

Dominance – One of the “Three Obstacles to Success in Al-Anon”

Red Light / Green Light – Fall Assembly 2016

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Not all of the research that follows was included in my verbal report, but I felt it was important to make it available to all. The bits and pieces I used in my verbal report appear in bold print.

RESEARCH:

Al-Anon / Alateen Service Manual 2014-2017

- **Our leaders are trusted servants; they do not govern. No member of Al-Anon should direct, assume authority, or give advice. Our program is based on suggestion, interchange of experience, and rotation of leadership. We progress in our own way and pace. Any attempt to manage or direct is likely to have disastrous consequences for group harmony. (pg. 24)**
- **Al-Anon and Alateen members expect a safe and pleasant environment when they attend a meeting, and when one member causes unrest due to inappropriate or intimidating behavior, the entire group could be affected. Groups are within their autonomy to establish group behavioral guidelines in a manner that reflects their group conscience and abides by the Traditions. When the behavior of any member impacts the group, members apply the Traditions to the problem, and determine how best to approach the individual(s) involved, to ask the member to change the behavior in question.(pg. 54)**
- One or two members may dominate the group, ignoring the principles of rotation of leadership. (pg. 54)

Many Voices, One Journey

- **We have one member, perfectly sincere and all that – but who practically takes over our meetings whenever a question is asked. She acts as an automatic answering service. Answers usually are pretty good but it would be better if others, not so quick on their feet, were given more of a chance to get into the act. How can this be managed without offending our eager beaver! (pg. 68)**
- **To insure the success of our meetings in solving our common problems, we must recognize and control three deadly enemies that can destroy the group, a handout from Westchester, California dated May 25, 1956 stated. The three deadly enemies: discussion of religion, gossip, dictatorship. These three points, with their short explanations, were later adapted and included in three different pieces published by Al-Anon, eventually becoming known as the Three Obstacles to Success. (pg.75-76)**

Alateen – a day at a time

- It's very easy for some experienced members of an Alateen group to take control of meetings, influence other members, and monopolize discussions. They think they know it all. They've been around for a while and they feel that gives them the right to speak for the group. Tradition Two tells us that we can't allow our group to be controlled by members like these. We have to remember that "our leaders are but trusted servants. No one person can act as a conscience of our group. Open and honest discussions among all members at our meetings is

the best way to find our Higher Power's true will for our group. (Things to Think About) Some people are leaders, but no one has the right to take over God's territory. The only way an Alateen group can keep going is if *everyone* has the chance to share their feelings and ideas. Tradition Two can make it happen that way in our group if we get to work and apply it. (pg. 56)

- We have leaders, but they're only trusted servants who carry out what the group wants. *Every* member is important and has the right to speak up. When we work together, we're a *real* group and we all have a share in looking for the answers that will make us strong. (Things to Think About) Group problems need group answers. One person can't decide what's best for the group; we all need to get involved. When we all help to solve problems, *everybody* has a chance to grow. That's the group conscience at work – the way God wants it to be. (pg. 167)

Hope for Today

- While I was growing up, my alcoholic father acted like a dictator, making decisions for everyone in the family without consulting anyone. On the other hand, my mother was subservient and rarely contested my father. I grew up seeing the extremes of decision-making – dominance and lack of participation. Before Al-Anon I had never experienced being part of a group working in unity to make collective decisions in a respectful manner, as suggested by Tradition One and Concept Four. Because I hadn't learned how to find my own balance between domination and deference, I usually kept quiet. As a result, when I state my position, it's hard to determine if I'm being meek or overbearing. My sponsor taught me that I could achieve balance by doing three things: make sure my audience can hear me, state my position, and then let go and let God. If I speak up again about the same thing, I am probably trying to impose my will on the group. (pg. 99)
- **The last sentence in Tradition Two is, "Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern." This prompts me to focus on an obstacle to success in Al-Anon – dominance. We strive to conduct our meetings as a fellowship of equals and to practice rotation of leadership. However, sometimes a member may keep a service position because no one else seems inclined to step forward to fill it. Occasionally, I have held service positions too long. I've learned that sometimes it is necessary for me to let go whether or not a replacement has stepped forward. No one can pick up the ball until I've dropped it. I also have learned that what I view as a finely developed sense of responsibility may actually amount to a form of dominance. I cannot attempt to direct the affairs of the group without standing in the way of the group's recovery or my own. (pg. 183)**

1973 World Conference Summary

Complaints about AAs dominating Al-Anon members.

1974 World Conference Summary

- The report noted that correspondence had been received concerning many complaints of gossip and domination of groups by individual members, causing disunity.
- Complaints of AAs dominating Al-Anon meetings.
- Members in Colombia asked for guidance about domineering members.

1980 World Conference Summary

- The report mentions that the Delegate is careful to avoid having one person, or problem dominate a meeting, as the program needs to be protected for the benefit of those to come.

1982 World Conference Summary

- **Q: My children complain that the Sponsor in their Alateen group talks too much, and dominates the group, so they are refusing to go. Any suggestions on how to handle this?**
A: Encourage a group inventory and be honest with the Sponsor as quite often adults in their desire to help, are unaware that they are talking too much.
- Q: We have the situation of a group dying out, people failing to attend because of dominating personalities. “Old Time” members have tried positive things and finally gave up. How can we handle this tactfully before the group dies? A: One way to deal with this is to have a meeting to take a group inventory. To suggest to the Chairman to have a meeting on the topic of “The Three Obstacles to Success in Al-Anon – Religion, Dominance, and Gossip. The most helpful thing may be to have several knowledgeable members speak privately to the individual in a loving Al-Anon way.

1988 World Conference Summary

- Q: How do you deal with groups who do not really understand the Al-Anon program, do not study the principles and therefore, have group problems? A: It was noted that groups with problems can sometimes be a blessing. We can help by visiting such groups to share the principles of our program, to offer help, practice patience, listen, offer to sponsor; however, we should not present ourselves as authority figures. If invited to chair at such groups, we can hold a group inventory meeting or discussion of the three obstacles and the use of the three “ity’s”: anonymity (to deal with gossip), spirituality (to deal with religion), and unity (to deal with dominance).

1990 World Conference Summary

- **The degree to which individuals dominate an Assembly varies from Area to Area. No Al-Anon service arm can function effectively and grow if new trusted servants do not feel free to express and implement ideas. Dominance at any level happens if it is permitted to continue. The Assembly or Area World Service Committee may wish to take an inventory and assess alternatives. Contacting other Areas may be helpful; this would also be a good open discussion or workshop topic at the Assembly. A past trusted servant carries the message by making the benefits of service attractive.**

1997 World Conference Summary

- Q: How do groups handle dominance at meetings? A: Some suggested methods are: to have personal discussion with the individual; conduct a meeting on the “Three Obstacles to Success” from Alcoholism – The Family Disease (discussion of gossip, religion, and dominance); take a group inventory using Let’s Take a Group Inventory.

2001 World Conference Summary

- Q: How can we recognize and deal with issues of dominance/control at the group, area or World Service Conference level? Do we enable such behavior from personalities we like? What are the most effective ways to constructively approach such a difficult situation? A: Some answers to the question of how to recognize and deal with these issues can be found in the Group Problems and Solutions section of the *2000-2002 Al-Anon Alateen Service Manual*, pg. 38. Also helpful is a reading of Concept Nine, the guideline Taking a Group Inventory, and study of Tradition One. Members can also talk to the individual one on one. If it affects the area, consider doing an area-wide inventory conducted by someone outside the area. Conduct workshops at assemblies on the Traditions and the Concepts of Service.

2006 World Conference Summary

- The positive focus and spiritual base of the Warranties keep us from going off the path. They point us away from greed, arrogance, dominance, and gossip, and lead us toward self-support, humility, and prudence.
- The ideas that we are all equal and everyone is valuable are important spiritual principles. We respect all ideas and do not tolerate domination. Lois modeled this when she did not want to be held higher than anyone else. Everyone has the right of participation but we need to look at what is best for the whole. There is a Higher Power in our midst and rotation of trusted servants ensures there is no Mr. or Mrs. Al-Anon. A dominating person can damage growth. If no one is above us, we can focus on our Higher Power.

2007 World Conference Summary

- Q: How do we deal with members who are overwhelmingly controlling, dominating, and threatening to members of the group to do things their way?

2008 World Conference Summary

- As a group, the Conference members discussed possible conflicts to use as an example (during a conflict resolution presentation). There was a common theme of dominance related to service and misunderstanding of dominance.

2010 World Conference Summary

- **“Principles above Personalities” protects both the group and the individual from unacceptable comments and domination. The exhibition of such behaviors has no place in a group conscience, whether exhibited toward the entire group or an individual. It demeans all present.**

2014 World Conference Summary

- Q: What is the best action to take to preserve personal integrity and that of the program when dealing with a member (who holds elected positions) that is out of control, dominant, disrespectful, micro-managing everything and everyone and disregards the feelings and/or anonymity of others? A: Ideas included workshops on what aggravates people at meetings

and what to do about it, workshops on spiritual principles, workshops on healthy meetings, sometimes people aren't aware that they are being dominant, separating the position into two or asking the person to step down, instituting a Tradition Study, rotation of service, conflict resolution tools, forming a Thought Force to handle the issue of dominance, discuss with a Sponsor.

2016 World Conference Summary

- **Suggestions and Strategies for issues of dominance: a) communicate without being dominant, b) accentuate the good qualities, c) hold a group conscience and talk about how longtimers can help by sharing experience, strength, and hope, d) use the Traditions, especially Tradition Twelve, e) there is a difference between perceived dominance and sharing experience, strength, and hope, f) in sponsoring or being sponsored, ask a Higher Power for clarity, openness, willingness, and strength to speak or hear the truth in love, g) rather than fill a job to prevent a void, give it to a Higher Power – it allows the position to remain open and may encourage someone new to step in, h) the Al-Anon definition of leadership creates balance, i) lead by example – people will do what they see works for others, j) encourage outgoing and incoming members to talk to each other so that they are both in a comfortable spot to ask and answer questions, k) hold regular group conscience meetings, l) use spiritual principles to solve problems, m) study the concepts at meetings, n) use the service manual - and many more**