

# The Responsibility Declaration: An Enduring Theme

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By most measures, Alcoholics Anonymous in 1965 had achieved success that seemed beyond the wildest dreams of its two co-founders thirty years earlier. Worldwide membership stood at an estimated 350,000, the Fellowship had become a well-known institution in North America, and many in the recovery field believed that A.A. was the clearest and best answer for alcoholism. With 10,000 members meeting in Toronto early in July for the fourth International Convention, it seemed a good time to bask in self-congratulation and gloat about A.A.'s achievements. The achievements were noted, but the Toronto Convention was also devoted to serious inventory and, especially, the theme of Responsibility. The Responsibility Declaration was formally introduced there by Bill W. It states,

“I am Responsible. When anyone, anywhere,  
reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A.  
always to be there. And for that: I am responsible.”

The author of the pledge was the late Al S., a former trustee of the General Service Board, who told the story behind the saying at the sixth International Convention in Denver in 1975. “A statement (on Responsibility) was wanted that would be emotionally gripping to A.A.s without imposing any musts,” he recalled. He tried and discarded several approaches before finally arriving at the thought that it should be personal choice and responsibility—“I” instead of “we.”

Ten thousand A.A.s joined hands at the Toronto Convention to repeat the declaration, and it has since been distributed throughout the Fellowship and is reprinted in A.A. pamphlets and The Grapevine. Wallet cards (M-21; \$7 per 100) and a heavy cardboard 19”x29” placard (M-10; \$8.65) carrying the declaration are available from G.S.O. Why was the declaration written and accepted at that time? A probable reason is that Bill W. and other A.A. leaders had detected new problems that cast a shadow over A.A.'s future ability to help alcoholics. In 1963, a national magazine had published a highly critical cover story about A.A., suggesting that it was no longer working well. Nonalcoholic professionals in the field were disturbed by the attitudes and actions of some A.A.s, and one of them would even speak at the Toronto Convention. Some hinted that it was time for A.A. to “take its inventory.”

Bill W. discussed this issue thoroughly in “Responsibility Is Our Theme,” in the July 1965 Grapevine, (The Language of the Heart, p. 328). He noted how we might have alienated people through our arrogant conviction that we were always right and had the only answers. We needed to correct such attitudes and behavior in order to continue reaching the alcoholic who still suffers. Bill, far from blaming the Fellowship at large, explained how mistakes of his own had often courted disaster. “If I inventory A.A.'s shortcomings, be also assured that I am also taking stock of my own.

I know that my errors of yesterday still have their effect; that my shortcomings of today may likewise affect our future. So it is, with each and all of us.” Our next responsibility, he pointed out, was “that of intelligently and lovingly sponsoring each man or woman who comes among us asking help. The care and concern with which we individually and collectively do this can make all the difference.”