

PNC 2019

“How do we keep up with technology and social media within the parameters of our Traditions?”

Good Morning, my name is John and I am a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. I have been sober since Thursday July 13, 2000 and my home group is Keys to the Kingdom. We are a literature based meeting that meets every Tuesday at 5:30 pm in Downtown Roseburg Oregon. Please join us if you are in town.

My topic is “How do we keep up with technology and social media within the parameters of our Traditions?”

I came to AA in July of 2000, shortly before the forth addition of the Big book was released. I remember the members of my group having spirited conversations about the part of the forward to the forth addition including this phrase “Modem – to - modem or face – to - face A.A.’s speak the language of the hart in all its power and simplicity.” Little did they know what was to come. This was six years prior to Facebook and seven years before the iPhone. These things are now so tightly woven into our society, it is hard to believe they have only been around for about 12 years. I think it is safe to say that we were met with a little bit of a learning curve.

When I became involved with general service I was told that a knee jerk reaction takes two years in AA. This doesn’t always seem compatible in a world filled with technology that seems to change daily. When A.A. was founded people used to mail postcards to friends and family when they went on vacation. Now we can post pictures of our vacation instantly for hundreds to see. Do we in A.A. need to strengthen our reflexes and decrease our reaction time to keep up with technology? Tradition one states that “AA must live or else most of us will surly die”. Is A.A. bound to become irrelevant and headed for extinction if we continue to proceed with so much caution in certain areas such as social media? Why do we proceed with such caution? Remember Tradition one embodies the spiritual principle of unity. It tells us that our common welfare comes first. We need to consider the long term consequences along with the short term benefits.

Our traditions are grounded in the experiences of our founders and in many ways are the shared experience of mistakes they made along the way. Tradition two suggests that we need to let a loving God express himself through our group conscious. Many times this group conscious is derived from our collective experience. Can we allow our higher power to reveal

itself through our shared experience and thus shape our collective conscious surrounding technology and social media? Are there mistakes we can learn from? Sure there are.

While racing to keep up with technology we need to make sure we are not excluding anyone from our fellowship. I recently served on an ad hoc committee, that looked into different IT issues within the Oregon Area 58 service structure. One thing we found is that it is now necessary for a person who takes a service position with the Oregon Area to have access to a computer and possess various abilities related to technology. The very least of which is to be able to operate an email account. Will these requirements ever be placed on the A.A. fellowship as a whole? Tradition three states that "Our membership ought to include all who suffer from alcoholism." Are we making sure that we don't limit access to A.A. for alcoholics that aren't plugged in to modern technology? Tradition three tells us that A.A. membership should never depend on money or conformity.

Tradition four gives us the right to be self-governing through the spiritual principle of autonomy. This means that through our group conscious, we can decide how we can most effectively carry our group's message of hope and recovery, so long as it doesn't effect other groups or A.A. as a whole. Now what if a group, say the Middleton Group, decided to start a public Facebook page so that they could broaden their reach to the alcoholic who still suffers anytime day or night. They know they could be helpful in many ways to the person just starting out. Of course they would recommend that people go to their meetings but they would also provide a list of other meetings in the area, only the good ones though. The obvious name for this page would be Middleton Group of Alcoholics Anonymous. Would it be within the Middleton Group's right of autonomy to create a public Facebook page? Would this have any effect on other groups or A.A. as a whole? Tradition four states that "no group, regional committee, or individual should ever take action that might greatly effect A.A. as a whole, without conferring with the trustees of the General Service Board." How many times do you think the General Service Board has been contacted regarding starting a social media account with Alcoholics Anonymous in the page name? Maybe we don't need to contact the board before every action we take but maybe we should take a moment and think about what they might say about it. I know that when I have a great idea and take pause to consider calling my sponsor, that sometimes his voice comes into my head and I reconsider my idea before I even dial his number.

GSO, along with most of the areas represented here accept on-line contributions. I know that in area 58 this is an effort to make participation in the seventh tradition more accessible to our members. What about at the group level? How many of you have looked into your wallets when the seventh tradition basket comes around to realize you do not have any cash? I know there has been times that I intended to stop at the bank before a meeting but forgot or just didn't have time. Some groups have begun to give it's member the option to make a

contribution by swiping a card. Will there come a time, which we will be unable to be self-supporting without adopting these contribution methods?

How well does our service structure a line with technology? Tradition nine tells us that we can create special boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve. In 2002 Oregon Area 58 created a Website Committee to develop and maintain a website for Oregon Area 58. Since then Area 58's use of technology has grown beyond a website, to include such things as Google's G Suite along with equipment such as computers, printers and projectors. This last May, we decided to rename our Web committee as IT Committee and restructure it to include three separate positions each with its own focus. The three positions are web servant, hardware/software support, and G Suite support. Along with carrying out the functions of each of these specialty areas, this committee will also collect and make available to our fellowship shared experience surrounding social media and online contributions. Area 58 felt that these changes were necessary to keep our service committee current. Tradition nine states "The trustees of the General Service Board are, in effect, our AA General Service Committee". Is the board doing everything it can to remain current? Are they actively looking for trustees with tech backgrounds?

My first exposure to A.A. was in 1996 and I drew all kinds of conclusions about A.A. that turned out not to be true. A couple of things I thought were, A.A. is a religious program because the meetings I went to were held at churches, that A.A. is somehow connected to the legal system, or AA is part of treatment programs because I was sent there from a treatment program that I was court ordered to by a judge. It wasn't for four more years when I came back for no other reason than sobriety that I discovered otherwise. Even though A.A. has no opinion on these things and is not connected to them, I did not come into my first meeting with that knowledge. I think it is important for us to remember what our thoughts were when first exposed to A.A. We need to remember that the newcomer may be coming to A.A. without the facts of our program that are so clear to us that have been around for a while. Today a person's first exposure to A.A. may happen in cyberspace. A.A.W.S. has a solid website with lots of good information about our program, as do many local websites hosted by areas, districts, and intergroups. When I searched A.A. on Facebook I found several pages that had Alcoholics Anonymous in the title. I went to a page titled Alcoholics Anonymous. Along with posts about personal experiences in sobriety, and members shared opinions on such things as medication. One post told a story of a girl that desperately needed to get into sober housing and gave a link to a go fund me page so that people could donate money to help her. While I knew that this was not an A.A. site, how do you think that looks to someone who has little to no experience with our program? Tradition Ten states that "Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues". Are there risks in A.A. not having an official presence on social media sites such as Facebook?

I am running out of time so this is what I have say about Tradition Eleven. Anonymity is the hardest word for a newcomer to pronounce and probably the least understood thing word in Alcoholics Anonymous. Thankfully we heard a great presentation on anonymity earlier this morning, allowing anyone attending this conference, to gain a better understand regarding that topic.

It may not be easy to practice a genuine humility as stated in Tradition Twelve, in a world where we have become accustom, in posting a cute picture of ourselves with our cat at the beach or sharing our thoughts with a hundred of our closest friends about potential presidential candidates. Here is a spot check inventory taken from the A.A. Guidelines on the Internet to help you along the way.

- Is my posting about the message or the messenger?
- Am I carrying the AA message in hopes to help someone else or simply “shouting from the rooftops”?
- Am I taking my story and affiliating it with political causes?
- Am I being extra cautious about not identifying other members as A.A. members in Photographs or statements?
- Am I avoiding temptation to incite controversy with caustic argument or bullying others who disagree with me?
- Am I providing helpful links to my local A.A. website, aa.org, or the aagrapevine.org.

The world we live in today may be much different than that of our founders but to insure our survival aren't our traditions just as applicable today as when they were formulated? Thank you for this opportunity to serve PNC.