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Working the Steps Early

*Waiting until we're comfortable
means waiting to reap the
benefits of the program*



IN SHARING my experience, I have been a very strong advocate of working all the Steps as soon as possible after coming to AA. When I first started doing this, I was very direct about how soon I had worked them—less than four months after my first meeting—but it wasn't long until I started hedging in my talks.

When I told people that it was not only desirable but possible to work the Steps within three to four months after coming on the program, it seemed to make many members very uncomfortable. I was invariably told, either openly or privately, as a "friendly piece of advice," that this was an individual program and that I was scaring people off by trying to rush them into working the Steps so fast. Since it is a suggested program, what these people said made sense to me at the time, and I stopped referring

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to how soon I had worked the Steps.

Today, however, I believe that I and most certainly many other members have been guilty of not fully sharing our AA experience. We have cheated ourselves and the whole of AA by trying not to be different from what seemed like the majority, rather than speaking out and having the courage to show what can be accomplished by working the Steps early.

If we will start fully sharing our AA experience, I think we will find this "majority" shrinking; AA couldn't exist today if everyone was as slow to work the Steps as some would have us believe. Until now, I thought that my working the Steps in three to four months was very fast, and perhaps it would be too fast for some members. But my attention has been drawn to page 292 in the Big Book, telling how Dr.

Bob "spent three or four hours" with a new man, taking him through the equivalent of the first eight Steps on that day.

Knowing that the Big Book not only suggests the program but suggests how to work it, I turned to Chapter 5 and found that those word-changing elves had been at it again. As many times as I have read Chapters 5 and 6, I hadn't understood what was so plainly said.

The first part of Chapter 5 brings us through the first three Steps, and the last paragraph beginning on page 63 states: "Next we launched out on a course of vigorous action, the first step of which is a personal housecleaning, which many of us had never attempted. Though our decision was a vital and crucial step, it could have little permanent effect unless *at once* followed by a strenuous effort to face, and to be rid of,

the things in ourselves which had been blocking us."

The emphasis on "at once" is mine, but it is there, taking us at once to Step Four. Now if the writers of the Big Book had meant that we could take several months or even years to work the Steps at a comfortable pace, then I hardly think that those two simple words would have been there. They wouldn't have been there any more than Chapter 6, which takes us through Steps Five through Eleven, would have been entitled "Into Action."

It is true that, because we are individuals, each of us must work the program at our own pace, but it is also true that we get out of the program what we put into it. "A man of action" gets things done, and he gets them done as soon as possible. He knows that the sooner he gets the work done, the sooner

he will reap the benefits of his labors.

A person who takes several months or years to accomplish eleven simple, but not necessarily easy, tasks may be described as comfortable, but surely not as a person of action. I don't believe that comfort is necessarily equated with happiness, serenity, and the other benefits we receive from the program. Further, when there is work to be done and we sit in our easy chairs, thinking of how to do it best, we are not just comfortable; we are lazy.

I believe the writers of the Big Book intended that we work the first eleven Steps just as fast as we can. They knew that once we had completed the Steps for the first time, and had begun to practice the principles in all our affairs, we would then be comfortable.

In Chapters 5 and 6, the Steps follow one immediately after the other; there is no indication that we should rest between them. There is no minimum or maximum time recommended for accomplishing each Step, but we are told to get into action and to go immediately from one Step to the next.

One exception is granted—but only under certain circumstances and not for our comfort or a chance to take a breather. On page 74, we are shown several suggested choices for people with whom we may take the last part of the Fifth Step, and are told that "we think well before we choose the person or persons." We are also told that "notwithstanding the great ne-

cessity for discussing ourselves with someone, it may be one is so situated that there is no suitable person available. If that is so, this step may be postponed, only, however, if we hold ourselves in complete readiness to go through with it *at the first opportunity*," (Again, the emphasis is mine.) The paragraph ends with the sentence "But we must not use this as a mere excuse to postpone."

It is my belief, based on my own experience, that if a person has honestly completed the Fourth Step, the Higher Power will provide that first opportunity very soon thereafter. I spent seven full days working on my inventory. On the eighth day, I couldn't find anything more to add. Then, I realized that in working the Fourth Step, I had actually taken the first two parts of the Fifth Step. With this realization came the unmistakable first opportunity to complete the Fifth Step. I took that opportunity and thus finished the Fourth and Fifth Steps in the same day. As the Big Book promises, I have never been happier.

Having had the good fortune to work the Steps so fast is exactly what has made my life so different since coming to AA. It is also something that I intend to share in working with others from now on. If this makes me different, then I am sure the HP will give me the courage to speak out. I want what those old-timers had, and I am more ready than ever to go to any length to get it.

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