General Service Representative (GSR)

The strength of our whole A.A. service structure starts with the group and with the general service representative (G.S.R.) the group elects. I cannot emphasize too strongly the G.S.R.’s importance.

-Bill W. on General Service and the G.S.R.

THE G.S.R. PREAMBLE

We are the General Service Representatives. We are the link in the chain of communication for our groups with the General Service Conference and the world of A.A. We realize the ultimate authority in A.A. is a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. As trusted servants, our job is to bring information to our groups in order that they may reach an informed group conscience. In passing along this group conscience, we are helping to maintain the unity and strength so vital to our fellowship.

Let us, therefore, have the patience and tolerance to listen to others share, the courage to speak up when we have something to share, and the wisdom to do what is right for our groups as a whole.

KEEP IT SIMPLE!

A group ought to choose its G.S.R. with as much care as it does in choosing its treasurer. Both are custodians of the group’s welfare. The G.S.R. should have knowledge of the A.A. service structure, the traditions and the program.

The G.S.R. is elected for a two-year term, during which they should hold no other office. Two or three years of sobriety are usually required. Ability, experience and willingness to serve are essential. The election of the G.S.R. (and Alternate G.S.R.) usually takes place just before the election of the Area Conference Delegate.

If the group does not understand its place in A.A. or the service structure, the G.S.R. needs to inform and guide the group.

The attitude of the group determines how well its G.S.R. can function. Many group members actively interfere with their own G.S.R.’s efforts to involve the group in legitimate A.A. business and the future of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Their reason is usually an objection to *“all that politics”,*or *“We don’t need all that stuff”*, and finally they will say, “Dr. Bob said ‘keep it simple'”. Somehow the false A.A. “slogan” of “Keep It Simple” has become an all-purpose cop-out and an effective argument against love and service.

Bill W. was concerned about the exhortation to “keep it simple”. In a Grapevine article (July 1970) Bill says:

A return to the kitchen table era would bring no hope for simplicity. It could mean wholesale irresponsibility, disharmony and ineffectiveness.

Let’s picture this:

* – ***No definite guiding principles.***
* – ***No literature.***
* – ***No meeting halls.***
* – ***No group fund.***
* – ***No planned sponsorship.***
* – ***No stable leadership.***
* – ***No clear relations with hospitals.***
* – ***No sound public relations.***
* – ***No local services.***
* – ***No world services.***

*“Returning to that early-time brand of simplicity would be as absurd as selling the steering wheel, the gas tank, and the tires off our family car. The car would be simplified all right – no more gas and repair bills, either! But our car wouldn’t go anyplace. The family life would hardly be simplified, it would instantly become confused and complicated.”*

WHAT DOES A NEW G.S.R. DO?

First, they register their Group and themselves as the G.S.R. of the group.  
They contact their Area Mailing Secretary.  
They do the homework; they get and read copies of the pamphlet *The AA Group* and the loose-leaf *The Group Handbook*. A new group gets free copies of the *Handbook*, *The A.A. Service Manual*, and the *A.A. Directory* in the group initial registration package, which includes a free subscription to Box 459 for the G.S.R.

If the group is being re-registered you can get a copy of the *“The Group Handbook”* **(M-36, $11.00),** *“The A.A. Service Manual”* **(BM-31, $1.55)** and the *A.A. Directory***(MD-4, $1.35)** from AA World Services, Inc., Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York N.Y. 10163 or from Central Office, 2245 Gilbert Ave Ste 304, Cincinnati, OH 45206.

Also, it is a good idea to get a group subscription to *“Box 459”*, the GSO newsletter. A group subscription (10 copies per issue) is **$6.00/yr**. It contains much information of interest and is useful to the group.

They find out who is the D.C.M. of their District, when and where the District business meetings are held. They go to all District meetings with their Alternate.

They give reports to inform the group about what is happening, regardless of opposition. It may be necessary to confront the group about your right to report. Some G.S.R.s have been creative in getting around opposition. One G.S.R. duplicated reports and left them lying around as though by accident. Curiosity did the job.

There is ample opportunity to participate at the District level if the District is host to a District Workshop, an Area Assembly, or a Conference. They require a lot of planning, publicity, actually putting the event on, etc.

They go to all Area Assemblies with their Alternate (it takes 2 years to learn what to do).

The Fall Assembly of odd year’s (e.g. 2003) is an election Assembly. The new Alternate Delegate and Area Officers are elected by the G.S.R.s. They need experience gained by attending business meetings at the District and Area level to pick the best people for the jobs.

They try to lead the Group in being a working part of A.A.

And finally, the pay off: They are doing something that is real to solve the problem of passing this program on. This is real 12th Step work. You meet people from all over; the future leaders in A.A. nearly all of our Trustees, Delegates, GSO staff, and Area Officeholders began their service as the group G.S. R. You need to start there if you wish to serve A.A. as a whole.

MEETINGS

A G.S.R. goes to meetings – lots of meetings. Being a good G.S.R. requires that you attend the service meetings that are held for you and your fellow G.S.R.’s. They include:

* YOUR OWN GROUP MEETINGS: This seems to be obvious, but it is not. But, from time to time, someone is elected G.S.R. who mistakenly thinks that it is an honorary post, which is bestowed for its prestige value. It is not. It is a job that requires a lot of involvement. Some of this is in your own group. You supply the knowledge of what is happening in the neighboring groups, what is the usual response to local problems that other groups have encountered. You may need to be the voice of the group conscience when your group has a problem. You should be one of the voices of reason and responsibility in the group. The group has given you some authority. Use it.
* DISTRICT MEETINGS: The Alternate G.S.R. should attend meetings with the G.S.R., learning the job so that the group can have an experienced representative when the present G.S.R.’s term is up. The Alternate votes in the District meeting and Assemblies when the G.S.R. is absent. It is the responsibility of the G.S.R. to notify the G.S.R.A. when the G.S.R. cannot attend a meeting.

HOW WE WORK

The basic unit is the autonomous A.A. Group, with 10-20 members in the average sized Group.

The G.S.R. is the General Service Representative for the Group. The G.S.R.s represent their Groups at the District Meetings and Area Assemblies.

Every Group has one vote in District Committee and Area Assembly meetings. The G.S.R. or the Alternate G.S.R. casts this vote, if the G.S.R. is absent. They participate in the making of A.A. policy. They carry news and opinions to and from the Group, forming the link between their Group and the rest of A.A.

The Area Committee, at the direction of the assembly, is responsible for the Area business, the Assembly Agenda, organizing the annual Area 56 Mini-Conference and hosting the Ohio State Convention every four years. The Area Committee is composed of the D.C.M.s or Alternates, Treasurer, Recording Secretary, Mailing Secretary, Chairperson/Alternate Delegate and Area Delegate. In this area, committee members, excluding the Delegate, are elected by the G.S.R.s at the Assembly meeting.

Included in the Area Committee are the chairpersons which are appointed by the incoming Delegate.

The SW Ohio, Area 56 is actually one of the 93 delegate Areas in the United States and Canada, to send a Delegate to the yearly General Service Conference of A.A. in New York City. The Area 56 Delegate is the representative of over ***280*** A.A. Groups.

The Conference meets for six days each April. There are 142 voting members: 93 elected Delegates from the A.A. membership, 21 Trustees, 9 A.A. World Services Inc. and Grapevine Inc. Directors, and 15 staffers from the General Service Office and 4 Emeriti. Seven of the Trustees are non-alcoholic.

THE COMMITTEE SYSTEM

The *“Committee”* is the device by which A.A. service manages to function.

Many of the new General Service Representatives going to their first business meeting expect that these affairs will be conducted in a manner that will duplicate the model of Democracy set by the ancient Greek City-states. Free Citizens met as equals to deal with the issues of the day; they proclaimed, analyzed, argued, and voted to decide what action was to be taken and decided who was to do it. What is forgotten is that this was just about all a Citizen did; the slaves did all the work. Democracy was so time consuming that very little got done.

In the same way, A.A. business meetings tend to choke up on endless talk and very little gets done. This is made worse by the alcoholic ego and emotional immaturity. An issue is presented, a motion is made, seconded, discussed and voted for; then the discussion continues, amendments are offered, arguments flourish and finally the motion is withdrawn. After two hours, they are back to square one. Sometimes new G.S.R.s, shocked at the wrangling they find at their first Area Assembly, vow never to attend another.

One answer is in the use of the Ad-hoc Committee. A group of people is given a problem or a task, and this group or “committee” goes off and thinks and talks about it; and usually they reach a decision, which is presented as a “report”.

One advantage that the committee has is time. Time to fully look into the various things that are involved. Time to gather information. Time to listen to people who have experience with or have a special interest in the proposed action. Time to allow heated emotions to cool. Time to sense the consciousness of the group.

The committee’s recommendation given in the report is then offered to the Area Assembly, or to the General Service Conference. The recommendation of the committee is not binding on the voting body. They may accept or reject the action suggested by the report. They are free to take a different action. However, in most cases the course of action recommended by the committee can be voted on without wasting a lot of time in hashing it all over again. At our annual General Service Conference a year’s worth of business is transacted in five days. This would be impossible without the work of the specialized Conference Committees.

This, then, is the committee system. It has served A.A. well. Like everything else it has flaws. It is slow, a dictator could move faster. A giraffe has been described as a horse designed by a committee. A committee is a good place to bury an unpopular idea.

Sometimes, we hear the plea *“Trust the Committee System”* being offered to turn aside difficult questions, as an argument against change, or to ward off a valid criticism. The implication is that the *“Committee System”* is some sacred principle, grounded in the spiritual bedrock of A.A. and to question the results of the *“Committee System”* would be rank heresy. This of course, is nonsense.

There is nothing in the committee system that makes it immune to poor judgment, errors, bad faith, or just being dead wrong. ‘The system is a tool, an implement, and to ask that one *“trust the system”* is like a mechanic asking that you trust his wrench when you complain about the bill.

AREA ASSEMBLIES

The Area Assembly conducts the primary business of the Southwest Ohio Delegate Area 56. The Area Assembly is held 11 months out of the year, with no meetings in March due to the Area 56 Mini Conference.

The Area Assembly is a closed business meeting made up of the Area G.S.R.s, the D.C.M.s, the Area Committee, past Delegates and all interested A.A’s. Any A.A. member may attend but they do not have a vote.

Any meeting of area G.S.R.s and the Area Committee is an assembly. The Area Assembly is the mainspring of the Conference structure – the democratic voice of the movement expressing itself. Assemblies are the responsibility of the Area Committee, and are conducted by its Chairperson.

The Delegate, Secretary and Treasurer also give reports to the Assembly. Reports are also given to the Assembly by committee chairpersons. Old Business and New Business follow this. Topics are the result of items brought forward by the Area Committee and/or the G.S.R.s. Discussion is held and, where necessary, items are voted upon. This is when any member may address the Assembly on any A.A. topic.