

September 1945

ROCHESTER PREPARES NOVICES FOR GROUP PARTICIPATION

(Editor's note: This is the third in a continuing series of articles outlining the various indoctrination plans followed by different groups throughout the country. In forthcoming issues, methods used in Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Cleveland will be presented.)

Dear Editor: The educational plan of the Wilson Club of St. Louis which was outlined in the June number of *The Grapevine* was read by the members of the Genesee Group of Rochester, New York, with considerable interest. As the education of our "novices" has been the chief concern of our group since its inception a year ago, we were all particularly keen to know that other groups are accenting that feature of group activity which we believe to be of the greatest importance.

Our Genesee Group plan utilizes the same technique as the St. Louis Group but has the additional, or more accurately, preliminary feature which seems to us of sufficient importance to justify this communication. We hope to invite comment, suggestions or criticisms from other groups or individuals who may have ideas along this line or who may have some other method of instruction which they are now employing. From such an interchange of thoughts and opinions through the medium of your columns much good may come. It might

even be possible to evolve from such discussion a coordinated general plan or framework within which all A.A. groups could work. Certainly, "a consummation devoutly to be wished."

Our plan differs from the Wilson Club plan in this respect: Our prospects or novices, as we call them, are given a personal "Canvass or workout" by their sponsor or sponsors before they are permitted to attend a group meeting. These personal talks follow the line set forth in a booklet prepared by our group for that purpose. It was designed to assist in bringing a prospective candidate up to his first meeting with a thorough knowledge of the aims and purposes of A.A. and the obligations he will have to impose upon himself if he undertakes membership in our group. It has been our observation that bringing men into the group indiscriminately, and without adequate preliminary training and information, can be a source of considerable grief and a cause of great harm to the general morale of the group itself. We feel that unless a man, after a course of instruction and an intelligent presentation of the case for the A.A. life, has accepted it without any reservation, he should not be included in a group membership. When his sponsors feel that the novice has a fair working knowledge of A.A.'s objectives and a sufficient grasp of its fundamentals, he is then brought to his first group meeting.

The time when the novice's progress has reached the point of acceptance of the program varies according to his mental capacity, his eagerness to learn and the sincerity of his self-examination. It is not measured by the yardstick of any lapse of time or the length of his sobriety. The sponsor's judgment of when his novice is ready is accepted by the group as final and the sponsor then brings him to his first meeting. There he listens to four successive talks based on the 12 Steps and the Four Absolutes. There are twenty-minute talks given by older members of the group and the steps, for convenience and brevity, are divided into four sections. The first three steps constitute the text of the first talk. The next four, the second; the next four the third; and the last step is considered to be entitled to a full evening's discussion by itself.

Following these constructive talks, a general summary is then given of the whole program. From this point on the novice is on his own and his growth and development in A.A. will depend entirely on his own sincerity and his active participation in all the group's affairs.

We feel that we have at least given him an opportunity to understand what A.A. is and it is his free choice from that point on as to how successful he will be.

Of course, this plan is not a rigid one nor is it exclusive, but we have found in practice, at least in our own group, that it has to a great extent, not completely, of course, eliminated failures and has erased from our vocabulary that distasteful, inaccurate and much overworked word "slip."

It also helps us to develop a sense of leadership among our members, a prime essential in the operation of any successful group. We feel that the objective to which such leadership must devote itself is not, as some may think, a vague, idealistic formula. On the contrary, it is the essence of our way of life, the only way worthy of a free man. The basic concept of the A.A. way of life is the integrity and dignity of the individual human being. This same idea is the core of the Declaration of Independence and the principal concern of our Bill of Rights.

A.A.s 12 Steps comprise the Alcoholic's Declaration of Independence."

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