The Knowledge Based Decision Making Process
To Reach an Informed Group Conscience

Having successfully implemented the Knowledge Based Decision Making (KBDM) process to reach an informed group conscience, the Board of Trustees introduced it to the members of the World Service Conference in 2006. Had the Board known the Conference members were going to be so excited about this, I think we would have introduced it sooner.

During the Conference, several of the sessions were introduced using this format so members could see how it worked. Many liked it so well, they introduced it to their Area’s and it has even been a session at an RSS. While it has been introduced successfully in some Areas it was met with resistance in others. We wonder if it isn’t because of a change in terminology rather than a change in process. I have changed the title of this explanation, in hopes it will help move some of our members that don’t understand it is simply a change in the way we build an informed Group Conscience rather than the Group Conscience, itself.

We think this is a good model. We are going to continue using this process at Conference, as it provides more information, a better informed Conference, and more dialogue between all members. Again, this year, we are going to be flexible in the process that we use for each session. We are working at giving every Conference attendee as much information as possible before Conference so that you will be able to participate in every discussion.

For those of you that will be new to this process, I want to give you some background and some information. The reason KBDM has worked so well for the Board is that the method provides participants involved in making the decisions with all the pertinent information that can be gathered from all relevant resources. This sometimes includes the use of specialty consultants outside the fellowship, if needed, and information gathered from the wide scope of personal experiences within the fellowship. All information is assembled, digested by the body, and the topic is discussed for as long as it takes for everyone to understand the information. It is then that an informed decision can be made. That can include a decision that no action is necessary.

The statement, “we look to the past to preserve the future” reminds each of us that we do not want to forget our “roots”, but also suggests that doing the same things over and over just because we have always done it that way will give us what we’ve always gotten in the past. That could create a good result or create insanity.

As the Board reviewed the collected archival information about the Conference, we realized that the original purpose of the World Service Conference was to gather representatives together to gain and reflect on the collected and far-reaching experience of the Al-Anon Family Groups. Lois, Anne, and the early pioneers created the Conference to keep the flow of information from the groups to the World Service.
Office and back to the groups. At the Conference, Delegates from each Area would bring the ideas and concerns to the Conference, and after deliberation, the Delegates would carry the informed decisions or the “Group Conscience” back to their Group Representatives (GRs) at their Area Assemblies. These GRs would then carry the information back to the groups. This would ensure the circle of communication necessary to make good decisions, reflect the wishes and desires of the informed membership, and keep the World Service Office in touch with the needs of the groups it was formed to serve.

With the introduction of the internet, the flow of information has increased to an almost unconceivable, unpredictable and sometimes unbelievable level. While this information could be considered as the will of the membership, the Conference remains the key to ensure that important informed exchange. As the pioneers created the relationship of the Conference, Board of Trustees, Executive Committee, and World Service Office as is outlined in the World Service Conference Charter and the Concepts of Service, it is most important for the Conference, Board and World Service Office to maintain that exchange and continuously seek ways to improve and evaluate its effectiveness. The Conference is a valuable tool that none of us wants to lose or diminish.

Even though it may not have been called by this specific name, the KBDM process to an informed group conscience was used at the very first Conference. Our history and the transcripts of those early Conferences tell us that our co-founders envisioned the Conference as a place to gather Al-Anon representatives from all over to have discussions about the direction of Al-Anon and to exchange ideas as to how to better serve the needs of the groups. If you are fortunate enough to have the Al-Anon book entitled First Steps” Al-Anon…35 years of beginnings, read chapter 10, The Conference. If you don't have it in your personal collection of Al-Anon literature, perhaps it is available in your Area Archives, or perhaps another member has a copy you can borrow.

Having given the historical context of the Board’s decision to discuss the KBDM process with the Conference in 2006, this is a brief overview of Knowledge Based Decision Making process. Remember, this is very basic.

KBDM has four essential elements:

*Open Communication between leadership and membership:*
“Talk to each other, and reason things out”, is a phrase we hear at the closing of every Al-Anon meeting. Wiser words were probably never spoken. Many societies function today, by the leadership talking among themselves and conveying the decisions to the membership. The “Paths to Group Conscience” is a graphic that was developed last year and given to Conference members for their use. It can also be found on the back of the 2006 Conference Summary. The writing on Shared Leadership, page 7 of the 2006 Conference Summary best describes our flow of two-way communication.
between our membership and leadership. KBDM is a process that keeps communication alive.

**Dialogue before Deliberation:**
Many of us are familiar with using parliamentary procedures adapting *Robert’s Rules*, in varying degrees at our Assemblies and other meetings, both inside the fellowship and outside in our personal lives. This process is most familiar to us because it is what we have done for many years. As a general rule, we know that you must have a motion on the floor with a second before any discussion can take place. After hearing the motion, we then enter discussion and often find ourselves focusing on getting the commas and wording the way we think it should be, rather than discussing the pros and cons of the topic of the motion itself. Often the discussion about whether the underlying idea is something that would have the desired results for the greatest number, fails to happen. The minority may believe that they must wait for the decision before it can adequately be heard.

With KBDM, the procedure is just the opposite. The discussion is held with background information being introduced to frame the topic. Sometimes discussions go on over long periods of time before any decision for a motion or action is made. All points of view are considered at each stage of the decision. Seems so simple doesn’t it? In reality, it is. However; it requires a lot of research and information gathering before and possibly even during the discussion. Each method has its pros and cons but we are seeing the benefits for the KBDM model, far outweigh the alternative. In reality, it is what group conscience is supposed to produce—a decision that most, if not all, can support.

**All decision makers having common access to full information:**
Much of the confusion around this element seems to be that everyone will have full access to all information about everything. To follow this idea would be to abandon our principles as outlined in the Concepts of Service. We know that Concept Four, Participation is the Key to Harmony, does not mean that everyone gets to participate in every decision. That interpretation would violate Concept Three and make the need for a Conference, as discussed in Concept Two, and at Board as discussed in Concept Six, irrelevant. With everyone participating in every decision, we would be back to polling the groups and never be able to serve them. What is essential to know about KBDM is that the members of the group assigned to make a decision will have access to the necessary information required to make an informed decision. This is why you receive information that is marked “For Delegate Use Only.” Once you have been involved in the discussion and possibly even a decision, you will have the full context of the subject for the discussion in your Areas.

**We exist in a Culture of Trust:**
After coming into Al-Anon, we find we often learned not to trust others around us. We don’t talk about things that are not comfortable for fear of retaliation. We can not depend on anyone else in what they do or what they say.
We often hear “fake it till you make it” as we start to talk about faith and trust. As we learn to change we sometimes make mistakes or hesitate to do anything for fear that it won’t be done right. No one criticizes us, instead they offer to help and give us encouragement. Soon, we learn Al-Anon provides us with a loving environment in which we can try new things until we have built our faith and learn to trust one another. Learning to trust, changes the way we interact with each other. We learn to have a firm belief that each of us would knowingly, never do anything to hurt Al-Anon. We have a belief in the reliability and truth of each other.

Last year we heard the phrase, “Presume Goodwill”. We have learned that if we presume good will on the part of our Conference partners, trust in their competence and learn to act within our roles, work is accomplished without the distraction of rumors, fears, or hidden agendas.

Just think about these four elements of the KBDM process. Do you think it could impact and benefit your Area? People are interested in and seem to want more information today – about everything. They are interested in knowing as much as possible about a subject in order to make an informed decision—that informed group conscience we so often talk about in our rooms. It is also an opportunity to bring our Area Archives alive, as much of the background information for the beginnings of our discussions is from this valuable resource.

During this past year, many Areas have requested a visit by a member of the Board or WSO Staff for the purpose of having a presentation and discussion about this process. It has been exciting to see Areas embrace this new process and decide it is a good model for them also. The discussions at the Area Assemblies have been enthusiastic, rich, and seem to bring a renewed interest in serving to many. Is it because they are getting more information or is it because they are being included in the conversation? We’re not sure, but we are hearing that members are having a renewed interest in serving. Assemblies are having better attendance.

A member recently asked, “How does this process allow for Concept Five.?” which aims to protect and make the best possible use of minority feeling and opinion. Isn’t this the perfect opportunity for that principle and assures that everyone is heard? Actually as the minority is heard earlier in the process, there is a greater likelihood that it can become part of the informed majority. In thinking about it, isn’t this the highest form of an informed Group Conscience?