



## S-ANON BUSINESS MEETINGS and the GROUP CONSCIENCE

### INTRODUCTION

S-Anon group unity is enhanced when all or most members of the group help 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, rather than apart from, the process. As Concept Four points out, "Participation is the key to harmony." These groups also observe 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 of this document are considered and implemented. While each group has the autonomy to decide how to handle the group business, Tradition Four is a good reminder for unity and common welfare. "Each group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting another group or S-Anon or SA as a whole."

### 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 information from the World Service Office, Regional Trustee, Area Delegate, or the local Intergroup if there is one, group financial updates, rotation of leadership, methods of welcoming newcomers, or planning related to local S-Anon events or outreach. Many routine group decisions can be made during a business meeting by a simple show of hands.

**2. OBJECTIVE:** The objective of an S-Anon business meeting is to share information, consider and discuss all members' perspectives, 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. Concept Twelve, Warranty Three states,

"That all decisions be reached by discussion, vote, and whenever possible, by unanimity."

**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 predictable schedule, it is important to periodically announce during the regular meeting that topics for a business meeting may be suggested, and business meetings subsequently scheduled, at the request of any group member. It is appropriate to give members adequate notice of the business meeting date, an invitation to add items to the agenda, and the 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 S-Anon meeting needs a format. If there is a group secretary, they 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 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:

- Identifying someone to run the business meeting, determining the meeting length, announcing the items for discussion ahead of time so all those attending are aware of what is going to take place.
- Opening the meeting with the Serenity Prayer
- Reading the S-Anon Twelve Traditions
- Reading the S-Anon Twelve Concepts of Service
- Approving the minutes of the previous meeting
- Reviewing the Treasurer's Report
- Reviewing Committee Reports (if the group has committees working on projects such as planning an upcoming S-Anon event or community outreach project)
- Discussing 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.
- Discussing 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 is on the agenda and

# S-ANON BUSINESS MEETINGS and the GROUP CONSCIENCE

(Page 2 of 3)

proposes a solution or action. Commonly, at least two voting members agree that the item is worth discussing before discussion commences. Discussion may not result in an immediate decision if, for example, more information needs to be gathered or members would like more time to consider the various perspectives discussed. An issue may be tabled until the next meeting, where it appears on the agenda under "Old Business."

- Announcing the time and place of the next business meeting, if known
- Closing with a 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 generally include a record of items discussed and decisions made; they need not contain details of the discussion or comments made by specific members.

**5. DECISION PROCESS:** Most decisions at a business meeting can be made with a show of hands. Typically, the initial discussion of a topic may begin with or result in someone making a suggestion to take some action in the form of a motion, that is, formally stating an action or decision on which the group should vote. Example: "I move that the group begin meeting at 7:30 p.m. instead of 8:00 p.m." All members are given the opportunity to express their thoughts on the motion. Once the issue has been thoroughly discussed, the chair closes the debate, and a vote is taken. Sometimes the matter is not decided in one meeting. If time for discussion runs out or members believe that additional consideration of the issue is needed, the matter may be tabled until the next business meeting. Any decisive action that affects the group as a whole may lead to scheduling a group conscience.

## B. GROUP CONSCIENCE PROCESS

**1. DEFINITION/FEATURES:** A group conscience is a specific decision-making 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 or going from a face-to-face meeting to a phone or virtual meeting or vice versa. A group conscience may also help resolve a group problem, such as deciding whether to use a timer to ensure all members have a chance to share during the regular meeting.

The group conscience process differs from other methods of decision-making because it brings awareness of the S-Anon Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, and Twelve Concepts of Service 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), all points of view are heard and 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).

**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 Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, and Twelve Concepts of Service.

**3. TIMING:** When the group decides to hold a group conscience 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 may occur within a regular group business meeting, or a separate meeting may be held. Members are identified to facilitate the discussion and to take notes.

**5. DECISION PROCESS:** The group conscience discussion may begin with a statement, either by the meeting chair or the member who has requested the group conscience, of the issue or idea for consideration and a suggested solution or action. Discussion continues until a substantial majority of members seem to be in agreement. The chair ends the discussion and the members vote. If the vote is not unanimous some groups, in accordance with our Fifth Concept of Service, ask dissenting members to briefly state their minority opinion.

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 rather than take an action with which many members disagree. Decisions on important matters may be implemented on a trial basis and re-evaluated at a future date. Any decision may be modified or rescinded by another group conscience if necessary.

## BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION

Participation in an S-Anon group business meeting or group conscience process can be a wonderful opportunity for us to see a Higher Power in action. If we tend to shy away from expressing our opinions, we are encouraged to recognize that every member's input and point of view are

## S-ANON BUSINESS MEETINGS and the GROUP CONSCIENCE

(Page 3 of 3)

of equal value. If it is challenging to listen to opinions with which we disagree, we may learn that any member's perspective can bring unexpected 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 the outcome over to a Higher Power, support the decision in the interest of our common welfare and group unity, and observe 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 of belonging 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 of relating to others in business meetings and the group conscience process can contribute greatly to the process of recovery and emotional growth.



© S-Anon International  
Family Groups, Inc. 2013  
World Service Office (WSO)  
P.O. Box 17294  
Nashville, TN 37217  
615-833-3152 or 800-210-8141  
email: [sanon@sanon.org](mailto:sanon@sanon.org)  
Website: [www.sanon.org](http://www.sanon.org)

*This guideline is produced  
as a service tool by the S-Anon  
World Service Office and may  
be photocopied without alteration  
or redaction.*