

GENERAL SERVICE OFFICE OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS  
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**GENERAL SERVICE OFFICE**

*Please direct all communications to:*

GRAND CENTRAL STATION  
P.O. BOX 459  
NEW YORK, NY 10163  
FAX# 212-870-3003

October 31, 2007

Loren

Dear Loren:

Thank you for your letter requesting that the following proposal be placed on the agenda for the 58<sup>th</sup> General Service Conference:

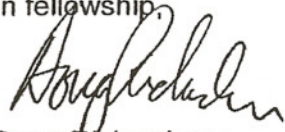
"Discuss the benefits and liabilities, both spiritual and practical, of funding the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous solely by the voluntary contributions of A.A. members and A.A. groups, that profits from literature sales will no longer be used to fund our General Service Office. Further, consider a procedure for gathering input from the Fellowship as a whole and prepare a report on these discussions for the 2009 Conference."

Your letter containing the area's proposal will be forwarded to the trustees' Finance and Budgetary Committee on for discussion at their February 2008 meeting. The committee secretary will contact you after that meeting to let you know the outcome of the committee's deliberations.

We may include your letter as background material for the trustees' Finance and Budgetary Committee, which may be widely distributed. Please let me know if you object to the letter being distributed.

As always, everyone here at G.S.O. enclose best wishes to you.

In fellowship,



Doug Richardson  
Conference Coordinator

DR/yt

cc: Vince Keefe, Chair, trustees' Finance and Budgetary Committee  
Don Meurer, Secretary, trustees' Finance and Budgetary Committee  
John Skilton, Chair, trustees' Committee on Conference

From: iltc ]  
Sent: Tuesday, October 30, 2007 11:01 PM  
To: Conference  
Subject: agenda item

October 30, 2007

Dear Conference Coordinator:

Please consider the following proposed agenda item for the 2008 General Service Conference.

**Agenda Item:** Discuss the benefits and liabilities, both spiritual and practical, of funding the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous solely by the voluntary contributions of AA members and AA groups, that profits from literature sales will no longer be used to fund our General Service Office. Further, consider a procedure for gathering input from the fellowship as a whole and prepare a report on these discussions for the 2009 Conference.

**Background:** On page 48 of the 2007 final conference report, under *Self-Support of the World Services of Alcoholics Anonymous*, the subcommittee states, "We hope that the day will come when AA groups and members, through their contributions, will be able to fund fully the services provided by the General Service Office. If that is achieved, revenues from literature sales will only be needed in amounts necessary to cover the actual costs associated with literature production and to maintain a Prudent Reserve Fund."

For many years now, I have heard AA members voice the opinion that Alcoholics Anonymous would be better off if our General Service Office was supported solely by the voluntary contributions of our members and groups—that it is not healthy for us to rely on literature profits. And now, in a report to the 2007 General Service Conference, a subcommittee of the trustees Finance and Budgetary Committee is saying the same thing. Instead of taking the comments of a few members and assume that it must be AA policy, this item should be discussed throughout the Fellowship. After a thorough discussion of the benefits and liabilities, both spiritual and practical, we can come to an informed group conscience and take the appropriate actions.

Bill W. was not clear in his writings as to which direction we should take. In a June 1955 Grapevine article (page 159 of Language of the Heart) he seems to complain that we had to rely on literature profits for ten of the last fifteen years. But in Concept XII, Warranty Two, he says these book profits aren't really profits, instead they are "the sum of a great many contributions which the book buyers make."

It's time the Fellowship addressed this issue. Should we eliminate literature profits or not? Which will it be?

Yours in Service,  
Loren  
Past Delegate  
Panel 51 Area 40 (Montana)

**From:** ldb:  
**Sent:** Friday, December 07, 2007 12:16 PM  
**To:** Meurer, Donald  
**Subject:** Re: proposal for consideration for 2008 Conference  
Hi Don,

Good to hear from you. To answer your question: This item is mine alone. I came up with the idea a month or so after our fall assembly, and our spring assembly is not held until after the February Board meeting. If I had waited until we discussed it at our 2008 spring assembly, it would not make the GSC agenda until 2009 (assuming it is accepted as an agenda item) and I didn't want to wait another year. I asked a past delegate in Area 40 to critique the item and I presented it to our current delegate so that he was informed on what I was doing.

I submitted this item in the spirit of the following:

Page S53 of the Service Manual states "The final agenda for any Conference consists of items suggested by *individual AA members*, groups, delegates, trustees. . ."

Tradition Nine states "AA, as such, ought never be organized. . ." While it may be beneficial to have one's group, district, or area discuss potential agenda items, I never want to see AA become so organized that we have to process these items through layers of AA bureaucracy before they are considered legitimate.

That is probably a longer explanation than you were looking for, but these are some of the things I thought about before submitting the item.

If there any other questions, I will be happy to answer them. You have my permission to use this email as part of the background material, if needed.

Happy Holidays!  
Loren

-----Original Message-----

**From:** Meurer, Donald <meurerd@aa.org>  
**To:** LDB  
**Sent:** Thu, 6 Dec 2007 11:01 am  
**Subject:** proposal for consideration for 2008 Conference

Hi Loren,

Don Meurer CFO from GSO here!

As Conference Coordinator, Doug has forwarded you request to the Trustees Committee on Finance for discussion at the February meeting.

Your email is fairly self explanatory as to you thoughts and the material you cite.

One item you have not addressed (that Committee's always ask) is if this proposals is yours alone or if you had wider discussion of the topic in your area.

I know that if I did not ask you they will ask the question.

Thanks,

Don Meurer  
GSO

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**From:** LDB  
**Sent:** Sunday, December 09, 2007 6:19 AM  
**To:** Meurer, Donald  
**Subject:** Re: proposal for consideration for 2008 Conference

**Attachments:** Self-Support or.doc

Don,

Hi again. Here is a little more background on the self-support agenda item. The way it started was I wrote an essay on self-support for our area newsletter. (The editor tells me my article will be published in the issue that comes out at the end of December). After I wrote it, I thought: Why stop here? Why not take action and submit this as an agenda item for the General Service Conference? So I did.

I am attaching the essay so that you can see how this whole thing evolved. I don't know if it is useful as background material; I will let you be the judge.

As an aside, I asked a past delegate to critique both the essay and the agenda item. This person suggested I consider submitting the essay to the Grapevine. So I did. I have not yet heard whether they will accept it for publication.

Now you know the rest of the story.

Loren

## Self-Support or Self-Delusion?

"We hope that the day will come when AA groups and members, through their contributions, will be able to fund fully the services provided by the General Service Office. If that is achieved, revenues from literature sales will only be needed in amounts necessary to cover the actual costs associated with literature production and to maintain a Prudent Reserve Fund." This comes from the Finance and Budgetary report given at the 2007 General Service Conference, and is on page 48 of the final conference report under Self-Support of the World Services of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Here we go again! Another implication that we AA members are not being financially responsible because we continue to use literature profits to help fund GSO. How many times over the years have I heard that we need to fund GSO by contributions alone and that we shouldn't have to use profits from literature sales? In service workshops, area assemblies, service conferences, and at the General Service Conference it comes up time after time, but never have I heard anyone suggest an action to move us in that direction. It's always just somebody voicing the opinion that it's something we *should* do.

Well, if it's something we should do, when are we going to do it? If it really is a problem for Alcoholics Anonymous, then let's solve it. But first let's decide if it is a problem.

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In an August 1947 Grapevine article (page 63 of Language of the Heart) Bill W. wrote that shortly after 1945 "...the Alcoholic Foundation (now the General Service Board) had become adequately supported by the AA groups and by income from the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*." A few years later, in a June 1955 article (page 159 of Language of the Heart) Bill wrote "...group voluntary contributions have fully paid office expenses in only five years out of the last fifteen. That Headquarters reserve of "book money" has had to foot the ten deficits."

Do the math. We have been relying on literature profits for over sixty years. So where is the problem? If these literature profits were going to cause a problem for Alcoholics Anonymous, wouldn't we have seen the negative effects by now? Or, maybe we have but the information hasn't been conveyed to the Fellowship.

In Concept XII, Warranty Two (page 67 of the 2007-2008 service manual) Bill wrote, "Some of us have another concern, and this is related to so-called book "profits." The fact that AA Headquarters and most of the groups sell books for more than they cost is thought to be spiritually bad. But is this sort of noncommercial book income really a profit after all? In my view, it is not. This net income to the groups and to AA's General Services is actually the sum of a great many contributions which the book buyers make to the general welfare of Alcoholics Anonymous."

Was Bill serious when he said this net income "is actually the sum of a great many contributions?" Or was he merely playing with words to hide his fear of financial insecurity? Perhaps he was rationalizing to justify the then-current state of affairs.

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From reading that one paragraph, Bill seemed to have no problem with literature profits. Yet in the 1955 Grapevine article, he seemed to be complaining about literature profits having to sustain GSO for ten out of the last fifteen years.

Is it even possible to fully fund GSO by contributions alone? Will the Fellowship truly rise to the occasion and increase contributions to the amount necessary to support GSO? Experience shows that whenever money is needed in AA, our members contribute. I have absolutely no doubt we can accomplish this. We might have to phase it in over three to five years, for example, in year one, we reduce literature profits by 20%, in year two by 40%, etc. Of course, we could make a radical move and say that beginning in 2009 we will no longer sell our literature at a profit. That would be exciting, wouldn't it? Kind of gets the adrenaline flowing.

Let's look at some numbers. According to the 2007 final conference report, GSO expenses for 2006 were just over \$12 million. We have approximately one million members in the U.S. and Canada. That works out to \$12 per member per year. Heck, I'll send in a check for \$12 right now to do my part. In fact, I'll make it out for \$24, assuming some other member either can't or won't send in any money.

Can we do this? Of course we can. We just have to make a decision.

I am not against fully funding GSO by contributions alone but let's decide as a Fellowship if that is what we want to do. Let's have a dialogue in our groups and areas.

Let's discuss it at the General Service Conference and let our Higher Powers guide us

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to the correct decision. If we are in favor of such a move, then let's take the appropriate actions. But let's stop wasting time theorizing and insinuating.

To initiate the discussion, I have submitted an agenda item for the 2008 General Service Conference. I hope we thoroughly discuss the practical and spiritual aspects of this issue and come to a collective group conscience that is in the best interest of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Loren Buettner  
302 S. Willson Ave, Apt. A102  
Bozeman, MT 59715  
ldbuettnr@aol.com

## Report of the Subcommittee on Self-Support January 28, 2007

At the July 2006 meeting of the trustees' Finance Committee the chairperson formed a subcommittee consisting of George M., Howard L. and John S. in order to examine the issues involved in developing a clear definition of the concept of self-support.

The committee defined its scope as follows:

1. Determine the following:
  - a. Does a policy, official or unofficial, for self-support currently exist? If so, how does this policy fit within the framework and guidance as stated in the Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous and The Twelve Concepts for World Service?
  - b. If such a policy exists, does it include both A. A. World Services and The A.A. Grapevine? Or does each corporation have its own policy?
  - c. Is there yet a separate policy in use by the General Service Board that might be broader still than any policy currently in use at A.A. World Services or The A.A. Grapevine?
  - d. If there are currently any policies in effect, how were they derived?
2. Determine how a policy and definition of self-support for the General Service Board and its separate operating corporations (A.A. World Services, Inc. and The A.A. Grapevine, Inc.) might be used in communicating with the groups and members what is meant by the General Service Board when it discusses self-support.

The subcommittee gathered extensive background material concerning self-support from the Archives and other sources. It requested the A.A.W.S. Board, the Grapevine Board, and the Treasurer of the General Serviced Board to provide input as to any existing policies on self-support, and received helpful responses from all. There has been a steady exchange of views by email and three conference calls.

The subject of self-support is a broad-ranging one, touching virtually every activity of the General Service Board and its operating corporations. The subcommittee decided to address the issues raised in its scope by considering the three matters at the end of the memorandum forwarded to the Trustees' Finance & Budgetary Committee by the A.A.W.S. Board which prompted the formation of the subcommittee. In brief, those matters and the subcommittee's conclusions with respect to them are as follows:

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1. Determine the relevance of any existing policy regarding what constitutes "self support" for its [the GSB's] purposes.

The GSB's Bylaws require it to be guided by the Twelve Traditions of A.A. in its deliberations and decisions. The Traditions (short form) are recited in the document, as are the Twelve Concepts. Our Seventh Tradition and Warranty Two contained in the Twelfth Concept are thus expressly made a part of the GSB's operational mandate.

The spiritual principle of self-support is a multifaceted concept that has been a topic of discussion and debate within the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous from its very earliest days. Bill W., one of A.A.'s cofounders, wrote extensively about self-support in the A.A. Grapevine. Many of Bill's thoughts on this topic found further expression in the 7<sup>th</sup> Tradition and his later essay on the 7<sup>th</sup> Tradition contained in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. Still later, the principle of self-support was addressed by Bill W. in *Twelve Concepts for World Service*. Together, these writings span a period of more than 20 years and capture the shared experience of the Fellowship from its beginnings to the early 1960's.

The General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous historically has looked to these seminal writings on self-support when developing procedures to implement world services and to the actions taken by the General Service Conference in further accomplishing these objectives. This subcommittee has been unable to identify any time when the General Service Board has adopted a policy statement that concisely defined for the Board its understanding of the A.A. principle of self-support in all its many aspects. Absent such a statement of policy, A.A. World Services and the A.A. Grapevine, the two operating corporations of the Board, have themselves developed procedures for conducting their business activities that they believe are consistent with the Traditions and Concepts and with direction received from the General Service Board and from the General Service Conference.

2. Absent a definitive policy, consider one.

The subcommittee was charged with the task of determining whether the General Service Board should now try to develop and adopt a specific policy statement that attempts to define what self-support means to the Board when it discusses this topic. After due consideration, this subcommittee recommends that the General Service Board not attempt to develop such a policy statement. The subcommittee believes that the Board and the Fellowship as a whole should continue to look to the Traditions and Concepts in guiding their actions regarding self-support and that it would not be possible to comprise within a single, concise statement what self-support means to either the Board or to the membership of Alcoholics Anonymous.

The subcommittee, in making this recommendation, took note of what it believes to be a healthy discussion of self-support within the fellowship that has continued for more than 70 years. While there is widespread consensus that self-support means that we should decline outside contributions, there is no such consensus on the

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role of literature sales in our efforts to be self-supporting. Writing such a policy statement would be, in our view, an attempt to forge such a consensus and end debate when there is no group conscience within the Fellowship as a whole on at least this aspect of self-support. Additionally, any policy statement that attempted to clarify the role of contributions and literature sales in self support of world services would necessarily have to exclude the A.A. Grapevine, Inc., since that corporation does not accept contributions from A.A. members or groups, except under extremely limited circumstances. Instead, the A.A. Grapevine seeks to be self supporting through the sales of its magazines and related items.

Furthermore, the subcommittee feels that the principle of self-support cannot be considered an absolute spiritual principle or one that is considered in isolation from other equally cherished spiritual principles embraced by the Fellowship. Thus, while there might be considerable agreement among our members that the ideal situation would be one where all services of Alcoholics Anonymous were fully supported by the contributions of its members, we are equally aware of the shared moral obligation we feel to reach the still suffering alcoholic today with these services. This subcommittee notes that the General Service Board and the General Service Conference have never recommended that services be trimmed to a level where they could be sustained by the current level of contributions alone. On the contrary, the actions of the Board and the Conference have consistently created a challenge to assure that funds are made available, consistent with the spirit of our traditions, to provide the services that have been expressly identified as needed.

3. Establish a clear and concise message to carry to the delegates and groups in the U.S. and Canada regarding matters of self-support.

The subcommittee noted that the Fellowship has access to extensive information about the financial affairs of the General Service Board, including both the sources of its income and the nature of its expenditures. The Fellowship also has access to the annual audited financial statements of the General Service Board and the two operating corporations, and receives a report of the General Service Board Treasurer each year providing analysis of the Board's financial position and results of operations for the preceding year.

A wide diversity of views on the future financial prospects of the General Service Board can be found not only within the Fellowship, but also among the Trustees themselves. The subcommittee believes that members of the Fellowship should continue to feel free to express their opinions on the financial affairs of the Board with confidence that the Board remains open to differing opinions and without concern that the Board has adopted a firm position on these matters; and that a consistent message fashioned by the Board on this subject, even if one could be agreed upon, would therefore not be helpful.

The subcommittee does believe, however, that a short statement acknowledging the role of literature sales in supporting the activities of the General Service Office may be helpful in communicating the conclusions reached by this subcommittee.

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The statement is intended to set forth in a factual and nonjudgmental manner the present need for income from literature to help support the services provided by the GSO and the Board and to communicate a shared hope that a time will come when the cost of such services can be funded entirely from the voluntary contributions of AA groups and members.

The subcommittee therefore offers the following statement as one that can be used by Trustees of the General Service Board in explaining to the Fellowship their views on self-support of world service activities:

### **Self-Support of the World Services of Alcoholics Anonymous**

**The A.A. spiritual principle of self-support enables us to pursue our primary purpose of carrying the message to the still suffering alcoholic with a shared sense of responsibility for our lifesaving work and without interference or financial dependence on outsiders. From our Fellowship's earliest days, the expenses of the General Service Office, and the world services provided by it, have exceeded the amount derived from contributions of AA groups and members. As a result, providing these needed services has necessarily been supported in part by income from the sale of AA literature. It is the policy of the General Service Board that income from literature sales should only be in amounts required to allow continued provision of vitally needed services and maintenance of a prudent reserve fund. We hope that the day will come when AA groups and members, through their contributions, will be able to fund fully the services provided by the General Service Office. If that is achieved, revenues from literature sales will only be needed in amounts necessary to cover the actual costs associated with literature production and to maintain a prudent reserve fund.**

Respectfully submitted,

Howard L.  
George M.  
John S.