

Concepts Play

Players:

Keith - First Time GSR
 Beth - Elder Statesman GSR
 Robert - Bleeding Deacon GSR and the Driver
 Norma - Returning GSR
 Narrator

Props:

Name Tags
 Applause sign
 Groan Sign
 Steering Wheel

Narrator: Imagine if you will a van filled with GSR's carpooling to the Fall Area Assembly. The group includes a first time GSR, Keith; an elder statesman, Beth, a veteran of many AA events and assemblies; a returning GSR, Norma and lastly the bleeding deacon, Robert, also a veteran of many AA events and assemblies.

To help keep you, the audience, interested, we've asked that the audience participate. I will hold up a sign for "GROAN". When you see the sign make a lot of groaning noise. Let's practice, (hold sign up). Of course we'll need an "APPLAUSE" sign too. Let's practice that, (hold sign up). (Applause) Everyone did great! (hold APPLAUSE sign up). See it's working!

Ok, back to our intrepid group of GSR's. They have a long car ride and lots of time to discuss Alcoholics Anonymous. During the course of the road trip the conversation turns to the concepts. Let's listen in.

Keith: Being a recovering alcoholic I've worked the steps. Being a GSR I've been getting familiar with the traditions. I know I'm supposed to be the one who educates my group about them. But what's this about Concepts. I can't believe there's another 12 things I've got to learn.

Robert: Oh my god, what a whiner...

Norma: Yea, I mean WTF, why does AA have to have so many lists of 12 things to do. I'm still figuring out how to live the traditions in my own life and to keep my home group in line.

Beth: Come on guys, it's not that bad. Its progress not perfection, you'll learn them as you go along. Some of them you are doing already.

Robert: You guys should be grateful there are concepts. AA wouldn't exist the way it does without them. I've been studying the concepts for many, many years of sobriety and I can tell you all about them. (the whole group rolls their eyes and groans – narrator holds up GROAN sign).

Robert: Go ahead and groan all you want but I know how to stay sober and I've made it my responsibility to be informed about every aspect of Alcoholics Anonymous and to make sure that every GSR learns about them.

Norma: Hey, I know a little about the concepts. I know they are in the second half of the Service Manual.

Norma: I've got my Illustrated Concepts pamphlet. Let me read, Concept 1, "The final responsibility and ultimate authority for A.A. world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship".

Keith: Well that doesn't seem such a big deal.

Robert: You don't have all the facts kid. This was probably one of the hardest for them to figure out. Remember AA was started by two guys, Bill W. and Dr. Bob. Well for a long time they ran the show. Then Dr. Bob got really sick and it dawned on Bill and Bob that they weren't going to live forever and something had to be done to keep the program going.

Beth: Although Bill and Bob were pretty much in charge they had created the General Service Board and we had trustees that were doing the work of AA on the national level. But the groups didn't really know anything about that. They focused on their local AA activities.

Robert: Thanks for interrupting me. I was getting to that. I was going to talk about how important Tradition Two is to Concept 1.

Norma: Oh, oh, I know tradition two (*Norma raises her hand enthusiastically*)..."For our group purpose, there is but one ultimate authority – a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern."

Beth: That's right. And it is saying that the groups have to be trusted with the program, it can't be in the hands of a few individuals.

Robert: Why does everyone keep interrupting me? I mean I know all this stuff forwards and backwards and you should listen to me. As I was saying, before I was so rudely interrupted. Back in 1951 we had our first experience with a General Service Conference, to test drive Tradition two at the national level. It took five years for everyone to be convinced but it worked. By 1955 everyone agreed that the conference was going to work.

Keith: You know I had always kind of wondered who was running AA. I kind of thought it was the delegates or trustees. Now I know it's me! Woohoo! (*Narrator holds up APPLAUSE sign*).

Norma: That's pretty cool. I knew Dr. Bob and Bill W. were the founders but I never knew how we got organized. Having Tradition two so important is pretty cool too. Usually all these lists – steps, traditions, concepts are always separate, it's good to see they build on each other.

Beth: Norma, go ahead and read Concept 2.

Norma: ok. “When, in 1955, the AA groups confirmed the permanent charter for their General Service Conference, they thereby delegated to the Conference complete authority for the active maintenance of our world services and thereby made the Conference – excepting for any change in the Twelve Traditions, or in Article 12 of the Conference Charter – the actual voice and the effective conscience for our whole society.”

Keith: Phew, that’s a long one and sounds pretty complicated.

Beth: It’s not quite as complicated as it sounds. It’s mostly a continuation of Concept 1, just more detailed.

Robert: Well that’s being pretty simplistic. Let me give you more information. (*Group groans – Narrator holds up GROAN sign*). Groan all you want but you are going to get more information whether you like it or not. So with Concept 1 the power in AA is turned over to the fellowship since they figured out Bill and Bob weren’t immortal. Concept two begins to define how it’s going to happen. What had been happening before 1955 was that Bill and Bob were turning over various aspects of running AA to trustees and the General Service Board. Our fellowship was growing like crazy then and it was more than two people could handle.

What they figured out was that the groups needed to delegate their authority. It was decided that the group authority would be expressed through the General Service Conference. So the chain of command went from the groups to the General Service Conference and that’s where the work is done.

Beth: Norma would you like to read Concept three?

Norma: Sure thing. “As a traditional means of creating and maintaining a clearly defined working relation between the groups, the Conference, the A.A. General Service Board and its several service corporations, staffs, committees and executives, and of thus insuring their effective leadership, it is here suggested that we endow each of these elements of world service with a traditional “Right of Decision.”

Keith: I’ve heard people talk about the right of decision. Some obnoxious old-timer in my group told me I had the right of decision at the Area Assembly. Something about my being a trusted servant and that they really do trust me. Our old GSR wouldn’t make any decisions on her own. She brought everything to the meeting and wouldn’t ever change her vote at an assembly.

Beth: Sounds like the old-timer got it right, not the former GSR. Each servant, from GSR to Delegate to trustee has to be able to make a decision based on the information they have at the time. Sometimes information comes out at the Assembly or Conference or wherever that was not originally available. If the servant decides the group would want to change its mind, the servant can change their vote.

Robert: And of course if someone screws up too badly, they will probably get canned anyway so there are some real world checks and balances. It's not all touchy feely garbage. (*The group groans – Narrator hold up GROAN sign*)

Norma: Let's move on to Concept Four. Concept Four, "Throughout our Conference structure, we ought to maintain at all responsible levels a traditional "Right of Participation," taking care that each classification or group of our world servants shall be allowed a voting representation in reasonable proportion to the responsibility that each must discharge."

Keith: Jeez, all I heard was blah, blah, blah de blah blah. Do I really have to understand all that gibberish? Why can't they just say it in English?

Beth: I know it sounds complicated but the language was developed over time as a result of experience. The important thing to hear in this one is "Right of Participation".

Robert: It means that the trustees, the directors of AA World Services, the Grapevine and their executive staff are allowed to vote at the General Service Conference.

Norma: D'uh, that doesn't seem to be a big deal. Why would they have to spell that one out, it seems logical to me?

Robert: Have you ever been involved with a large group of alcoholics, especially ones talking about money? Everyone has an opinion and sometimes those with power want to make sure their opinions are the ones that everyone one votes for.

Beth: In other words this is about giving all the various branches of the General Service Structure equal power. If they can't all vote at the Conference then they won't feel empowered and then that's when politics and special interests can step in. By giving everyone a vote no one can control the others.

Beth: Don't forget the spiritual side of all this, that by allowing participation, everyone gets to belong to our spiritual corporation. Just like in groups everyone is equal so they are equal in General Service.

Keith: Ok, I think I got that one now. That's actually pretty cool. Bill and Bob seem to have their act together.

Beth: Norma, why don't you read the next one.

Norma: Good idea. Concept Five "Throughout our world service structure, a traditional "Right of Appeal" ought to prevail, thus assuring us that minority opinion will be heard and that petitions for the redress of personal grievances will be carefully considered."

Keith: Oh, minority opinion, I've learned about that. It's a very neat thing. After a vote, the people who lost, the minority, get to say why they voted the way they did and then the whole group gets a chance to change their vote.

Robert: That's it at the lowest level. This tradition also talks about the 3rd legacy voting. It is also known as going to the hat. When it gets to the fifth vote and down to two people then the name is picked out of a hat. That way no one is really upset afterwards because everyone had an equal chance and God gets to pick the winner. There's also a lot of history involved in how the third legacy evolved. Let me tell you about De Toqueville and the full history behind his influence on this concept. See, he lived at the time of the French revolution. *(Narrator holds up GROAN sign)*

Keith: Wait a minute, I like AA history as much as the next guy but today I'm only interested in events more current than the French revolution. I think I understand how we use minority opinion at the assembly level. I promise I'll read about it later. *(Keith holds up crossed fingers out of Robert's view)* Let's just move on to the next Concept.

Norma: Ok, Concept Six "On behalf of AA as a whole, our General Service Conference has the principal responsibility for the maintenance of our world services, and it traditionally has the final decision respecting large matters of general policy and finance. But the Conference also recognizes that the chief initiative and the active responsibility in most of these matters should be exercised primarily by the trustee members of the Conference when they act among themselves as the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous."

Keith: It seems these concepts are getting longer and harder to understand. I guess the good news is we're half through.

Beth: This is the tradition that talks about how the general service structure is like a corporation. It describes the groups as the stockholders, our delegates are the proxies at the annual meeting, the trustees are the directors of the holding company. So the trustees are the ones who have their hands in the day to day running of the general service organization. The groups and the delegates are trusting them and giving them the responsibility to get the work done. See not so complicated.

Norma: Are we there yet?

Keith: She's on my side!

Beth: If you two don't stop you can just walk the rest of the way. *(Everyone, but Robert, breaks out in laughter)* Well, I guess we really are not a glum lot. So let's move on to the next one. What is Concept Seven?

Norma: "The Conference recognizes that the Charter and the Bylaws of the General Service Board are legal instruments: that the Trustees are thereby fully empowered to manage and conduct all of the

world service affairs of Alcoholics Anonymous. It is further understood that the Conference Charter itself is not a legal document: that it relies instead upon the force of tradition and the power of the A.A. purse for its final effectiveness.”

Keith: Wait, what? The Conference Charter is not a legal document but the General Service Board Charter is? That doesn't make any sense, and you're telling me that AA is still running and that the Conference actually gets any work done. It has to be another AA miracle.

Beth: Remember when you were studying the US government and they talked about balance of power in the 3 branches of government? Well, it's kind of like that. The Trustees do the actual administrative work of AA. The Conference is more a guidance body. They point the direction that AA should go and the trustees make it happen. However to make sure the conference still has real power the Conference is in charge of how the money is spent so the trustees have to get along with the conference to make everything work.

Robert: You forgot to mention that the trustees have the ability to veto the conference if they think they've made a big mistake. So there are checks and double checks so no one group will get total control of everything. So it's all worked pretty well. I expect you don't want to know all the details of the experiment since 1950. *(Narrator holds up GROAN sign)*

Beth, Keith & Norma: You are correct!

Norma: So how about I read concept eight now? *(Everyone nods)* Ok, “The Trustees of the General Service Board act in two primary capacities: (a) With respect to the larger matters of over-all policy and finance, they are the principal planners and administrators. They and their primary committees directly manage these affairs. (b) But with respect to our separately incorporated and constantly active services, the relation of the Trustees is mainly that of full stock ownership and of custodial oversight which they exercise through their ability to elect all directors of these entities.”

Keith: Ouch! I think this one has my eye permanently twitching!

Norma: Do you want me to read it again?

Keith: Nooooooooooooooooo.

Robert: Stop being such a baby. It's important to know this stuff. Remember your GSR responsibilities!

Keith: The old GSR didn't mention any of this stuff. She never said anything about the concepts.

Beth: Well when it comes time for the Conference agenda items and nominating trustees and such things you'll have a much better idea what is going on. You'll understand how important Trustees are and what they are supposed to do. It's good for you!

Keith: Groan (*Narrator holds up GROAN sign*). Ok, ok, let's keep going.

Beth: It's not so bad really. The board is supposed to plan, manage and execute. The trustees don't have the time nor are they paid to deal with day to day running of AA. That's why it uses the words "custodial oversight". They do this by electing directors for AA World Services and the AA Grapevine.

Robert: then each of these has its own Charter, money, people, etc.

Keith: What? More charters! I feel a headache coming on.

Norma: Before that happens let's move on to Concept Nine. "Good service leaders, together with sound and appropriate methods of choosing them, are at all levels indispensable for our future functioning and safety. The primary world service leadership once exercised by the founders of AA must necessarily be assumed by the Trustees of the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous."

Beth: This is a really important concept and relates to you directly. It even mentions GSR's in the explanation in the service manual. Without you, the DCM's and the delegates, AA couldn't function. You are the foundation of the service structure. You pick the delegates and then things go "down" the food chain from there. It's critical that groups have a GSR and that they try to pick good ones.

Robert: To quote Bill when electing people to service, "Who are the best qualified people that we can name? This should be the thought of all." See why it's so important you understand the concepts as well as the traditions – you need to be the best representative of your group you can be to live up to being an AA leader. You need to read in Concept Nine the piece Bill wrote; "Leadership in AA: Ever A Vital Need". Bill talks about the qualities of leadership.

Keith: I'll read it during the elections. There's always a lot of down time while they are counting the votes. Especially the first one or two ballots when there are more votes than people who are allowed to vote.

Norma: That's a good idea. That's always a boring part. I'm going read Concept Ten now. "Every service responsibility should be matched by an equal service authority – the scope of such authority to be always well defined whether by tradition, by resolution, by specific job description or by appropriate charters and bylaws."

Robert: Now this is a good one. Let's talk about responsibility, authority and ultimate authority (my favorite), influence, and pretty much, who is in charge of what and how much power do they have. Bill and Bob went to an extreme to make sure that all aspects of service would have just the right amount of power to get their jobs done.

Beth: At the end of the chapter Bill describes it as "...the "group conscience" as the ultimate authority and the "trusted servant" as the delegated authority. One cannot function without the other."

Keith: Phew, that wasn't so bad. What's next?

Norma: Concept Eleven "While the Trustees hold final responsibility for AA's world service administration, they should always have the assistance of the best possible standing committees, corporate service directors, executives, staffs and consultants. Therefore the composition of these underlying committees and members, the manner of their induction into service, the systems of their rotation, the way in which they are related to each other, the special rights and duties of our executives, staffs and consultants, together with a proper basis for the financial compensation of these special workers, will always be matters for serious care and concern."

Keith: (*Looking in his service manual*) This is a really, really long chapter! Is there really that much that can be said on this topic?

Robert: Ok, hang on kiddies. We're going to talk about AA's service structure. (Narrator hold up GROAN sign). I'm just going to ignore your groaning. Here's what you need to know. The standing committees are Nominating, Finance, Public Information, Literature, CPC/Treatment/Special Needs, General Service Conference, Archives, Int'l Conventions/Regional Forums, Corrections, International and General Sharing Session. The AA World Service organization is described here, as well as the AA Grapevine. It's a long chapter compared to the earlier ones but it really goes into detail on how it all came about and how everything relates to each other. It's amazing how things that don't work in the real world do work in AA.

Norma: I guess there's more reading to do while waiting for election counts. We're getting pretty close to the assembly. We might as well finish up. I'll read the last concept now. Concept Twelve, "General Warranties of the Conference: in all its proceedings, the General Service conference shall observe the spirit of AA tradition, taking great care that the conference never becomes the seat of perilous wealth or power, ; that sufficient operating funds, plus an ample reserve, be its prudent financial principle; that none of the Conference Members shall ever be placed in a position of unqualified authority over any of the others; that all important decisions be reached by discussion vote and whenever possible, by substantial unanimity; that no Conference action ever be personally punitive or an incitement to public controversy; that though the Conference may act for the service of Alcoholics Anonymous, it shall never perform any acts of government; and that like the Society of Alcoholics Anonymous which it serves, the Conference itself will always remain democratic in thought and action."

Beth: And there you have it, the six warranties. (*Narrator holds up APPAUSE sign*)

Keith: Hey, that's cheating. They are squeezing six into one. That's not fair. That's really 17 not 12!

Robert: Quit your whining.

Beth: And the real kicker is it is actually Article 12 from the Conference Charter.

Keith: So they are having them do double duty?

Beth: Well they are really important and only the AA groups can change them.

Beth: The warrantees are considered as vital to AA as the traditions, at least in terms of world service. They are considered our Bill of Rights, so to speak. They are a way to try to ensure that world services will work on prudence and spirituality. They are part of the foundation of AA and why after all these years we still function as a democratic organization. By spiritual power the Concept refers to its trusted servants as being humble, unselfish and dedicated. They lead by example and not mandate.

Robert: You guys really need to review these warranties. They are critical to AA and as GSR's you really need to understand what they mean. I know it's a lot to expect from you, but you should put them at the top of your reading list. Let me go into more detail. *(Narrator holds up GROAN sign)*

Beth: Hey look! We have arrived at the Area Assembly. Let's go in and put those Concepts to work!

(Narrator holds up applause sign)