

# Chapter Five: AA and Employment

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Section A of this Guidance is published to assist Employment Liaison Officers (ELOs) to carry AA's message to employers and also contains suggestions for AA groups in industry while Section B is published to help individual members who are employees.

## 5:1 Section A

Since the early days of our Fellowship, AA has sought to carry its message to Employers, hence Chapter 10 of the "Big Book" *Alcoholics Anonymous*. In Great Britain the General Service Conference has considered since 1982, how best to carry the message to the workplace in a structured way. At present intergroups and regions support and appoint liaison officers at local level to deal with this branch of service within PI/Service Committees (see Chapter 1 on PI).

### 5:1.1 Employment Liaison Officers

The responsibility of ELOs is to carry AA's message to employers within their local area supported by intergroup and region and a PI/Service Committee if one exists. Employment specifically concerns any organisation employing or serving staff companies, trade unions and associations, government departments and/or related agencies. An established period of sobriety (ideally not less than three years) and a thorough knowledge of the AA Service Handbook for Great Britain are necessary before accepting this role. Willingness to commit to three years service and the ability to deal with a wide range of professional people and talk about AA when invited to do so, are also qualities that have proven to be desirable.

### 5:1.2 Activities

Many industries see alcoholism as a very wasteful overhead and are often encouraged to find that AA does not cost them either time or money. They see the advantages of a sober worker who attends AA and will often display and make available AA literature.

Experience has shown that a business-like approach to employers is most likely to succeed. Often a phone call to ascertain the right person to contact is required, asking for the name

and title of the person who deals with alcohol policies or employee welfare. This could be the Personnel Manager, Welfare Officer, Occupational Health Nurse, Health and Safety Officer, Company Doctor or Managing Director. An approach should then be made by telephone, e-mail or letter to that person, requesting an interview and followed up by a letter of confirmation if requested. Intergroups and regions should supply properly headed paper for this purpose.

### 5:1.3 Co-operation with Employment Programmes

Experience has shown that AA can help in the following ways:

- by making posters, literature, local contact numbers and details of local meetings available
- offering to talk to staff or management about the AA programme including showing appropriate presentations
- by making available the cumulative experience of over two million recovering alcoholics
- by explaining what AA is and how AA can help with the problem of alcoholism in the workplace
- by putting employers in direct contact with men and women who have achieved sobriety in AA and who are willing to share their personal experience freely with any problem drinker who seeks help
- by welcoming into the local group the employee who wants to do something about a drinking problem, where he or she will find the environment and friends to help them to achieve sobriety

### 5:1.4 AA Does Not Plan or Set Up Alcoholism Programmes

It is important to establish that AA does not plan or set up alcoholism programmes for industry, rather AA should be presented as a community resource available to the employee with a drinking problem. Bodies such as Alcohol Concern and its affiliated Regional Councils, the Medical Council on Alcohol and the Scottish Council on Alcoholism provide such a service and many AA members are active in the work of these. We are reminded that AA has no opinion on outside issues including alcohol policies but that does not mean we cannot co-operate within our Traditions.

### 5:1.5 Large Companies

In larger companies, which may have formal programmes for problem drinkers, one employee may be given the job of acting as a counsellor for alcoholic employees. He or she may sometimes be an AA member who has had the necessary training to qualify for such a job. The counsellor generally works closely with the medical department and since this kind of work constitutes professional activity, it is therefore not Twelfth Step work.

### 5:1.6 AA Groups

*Tradition Six: An AA Group ought never endorse, finance or lend the AA name, to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.*

Some companies that have formal programmes for problem drinkers may support the formation of an AA group. Experience suggests that an AA group is most successful when the non-alcoholics who have co-operated limit their “support” to making facilities available for group meetings. Meetings held on company premises, whether in company time or not, are within the Traditions of AA, provided that no strings are attached. AA groups within a company made up entirely of employees of that particular company can be helpful in introducing the AA programme to the problem drinker. Experience has indicated that the “specialised” group is not totally successful, unless the newcomer is also encouraged to participate in the activities of regular AA groups.

Where a company employs a recovering alcoholic as a counsellor, an AA group can usually be set up without difficulty, following traditional AA procedures. In such cases, it is appropriate for the counsellor to take his or her place as a member of the group. Where there is no recovering alcoholic on the company’s staff, an outside AA group may be invited to assist with the responsibility of forming and sponsoring a group made up of company employees. In most areas the local AA groups should be able to handle all referrals, making “employee only” groups unnecessary.

### 5:1.7 Trade Unions

Unions should be dealt with in similar ways to employers. However, our experience shows that before contacting local branch officers, an approach initially to their headquarters is not only courteous but also beneficial in carrying the AA message. Often they will supply you with details of who to see or may arrange it directly.

Many Unions and employers organise conferences, trade shows and information meetings. Attendance at these meetings can usually be arranged through the organisers or the support of a friendly contact. The display of literature and providing information can involve a PI/Service Committee with much follow-up work in carrying the message to those who attend.

### 5:1.8 To Summarise

Guided by our Traditions the Employment Liaison Officer can, while acting as a contact for employers within an intergroup area, working as part of a PI/Service Committee and sharing information with other intergroup officers and in particular the regional Employment Liaison Officer, offer our programme of recovery to all problem drinkers who come to the notice of employers.

AA welcomes any opportunity to:

1. Meet with any employer to discuss ways AA can co-operate
2. Present meetings to explain AA to employees
3. Take employees with a drinking problem to AA meetings

## 5:2 Section B

### 5:2.1 Personal Anonymity

Perhaps one of the most frequent questions asked by newer members at group meetings is “*Should I tell my employer that I am an alcoholic*”? Clearly the answer to this must rest with the individual but is likely to be influenced by whether or not the employer in question is enlightened on the subject of alcoholism.

Where an employee is reasonably confident that the employer is sympathetic towards the problem and has decided to disclose that they are alcoholic, it is suggested that they tell their employer that Alcoholics Anonymous would like to offer help to any fellow employee who may have a problem with alcohol.

### 5:2.2 Personal Involvement

Because of the complexity of the circumstances which can arise when members find themselves becoming involved in this field, we should be aware of the dangers to our security and sobriety unless we tread carefully.

In some situations it may be appropriate to Twelfth Step a fellow employee, but it is usually better for an AA member to refer a problem drinker to another AA member outside the company. This can often be the case within small companies where informal arrangements between management and AA members can lead to referral, of those with a drinking problem who are willing, directly to the AA member.

Whether the contact takes place during working hours or not depends largely on how the request for help arose in the first instance, but it is generally better to undertake a Twelfth Step contact outside business hours, unless the introduction is made with the knowledge of management.

If the problem drinker declines the help proffered, members should be aware that there is always a possibility they may be judged adversely by management because of their inability to help the suffering employee.

The employer should be told that Alcoholics Anonymous has no financial interest in recruiting members; that there are no dues or fees and that outside contributions must be declined. The sole concern of AA is the personal recovery and continued sobriety of those who turn to it for help with their drinking problems.

The Fellowship is committed to remaining forever non-professional, and the AA approach is essentially a simple one based on the unique ability of recovered alcoholics to work effectively with other problem drinkers. This approach is already being used productively in many company programmes to combat alcoholism.

## 5:3 Recommended Literature Available from GSO

- *AA Service and Structure Handbooks for Great Britain*
- *Speaking at non-AA meetings*
- *How AA members Co-operate with Professionals*
- *A Member's Eye View of AA*
- *AA as a Resource for Employers*

- *When Drink Stops Working*
- *A Message to Professionals*
- *A Brief Guide to AA*
- *AA at a Glance*
- A4 display leaflets (with local contact number)
- Contact Postcards (with local contact number)
- *Is AA for YOU*
- *Who Me*
- List of local AA meetings (without telephone contact number)
- AA Presentation “*An inside view of AA for professionals*”
- For details of Confirmation of Attendance ‘Chits’ see Chapter 9.3.2 page 61 (Probation/Criminal Justice Services)

(Revised 2017)