

ANONYMITY ONLINE

“In my belief, the entire future of our fellowship hangs upon this vital principle. If we continue to be filled with the spirit and practice of anonymity, no shoal or reef can wreck us. If we forget this principle, the lid to Pandora’s box will be off and the spirits of Money, Power, and Prestige will be loosed among us. . . . I am positive that A.A.’s anonymity is the key to long-time survival.”

A.A. Comes of Age, pp. 131-132

Modern communication in A.A. is flowing from one alcoholic to another in ways that are high-tech, relatively open-ended and evolving quickly. Protecting anonymity is a major concern for members, who are accessing the Internet in ever-growing numbers.

In 2013 the General Service Conference affirmed “ . . . that the Internet, social media and all forms of public communications are implicit in the last phrase of the Short Form of Tradition Eleven, which reads: ‘ . . . at the level of press, radio and films.’”

At this level, according to Bill W., “. . . anonymity—100 percent anonymity—was the only possible answer. Here, principles would have to come before personalities, without exception.”

[Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions](#), p. 187

General Principles

“When appearing on radio, television, film or on the Internet as A.A. members, we refrain from showing our faces or revealing our last names. In printed articles, on Web sites or e-mail, we are identified by our first names and last initials only.”

[“The A.A. Group – Where it All Begins,”](#) p. 8

“When using digital media, A.A. members are responsible for their own anonymity and that of others. When we post, text, or blog, we should assume that we are publishing at the public level. When we break our anonymity in these forums, we may inadvertently break the anonymity of others.”

[“Understanding Anonymity,”](#) p. 5

A.A. Web Sites

“We observe all A.A.’s principles and Traditions on our Web sites. As anonymity is the ‘spiritual foundation of all our Traditions,’ we practice anonymity on A.A. Web sites at all times. An A.A. Web site is a public medium, which has the potential for reaching the broadest possible audience and, therefore, requires the same safeguards that we use at the level of press, radio and film.”

[Frequently Asked Questions about A.A. Web Sites](#), p. 2

Social Networking Web Sites

“. . . social networking Web sites are public in nature. Though users create accounts and utilize usernames and passwords, once on the site, it is a public medium where A.A. members and non-A.A.s mingle.

“As long as individuals do not identify themselves as A.A. members, there is no conflict of interest. However, someone using their full name and/or a likeness, such as a full-face photograph, would be contrary to the spirit of the Eleventh Tradition, which states in the Long Form that, ‘ . . . our [last] names and pictures as A.A. members ought not be broadcast, filmed or publicly printed.’”

[A.A. Guidelines – Internet](#), p.1

Internet Streaming and Web Conferencing

“Many technological options are possible and, presumably, more are being developed each day. Yet . . . it is important not to let the speed of technological development pressure a committee [or an A.A. group] into a quick solution as opposed to a well-thought-out A.A.-oriented decision. Of course, all decisions must include careful consideration of any situations where an A.A. member’s anonymity could be compromised at the public level.”

[A.A. Guidelines – Internet](#), p. 4

E-Mail

“When using e-mail it is necessary to consider the anonymity of the recipients of messages. Sending messages to multiple recipients that disclose the e-mail addresses of everyone on the addressee list is a potential break of someone else’s anonymity. Therefore, it is a good idea to obtain a recipient’s explicit permission before using his or her e-mail address for A.A. correspondence, especially if it is a workplace e-mail address. When sending A.A. mail to multiple recipients who wish to remain anonymous, use can be made of the BCC (Blind Courtesy Copy) option available on most computers.”

[A.A. Guidelines – Internet](#), p. 3

More Reflections on Anonymity

“Anonymity has two attributes essential to our individual and collective survival; the spiritual and the practical.

“On the spiritual level, anonymity demands the greatest discipline of which we are capable; on the practical level anonymity has brought protection for the newcomer, respect and support of the world outside, and security from those of us who would use A.A. for sick and selfish purposes.”

[Bill’s Last Message](#)

“. . . anonymity is real humility at work. It is an all-pervading spiritual quality which today keynotes A.A. life everywhere. Moved by the spirit of anonymity, we try to give up our natural desires for personal distinction as A.A. members both among fellow alcoholics and before the general public. As we lay aside these very human aspirations, we believe that each of us takes part in the weaving of a protective mantle which covers our whole Society and under which we may grow and work in unity.”

[Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions](#), p. 187

“A vast communications net now covers the earth, even to its remotest reaches. Granting all its huge public benefits, this limitless world forum is nevertheless a hunting ground for all those who would seek money, acclaim and power at the expense of society in general. . . .

“Therefore nothing can matter more to the future welfare of AA *than the manner in which we use this colossus of communication*. Used unselfishly and well, the results can surpass our present imagination. Should we handle this great instrument badly, we shall be shattered by the ego demands of our own people—often with the best of intention on their part. Against all this, the *sacrificial spirit* of AA’s anonymity at the top public level is literally our shield and our buckler. Here again we must be confident that love of AA, and of God, will always carry the day.”

“Freedom Under God: The Choice Is Ours”
Bill W., *AA Grapevine*, November 1960