

Hi my name is Lisa and I am an alcoholic. My sobriety date is January 31, 2012. My home group is the Start To Live Women's Meeting in Oregon City, District 15, and beautiful Oregon Area 58. Currently I serve as our Area Registrar.

I have been given the topic "Inform – Communicate: From one drunk talking to another, to the General Service Conference, our lives depend on communication."

When speaking about communication, we need to figure out who is communicating, how do they communicate and what are they communicating.

In Alcoholics Anonymous, we work in an upside-down triangle. What does that mean? It means that first and foremost the member and the home group are the most important and therefore at the top of the upside-down triangle. The group either elects or appoints a General Service Representative, also known as a GSR.

That brings up the next level down the triangle, the district. A GSR attends District meetings on a regular basis and therefore brings the voice of their group to the meeting. The district elects a District Committee Member, also known as a DCM.

The next step down the triangle is the Area Service Committee, which works hand in hand with the DCMs and GSRs to work for the good of Alcoholics Anonymous within their Area, and to consider A.A. as a whole. The Area elects a Delegate every 2 years who then attends the annual General Service Conference.

The General Service Conference is composed of 93 delegates, 21 trustees and staff. This group is the bottom of the triangle.

Now let's talk about the methods we use to communicate through the service structure.

First off, we use ourselves – people who communicate with each other. We share the experience, strength and hope that we have experienced and help our fellow alcoholic or anyone else who reaches out for help. When a member has a concern and wants this item to be heard "all the way up" to the General Service Office, the best way to communicate that concern is through the upside-down triangle.

First the member would bring it to the home group business meeting. The GSR of the group would then bring that concern along with their home group's feelings to their District meeting. When communicating home groups' feelings to the district, it is the GSR's responsibility to bring up all opinions whether they agree or not, as they are the Group's representative. The GSR will then get feedback from the other group GSRs at the District meeting. The DCM then has the responsibility to do the same – they will listen to the GSRs. They then attend the Area assembly, again bringing any concerns/ideas to the Area giving feedback both pro and con, as they are representing all members of their District.

At the Area assembly, our Delegate listens to each DCM, as well as any GSRs that are in attendance when issues/concerns are brought up either via discussion or as a motion at the Area business meeting. It is the delegate's responsibility to take the "pulse" of the Area. This is a one-way communication. Whereas at the GSR & DCM position, there is participation by both the GSR and DCM, the delegate is a one-way communication and does not participate in this discussion – just listens.

In Oregon Area, we have a special opportunity as AA members with our Delegates. We have a pre-conference assembly in February of each year where the delegate provides all the General Service Conference agenda items to the DCMs and the GSRs in attendance. Each district is given the opportunity to meet with District and GSRs to go over the conference agenda items and then provide their groups voices to the Delegate prior to them leaving for the General Service Conference. A lot of the feedback the delegate receives is of differing opinions and it is their responsibility to listen and take note of all comments. This is the only opportunity that we have where an A.A. member's voice can be given directly to the delegate in addition to going through the normal communication chain.

When the delegate attends the General Service Conference, they are not taking an opinion with them. They are referring to the notes given to them by the groups and making sure to communicate all feedback to make the best decision possible for AA as a whole.

During this past General Service Conference, one of the agenda items for Corrections read:

Recommended: Revisions to A.A.W.S literature directed to members behind the walls and to replace the terms, “inmate” and “offender” with “persons in custody.”

When the initial vote was taken, this motion failed. However, our Oregon Area delegate, Amber N., used the minority opinion to share how this recommendation is so important to Oregon Area Corrections. In Oregon, the correctional facilities do not allow any literature inside the walls that says inmate or offender. All incarcerated individuals are known as AICs (Adults in Custody). Therefore, if this motion failed, it reduced the literature that could be shared to those members on the inside. Amber was able to effectively communicate our area’s passion about this conference agenda item. In doing so, it brought the conference’s awareness to the inclusivity of changing the wording and the negative connotation of inmate and offender. There was a motion to reconsider, and the motion then passed.

It was through the communication from the groups to our delegate’s listening ear, that voices from our members on the inside were heard. This was near and dear to my heart as I was once an Adult in Custody who heard the life-saving message of AA through volunteers that brought the message inside the walls.

So now, we have our second special opportunity in Oregon Area. In May of each year, at our area assembly, it is our post-Conference report assembly. Our delegate gives a full report of what they experienced at the General Service Conference including all action items and decisions. The exciting part of this process is that the information does not just come to the DCMs to communicate to the GSRs, but our Districts host picnics, zoom meetings, workshops, etc., so that the Area Delegate can communicate this report directly to the home group members, who again are at the top of the upside-down triangle.

Alcoholics Anonymous World Services communicates in many ways to the membership as well as providing literature for the alcoholic who still suffers.

One of the General Service Conference Literature Committee agenda items was a recommendation that a draft version of the book, Alcoholics Anonymous (Fourth Edition), be translated into Plain Language and be developed in a way that is accessible and relatable to as wide of an audience as possible and that a progress report or draft be brought back to the 2022 Conference Committee on Literature. This agenda item passed.

I know that this subject has been mentioned many times since I have been active in general service. In the beginning, I had the opinion that of course this should happen – what is the big deal? But I had to open my ears and my heart to hear other opinions and understand with compassion differing opinions.

What we need to understand is that Plain language is a language with its own rules. It is not someone putting their own idioms or slang into the Big Book. This translation is no different than translating into Japanese, Spanish, ASL, French or any other foreign language. Each of these languages have their own idioms and their own linguistic rules. Such is the case for Plain Language.

For over 80 years, as we collaborate with one another, we assist another alcoholic to better understand the Big Book and the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. I have not spoken with anyone that has not had to explain some portion of the first 164 pages to another person. As a woman, when I speak to another woman, I speak to her in a language that she can understand. Members of each generation have decided how to explain our program using the language and current slang of the time. The different words we use will continue to change with time and we should not stand in the way of another suffering alcoholic to understand the life-saving gift of our 12 steps. Even with the plain language text, working with others will still be necessary not only for the person working the steps but for the sponsor as well. We will continue to communicate using our own language, our own education level, our own slang that is understood by people of our generation. Let us keep moving forward so that AA is here for future generations.