

IDEA TO REALITY

FACILITATOR: Many AA members when they first encounter the Agenda Topics can't see just what they can actually accomplish. Indeed, many of the topics do involve just discussion and review, but there are those that propose some sort of change also. The most tangible results of Agenda Topics is our literature. Since AA does not own buildings and other property, our literature and the precious message of recovery contained therein is the only thing that AA truly owns. Since the Big Book was published in 1939, we have now amassed many other books, videos, pamphlets, booklets, directories, service materials, and numerous other ways to fulfill our primary purpose of staying sober and helping other alcoholics achieve sobriety.

But these literature items do not just fall down from the sky miraculously. They are the result of thoughtful analysis of need by AA members who then argue...uh, that is...lovingly discuss the topics which are then taken to the General Service Conference by the Area Delegates. They then may or may not be implemented. If they are, they become Conference Advisory Actions. If they do not, we just keep talking about them forever. So, how do agenda topics come about? Well, sometimes like this: Meet Johnny Jailbird

JOHNNY JAILBIRD: Hi, I'm Johnny and I'm an alcoholic. Man, it would be really cool if I could have my very own Big Book that I could keep in my cell. But the prison stopped allowing hardcover books in since my cellmate brutally attacked that guard with a volume of *War and Peace*. He got 5 more years added on to his sentence for Assault with a Literary Weapon. If only the Big Book was available in paperback...

FACILITATOR: After discussion by the groups, soft-cover Big Books (*hold up soft-cover BB*) were approved in 1986 and many alcoholic inmates as well as reassured prison guards have been thankful ever since. Another need for literature was expressed by Georgina Gargantuangoggles:

GEORGINA GARGANTUANGOGGLES: Hi, everyone my name is Georgina and I'm an alcoholic. I attended a *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* book study last week and when it was my turn to read I misread Step Three as "The only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop stinking". I was SOOO embarrassed and it's only because I couldn't see the words. It would be great if that book was made in large print...

FACILITATOR: (*hold up large-print 12 x 12*) In 1991, Georgina saw her wish become reality and she can now attend book studies without fear of humiliation. Ready for another example? Next up is Nathan Nonbeliever:

NATHAN NONBELEIVER: I'm Nathan and I'm an alcoholic. I'm also an atheist and early in my sobriety I had real issues with saying the Lord's Prayer at the end of meetings and all the chanting like we're in some sort of weird cult and the idea that if I stayed around long enough, I would "come around" and be a believer in God. Well, I have been sober for many years and I'm still an atheist and boy does it piss a lot of people off. It would be nice for newcomers who are atheists to have a pamphlet specifically for them...

FACILITATOR: This idea has gone before the fellowship numerous times and as yet has not been accepted. Most feel there is either not enough need expressed or that there is sufficient information already available such as the "We Agnostics" chapter in the Big Book. Still, there is always hope for Nathan because no topic ever truly dies in AA. Let's look at yet another example, here is Henrietta Hazelton:

HENRIETTA HAZELTON: Hi, I'm Henrietta and I'm a grateful recovering alkie. I really enjoy my inspirational book that I read every day. The only problem is, every time I talk about it at a meeting, it starts a fight because it isn't conference-approved. Yesterday at my home group, an oldtimer told me that if I brought up that book again she would slap all the taste out of my mouth. A daily, inspirational book written by AA members for AA members would be wonderful...

FACILITATOR: (*hold up Daily Reflections*) *Daily Reflections*, which was born in 1990, fulfilled Henrietta's wish and stopped threats of violence in her home group. Next up is Fran Newbie:

FRAN NEWBIE: Hi, I'm Fran and I'm an alcoholic. I'm a newcomer and I like the fellowship of AA and everything, but MAN! It would definitely be cool if we could, like, have some stories in the Big Book from people whose info about World War II comes from *Saving Private Ryan* and not first-hand accounts. I mean, I don't have anything against older people, but reading stories from a broader spectrum of members who represent AA as it is today would be off the hook...

FACILITATOR: (hold up 4th ed. BB) In 2001, Fran got her wish as the 4th edition of the Big Book was published. Here is one last example by William Webwonder or WWW as his friends call him:

WILLIAM WEBWONDER: I'm William; alcoholic. I think it would be great if the 4th edition of the Big Book was posted on AA's website. Not only could I save five bucks I could tell my sponsor I was reading the book online instead of just mindlessly surfing the internet.

FACILITATOR: Saving a few bucks and lying to your sponsor are not the best motivations for wanting change in AA, but what do YOU think about this topic? This is actually one of this year's agenda topics.

Now, we've obviously simplified the actual process of how ideas turn into agenda topics and possibly conference advisory actions, but hopefully you get the gist of it. The general idea is that while the way in which we are attempting to fulfill our primary purpose is good, it may sometimes be the enemy of the best. In AA, we are not afraid to take an annual look at how we doing. So talk with your GSR and let your voice in AA be heard! Thank you.