

Group Conscience Guide

Wednesday, July 19, 2023 7:10 AM

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(Adopted 7/15/2023)

This guide is not endorsed by SAA. This guide is a reference for any 12 step program to refer to for assistance.

AN INFORMED GROUP CONSCIENCE:

Where Does a SAA Group Get Its Guidance?

The Second Tradition states, "For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority - a loving God as known in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern." When a group needs to address an issue, the members get all the information they can and come together to discuss it. We seek to be guided by a Higher Power in reaching a decision that will be good for the group as a whole. This decision is normally called the *group conscience*, and it is usually wiser than any individual member's conclusion.

One issue common to many SAA groups is that of the founding members becoming the de facto final authority for the group. In these instances - and often with the best of intentions - personalities have been placed before principles. With honest sharing and through the process of group conscience, often difficult issues like this can be addressed gently, positively, and in the spirit of loving discussion.

In SAA, as in all Twelve-Step fellowships, our leaders are simply trusted servants exercising only limited authority. When a group is starting up, usually more experienced members guide the meeting, attending to most of the tasks. Once the group is firmly established, however, these members prudently tend to retire to the sidelines where they may be consulted, but not interfere with the principle of rotation of service. Sharing responsibilities and working together are the underpinnings that promote the effective development of the group conscience. Since the concept was first developed in Alcoholics Anonymous, years of Twelve-Step experience have demonstrated that the group conscience process does work. More than simply majority rule, the group conscience is the powerful notion that if people have a common spiritual commitment and respectfully listen to one another until a shared view emerges, they can rise above petty individual concerns and unite in a common purpose. Our primary purpose is to stop our addictive sexual behavior and to help others recover from sexual addiction.

Scope of the Group Conscience

The scope of a group conscience should not be so broad where as an understanding of the request can not simply be made. It needs to be more than a general discussion about a topic when brought forth. Here are two examples of a group conscience request looking for the similar outcomes.

Good example

We have \$550.00 in the treasury. I would like to bring forth a group conscience in 2 weeks to discuss and vote upon donating 25% of 7th tradition income to the ISO moving forward keeping the \$450.00 (that we have previously agreed upon as a reserve) out of this discussion. The treasurer would do this with out any movements or approval from the group. It will be paid quarterly or more frequent (however the treasurer desires) as long as we maintain a \$450.00 reserve in the treasury. This would create an initial donation of \$100.00 and 25% donations moving forward.

Bad example

We have \$550.00 in the treasury. I would like to bring forth a group conscience in 2 weeks to discuss and vote upon spending the money in the treasury. Also be leery of the opposite direction with a group conscience that lacks the flexibility of the groups own views. It should be able to be heard, discussed, amended, and voted on. If a group conscience topic is brought up as a yes or no vote, with no discussion that is probably not healthy for the group.

Emergency vs Regular Group Conscience

A regular group conscience is held two weeks (or if a group has modified that waiting period) after the group conscience is called. This is normal practice and allows people to think about what is being brought up for discussion and potential vote.

An emergency group conscience can be brought up immediately at the end of a meeting. This is a rare, but necessary form of group conscience. It should only be used if there is a continuous issue that effects someone's safety or the groups sobriety.

How Does the Group Conscience Differ From a Majority Vote?

What exactly is the group conscience? And how does it differ from a group opinion or a majority vote? And what is the best way to "get there"?

A true group conscience strives for consensus, not simply majority rule. This involves respectful and open-hearted listening to all viewpoints, as well as to the quiet voice of our Higher Power. Working deliberately, following the SAA Steps and Traditions, and placing principles before personalities, gradually a collective view tends to evolve. The group needs to hear all of its members, often more

than once, so that the group's collective insight prevails rather than the opinions of a dominant few. At its best the group conscience is the coming together of the entire group in a common purpose, a true spiritual expression of the whole group. It is based on mutual trust and respect, not simply the winning of one faction over another.

How Important Is the Word "Informed"?

A central element of the concept of group conscience should be the word "informed" - something often left out of the discussion. Without the word "informed," a fellowship's group conscience could mean almost anything, easily becoming the rule of a dominant clique. When a group's sense of what is appropriate is "informed" and their deliberations respectful, the results are usually enlightened and well thought out. Without sufficient insight, respect, and deliberation, the group conscience can stray from SAA principles.

How Does a Group Get Informed?

First, if we are to achieve an informed group conscience, we will learn about our SAA Traditions. We will read our literature and be willing to share that knowledge with newcomers. We will understand and participate in our service structure. To ensure that we truly have group conscience meetings, we will seek guidance through prayer or meditation. The only authority in a group conscience is our Higher Power.

The Formula for Getting the Group Conscience

An effective formula for an informed group conscience calls for :

- A straightforward explanation of the issue at hand in all its aspects;
- The Chair polling the group members for their views (this should be less a debate than a calm and respectful airing of views);
- The rotation around the group continuing a second time, a third time, or until all have had their turn, giving even the shyest person an equal voice (the idea is not to "win" but to come together as a group on a topic).
- The Chair will usually speak only after everyone else has talked.

We have found that when we continue discussion in this way, we can usually achieve a united group conscience. When the group agrees that discussion has been completed, the Chair will summarize the discussion. If we cannot reach consensus, it is a good idea to postpone a decision to a later date. Only if a decision must be made immediately should a vote be taken. A group conscience does not mean that everyone is happy with a decision, but that we are satisfied that it is the best one we can make under the circumstances.

Issues and Problems for the Group Conscience Process

The impact of group conscience decisions can be seen in numerous ways: from election of officers to the selection of our ISO; from how a group chooses to handle people with special issues to the development meeting literature. Here are just a few of the issues some SAA groups have dealt with through the process of informed group conscience:

- What type of meeting do we want? (Speaker, Step, Topic, Check-in, etc.)
- Changing meeting readings (add, subtracts, or modify readings)
- How do we address a member's motion to change our meeting day, time, or location?
- How do we establish a prudent treasury reserve for our group?
- How do we address a member's motion to increase the Seventh Tradition's suggested contribution?
- How does a group develop its guidelines on cross-talk?

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