



S-ANON BUSINESS MEETINGS and the GROUP CONSCIENCE PROCESS

INTRODUCTION

S-Anon group unity is enhanced when all or most members of the group help to make decisions that affect the group by participating in the decision making process. Groups that hold business meetings regularly tend to remain healthy and vital because members feel a part of the process, rather than apart from. As Concept Four points out, "Participation is the key to harmony." These groups also are observing the spirit of Tradition Two, "For our group purpose there is but one authority – a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern." Thus, members are reminded to include a Higher Power as they discuss and vote on issues. The terms "business meeting" and "group conscience" are sometimes used interchangeably because they are both forums for discussion and decision-making, but they have somewhat different meanings.

There is no right or wrong way to conduct group business meetings. This material aims to provide information and clarify terms, not to dictate a process. However, when an S-Anon group has an important decision to make, valid solutions are more easily found and unity is enhanced when the suggestions in Section B, below, are considered and implemented.

A. S-ANON BUSINESS MEETINGS

1. DEFINITION/FEATURES: A business meeting is a discussion of practical matters that affect an S-Anon group. Some examples of business meeting topics include sharing of information from the World Service Office or the local Intergroup, discussion of group finances, rotation of leadership, methods of welcoming newcomers, or planning related to local S-Anon events. Many routine group decisions can be made during a business meeting by a simple show of hands. Large group and Intergroup business meetings may follow the format shown below if there are many topics to discuss.

2. OBJECTIVE: The objective of an S-Anon business meeting is to share information, hold discussion, and make decisions that reflect the views of a majority of group members. Business meetings also provide a forum for members to share concerns and identify solutions to group problems.

3. TIMING: Each S-Anon group decides how often to hold business meetings (Tradition Four). Some groups hold them regularly, and some hold them on an "as needed" basis. Business meetings are usually held before or after the regular meeting. If business meetings are not held on a regular basis, it is important periodically to announce during the regular meeting that topics may be suggested and business meetings subsequently scheduled at the request of any group member. Members should be given advance notice of the business meeting date and discussion topics to allow them time to consider the issues and plan to attend.

4. FORMAT: A group business meeting usually needs some structure, just as a regular meeting needs a format. The group Secretary may provide a simple agenda prior to the business meeting, and additional materials may be provided as needed. For some larger groups, Intergroups, or groups with many topics to discuss, it may be helpful to employ Robert's Rules of Order, which provide both a fair and agreed upon method to discuss and vote on an issue.

Business meetings can include some or all of the following elements, as the group decides:

- Serenity Prayer
- Reading of the 12 Traditions of S-Anon
- Approval of the minutes of the previous meeting
- Treasurer's Report
- Committee Reports (if the group has committees working on projects such as planning an upcoming S-Anon event or community outreach project)
- Old Business (status updates or continuing discussion of topics that have been discussed previously). After discussion, the item may be tabled (remain on the agenda) for further discussion or update at the next meeting.
- New Business (for items that have not been discussed previously). The member who suggested the item of new business presents the idea or states the reason why this item should be on the agenda. Note that: 1) it is not necessary to make a motion in order to bring up a topic for discussion, and 2) the initial discussion need not result in a motion, if for example, more information needs to be gathered. An issue may be tabled until the next meeting, where it appears on the agenda under "Old Business."

S-ANON BUSINESS MEETINGS and the GROUP CONSCIENCE PROCESS

(Page 2 of 3)

- Announcement of time and place of next business meeting, if known
- Closing prayer from S-Anon literature.

The group Secretary or a volunteer takes notes and produces meeting minutes that are made available to all group members. Minutes may include a list of members in attendance and a record of decisions made; they need not contain details of the discussion or comments made by specific members.

5. DECISION PROCESS: The initial discussion of a topic may begin with or result in someone making a motion, that is, formally stating the decision they think should be made. Example: "I move that the XYZ group begin their meetings at 7:30 pm instead of 8:00 pm." Every motion at this level needs a "second," and once another member seconds the motion, additional discussion is held. All members are given the opportunity to express their thoughts on the motion. When all are satisfied that the issue has been thoroughly discussed, anyone can "call the question," that is, request that a vote be taken. This must be followed by a "second" from another member. The vote is then taken. However, even if a motion is "on the floor" (being discussed), the matter need not be decided in that same meeting. If time for discussion runs out and members believe that additional consideration of the issue is needed, the matter may be tabled until the next business meeting.

B. GROUP CONSCIENCE PROCESS

1. DEFINITION/FEATURES: A group conscience is a specific discussion method often reserved for matters that are more sensitive or that have an important impact on the group. An example of such a topic might be adding an expanded definition of crosstalk to the meeting format. A group conscience discussion may also help to resolve a group problem, such as deciding whether to use a timer to ensure all have a chance to share during the regular meeting.

The group conscience process makes Twelve-Step groups different from all others because it brings awareness of the Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, and Twelve Concepts into the discussion. It has been said that holding a group conscience is one way to practice the first three Steps as a group. The more our opinions differ on an issue, the more time we should take during the group conscience process to ensure that issues are clearly identified (Step One), a Higher Power is invited into our thinking and discussion (Step Two), and agreement is reached to turn over the outcome of the group conscience to a Higher Power (Step Three).

A group conscience decision is valid when three conditions are met: 1) the group is well informed; 2) those not present have had a chance to voice their opinions; and 3) the discussion continues long enough that the decision is supported by a substantial majority of participants (sometimes called "substantial unanimity"). The group decides whether substantial unanimity will consist of two-thirds, or possibly three-fourths of members voting "yes" on the motion.

2. OBJECTIVE: The objective of a group conscience is to reach a decision upon which most group members agree. It results from discussion that includes both participation by all or most members in attendance and consideration of the applicable S-Anon Steps, Traditions and Concepts.

3. TIMING: When the group decides to hold a group conscience discussion on an important issue, the timing should be announced well in advance, so that all members are aware of the issue, have a chance to become informed, and can plan to attend.

4. FORMAT: A group conscience discussion may occur within a regular group business meeting, or a separate meeting may be held.

5. DECISION PROCESS: The group conscience discussion may begin with a statement of the issue by the meeting chair or the member who has requested the group conscience. The statement may be in the form of a motion. Discussion continues until the group believes that all facets of the topic have been explored, all participants have had a chance to express an opinion, and a substantial majority of members seem to be in agreement. Someone then makes a motion (if one has not been made previously) or "calls the question," and the members vote.

If discussion becomes heated or if some members seem reluctant to participate, it is helpful to recall that Tradition Twelve reminds us to place principles above personalities, and to invite each group member, in turn, to speak to the issue for an agreed upon length of time. This suggestion encourages every participant to contribute her or his voice (Concept Four). If the vote shows that substantial unanimity has not been achieved, it may be better to continue the discussion at a later date, than to take an action with which many members disagree.

Decisions on important matters may be implemented on a trial basis and reevaluated at a future date to see if there have been unanticipated impacts of the change. A decision may be modified or rescinded by another group conscience discussion if the action resulting from the decision did not produce the results that were intended.

S-ANON BUSINESS MEETINGS and the GROUP CONSCIENCE PROCESS

(Page 3 of 3)

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION

Participation in our S-Anon group's business meeting or group conscience process can be a wonderful opportunity for us to see a Higher Power in action. If we shy away from expressing our opinions, we can recognize that no one else's opinion is more important than ours. If listening to opinions with which we disagree presents a challenge, we can learn that even a member's unexpected perspective can bring clarity to an issue or cause us to see things in a new way. If we find we do not agree with the eventual decision, we learn to turn over the outcome to a Higher Power and become an observer of how the decision works after it is implemented. We learn that each member contributes a piece of the puzzle (Concept Four). We

experience a stronger sense that we belong when we participate in the decisions that all groups must make, even if that process is sometimes stressful. Finally, many members have found the practice we get when relating to others in business meetings can contribute greatly to the process of recovery and emotional growth.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- *Paths to Recovery: Al-Anon's Steps, Traditions, and Concepts*
- *Al-Anon/Al-Ateen Service Manual 2014-2017*
- General publications containing a simplified version of *Robert's Rules of Order*

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International



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