

The Twelve Steps of Unity

Reprinted from the original "Blue Book", 3rd Edition.

With gratitude to GA (USA)

December 1994

www.gamblersanonymous.org.uk

Note for members of GA in the UK: The following is reprinted without changes. The UK organisation differs slightly from the USA, but the principles of the Steps of Unity remain unchanged.

No attempt has been made to bring it up to date or anglicize it. All references to male gamblers are of course equally true for female gamblers.

STEP ONE. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon group unity.

The unity of Gamblers Anonymous is the most cherished quality our society has. Our lives, the lives of all to come, depend squarely upon it. We stay whole or GA dies. Without unity, the heart of GA would cease to beat, our world arteries would no longer carry the life-giving grace of God, and His gift to us would be spent aimlessly. Back again in the deep pits they have dug for themselves compulsive gamblers would reproach us and say, "What a great thing GA might have been!" Does this mean some will anxiously ask that in GA the individual doesn't count for much? Is he to be dominated by his group and

swallowed up in it? We may certainly answer this question with a loud "no!"

We believe there isn't a fellowship on earth that lavishes more devoted care upon its members; surely, there is none that more jealously guards the individual's right to think, talk and act as he wishes. No GA member can compel another to do anything; no one can be punished or expelled.

Our Twelve Steps to Recovery are suggestions. The Twelve Unity Steps, which guarantee GA's unity, contain not a single "Don't". They repeatedly say "We Ought", but never "You Must." To many minds, all this liberty for the individual spells sheer anarchy. Every newcomer, every friend who looks at GA for the first time, is greatly puzzled. They see liberty verging on licence; yet they recognise at once that GA has an irresistible strength of purpose and action. "How", they ask, "can such a crowd of anarchists function at all? How can they possibly place their common welfare first? What in heaven's name holds them together?" Those who look closely soon have the key to this strange paradox. The GA member has to conform to the principles of recovery. His (or her) life actually depends upon obedience to spiritual principles. If he deviates too far, the penalty is sure and swift: he sickens and

dies. At first he goes along because he must, but later he discovers a way of life he really wants to live. Moreover, he finds he cannot keep this priceless gift unless he gives it away. Neither he nor anyone else can survive unless he carries the GA message.

The moment this Twelfth Step work forms a group, another discovery is made: most individuals cannot recover unless there is a group. Realisation dawns that he is but a small part of a great whole and that no personal sacrifice is too great for preservation of the fellowship. He learns that the clamour of desires and ambitions within him must be silenced whenever they might damage the group. It becomes plain that the group must survive or the individual will not.

So, at the outset, how best to live and work together as groups become the prime question. In the world about us, we saw personalities destroying whole peoples. The struggle for wealth, power, and prestige was tearing humanity apart as never before. If strong people were stalemated in the search for peace and harmony, what was to become of our erratic band of compulsive gamblers? As we had once struggled and prayed for individual recovery, just so earnestly did we commence to quest for the

principles through which GA itself, might survive. Our anvils of experience, the structure of our society, was hammered out.

Countless times, in many cities and hamlets, we reacted to the story of Eddie Rickenbacker and his courageous company, when their plane crashed in the Pacific. Like us, they had suddenly found themselves saved from death; but still floating on a perilous sea. How well they saw that their common welfare came first. None might become selfish of water or bread; each needed to consider the other; and in abiding faith, they knew they must find their real strength. And this they did find, in measure to transcend all the defects of their frail craft and every test of uncertainty; pain, fear, despair and even the death of one.

Thus has it been with GA. By faith and by work, we have been able to build upon the lessons of an incredible experience. These live today in the Twelve Steps of Unity of Gamblers Anonymous, which, with God willing, shall sustain us in unity for so long as He may need us.

STEP TWO. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.

Where does GA get its direction? Who runs it?

This, too, is a puzzler for every friend and newcomer. When told that our fellowship has no President having authority to govern, no Treasurer compelling the payment of dues, no Board of Directors casting erring members into outer darkness, and no members giving others directives and enforcing obedience, our friends gasp and exclaim, "This simply can't be! There must be an angle somewhere." These practical folk then read Unity Step Two and learn that the sole authority in GA is a Higher Power, of our own understanding, in the group conscience. They dubiously ask an experienced GA member if this really works. The member, sane to all appearances, immediately answers, "Yes, it definitely does!" The friends mutter that this looks vague, nebulous, and pretty naive to them. Then they commence to watch us with speculative eyes, pick up a fragment of GA history, and soon have the solid facts.

What are these facts of GA life, which brought us to this apparently impractical principle? John Doe a good GA member, moves, let us say to Middletown, USA. Alone now, he reflects that he

may not be able to refrain from gambling, or even live, unless he passes on to other compulsive gamblers what was so freely given to him. He feels a spiritual and ethical compulsion, because hundreds may be suffering within reach of his help. Then, too, he misses his home group. He needs other compulsive gamblers as much as they need him.

He visits preachers, doctors, editors, policemen, and social workers, with the result that Middletown now has a group and he is the founder. Being the founder, he is at first, the boss. Who else could be? Very soon, though, his assumed authority to run everything begins to be shared with the first compulsive gamblers he helped. At this moment, the benign dictator becomes the chairman of a committee composed of his friends. These are the growing group's hierarchy of service: self-appointed, of course, because there is no other way. In a matter of months, GA booms in Middletown. The founder and his friends channel spirituality to newcomers, hire halls, make arrangements to visit prisons, and entreat their wives to brew coffee.

Being on the human side, the founder and his friends may bask a little in glory. They say to one another, "Perhaps it would be a good idea if we

continue to keep a firm hand on GA in this town. After all, we are experienced. Besides, look at all the good we have done these compulsive gamblers. They should be grateful!" True founders and their friends are sometimes wiser and more humble than this; but more often at this stage they are not.

Growing pains now beset the group. Panhandlers panhandle. Lonely hearts pine. Problems descend like an avalanche. Still more important, murmurs are heard in the body politic, which swell into a loud cry, "Do these old-timers think they can run this group forever? Let's have an election!" The founder and his friends are hurt and depressed. They rush from crisis to crisis and from member to member, pleading; but it's no use, the revolution is on.

The group conscience is about to take over. Now comes the election. If the founder and his friends have served well, they may, to their surprise, be reinstated for a time. If, however, they have heavily resisted the rising tide of democracy, they may be summarily beached. In either case, the group now has a so-called rotating committee, very sharply limited in its authority. In no sense whatever can its members govern or direct the group. They are servants. Theirs is the sometimes thankless

privilege of doing the group's chores.

Guided by the chairman, they look after public relations and arrange meetings. Their treasurer, strictly accountable, takes money from the hat that is passed, banks it, pays the rent and other bills, and makes a regular report at business meetings. The secretary sees that literature is on the table, looks after the phone answering service, answers the mail and sends out notices of meetings.

Such are the simple services that enable the group to function. The committee gives no spiritual advice, judges no one's conduct, issues no orders. Every one of them may be promptly eliminated at the next election if they try this. And so, they make the belated discovery that they are really servants, not senators. These are universal experiences. Thus, throughout GA, the group conscience decrees the terms upon which its leaders shall serve.

This brings us straight to the question, "Does GA have a real leadership?" Most emphatically the answer is "Yes, notwithstanding the apparent lack of it." Let's turn again to the deposed founder and his friends. What becomes of them? As their grief and anxiety wear away, a subtle change begins. Ultimately, they divide into two classes, known in GA slang as "elder statesmen" and "bleeding-

deacons". The elder statesman sees the wisdom of the group's decision and holds no resentment over his reduced status. His judgement, fortified by considerable experience, is sound. And he is willing to sit quietly on the sidelines and patiently await developments.

The bleeding deacon is one just as surely convinced that the group cannot get along without him, who constantly connives for re-election to office, and who continues to be consumed with self-pity. A few haemorrhage so badly, that drained of all GA spirit and principle, they go back to gambling.

At times the GA landscape seems to be littered with bleeding forms. Nearly every old-timer in our fellowship has gone through this process in some degree. Happily, most of them survive and live to become "elder statesmen." They become the real and permanent leadership of GA. Theirs is the quiet opinion, the sure knowledge, and the humble example that resolves a crisis. When sorely perplexed, the group inevitably turns to them for advice. They become the voice of the group conscience. In fact, these are the true voices of Gamblers Anonymous. They do not drive by mandate; they lead by example. This is the

experience which has led us to the conclusion that our group conscience, well advised by its elders, will be, in the long run, wiser than any single leader.

When GA was very young, an event demonstrating this principle occurred. One of the first members of GA, entirely contrary to his own desire, was obliged to conform to group opinion. Here is the story in his own words:

One day I was doing Twelfth Step work at court in a large city. The judge summoned me to his chambers. He started off with, "Does it not frustrate you that some of the people you help stop gambling, prosper and make lots of money; far more than you do? Is this fair?" The judge left me with this thought. On the way home, I thought of my wife having to work all day; come home, do the cooking, washing and housekeeping; yet never refusing to accompany me to see a couple in dire need of help. The thought kept flashing through my mind - why shouldn't I do as well as some of the others? When I arrived home, I told my wife about my thoughts to form a special therapist group and make it a business. I could clean up. She seemed a little interested, but not excited.

It was meeting night: the compulsive gamblers

and their wives crowded into the meeting hall. At once I burst into the story of my dreams. Never shall I forget their impassive faces and the steady gaze they focused on me. With waning enthusiasm, my tale trailed off to the end. There was a long silence.

Almost timidly, one of my friends began to speak. "We know how hard up you are. It bothers us a lot. We've often wondered what we might do about it. But I think I speak for everyone here when I say that what you now propose bothers us an awful lot more." The speaker's voice grew more confident now. "Don't you realise," he went on, "that you can never become a professional? As generous as we would like to be with you, don't you see that we can't tie this thing up with anything professional? I know and we know your plan is ethical, but what we've got won't run on ethics alone; it has to be better. Sure, the idea and thoughts were good, but they're not good enough. This is a matter of life and death, and nothing but the very best will do!" Challengingly, my friends looked at me as their spokesman continued. "Haven't you often said, right here in this meeting hall, that sometimes the good is the enemy of the best? Well, this is a plain case of it. You can't do this thing to us!" So spoke the group conscience.

The group was right and I was wrong. The voice on the way home was not the voice of God. Here was the true voice, welling up out of my friends. I listened; thank God, I obeyed.

STEP THREE. The only requirement for GA membership is a desire to stop gambling.

The above tradition is packed with meaning. For GA is really saying, to every serious compulsive gambler, "You are a GA member, if you say so. You can declare yourself in; nobody can keep you out. No matter who you are, no matter how low you've gone, no matter how grave your emotional complications - even your crimes - we still can't deny you GA. We don't want to keep you out. We aren't a bit afraid you'll harm us; never mind how twisted or violent you may be. We just want to be sure that you get the same great chance for refraining from gambling that we have had. So you are a GA member the minute you declare yourself."

To establish this principle of membership took years of harrowing experience. In our early time, nothing seemed so fragile, so easily breakable as a GA group. Hardly any compulsive gamblers, approached by us, paid attention. Most of those who did join us were like flickering candles in a

windstorm. Time after time, their uncertain flames blew out, not to be relighted. Our constant, unspoken thought was, "Which of us may be the next?" A member gives us a vivid glimpse of those days:

At one time, every GA group had many membership rules. Everyone was scared witless that something or someone would capsize the boat and dump us all back into the mire of compulsive gambling. Our National Service Office asked each group to send its list of "protective" regulations. The total list was a mile long. If all those rules had been in effect everywhere, nobody could possibly have joined GA at all. So great was the sum of our anxiety and fear.

We were resolved to admit only that hypothetical class of people we termed "pure compulsive gamblers". Except for their gambling and the unfortunate results thereof, they were to have no other complications. Yes, sir, we'd cater only to pure and respectable compulsive gamblers. Any others would surely destroy us. Besides, if we took in all these other ones, what would decent people say about us? We built a fine mesh fence around GA.

Maybe this sounds comical now. Maybe you think we old-timers were pretty intolerant. But, I can tell you there was nothing funny about the situation then. We were grim because we felt our lives and homes were being threatened, and that was no laughing matter. Intolerant, you say? Well, we were frightened. Naturally, we began to act as most everyone does, when afraid. After all, isn't fear the true basis of intolerance?

Yes, we were very intolerant. How could we then guess that all those fears were to prove groundless? How could we know that thousands of these sometimes frightening people were to make astonishing recoveries and become our greatest workers and intimate friends? Was it credible that GA was to have a divorce rate far lower than average? Could we then foresee that troublesome people were to become our principle teachers of patience and tolerance? Could any then imagine a society that would include every conceivable kind of character and that would cut across every barrier of race, creed, politics, and language with ease?

Why did GA finally drop all its membership regulations? Why did we leave it to each newcomer to decide for himself whether he was a compulsive

gambler and whether he should join us? Why did we dare to say, contrary to the experience of society and government everywhere, that we would neither punish nor deprive any GA of membership; that we must never compel anyone to pay anything, believe anything, or conform to anything? The answer, now seen in Unity Step Three, was simplicity itself.

At last, experience taught us that to take away any compulsive gambler's full chance was sometimes to pronounce his death sentence; often, to condemn him to endless misery. Who dare to be judge, jury and executioner of his own sick brother? As group after group saw these possibilities, they finally abandoned all membership regulations. One dramatic experience after another clinched this determination, until it became our universal unity. Here are two examples:

On the GA calendar it was Year Two. In that time, nothing could be seen but two struggling, nameless groups of Gamblers Anonymous, trying to hold their faces up to the light. A newcomer appeared at one of the group's meeting place, knocked on the door and asked to be let in. He soon proved that his was a desperate case, and that above all, he wanted to get well. "But," he asked, "will you let me join your group? Since I am the victim

of another addiction, even worse stigmatised than compulsive gambling, you may not want me among you. Or do you?"

There was the dilemma. What should the group do? The most experienced member summoned two others and, in confidence, laid the explosive facts in their laps. Said he, "Well, what about it? If we turn this man away, he'll soon die. If we allow him in, only God knows what trouble he'll brew. What shall the answer be, 'Yes or No'?" At first, the elders could only look at the objections. "We deal," they said, "with compulsive gamblers only. Shouldn't we sacrifice this one for the sake of many?" So went the discussion while the newcomer's fate hung in the balance. Then, one of the three spoke in a very different voice. "What we are really afraid of," he said, "is our reputation. We are much more afraid of what people might say than the trouble this strange, compulsive gambler may bring. As we have been talking, four short words have been running through my mind. Something keeps repeating to me, 'What would God do?'"

Not another word was said. What more could be said?

Overjoyed, the newcomer plunged into Twelfth Step work. Tirelessly, he laid GA's message before

scores of people. Since this was a very early group, those scores have since multiplied themselves into thousands. Never did he trouble anyone with his other difficulty. GA had taken its first step in the formation of Step Three.

Not long after the man with the double stigma knocked for admission, GA's other group received into its membership, a salesman, we shall call Tom. A power-driver, this one, and brash as any salesman could possibly be. He had, at least, an idea a minute on how to improve GA. These ideas he sold to fellow members with the same burning enthusiasm with which he distributed automobile polish. But, he had one idea that wasn't so saleable. Tom was an Atheist. His pet obsession was that GA could get along better without its "God nonsense". He browbeat everyone and everyone expected he would soon go back to gambling; for at the time, GA was on the pious side. There must be a heavy penalty, it was thought, for blasphemy. Distressingly enough, Tom proceeded to stay on the programme and not gamble.

At length, the time came for Tom to speak at a meeting. We shivered, for we knew what was coming. He paid a fine tribute to the fellowship; told how his family had been reunited, extolled the

virtue of honesty; recalled the joys of Twelfth Step work; and then he lowered the boom. Cried Tom, "I can't stand this God stuff. It's a lot of malarkey for weak folks. This group doesn't need it, and I won't have it! To Hell with it!" A great wave of outraged resentment engulfed the meeting; sweeping every member to a single resolve: "Out he goes!" The elders led Tom aside. They said firmly, "You can't talk like this around here! You'll have to quit it or get out!" With great sarcasm, Tom came back at them, "How, do tell! Is that so?" He reached over to a bookshelf and took up a sheaf of papers. On top of them lay the foreword to the book, "Gamblers Anonymous", then under preparation. He read aloud, "The only requirement for GA membership is a desire to stop gambling." Relentlessly, Tom went on, "When you guys wrote that sentence, did you mean it, or didn't you?" Dismayed, the elders looked at one another; for they knew he had them cold. So, Tom stayed.

Tom not only stayed; he refrained from gambling, month after month. The longer he refrained, the louder he talked against God. The group was in anguish so deep that all fraternal charity had vanished. "When, oh when," groaned members to one another, "will that guy go back to gambling?"

Quite a while later, Tom got a sales job that took him out of town. At the end of a few days, the news came in. He'd sent a telegram for money; everyone knew what that meant! Then he got on the phone. In those days, we'd go anywhere on a Twelfth Step job. "Leave him alone! Let him try it by himself for once!" Tom stole, by night, into a GA member's home and, unknown to the family, went to bed. Daylight found the master of the house and another friend drinking their morning coffee. A noise was heard on the stairs. To their consternation, Tom appeared! A quizzical smile on his lips, Tom said, "Have you fellows had your morning meditation?" They quickly sensed that he was quite in earnest. In fragments, his story came out.

In a neighbouring state, Tom had holed up in a cheap hotel. After all his pleas for help had been rebuffed, these words rang in his fevered mind: "They have deserted me. I have been deserted by my own kind. This is the end. Nothing is left!"

As he tossed and turned in bed, his hand brushed the bureau nearby, touching a book. Opening the book, he read. It was a Gideon Bible. Tom never confided any more of what he saw and felt in that hotel room. That was the year 1958, and he hasn't had to make a bet since.

And, nowadays, when old-timers who know Tom foregather, they exclaim, "What would have happened to Tom and all the others he later helped, if we had succeeded in throwing him out for blasphemy?"

So, the Hand of Providence early gave us a sign that any compulsive gambler is a member of our fellowship when he says so.

STEP FOUR. Each group should be self-governing except in matters affecting other groups or GA as a whole.

Autonomy is a ten dollar word. But in relation to us, it means very simply that every GA group can manage its affairs exactly as it pleases, except when GA as a whole is threatened. Now comes the same question raised in Step One. Isn't such liberty foolishly dangerous?

Over the years, every conceivable deviation from our Twelve Steps of Recovery and Unity has been tried. That was sure to be, since we are so largely a band of ego-driven individualists. Children of chaos, we have defiantly played with every brand of fire; only to emerge unharmed and, we think, wiser. These very deviations created a vast process

of trial and error, which under the guidance of a Higher Power has brought us to where we started today.

When GA Unity was first written in 1957, we had become sure that a GA group could stand almost any amount of battering. We saw that the group, exactly like the individual, must eventually conform to whatever tested principles would guarantee survival. We discovered that there was perfect safety in the process of trial and error. So confident of this had we become, that the original statement of GA unity carried this significant sentence: "Any two or more compulsive gamblers gathered together to stop gambling may call themselves a GA group; provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliations." This meant, of course, that we had been given the courage to declare each GA group an individual entity, strictly reliant on its own conscience as a guide to action.

In charting this enormous expanse of freedom, we did find it necessary to post two storm signals: a group ought not to do anything that would harm GA as a whole; nor ought it affiliate with anything or anybody else. There would be greater danger should we begin to call some groups "solids", others "slippers", and still others "Catholic" or

"Protestant". The GA group would have to stick to its course or be hopelessly lost. To stop gambling had to be its sole objective. In all other respects, there was perfect freedom of will and action. Every group had the right to be wrong.

When GA was still young, lots of eager groups were forming. In a coastal town, a real "eager beaver" had come along. He was as hot as a fire cracker about it. Star gazing, he dreamed of innovations. He and his followers figured that they needed a great GA centre; a kind of pilot plant that GA groups could duplicate everywhere. Beginning on the ground floor, there would be a club; on the second storey, they would counsel compulsive gamblers and hand them currency for their back debts; the third deck would house an educational project, quite uncontroversial, of course. In imagination, the gleaming centre was to go up several stories more; but three would do, to start. This would take a lot of money, other people's money. Believe it or not, wealthy people bought the idea.

There were, however, a few conservative dissenters among the compulsive gamblers. They wrote to the NSO, GA Headquarters in Los Angeles, wanting to know about this sort of streamlining.

They understood that the "eager beaver" and his followers, just to nail things down good, were about to apply to NSO for a charter. These few were disturbed and sceptical of course, there was a promoter to take over the deal - super promoter. By his eloquence, he allayed all fears; despite advice from NSO that it could issue no charter, and that ventures that had mixed clubs, education and counselling had come to sticky ends elsewhere. To make things safer, the promoter organised three corporations and became President of them all! Freshly painted, the new centre shone. The warmth of it all spread through the city. To insure foolproof, continuous operation, sixty one rules and regulations were adopted. But alas, this bright scene was not long in darkening. Confusion replaced serenity. It was found that some gamblers yearned for education; but, they doubted if they were compulsive gamblers. The personality defects of others could be cured, maybe with a loan. Some were club minded. It was a beehive of activity; but unlike a beehive, it was confusion compounded. A GA group, as such, simply couldn't handle this sort of project. All too late, that was discovered.

Then came the explosion! A chill shock, damp with fear and frustration, fell over the group. That lifted, and a wonderful thing happened. The head

promoter wrote to the NSO and said he wished he'd paid some attention to GA experience. Then he did something else; he wrote, "Don't take yourselves too damn seriously."

Thus it was that under Unity Step Four, a GA group had exercised its own right to be wrong. Moreover, it had performed a great service for Gamblers Anonymous; as it had been humbly willing to apply the lessons it had learned. It had picked itself up with a smile and had gone on to better things. Even the head promoter could laugh at himself, and that is total humility itself.

STEP FIVE. GA has but one primary purpose - to carry its message to the compulsive gambler, who still suffers.

"Blacksmith, stick to your anvil!" It's better to do one thing supremely well, than many badly. That is the central theme of this Unity Step. Around it, our society gathers in unity. The very life of our fellowship requires the preservation of this principle.

Gamblers Anonymous can be likened to a group of physicians who might find a cure for cancer; and upon whose concerted work would depend the answer for sufferers of this disease. True, each

physician in such a group might have his own speciality; every doctor concerned, at times, would wish he could devote himself to his chosen field rather than work only with the group. But once these men had hit upon a cure; once it became apparent that only by their united effort could this be accomplished, then all of them would feel bound to devote themselves solely to the relief of cancer. In the radiance of such a miraculous discovery, any doctor would set his other ambitions aside, at whatever the personal cost.

Just as firmly bound by obligations are the members of Gamblers Anonymous; who have demonstrated that they can help a problem gambler as others seldom can. The unique ability of each GA to identify himself with and bring recovery to the newcomer in no way depends upon his learning, eloquence, or any special individual skills. The only thing that matters is that he is a compulsive gambler who has found a key to stop gambling. These legacies of suffering and of recovery are easily passed among compulsive gamblers; one to the other. This is our gift from God, and its bestowal upon others like us is the one aim that today animates GA's all around the globe.

There is another reason for this singleness of

purpose. It is the great paradox of GA that we know we can seldom keep the precious gift of not gambling unless we give it away. If a group of doctors possessed a cancer cure, they might be conscience stricken if they failed their mission through self-seeking; yet, such a failure wouldn't jeopardise their personal survival. For us, if we neglect those who are still sick, there is unremitting danger to our own lives and sanity. Under these compulsions of self-preservation, duty, and love, it is not strange that our society has concluded that it has but one high mission: to carry the GA message to those who don't know there is a way out. Highlighting the wisdom of GA's single purpose, a member tells this story:

Restless one day, I felt I'd better do some Twelfth Step work. Maybe I should take out some insurance against a "slip". But first, I'd have to find a compulsive gambler to work with. So, I drove to the city's holdover quarters at the jail. I asked the sergeant on duty if anyone had been picked up on a hot cheque or embezzlement charge.

He replied, "We have a real tough one; been in several times. He always blames other people his partner, his wife. He's very suspicious of everyone."

"Doesn't sound too good does it?" I said. "But

working with him may do something for me, so may I have permission to see him?"

I was soon sitting beside a very unfriendly man; he stared at me and I agreed with the sergeant that he certainly didn't look good. However, I told him my story. I explained what a wonderful fellowship we had and how well we understood each other. I bore down hard on the hopelessness of the gambling problem. I insisted that very few compulsive gamblers could ever get well on their own; but that in our groups, we could do together what we could not do separately.

He interrupted to scoff at this and asserted that he'd fix his wife, his partner, and stop gambling by himself. Sarcastically, he asked, "How much does your scheme cost?" I was thankful I could tell him, "Nothing at all." His next question: "What are you getting out of it?" Of course, my answer was, "Keeps me from gambling and makes a mighty happy life."

Still dubious, he demanded, "Do you really mean the only reason you are here is to try to help me and to help yourself?" I told him, "Yes, that's absolutely all there is to it. There's no angle."

Then, hesitantly, I ventured to talk about the

spiritual side of our programme. What a freeze he gave me! I had no sooner gotten the word "spiritual" out of my mouth than he pounced, "Oh, now I get it! You're recruiting for some damn religious sect or other. Where do you get that 'no angle' stuff? I belong to a great church that means everything to me. You've got a nerve to come in here talking religion!" Thank heaven; I came up with the right answer for that one!

"You have to have faith," I said, "perhaps far deeper faith than mine. No doubt you're better taught in religious matters than I; so, I can't tell you anything about religion. I don't even want to try. Can you give me a letter-perfect definition of humility? From what you have told me about yourself, your problems, and how you propose to lick them, I think I know what's wrong."

Okay, give me the business", he said. I told him I thought he was just a conceited man with a big ego who thought he could run the whole show. This really rocked him; but as he calmed down, he began to listen while I tried to show him that humility was the main key to stopping gambling. Finally, he saw that I wasn't attempting to change his religious views; that I just wanted him to find the grace of his own religion that would aid his recovery. From then

on, we got along fine. What would have happened if I had been obliged to talk to this man on religious grounds? Suppose my answer had to be that GA needed a lot of money; that GA went in for education and rehabilitation? Suppose I had suggested that I take a hand in his domestic and business affairs? Where would we have wound up? No place, of course.

A few years later, this same man liked to say: "My sponsor sold me one idea and that was to stop gambling. At the time, I couldn't have bought anything else."

STEP SIX. GA ought never endorse, finance or lend the GA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

The moment we saw that we had an answer for compulsive gamblers, it was reasonable, or so it seemed at the time, for us to feel that we might have the answer to a lot of other things. The GA groups, many thought, could go into business, and finance any enterprise whatever in the total field of gambling. In fact, we felt duty bound to throw the whole weight of the GA name behind any

meritorious cause.

Here are some of the things we dreamed:

Law enforcement officers didn't like gamblers, so we thought we'd build a community centre or haven for compulsive gamblers who were down on their luck. People needed to be told what compulsive gambling was, so we would educate the public; even rewrite the laws - compulsive gambling was an illness. We would gather up gamblers from Skid Row, sort out those who could get well and make it possible for the rest to earn their livelihood in a kind of quarantined confinement. Maybe these places would make large sums of money to carry on our other good works. We seriously thought of re-writing the laws of the land, and have it declared that compulsive gamblers are sick people. No more would they be jailed; judges would parole them in our custody. We'd spill GA into the dark regions of dope addiction and criminality; we'd form groups of depressive and paranoid folks. The deeper the neurosis, the better we'd like it! It stood to reason that if compulsive gambling could be licked, so could any problem.

It occurred to us that we could take what we had into the factories, causing labourers and capitalists to love each other. Our uncompromising honesty

might soon clean up politics! With one arm around the shoulders of religion and the other around the shoulder of medicine, we'd resolve their differences. Having learned to live so happily, we'd show everyone else how. Why, we thought, our society of Gamblers Anonymous might prove to be the spearhead of a new spiritual advance. We might transform the world!!!

Yes, we of GA did dream those dreams. How natural that was, since most compulsive gamblers are bankrupt idealists. Nearly every one of us had dreamed to do great good, perform great deeds, and embody great ideals. We are all perfectionists who, failing perfection, have gone to other extremes; settled for another bad cheque cashed, and back to the poker tables.

Providence, through GA, had brought us within reach of our highest expectations. So why shouldn't we share our way of life with everyone? Whereupon, we tried GA centres; which all got bogged down because you can not put GA groups into business; too many busybody cooks spoil the broth! GA groups had their fling at education; and when they began to publicly whoop up the merits of this or that brand, people became confused. Did GA help compulsive gamblers, or was it an

educational project? Was GA spiritual or was it medical? Was it a reform movement?

In consternation, we saw ourselves getting married to all kinds of enterprises; some good and some not so good. Watching compulsive gamblers committed 'willy-nilly' to prisons and mental institutions, we began to cry, "There oughtta be a law!" Some GA's wanted to take a case to the highest court for legal reform. That would have made good newspaper copy, but little else. We saw that we'd soon be mired in politics. Even inside GA, we found it imperative to remove the GA name from clubs and Twelfth Step Houses.

These adventures implanted a deep rooted conviction that in no circumstances could we endorse any related enterprise, no matter how good. We, Gamblers Anonymous, could not be all things to all men: nor should we try.

Years ago, this principle of 'no endorsement' was put to a vital test; and still is today. Every time the subject of legalised gambling comes up, Gamblers Anonymous is called several times to take a stand. People immediately think of Gamblers Anonymous. If they could find a good Public Relations man in our ranks, why wouldn't it be ideal? He would certainly know the problem. His connection with

GA would be valuable because the fellowship stood high in public favour and hadn't an enemy in the world.

Soon they spotted their man; a GA with the necessary experience. Straight away, he appeared at the NSO asking, "Is there anything in our Unity Programme that suggests I shouldn't take a job like this? This kind of education seems good to me and it's not too controversial. Do you NSO folks see any bugs in it?"

At first glance, it did look like a good thing; then, doubt crept in. The committee working against legal gambling wanted to use the member's full name on all posters, radio and television, and as a member of Gamblers Anonymous. Of course, there wouldn't be the slightest objection if such a committee hired a GA member solely because of his public relations ability and his knowledge of compulsive gambling. But that wasn't the whole story; for in this case, not only was a GA to break his anonymity at a public level, he was also to link the name of Gamblers Anonymous to this particular committee project in the minds of millions. It would be bound to appear that GA was now backing the committee in its efforts to defeat legal gambling in their style. The minute we saw this

compromising fact for what it was, we asked the prospective publicity director how he felt about it.

"Great Guns!" he said, "Of course, I can't take the job. The ink wouldn't be dry on the first ad before an awful shriek would go up from all compulsive gamblers. They'd be out with lanterns looking for an honest GA to handle their kind of endorsements. GA would land exactly in the middle of the legal and non-legal gambling controversy. Half the people in the country would think we'd signed up with the non-legal gambling committees; the other half would think we'd joined the legal gambling crowd. What a mess."

"Nevertheless," we pointed out, "you still have a legal right to take this job." "I know that", he said, "But this is no time for legalities. Gamblers Anonymous saved my life, and it comes first. I certainly won't be the guy to land GA in big-time trouble, and this would really do it!" Concerning endorsements, our friend had said it all. We saw, as never before, that we could not lend the GA name to any cause, other than our own.

STEP SEVEN. Every group ought to be fully self-supporting; declining outside contributions.

Self-supporting compulsive gamblers? Who ever heard of such a thing? Yet, we find out that's what we have to be. This principle is evidence of the profound change that GA has wrought in all of us. Everyone knows that active compulsive gamblers scream that they have no problems that money can't cure. Always, we've had our hands out. Time after time, we've been dependent upon someone, usually moneywise. When a fellowship composed entirely of compulsive gamblers states that it's going to pay its bills; that is really news!

Probably no GA Unity Step had the labour pains that this one did. In early times, we were all broke. When we add this to the habitual supposition that people ought to give money to compulsive gamblers trying to stop gambling, it can be understood why we thought we deserved a pile of folding money. What great things GA would be able to do with it. But, oddly enough, people who had money thought otherwise. They figured that, with stopping gambling, it was high time we paid our own way. So, our fellowship remained poor, because it had to.

There was another reason for our collective

poverty. It was soon apparent that while compulsive gamblers would spend lavishly on Twelfth Step cases, they had a terrific aversion to dropping money into a meeting place hat for group purposes. We were astounded to find that we were as tight as the bark on a tree. So GA, the movement, started and remained broke, while individual members became prosperous. Compulsive gamblers are certainly "all" or "nothing" people. Our reactions to money prove this.

As GA emerged from infancy to adolescence, we swung from the idea that we needed vast sums of money to the notion that GA shouldn't have any money. On every lip were the words, "You can't mix GA and money. We will have to separate the spiritual from the material." We took this violent new tack because, here and there, members had tried to make money out of their GA connections; thus, we feared we'd be exploited. Now and then, grateful benefactors had endowed clubhouses; as a result, there was sometimes outside interference in our affairs.

Once GA was offered a percentage in a motion picture of "Nick the Greek". The hassle over the money, even though we did not accept it, was carried on for a long time. The clubs at Gardena

offered to make donations. Being frightened by these complications, some groups refused to have a cent in their treasuries.

Despite these misgivings, we had to recognise the fact that GA had to function. Meeting places cost something. To save whole areas from turmoil, small offices had to be set up, telephones installed and a few full-time secretaries hired. Over many protests, these things were accomplished. We saw that if they weren't, the man coming in the door couldn't get a break. These simple services would require small sums of money that we could and would pay ourselves. At last, the pendulum stopped swinging and pointed straight at Unity Step Seven as it reads today.

In this connection, Jim likes to tell the following story. He explains that Paul Coates had a newspaper article on compulsive gamblers. There were over fifty letters received from this coverage. All were answered by Jim and his wife. The first meeting was held on Friday the 13th September, 1957

Thirteen people showed up, of which seven were compulsive gamblers. At the very first meeting, someone asked what happened to the monies. It was explained that it would go to pay rent,

refreshments and to purchase literature, for answering mail, etc.

There were many times this group needed money to pay back rent; and since there wasn't enough, volunteers answered mail, made phone calls, etc.

One of the original seven showed up at Jim's house. He had just "blown" everything again and he needed ten dollars for groceries for the wife and kids. Good hearted Jim gave it to him, although he could not afford it. That night at the meeting, the Treasurer gave a talk on how broke the group was; that they were behind in rent; and the landlord would put them out if they didn't pay up. He concluded his remarks by saying, "Now, boys, please go heavier on the hat tonight, won't you?"

Jim heard all this quite plainly, as he was trying to help a newcomer sitting next to him. The hat came in his direction and he fumbled around and came up with a fifty cent piece. Somehow, it looked like a very big coin. Hastily he dragged it back and fished out a dime which clinked thinly as he dropped it in the hat. Then he woke up! He, who had boasted his own generosity that very afternoon, was treating his own meeting worse than he had treated the distant compulsive gambler who had asked for ten dollars(that man was not at the meeting and was

never seen again). He realised that his ten dollar gift to the "slippee" was an ego-feeding proposition; bad for him and bad for the "slippee". There was a place in GA where spirituality and money would mix, and that was in the hat!

There is another story about money. One night in 1965, the Board of Regents of the NSO was having its monthly meeting. The agenda discussion included a very important subject: "the NSO was well over \$1,000.00 in the 'red'. What a debate we had on that! A special meeting was held, at which the facts were laid out. One solution was to take outside contributions. Some said, "The groups would never support the NSO, so why not take outside contributions. Let's take all such donations in the future. We're going to need them. We can't let the NSO shut down; it's far too vital!" Then came the opposition.

They pointed out that the Board of Regents. already knew of many outside donations that they could have taken. Heaven only knows how many we did not hear about. Moreover, at the slightest intimation to the general public that we needed money, we could become immensely rich; but like the compulsive gambler's first bet, it would, if taken inevitably set up a disastrous chain reaction. Where,

would that land us? Whoever pays the piper is apt to call the tune. If the GA NSO obtains money from outside sources, the groups might be tempted to run things without reference to the wishes of GA as a whole. Relieved of responsibility, every compulsive gambler would shout and say, "Oh, the NSO is rich. Why should I bother?" The pressure of that fat treasury surely tempted the Board to invent all kinds of schemes to do good with such funds; and so divert GA from its primary purpose. The moment that happened, our fellowship's confidence would be shaken. The B.O.R. would be isolated and would fall under heavy attack of criticism from both GA and the public. These were the possibilities, pro and con. Our trustees wrote a bright page of GA history. They declared for the principle that GA must always decline outside contributions and that the NSO should have a working, balanced budget with a prudent reserve. This would be NSO's financial policy. At that moment, we set up the principal of sound budgeting; declining outside contributions. The expeditors were reenacted. When these facts were printed, there was a profound reaction. To people familiar with endless drive for charitable funds, GA presented a strange and refreshing spectacle!

Approving editorials, here and abroad, generated a

wave of confidence in the integrity of Gamblers Anonymous and had revived an ideal that its ear had almost forgotten.

STEP EIGHT. Gamblers Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centres may employ special workers.

Gamblers Anonymous will never have a professional class. We have gained some understanding of the ancient words, "Freely ye have received, freely give." We have discovered that, at the point of professionalism, money and spirituality do not mix. Almost no recovery from compulsive gambling has been brought about by the world's best professionals, whether medical or religious. We do not decry professionalism in other fields, but we accept the fact that it does not work for us. Every time we have tried to professionalise our Twelfth Step, the result has been exactly the same; our single purpose has been defeated. Compulsive Gamblers simply will not listen to a paid Twelfth Stepper. Almost from the beginning, we have been positive that face to face work with the compulsive gambler who suffers could be based only on the desire to help and be

helped. When a GA talks for money, whether at a meeting or to a single newcomer, it can have a very bad effect on him too. The money motive compromises him and everything he says and does for his prospect. This has always been so obvious that only a very few GA's have ever worked the Twelfth Step for a fee.

Despite this certainty, it is nevertheless true that few subjects have been the cause of more contention within our fellowship than professionalism. Secretaries in offices, authors writing books, public relations men appearing on TV - all these we have seen hotly assailed because they were, as their critics angrily remarked, "making money out of GA". Ignoring the fact that these labours were not Twelfth Step jobs at all, the critics attacked, as GA professionals, these workers of ours who were often doing thankless tasks that no one else could, or would do. Even greater furores were provoked when GA members wanted to run rehabilitation houses for the broke and down and needy compulsive gamblers. In all these instances, and more, it was claimed that GA knowledge and experience were being sold for money; hence, these people were professionals, too.

At last, however, a plain line of cleavage could be

seen between professionalism and non-professionalism. When we had agreed that the Twelfth Step couldn't be sold for money, we had been wise. But when we had declared that our fellowship couldn't hire service workers, how could any GA member carry out knowledge into other fields. We were taking the counsel of fear, which today has been largely dispelled in the light of experience.

Take the case of the paid secretaries in offices. We tried volunteers, who were quickly disenchanted. They just didn't show up. Even more important, an empty office couldn't answer its telephone; but, it was an open invitation to a compulsive gambler, who was gambling and who possessed a spare key. So, someone had to look after the place full-time. If we hired a compulsive gambler for the same job, the job was not to be Twelfth Step work. It was to make Twelfth Step work possible. It was a service proposition, pure and simple. GA itself could not function without full-time workers. At the NSO, we couldn't employ non-compulsive gamblers as secretaries; we had to have people who knew the GA pitch. But the minute we hired a GA, or someone from a compulsive gambler's family, the ultra conservative and fearful ones shrielled, "Professionalism!"

At one period, the status of these faithful servants was almost unbearable. At times they were actually shunned by fellow members. Even the most charitably disposed described them as a "necessary evil". Such a person could surely not be called a professional GA. He was not professionalising the Twelfth Step; he was just making it possible. He was helping to give the man writing, calling, or coming in the door, the break he ought to have. Volunteer committeemen and assistants could be of great help, but they could not be expected to carry this load, day in and day out. At the NSO, the same story repeats itself. Several hundred pieces of literature per month, sacks of bulletins put out per month, letters on every subject, from broken-hearted wives to the growing pains of the groups, do not package and channel themselves all over the world. Right contacts with the world outside must be maintained. GA's lifelines have to be tended. So we hire GA secretaries. We pay them well; they earn what they get!

They are professional secretaries, but they certainly are not professional GA's

Perhaps the fear will always lurk in every GA heart that one day our name will be exploited by someone, for real cash. Even the suggestion of such

a thing never fails to whip up a hurricane; and we have discovered that hurricanes have a way of mauling, with equal severity, both the just and the unjust. They are always unreasonable. There is no doubt in my mind that some day GA members will be asked to accept employment with outside agencies, dealing with the compulsive gambling problem. A university may want a GA member to educate the public on compulsive gambling. A city may want a social worker experienced and who understands the compulsive gambling problems. Would these be branded as professionalism under GA unity? We think not. Members who select such full time careers do not professionalise GA's Twelfth Step. Of course, this conclusion will be a long and rocky one. At first, we could not see the real issue involved. When a GA was hired out to such enterprises, he was immediately tempted to use the GA name for publicity or fundraising purposes. Unthinkingly, GA's so employed, recklessly broke anonymity for their pet enterprise. For this reason, some very good cases may arise and all connected with them will suffer unjust criticism from GA groups. You will hear the cry, "Professionalism! That guy will be making money out of GA". Yet, not a single one of them had been hired to do GA's Twelfth Step work. The violation,

in these instances, was not professionalism at all; it was breaking anonymity. GA's sole purpose was being compromised; the name of Gamblers Anonymous was being misused.

It is significant, now that almost no GA in our fellowship breaks anonymity at the public level, that nearly all these fears have subsided. We see that we have no right or need to discourage GA's who wish to work as individuals in these wider fields. We cannot declare GA such a closed corporation that we keep our knowledge and experience "Top Secret". If a GA member, acting as a citizen, can become a better researcher, educator or personnel officer, then why not? Everyone gains and we have lost nothing. True, some of the projects to which GA's have attached themselves have been ill-conceived; but that makes not the slightest difference with the principles involved. This is the exciting welter of events which has finally cast up GA unity of non-professionalism. Our Twelfth Step is never to be paid for; but those who labour in service for us are worthy of their lives.

STEP NINE. GA as such ought never be organised, but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

When Unity Step Seven was first written, it was stated that "Gamblers Anonymous needs the least possible organisation." In the years since then, we have changed our minds about that. Today, we are able to say with assurance that Gamblers Anonymous, GA as a whole, should never be organised at all. Then, in seeming contradiction, we proceed to create special service boards and committees which, in themselves, are organised. How, then, can we have an unorganised movement which can and does create a service organisation for itself? Scanning this puzzler, people say, "What do we mean, no organisation?"

Well, let's see! Did anyone ever hear of a nation, a church, a political party, even a benevolent association with no membership rules? Did anyone hear of a society that couldn't, somehow, discipline its members and enforce obedience to necessary rules and regulations? Doesn't nearly every society on earth give authority to some of its members to impose obedience upon the rest, and to punish or expel offenders? Therefore, every nation, in fact

every form of society has to be a government, administered by human beings. Power to direct or govern is the essence of organisation everywhere.

Yet, Gamblers Anonymous is an exception. It does not conform to this pattern. Neither its National Service Office, nor the National Board of Trustees, nor the National Board of Regents, nor the humblest group committee can issue single directive to a GA member and make it stick, let alone, mete out any punishment. We've tried it a lot of times; utter failure is always the result.

Groups have tried to expel members, but the banished have come back to sit in the meeting place saying, "This is life for us; you can't keep us out." Committees have instructed many a GA to stop working on a chronic backslider, only to be told, "How I do my Twelfth Step work is my business. Who are you to judge?" This does not mean that a GA won't take advice or suggestions from more experienced members; but, he surely won't take orders. Who is more unpopular than the old-time GA, full of wisdom, who moves to another area and tries to tell the group there how to run its business? He, and all like him, who view with alarm for the good of GA, meet the most stubborn resistance or, worse still, laughter.

You may think GA's NSO in Los Angeles would be an exception. Surely, the people there would have to have some authority. But long ago, trustees and secretaries alike found they could do no more than make suggestions, and very mild ones, at that. They even had to coin a couple of sentences that still go into half the letters they write: "Of course, you are perfectly at liberty to handle this matter any way you please, but the majority of experience in GA does seem to suggest. . . ". Now, that attitude is far removed from central government, isn't it? We recognise that compulsive gamblers can't be dictated to, individually or collectively. At this juncture, we can hear a churchman exclaim, "They are making disobedience a virtue!". He is joined by a psychiatrist who says, "Defiant brats! They won't grow up and conform to social usage!". The man in the street says, "I don't understand it. They must be nuts!". But all of these observers have overlooked something unique in Gamblers Anonymous. Unless each GA member follows, to the best of his ability, our suggested Twelve Steps of Recovery, he almost certainly signs his own death warrant. His compulsive gambling and dissolution are not penalties inflicted by people in authority; they result from his personal disobedience to spiritual principles.

The same stern threat applies to the group itself. Unless there is approximate conformity to GA's Twelve Steps of Unity, the group, too, can deteriorate and die. So, we of GA do obey spiritual principles; first, because we must, and ultimately because we love the kind of life such obedience brings. Great suffering and great love are GA's disciplinarians; we need no others. It is clear now that we ought never to name boards to govern us; but, it is equally clear that we should always need to authorise workers to serve us.

It is the difference between the spirit of vested authority and the spirit of service: two concepts which are sometimes poles apart. It is in this spirit of service that we elect the GA group's informal rotating committee, the Intergroup for the area, and the service centre of Gamblers Anonymous, for GA, as a whole. Even our NSO, once an independent board, today is directly accountable to our fellowship. Its trustees are the caretakers and expeditors of our National Service Office.

Just as the aim of each GA member is personal recovery from compulsive gambling, the aim of our services is to bring non-gambling within reach of all who want it. If no one does the group's chores; if the area's telephone rings, unanswered; if we do not

reply to our mail; the GA, as we know it, would stop. Our communication lines, with those who need our help, would be broken.

GA has to function; but, at the same time, it must avoid those dangers of great wealth, prestige, and entrenched power that necessarily tempt other societies. Though Unity Step Nine, at first sight, seems to deal with a purely practical matter; in its actual operation, it discloses a society without organisation, animated by the spirit of service - a true fellowship.

STEP TEN. GA has no opinion on outside issues; hence the GA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

Never since it began has Gamblers Anonymous been divided by major controversial issues; nor has our fellowship ever publicly taken sides on any question in an embattled world. This, however, has been no earned virtue. It could almost be said that we were born with it; for as one old-timer recently declared, "Practically never have I heard a heated religious, political, or reform argument among GA members. So long as we don't argue these matters privately, it's a cinch we never shall publicly."

As by some deep instinct, we GA's have known

from the very beginning that we must never, no matter what the provocation, publicly take sides in any fight, even a worthy one. All history affords us the spectacle of striving nations and groups torn asunder because they were designed for, or tempted into, controversy. Others fell apart because of sheer self-righteousness, while trying to enforce upon the rest of mankind some millennium of their own specification. In our own times, we have seen millions die in political and economic wars, often spurred by religious and racial differences.

We live in imminent possibility of a fresh holocaust, determining how men shall be governed and how the products of nature and toil shall be divided among them. That is the spiritual climate in which GA was born and, by God's grace, has nevertheless flourished.

Let us re-emphasize that this reluctance to fight one another or anyone else is not counted as some special virtue which makes us feel superior to other people. Nor does it mean that the members of Gamblers Anonymous, now restored as citizens of the world, are going to back away from their individual responsibilities to act, as they see the right, upon issues of our time. But when it comes to GA as a whole, that's quite a different matter. In

this respect, we do not enter into public controversy because we know that our society will perish if we do. We conceive the survival and spread of Gamblers Anonymous to be something of far greater importance than the weight we could collectively throw back of any other cause.

Since recovery from compulsive gambling is life itself to us, it is imperative that we preserve, in full strength, our means of survival. Maybe this sounds as though the compulsive gamblers in GA had suddenly gone peaceable and became one great big happy family.

Of course, this isn't so, at all. Human beings that we are, we squabble. Before we levelled off a bit, GA looked more like one prodigious squabble than anything else; at least, on the surface. A corporation director, having just voted a company expenditure of a hundred thousand dollars, would appear at a GA business meeting and blow his top over twenty five dollars' worth of needed postage stamps. Disliking the attempt of some to manage a group, half its membership might very angrily rush off to form another group more to their liking. Old-timers, temporarily turned Pharisee, have sulked. Bitter attacks have been directed against people suspected of mixed motives. Despite their din, our puny rows

never did GA a particle of harm. They were just part and parcel of learning to live and work together. Let it be noted, too, that they were almost always concerned with how to make GA more effective and how to do the most good for the most compulsive gamblers.

The Washington Society, a movement among alcoholics that started in Baltimore a century ago, almost discovered the answer to alcoholism. At first, the society was composed entirely of alcoholics trying to help one another. The early members foresaw that they should dedicate themselves to this sole aim. In many respects, the Washingtonians were akin to the AA of today.

Their membership passed the hundred thousand mark. Had they been left to themselves, and had they stuck to their one goal, they might have found the answer. Instead, the Washingtonians permitted politicians and reformers, both alcoholic and non-alcoholic, to use the society for their own purposes. Abolition of slavery, for example, was a stormy, political issue at that time. Soon Washingtonian speakers violently and publicly took sides on the question. Perhaps the society could have survived the abolition controversy, but it didn't stand a chance when it determined to reform America's

drinking habits. A few years following their temperance crusade, the Washingtonians completely lost their effectiveness in helping alcoholics.

The lesson to be learned from the Washingtonians was not overlooked by Gamblers Anonymous. As they surveyed the wreckage of that movement, early members resolved to keep the society of Gamblers Anonymous out of public controversy. Thus was laid the foundation for Unity Step Ten: "Gamblers Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the GA name ought never be drawn into public controversy."

STEP ELEVEN. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we should*always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films and television.

Without its legions of well-wishers, GA could never have grown as it has. Throughout the world, immense and able publicity of every description has been the principal means of bringing compulsive gamblers into our fellowship. In GA offices and homes, telephones ring constantly. One voice says, "I read a piece in the newspapers ...", another, "We heard a

radio programme ...", and still another, "We saw something about GA on television ... ". It is no exaggeration to say that half of GA's membership has been led to us through channels like these.

The inquiring voices are not just those of compulsive gamblers or their families. Doctors, having read articles about compulsive gamblers and how Gamblers Anonymous can help, call or write for information. Clergymen, seeing articles in the papers also make inquiries. Employers, learning that great corporations have set their approval upon us, wish to discover what can be done about compulsive gamblers in their own firms.

Therefore, a great responsibility fell upon us to develop the best possible public relations policy for Gamblers Anonymous. Through many painful experiences, we think we have arrived at what that policy ought to be. It is the opposite, in many ways, of usual promotional practice. We found that we had to rely upon the principle of attraction rather than promotion.

Let's see how these two contrasting ideas, attraction and promotion, work out. A political party wishes to win an election; so, it advertises the virtues of its leadership to draw votes. A worthy charity wants to raise money; forthwith, its letterhead shows the name of every distinguished person whose support can be obtained. Much of the political, economic and religious life of the world is dependent upon publicised leadership.

People who symbolise causes and ideas fill a deep human need. We of GA do not question that; but we do have to honestly face the fact that being in the public eye is hazardous, especially for us. By temperament, nearly every one of us had been an irrepressible promoter, and the prospect of a society composed almost entirely of promoters was frightening. Considering this explosive factor, we knew we had to exercise self-restraint. The way in which this restraint paid off was startling. It resulted in more favourable publicity for Gamblers Anonymous than could possibly have been obtained through all the arts and abilities of GA's best press agents. Obviously, GA had to be publicised somehow; so, we resorted to the idea that it would be far better to let our friends do this for us. Precisely that has happened, to an unbelievable extent. Veteran newsmen, trained doubters that they

are, have gone all out to carry GA's message. To them, we are more than the source of good stories. On almost every newsfront, the men and women of the press have attached themselves to us as friends.

In the beginning, the press could not understand our refusal of all personal publicity. They were genuinely baffled by our insistence upon anonymity. Then they got the point. Here was something rare in the world; a society that said it wishes to publicise its principles and its work, but not its individual members. The press was delighted with this attitude. Thereafter, these friends have reported GA with an enthusiasm which the most ardent members would find hard to match.

There was actually a time when the press of America thought the anonymity of GA was better for us than some of our members did. At one point, there was some of our society breaking anonymity at the public level. With perfectly good intent, these folks declared that the principle of anonymity was "horse and buggy stuff" and something appropriate to GA's pioneering days. They were sure that GA would go faster and farther if it availed itself of modern publicity methods. GA, they pointed out, included many persons of local, national, and international fame. Provided they were willing, and

many were, why shouldn't their membership be publicised; thereby, encouraging others to join. These were plausible arguments, but happily our friends of the writing profession disagreed with them.

The NSO wrote letters to practically every news outlet in North America, setting forth our public relations policy of attraction rather than promotion, and emphasising personal anonymity as GA's greatest protection. Since that time, editors and rewrite men have repeatedly deleted names and pictures of members from GA copy; frequently, they have reminded ambitious individuals of GA about the anonymity policy. They have even sacrificed good stories to this end. The force of their cooperation has certainly helped. Only a few GA members are left who deliberately break anonymity at the public level.

This, in brief, is the process by which GA's Unity Step Eleven was constructed. To us, however, it represents far more than a sound public relations policy. It is more a denial of self-seeking. This Unity Step is a constant and practical reminder that personal ambitions have no place in GA. In it, each member becomes an active guardian of our fellowship.

STEP TWELVE. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of the GA Unity Programme, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

The spiritual substance of anonymity is sacrifice. Because GA's Twelve Steps of Unity repeatedly ask us to give up personal desires for the common good, we realise that the sacrificial spirit, well symbolised by anonymity, is the foundation of them all. It is GA's proven willingness to make these sacrifices that give people their high confidence in our future.

In the beginning, anonymity was not born of confidence; it was the child of our early fears. Our first, nameless groups of Gamblers Anonymous, were almost secret societies. New prospects could only find us through a few trusted friends. The bare hint of publicity, even for our work, shocked us. Though ex-gamblers, we still thought we had to hide from public distrust and contempt.

When the Big Book appeared in 1964, we called it "Gamblers Anonymous". "It is important that we remain anonymous because we are too few, at present, to handle the overwhelming number of personal appeals which may result from this

publication. Being mostly business or professional folk, we could not carry on our occupations in such an event." Between the lines, it is easy to read our fear that large numbers of incoming people might break our anonymity wide open.

As the GA groups multiplied, so did anonymity problems. Enthused over the spectacular recovery of a brother compulsive gambler, we'd sometimes discuss those intimate and harrowing aspects of his case, meant for his sponsor's ear alone. The aggrieved victim would then rightly declare that his trust had been broken. When such stories got into circulation outside of GA, the loss of confidence in our anonymity promise was severe. It frequently turned people from us. Clearly, every GA member's name and story had to be confidential, if he so wished. This was our first lesson in the practical application of anonymity.

With characteristic intemperance, however, some of our newcomers cared nothing for secrecy. They wanted to shout GA from the housetops and did! Compulsive Gamblers, barely free from gambling, rushed about bright-eyed, buttonholing anyone who would listen to their stories. Others hurried to place themselves before microphones and cameras. Sometimes they soon went back to gambling and let

their groups down with a bang. They had changed from GA members into GA "slippers" and "showoffs".

This phenomenon of contrast really set us thinking. Squarely before us lay the question, "How anonymous should GA members be?" Our growth made it plain that we couldn't be a secret society; but, it was equally plain that we couldn't be a vaudeville circuit either. The charting of a safe path between these extremes took a long time.

As a rule, the average newcomer wanted his family to know immediately what he was trying to do. He also wanted to tell others who had tried to help him; his doctor, his minister, his close friends. As he gained confidence, he felt it right to explain his new way of life to his employer and business associates. When opportunities to be helpful came along, he found he could talk easily about GA to almost anyone. These quiet disclosures helped him to lose his fear of being a compulsive gambler, and help spread the news of GA's existence in his community. Many a new man and woman came to GA because of such conversations. Though not in the strict letter of anonymity, such communications were well within its spirit.

However, it became apparent that the word-of-

mouth method was too limited. Our work, as such, needed to be publicised. The GA groups would quickly have to reach as many despairing compulsive gamblers as they could. Consequently, many groups began to hold meetings open to interested friends and the public, so that the average citizen could see for himself just what GA was all about.

The response to these meetings was warmly sympathetic. Soon groups began to receive requests for GA speakers to appear before civic organisations, church groups, and medical societies. Provided anonymity was maintained on these platforms, and reporters were cautioned against the use of names or pictures, the result was fine.

Then came our first few, breathtaking excursions into major publicity. Articles appeared about us, running our membership from a few into hundreds overnight. The news stories about Gamblers Anonymous written by Ann Landers, Dear Abby, and others helped to increase our membership in a hurry. They highly recommended GA. Such tributes bought opportunities for still more recognition. Other newspapers and magazines wanted GA stories. Film companies wanted to photograph us. Radio, and finally television, besieged us with

requests for appearances. What should we do?

As this tide, offering top public approval, swept in, we realised that it could do us incalculable good or great harm. All would depend upon how it was channelled. We simply couldn't take the chance of letting self-appointed members, representing GA, present themselves as Messiahs before the whole public. The promoter instinct in us might be our undoing. If even one member publicly went back to gambling or was lured into using GA's name for his own purposes, the damage might be irreparable.

At this level (press, radio, films and television), 100 per cent anonymity was the only answer. Here, principles would have to come before personalities, without exception. These experiences taught us that anonymity is real humility at work. It is an all-pervading spiritual quality which today keynotes GA life everywhere. Moved by the spirit of anonymity, we try to give up our natural desires for personal distinction as GA members, both among fellow compulsive gamblers and before the general public. As we lay aside these very human aspirations, we believe that each of us takes a part in the weaving of a protective mantle, covering the whole society under which we may grow and work in unity. We are sure that humility, expressed by

anonymity, is the greatest safeguard Gamblers Anonymous can ever have.

What is the GA Recovery Programme?

When compulsive gamblers apply the 12 Step GA Recovery Programme in their lives, disintegration stops and unification begins. These steps are basically spiritual in their concept and their practice can be highly rewarding. These are the steps which are suggested as a programme of recovery:

1. We admitted we were powerless over gambling that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to a normal way of thinking and living.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of this Power of our own understanding.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral and financial inventory of ourselves.

5. Admitted to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have these defects of character removed.
7. Humbly asked God (of our understanding) to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God (as we understand him), praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having made an effort to practise these principles in all our affairs, we tried to carry this message to other compulsive gamblers.

*God grant me the serenity
to accept the things
I cannot change...*

*Courage to change
the things I can...*

*and Wisdom
to know the difference.*

www.gamblersanonymous.org.uk

updated 20.07.2019