

The Letter of the Law versus The Spirit of the Law. When one obeys the letter of the law but not the spirit, one is obeying the literal interpretation of the words (the "letter") of the law, but not the intent of those who wrote the law. Conversely, when one obeys the spirit of the law but not the letter, one is doing what the authors of the law intended, though not necessarily adhering to the literal wording.

"Law" originally referred to legislative statute, but in the idiom may refer to any kind of rule. Intentionally following the letter of the law but not the spirit may be accomplished through exploiting technicalities, loopholes, and ambiguous language. Following the letter of the law but not the spirit is also a tactic used by oppressive governments.

From: mg-18_internet.pdf dated 6/12

GENERAL SOCIAL NETWORKING WEB SITES

Facebook and other social networking Web sites are public in nature. Though users create accounts and utilize usernames and passwords, once on the site, it is a public medium where A.A. members and non A.A.s mingle.

As long as individuals do not identify themselves as A.A. members, there is no conflict of interest. However, someone using their full name and/or a likeness, such as a full-face photograph, would be contrary to the spirit of the Eleventh Tradition, which states in the Long Form that, "...our [last] names and pictures as A.A. members ought not be broadcast, filmed or publicly printed."

Experience suggests that it is in keeping with the Eleventh Tradition not to disclose A.A. Membership on social networking sites as well as on any other Web site, blog, electronic bulletin board, etc., that is not composed solely of A.A. members and not password protected, or is accessible to the public.

Web sites social networking offer individuals the chance to post a great deal of personal information about themselves (and others). Our experience suggests that some A.A. members do not post anything that is "A.A. jargon" on their personal profiles and in "status updates," while others feel it is alright to do so as long as A.A. or Alcoholics Anonymous specifically is not mentioned.

These Web sites often allow users to create social networking "groups" and the ability to invite others to "events" for like-minded individuals. Some A.A.s have chosen to create A.A.-related groups. Since this is a relatively new medium, A.A. members are frequently "learning as they go," and technology and applications change practically on a daily basis. However, our experience suggests that A.A.-related groups and events are better listed as "closed" or invitation-only groups. Even then, some A.A.s may not wish to be contacted for an A.A. event on their personal social networking page — they may feel their anonymity is breached by being included in an invitation list that can be viewed by all invitees. Perhaps a better option is to create a completely "private" (also called secret) group which does not appear in any group searches or on any personal profiles, and is by invitation to fellow A.A.s only. Currently, this seems to be the closest option for trying to recreate the atmosphere of a "closed" A.A. meeting and would maintain members' anonymity most effectively.

G.S.O. has received numerous complaints from concerned A.A. members regarding anonymity breaks online, inappropriate use of the A.A. name, and copyrighted materials and protected trademarks being improperly used on Facebook and other social networking Web sites. No local online A.A. or non-A.A. entity should purport itself to be a spokesperson for A.A. or act as if they represent the General Service Office, A.A.W.S., or the General Service Board. Each A.A. entity is autonomous and encouraged to make decisions by informed group conscience decision in light of the guidance provided in our Twelve Traditions.

A.A. members sometimes contact G.S.O. for suggestions on how to remain within the Traditions on Facebook and other social networking Web sites. Keep in mind that G.S.O. staff members are not "special workers" of the "technological wizards" variety, but they can act as a resource regarding A.A.'s Twelve Traditions and the shared experience of the Fellowship in the U.S. and Canada. How A.A.'s spiritual principles play out in new technologies needs to be carefully discussed by each A.A. individual or entity creating an online presence.