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Dear friends,

My name is Tom Ivester, and I am not an alcoholic. I am privileged and deeply honored to serve as a Class A Trustee to the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous. In fact, just this year I made it through my 1st General Service Conference, so I feel that I've finally graduated from my orientation to the structure and work of the service side of AA.

While I attempted to find some creative pathways to becoming so, I am obviously not a member of AA, yet I feel like I belong. I even feel like I have a home group back in Southern Pines, NC, though I haven't attended in a while. And with that sense of belonging, I also feel a strong sense of responsibility to and for this amazing fellowship. You see, I am a product of this program. In a somewhat perverse sense, I am one of your children. This came to be through what the fellowship gave to my father, which wasn't just sobriety but a life - and an amazing one at that. He came to AA behind the walls of Michigan State Penitentiary, as broken and wasted a human as you can be. The man that emerged, however, assumed a life that was deeply committed to service - not just in AA but in every aspect of his life, and he contributed greatly to the community and beyond. I could not have asked for a better role model. We lost our father just over 3 years ago, at which time he had 65 years of sobriety. Throughout those 65 years, the spiritual foundations of Alcoholics Anonymous fully informed his values and how he lived them. He never relented in his commitment to service, both formal and informal, and that imprinted deeply on my sister and me.

Now, Dad was not particularly effusive or open on a personal level with my sister or me. Rather, growing up, we got to know him through this fellowship. We observed keenly as he interacted with others, and we listened intently to his talks. And the more I learned, the more I wanted to learn. I read the Big Book for the 1st time around age 10 or 11, ripping it from Dad's shelf the night I heard his story for the first time. I gobbled up pamphlets at every opportunity (thankfully, none of my 11-year-old friends discovered this odd library hiding in my nightstand!). Of course, I made no connection between the literature I was consuming (or the coffee and cookies) and the basket being passed at every meeting! I would soon be introduced to the Seventh Tradition.

Now I do not mean to hyperbolize, but in a very real sense, I owe my life to this program. Without this program, I don't exist. My family doesn't exist. And the life I have

is all the fuller as a result of the spiritual principles instilled in me by virtue of my father's truly living this program. So you can hopefully understand my occasional frustration with this one particular Tradition that prohibited me from contributing to AA! "What kind of organization is this???" we would complain. "Don't they need our money?" "Don't we owe them something?" I explored every loophole. What if we sent money anonymously? Nope. Could you bequeath a portion of your estate? Nope. Can I sneak some money into the basket? Nope (well, on occasion, Dad would hand us a dollar or two to drop in the basket on his behalf). I had resigned myself to the notion that our family was a perpetual beneficiary of Alcoholics Anonymous and there was simply nothing I could contribute. That is, until a couple members reached out and educated me on the opportunity to serve as a Class A Trustee. Being almost completely ignorant of the service structure of AA, I had no idea such a thing existed! Having learned this, there really was no choice except to apply for the role. The timing was not ideal due to other life and professional circumstances, but I have a sense that it happened now because it needed to.

The learning curve has been steep. As a physician and senior healthcare leader, I've been a part of a handful of corporate and nonprofit boards, but there simply is no other organizational structure like this one! I read the service manual, attended meetings of the board, participated in committees and subcommittees, read the Big Book, watched videos, and read pamphlets. The 'upside down triangle' just didn't make complete sense, at least not completely, until I got into my first General Service Conference. This is when the lights came on and the whole structure came to life for me. Does it make perfect sense to me? No, but I understand it, and I certainly wouldn't want to change it! And there are absolutely some elements that should be adopted by other boards, and maybe even society. To see the voices of the fellowship and its vast diversity of groups channeled and amplified before the entire Conference, the steadfast adherence to spiritual principles and our primary purpose, and the expression of substantial unanimity were simply awesome. It was simultaneously heartwarming, and frustrating, and inspiring, and exhausting, and meaningful, but it was the sheer beauty of it all together, and the love for one another and AA that will stay with me.

Having reflected on this year of learning, and looking to my years of service ahead, I have major ambitions for what I hope we can accomplish as the General Service Board and the small amount I get to contribute - there are so many out there who desperately need this fellowship but haven't found it. I also feel the full weight of our critical roles as stewards of very finite and valuable resources. I know first-hand that my fellow trusted servants and every member of the General Service Office feel this as well, and it is fully expressed in the careful discipline, incredibly hard work, and staunch orientation to our primary purpose with which they approach their roles. I know that my ambitions for us must be tempered to meet the realities of our resources, but I am nonetheless excited for all that we will accomplish together in service.

Before I close, I hope y'all will tolerate a brief diversion as I work to navigate the intersection of my professional and service brains. At work, I often need to rely on analyses to help guide important decisions. A common metric we use around key investments is ROI (return on investment), which measures whether an investment will yield a particular level benefit for our patients or a financial margin for the organization. Ideally, it's both! So, as I've reflected on the experience of my father and my family through recovery, and how that translates across the fellowship, I've begun to ponder the ROI of our service structures and AA in general, and I think most folks have totally missed the boat on this.

Okay, stick with me here, 'cause this might get a little slippery but should be directionally accurate. Now, I am not inclined to attach a dollar value to a life, but certain agencies do. This is how they determine the investment threshold for a new safety device, regulation, or health intervention. A commonly used measure is the Cost of a Quality Adjusted Life Year, or QALY (each additional year of good life quality), which averages around \$100,000 per QALY. Using my father as a case study, there is no doubt in my mind that he accumulated at least 60+ solid QALY's as a direct result of this fellowship. Even simple math shows a solid return. Since his was likely on the more severe end of spectrum, we can't apply that impact across the fellowship. But let's say that AA has a substantial life impact on 20% of its members (400,000), and that they achieve an average 7 additional QALY's. That would mean an aggregate value of **\$280 Billion USD**. The General Service Board receives around \$11 million in contributions annually. Doing some creative backwards math, one could estimate contributions across the entire fellowship (groups, districts, areas, GSO) at around \$175 million. The resulting ROI is around 1600x – meaning \$1600 in value for every dollar contributed. I know of no other organization with this level of impact.

Ultimately, though, there is no dollar amount I can place on the impact of AA on my family – it has been priceless. It is no doubt the same for many others. What Dad got was joy, achieved via a deep sense of purpose and a true sense of belonging, a life of service and meaningful contribution. That can't be measured or repaid. But it can be passed on. I hope that I can help.

To close, I really can't adequately convey the immense gratitude I feel for this incredible opportunity to serve Alcoholics Anonymous. It is indeed among my greatest honors. I can't give you my wallet (though I gladly would), but you have my heart and mind. While I know my contributions will be small in the grand scheme of things, I hope that I am used to the fullest of my capacity and capabilities for the short time I am able to serve. And for that, I am truly grateful.

Tom Ivester