

The comments below were given by various members of the Conference Steps and Traditions Committee and do not represent a group conscience of the entire committee. The opinions expressed here are solely that of the person giving them. Take what you like and leave the rest.

The Question

In my area some members decided to start an S.L.A.A. study group using the (well known step recovery book), which is not a conference approved text. A coordinator was selected and was to contact various local meetings to announce the study group.

One member asked for information and was told by the coordinator that she/he was not welcome to attend because someone else felt uncomfortable around that person and that it is a private meeting in which the members have chosen to not adopt the 12 Traditions. They do plan to read the Preamble, The 12 Steps, The 12 Signs of Recovery of S.L.A.A. and the Promises of S.L.A.A. from page 95 of the Basic Text. Additionally the meeting is to be open to all S.L.A.A. members for the first 4 meetings and then open only to those who have attended at least one of the first 4 sessions. There is a beginning and an ending date for this study group.

I have asked various members regarding whether or not any of the 12 Traditions have been violated. I have received differing opinions as to whether or not Traditions have been violated regarding the use of the book and the exclusion of one member of the Fellowship. Some feel that it is a violation of different Traditions and others believe that it is not since this is not a registered S.L.A.A. meeting.

These are my questions – Is this step study meeting an S.L.A.A. meeting? If this step study meeting is an S.L.A.A. meeting, what Traditions have been violated? Or is this not an S.L.A.A. meeting.

Could you please respond with some guidelines?

Committee Responses -

In my area there are some special meetings which have rules like closing membership after four weeks or orientation, expecting people to leave if they do not meet sobriety requirements or miss some number of meetings. Sometimes they use conference approved literature and other times they do not.

Here it is recognized that because these meetings do not act in accordance with the Traditions, they are not considered S.L.A.A. meetings, cannot be included on our meeting list and should not be announced with S.L.A.A. announcements. In our area there are meetings that have at the close of their meeting format “Are there any non-S.L.A.A. announcements?” This allows members to announce these meetings but also makes it clear that it is not a part of S.L.A.A.

At a recent meeting I attended, a member was attempting to make an announcement for what is essentially one of these meetings during the S.L.A.A. announcements. During the meeting break, some of the long time members gently pointed out the Traditions issues and suggested options for announcing this meeting. My suggestion would be that the group discuss it at a business meeting and suggest putting a place in the format for non-S.L.A.A. 12 Step announcements if that is within the group conscience of the meeting.

Even though it is not a registered S.L.A.A. meeting a coordinator is designated to announce it in the meetings in the area and the behavior of excluding one interested member breaches Tradition 1: our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon S.L.A.A. unity. And by one S.L.A.A.

member standing up with the decision to exclude a fellow member, they are failing to recognize Tradition 2: For our group purpose, there is but one ultimate authority – a loving God as this Power may be expressed through our group conscience. Or leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern. I wonder how the decision maker would feel if they were excluded on the basis of making others feel uncomfortable.

I do not believe S.L.A.A. Traditions are being followed, but it is technically an S.L.A.A. meeting.

There are many different factors at play: non-conference approved literature, one member being told she wasn't welcome/private meeting, group chose not to adopt the 12 Traditions and it is not a registered S.L.A.A. meeting.

Then the questions; Is this step study meeting an S.L.A.A. meeting? – Tradition 2 comes to mind here; "The only requirement for S.L.A.A. membership is a desire to stop acting out a pattern of sex and love addiction." So it seems to me that they may call themselves an S.L.A.A. meeting. If this step study meeting an S.L.A.A. meeting, what Traditions have been violated? – By asking a member not to attend the group seems to be violating Traditions 3. There is a difference in having a closed meeting open only to sex and love addicts and banning one member, unless this is a group conscience decision, in which case Tradition 4 would apply. I think the same Tradition applies in using non-conference approved literature. It is discouraged (mainly because it can be confusing to the newcomer, at least in my understanding. But if GC decides to use it, it's OK, but it a good idea to announce often that this is non-conference approved. Or is this not an S.L.A.A. meeting? – I don't have any experience around a group deciding not to adopt the Traditions.

I think that it's fairly common to close step studies to new folks after a period of time. I have experience with that in another Fellowship. If the group is working the Steps and sharing what each has written, it starts to feel unsafe to have those present who are not doing so or who have not been doing so. I'm not saying it's the right way to do it; I just know another fellowship did it that way also.

This is one of the toughest questions with which we have dealt. There seem to be several areas of difficulty with the scenario presented.

First of all, the adoption of a piece of non-conference approved literature is an area of concern. This is a Tradition 4 issue since it is up to the individual group as to how they conduct their meetings. As long as it is made clear that this is a Group Conscience, I would have no personal problem with their decision and could choose whether or not I wanted to attend that meeting.

However a second issue presents itself in this question – since this is a text written by a professional and is used by other fellowships as a means of teaching the steps, I wonder if this could be a bit of a Tradition 8 issue, since it is written by a professional. It would appear to be a Tradition 6 issue because if this is the only thing being discussed at this meeting, it would appear to be an endorsement of the author as well as the recovery foundation with which he is associated and publishes his book. This poses a problem for me since it seems to violate these two Traditions. Perhaps another Tradition to consider is Tradition 5 – which states that our primary propose is t carry the message to the sex and love addict who still suffers. It would be difficult to carry the message when we are not using our Basic Text, which is the message, as the basis of our study.

The third issue which poses a problem for me is the exclusion of certain members form the study. Tradition 3 tells us that the only requirement for S.L.A.A. membership is the desire to stop living out a

pattern of sex and love addiction. Although the next phrase of this same Tradition states that any two or more persons gathering together for mutual aid in recovering from sex and love addiction may call themselves an S.L.A.A. group provided they have no other affiliation. That takes us back to the second issue, once again. I also see a Tradition 12 issue here since exclusion would seem to be placing personalities before principles, instead of principles before personalities.

To have a beginning and ending date for the study would make this seem to be more like a special interest recovery workshop, which would not be directly affiliated with any S.L.A.A. meetings, which would make it possible for them to use anything which they desired for that workshop. That they do intend to register this meeting with could indicate that this is their intention.

Finally, that they do not intend to adopt the entire S.L.A.A. program, which would include the 12 Traditions, it would seem that they are not truly and S.L.A.A. group. To ignore the Traditions would seem to be a violation of S.L.A.A. unity. If we are not all going to embrace the entire program, we would truly cause confusion within the local area and the Fellowship as a whole, which would relate to Tradition 4; the principle of unity.

The book in question was used in my area a few years ago, as the theme of a retreat. It raised a lot of concern from some of the more experienced members.

The CSTC is a group of volunteers, some of whom were ABM delegates, and others who volunteered out of interest. We do not represent a group conscience of S.L.A.A., but are committed to bringing thoughtful discussion and study of 12 Step Fellowship literature and experience to the questions that are brought to us. Other non-S.L.A.A. literature, such as AA or Al-Anon literature may have been accessed in order to see how other 12 Step Recovery Fellowships have addressed these issues. We offer this summary as the result of our discussions. We present the major points of concern in the hope that wider discussion in the Fellowship will help us evolve our customs and practice of the S.L.A.A. program of recovery to better represent the loving guidance of a Higher Power. Always we affirm the autonomy of each group and the need for each individual to follow her/his own conscience. No decision of this group, or any other, is ever forced upon another, even when we believe a practice is clearly in conflict with the Steps and Traditions.