

Inside Al-Anon Family Groups

When I Don't Agree with the Group Conscience

Two years ago, my group decided to extend the meeting time from 60 to 90 minutes. I never liked longer meetings, but I wasn't at the business meeting that voted for the new time.

Because many meetings nearby met for one hour, newcomers or visitors would often interrupt to ask when the meeting would end. Some members arrived late, some left early, and some got up to stretch in the middle of the meeting. In my opinion, it was all very disruptive.

The upcoming business meeting was announced well in advance, and I had plenty of time to clear my schedule to attend. The agenda included the topic of changing the meeting back to 60 minutes. When the business meeting began, I was surprised that so many members were not interested in returning the meeting to its original duration. I presented all the reasons I wanted the meeting time to change and proposed solutions to address any objections.

Members shared how relaxed they felt not having to rush through the Suggested Opening and Closing, noted that there was time to answer questions about announcements, and pointed out that the disruptions that bothered me so much also occurred in many shorter meetings. None of this changed my position, and my stance didn't change the position of the other members.

Now that the group had made the decision to keep the meeting at 90 minutes, even though I disagreed, I had to reconsider my choices. One extreme option would be to leave my home group and find a different one; another would be to attend and pout and sulk about the things that bothered me. Given these extremes, I set out to find a middle ground.

I reminded myself that I am in this Al-Anon program to recover from the effects of someone else's alcoholism, not to nurture the impact of the disease on my life. So, I called my Sponsor to discuss the Traditions. Traditions One and Two reminded me that it's not "my" common welfare, but "our" common welfare, and that a Higher Power—greater than me or the group—guides the decisions. As stated in the "Groups at Work" section of the *AlAnon/Alateen Service Manual* (P-24/27), while Concept Five grants us the right of appeal, once the group hears the appeal, regardless of whether the decision is maintained or altered, the individual accepts the group conscience. My Sponsor encouraged me to examine my motives and assess how important this was to me and the group.

What started as an attempt to have my voice heard ultimately became a thorough growth opportunity. I thought I knew what I wanted and believed it was best for the group. When I was able to get to the bottom of what was truly important to me and the group, I was able to join in supporting Al-Anon's purpose and uncover opportunities to participate in the group's unity by practicing tolerance and acceptance. I was able to appreciate my home group.

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