

Gene D

Sobriety date July 24, 1988

Home Group is Asotin Group in Asotin, WA.

Past Delegate Area 92 Panel 52

Topic: Hard of Hearing AA Members

It is an honor to participate at this P.N.C. I hope that we can acknowledge that we have members that are hearing impaired. These AA members may not be getting all that our meetings offer.

Some groups address hearing impaired in various ways.

- A . Have members speak loudly
- B . Have members sharing to stand up or go to a podium to speak.
- C . Have those with hearing impairment set close to the front of the room.
- D . Tell those people to buy a hearing aid or try AA online meetings.
- E . Use a microphone.

My Home Group took a group inventory last year using the AA Group pamphlet inventory questions.

Question 2 – What more can the group do to carry the message?

Question 4 - Do new members stick with us or does the turnover seem excessive? If so, why? What can we as a group do?

We had a lot of discussion on what our group could do and what the group's responsibilities are. One solution was to save money to purchase a microphone. We are getting close to the purchase date.

It is not about making rules for the hearing impaired it is about a spiritual group conscience , to be willing to go to any length to help another alcoholic to get and maintain sobriety.

Tradition One states, "Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity." Bill wrote about AA being all inclusive and never exclusive.

Tradition Three "The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking" . You did not ask me when I joined A.A. if I was Hard Hearing or not!

Tradition Four "Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole." This just means some groups will help the Hard of Hearing and others won't.

Tradition Five "Each group has but one primary purpose – to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers." The hard of hearing members maybe the still suffering alcoholic, because of not hearing the sharing of experiences of other members.

Tradition Nine "A.A. as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve." We as a District or Intergroup may have a need to create a Special Needs/Accessibilities Committee that can work with Area 92 Accessibilities Committee.

Tradition Ten "Alcoholic Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy." This is not an outside issue, and we can find spiritual solutions from within.

Tradition Eleven "Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films."

When we find & apply solutions to be helpful to the Hard of Hearing it will make us (A.A.) even more attractive and inclusive.

Responsibilities of a group or Area - do we do nothing and ignore the problem or with a group conscience go forward and experiment of what works for each Home Group. Does the Area have a responsibility to make sure it is selecting its leaders from our whole membership?

What makes a person not hear all that is said?

Insufficient acoustics, high ceilings lots of windows do not help the problem so putting rugs on the floor will be helpful; also hanging banners in the middle of the room such as our Steps, Traditions or Concepts shades will help buffer the sound. Sometimes it can be people that speak with a drawl (from the South) or some just talk really really fast.

Do all or most hard of hearing members leave us? I don't know. This is one story of how hard of hearing can make us feel like we do not belong any longer.

I was at an A.A. Meeting recently. It was quite small about ten in attendance. All was going much as usual then a young lady was asked to share. She spoke very softly, and I was unable to hear. When everyone broke out into laughter that continued and continued. I was the only one there that was not laughing.

I did not know what to do, should I laugh and go along with the crowd or just sit there. I just sit there, and several people gave me one of "those looks" like what's wrong with you. At that moment I felt left out and did not fit in that group. What to do? Do I stop going to meetings because I am different? Well, I am still willing to go to any length to stay sober and I chose to buy a Personal Sound Amplifier. It does help but is not the ultimate answer.

I am concerned about the Hard of Hearing alcoholic that stops going to meetings.

1. We will not hear their wisdom.
2. We all have heard stories about alcoholics that don't come around anymore. For one I need to hear from all members not just a select few on how to stay sober.
3. We seem to focus on the newcomer, and I love that, however I hope that we also can focus on keeping the older AAers that don't come around or share or sponsor or get involved in Service because of poor hearing.

Group Experience

A Spokane group meets in a very noisy restaurant. They tried asking those who share to speak up. This sounds like a solution; however, the speakers would start talking with a strong voice then it would get softer & softer as they shared. Next was to buy a handheld microphone's to be passed around. This created two service positions. One was the mic. Caretaker and the other was person to hand a mic to those sharing. At first some members were reluctant to speak into the mic. A year later I was told all members were more than comfortable and were asking for the microphone. This seems to be the best solution for that group.

I searched the Special Needs/Accessibilities Workbook and found the workbook great if you want to start a committee however it does not address very much for the "Hard of Hearing". Here is what I found. A member who is Hard of Hearing shared suggestions to facilitate communication that can help at both service and recovery meetings;"Members can arrange meeting room chairs in a circle, not in straight lines. The more faces I can see, the better I can 'hear' the speakers. The better the lighting is in the room, the better I can see lips to read them. You can turn off the fans to eliminate background noise."

I have had my eyes opened a little wider after doing some research on this topic. My heart goes out to those that have special challenges and I want to thank you for showing me it is possible to stay sober no matter what. I know that we have exceptional people in A.A. so some of you will have answers we can try until we find the solution.

Thank you so much for allowing me to participate

Gene D.