

Families Anonymous Tips For Group Secretaries

Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
GENERAL TIPS FOR THE GROUP	1
CONTACTING FA	1
FIRST ORDER OF BUSINESS	1
MEMBERS HANDBOOK	2
DELEGATION OF RESPONSIBILITIES	2
“BACK-UP” GROUP SECRETARY PREPARATION	3
ROTATION OF GROUP SERVANTS	3
HANDLING PHONE / EMAIL REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION	3
YOUR FA MEETINGS	5
WHO CONDUCTS OUR MEETINGS?	5
ROTATION OF MEETING LEADERS	5
KEEP IT FA AT THE MEETING!	5
MEETING TOPICS	5
PREVENTING CROSSTALK	6
MEETING ROSTER	6
FOCUS ON RECOVERY, NOT “WHO’S TO BLAME”	6
LITERATURE DISPLAY / SALES	6
OUTSIDE SPEAKERS	7
BUSINESS MEETINGS (GROUP CONSCIENCE)	8
STAY ORGANIZED	9
FINANCIAL RECORDS	9
GROUP CONTACTS	9
A RESOURCE FOR YOUR GROUP: THE FA GROUP OUTREACH COMMITTEE	9
MAIL FROM THE WSO	10
FA MEETING DIRECTORY	10
NEARBY FA GROUPS	10
SUPPORTING THE FELLOWSHIP	11
NEWCOMERS: FA’S LIFEBLOOD	12
WELCOMING THE NEWCOMER	12
SUGGESTED HANDOUTS FOR THE NEWCOMER	12
GROWING THE GROUP	13
SPREADING THE WORD	13
TELEVISION / RADIO	13
PUBLIC INFORMATION SERVICE	13
KEEP COMING BACK	13

Introduction

This document presents basic guidelines for serving as an FA Group Secretary. Like most things in FA, all these ideas are suggestions only. They have been compiled from the personal experiences of many FA secretaries. It is hoped they will help you in embarking on a successful and happy term as Secretary for your group. Your comments are welcomed, and if you have questions, or need more help, please contact us.

General Tips For The Group

Contacting FA

The FA World Service Office (WSO) may be contacted by:

- Phone at (847) 294-5877 or (800) 736-9805
- Email at famanon@familiesanonymous.org
- Fax at (847) 294-5837
- Mail at 701 Lee St, Suite 670, Des Plaines IL 60016-4508

First Order of Business

Let the World Service Office (WSO) know you are your group's secretary by registering with the WSO. There are two ways to register:

- You may register online at the FA website at www.familiesanonymous.org
or, if you prefer,
- Fill out the registration form using the provided instructions and return it to the WSO via mail or fax. The registration form is included in each New Group Pack, and is also available for download from the FA website.

Please provide all required information. The "Instructions" section is for any special room numbers or entrances, location of parking etc.

Please be sure to provide the secretary's full name. The full name will ONLY be used for mailing FA information, literature, and The Twelve Step Rag newsletter for the group. Your anonymity will be respected for all other purposes. Group contact phone numbers and any email address provided will appear in our meeting directories. The separate secretary phone numbers and a personal email address will be used by FA but will not appear in our directories or be shared with the public at large.

It is very important that you register the group. By registering with the WSO, your group meeting will be included in our printed and online meeting directories, you will receive a complimentary subscription to our newsletter (The Twelve Step Rag), your group will be covered by FA's liability insurance policy, and you will receive important communications from FA on a regular basis.

Members Handbook

Read and follow *FA Tools of Recovery: A Members Handbook* (#5001), and refer to it often. Every member should be urged to buy their own copy, please encourage the purchase of this book.

Delegation of Responsibilities

Doing everything oneself is a common pitfall of the group secretary, and it is very unhealthy for the group. Our First Tradition states the importance of unity and personal progress for the greatest number. This is achieved with everyone sharing service to the group. The phrase "trusted servant" does not mean that one waits on all!

As the membership grows, the group may designate a Treasurer, a Program Chair, a Literature Chair, a Refreshment Chair, a Welcome Chair, etc. Groups whose members share service to the fellowship grow and prosper.

The Treasurer is responsible for keeping the financial records of the group, including all income (from "passing the basket") and all expenses (rent if any, refreshments, literature purchases, donations to the WSO etc).

The Program Chair is responsible for scheduling meeting leaders and encouraging rotation of this role.

The Literature Chair places literature orders with the WSO and oversees the display of FA literature at the meetings.

The Refreshment Chair is responsible for ensuring that water, coffee, snacks etc., as desired by the group, are available at each meeting.

The Welcome Chair ensures that newcomers are promptly greeted and made as comfortable as possible during their first few meetings.

“Back-up” Group Secretary Preparation

For emergency purposes, or when you are out of town, it is wise to have another member ready to take care of secretarial duties (and perhaps to take over as secretary when ready). Make sure one other group officer or member has a key to the meeting room. Provide a list of current phone numbers of all your group members, using first names only (be sure you have permission from each member to do so). Giving every member a copy of the roster facilitates members calling each other between meetings. All members should be familiar with restroom locations, exits, etc.

Rotation of Group Servants

Periodic rotation of secretary and group chairs is encouraged every six months, but at least once a year. The WSO should be notified of any change of Secretary or meeting information by re-registering the group either online or via hardcopy registration form.

And please remember to make a new secretary aware of this document by passing along your copy or referring them to our website!

Handling Phone / Email Requests for Information

You or a designated group contact will receive calls or emails from prospective members or other interested parties. **Please remember that you represent FA each time you take a call or respond to an email.**

Please keep the following in mind in handling these communications:

- As a representative of FA, inform the caller that you are not a counselor or any other type of professional.
- Try to confine your conversation to the FA program, meeting location and day, and your experiences.

- Persons with Internet access should be directed to the FA website at www.familiesanonymous.org for more general information about FA.
- Be alert for individuals who might initiate improper conversation. Improper conversation might include counseling, professional referrals, asking for advice etc.
- You may consider having a list of referrals handy, containing contact information for other Twelve Step fellowships that might more appropriately meet the needs of the caller, and local health or social service agencies. Remember that we do not recommend or endorse commercial institutions (such as rehabs or hospitals), individual physicians, psychologists, counselors, churches, ministers or other clergy, etc.

Your FA Meetings

Who Conducts Our Meetings?

Meeting leaders are the members of the group. Do not allow outside professionals to “get into the act.” FA members must conduct all aspects of their meetings. Experience has shown that groups will not grow in the program if the meetings are conducted outside FA guidelines. (Many professionals attend FA meetings as members only).

Rotation of Meeting Leaders

It is critical for group health to rotate meeting leaders, and give everyone a chance to serve, even if they are fairly new to FA. The Secretary or a Program chair may be responsible for scheduling a leader for each meeting. Alternatively, some groups during each meeting call for volunteers to lead future meetings. The purpose of leading is to share our own successes in trying to work the program. It has nothing to do with how well or how poorly the people who bring us to the program are doing. Leading the meeting is healthy service in Twelve Step work. Personal growth depends on our willingness to share our experiences, strength and hope.

Keep it FA at the Meeting!

Follow the FA Meeting format! Our five basic readings (About Drug Abuse, Four Destructive Forces, the Twelve Steps, the Twelve Traditions, and Helping) should be read aloud every week. This allows members to relax, reflect and focus on recovery, providing a healthy receptiveness to the topic and the FA program. This has worked for thousands of meetings for many years, keeping members on task and providing “presence of mind” concerning the Traditions that guide our groups.

Meeting Topics

Use *Today A Better Way* (#1015) and *The Twelve Steps* (#1004) as study guides. These are two of the most important pieces of literature a member can obtain to help work and practice the FA program. Use the *Member Handbook* (#5001), Appendix A for additional meeting topics.

Many other FA recovery pieces provide excellent topics for meetings as well, e.g., *The Twelve Promises of FA* (#2011), *What Do I Say* (#1026), *Setting Boundaries – A Very Loving Thing To Do* (#1028) etc. Using literature for a meeting topic brings it to life. You can also find meeting topics listed under “Meetings In A Can” on the FA website.

Preventing Crosstalk

Straying from the meeting topic or allowing “crosstalk” hinders individual recovery. Focus on “How I use the program” rather than the “problem.” This is actually the leader’s responsibility, but the secretary may need to give a gentle nudge by referring the group to the Members Handbook (Tradition Four) or the displayed tent placard titled “Crosstalk”.

Meeting Roster

Maintain a sign-in sheet for the first names and phone numbers of attendees. It can be used to let people know when you have a special meeting or speaker, or just to say hello to a member who has not attended in some time, or for newcomers.

Focus on Recovery, Not “Who’s To Blame”

During the meeting, keep the discussion focused on our recovery through the FA program. Little is to be gained by trying to put blame for “the problem” on society, the Internet, schools, police, government or other organizations.

Literature Display / Sales

Put FA literature ONLY on your literature display table. Outside material detracts from the message of the FA program and often confuses the newcomer. Discussion of outside literature, if necessary, should only occur during the break, or before or after the meeting.

Prices for FA literature are a matter of Group Conscience. Some groups price at their cost and a small increment to cover shipping. Other groups sell literature at their actual cost. Still others provide some literature for free to newcomers. This is, however, strictly a group decision.

Outside Speakers

Use outside speakers, but use them infrequently. Outside speakers need to be selected carefully and must be familiar with the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions, especially Traditions Six and Eleven. Remember that the primary purpose of the meeting is to help members understand and work the Twelve Step Program, not to entertain them.

Business Meetings (Group Conscience)

Business meetings are an important part of a thriving group and provide opportunities to make plans and get things organized. Review of problems, plans for public information efforts, guest speakers, WSO financial support, appointing delegates to your local Intergroup, (an organization of geographically related groups which supports and assists its member groups) or the FA annual convention should be done without interfering with the regular meeting.

If the group is small, a short business meeting might take place during the coffee break, or before, or after the regular meeting. Longer meetings can be scheduled as a potluck supper or at a time convenient for most members to attend. The whole group should be kept apprised of the outcome of a business meeting, especially if there is news or information from your Intergroup, National Service Board (an organization established in an ex-US country which serves as a local service office for the member groups in that country), or the FA World Service Board of Directors (WSB) to be shared.

Above all, it should be kept in mind that final decisions concerning plans from the business meeting should be voted on by all members (the Group Conscience.)

Should controversy occur, always refer to the Twelve Traditions. FA's "*Twelve Traditions In Action*" (#5001) provides practical guidance in our traditions. Should you require further guidance, contact our Group Outreach Committee via email at go@familiesanonymous.org or contact the WSO.

Stay Organized

Financial Records

The Treasurer should keep the group's financial records up to date at all times and have them available for review by any group member on request.

It is best not to keep large amounts of funds in the group treasury. Funds remaining after expenses and a prudent reserve should be donated to the WSO or your local Intergroup or National Service Board.

If your group finds it generally maintains amounts above \$250 in the treasury, a group checking account should be opened. Do not open the account in the name of a group member. Rather, the group should obtain a Federal Tax ID from the IRS. This process is free, takes only a few minutes, and may be done by phone, online, or by mail. For more information, see the FA or IRS website, or contact the WSO.

Group Contacts

Communication between the FA fellowship as a whole and your group is vitally important. Keep in touch with the WSO. Generally speaking, the Group Secretary is the primary contact with the WSO.

A Resource for your Group: The FA Group Outreach Committee

The FA World Service Board of Directors has established a Group Outreach (GO) committee whose responsibility is to assist new and established groups and work hand-in-hand with them to help them grow and prosper.

Please feel free to contact the GO committee at any time should your group need assistance or have any questions. They may be reached directly at go@familiesanonymous.org or via the WSO. Even if you are not experiencing problems, we would welcome hearing from your group periodically. Send a note now and then telling us how your group is doing. Feel free to ask questions concerning the fellowship as a whole.

Mail From the WSO

All FA paper correspondence, including your group's complementary copy of The Twelve Step Rag, is mailed to the current or last known Group Secretary. If the post office cannot deliver mail, it will be returned to the WSO at additional cost to the fellowship. We cannot emphasize enough how important it is to keep the WSO up to date with group contact-secretary information!

All mail from the WSO, the WSB, or its committees, should be read aloud to your entire group when it is received and for the duration requested.

FA Meeting Directory

The WSO maintains both online and printed versions of our world wide meeting directory. Your group's contact information is contained within these directories, and is the avenue through which potential new members will contact you.

When a group changes its meeting place, day or time, or its contact information, it is the responsibility of the current Secretary to notify the WSO as quickly as possible by providing the WSO with a group registration form. There is perhaps nothing worse for a community member in crisis to reach out to FA for help and find a dark meeting room or an invalid contact phone number or email address.

It is important that the group contact phone number be that of a member willing to take calls and talk to newcomers. Check to be sure it is correct. The contact number should NOT be the number of the place where the group meets. It is not acceptable to expect people at meeting sites to answer FA phone calls and may give the impression that FA is associated with the facility.

Nearby FA Groups

It is valuable to keep in touch with any nearby FA groups. If you are within an hour's drive of another FA meeting, it would be worthwhile visiting them and exchanging information and encouragement. If you cannot visit nearby groups, be sure to keep in telephone or email contact. If there is enough interest, you may consider joining together and forming an Intergroup. For information on forming an Intergroup, contact the WSO.

Supporting the Fellowship

Encourage group members to support FA as a whole, and especially reach out to new groups in the area. They may also support the fellowship by writing about their personal experiences in recovery for *The Twelve Step Rag* or suggesting new literature for consideration by the FA Literature Committee. Finally, group members are encouraged to volunteer to serve on the FA World Service Board, or on one of the many FA committees associated with the board.

Newcomers: FA's Lifeblood

Newcomers keep our groups strong and healthy, and are perhaps the most important people who enter our meeting room. Often, they are suffering, as we once were, and they should be welcomed and made to feel as comfortable as possible.

Remember that all your good work is for nothing if newcomers do not find a warm, friendly atmosphere at their first few meetings.

Welcoming the Newcomer

The Welcome Chair or another member should greet newcomers as they enter the meeting room. Have the *Letter to the Newcomer* (#6001) available, and hand it to them when they come in. Suggest that they read the letter while waiting for the meeting to start. Be sure they understand that our program is for them, not for the abuser or the person who brought them to the meeting.

Remind the leader to read the January 1 reading ("To the Newcomer") in Today A Better Way as suggested by the FA meeting format.

Suggested Handouts for the Newcomer

Some groups purchase the FA *Welcome Folder* (#6002) specifically for newcomers and include several items in it, such as:

- Letter to the Newcomer (#6001)
- An Open Letter to my Family (#2007)
- FA Do's and Don'ts (#2001)
- The Meeting Roster or at least several names and phone numbers of members willing to take Twelve Step calls in between meetings
- A recent issue of *The Twelve Step Rag*

It is a matter of Group Conscience whether or not to charge for this material.

Growing The Group

Spreading the Word

Your group's public information program for "spreading the word" about the group and FA is an ongoing project of great importance. It will help your group increase attendance, attract new members, form new groups, and revitalize your existing group

A number of effective public information tools are available for ordering from the WSO, and supplementary materials are available at no cost on the FA website or from the FA Public Information Committee (contact pi@familiesanonymous.org).

Areas of concentration should include schools, churches, police, judicial officers, medical professionals, counselors, local newspapers, television and radio stations etc.

Television / Radio

Consult the World Service Office concerning anonymity issues before agreeing to appear on television or radio.

Public Information Service

Planning and implementing the group's public information campaigns should involve as many group members as possible. This Twelfth Step service is a wonderful way to enhance each member's recovery and provides the group with a cohesive bond of mutual compassion and understanding.

Keep Coming Back

Many times this statement applies to you and one or two others when your group is young. Keep your meetings open and do your Public Information work. Be patient and be there – every week, rain or shine, holidays included! Don't be discouraged if weeks or months go by with few new members. FA groups are built slowly as people gain confidence in what our program can do for them.