

# ANONYMITY GUIDELINES OVERVIEW

## **AA Tradition 11 tells us:**

“WE NEED ALWAYS MAINTAIN PERSONAL ANONYMITY AT THE LEVEL OF PRESS, RADIO, AND FILMS”.

“AREA 76 RECOGNIZES THIS ALSO TO INCLUDE TV, WEB, AND SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES”.

## **Tradition 12 tells us:**

“ANONYMITY IS THE SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION OF ALL OUR TRADITIONS EVER REMINDING US TO PLACE PRINCIPLES BEFORE PERSONALITIES”.

Anonymity in our fellowship is of paramount importance for the fellowship and the individual member. Lapses of anonymity by using full name and AA affiliation at the public level could cause immense harm to the fellowship by placing the wrong image before the public on issues in which Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion or interest. At the individual level, many members might be harmed if their anonymity is broken in the areas of employment or professional, civic, or personal standing.

Many members are not overly concerned with their anonymity at the personal level. That is their choice, but they must be cautious that another member’s anonymity is not compromised along with their own.

Anonymity at the public level must always be observed. Do not use your full name or anyone else’s full name at any time at the public level. Whether this is at the media level, public speaking level or at the 12th step work level.

We of Alcoholics Anonymous, of course, cannot tell an individual member what he can or must do, but we do suggest that you protect anonymity by every means possible to protect individual members and the fellowship in general.

Anonymity in many respects is common sense and a respect for others.

Thank you for your help in observing Anonymity!

## ANONYMITY SUGGESTIONS FOR THE AREA76 WEBSITE

Last names SHOULD NOT be used on any part of the site accessible to the public (unsecured side).

The (SECURED) side of the website, while not in use now, will be, if used, double password protected.

Great care should be exercised in the use of last names, and last names will not be used except with that persons express permission.

The website will use a disclaimer that states, "Area 76 does not claim responsibility for content of any pages developed by any of its 12 districts or any information provided by its committees.

## ANONYMITY SUGGESTIONS FOR THE AREA76 TRIBUTARY

Use of last names in article contributor's signatures is highly discouraged.

Contributor's SHOULD NOT use another person's last name. Use of 'titles' may be used when necessary.

The Tributary chairperson, (editor), SHOULD remove ALL last names before submission to the Webmaster for posting on the Area 76 website.

## SOME 'GENERAL' SUGGESTIONS ON ANONYMITY

Never use full name when the fellowship or another person might be implicated in any manner.

Avoid use of full names when corresponding through electronic or printed media except when necessary.

When corresponding through the U.S. Postal Service use the addressee's full name, but do not refer to Alcoholics Anonymous or the person's title. Full names must be used due to USPS regulations.

"Nicknames" at times can be a giveaway to a person's identity. Do not use them if there is a chance of compromising another's anonymity.

(Dr. Bob) said there were two ways to break the Anonymity Tradition: (1) by giving your name at the public level of press or radio: (2) by being so anonymous that other drunks cannot reach you.

Dr. Bob and the Good Old Timers, page 264

## » Anonymity and Social Networking Sites

In today's fast-paced, high-tech world, A.A. members are accessing the Internet in ever-growing numbers and in ways that could not have been imagined even ten years ago. Chatting online with members halfway around the globe has become more and more commonplace, and a tremendous amount of information about alcoholism and A.A. is often just a click of the mouse away. However, with the breadth and scope of the Internet have come challenges, and protecting A.A.'s Traditions online is an important subject to many in the Fellowship.

As with many topics of concern throughout A.A., G.S.O. has developed a set of A.A. Guidelines on the Internet (MG-18) based on the shared experience of A.A. members, groups, and committees, covering many of the questions this new technology gives rise to. One such area of concern is the question of anonymity online, particularly as it relates to social networking Web sites, a question which has prompted a more careful look at A.A.'s existing literature and how A.A.'s Traditions can best apply to this popular medium.

"What is the purpose of anonymity in Alcoholics Anonymous?" and "Why is it often referred to as the greatest single protection the Fellowship has to assure its continued existence and growth?"

These questions from the A.A. General Service Conference-approved pamphlet, "Understanding Anonymity," lie at the heart of any discussion about A.A.'s Tradition of Anonymity, whether the discussion centers on a newspaper article or an Internet Web site featuring full names or full-face pictures of A.A. members.

"If we look at the history of A.A., from its beginning in 1935 until now," the pamphlet continues, "it is clear that anonymity serves two different yet equally vital functions:

"At the personal level, anonymity provides protection for all members from identification as alcoholics, a safeguard often of special importance to newcomers.

"At the level of press, radio, TV, films and new media technologies such as the Internet, anonymity stresses the equality in the Fellowship of all members by putting the brake on those who might otherwise exploit their A.A. affiliation to achieve recognition, power, or personal gain."

Regarding the specific question, "What about anonymity online?" the AA Guidelines on the Internet state: "An AA Web site is a public medium, which has the potential for reaching the broadest possible audience and, therefore, requires the same safeguards that we use at the level of press, radio, and film."

Nevertheless, G.S.O. has received numerous communications from concerned AA members regarding anonymity breaks online, inappropriate use of the AA name, and copyrighted/trademarked materials being improperly used on social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, and others. These Web sites offer individuals the chance to post a great deal of personal information about themselves (and others), and these Web sites often allow users to create social networking "groups" and "events" for like-minded individuals. Some members do not post anything that is reflective of AA. In their personal profiles or "status updates," while others feel it is all right to do so, so long as AA is not specifically mentioned.

Says one A.A member, however, "I typed 'Alcoholics Anonymous' in one of the social networking sites and a group came up with over 6,600 members. It assured 'a safe place to discuss' so I thought it was okay. Then I clicked to see who the members were and the page opened to show me first and last names, many with photos."

From there, depending on people's privacy settings, one could easily see personal information about these people, their families, and friends. "I was taught the importance of our Traditions," the concerned AA member relates, "and about keeping this Fellowship the way we found it. . . This page is not what AA is about, in my opinion."

Some AA members feel that social networking sites are a private venue; other members strongly disagree and view them as a public setting. G.S.O.'s AA *Guidelines on the Internet*, state that social networking Web sites "are public in nature."

After being alerted to anonymity break G.S.O. normally forwards the matter to the delegate in the area where the member resides, for the delegate to handle as he or she sees fit. (The area delegate usually sends a loving reminder to the member about the importance of our Eleventh Tradition.)

Regarding the Internet, the current method of handling anonymity breaks at the public level does not apply well on social networking Web sites. Given the popularity achieved by the Internet and the vast numbers of people involved, the question of anonymity has become more and more relevant, and as shared experience within the Fellowship accrues on this rapidly evolving medium of communication, greater focus is being brought to what Bill W. described as "the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions."

As with most matters in AA, regardless of how the Internet and new technology have opened up the kinds of connections one A.A member and another can share, there is great benefit to be found in careful thought and prudent evaluation of a situation that causes concern for so many. Speaking to AA sponsors and friends about how to apply A.A.'s Traditions online hopefully will provide individual members who are utilizing this technology with a greater understanding of how we present ourselves as AA members to anyone-be they AA member or non-AA member-who may "walk" unannounced into the rooms of the Internet's many social networking sites.

As presented in the pamphlet "Understanding Anonymity," regarding anonymity online, the collective conscience of the A.A Fellowship, as expressed through its Conference-approved literature, suggest that "Publicly accessible aspects of the Internet such as Web sites featuring text, graphics, audio and video ought to be considered another form of 'public media.' Thus, they need to be treated in the same manner as press, radio, TV, and films. This means that full names and faces should not be used. However, the level of anonymity in e-mail, online meetings, and chat rooms would be a personal decision."

**A.A. ANONYMITY**

**(ANNOUNCEMENT FOR READING AT MEETINGS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC)**

There may be some here who are not familiar with our Tradition of personal anonymity at the public level:

"Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films."

Thus, we respectfully ask that A.A. speakers and A.A. members not be photographed, videotaped, or identified by full name on audiotapes and in published or broadcast reports of our meetings, including those reports on new media technologies such as the Internet.

The assurance of anonymity is essential in our efforts to help other problem drinkers who may wish to share our recovery program with us. In addition, our Tradition of anonymity reminds us that "A.A. principles come before personalities."

**Adhering to these "guidelines" might prevent a violation of the 11th Tradition. Help protect our fellowship by remembering and practicing anonymity. Thanks for your cooperation.**