

# GENERAL SERVICE OFFICE OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

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GENERAL SERVICE OFFICE

*Please direct all communications to:*

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TO: General Service Conference Delegates  
FROM: G.S.O. Public Information Desk  
DATE: September 17, 2013  
RE: Anonymity and A.A.

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We have received inquiries from A.A. members regarding a documentary on anonymity being screened in many communities. In keeping with our Tenth Tradition, Alcoholics Anonymous expresses no opinion on books, films, television shows or other media generated or distributed by other organizations. We find it best to simply provide clear and consistent information about our organization and our principles, in order to help the general public and our friends in the media best understand what A.A. is and is not.

Below are a few questions we have received, along with our shared experience that is available in our literature on these topics. We hope this information from your General Service Office is helpful to any local discussions on this topic.

**Q: Why is anonymity important in A.A.?**

**A:** In Alcoholics Anonymous, our Traditions urge members to maintain anonymity regarding their membership in A.A. for three reasons, as described in our wallet card “What Does Anonymity Mean to A.A.?”

1. We have learned from our own experience that the active alcoholic will shun any source of help which might reveal his or her identity.
2. Past events indicate that those alcoholics who seek public recognition as A.A. members may drink again.
3. Public attention and publicity for individual A.A. members would invite self-serving competition and conflict over differing personal views.

**Q: Is it an anonymity break to tell people I am a sober alcoholic?**

**A:** On page 11 of our pamphlet “Understanding Anonymity” the following suggestion can be found:

“A.A. members may disclose their identity and speak as recovered alcoholics, giving radio, TV and Internet interviews, without violating the Traditions – so long as their A.A. membership is not revealed.”

(more)

**Q: Is it okay for A.A. members to be involved in lobbying for new legislation?**

**A:** *As an organization*, Alcoholics Anonymous would not be involved in such efforts. On page 157 of *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* an account of the lessons learned from A.A.'s early attempts to enter such public discussions is provided:

“...we saw ourselves getting married to all kinds of enterprises, some good and some not so good. Watching alcoholics committed willy-nilly to prisons or asylums, we began to cry, “There oughtta be a law!” A.A.'s commenced to thump tables in legislative committee rooms and agitated for legal reform. That made good newspaper copy, but little else. We saw we'd soon be mired in politics...These adventures implanted a deep-rooted conviction that in no circumstances could we endorse any related enterprise, no matter how good.”

**Q: Is it okay for an A.A. member as an individual citizen to be involved in such efforts?**

**A:** As stated above, so long as membership in A.A. is not disclosed, recovering alcoholics may speak of their recovery and sobriety without breaking their anonymity. On pages 176-177 of *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* we can find the following suggestions:

“As by some deep instinct, we A.A.'s have known from the very beginning that we must never, no matter what the provocation, publicly take sides in any fight, even a worthy one[...]

Let us reemphasize that this reluctance to fight one another or anybody else is not counted as some special virtue which makes us feel superior to other people. Nor does it mean that the members of Alcoholics Anonymous, now restored as citizens of the world, are going to back away from their individual responsibilities to act as they see the right upon issues of our time. But when it comes to A.A. as a whole, that's quite a different matter. In this respect, we do not enter into public controversy, because we know that our Society will perish if it does. We conceive the survival and spread of Alcoholics Anonymous to be something of far greater importance than the weight we could collectively throw back of any other cause. Since recovery from alcoholism is life itself to us, it is imperative that we preserve in full strength our means of survival.”

Cc: Phyllis Halliday, General Manager GSO  
Regional Trustees  
Trustees' Public Information Committee  
A.A.W.S. Directors  
G.S.O. Staff