

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: RIPTAB II Progress Report to Trustees' Committee on Literature 01.11.21

With gratitude for the opportunity to continue the work of this subcommittee, this report details the progress of our work to date during this conference-year cycle. After considerable study of all materials and shared experience (including fellowship submitted agenda items, sharing from Trustees Committees and GSO staff desks, letters, and sharing sessions), we find:

1) Continued review supports the observation that these agenda items and inquiries from the fellowship relate to barriers to *accessing* or *relating* to the program of recovery contained in the text *Alcoholics Anonymous*.

2) Within AA, over time the General Service Conference has directed the creation of material that is simplified or directed to specific populations of alcoholics to improve access or relatability. A host of additional tools, texts, and digital resources have been developed outside of A.A to this end.

3) Input from General Service Office service desks highlight the challenges that some potential and actual members have, as well as impact on our public relations (i.e., the perception of AA amongst the public, including professionals) that our basic text has.

4) Input from trustees' committees also illustrate concern for reaching many still suffering alcoholics who do not have the benefit that many in the membership do, including not only those with literacy challenges but those who might have difficulty accessing resources to comprehend or apply the message of Alcoholics Anonymous. This includes populations with different literacy levels and from different linguistic or cultural backgrounds, some of whom also belong to remote or incarcerated communities.

5) The subcommittee humbly suggests that a strategy to address these barriers is needed for progress, as changing literacy and how people consume information changes over time. For long-term consideration, the Trustees Committee on Accessibility may wish to consider review of materials/formats for access and relatability at regular intervals. More immediately, recent and current agenda items might be organized and presented to the Trustees' Literature Committee and Conference Committee on Literature for further study using a topical organization as outlined in Section D, or some other method of considering the thematic problems and solutions that have been proposed.

6) The subcommittee reviewed recent and current fellowship submitted agenda items, and found compelling strength and possibility in two approaches to impact barriers related to accessibility and

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reliability. These approaches focus on the development of a) multi-media digital material and b) plain language content. Neither of these approaches would be designed to replace or supplant the current text *Alcoholics Anonymous*.

With gratitude and respectfully submitted,
the RIPTAB II subcommittee

2020-21 Trustees' Literature Committee (TLC) Subcommittee on Researching Issues, Possible Tools and Access to the Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous* (RIPTAB II) Progress Report as of January 11, 2021

Subcommittee: Deborah Koltai, chair; Carolyn Barnes Walsh, Cathy Beckham, Katie Heilmann, and Steve Smith, secretary

Meeting dates, this term:

August 21, 2020	November 23, 2020
September 16, 2020	December 7, 2020
October 15, 2020	December 14, 2020
November 5, 2020	January 7, 2021
November 12, 2020	

Background: This subcommittee (RIPTAB II) was tasked with continuing the work of the 2020-21 Trustees Literature Committee, and the previous 2019-20 RIPTAB I subcommittee, to gather information about issues related to previous and current fellowship requests regarding the language of book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, also referred to as the Big Book (BB). In this report we briefly summarize previous findings, and report the work of our subcommittee to date.

RIPTAB I (2019-2020):

The work and findings of the previous subcommittee are detailed in its February 1, 2020 Progress Report and is reflected in the PowerPoint presentation that will be available to General Service Conference (GSC) members as a video shortly. These materials serve as an important foundation for following the study and findings of these subcommittees. RIPTAB I outlined the fellowship submitted requests related to the Big Book, and history and data related to these matters, and found two distinct themes:

- **Accessibility** – due to literacy level or lack of ability to adequately comprehend the message of recovery by the individual as written in the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*. The subcommittee noted that requests for simplified language and/or tools to access the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* are primarily based on observations of A.A. members who are unable

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to access the message of recovery in its current form. Such accessibility challenges can arise from low literacy, English as a second language, traumatic brain injuries, or other factors.

- **Relatability** – changes in current language and culture (including views on modern language, gender and religion) which hinder the individual’s ability to relate and embrace the program as set forth in the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*.

Prior General Service Board subcommittee discussions related to similar topics were reviewed and tended to lean away from creation of tools such as “workbooks” or “study guides”, noting the liberty and significant variability of how people work the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. However, there is a history of creating supplemental material, both inside and outside AA, with the goal of facilitating understanding and application of the recovery program. The reader is referred to SECTION B. EXISTING MATERIALS, below, as RIPTAB II has expanded on the findings of this work.

RIPTAB I also began a study of established literacy levels to guide discussions of what language comprehension skills a reader, the prospective alcoholic, would need to comprehend the book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*. The subcommittee concluded that literacy concerns reflect potential accessibility barriers, and learned how this can relate to factors such as education, ethnicity, immigration status, and incarceration. Initial illustration of the percentage of US and incarcerated populations that have a level 3 literacy was presented.

The subcommittee also considered how modernized language in terms of vernacular, as well as considerations related to gender, faith, culture and other social factors could affect an individual’s ability to relate to and identify with our program of recovery.

The 70th General Service Conference Committee on Literature (CCL) received the February 1, 2020 report and the PowerPoint presentation “*The Big Book: Researching Issues, Possible Tools and Access (70th GSC 2020)*” on May 2, 2020 during their agenda reduction meeting. In an additional committee consideration, the CCL asked that the TLC continue to explore this topic. The CCL also requested that the TLC make available to the Fellowship, as soon as possible, in Spanish, English and French, the PowerPoint presentation, noting the importance for the Fellowship to be informed about the nature of the accessibility challenges with regard to A.A. literature. The committee requested that a progress report be brought back to the 2021 Conference Committee on Literature. Since the 70th GSC, the requested presentation has been recorded to video and translated into French and Spanish, and we understand that it will be distributed to conference members soon. As this material is foundational to the work of this subcommittee and informs these discussions, we encourage widespread distribution of that

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presentation. When it is released, information about accessing the video can be obtained through conference delegates and the GSO Literature desk.

The 2020-21 TLC convened the current RIPTAB II subcommittee to: 1) determine the specific literacy level of the Big Book; 2) continue exploring how non-Conference approved literature is being utilized by A.A. members to carry the message for the purpose of better addressing any perceived gaps and their solutions at the local level for accessibility and relatability to the program of Alcoholics Anonymous; 3) request additional input on this topic from trustees' committees, including but not limited to Public Information, Corrections and Treatment and Accessibilities committees; and 4) undertake any other areas of exploration as they become identified. The following report reflect efforts related to this scope.

We also incorporated in our approach the 2019 request from Michele Grinberg, General Service Board chair, that this subcommittee: 1) *Identify and define the problems that these agenda items are trying to solve;* 2) *Group these agenda items in some way that makes sense so that information gathering, discussions and recommendations can evolve in a unified manner (workbooks, plain language BB, modern language BB, simple language BB, large-print BB), and* 3) *Identify what further information Trustees and Conference Literature Committees might need in order to decide on recommended agenda items that is/are best for the suffering alcoholics, based on a fully-informed background. Michele recognized that a plan to document the full spectrum of items and thinking would be needed, a plan to frame it for broad board and conference level discussions, and a need to share these ideas and receive input from the Conference Committee on Literature and General Service Conference as a whole.*

We have continued this work to the best of our ability, and present our work and findings below.

RIPTAB II (2020-2021):

A. LITERACY LEVEL OF THE BIG BOOK

We were asked to determine the literacy level of the Big Book (BB). The focus has been the study of *literacy* (that is, the ability to use written information to function, achieve one’s goals, or develop one’s knowledge) rather than *reading level*, as the latter does not necessitate comprehension. Our findings are not inconsistent with and roughly parallel the patterns one would see in examining the reading level of the BB and population statistics on reading levels, but we have focused on the more relevant construct of literacy. The committee studied material provided by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) for this determination, and agreed that on average, the Big Book is written at Literacy level 3. While there are sections that are at level 2, other sections are at 4, and on balance, most of the text appears to be written at level 3. This level requires the reader to identify, interpret, or evaluate one or more pieces of information contained in the text, and will require various levels of inferencing at times.

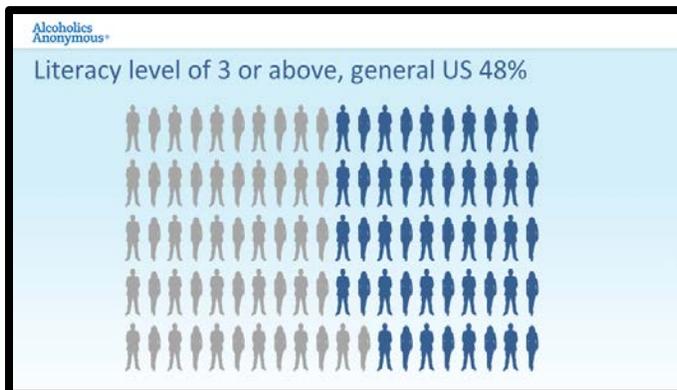
Examples of text that require considerable vocabulary, interpretation, or inferencing:

“Despite all we can say, many who are real alcoholics are not going to believe they are in that class. By every form of self-deception and experimentation, they will try to prove themselves exceptions to the rule, therefore nonalcoholic”. More About Alcoholism page 31.

“It is easy to let up on the spiritual program of action and rest on our laurels. We are headed for trouble if we do, for alcohol is a subtle foe. We are not cured of alcoholism. What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition.” Into Action, page 85.

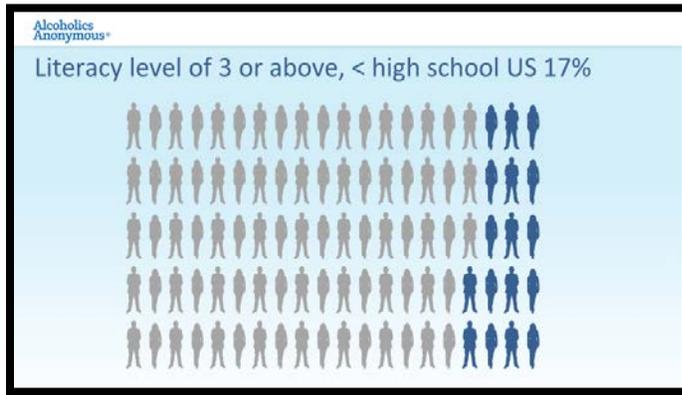
As a contrast for those that may now be accustomed to the language of the Big Book is a snippet from the Akron pamphlet mentioned above: *“There is no standing still in this work. You either forge ahead or slip backwards. Even the oldest members, the founders, learn something new almost every day.”*

The NCES has conducted and published robust national studies of the general population and incarcerated populations from which we can learn about the various levels of literacy.



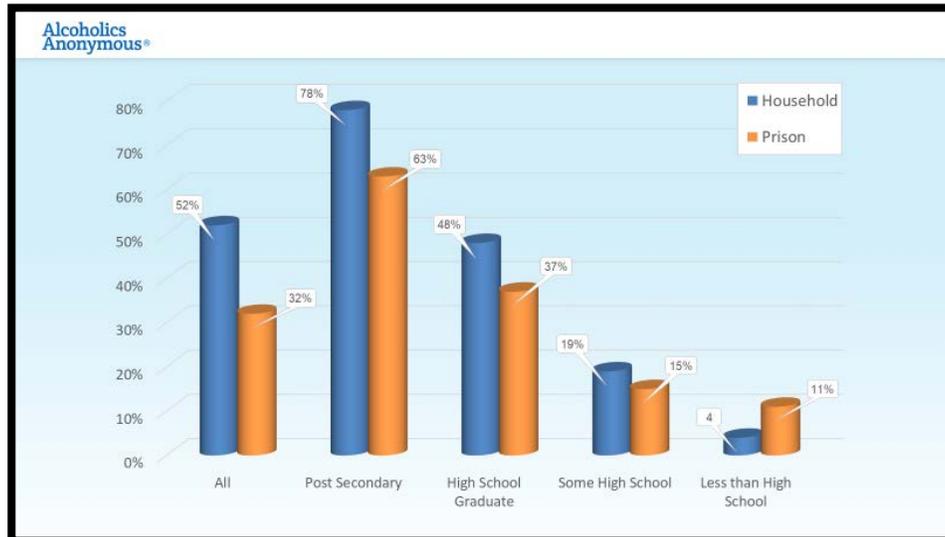
In the United State, 48% of the general public have a reading comprehension at Level 3.

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Among those in the general public that did not finish high school, only 17% have level 3 literacy skill.

Studies demonstrate that factors related to education and incarceration are related to literacy. For instance, among incarcerated populations, 32% have this level of literacy.

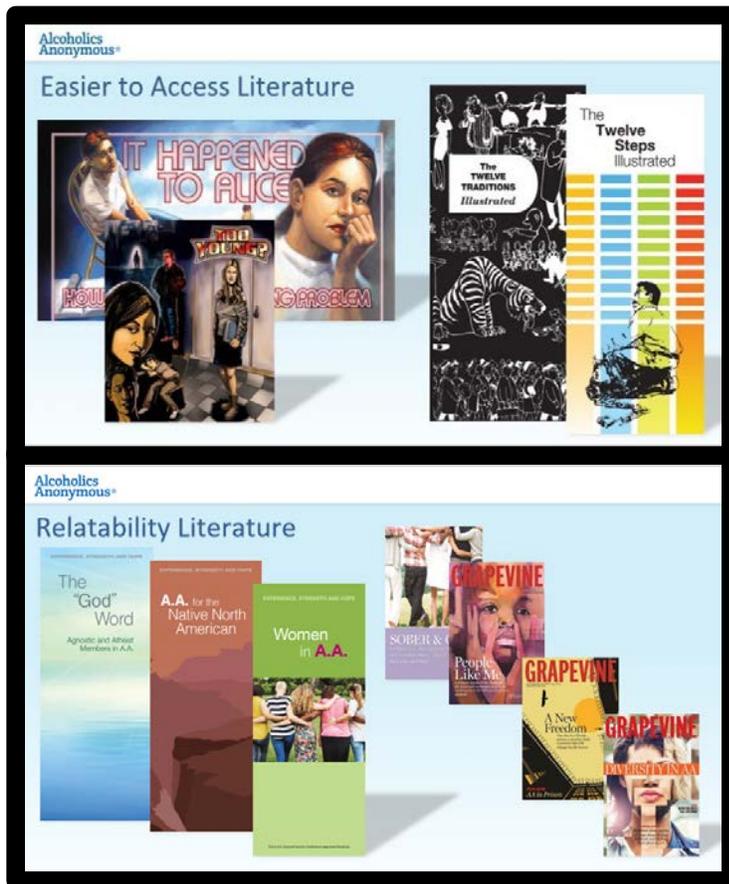


Indeed, many AA members share that they initially had difficulty understanding the Big Book. People who have overcome these challenges through working with a sponsor or other study methods remain in the rooms to report on their success. In contrast, we cannot obtain the shared experience of those that could not overcome the barriers who left. It may also be important to consider that not all those with reading and literacy barriers are able to access people with more recovery for assistance (for instance, those who are incarcerated or who live in remote communities). For some, the task of finding or getting assistance may be daunting, or impossible.

**RIPTAB II (2020-2021):
B. EXISTING MATERIAL**

As a part of our continued research to examine what materials may have in part been developed based on need or interest, we maintained and expanded a list of books, pamphlets, and digital products made either (1) by Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. (AAWS) or AA Grapevine, Inc. (AAGV), or (2) outside of Alcoholics Anonymous, (AA), that relate to challenges of accessibility or relatability.

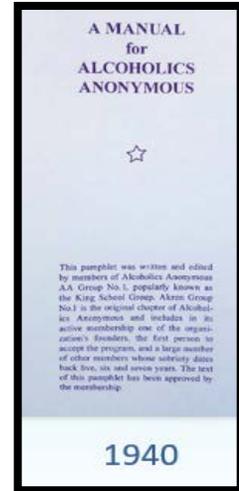
Review of General Service Conference (GSC) advisory actions over time indicate a recognition by GSC of the need for accessible and relatable material, with requests for AAWS and AAGV to produce simplified material.



AAWS pamphlets and AAGV issues and books have been developed to address relatability associated with gender, age, spiritual, or ethnic/cultural identities.

Note, however, that we have little material that reflects the actual program of recovery, outside *The Twelve Steps Illustrated* and *The Twelve Traditions Illustrated* pamphlets.

Interestingly, efforts to create alternative, simplified material began almost immediately after the Big Book was published. One of the first attempts to provide material for alcoholics who may have difficulty understanding our basic text was requested by Dr. Bob in 1940. It was said that he felt the language in the Big Book might be a little “high brow” for the average alcoholic. To ensure that more people could understand the message, he commissioned Evan W. to write a simple guide that could be given to the newcomer. This resulted in “A Manual for Alcoholics Anonymous”.



Then, the illustration below shows the multitude of items published by outside entities, or non-AA publications, including workbooks/study guides, tools for interpretation, audio and internet offerings that have followed.

1 Published Literature

- *Staying Sober without God*, Jeffrey Munn
- *Understanding the Twelve Steps*, Terence Gorski
- *Twelve Secular Steps*, Bill W
- *Common Sense Recovery: An Atheist's Guide to AA*, Adam N
- *The Five Keys: 12 Step Recovery Without A God*, Archer Vaux
- *An Atheist's Unofficial Guide to AA*, Vince Hawkins
- *A Skeptic's Guide to the 12 Steps*, Phillip Z
- *Daily Recovery: AA for Atheists & Agnostics*, Alex M
- *A Secular Sobriety*, Dale K
- *The Alternative 12 Steps A Secular Guide to Recovery*, Martha Cleveland
- *Alcoholics Anonymous Universal Edition*, Archer Vaux
- *A Free Thinker to AA*, John Lauritan
- *Don't Tell! Stories by Atheists and Agnostics in AA*, Rager C
- *Beyond Belief: Agnostic Musings for 12 Step Life*, Joe C
- *Not God: A History of Alcoholics Anonymous*, Ernst Kuitz
- *Waking: A Non-Believer's Higher Power*, Mariya Haribacker
- *Buddhist 12 Steps Pages in Recovery*
- *Freedom from our Addictions*, Russell Brand
- *A Program for You*, Hazelden

*Identified from member questionnaires

2 Workbooks

- Hazelden Big Book Workbooks
- Big Book Workbook
- www.thebigbookworkbook.com
- Big Book Awakening Workbook
- Guide to the Big Book's Design for Living, Hazelden
- 12 Step Workbook, including 4th Step Worksheets

The Big Book Workbooks Set

These three workbooks feature illustrations in various separate parts in the book and include exercises for self-examination and discussion.

- *Living with Your Higher Power: Step 9-12*
- *Living with Others: Steps 4-7*
- *Living with Oneself: Steps 1-3*

Clear illustrations of each Step and posing questions offer us a guide to personal insight and reflection. Worksheets are 10 steps each.

ISBN: 007-1-10000-0
 ISBN-10: 007-1-10000-0
 Published Year: 2007
 Category: Literature

3 Tools

- Big Book Dictionary
- 12 & 12 Dictionary
- Little Big Book Dictionary
- Glossary of Terms used in AA

Audio

- Joe & Charlie Tapes (an app)
- Speaker Files (thousands online)
- Variety of Speaker Apps

4 Internet Resources

- 164 and More
- Big Book Study Guides (created by groups)
- BB55.net
- Recovering sites with guides
- Silkworth.net

What others do is an outside issue. However, the concepts warn against the potential harm of others misusing the name, Alcoholics Anonymous. Ideally, we would remain the custodians of

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our recovery program. From Concept XI: [The Trustees Literature Committee] *“This body is charged with the revision of existing books and pamphlets; also with the creation of fresh pamphlet material to meet new needs or changing conditions. Broadly speaking, its mission is to see that an adequate and comprehensive view of A.A. in its every aspect is held up in writing to our members, friends, and to the world at large. Our literature is a principal means by which A.A. recovery, unity and service are facilitated. Tons of books and pamphlets are shipped each year. The influence of this material is incalculable. To keep our literature fully abreast of our progress is therefore an urgent and vital work. The Literature Committee constantly will have to solve new problems of design, format and content.”*

Do we remain the custodians of the message if others are providing the formats people are seeking?

RIPTAB II (2020-2021):

C. SHARING FROM TRUSTEES’ COMMITTEES AND GSO DESKS

RIPTAB II requested sharing from the trustees’ committees on Corrections, Public Information, Cooperation with the Professional Community/Treatment-Accessibilities, and from staff members responsible for the corresponding desks at the General Service Office. We offered the following prompts for sharing:

- How has accessibility (e.g., literacy) and relatability (e.g., secular perspectives, gender identification) impacted assignments?
- Sharing on barriers to alcoholics being referred to AA or support of their AA membership related to the Big Book.
- Any knowledge of credibility concerns related to outdated vernacular or content in the BB?

Sharing was offered from each desk/committee and largely paralleled concerns about access and relatability that have been expressed by the fellowship in the submitted agenda items. Some of the sharing is excerpted below:

Sharing from GSO Service Desks

- We are limited in our ability to communicate effectively with people who do not speak English well or regularly, because “our resources are written in a language that is not simple”
- Even when videos are subtitled, the user may not be able to read or comprehend the language. This could be due to the user but could also be due to the complexity (e.g., historical inferences and passages) of the language employed.

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- Certain populations, for example, autistic alcoholics, forensic psychiatric hospital patients, people with Alzheimer’s or other dementias, often struggle with our resources.
- People with linguistic/cultural differences (e.g., Hispanic; indigenous populations) may also have difficulty accessing and relating to our materials.
- We have little communication with Buddhist, Muslim or indigenous belief communities.
- We have little communication from A.A. communities who do not have digital literacy.
- After the GSC, many requests and offers were extended to the office, such as offers to re-write the Big Book. People share that the content is offensive and exclusionary. Concerns are expressed that the context is not accessible or relatable, with note for the need to modernize language to be effective. There is a regular flow of feedback that we are falling short in regards to inclusivity.
- There have been advisory actions (1986 and 1992) to degenderize AA literature (excepting Bill’s writings) as items are reprinted (e.g., ‘staffing the booth’ rather than ‘manning the booth’) but publishing and the GSC has not kept in current practices on what this means today.
- From a PI perspective, the Big Book is almost a part of contemporary “pop culture”. While many outside AA have heard of our basic text and the description of the alcoholic still hold true, while I would use excerpts, the Big Book is not a tool that I would use as a calling card to the public to carry the AA message to the media or high school settings.
- We often hear concerns from members of the fellowship about the language of the Big Book: “There is an inequality in how some members have to twist and turn to achieve identification within the first 164 pages and some members just have to do slight adjustments...”
- From a PI perspective, “To Employers”, “To Wives”, and “The Family Afterword” may need greater footnoting for the general public or those new to AA.
- Perhaps a footnote in “We Agnostics” noting that “A.A. members used varying pronouns or no pronouns to describe their HP. Those who want the shared experience of members who are Atheists and Agnostics might find the pamphlet “The God Word” or the AAGV book “One Big Tent.”
- From a sober meme Instagram page: “To Wives is a useless chapter”

It states: “To Wives” Is a Useless Chapter
Over 3,000 likes.



Liked by 3667

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- An interview with Dr. Stephanie Covington, a well-known clinician, author and treatment expert (<https://www.thefix.com/content/interview-dr-stephanie-covington>) offers insight into how the language of the big book is perceived among contemporary professionals: *“It is unfortunate that the Big Book still reflects the time of its beginning/origin when women were in the minority and literally ignored. The Big Book reflects a particular time in history”*.
- The Corrections desk receives, on average, one inquiry a week from incarcerated members asking if there is a workbook to help them better understand and work through the Steps.
- 9.14.20 Excerpt from Corrections Correspondence letter forwarded by the Corrections Desk

“...The Big Book has so many questions and very hard to read and understand by prisoners. The reason being the size of the book and the questions are not set right there, you have to use your head to formulate the questions and then search for the answers, and remember not everyone in prison has a general education degree (G.E.D.) In fact, I will use here at [this correctional facility], there is close to four hundred (400) individuals working on getting a High School diploma or equivalent. Now consider the AA Big Book, it close to how many pages, “many.” Someone who cannot read and properly write, in actual sense, will need help in understanding the Steps of AA and their spiritual principles. I was in AA for the 1st five years, I never digested anything until I sat down with an accountability brother, he was more experienced, he had two questions and some answers. We were using the 12 in 12. Each Step has a spiritual principle. When you pick up The 12 in 12 AA book. Open up the pages, read through the Steps, you cannot pinpoint those spiritual principles until someone walks hand in hand with you discuss the Steps and tells you that the first spiritual principle for AA’s Twelve Step is “honesty.” If someone does not explain to you in a question and answer discussion, one will not readily understand the Twelve Steps themselves. That is why I was of the idea that when you need inmates like us to understand the workings of AA, some questions will have to be developed and written in simple, plain language, considering that not everyone in a prison setting has a general education much less an understanding of the working of the Twelve Steps.

“Anyways, this was the little discussion in regards to the questions in the Big Book. They are good and easy for a man like you but not for a man inside these walls, who is learning how to read and write his name...”

Sincerely,

J.

Sharing from Trustees’ Committees

- The average reading level of inmates is low. One study estimated 5th grade level. It is important to differentiate between reading level and literacy level, which is also low among inmates. Literacy encompasses all the skills needed for reading and writing including vocabulary, comprehension, and being able to assimilate and analyze what is read. Members on the outside have easier access to sponsors who can help them understand the Big Book.

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- ... those behind the walls, they do not have the ability to seek answers to their questions nor may they have access to a sponsor who can guide their journey. Most prisons/jails may only have one meeting a week. There may not be the opportunity to have the one-on-one with another member to review, discuss or teach due to time/ space constraints. Significant numbers of prisons/jails have not offered meetings since March 2020 and may not be able to do so until the pandemic is over.
- The Big Book contains some antiquated language (e.g., “whoopie parties” and a different meaning for “brainstorm”) which can be a barrier to understanding.
- The Big Book may not be the best way to introduce inmates to A.A. Materials from Grapevine (especially stories from the annual “Corrections” issue and an upcoming new collection of stories from inmates) are shorter and easier to relate to.
- There is a lot of A.A. history in the Big Book, especially at the beginning with the forewords. “The Doctor’s Opinion” may be helpful in explaining the disease concept. But they do not know who “Bill” is and may not be able to relate to his story. Chapters like “There is a Solution” “More About Alcoholism” and “How It Works” do better at helping them decide if they are an alcoholic and introduce the Steps.” We may not want to change the Big Book, but we should consider history coming after they are interested in A.A.
- Audio versions may help some, but also audio studies (in the style of the Joe & Charlie study but updated from the 80s) might be useful.
- With the expansion of digital access, we might inquire whether audio or highlighting functions can be utilized on the tablet.
- The medical community may approach the beginning of recovery differently (e.g., “readiness to change” preceding the actual engagement of person in change, as observed in the first 3 steps.
- Professionals, not acquainted with AA principles, may misunderstand anonymity with secrecy, and may even feel that by sharing about AA with other professionals they are breaking Tradition 11.
- The courts routinely refer to AA, but most judges know little about the structure and work of AA.
- The biggest objection from people about AA is references to God, religion, or higher power. A discussion of religion and spirituality is very foreign to many people. They just see the God word and turn off.
- There is a disconnect between AA and the courts. The courts do not know about and are not invested in “conference approved literature”, what edition of the Big Book is provided, or about the service work behind our literature and services. They just don't speak the AA language. The courts want to refer people they perceive as alcoholics or addicts to an organization which can help them change into people who won't come back on additional criminal charges.
- Reading for pleasure has become a rare thing—so many people say they never or rarely read books. Reading books or even pamphlets is just not the current way to reach people. Reading skills are low. Acquiring books may be economically difficult. Books are just not where people look for either pleasure or for information.
- I had the best results "carrying the message" as a judge when I handed out books and material I had bought at treatment conferences from the bench. I did not realize these were not official AA books.

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Things like the "EZ Big Book" were great. No way would a real Big Book appeal to this population. The 12 Step workbooks from Hazelden were also very popular.

- I realize the Big Book has great significance to members of AA. As does the Bible to Christians. But the Bible has been adapted to many editions which changed and simplified the Bible of even 50 years ago. It has been made accessible to children, undereducated adults, and just about any population you can describe. It is ACCESSIBLE! I don't believe the Big Book is.
- At this point, the only publication I give away for AA to the population I work with is the Grapevine. It is much more readable, accessible and understandable for them.
- The language of the Big Book may never be changed, but we have to find a way to create something based on the message of the Big Book which people can relate to.

Subcommittee receipt of feedback:

The feedback largely parallels what is reflected in the requests from the agenda items. However, we would like to highlight: 1) The frequency of complaints and concerns expressed to the office about the inaccessibility or exclusionary nature of our writing is notable. 2) The perception of inequality, rejection, and exclusiveness among some is palpable and incompatible with the spirit of the 3rd tradition. It seems that our language requires access and conformity that is not attainable by some. 3) The antiquity of some of the language can spur cultish social trends—where knowing and understanding phrases like “salt and pepper diet” signals being ‘in the know’. 4) The use of literature that looks and reads more simply amongst professionals, and the prevalent requests to our service desks and the GSC for accessible material to access the message of recovery seems to reflect a widespread need. 5) Most importantly, perceived clearly from our front facing service desks and among our professionals, as well as those working in the field, there are barriers to understanding, relatability, and inclusion that impact our core responsibility to help the alcoholic who still suffers.

RIPTAB II (2020-2021):

D. FELLOWSHIP AGENDA ITEMS (RECENT)

In recent years, approximately 3-5 proposed Conference agenda items per year related to updating or changing the Big Book or creating new material related to our basic message of recovery are received. The increasing frequency, clarity, and overlap of these items prompted formation of the RIPTAB subcommittees. In this cycle, we reviewed the recent and pending agenda items pertaining to fellowship proposed agenda items that related to modifying existing or creating new material focused on carrying the message of Alcoholics Anonymous found in our basic text, the Big Book of AA, to help us further understand and organize this material for consideration. Agenda items (14) with requests emanating from concerns about accessibility and/or relatability were included:

Creating a 5th Edition

1. That the General Service Conference consider creating a 5th Edition of the book Alcoholics Anonymous in order to update the personal stories to better reflect our current membership. (Disposition: Discussed at 69th GSC; did not result in an Advisory Action; DONE)

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2. Consider developing a Fifth Edition of the Big Book to aid new members with more relevant stories by our current members today. (Disposition: Discussed at 69th GSC; did not result in an Advisory Action; DONE)
3. Consider creating a Fifth Edition of the book, Alcoholics Anonymous, which would include a new concentrated section of stories comprised of individuals who got sober as young people, meaning under the age of 25. (Disposition: Discussed at 69th GSC; did not result in an Advisory Action; DONE)

Proposed Changes to the Big Book or 5th Edition

4. That the Conference form a study committee to audit the first 164 pages of the Big Book with the purpose of identifying changes that can be made to make the Big Book more reflective of the A.A. membership composition. (Disposition: Forwarded to the 71st from the 70th GSC)
5. Consider to allow Jewish Rabbis and Muslim leaders and Indian Ancient Vedas scholars et al to have diverse spiritual language in the Fifth Edition Big Book rather than the current predominantly Judeo-Christian language. (Disposition: RIPTAB)
6. That the General Service Conference consider creating a 5th Edition of the book Alcoholics Anonymous with the removal of the Chapters 'To Wives', 'The Family Afterward', and 'To Employers'. (Disposition: RIPTAB)
7. That the words of the opposite sex be removed from the paragraph in Chapter 12 of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions which currently reads: "Nearly every sound human being experiences, at some time in life, a compelling desire to find a mate of the opposite sex with whom..." (Disposition: Forwarded to the 71st from the 70th GSC)
8. *Consider a proposed addendum to a Fifth Edition forward, of the book Alcoholics Anonymous, at the time it is published. The addendum of gender terms is written with the intent that all who are seeking answers (help) for a drinking problem are encouraged to give Alcoholics Anonymous a try. (Disposition: Forwarded to 70 GSC and now to 71st GSC)

Development of Interpretive Tools

9. Consider a motion that Alcoholics Anonymous create an approved A.A. dictionary to compliment the Big Book. (Disposition: RIPTAB)

Proposed Workbooks or Study Guides

10. Consider the development of a contemporary and comprehensive new work book to study the Twelve Steps, Traditions, and Concepts. (Disposition: Sent to RIPTAB Nov. 2019)
11. Consider an individualized workbook to accompany the Big Book. (Disposition: Sent to RIPTAB)
12. Request to develop a simplified language workbook for the Steps. (Disposition: RIPTAB)

New Material, presenting the Program of Recovery in Plain Language or Digital Formats

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13. *That the General Service Conference consider presenting the A.A. program of recovery as outlined in the book Alcoholics Anonymous in a digital format, (such as but not limited to podcasts), to be made available online, in accordance with all AA Traditions. (Disposition: RIPTAB)
14. *Consider translating the Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous into plain language – at a fifth grade or similar reading level. (Disposition: Sent to RIPTAB)

For each item, we reviewed the submitted item and its background. Agenda items loosely fell into requests for a Fifth Edition BB, requests for plain language or digital material reflecting the message of recovery, and requests for workbooks or study guides. Some of these had been recently deliberated and disposed of by a recent GSC, but some are pending review. For each item we considered whether or not the item might address the issues that arose as driving these requests, as the proposed solutions varied in their focus and reach:

- Literacy
- Other access barriers
- Gender
- Secular
- Modern vernacular (linguistic); cultural references
- Professional content or audience impact

In addition to considering whether the proposed item addressed one or more of the expressed challenges, we discussed some of the possible advantages and disadvantages of these approaches. Without taking a position on each of these items and without overstepping the requested input from this committee, we offer the following observations on these ideas that have been offered from the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous.

RIPTAB II (2020-2021):

E. RIPTAB II CONCLUSIONS

1. It is our impression, based on reviewing agenda items, appreciating the disposition of previously considered items, and importantly, listening to discussion at several and geographically diverse workshops and sharing session, that the fellowship does not have an appetite for full revision of the Big Book. There exists a strong sentiment and love for the original language of the book, which understandably develops with the experience of this text being associated with successful recovery. For some, the idea of changing the text appears almost threatening, while others are concerned that changes to the text used would fundamentally alter the recovery program itself. Collectively, we do not believe that at the present time the fellowship would support the revision of our basic text.

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2. Regardless of any new material that may be developed independent of the Big Book, there are many requests for the 5th edition to move forward. When it does, it is our impression that it would be prudent to use footnotes, forwards, and appendices to acknowledge its historical context, potentially inaccurate or offensive characterizations. Here we ask the reader to think about material that is dated in its reflection of current statutes, policy and family roles. As an example, in current times human resource (HR) guidance and state/federal law dictate the handling of the alcoholic and his/her alcoholism as a disability; protocol in these matters may differ from the advice stated in 'To Employers'. Likewise, the 'Family Afterward' does not reflect the current variety of roles of spousal relationships. Footnotes, forwards, and appendices may serve to help contextualize some of these divergences from current language and practice.
3. Some agenda items or discussion have raised the possibility of using literacy aids or tools to help people with lower literacy better understand the material. Such suggestions include dictionaries, encyclopedias, or text with annotations (explanations) on the side. It is our impression that these are tools that are more likely to be utilized by people with strong exposure to such aids through education, tutoring, or other support, and that they may be foreign or awkward for many who are literacy challenged. As such, while they may benefit a few, we do not believe that such tools will uniformly and effectively help those who most need assistance to access the written message.
4. Collectively, the background information found in the agenda items, the sharing from desks and committees, and from the fellowship suggest that:
 - a. There is a strong commitment to not eliminate or alter the fundamental principles and actions suggested in our program of recovery as laid out in the Big Book. Any work related to accessibility, whether by addition of footnotes-forwards-appendices or development of new material, should take painstaking care to not fundamentally eliminate or shift the basic tenants of the recovery program.
 - b. Sharing from those that overcame literacy barriers is passionate and inspiring. However, at times it reflects limited awareness that the resources that were used to overcome literacy barriers are not available to many. As an example, access to a sponsor or person with time to help define words or concepts in the Big Book can be limited in prison settings, some treatment or living facilities, and in remote communities. The voices of these people may not be clearly appreciated, frankly, because they likely did not stay.
 - c. It is prudent to consider these discussions in light of Tradition Three, where no additional requirement other than a desire to stay sober, is required for membership in Alcoholics Anonymous. Some shared alarm that there are additional requirements, whereby the alcoholic is to have a certain level of literacy, or the where-with-all to

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secure assistance or willingness to suffer humiliation. We are particularly concerned when this is justified with the idea that an alcoholic's desperation will motivate them.

- d. We have become aware that the accessibility of our message has public relations impact.
5. We would like to humbly suggest that the work of RIPTAB is one that requires ongoing consideration and renewed strategy. To this end we suggest two strategy considerations:
- a. We suggest that it would be prudent for the TLC to review the agenda items not yet considered, along with any related agenda items and background, to progress their disposition. In keeping with the strategy suggestion from the GSB chair in 2019, TLC may consider presentation of items with similar themes together to facilitate efficiency by the Conference Literature Committee. The organization presented in Section D is an illustration of such topical presentation, with groupings of requests related to: Creating a 5th Edition; Proposed Changes to the Big Book or 5th Edition; Development of Interpretive Tools; Proposed Workbooks or Study Guides; New Material, presenting the Program of Recovery in Plain Language or Digital Formats.
 - b. Issues related to accessibility and relatability will change over time, as literacy levels change, learning approaches evolve, and methods of how people consume information change. Now in 2020 communication reflects multi-media access and preferences which include the written word, audio word, graphic illustrations, and video content. It is reasonable to expect that how individuals engage and learn will continue to evolve. As we continually seek to be maximally effective in our primary purpose of helping the still suffering alcoholic, ongoing interval review of the accessibility and relatability of content might be achieved through the trustees' Committee on Accessibility, and supported by the Communication Services and Publishing Departments.
6. Of the many potential solutions to the accessibility and relatability agenda items in recent years, RIPTAB II found compelling strength and possibility in two agenda item approaches that appear promising in their potential reach while maintaining the integrity of the message. Here we share some comments to illustrate why we feel that further study is warranted. If prudent, the trustees' Committee on Literature might request input from the Conference Committee on Literature and the AA Fellowship on these approaches, submitted by the Fellowship across numerous agenda items.
- a. Development of digital material related to the message of recovery (#13 above; agenda item currently in TLC). This agenda item proposed development of multi-media platforms to share historical and current perspectives related to BB content. This digital content would not be intended to replace or translate the Big Book, but rather to supplement access to the message through a multi-media platform. Such projects might include visual/video interviews; podcasts; graphic illustrations or animation. In considering such dynamic material, it was thought that such a project might be best

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curated through the AAGV, but with the GSC providing guidance, structure, and vision. By seating the project in the AAGV, dynamic and ongoing content could be accessed from historical material and created via avenues already piloted in some manner (submissions, review, archiving). We recognize that the GSC and GSB would need to authorize and direct such a novel AAGV endeavor.

- b. The Fellowship has repeatedly indicated a desire or need for a new plain language written book, not meant to replace the big book but instead to break through access and relatability barriers. Persistent and widespread need appears to be demonstrated. Such a plain text is conceptualized as an entirely new item, rather than a replacement, designed to be relatable and understandable at very basic literacy levels. Formats that could be considered:
 - i. Simple plain text content reflecting the Big Book text, a plain language reader.
 - ii. Workbook format: Brief introductions, sharing on each principle and questions to prompt self-examination and/or work with a sponsor. Example: Reaching for Personal Freedom, Al-anon's workbook for steps, traditions, and concepts.
 - iii. Study Guide format: In depth chapters on each step, tradition, and concept, with sharing and questions at the end of each. Example: Pathways to Recovery.

Fundamentally, the format is secondary to the idea that there is value to using plain language for comprehension and relatability. If shared experience is included, it should be illustrative rather than directive in nature. Our pamphlets do just this, editorial content is supplemented by examples or illustrations of the concepts. Such a plain language reader could be formatted similarly (like a giant pamphlet with a hardcover).

As noted, neither of these approaches, or any other, should be designed to replace or supplant the current basic text, *Alcoholics Anonymous*. Instead, this content would be designed to introduce those who cannot access the message in its current form to the program of recovery. It is critical to note that our existing supplemental pamphlets, booklets, and books have not deterred individuals from pursuing study of our basic text when they are able, and that such material can be carefully created to effectively reach the still suffering alcoholic without compromising the fundamental message of Alcoholics Anonymous.

We close with gratitude for the opportunity to study this matter, respect for the challenges of all who need AA and those who thrive in sobriety, and humility related to the work needed to simultaneously create access while preserving the AA program.

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