

KBDM – Should WSC give conceptual approval to develop a new daily reader that reflects the diversity of our fellowship?

Framing/Background: During the March 2012 conference call, the Literature Committee began discussing a suggestion for a new daily reader. The Committee considered the fact that it takes an average of three to five years to develop a daily reader, primarily because of the time it takes to receive enough suitable, thought-provoking sharings. The discussion continued for five more conference calls, using the Knowledge-Based Decision-Making Process to Reach an Informed Group Conscience.

In an attempt to consider what the needs of the fellowship might be five years from now, the Committee took into account that a new reader could give members an opportunity to share on topics that they feel are under-represented in our current readers. A reader addressing the many voices of Al-Anon could bring forward all the conversations about diversity that have taken place at recent World Service Conferences and throughout our fellowship. Although Al-Anon welcomes everyone affected by another's alcoholism, not all segments of the population are fully represented in Al-Anon's membership. This includes men, people under 50 years old, and other minorities based on ethnicity, race, or sexual orientation.

The Literature Committee felt that a new daily reader could provide an opportunity for all members to express what Al-Anon is today, with topics that are pertinent to them now, much as *One Day at a Time in Al-Anon* (B-6) did in 1968, *Courage to Change* (B-16) did in 1992; and *Hope for Today* (B-27) did in 2002. This proposed book could provide a voice for various minorities within the program and illustrate the diversity of relationships that lead people to Al-Anon, while still focusing on what we have in common—both in problems and solutions.

What follows are responses from the Literature Committee members to the Knowledge-Based Decision-Making questions on this idea. In general, these comments are based on English-speaking realities in the World Service Conference structure, and may not reflect the realities of other structures (e.g. some structures only have one daily reader translated for their use). They show the diverse and sometimes contradictory opinions of the Committee members in the course of the discussion, and reflect the opinions of the individuals who gave them.

Question 1: What do we know about our members or prospective members' needs that is relevant to developing a daily reader that reflects the diversity of our fellowship?

- The fellowship is much more diverse than it was when it began.
- The general population is currently more diverse than our membership.
- Alcoholism does not discriminate, and affects a wide variety of people from all walks of life.
- At first, attendees often feel unique. Isolation and “feeling different” are among the effects of alcoholism for many members and potential members. In some ways, we are all different, but over time, we discover our common humanity.

- Members want literature with which they can identify. The more that members relate and feel included, the more likely they will remain in Al-Anon.
- Our members like daily readers. They are widely used personally and in meetings. Daily readers remain among our best-selling literature, with the three Al-Anon daily readers among our top five books.
- The WSO has received numerous requests over the last eleven years for a new daily reader. The Literature Committee considered all these requests, but only recommended one of them to the World Service Conference (a 2004 motion for a daily reader for parents, which did not carry). Those requests varied on what the focus of the reader should be, but most have been for specific categories of members (e.g. parents, men, gays/lesbians/bisexuals/transgendered, and grandchildren of alcoholics). A daily reader reflecting our diversity could include all these members without putting the focus on any of them.
- In order to make a positive decision to join a group or organization, people usually have a need to be able to identify with the group. Based on that, it seems that minorities, defined in the broadest sense of that word, would have a need to see themselves identified in our literature.
- Based on sales, the most popular daily reader is *Courage to Change*. Some members have expressed that they don't identify with *One Day at a Time in Al-Anon* because it primarily shares from the perspective of the wives of alcoholics. Yet even though some members may not identify with the circumstances in the sharings in *One Day at a Time in Al-Anon*, many express that they benefit from the recovery in those sharings.
- If there is less interest in *One Day at a Time in Al-Anon*, it is probably due to members not relating to it. Members have shared that they are not using the book because of the "old language" and life situations, and that the information seems outdated and irrelevant to them.
- The newer daily readers contain more diverse sharings, but there are members who don't identify with the newer books, either.

Question 2: What do we know about our current resources and our vision for the organization that is relevant to this discussion?

- Conference Approved Literature currently includes five daily readers: *One Day at a Time in Al-Anon* (B-6), *Alateen—a day at a time* (B-10), *Courage to Change* (B-16), *Living Today in Alateen* (B-26), and *Hope for Today* (B-27). The Al-Anon daily readers remain among our most popular books.
- Gathering stories from members for any new project is time intensive. The CAL process to produce a new daily reader takes approximately four to five years.
- Resources are best used when we think abundantly. We move toward abundance when we are willing to learn from everyone, not just from the people who seem most like us.

- Our most valuable resource is our members. When they share their experience, strength, and hope, it is very powerful.
- Our literature is intended to be responsive to identified needs and understandable by a broad-based reading audience. It is written by our membership based on personal experience, strength, and hope in solving our common problem of living with the disease of alcoholism.
- The language in *One Day at a Time in Al-Anon* (B-6) is somewhat dated and the book no longer sells as well as it once did.
- Our fellowship is heavily dependent on literature sales to fund our WSO and the work that it does. While this should never be a primary reason for producing literature, it is a consideration.
- Our Declaration states, “Let It Begin with Me. When anyone, anywhere reaches out for help, let the hand of Al-Anon and Alateen always be there, and Let It Begin with Me.”
- Our Board Vision Statement is: “All people affected by someone else’s drinking will find help and recovery in every community”
- Our Board Mission Statement is: “Anticipate the future and Al-Anon’s place in it and ensure that the necessary resources are available.”
- Al-Anon members share a common desire to reach out to others who could benefit from knowing about our program of recovery.
- In order to flourish and grow we need to continually reach out to those in need of this program, even when they aren't "like us" in other ways (in other words, the principal of inclusion vs. exclusion).

Question 3: What do we know about the current realities and evolving dynamics of the world and our fellowship that is relevant to this discussion? What are the Pros and Cons?

- The awareness of who is or has been affected by alcoholism has changed over the last several of decades. Alcoholism is no longer just a spouse or couples issue.
- The world is getting more diverse by virtue of race, ethnicity, and religion, as well as lifestyles and family structures. Gay households, single parents who never married, grandparents raising children, and people with physical disabilities are other examples of diversity that are changing in our fellowship.
- Al-Anon has always been an inclusive fellowship, open to anyone affected by someone’s drinking, but it is not as diverse as the world around us.
- Most larger cities are quite diverse but groups often do not reflect this in their membership. Smaller communities tend to reflect the current make-up of our groups. The International Convention’s big meetings did very little to reflect diversity.

- As the population changes, so should our fellowship. If we are to maintain our relevancy, we need to embrace diversity.
- In order to attract a more diverse group of members, they must be able to relate. Having a more diverse membership would strengthen our program.
- A daily reader reflecting Al-Anon's diversity could help us learn from people that we might never otherwise have the opportunity to communicate with. This could be a vehicle for making meetings more beneficial for all members.
- We want to be inclusive and relevant to a broad range of people affected by the disease of alcoholism—the disease makes no distinctions, and our membership should reflect that.
- The ways in which our members learn and live the Al-Anon program are as diverse as the membership itself. The distribution of information is becoming increasingly electronically oriented, and likely to be more-so in the coming years. The book could be presented in a variety of formats in addition to hard copy.
- If the Conference carried a motion for a daily reader in 2014, the earliest the book would most likely be ready would be 2018. This is the year of our next International Convention. We have introduced new literature at all five Al-Anon International Conventions so far, as well as at many of the A.A. International Conventions, beginning in 1955 with our very first book. The introduction of new literature at International Conventions generates excitement among attendees, which carries back to the groups through word-of-mouth.
- It is important to see that Al-Anon is made up of a wide variety of members, even though we are all there for the same reason.

PROS:

- The world is changing very rapidly. In times of rapid change, alcoholism increases and families of all types are affected. A reader reflecting diversity might be welcomed by those overwhelmed by change.
- A daily reader that includes the sharings of siblings, grandparents, co-workers, friends, and others could reach a wider audience and help people see themselves in the reading, making them feel more welcome.
- While most members are not demanding a new daily reader, people don't always realize what they want until they actually see the material.
- If we wait long enough for a unanimous outcry for a new daily reader, we will always be behind the times.

CONS:

- Groups located where changes aren't as rapid might be more resistant to change. A reader reflecting diversity might not be welcomed by those resistant to change.

- Some members feel that when we talk about diversity, we divide rather than unite. The 2004 Conference motion for a daily reader for parents did not carry because many Conference members felt it separated and divided.
- By being more inclusive, we could be distracted by outside issues instead of focusing on our commonality. We might focus more on personalities than principles.
- There is a lot of Al-Anon literature available, and it appears that many members are not using it. We could focus resources on raising awareness of available, underutilized literature, rather than creating a new piece.
- Having four different daily readers doesn't seem like "Keep It Simple," and may create too many options. Members will have to decide which is the right one, or use them all, etc.
- There does not appear to be a lot of clamor from the fellowship for a new daily reader.
- People don't necessarily include specific details about their circumstances when writing about their experience, strength, and hope.

Question 4: What are the ethical implications of our choices? In other words – Will our decision be consistent with our spiritual principles?

- Our fellowship continues its growth on a worldwide level. Having stories from a wide variety of members around the world could show how the fellowship has continued to grow and change, and yet remain universal.
- We want Al-Anon to be available to all who might need it. Tradition Three states that the only requirement for membership is that there be a problem of alcoholism in a relative or friend. We want our program and its literature to be as inclusive as possible.
- We need to be cautious that we don't continually produce literature that focuses on how we are different, but rather on our common principle purpose. However, if everything we publish is written from a majority perspective, we run the risk of sending an unintended message that Al-Anon serves mostly or only the majority, and that message is certainly contrary to our spiritual principles.
- In the spirit of anonymity, we all walk on even ground, regardless of intellectual, financial, or social status. There are no in-groups in Al-Anon. We welcome all to our fellowship and benefit from the sharing of all. Inclusion in as wide a spirit as possible supports the spiritual principle of abundance and humility in the sense that a Higher Power is best able to teach us through others when we include all in this process.
- We strive to be forward-thinking.
- We have an obligation to demonstrate beyond rhetoric that Al-Anon is for everyone.
- Reaching out to everyone has always been one of the spiritual principles. This book would be another way to do that.

- Continuing to learn is consistent with our principles.
- The Board Mission Statement asserts that we “anticipate the future.”
- Our Declaration states, “Let It Begin with Me. When anyone, anywhere reaches out for help, let the hand of Al-Anon and Alateen always be there, and Let It Begin with Me.”
- According to the descriptive text of Concept Eleven in the *Service Manual*, the charge of the Literature Committee is to “create material to meet new needs or changing conditions. . . . Broadly speaking, their mission is to see that every aspect of the Al-Anon program of recovery is presented in comprehensive written material for our members, friends, and the world at large. Our literature is a principal means for facilitating Al-Anon growth, unity, and service.”
- Page 110 in *One Day at a Time in Al-Anon* states, “Al-Anon is for people—people who have a problem they want to solve by sharing their experiences, strengths, and hopes with other people. The more varied the experience, the greater the strength and hope.”

Question 5: What do we wish we knew, but don't?

- Are there members (or potential members) that are unable to identify with the sharings in our current daily readers?
- Is our membership diverse enough presently (86% Female, 1% Black, 5% Latino) to obtain sharings for a daily reader that includes diversity?
- Are four Al-Anon daily readers just too many to choose from?
- Is a new book really warranted by need, or do we just get bored easily?
- Will members welcome it, buy it, and use it?
- Will it sell well in print, or will we need to make it available only in an electronic version?
- How could we encourage as diverse a group as possible to submit sharings?
- Being sensitive to the diversity of others is a tricky business. Even people who have been familiar with other cultures for years find they keep learning. How can we ensure that submissions and the review process itself are sensitive to diversity?
- Will the book appeal to a broad cross section of our membership, even though it includes a conscious effort to include those who are under-represented (race, gender, sexual identity, nationality, geographically under represented, et. al.)?
- Would more diversity in our fellowship expand our outreach and have exponential effects?
- What's different now (compared to 2002, when we published *Hope for Today*), and what will be different in five years? What technologies will be available and user-friendly? What needs are we not responding to now?