

Using a modified reading of A.A. literature to open an A.A. Meeting

When new people come to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting for the first time, it is vital that they are presented with the message as approved by the group conscience of Alcoholics Anonymous as a whole. To do otherwise may affect other A.A. groups that the person may attend later, as they will expect to hear the same message there.

Does this mean that a group cannot use a modified version of something like How It Works at other places in their meeting? No, it does not! However, if the group chooses to utilize the autonomy that our Twelve Traditions extend to us all—it is vital to both the group and the new member that more than a simple, unexplained reading take place. We want them to have a full and complete understanding of everything the program of Alcoholics Anonymous has to offer them.

Let's use the example of modifying the use of the words *Him* and *God* in the How It Works reading. In the event that those particular words are considered offensive or disrespectful relative to the sense the group members have of themselves and the principles they operate with in their personal lives—then an A.A. group, out of a desire to be honest with, and respectful to, the newcomer ought to clearly spell out when and where they have modified A.A. readings. This ought to occur after the reading of the original has taken place.

In doing so, it provides clarity regarding what the original version was—and how it was modified. To those who concur with the change, they will be grateful for what was done in anticipation of their concern; and to those who do not have that concern, it will be clear that they have the option of utilizing the original version. This will assist the new person in understanding the wonderful freedom that occurs in Alcoholics Anonymous with respect to each member's approach to life. It also helps develop an understanding that each of us may risk possible future difficulties with the departure for the original. The choice, however, rests with each of us individually, or collectively as groups.

This respectful and honest approach also provides a great lesson to the new person regarding how Alcoholics Anonymous is, at its heart, a very open society. As well as being a wonderful example of how ideas, concerns and approaches are shared within A.A.

Our chief responsibility to the newcomer is an adequate presentation of the program.

Bill W. – AA Co-founder