

# Cooperation with Other Twelve Step Fellowships

It's a pleasure and a privilege to speak to you today about our Fellowship's cooperation with other Twelve Step Fellowships. The topic, as you probably know by now, is one which was suggested at the most recent Pacific Regional Forum in my home state of Hawaii in 2016.

I researched this topic with a bit online searching, by sending out a request for feedback to our Area Delegates, and through several conversations with G.S.O. staff members. I want to thank everyone who helped; I've come to learn that nothing in A.A. is solo effort.

Where to begin? Let's start with a definition of the word cooperation. Here are some pretty standard definitions:

1. The action or process of working together to the same end.
2. Assistance, especially by complying readily with requests.
3. In economics, the formation and operation of cooperatives.

Now I'm going to read a couple of things I think you'll recognize because I think when many of us hear the word cooperation we start asking some questions:

1. A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution.
2. Tradition Six: An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

It's true that Alcoholics Anonymous doesn't affiliate itself to any other group and we've strived to live up the ideal of Tradition Six as well. Because of this, the word cooperation can

start sounding a little suspect. In fact, one of the responses I got from my inquiries stated this plainly:

*“Cooperate how? Not in any kind of "official" way, but of course we refer non-alcoholics to other 12 Step Fellowships. I'm not even sure what other way there could be that would not be implied or actual affiliation.”*

Cooperate how? Indeed.

A potato is a potato and a carrot a carrot. By themselves they can be eaten but they certainly don't cooperate much less affiliate. But cook up a stew and you'll have fine dish. You still won't mix up the bits potatoes with the bits of carrots, but you'll have to admit they are cooperating in the dish. Any analogy can be pushed too far, and I don't want to take that one any further and overcook it if you will, but Alcoholics Anonymous does cooperate with other Twelve Step Fellowships on a number of levels, and happily so.

The first, and most obvious, is that without the cooperation of Alcoholics Anonymous there likely would be no other Twelve Step Fellowships to cooperate with. I can't tell you how many Twelve Step Fellowship there are at this time, the list is extensive, but there's one for just about any addictive substance or behavior you can name. I think we are all familiar with the Al-Anon Family Groups, Narcotics Anonymous, and Gamblers Anonymous.

Without our Twelve Steps these groups wouldn't exist, or at least wouldn't exist as we know them. Perhaps they'd have taken the Six Steps of the Oxford Groups directly and be known as Six Step Fellowships.

We've been quite liberal in letting other groups use the steps and almost always on the websites of the groups you'll see something like this printed below their adaption of the Twelve Steps:

“The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous have been reprinted and adapted with the permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. (“A.A.W.S.”). Permission to reprint and adapt the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions does not mean that Alcoholics Anonymous is affiliated with this program.”

I don't know how many groups may use the Steps without permission, but it's pretty clear that we do cooperate with other Fellowships at the very basic levels, their creation.

I've also learned that at the General Service Office level, we cooperate in other ways. Through our Cooperation with the Professional Community desk we answer queries from other Fellowships and even have discussions about our common interests. One example would be discussions with Narcotics Anonymous about taking literature into corrections facilities. We should never be afraid to learn from others what works for them. Further, we also participate with representatives of other Fellowships in giving input to national health organizations.

We do not operate, nor I think do we ever want to operate, in a vacuum; we are part of the stew. I would even suggest that through such participation and cooperation we actually strengthen our identity and singleness of purpose as we have the opportunity to make it clear to all just who we are, what we do, and why we do it.

At local levels, Areas and Districts, I think we are all familiar with A.A. events with Al-Anon participation. That one at least seems quite natural, after all we do share, as did Bill and Lois, a special relationship. You can read about that declaration in the G.S.O. Guidelines document, MG-08, Relationship Between A.A. and Al-Anon. There's actually a lot of good

information in that document on just how we manage our relationship and just how we cooperate. Most of the responses I received from other Area Delegates were specific to the Al-Anon Family Groups and how they cooperate at conventions and other events. Quite often separate but parallel meeting spaces are used, in cooperation but clearly unaffiliated.

And at the personal level, if my own experience is any guide, there's probably a lot of cooperation going on. We all know members who claim to be members of more than one Fellowship or at least attend meetings of more than one. I've certainly attended my share of Al-Anon meetings, and plan on continuing to do so when the opportunity presents itself. Certainly, they are included at our own International Convention, in the spirit of cooperation, just check the agenda of our last International Convention and you can see proof of our cooperation.

In summary, we needn't be afraid to cooperate with other Twelve Step Fellowships as long as we remember that affiliation and cooperation are not the same things. "Let's be friendly with our friends," is the catchphrase of our relationships with other organizations and there's no reason not to carry that idea into our relationships at the world service level, the area and district level, and at the level of our own lives in recovery. Let's get cookin'.

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