

Concept Five

Throughout our structure, a traditional “Right of Appeal” ought to prevail, so that minority opinion will be heard and personal grievances receive careful consideration.

Concept Four reminds us that fellowship voting privileges are allowed in proportion to each individual’s or group’s level of responsibility. Individuals vote in their **group** meetings, delegates vote in the Annual Delegate Meeting, **committee members vote in their committee meetings**, and board members vote on board-level issues. Although we always seek unanimity, even the most diligent and respectful decision-making process will **sometimes** yield a result with which some members disagree. Concept Five ensures that members and groups have the right to request reconsideration of a decision they do not agree with and, further, **to request** that those who participated in making the decision listen and carefully consider the opinions expressed. This Concept serves to protect us from the harm that an uninformed or misinformed majority may cause.

The words “throughout our structure” indicate that the request to appeal a decision may come from any level of our fellowship: an individual, **a group**, an Intergroup, **a committee member**, or a board member. “Minority opinion” and “personal grievances” encourage us to remember that each of our voices is important and worthy of being heard, even when those voices are speaking alone. For many of us, the COSA fellowship is the first place we dared to speak up, **even if we still felt fear**. For others, it may be the place where we **developed and practiced the willingness and ability** to truly listen without judgment. When we give “careful consideration” to an appeal, we dedicate thought and reflection to it, and we do so with the same sincere interest and attention we would want given to our own plea.

By honoring Concept Five and respecting the opinions and voices of those appealing a decision, we give the fellowship another opportunity for increased certainty and agreement **in reaching a group conscience**. We strive to avoid making easy choices today that may turn out to be problematic in the future. Even when the minority voice does not change a majority’s decision, those few who spoke out will know that they were not overlooked or cast aside. Whether we are approving new literature, amending our bylaws, or voting on the purchase of medallions in a

small meeting, Concept Five gives every minority, be it an individual or a group, the means of participating without shame and being confident of being heard.

Those members or groups who believe an error in judgment was committed or a mistake was made have a right, and perhaps a duty, to share their views. In the same way that we practice rigorous honesty with ourselves as we work the Twelve Steps, our service to the COSA fellowship will be **most impactful** when we employ the same principles of clear, truthful communication. Neglecting to exercise our right of appeal may end up depriving the fellowship of an opportunity to better carry the message to those who still suffer. While it may be difficult for some of us to share our opinions, especially if we are new to the fellowship, our moment of struggle in speaking out may be the start of a lifetime of peace for someone else and, **it may encourage our own growth, serenity, and sense of freedom to speak up in the world.**

When we allow Concept Five to influence our service to the COSA fellowship, our families, and our work, the gifts of the program will spring to life not only for us but for **those** around us. Our active consideration of perspectives other than our own is living proof of our willingness to grow and collaborate for the greater good. We owe it to ourselves and each other to encourage sharing opinions that differ from what is most popular or widely believed. We must also remain accountable for thoroughly examining those other viewpoints **and inviting discussion when** required for complete understanding. When **considering whether or not to** reverse a decision, our human desire to be right should always yield to our spiritual need to do the right thing, **according to Higher Power's will for us.**

As we reflect on Concept Five's importance in our service to the COSA fellowship, we also see how it can be applied to our families and our work. It may be helpful to ask the following questions:

- Do I encourage the sharing of opinions that differ from the majority?
- Do I go along with the majority even when it bothers my conscience?
- Do I gloss over minority opinions, giving them no more than an **obligatory** consideration?
- Do I understand why it can be difficult for someone to speak up **when they have an opinion different from that of** the majority?

The Fifth Concept suggests that we surrender fear and use our right of appeal to stand up to a majority **when we have a different opinion.** It also suggests that we stand down and listen to the minorities in our midst to achieve true unity in our fellowship. Once an appeal has been heard, the final decision rests with a Higher Power will as expressed in our group conscience.