

# GENERAL SERVICE ASSOCIATION OF ABA PRESIDENT'S REPORT—MARCH 31, 2019

Today we celebrate the end of the General Service Association's sixteenth year, and the start of its seventeenth. As is the case with many sixteen-year-olds, it was a tumultuous passage! Time and again events and circumstances demonstrated the wisdom embodied in the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. Individually and collectively we were granted opportunities to learn important lessons about our common welfare, who holds ultimate authority, our singleness of purpose, non-professionalism, organization, and other matters necessary for our survival, much less our evolution.

I have had the privilege of interacting with many people (in person, by phone, through messaging, and via email). Though the opinions expressed sometimes diverged or even conflicted, all of the women and men I spoke with demonstrated concern for the health and wellbeing of our beloved fellowship. I heard pain and frustration, but also passion and hope.

I thank everyone who participated in Board and Committee proceedings and in one-on-one discussions: GSA Board Officers and Directors, Committee Chairs and Members, GSRs, ABA Members at large, my ABA and AA sponsors and the men I sponsor, ABA and AA elder statespersons, and others who contacted me or whose counsel I sought.

I also wish to thank our accountant, Dan Cohen of HC Professional Corporation, for generously donating his time on the phone and in the preparation of legally required documents.

Later, Officers and Committee Chairs will report on issues they are uniquely qualified to address. First, however, I offer a few words from my perspective looking back and looking forward.

## THE YEAR IN REVIEW

Prior to the 2018 AGM I was asked if I would stand for the position of Board President. I had reservations—mostly having to do with my lack of experience—but after time in prayer and consultation with my sponsors, I agreed. Then, just moments after the election, the meeting plunged into a cauldron of conflict and confusion. The former President handed the “gavel” to me and left the room. Clearly, this was going to be a trial by fire!

In April, the GSR Committee was suspended and a Consultative Committee was created. This action exacerbated discord among factions. Months later, in December, a counter motion reinstated the GSR Committee, which is currently operational.

Several sources reported that some groups withheld Seventh Tradition donations in response to the GSR Committee suspension. It is hoped that the reinstatement of the GSR Committee will lead to a commensurate increase in donations.

Over the course of the year, the number of Board Directors fluctuated. As of now (prior to elections), we are short of our quota. At one point the Board elected not to add any additional ABA members. This was subsequently reversed.

After many years managing the office, Tera B. has moved on. We thank her for all she did—which was a lot—and wish her well going forward. Meanwhile, we welcome Shahin S., our new Office Manager. Prior to this year, the legal status of the Office Manager position was somewhat nebulous. It is now clearly a contract position (as opposed to employee).

This was our first year working with Dan Cohen. Dan recommended that the GSA switch accounting software from Sage to Quickbooks. This migration has been successfully completed.

Florida groups developed a plan to host an International Conference in August. Unfortunately, the event was cancelled for lack of registrants.

## **THE YEAR IN ADVANCE**

Here are some of the defining themes and highlights I expect to occupy the Board’s attention in the year ahead:

### ***Document Board activity with a motions log***

I suggest the GSA Board create an online document (i.e., Google) to record motions passed by the Board. As of now, it is a pain to sort through years of minutes.

### ***GSR Committee***

The Consultative Committee has not been terminated, though it’s fate is uncertain. Perhaps the GSR Committee itself can fulfill the mandate intended for the Consultative Committee.

### ***Finances***

Like all Twelve Step fellowships, ABA is both self-supporting, and bound by a self-imposed “vow of poverty.” Without sufficient funds, the GSA cannot maintain an office, publish literature, disseminate information, or fulfill its other mandates.

I recommend the formation of an ad hoc committee tasked with developing ways to encourage donations and ways of cutting expenses. Appeal letters have proven effective in the past and will likely do so in the future. Other suggestions, like birthday donations, are both fun and relevant.

I would advise the Board to evaluate expenses and consider cost-saving measures. These might include: closing the office; eliminating book inventory (convert to on-demand printing or rent off-site storage); adopting efficient and/or cost-effective policies and practices; increasing volunteering; and/or other measures.

It is essential that there be an annual budget. The Treasurer should spearhead this effort, but others may be called upon for support and assistance. The budget should be regarded as a “living” document, subject to change over the course of the year.

Finally, I strongly suggest that balance sheets and profit and loss statements be presented at every Board meeting. These reports can be issued by the Treasurer, the Office Manager, or, if need be, by the accountant. Now that the organization is using QuickBooks, generating reports should be very straightforward.

### ***Board Composition***

Our bylaws state that the Board is to consist of 12-20 Directors (including officers). We currently fall short of our quota. I believe a healthy Board would consist of approximately 50% members and 50% non-members.

### ***Three Legacies: Recovery, Unity, Service***

I believe ABA is not only ready for, but in need of, the third of AA's Three Legacies: the Twelve Concepts (associated with service). Along with the Steps (recovery) and Traditions (unity), the Concepts promote stability and allow for growth. I hope formal adoption of the Legacies will be considered in the upcoming year.

### ***International Conference***

I suggest the Board research and reflect upon reasons the international conference failed to attract participants, and then consider next steps. Such gatherings are of inestimable value to participants and to the fellowship as a whole.

### ***Website***

The website would benefit from professional oversight. Ideally, we would either hire a webmaster or find a volunteer with sufficient expertise to do the job. A first step might be to create a thorough job description.

### ***Past President***

The Bylaws include a provision for presidents, upon completion of their term, to remain on the Board in the capacity of Past President for one year (item 14). I have determined not to remain on the Board, but to make myself available to the next President by phone and email.

Again, I offer my thanks to everyone who variously offered support, made suggestions, and showed tolerance to the Board during an unusually turbulent year. It was truly a privilege to serve among such venerable company. May God bless you and keep you all.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Harris". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Peter Harris  
G.S.A. of A.B.A. Board President