

## AA District 9

Kari Isaacson's raw notes

Notes of the District Level Inventory held Sunday, Sept. 17<sup>th</sup> – 12:30 pm to 5 pm at SonBridge. A potluck luncheon was provided by participants.

Present: Facilitator Benjamin G. (Chair of Area 92, of which District 9 is part), GSRs Greg, Margue, Chris, Gene A., Ron (also chair of Juvenile Justice Committee), Rick (also chair of Activities); District 9 officers Ben H, Interim DCM and Treasurer, Kari I., Secretary, and Committee Chairs Barbara H., Literature chair, Marc, corrections, Janet, webmaster and technology;

AA members Virginia, Nancy, Heidi, Danielle, Will, Walt, Tyler, Lauren, Steve; Al Anon member Jan

Ben H. opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and restating the purpose of the meeting. He referred to the AA reflection for Saturday Sept. 16<sup>th</sup> that reminded us that we stand or fall together. He asked everyone to take a moment of silence to reflect on the plight of the still suffering alcoholic. Participants then said the Serenity Prayer together. Tradition 1 was read "Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon AA unity." He then turned the meeting over to facilitator Benjamin G. who leads Area 92, of which District 9 is part. He asked for a volunteer to read the summary version of the Twelve Traditions – Gene A. did so. He then asked everyone to introduce themselves including whether they were GSRs, officers and/or identify their home groups. He said there are 26 districts in Area 92 – he described his work as Chair. He hosts three monthly meetings with various groups of leaders within the Area including a standing meeting (via Zoom) with District DCMs. Benjamin G. then summarized how today's meeting came together, and the work of the excellent Inventory Planning Committee. He is experienced in District level inventories; there is an AA resource available on group level inventories. Benjamin G. then went over ground rules for today's meeting starting with the importance of respecting everyone's viewpoint. Six questions were prepared by the Inventory Planning Committee – whom he thanked for their outstanding work. Everyone at the meeting today will have an opportunity to comment on each of the six questions. Each person has up to three minutes to respond to each question. Walt is the time keeper. Benjamin G. prepared a PPT of the questions, several of which had secondary questions that are related to the main question. Paper copies of each question were on the tables. He asked if everyone agreed to the structure of the meeting and time limitation – all agreed. He asked that people respond to the questions honestly, and reassured us that the inventory will proceed smoothly and would be productive. A summary will be prepared of the day's discussions by the Inventory Planning

Committee based on the notes taken by Kari and Janet. It is hoped that action items will result from today's Inventory.

Benjamin G. stated that today's meeting is not a debate but a discussion. He asked everyone to share their own viewpoint and not comment on someone else's viewpoint.

Kari asked if the notes should identify the person making each comment or summarize the responses to the questions. It was agreed that it was important to capture themes that emerge from the discussion as well as ideas rather than individual's comments.

Each bullet point in my notes summarizes the comments made by an individual participant.

Question 1 – What is the basic purpose of District 9? Are we reaching out and serving the still suffering alcoholic?

- District 9 facilitates acting together. Yes we are reaching the still suffering alcoholic.
- District 9 basically is about conducting business. Each District is set up differently. Handling money, inventory of literature, phone line etc.
- District 9 facilitates tools for groups in the district – literature, events, outreach.
- As a GSR, this person said their responsibility is to take group conscience to District and relay District information back to group. District 9 is a hub, a way to stay in touch with AA. Also a way to have better events.
- District 9 is to help direct participants stay sober as well as helping others stay sober.
- Agrees that the District is carrying the message to suffering alcoholics, but is concerned that not all groups are represented at District meetings. Not all GSRs attend.
- Several members in attendance said they were new to Walla Walla, or to AA, and were there to learn. Another said it was their first District level meeting and they were there to learn about AA hierarchy. Another stated that they were interested in serving on a District committee.
- Agrees about all of the basic purpose comments made so far; District should be welcoming to everyone, and people should want to attend it. But it is common at District meetings to spend time focusing on minor issues like a \$7 discrepancy – that drives people away.
- Participant said we all know what we are supposed to do – but are we really doing it? Why isn't the room packed today? Being relatively new to Walla Walla, the participant is excited to be part of District 9. What can we do to support the still suffering alcoholic, and groups?
- District 9 exists to ensure that the Responsibility statement can be fulfilled – that the hand of AA is always available to help the suffering alcoholic. Printing schedules of all groups, supplying literature, maintaining the phone line, organizing large events open to all – these are beyond the ability of an individual group to do – but by working together at a district-wide level we can accomplish these things.

Benjamin G. commented that he is hearing theme about education on District 9 and structure. Could it do more?

- One participant said they brought a young person they were sponsoring to a District meeting. This 18 year old sponsee learned a lot. They are moving to Kennewick and plan to begin a group there. So yes the District is reaching the still suffering alcoholic. The participant was asked how did the young person find out about AA? The participant said they had been in juvenile detention and responded to the opportunity to attend a meeting on site.
- District 9 hasn't had a GSR workshop for 8 years. Several DCMs have moved through – these workshops have collapsed. Normally there had been a workshop every two to four years in their experience.
- District 9 could offer seminars to AA members about how to get involved at the District level, and what it means to be a GSR. Because of District resources, groups don't have to reinvent the wheel.
- One new AA member who was attending the Inventory as a first time District level meeting had to leave the meeting but offered their parting comment: District events and meetings should have people serving as greeters. Would make new people feel more welcome. They hadn't seen this at local AA meetings or this District Inventory.
- This person's sponsor emphasized service work from the beginning. At first they didn't like service work but soon came to really love it. Sometimes we don't know what is good for us. Service work is good for us. This includes District level work.

Benjamin G. commented that when someone asks him to be their sponsor he goes through the AA pamphlet on sponsorship with them. Sponsors should also take sponsees through the traditions and service opportunities in addition to the steps. He highly recommends the pamphlet on sponsorship to all.

Question 2 – Are our District 9 service positions clearly defined? Why is it OK for District 9 to be judgmental about newcomers in relation to holding positions within District 9?

- Is there a time requirement of sobriety for someone to be an officer? The purpose of a minimum requirement is to ensure that person is stable in their recovery. Also, there's more to AA than a newly sober member might know.
- There's tons of information on how AA works.
- One participant confessed that they did not seek out the information in the beginning – and as a result wasn't aware that officers couldn't vote on District 9 meetings, only GSRs. Two other participants said this matched their experience.
- Don't discourage a new member in service work.
- Totally agrees with time requirement for sobriety would be fair.

- This person is new to sobriety – what is “GSR”? (several answer “General Service Representative”) – they makes coffee and grateful to opportunity to help their group. They know they have a lot to learn.
- They don’t feel anyone is judgmental towards them as a newbie – everyone has something to offer.
- As to sobriety requirements, they doesn’t care about how long someone has been sober. Rather than judge people, this person does assess people however. Everyone has something to offer as a volunteer. Unity of the group is paramount. Can’t have people who tear it up.
- They said they didn’t think the positions were clearly defined. There’s suggested information from guidelines and Area 92. But District hasn’t done that work. They would love to see descriptions on positions for District done.
- Some people wanted to speak up – they were in prison program and likes service. They like the idea of observation for newcomers – some people need to be pushed to do things. They were a GSR after a year of sobriety.
- They moved to WW a year and half ago. They don’t think the job descriptions are available. As to time requirements for sobriety for service – they encourage their sponsees to sponsor people even if sponsees are reluctant – they point them to sponsorship information.
- This person attended an Area 92 meeting and bought the Guidelines booklet themselves. They trust it as much as the Big Book. It helps her understand their role as GSR.
- Is there still a District handbook for our Area? A service manual would be great – need a handbook.
- No there aren’t job descriptions at District level. Would be nice to have clear description. In their work life there are detailed job descriptions for everyone – very helpful to have.
- Yes they think the jobs are clearly defined. As to the “judgmental” question, we need to judge less and love more. Would be helpful to have more clarity on positions though. Don’t forget that only 10% of any organization such as churches, nonprofits, service clubs volunteer for it.
- They’ve been sober for less than 4 months. They have seen the service manual but its not available for reading. Why not? If someone is being judgmental it says more about the person judging than the person judged.
- Lots of people should be encouraged to volunteer – they have been around a long time – shared their experiences. At their third meeting they volunteered to serve.
- Agrees with everything said earlier about judging less and loving more.

Benjamin G. referred the group to area92AA.org website - lots of resources online. There is also a GSR orientation on that website in the Area Handbook. Every group of District in Area 92 has the right to set up their own guidelines and descriptions. "Every group has the right to be wrong". Its up to us. Districts 7 and 8 have a good set of guidelines. One thing he heard when he first came in (in 1988) was that one had to have a year of sobriety in order to chair a meeting. But once he did he was more invested in it.

Participants responded:

- District 9's guidelines are on its website. (both versions as they were in the process of being updated – not finalized though).
- Most of the people holding District 9 positions are GSRs but not all.

Benjamin G. asked whether the two versions of the guidelines have the history of motions notated on them? When someone answered in the negative, Benjamin G. said look at the history of all of the motions made, approved or denied, and ideally it would be searchable. Another participant said it DOES have the motion history from 2012 to the present. It should be put in a searchable document however. Another participant said our guidelines are on our website and has motions from 1961 on it.

BREAK

Question 3

Are our guidelines clear and concise? How is spirit of rotation dealt with?

- Doesn't really know about it.
- No opinion
- From participant who joined the meeting after the break – they agree with the speaker who said its hard to get volunteers. One sacrifices family time to do these things.
- Haven't read the guidelines. Spirit of rotation is good if you can find people to take on these roles.
- They were asked to be an officer and were glad to do it.
- Only listening right now.
- The revised guidelines were acted on by motion and unanimously denied a month ago.
- Rotation is good – give someone else a chance.
- We should be training our replacements.
- I'm a big believer in rotation.
- We need "clear and concise" guidelines – rotation goes with humility and brings in fresh perspectives. Both important to have. They don't think moving from one position to another within the District is within the spirit of rotation. Their group doesn't need District level guidelines- they go directly to Area.

- They don't know about guidelines – they could see how it's a real challenge.
- Its true that only 10% to 15% of any group will volunteer – the point is that people who stay too long in their positions start to feel indispensable. When they left their former home group (in another state) they worried how they would get along since they were so active. But it has worked out fine for them. Still going! They have learned they have to let go.
- No one should be king or queen and in charge all the time.
- Rotation is a good thing. They were asked to take on a specific officer role and agreed to do it.
- They haven't read the guidelines but they've seen people come and go over the years (they have been sober for over 25 years). People with longevity – they'd like to see more new people in these roles. Recruit people.
- What are we doing to pray for God's guidance here – step 11.
- I was asked to take on the interim DCM role.
- If no one can be found to replace you then you should still vacate the position. If its not filled its not meant to be.
- Isn't the election of the GSR up to the group? If they re-elect a GSR its up to them.
- The groups are autonomous – that's a good point.
- They requested clarification on re-election of GSRs.

Benjamin G. closed this line of discussion by saying each group is autonomous. He commented that he doesn't want District 9 to go dark if key officer roles not filled. Having alternates for positions are good- not a 2<sup>nd</sup> rate position.

Question 4 – Are our business meetings attractive, informative, and filled with enthusiasm, do we treat each other with respect and dignity?

- No they doesn't like the District meetings.
- No. They do not feel trusted by the group as a supposed "trusted servant". The not being able to vote on issues before the District while being a District officer although not a GSR doesn't make sense to them. How can one be responsible for moving things forward when one cannot vote? She is an organization-building and process-focused person so perhaps their role as a District 9 officer isn't a good match for her. They are glad to have the opportunity to share this with the group. They have seen other people disrespected, and sexist, demeaning comments and body language at meetings, some of which was directed to the former DCM. At the June 2023 meeting which was so disruptive and dysfunctional people were over-talking others, not listening to others, and not responding to efforts to reign them in and restore some order. Very rude. District should consider some "Roberts Rules of Order- light" processes so that the

basics of ensuring motions are made and seconded before any discussion starts. There are resources out there to help with this.

- No. There have been email communications among officers that should not have been sent as critique of meetings was personalized.
- No – hasn't heard anything good about District meeting – end of story.
- No – agrees with the comments from the officer speaking about lack of trust towards District 9 board.
- No – in this participants' short experience with District 9 meetings there has been chaos. Comments among District meeting participants at times rude and disrespectful. This needs 4<sup>th</sup> Step attention.
- In their first few meetings he was full of enthusiasm for District. Less so now.
- Participant thought that the former DCM was attractive and the DCM brought candy for everyone! Meeting controversies were exciting – showing a lot of passion for the work.
- No comment.
- During their first year on District felt reluctance to attend District meetings but glad that they continue to be on District. Believes that some parliamentary procedure would be helpful, particularly in keeping order and a little more structure. That would make the meetings more attractive.
- Other Districts they have been in run about the same as District 9. In general they believe District 9 meetings are pretty attractive. There have been instances though where not attractive. Participant wasn't aware of voting restricted to GSRs however – believes officers even if not GSRs should be able to vote.
- Its been a while since they have been at District – glad others are doing it! This participant said for sake of staying sober they cannot be part of something that full of conflict – they must be at peace. Don't forget Step 10's daily self-reflection.
- This participant arrived in 1972 and knows a lot about the history of the District. When former DCM began she asked for new handbook to be prepared. This participant volunteered but the handbook group never met; then another source came up. About non-GSR officers voting at District, everyone may express their opinion at the meetings. Participant is in favor of "parliamentary procedure lite" being used. NOTE: Participant ran out of time and asked for a few more minutes to speak which was granted. Further suggestions on District 9 officers who aren't GSRs ability to vote including joining a group that doesn't have a GSR and become GSR.
- Parliamentary procedure should be followed.

Benjamin G. said AA has a paradox in its approach to running District. On the one hand AA is to remain undefined and non-professional and there is the right to be autonomous by groups and District. On the other hand AA service positions should be well-defined. Trust is key when electing a leader like a DCM – members and groups need to respect and support them.

Question 5: Do we attract new members and GSRs? Will the inventory have actions that will fix things?

- Yes we do. And yes, things can be fixed by taking the right action.
- Some District meetings go well and others do not. Believes things can be fixed.
- No comment.
- We do attract new members in groups. How much are we willing to be open? We need to take a fresh look at how District works – look at ourselves.
- Agrees – we have had some great meetings. How do we make it more appealing? Participants hopes newcomers will come in due to all of our combined efforts – not up to one person.
- Participant has attended three meetings where she has been invited and always feels welcomed.
- District worth it as a way to bring information to their group.
- Participant hopes for a plan to address problems.
- Take care of housekeeping like guidelines and how meetings are conducted but let's not get too caught up in it.
- We do attract people at the group level – sure hopes we have good notes from today's meeting.
- Participant is impressed with how many new people from WW there are (it's a small community). Good to do things like having this meeting – it will bring about change. Bring group dynamic to District.
- Why isn't a group represented at District for ALL meetings?
- Doesn't know – participant likes to stay in her own little group. How can we best put this inventory into action?
- Willing to be part of planning and solution.
- We can do better – make the District meetings more welcoming to visitors (participant wasn't aware when they started that visitors were welcome to District meetings!). Reach out to meetings that are not represented at District by GSR and encourage someone to come anyway.
- Is there a way to handle an unruly attendee?
- Didn't think we have had unruly people at District meetings.
- First suggestion is to take structural things like the vote and Roberts Rules of Order – but with good education along with those actions. This is the end of rotation for this participant – they just want to be of service – not interested in positions. Rather make coffee for group!
- Participant really liked working on ad hoc committee – there's minor housekeeping to be done like revisiting guidelines.
- Keep it simple.



- Important to have format like today's meeting – hear everyone's opinion. It's a good idea for DCM to visit groups. Appreciates today's effort and believes it will payoff.
- No comment.
- Likes the idea of GSR school or "kindergarten" as someone has said.
- "Action" is key word – find our spiritual principles.
- Education, information, prayer

Benjamin G. – he summarizes this discussion and lists next steps. First, prepare a final summary of the day's discussions. Second, this group should prepare a list of suggestions and action items. Publish the results. Post on District 9 website. But no motions from Ad Hoc Committee. Its up to the GSRs to do something.

Meeting adjourns with prayer. Everyone is thanked for coming, for bringing treats and for their participation.

- Kari Isaacson, Secretary