

Back to the Big Book

I have recovered from alcoholism using the Twelve Steps, the Twelve Traditions, the first 164 pages of the Big Book, and the lead of a strong teaching sponsor. When thirty-five years of hard drinking took me to ruin and all other methods of recovery failed, AA brought me to sanity. Although I'll always have the allergy, I am no longer plagued with the obsession of the mind and am grateful for my home group, the Back to the Big Book Group.

In the early days of AA it was not uncommon to have high recovery rates, but my impression is that today this rate has fallen sharply and there is a genuine growing concern for the future of AA. It is my opinion that group sickness should bear the brunt of responsibility and that this cancer eating away at the AA legacy must be arrested

or I and millions of alcoholics are doomed.

Group sickness is easily recognized. The first stage is recognized when you enter the door of the group you visit. If you are greeted with a handshake and a warm smile you may assume that the group conscience is at work and you are home. At this point, if you don't feel comfortable and welcome, you're probably not. If a sincere effort is not put into making newcomers and visitors welcome, you have entered an infected group.

The second stage of group sickness manifests itself in this way: You are sitting in a meeting listening to someone go on and on — and on — about how their cat clawed up their new chair. If this kind of monologue dominates the meeting, prepare to have a struggle with yourself about whether or not ever

to go back. This is not recovery as promised in the Big Book.

Stage three unfortunately is prevalent in too many groups. If and when the person who has been dominating the meeting finally shuts up, group therapy begins. Well-meaning, self-appointed pseudo-psychiatrists come out of the woodwork offering suggestions in an effort to help. Groups indulging in this sort of meeting need to read the "Doctor's Opinion" in the Big Book where Dr. Silkworth tells us "we physicians must admit we have made little impression upon the problem (alcoholism) as a whole." If modern psychiatry can't help, what makes this circle of quackiatrists think they can?

"There is a solution": The group conscience needs to institute rules of order which will insure the recovery of the group as a whole and its individual members. These rules should be stated at the beginning of each meeting and strictly adhered to.

First and foremost, teach the Twelve

Steps of recovery as outlined in the "Doctor's Opinion," the Twelve Traditions, and the first 164 pages of the Big Book — nothing else. Recovery is there and all attempts to recover using

other texts or means will end in disaster for the alcoholic. You can either teach, practice, and live the Twelve Steps or as Bill told us in chapter three, "Step over to the nearest barroom and try some controlled drinking."

Second, make newcomers and visitors feel welcome. Place greeters at the door before each meeting. Some say, "No one wants to do that!" Step Seven tells us to do what we don't want to do. Besides, it's a great way for new

members to get involved in group activity. And you'll be pleasantly surprised at the results.

Third, offer strong teaching sponsorship to all newcomers and visitors. Anyone wanting a sponsor should have one appointed by the group conscience at that meeting. Don't wait for the newcomer to ask. Newcomers are not the best judges of who should sponsor



them; it was their best judgment that got them drunk in the first place. I never regretted the appointment of my sponsor. He has saved my life.

Fourth, limit the comments of members to five minutes or less, and if they stray from the topic or from the discussion of recovery, ask them to be seated. Except to introduce themselves, newcomers should not be allowed to talk. They are there to learn and the way to do that is to listen. Their time will come. My home group has a member who will speak to you if you stray from the subject or speak over five minutes. He is like a human horn.

Last, but not least, members having a personal problem should be directed to talk with their sponsor or other group members after the meeting. A meeting based on recovery is not a forum for personal problems, which detract, inhibit, and downright destroy others involved in the program of recovery.

The AA Grapevine is a wonderful

publication, full of experiences and anecdotes to be used by recovering and recovered alcoholics. It has been called a "meeting in print" and this too is a problem. Many groups have adopted this format for their meetings and all but abandoned the Big Book. They are listening to everybody else's problems in turn and then going into their group therapy mode. Stop it!

The stories in the Grapevine and in the back of the Big Book are just that, stories. They are presented to show the growth of the Fellowship and give a way by which the alcoholic may identify with others.

No foundation will be laid, no archway will be built, and no spiritual awakening will be had by reading any book, magazine, or publication other than the Big Book, specifically the first 164 pages.

Let's get the recovery rates back up where they belong by getting back to the Big Book.

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