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## If You Want to Stay Sober

**S**UPPOSE YOU asked twenty-five AA members to fill in the blank in this statement: "If you want what we have and if you want to stay sober, then the most important things that you can do are———." You would probably get twenty-five different answers. To be sure, all of the answers would in some way indicate that the person has to put the plug in the jug and would then show what can best be done to insure that it stays there. However, the methods that we use to stay sober are as individual as each AA member.

I think there is universal agreement that we must stay sober and learn to trust in a higher power one day at a time; but how we go about doing that is where the difference lies. Work the Twelve Steps; get honest; go to meetings; get a sponsor; get involved; "Live and Let Live"; "Easy Does It," but do it; talk to someone; carry the message; read the Big Book and other AA literature — those are but a very few of the answers to fill in the blank. In reality, we combine all of those and

many other AA tools to help us stay sober and recover from alcoholism. Therefore, I believe that we should refrain from pointing out a single most important thing, except: Read the Big Book and follow its suggested program of recovery.

Within AA, there is only one program of recovery — the Twelve Steps. Everything else that we have, including the rest of the Big Book, is part of the instructions and tool kit that we need for that recovery. Unfortunately, some members never read the Big Book, and most others do so only after they have been attending meetings for some time. Surely, we drunks inspired the old saying "When all else fails, read the instructions!"

Since coming to AA, I have become a self-taught cabinet-maker, quite proficient in the use of several power tools. With the price of wood these days, one has to be either proficient or rich. After ruining some pieces of wood, I learned that there are many tricks of the trade in using power saws, routers, sanders, and

other tools. I could figure out how to operate them easily enough; but in each case, I had to read the instructions to find out how to do so properly with the greatest ease and advantage. I read the instructions *after* I had already ruined the wood.

So it is with AA. If all we want is to quit drinking, then using some of the tools may be enough. But if we want what those first AA members had, we must find out first what they had and then how they got it. To do either, we must read the instructions — the Big Book. Using the other AA tools before reading the Big Book is like trying to find the definition of a

word in the dictionary before you know what the word is.

I believe that we are cheating new members if we don't make every possible attempt to get them to read the Big Book as soon as possible. I could talk for twenty-four hours straight on a Twelfth Step call and still not be able to get across a tenth of what is in the Big Book. However, I can tell the new person, "If you want what we have and if you want to stay sober, then the most important things that you can do are to read the Big Book and follow its suggested program of recovery."

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