

‘How Are We Doing As a Group?’ Let an Inventory Point the Way

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One of the greatest gifts A.A. gives us is the means to be honest with ourselves and others—something that must happen before we can arrive at the group conscience so essential to A.A. unity and survival. But what exactly is the group conscience? How does it differ from a group opinion or a majority vote? And what is the best way to “get” there? Not always understood, group conscience is a basic and powerful concept that makes it possible for people of diverse backgrounds and temperament to rise above personal ambition and to unite in one common purpose: to stay sober and help the still-suffering alcoholic to achieve sobriety. As a way to achieve it, the idea of a “searching and fearless moral inventory” threads throughout the A.A. program of recovery. First we are guided to take personal stock in Step Four, and to continue the process on a daily basis in Step Ten. On a collective level we repeat the process in Tradition Two, which states, “For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. . . .” In essence, just as periodic inventory is essential to personal growth, so too is group inventory vital to maximum group harmony and effectiveness in carrying the A.A. message. Says California’s Linda S., whose Sierra Step Sisters Group in El Dorado recently did a painstaking inventory based on the collective experience of other groups, much of it obtained from the General Service Office: “This was my first time being involved in an inventory; it was stressful but so rewarding.” When the idea was first proposed she relates, “members expressed reluctance ‘to stir the pot,’ as one put it, but as the women compiled a list of questions to be inventoried, in the order in which they wished to address them, you could feel their interest grow.” Linda emphasizes that the key to the success of the group’s first inventory meeting, held last April, was in having an A.A. member from another group, former Northern Interior California delegate Inez Y., to keep the focus objective. During the session, which lasted about an hour and a half, each member had two-to three minutes to question and comment—with no Cross-talk allowed—as we went around the room.” Most of that inventory meeting was devoted to the question “Do we take time to talk to newcomers?” reports Linda, who says the ideas that emerged were then aired at the group’s next business meeting. “Having arrived at a consensus, we voted to prepare introductory packets for newcomers and have greeters at the door to welcome and make them feel at home,” she says with a smile. “Now the newcomers are being bombarded with attention whether they want it or not.” So successful was the group’s first inventory meeting, Linda reports, that now it is being held regularly, alternating bimonthly with the business meeting. Participants in another inventory conducted in June At the Northeast Regional Forum in Rochester, New York, found that there are many ways of moderating an inventory for a group, district or area, just as there are many ways for individuals to use our personal inventory Steps. Commented one A.A. who attended the Forum: “The best suggestion I can give is to just *do* it. It can always be done again. Regular inventoring is Good for unity and good for love and service. No matter how thorny the problems, an inventory can provide answers. Experience shows it has the same strengthening; freeing effect on the group that taking Step Four has on the individual member. Many groups that regularly take a look at themselves use the questions suggested in the pamphlet “The A.A. Group” (reprinted in this issue on page 10). And as Step Ten points out, “inventory-taking is not always done in red ink. It’s a poor day indeed when we haven’t done *something* right. . . .” Numerous inventories are taken in the context of a sharing session, where, *The A.A. Service Manual* (page S36) explains, “. . . everyone has a chance to use their experience, strength and hope to contribute ideas and opinions about the welfare of A.A. . . . Each person offers an opinion and never needs to defend it.” Some members experienced in doing an inventory suggest that participants who share about a group problem be Encouraged to offer a possible solution as well. On sensitive issues it is suggested that the group work slowly, discouraging formal motions until a clear sense of its collective view emerges from the inventory process—and always placing principles before personalities. The result rests on more than arithmetic—a “yes” or “no” count—because all members are encouraged To be heard. Their ultimate decision is the spiritual expression of the group conscience.

Note: Some A.A. groups find it helpful to review the “Twelve Traditions Checklist” at the time of a group inventory. A copy of the Checklist is enclosed with this issue, courtesy of the A.A. Grapevine, Inc.