

“The Care and Tending of GSRs”

Concept 9: “Good service leaders, together with sound and appropriate methods of choosing them, are at all levels indispensable for our future functioning and safety...”

When thinking of this topic, I first imagined my district as a wonderful garden with the GSRs as the beautiful plants in the garden and the DCMs and district officers as the gardeners. The gardeners are always more in the background, while the plants and flowers are the main attraction. If you don't have any flowers or plants in your garden, then your garden will not be able to sustain itself. On the other hand, you cannot have a garden without a gardener. So as to not get way too into this extended metaphor, I will break this down in a slightly different way.

GSRs need a lot of care and support to do their jobs. As the GSR pamphlet so aptly states, the GSR position may be the most important job in AA. When I spoke to another AA member about this topic, he suggested the idea that DCMs help GSRs cultivate a good understanding of their position rather than tend to them. The definition of to tend is to “care or look after; give one's attention to.” On the other hand, the definition of to cultivate is to “try to acquire or develop a quality, sentiment, or skill.”

In my opinion, as a DCM, it is better for me to help my GSRs develop their skills around their position and their understanding of general service rather than to simply give them attention. That being said, how do I go about that process? First, it is important that I welcome all the GSRs in my sub-district, or whatever GSRs seem to want to find a home at my sub-district table (though I encourage these GSRs to also connect with their own DCM). I think about what made me feel welcome when I came to the rooms and try to give that to the new GSRs. Luckily at my district, we do sub-district roundtables at each district meeting, so there is not a need for us to meet outside of the meeting each month.

These roundtables greatly help create unity within my sub-district. Another way to create unity could be to create a GSR email list and reach out to GSRs before each district meeting and assembly to give them some quick reminders and create a feeling of belonging that seems just as necessary in general service as it is at a member's home group.

Another thing I try to do is act as a surrogate or permanent service sponsor to the GSRs in my district. This means sharing with them what I did as a GSR, what they should expect at district meetings and assemblies, how to talk to their groups about funding, why it's a fun idea to go to the area meeting and PRAASA, how to take a group conscience, and what exactly to bring back to their groups.

One thing I have found is that many GSRs in my district become confused about informational reports such as reports from H&I or Bridging the Gap and believe that this needs to be part of their report back to their groups. I have found it helpful to clarify this with my GSRs and let them know that other trusted servants such as H&I reps or Bridging the Gap reps will be sharing that information with their groups, so they only need to share pertinent general service related information.

Additionally, Concept 9 in the 12 Concepts Illustrated tells me that it is important that I recognize that a “fine plan or idea can come from anybody, anywhere.” So when I talk to my GSRs about how to do a group conscience, I let them know a few ways I have done it or heard of others doing it, and remind them that they should do whatever they believe works best for

their group. I also offer to be there with them at their group conscience sessions to help them lead the session, to be a note taker, or just for moral support. Going back to the garden metaphor, if I overwater a plant or flower, it will not do as well as one that receives just enough support. Therefore, I must allow my GSRs to make some mistakes and to learn on the job. This means not micromanaging or overloading them with information. This also means not randomly showing up at their business meeting to try to control how their group conscience session goes.

Lastly, another part of concept 9 that I find compelling is this quote: "Good leadership will often discard its own cherished plan for others that are better, and it will give credit to the source." At assemblies, I would love to see all of my GSRs in 100% attendance for the entire time. I do suggest that they attend the whole time and fully experience the assemblies. I encourage them to check out the area meeting and anything related to general service. I do all this knowing that my expectations will not be met. That's okay! I also congratulate my GSRs when they are putting in effort and giving the whole process a try. So, in conclusion, my hope is that you are able to cultivate a warm, mentor-type relationship with your GSRs and are able to watch them blossom into competent, trusted servants, working on improving our fellowship so our program continues to reach the alcoholics still suffering.