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PRESENTATION
THE A.A. GRAPEVINE
Participation: The Privilege of Passing It On
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This presentation topic is “Participation: The Privilege of Passing It On,” and how that applies to the A.A. Grapevine.

Let’s start with examining what we are trying to communicate in this topic. What exactly do we mean by “participation, privilege and passing it on” and how do these terms relate to the A.A. Grapevine?

What does “participation” mean for you? Some definitions we commonly associate are that of 1) joining with others in an activity or 2) the state of being related to a larger whole. From a business standpoint, one might view participation as 3) ownership or 4) receiving some benefit from the performance of an asset.

So how do these definitions of participation relate to the A.A. Grapevine? As a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, I join with two million others in this Fellowship in a common bond of recovery from alcoholism. I attend meetings, share my experience, strength and hope and try to carry the A.A. message of recovery to the still-suffering alcoholic. If the A.A. Grapevine is our International Journal of Alcoholics Anonymous and referred to as our “meeting in print,” how can I participate in only one part of our program and not in the other? How can I not subscribe to the A.A. Grapevine? Do I have to write a story in order to participate? My own personal experience is that regardless of whether I speak at a meeting, I participate by listening and, most importantly, I benefit by simply being present. In fact, I usually gain more by listening than by sharing. When I subscribe to the A.A. Grapevine, I participate in our “meeting in print” and I benefit when reading the collective sharing of other fellow members and again, I benefit just by being present. Like our definition, I join with others in that shared activity and feel related to a larger whole. I take personal responsibility for its usefulness and continued success and feel “ownership” by being a subscriber. I want to pay whatever it takes to make the A.A. Grapevine the best possible magazine for recovery. How can I place a price tag on its value? How much did I spend on that non-fat, double shot, mocha this morning? Or that ice cream last night? How much did I spend on my last night of drinking?

When I write for the A.A. Grapevine, I also feel related to my fellow members of Alcoholics Anonymous and feel I actively participate in my recovery by sharing my experience, strength and hope in our “meeting in print.” There may be some of you who do not like the content of the A.A. Grapevine and therefore excuse yourself from participation. Where I got sober, they have a saying, “If you have a headache and you won’t take an aspirin, then just shut the heck up.” When deciphered it means I can’t complain if I don’t want to hear the solution. If you don’t like the content, then contribute. And calling your sponsor always helps as well.

Now that I know what “participation” means, what does “privilege” mean for me? For me, it is defined as a right not enjoyed by everyone. My sobriety is a free gift; I have done nothing to earn this gift. Otherwise, it isn’t technically a gift, is it? For every one of us blessed to be here in this room today, there exists another 80,000 out there dying from alcoholism. I enjoy the right, the gift today of attending meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous, being able to assemble here today as the 58th General Service Conference of the U.S. and Canada. This is a privilege freely given to me by my continued participation in this program of recovery, my gift of a daily reprieve from active alcoholism, granted by my Higher Power. If I am grateful for this privilege then it makes sense I would put that feeling into action, as I have been taught that gratitude is an action word. Evidence of my action is my participation in the A.A. Grapevine as one of the best recovery tools I can have in my arsenal. It can go anywhere, anytime, and reach someone who needs a meeting, a “meeting in print.” So by my continued participation in Alcoholics Anonymous I am given a gift not enjoyed by all. By subscribing to the A.A. Grapevine and reading the collective sharing of my fellow A.A. members, I feel a part of the great whole of Alcoholics Anonymous, I participate in its future success and my sobriety is enriched just by being present.

This is all great and wonderful, but what about the third part of our topic, that of “passing it on?” Isn’t that our legacy? What good does the gift of sobriety do if all I do is hoard this phenomenal blessing for myself? Don’t I have to try to give it away in order to keep it? Did my Higher Power really give me this free gift, this feeling of being a small part of a great whole, this wonderful joining together with my common sufferers from this illness of alcoholism just to have me keep it all to myself? Why would I want to do that with the A.A. Grapevine? I have this wonderful tool that is our “meeting in print,” able to reach out to any alcoholic, anytime, anywhere. I have read the letters from inmates, who shared of being in a lonely, dark place in their disease, who found a copy of the A.A. Grapevine inside the walls and how the stories, your stories, contained within its pages, touched their hearts and changed their lives, so much so they had to pick up pen and paper and write to the A.A. Grapevine to tell what happened. I have a sponsee who shares how she had a very difficult family encounter this Christmas and felt absolutely lost afterwards. She shares how she did not want to bother anyone on Christmas but needed someone to talk to. She picked up the Grapevine and lo and behold, a story spoke to her of family and resentments and recovery. She shares how that one story helped her to make it through that day. She is now my home group’s GVR, and you can’t shut her up about the power of the stories shared in the A.A. Grapevine. She feels she must share the gift of the A.A. Grapevine with everyone. She doesn’t want to keep it to herself; she wants everyone to have this same privilege.

So, today I challenge all of you to embrace this privilege we have all been given, to participate in the ownership of the A.A. Grapevine by subscribing and actively participating in its success, for being present in our monthly “meeting in print” and to pass it on to those in need of your experience, strength and hope. And remember, it can only be the best “meeting in print” if you write for it, so send your stories to your International Journal of Alcoholics Anonymous, the A.A. Grapevine.

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