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Keynote by Allen Ault, Class A Trustee 57th General Service Conference, April 2007

Good morning. I am Allen Ault, a departing Class A trustee. I was introduced to Alcoholic Anonymous in 1971 when three members of the Fellowship visited my office in a maximum security prison outside of Jackson, Georgia. As Warden, they asked me to allow them to visit the institution once a week and work with inmates who had a drinking problem. It is amazing, at least to me, that thirty-six years later I have been invited to make the keynote address to the General Service Conference of that same Fellowship. The only thing that could remotely qualify me to give this presentation is that I have had the wonderful opportunity to attend the preceding five General Service Conferences; I have attended Regional Forums and International Conventions; and have also listened to the sharing of literally hundreds of individuals who attribute their sobriety to AA. An equally intense AA learning experience, over the past six years, has been my fellowship with the trustees of the General Service Board and the staff of the General Service Office.

I am now a dean at a university. So after receiving my invitation from Rick, I proceeded in the typical academic manner, to research great speeches. I found that, arguably, one of the very best speeches was also one of the briefest. It was given by Winston Churchill at a commencement in 1941. After a lengthy introduction, Mr. Churchill strode to the rostrum, looked at the audience and then, after a dramatic pause, said, "Never give in. Never give in. Never, never, never -- on nothing great or small, large or petty, never give in, except to the convictions of your own honor and good sense." He then proceeded to sit down. After a few seconds of stunned silence, the audience broke into a sustained applause, which lasted for several minutes.

I believe that Prime Minister Churchill's remarks are still very pertinent today when related to the theme of this Conference -- Our Twelfth Step Responsibility - - Are We Going to Any Length?

This, of course, is not a commencement speech or even a great one. It is simply my thoughts about the theme for the 57th General Service Conference. What you have before you is an individual who has never formally worked any of the preceding Eleven Steps, giving you a lecture about the Twelfth Step. The audacity of some Class A trustees is beyond the pale!

To make it official, the Twelfth Step reads as follows: "Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

My speech is already longer than Winston's and I am just now getting to the point.

Early in my career as a psychologist, I observed that good mental health, or phrased another way, personal "well-being," only began if individuals started to care about others, rather than totally concentrating on self.

The wonderful thing about Bill W. and Dr. Bob's "revolutionary insight" was that they articulated that it took a great deal of focused effort on "self" and a spiritual awakening before one could effectively reach out to others. Hence, the brilliance of the first eleven Steps!

The other essential realization was that in order to maintain or sustain personal well-being, one has to continue to care about and reach out to others. To put it in context for the members of the Fellowship, it means that in order to sustain sobriety and health, one has to consistently extend a helping hand to other "still-suffering alcoholics." The Twelfth Step.

Are we going to any length with the Twelfth Step? Absolutely not; there are still millions of human beings in the world who are still suffering the ravages of alcoholism. If that is a truism, then what strategies do we need to develop or change in order for us to optimize our efforts in leaving no hand untouched that is reaching out for help?

This is a totally different world than the one known by Bill W. and Dr. Bob. The methods of communications are drastically different and varied. The problems that face the human race are much more complex than in 1935. The available knowledge base has increased a trillion times since the early days of the Fellowship. Because of these dramatic changes, along with new transportation methods, the world has drastically shrunk. Or, as Mr. Friedman proclaims in his book, *The World Has Become Flat*.

With that in mind, the theme of this Conference may cause its delegates to reflect on some key issues for the betterment of the Fellowship:

Have the basic needs of the human spirit changed?

Answer: Probably not.

Is it all right, for the sake of the continued "well-being" of the Fellowship, that its members only reach out to individuals who look like them?

Answer: Resoundingly no.

Is it all right to regress on occasion and become self-centered and self-serving?

Answer: No, it is not healthy for the Fellowship or its members, but it is human.

Most importantly, in light of the vast changes in the world over the past seventy-two years, can the methods used by the Fellowship to carry the message be greatly improved?

Answer: Absolutely, yes!

That leads directly to the theme of the Conference, paraphrased: How Can That Be Accomplished?

Enabling members of the Fellowship to more effectively carry the message to other alcoholics has been and continues to be the only litmus test for any action taken by the General Service Conference and the General Service Board of Trustees.

Thank you for being my friend.

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