. Some groups do well, others do poorly. Some groups flourish for a while and then go into a decline. Some groups fail, close down and cease to hold meetings. Why?

If an individual should take inventory even if he is doing well, why not the group? If things are not progressing satisfactorily, then an inventory is particularly in order.

How does a group take inventory? Much in the same manner as an individual. It should probably be done at a closed meeting. The leader might have pencil and paper and some prepared questions. The group then, through its members present, should review its assets and liabilities--not just the financial items, though these, too, might be included. Emphasis should be given to the over-all job being done, to an examination of how the group is executing its responsibility. This might best be accomplished by asking some questions. The following queries are not intended to be complete in coverage but merely illustrative. They may suggest others more directly applicable to your group.

1. What is the basic purpose of the group? To keep its members sober? To welcome new members? To provide a social outlet? The Fifth Tradition says, "*Each group has but one primary purpose. . . to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.*" Is that somewhat surprising?
2. Just what is your group doing to "carry" the message? Does it take refuge completely in the Eleventh Tradition which says, "Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion"? Sure, it welcomes newcomers, but is that carrying the message, or is it reaping the harvest resulting from the prior sowing of others? Does the newcomer in fact practically have to beat down your door in order to get in? If he sneaks in, do you ignore him?
3. Your group has 35 members after five years of existence. "Very good," you think. Are you sure the number should not be 100? What is your "trading area" population? 60,000? Applying the national average, there should be 1,500 drunks in your area. Again applying the rough national average, 55 of the 1,500 should be in AA. But with your group's talent, members with available time, and other assets, perhaps your figure should be half again as large as the national average. Perhaps then you should have 82 instead of the projected 55 or the 35 you actually have? Why don't you have more? Has your group done anything lately to bring the AA message to the attention of local editors, physicians, judges, teachers, and other public leaders who can be helpful in reaching those who need AA?
4. Are you getting a proper cross-section of your community? Or just the low bottoms? Or just the high bottoms who form a cozy, exclusive clique to which other types of alcoholics receive a frigid welcome? Do you get the proper percentage of men and women? Or mostly men? Or mostly women?

5. Do your members stick or is turnover excessive? Do a lot of new prospects come in but fall by the wayside quickly? Are you complacently sure that part of this is not due to group methods? Does your group do a proper job in educating, encouraging, and assisting the spouse of the alcoholic?
6. How effective is your sponsorship system and how much of a sense of sponsorship responsibility does your group have? What does it do about a prospect who comes in without a sponsor? Or the one who comes for a while and then does not show up? How many times will you "go after" him? Twice, ten times? Or do you say, "to h--I with him," or "he knows where it is. If he wants it, let him come and get it"?
7. Has everything practical been done to provide an attractive meeting place where new people will be reasonably comfortable and to which older members will be glad to return? Or are you satisfied with inadequate quarters on the rundown side? Are you paying reasonable rent or are you taking advantage of some church, fraternal club or other organization which in a sense is underwriting your sobriety? Did you ever figure out how much cash your group could get up in an evening in the days when all who are now its members were drinking and when the cash was going for liquor?
8. Has proper effort been made to explain to all members the need and value of working in the kitchen and performing other housekeeping duties? Have they been told precisely how to do those jobs, or is the whole matter left to their initiative and imagination even though they have little of either? What methods do you use to bring members more definitely into the group, to make them feel that they belong?
9. Is adequate opportunity given to all eligible members to speak before the home group and before other groups? Does anyone actually keep a check list to see that no one is overlooked? How far back does that list go?
10. Do you pick officers with care and consideration on the basis that officership is a great responsibility and an opportunity for unusual Twelfth Step work? Or do you consider the whole thing a chore and a sort of joke, electing someone in open meeting who may not even be present? Do you elect someone because you think it might be good for him, forgetting that our common welfare should come first?

Have you given thought to the selection of a nominating committee whose job it would be to consider all eligible members, evaluate their stability, interest in the group, ability, available time, and other relevant factors? The nominating committee could then present the slate of candidates to the group for its consideration. While other names could be suggested at the election meeting, the group will usually support its committee. This method tends to eliminate the occasional nomination from the floor of the least likely member by an ill-advised or even confused buddy.

11. Does your group lend its fair share of support to Intergroup, the Grapevine, and General Service Headquarters? These service organizations are doing a Twelfth Step job on an area, a national and an international basis. No one group could carry out that responsibility. Could your group prepare and finance the publication of a Big Book? Or contact editors and movie producers to prevent the dissemination of erroneous information that might be harmful to AA, and to supply correct information of value to the alcoholic who still suffers?

AA is easier to know about today because of the work of our service organizations. AA is respected today and it is therefore easier for some of us to join than it was years ago. My sobriety or your sobriety in the final analysis might depend on the over-all national acceptance of AA. Any disgrace to AA on the national level would have an effect in every local area, in every group. Do you ever give any thought to these broader concepts, or is your group thinking solely on a provincial, selfish level? If your group has a broad outlook, does it result in action, in generous help to your Intergroup, the Grapevine, and General Service Headquarters?

12. Just what *has* your group done during the last six months to carry the message?

Most of these questions relate to the Fifth Tradition, carrying the message. Many others could be raised relative to a group's success in the light of other Traditions: common welfare, unity, group conscience, money, outside interests, anonymity--could all be subjected to extensive inquiry.

In taking group inventory, the chairman, leader, or secretary might want to make some notes. The group might wish to take action as it went along. Ideas could be referred to committees and chores assigned to specific individuals for execution. A complete set of minutes might be prepared for reading at the next inventory meeting, say six months hence. The minutes might help to look back and see what improvements resulted from the inventory taking.

We are fortunate that it was *the group* which developed into the primary instrument for channeling the AA message. AA did not necessarily have to develop in that manner. The founders might have chosen paid consultations, paid sanitarium incarceration, paid correspondence courses, or a dozen other methods of transmitting the message.

The fact that the informal, no-dues-or-fees group was created is the principal reason why AA has grown so rapidly.

It may be the reason why you and I are sober.

The group is a precious thing. Let's look after it.

(Ed. note: See Closed Meeting, p. 35, for an experiment in group inventory-taking.)

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