

Lead Meetings

by Gary N.

Many years ago when I was visiting Northeast Ohio for my first sober Thanksgiving, my brother introduced me to an A.A. who was going to take me to my first meeting up there.

As soon as the fellow picked me up in his car, he asked, "Would you like to do a discussion meeting or a lead meeting?"

I didn't have a clue what a lead meeting was. I thought it might be timely to describe some differences between typical lead meetings in Akron and Cleveland versus typical meetings in Atlanta. A.A. Meeting #1, The Kings School Meeting in Akron, Ohio, is a lead meeting. The oldest clubhouse meeting in Cleveland at Club 24 is a lead meeting. More than 70% of the meetings in Northeast Ohio are lead meetings.

Typically there are three people sitting up front of the members in attendance. One is the secretary, one is the meeting chair, and the third is the person that will be doing the lead.

After the AA Preamble is read, the meeting chair asks who is in need of prayer. Members will respond regarding whomever may be ill, or out of a job, or who might have recently lost a loved one. After no one responds to the solicitation for prayer, the chair will ask for a moment of silence. He then concludes the silence with an affirmation, such as, "May God heal them and bring them peace."

(Without any evidence, I'm guessing this practice is a holdover from Oxford Group meetings. If the lead meeting is held at a club house, it is not at all unusual for the Oxford Group Four Absolutes to be posted between the Steps and the Traditions.)

After the basket is passed, visitors are welcomed, Anniversaries are acknowledged without chips. Announcements are solicited. The meeting secretary may announce news about the meeting. The chair will then introduce the lead. The lead is given by a person that will be telling his story. The length of time that the lead takes may be as short as twenty minutes. The lead begins by asking the listeners to join in saying the Serenity Prayer. The story is told, and when the lead concludes, the room circles and at the request of the lead, the Lord's Prayer is said.

At my first lead meeting, I looked at the clock when the lead concluded, and I said to myself, "They have thirty minute A.A. meetings here!" However, after the Lord's Prayer, people return to their seats. Then, the lead is discussed by those that heard it.

The chair will do the first response to the lead. He speaks directly to the lead typically thanking him for his message. No one introduces himself. The next person rises, will say how the lead impacted him or whatever else comes to mind. People will rise until the scheduled time for the meeting to close, and if no one rises to speak, the meeting ends at the direction of the chair. One meeting I attended lasted 45 minutes. Another lasted one hour a fifteen minutes.

Isn't it interesting that one responds to the lead without introducing oneself? By itself, that observation alone could easily become an entire article on its own.

The A.A. Speakers Manual available from Akron, Ohio today, written at the request of Founder Dr. Bob, states, "No souls are saved after the first twenty minutes . . . Remember, alcoholics are restless people. They squirmed at sermons . . . avoided long plays and concerts, almost never attended lectures. Demosthenes himself could not hold an alcoholic audience for more than a half hour."

So, over and over again, the practice of a lead meeting seems to implement a characteristic Dr. Bob most wanted to provide to A.A. speakers: "Be Brief!" And among the other brief suggestions:

- 1) Don't try to cover everything you know in one talk. You probably will be invited to lead at some future date.
- 2) Try to use as much new material as possible in each talk. The man who heard you Monday night might hear you again on Thursday
- 3) No one knows all the answers. Don't give the impression that you are an exception to the rule.
- 4) Don't read lengthy poems or quotations of any kind. They are boresome. If you must quote, be brief.

And finally, the speaker manual states: "Don't criticize. Leave that for your fifth anniversary. And when your fifth anniversary comes, don't criticize . . . and when you are finished, SIT DOWN."

Not bad suggestions, don't you think?

So now, hopefully, if you're in Northeast Ohio for the first time, you'll be more clued in to your first A.A lead meeting than I ever was.

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