

P O Box 300
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18 October 1984

To Everyone in SA,

Hi! And welcome to all the newcomers.

Our fellow-members in Arizona want to invite everyone to the get-together in Phoenix December 7-9, so I thought I'd take this opportunity (and save a lot of postage to boot) to let you all know what's been going on and respond to some questions at the same time.

I'll try and put some thoughts together on —

Status and process of the SA book
The First Step Inventory
SA and organization
The "General Service Office"
Our real needs as I see them now.

I want to share these matters with you and want these things to help bring us closer together. We need each other.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Roy", with a horizontal line underneath it.

Status and Process of the SA Book

Like just about everything else in SA, it seems the book 'wasn't supposed to happen that way.' Here's how what we now are calling our SA booklet came about and is still coming about. It was written piece by piece over time, each piece responding to or arising from some need in the fellowship.

The first draft of the Twenty Questions was written in December 1977, a year before SA meetings began in Hollywood. 'Free at Last' was first written and tested in August of 1981 for the first Dear Abby inquirers. 'Sexaholism — The Addictive Process and Personality' first came out in February of 1982. Part II, 'How It Works —The Practical Reality' was started in 1982 and not completed until this year. And so on....

Before ever being put into their present form, the pieces were tested on the membership and others over time. The effort bears the marks of this feedback throughout.

This stack of loose pieces grew and grew and became quite unwieldy; each new batch of inquirers got more material than the previous one. I had no choice, and was looking ahead to the time when I could "write the book." Who would have guessed that apparently it had, for the most part, already been written in this very evolutionary process? The idea of putting these various pieces together did not come from me; it came from the membership. It arose from members and groups using the pieces and their increasing demand for more literature. Some groups began compiling the pieces unknown to me and stapling the mess together. They even added a title page, calling it SEXAHOLICS ANONYMOUS. I resisted such attempts, still planning I'd soon be able to sit down and "do it right," designing the book as it should be done—so I thought. I even outlined it and wrote a Foreword, putting off pleas from members by telling them it was in process.

This practice of the groups and insistent requests from key SA members forced me to start putting the pieces together also. That's how the "blue folder" came about. The wide acceptance and need for this then forced me to go the next step and have the mess bound properly, even though it was still xeroxed; it was just getting to be too much work to compile individual booklets as demand increased. The garage operation here was then at the height of its paper-mill madness. (Imagine trying to collate an order for twenty books of a hundred or so pages apiece and you can visualize the piles of paper strewn all over the indoor-outdoor carpet lining the garage floor.) This forced me to then try and organize the various pieces into something resembling a unified whole (if such was possible!). At this point I asked in a newsletter to the general membership for careful feedback from all members. I got some very good and carefully thought out edits and comments that really helped. Four members did complete edits of the entire manuscript.

As I look back on this whole incredible process, at what came about in such an unorganized manner, I'm amazed at what semblance of order and continuity there is. And I'm absolutely taken aback and even embarrassed by the overwhelmingly positive response. It's truly a humbling experience. And perhaps, if we think about it, this was the way it should have happened. So no one can really take the credit. It came from the need and inspiration of the fellowship as much as from my own experience. And it's like it was suddenly there to fill the need, and all without that deliberate imposition of the rational of what it "should have been." Time will tell.

The First Step Inventory

After SA first went national in June of 1981, another member and I spent a month visiting groups trying to get started around the country. (What a marvelous time we had! And we both got unlimited air mileage for \$398, another of those small "coincidences" that we have been party to since we launched out on "a wing and a prayer.")

In one city we visited a group of men who were using the 12-Step program for their sexual problems who got going about the same time SA began, though independently. (Humbling thought. God seems to be telling us it's not going to be personalities before principles!) This group was made up of psychologically oriented professionals. We happened on one of their First Step Inventory meetings; we'd never heard of such a thing. We saw problems with the way it was done but wondered if it could be of benefit to SA. I personally had reservations, but under prodding from my friend agreed we should try it. We were still very young and weren't having much success at seeing people get and stay sexually sober. "Is there any way we can accelerate this thing," I kept asking myself and others, even then. Progress in SA is SLOW.

In the ESSAY newsletter of November 1981 I introduced the First Step Inventory and asked for feedback on it. Since then, we've seen a few groups use it. As it turns out, groups using it have been changing their use of it over time, and this process of change still seems to be going on.

Recently, in the May 20th 1984 newsletter, I again asked for feedback on the First Step Inventory. I had been getting various signals that there had been problems. Based on the lack of response to that newsletter and some of the negative inputs I'd been getting, I decided to let the First Step Inventory be optional and announced this in the 20 August 1984 newsletter. Three pages in the SA booklet were changed, but the format was left in the Meeting Guide. The suggestion made after the fact to retain those three pages in an appendix would probably have been more appropriate at this time than straight deletion. Whatever... This has opened the Great Debate, which you are all invited to enter.

All entries must be submitted in writing
and postmarked no later than midnight,
January 1, 2001. Decision of the judges
will not be final.

Seriously —just a little levity to wake up the troops —please submit your inputs in writing so they can be studied and made available to others.

My reasons for making it optional can best be summed up in some typical questions that are being asked and perhaps should be answered in the on-going debate:

- Is it really working? Are people getting sexually sober faster and staying sober better with the First Step Inventory? Has everyone with negative responses to it spoken up? Has everyone with positive responses to it spoken up?
- Is there proven reason for departing from time-tested AA practice? "Why not stick with Steps Four and Five as AA does and let our sexual story come out when it wants to or has to?" Are we, by adding a First Step Inventory, trying to fix something that already works?

- Should we introduce the group therapy principle of modern psychology (the group feedback portion of the Inventory) into the natural spiritual process of the 12-Step program? Is this letting professionalism in the door? (This is the only aspect of our program that has such a tilt.)
- Should we try to set the pace of recovery for another? Is it saying too much too soon?
- Does it focus too much on what we did, leaving the false impression that such an exercise is part of a "cure"?

SA and Organization

From the beginning, I have followed the principle of "least possible organization" (Ninth Tradition long form) when it comes to organizational structure at the national level, which is the principle most groups follow at the group level. That's the principle that worked so well in AA. As AA developed in Akron and NYC, then started to spread, it had no organizational structure whatever. It was a spiritual entity that grew from the inside out. Problems and issues were hammered out under the first two trusted servants as the group conscience principle slowly evolved. It took AA many years before it proved to be strong enough and responsible enough to handle the structure it has today.

Here's a sampling of how things have worked so far; and, by God's grace, it has been working so far in SA:

1. SA meetings began in the L.A. area in 1978 and 1979 and went through the same process most SA groups go through now: members coming in and going out, people getting sober and going back out there, a few staying sober. That was SA; there was nothing else anywhere. Local group conscience was it, for it was the only group! I remember that very first public meeting in Hollywood where an informal group conscience voted to use the AA approved literature and have closed meetings (sexaholics only).
2. With publication of the first Dear Abby column, we had the first "shotgun" impulse that put us on the map nationally. That one little column required setting up an office operation here that could handle the 3000 inquiries that came in. But SA was very shaky everywhere, with ones and twos trying to get sober and get a meeting together. This was June of '81.
3. The weekend of July 26, 1981 saw our first "national" get-together here. We weren't alone anymore, and I wanted us to be and act together under God. Eleven attended, but only nine were involved in that first business meeting—two women and seven men. We were it because there was no one else that would come. Around that rented table in my garage we sat and came to agreement on such things as meeting format, meetings closed to non-sexaholics, and no smoking during meetings. We also agreed on the wording of the Chapter 3 and 5 Big Book excerpts. This was the session where we dropped the paragraph mentioning homosexuality, prostitution, adultery, and promiscuity from what has come to be our "What Is A Sexaholics and What Is Sexual Sobriety" (page 4 of the booklet). It was agreed that the garage-shop operation here continue as the focal point for national 12th Step work. Of those nine attending in 1981, only two are sober today and still in SA. And that was the only "governing" session that body was involved in.

As we look back at that informal, unorganized gathering now, we see that we were simply hammering out things that had to be dealt with. No one had any titles or authority, and there was no organizational structure. We worked together in a beautiful consensus—not without some heat and a few sparks flying off in the process, however. We had what we needed, and it worked.

4. In September of 1981 another sober member and I spent a month traveling to the various areas where there were individuals wanting to get started. The job cried out to be done, and at the time we were in a position to do it. Again, no titles or authority, just sex drunks having a marvelous time meeting each other for the first time and witnessing what God had in store for us.
5. In October of 1981 some issues arose that I felt required a national consensus. (There were probably not over 50 people in SA at that time.) In September, the other member and I had visited an SAA group in the Twin Cities, and while there asked if they wanted dialog with SA. In a series of letters and phone calls I asked all the groups and sober loners for feedback on such issues as whether to pursue dialog with SAA and the Statement of Principle that would form the basis of that dialog. I also submitted three pieces of literature (Lust Kills, The Problem, and What Is Lust?) for review and feedback. That process worked very well; the fellowship voted for dialog and the Statement & literature and went on record as stating we should in no-wise compromise our stand on use of the AA program. Again, as the need arose and we decided to put our heads and hearts together, we did what had to be done within the framework of a living organism.
6. In 11/81 I applied for tax-exempt status with the IRS so member contributions, including my own, could be legally tax-deductible. Members were wanting to share the cost of running the operation here, and we felt being tax-deductible was the way to go. However, this produced an unforeseen side effect. Since we had to show on paper what SA was, I was advised by the IRS to provide a list of people we could show as a governing body on the Form 1023. Thus, I wrote: "The following persons are Delegates to the national General Service Conference of Sexaholics Anonymous and as such represent the group conscience of the membership at large," listing the names of ten men who agreed to the use of their names for that purpose. But there was no General Service Conference formally set up as it is in AA today. And those ten men never acted as Delegates, never met together, and never acted on matters affecting the fellowship at large. We were still playing it by that loose "national" consensus as we went along, as we had before.

When JH and I wrote the letter of response for all the media requests that came in from the Dear Abby column, we slapped on the signature the words "General Service Board" at the end so one individual wouldn't have to sign his name to the thing and so it could still carry some weight. That this was never deleted from that form letter was an oversight. There is no General Service Board of SA.

7. In the ESSAY newsletter of November 1981 I introduced the First Step Inventory and asked for feedback on it. The organizational principle here again was informal, relying on the "group conscience" of the fellowship at large as well as on my own experience, testing one against the other.
8. In April of 1982 I asked key sober men in the fellowship to join with me in an hour of prayer for SA.

9. In January of 1983 I called for a "spiritual retreat with urgent practical overtones and aims." Two women and five men made it that time. Since I had just gone to full-time employment again, I was looking for help here at Central. We also discussed whether there should be any media coverage at that time and decided against it. Again, there were no titles and no organization in the formal sense. We simply got together and did what had to be done, and no one structured the thing.

10. Later in 1983, with the work here at Central and the needs for literature increasing, I felt the need for another "national" get-together; and it was important to try and get more people involved in the national 12th-Step work. At first, I called this a retreat, since I was primarily concerned with the spiritual problems being encountered in the fellowship. I changed it to a "conference" when these other issues came to the fore.

The December get-together was quite an experience for us; and we're back now to where we were before, only a little wiser. In perspective, many of us see that it was too much too soon. Going full-blown formal Organization all at once at this time would be like man trying to jump from log-cabin country dwellings to big-city skyscrapers overnight without benefit of any intervening stages and the opportunity for natural growth they afford. But apparently we had to go through that to see it. The response of the fellowship to the handling of leads has been disappointing. The enduring result of the December get-together, I feel, was its action for agreement on use of the SA booklet. Here again, things don't always work out the way we plan.

These are just a few highlights to let you know how SA has been working so far. My best suggestion to the fellowship is that we make haste slowly in this matter of organizing SA. I can't put it any better than JH and his fellow-members, who say,

"...Work within what we have, and at least until there is more numerical sobriety in our national fellowship, go for change only when the situation screams for it."

The "General Service Office"

Regarding the work here at Central, I'm not the one who started calling this operation the General Service Office. Other members and groups began referring to it in that way, apparently because it was serving that function, since most of our members are from other Twelve Step programs, such as AA, and know about AA's GSO in NYC. This came about from the sheer necessity of having to have a central focus for 12th Step work in the aftermath of the Dear Abby "shotgun." I called it nothing until late '81 or '82 because during that pre-Abby period it was largely the focal point of my own 12th Step work. Sometime in '81 or '82 after the Abby onslaught, I began calling it SA Central due to the effect the Abby column had. It called for responses to some 3000 inquirers from all over in a very brief span of time.

You see, that's how SA got started nationally —from that one newspaper article in June of '81. To handle the response, I opened Box 300 here in Simi Valley, and it—and my garage!—became the focal point to and from which all the mail flowed, members made contact with each other, and groups were formed. Hundreds of individuals who said they wanted in —the whole shotgun blast of them —had to be paired up with others in their areas. That's how the first groups outside of California were formed. The centralized operation here arose by necessity. There were no other SA groups in existence, so there was no place else for inquirers to write for information and connection with others. For those who had no others in their area, special means were taken to phone and correspond with them until they found their people.

It was sometime after '81, when some groups were going and SA was getting off the ground, that certain members and groups started using the term "General Service Office"—which is still in my converted garage. The term is used loosely (and technically incorrectly) and derives from the common usage and affirmation of the fellowship at large—the principle that seems to be guiding SA in the rest of its matters.

The work here at Central takes fifty to sixty manhours per week on the average and as much as 120 hours/week and more when we get media attention such as Dear Abby. The work consists of answering mail, corresponding with newcomers and a growing number of SA members, heavy phone work with members and newcomers, handling literature orders, and other routine office matters.

Dr. Bob presented his ideas on the future of A.A. in his last major talk, in Detroit in 1948 (Dr. Bob and the Good Old Timers, p 287-288:

"We know what A.A. has done in the past 13 years, but where do we go from here? Our membership at present is, I believe, conservatively estimated at 70,000. Will it increase from here on?

"Well, that will depend on every member of A.A. It is possible for us to grow or not to grow, as we elect. If we fight shy of entangling alliances, if we avoid getting messed up with controversial issues (religious or political or wet-dry), if we maintain unity through our central offices, if we preserve the simplicity of our program, if we remember that our job is to get sober and to stay sober and to help our less fortunate brother do the same thing, then we shall continue to grow and thrive and prosper.."

Our Real Needs As I See Them Now

1. We need above all, right now, to be honest with ourselves as to where we really are today and where SA really is today. The same kind of honesty we need sharing in meetings, only at the group and national level. Let us not think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think.
2. We need more sober members who are working the Steps and staying sober.
3. We need to be responsible to our primary purpose as a fellowship — to carry our message to the sexaholic who still suffers.
4. We need to communicate and fellowship more with each other —at all levels.
5. We need a breakthrough from God. "With man, it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God." We haven't made it happen and we apparently aren't going to make it happen. It's God or nothing for us.
6. We need to pray each other through. Each one pray for one, perhaps the one for whom we have the worst feelings. We need each other. We can't do this isolated in our own little corners; it's not working that way. We need to pray and work each other through all the way—to true sobriety and victory over our defects. God will bless us if we put the other ahead of ourselves.

"With man, it is impossible, but not with God;
for all things are possible with God."

My very best to you all,

