

P O Box 300
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20 August 1984

To All SA Members,

Hi everybody! And welcome to all the new members!

Our last ESSAY newsletter came out May 20th, and we're overdue for another. It's important that everyone know about new changes to the SA booklet; we'll itemize these. There'll be a word about the Utah get-together last June and the one coming up in December in Phoenix. We'll bring up the latest incident with the press. And we'll take a brief realistic look at where we are today with some suggestions for group and member consideration.

I was going to start this letter off by thinking of a couple of ways our fellowship is tied together at the larger-than-group level. But once I got started, I was surprised how many there were:

Our common problem
The common solution
Our literature
National and regional get-togethers
The mails
The telephone
Prayer.

Take any one of them and we are blessed indeed! The only question is, How can we make better use of these for our mutual benefit?

As always, we ask that those who receive the newsletter who hold SA group or lead responsibilities see to it that copies are made available to all SA members. We're still on a very informal basis and have no other way of getting this to everyone.

"Victory through powerlessness by the grace of God."

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'Roy' or similar, with a stylized flourish at the end.

I. Changes to the SA Booklet

1. The big change is that all quotes from the AA Big Book and Twelve and Twelve are in quotes with the credit line at the bottom of the page. AA is not letting us paraphrase their literature as they have in the past; they've changed their policy. However, we still can paraphrase the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions by changing "alcohol" to "lust/sex", etc.
2. Apparently we can still read our versions of Chapters 3 and 5 of the Big Book in meetings but it looks like we may either have to delete them from the booklet or quote them verbatim with the word "alcohol." I'm still working on this with AA GSO in NYC.
3. The extensive treatment given to the First Step inventory has been replaced with one paragraph. This change is based on responses to the last ESSAY newsletter and other group inputs. First Step inventories are optional for both groups and individuals. In place of this material I've added pages 60, 60A, and 61-62 (copies of which are enclosed) with two new headings: "I Am A Sexaholic" and "The Second Half of Step One." The last paragraph of page 76 has been rewritten to reflect this, plus other minor changes on 76. Also, on page 119, paragraphs 5 and 6 reflect this change.
4. Two AA Grapevine pieces have been deleted, a long one on meditation in the Eleventh Step and a short one on sponsorship. (The Grapevine Board says we must quote the entire article verbatim or not at all.)

Nan tells me we sold 533 SA booklets and 1947 brochures in the last 4-1/2 month period (this does not include brochures sent with first inquiry). [Nan is the non-sexaholic secretary here.] The revised printing of the booklet is now available.

II. Salt Lake City Get-Together

The word from the SLC people is that their June get-together was a resounding success. Over sixty SAs and S-Anons attended. Many members met face-to-face for the first time, and the one-on-one fellowship was intense and rewarding.

III. Phoenix Get-Together

The Phoenix-Tucson people tell us their December get-together is in the planning stages. They're inviting all SA members, just as the SLC members did. For those who'd like to attend, now's the time for any inputs/suggestions you may have. Contact Jeannette G. at (602)934-0800 or write her at 4219 W. El Caminito, Phoenix, AZ, 85021.

IV. Yellow Journalism

We've learned that earlier this year a writer for the pop sexology/"girlie"

magazine press posed as a sexaholic and attended SA meetings in at least two cities. This man had requested an interview and used "dirty tricks" to try and force one. He was given the standard response that we are not granting interviews at this time, and we sent him our media form letter (copy enclosed). [This letter was drafted in July 1981 when we got our first batch of media requests following the first Dear Abby column.]

All of the other requestors from the media (scores of them) have honored this letter; not so in this case. The man created his own cover story and attended enough meetings to gain the confidence of SA members. He also obtained my name and phone number from SA members, and using those members as references, came to see me under false pretenses. We don't come off very well, and apparently I'm to be his next target. The piece helps confirm why our current policy of not granting interviews is wise.

At an SA business meeting of the West L.A. group this matter was discussed and it was concluded that the best course was for their members not to respond in any way; to do so would involve them in controversy against the Traditions and would expose us further. I concur. I suggest we simply take it on the chin and learn from the experience. The West L.A. group also decided to pray for the man and ask that God's will be done - to "turn it over" and let Him handle the thing.

SA member, M.O., of Las Vegas tells us that Bill W.'s response to the bad press AA got in one instance was, "I doubt if it will do us much harm....So we can afford to take a little panning, however unfair, now and then....I'm sure it ought not to be dignified by any reply." (July 29, 1954 letter)

This may be the time to ask ourselves some questions regarding meeting and membership guidelines, which some of us have been raising recently anyway.

V. Where Are We Today, Really?

As we look at ourselves, we see we have a long way to go:

1. There are lots of newcomers (in many groups) and initial interest and even great honesty.
2. Mere numbers do not make sobriety or unity.
3. Very few take hold and get and stay sober.
4. There's lots of shaky sobriety, coasting along on meetings only, will power, and whatever. Maybe even some pretended sobriety.
5. There are those in groups who do not really want or even believe in our concept of sexual sobriety who poison the atmosphere of unity and weaken the bond of love and trust in meetings.
6. There is also some real, solid sobriety developing. This is the great miracle, and it is in spite of all the other. The program works for those who really work it - even the "lowest bottom" cases.

7. Whenever individuals and groups reach out and share across and beyond individual and group lines and become part of the larger fellowship, there is increased power, life, unity, and love - and sobriety - for all concerned. Thank God for the telephone; what a marvelous way to get so much for so little! And surely, there would be no SA without it!

These are simply some of the facts we see today as we take our SA inventory.

What can we do about all this?

1. We can get sober, stay sober, and work the Steps and Traditions.

2. *One for another.*
We can pray. ^ For the "knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out." (Step 11) The same God who brought us into being and saves us from our lust every time we let Him can see us through these problems. "God could and would if He were sought." (Big Book chap 5)

VI. Suggested Items for Discussion

Under Traditions One and Three, each SA group has the right and responsibility to bring up issues that bear on membership, group unity, and meeting quality. The following are merely suggested for debate and feedback, supporting the idea that if we don't look out for our unity - both group and SA as a whole - who will?

"Our common welfare should come first;
personal recovery depends on SA unity" (Trad. One)

"The only requirement for membership is a desire
to stop lusting and become sexually sober." (Trad. Three)

First, let's quote from the current SA Meeting Guide (This is available upon request and is currently being revised):

"Closed Meetings. At the present time, it is suggested that all SA meetings be closed to all but sexaholics ("closed" = sexaholics only). Only those men and women desiring sexual sobriety for themselves may attend. There are hundreds of thousands of people out there with sexual and marital problems of every conceivable description and motivation - many misguided. The experience of SA to date has taught us this hard lesson: SA is not for everybody. It is only for those who want sexual sobriety. The precise analogy is with Alcoholics Anonymous. There are many troubled people who want the support group but who are not willing to change their old ideas; they seem more intent on changing SA to suit themselves. Keeping the meetings "closed" in the AA sense will help keep out the curious, the exploiters, and those perennial "groupies" with vague impulses of wanting to feel better. SA is for all those who want to stop their sexually self-destructive thinking and behavior."

1. How do we handle newcomers? Before they attend their first meeting shall we have two or more members meet with them and ask pertinent questions such as:
- a) What is your problem?
 - b) What do you want from SA?
 - c) Do you want

sexual sobriety as we must have it for ourselves? d) What do you want to stop? e) Are you here for any other reasons? f) Are you connected with media in any way?

Shall we communicate to them something like the following: "We don't know where you're coming from, and you don't know where we're coming from yet. We need and cherish the spirit of love and unity and common purpose springing from our common problem and our common desire to stay sexually sober. We dare not let this be jeopardized by any who may still want to "control and enjoy their drinking." If we allow a spirit to take over or poison our meetings that is alien to our hunger for sobriety and spiritual growth, we let in a destructive force. Our common welfare comes first; our own personal recovery depends on SA unity. A threat to the spirit of unity in our meetings is a threat to our sobriety, recovery, and very lives. We want you to understand this. SA is not for everybody who needs it; it's for those who want it."

2. Do we ask that newcomers attend at least x number of meetings before sharing in the meeting proper?
3. Will there be a minimum length of sobriety required before a person can share in meetings?
4. Should we assign interim sponsors to every new member as soon as the person comes in?
5. What shall be the minimum length of sobriety to lead a meeting? Thus the secretary draws only from a pool of qualified sober members.
6. What do we do with those who attend meetings who don't want sobriety and otherwise adversely affect group spirit and unity? One of the groups suggests the following approach: First, concerned individuals may confront such an individual on a one-on-one basis to question why they're here and what they really want. We can always ask, "What do you want to stop," and remind them that the desire for sexual sobriety as we conceive it is the requirement for membership.
7. Some have put the question this way: "Do we want people in meetings who don't want sexual sobriety?"
8. Another question raised is, Do we call a person sexually sober who is using mood-altering substances, such as alcohol, drugs, or tranquilizers?

VII. Member Commitments

Here are some principles thrown out for suggestion/feedback:

1. SA members commit themselves to SA Meetings. They attend every SA meeting they can. On time. Meetings; on time. Why this emphasis?

When those we hope will be there don't show up or when the meeting is handled in a haphazard manner, there's a feeling of What's the use? A feeling of having been let down, that the secretary, leader, or other members don't care and are not really a part of. And if there's no feeling of mutual

caring, then I can't become a part of. How can I become a part of something that's always shifting around? Then I don't want to be a part of. And a feeling of separation and isolation comes into play - deadly for us.

Meetings starting on time are one of the legacies we've gotten from AA that works so well. One of the great disciplines we need in recovery. Instead of "doing our own thing," which characterized our self-obsession, we submit to the group. We do what doesn't come naturally: we commit ourselves to every meeting and to being on time. No matter what - wives, jobs, money.... We put the group first because we put our own sobriety first.

Our recovery cries out for support and structure in our individual lives. To have helter-skelter, catch-as-catch-can meetings, with officers coming in late, leaders not being sober and responsible to guidelines, members not showing up, and no form or focus on sobriety and the Steps, we eventually just fade away.

Commitment to sobriety is commitment to the fellowship of sobriety.

VIII. Meeting Guidelines

1. Leaders lead and sharers share. Leaders of meetings are servants of that meeting; they don't "carry" the meeting; they merely facilitate it.
2. The leader of the meeting does not have to acknowledge a raised hand; he can call on someone else. He is not at the mercy of the members. He can interrupt the one talking, if it is called for. This is in line with best of AA traditions.
3. Should a certain basic minimum or basic set^{of readings} be read at every meeting? If so, which items?
4. We stick with authorized AA and SA literature - both for use during meetings and what appears on the literature table.
5. We can benefit from the unwritten guidelines that have contributed so profoundly to the success of AA meetings and have proven valuable in our own: More from the Meeting Guide:
 - a. There is no cross-talk. That is, we don't interrupt others. However, the leader has the right to remind the person sharing of guidelines, time consumed, etc.
 - b. We don't give advice. We talk in the "I," not the "You," speaking from our own experience. Thus, if we want to respond to what someone has said, we do so only in terms of our own experience. "I can only speak for myself; but whenever I did so and so, this was what happened in my life...."
 - c. We don't psychoanalyze ourselves or others, and we don't get carried away analyzing what "caused" our behavior or attitudes. We don't talk as victims. We talk as those responsible for our diseased attitudes and actions and who are willing to take responsibility for our altered attitudes in recovery.

- d. We don't display knowledge, education, status, accomplishments, or erudition.
- e. We avoid politics and religious dogma.
- f. We avoid "dumping," self-pity, and blaming others.
- g. We don't take the "inventories" of others; that is, we uncover and work on our own defects, not those of others. We can indirectly confront others, as in item b, above, by referring to our own experience.
- h. We DO speak honestly of where we really are today.
- i. We DO lead with our weakness and take the risk of absolute self-disclosure.

One Final Thought

"Each member of Sexaholics Anonymous is but a small part of a great whole. SA must continue to live or most of us will surely die. Hence our common welfare comes first. But individual welfare follows close afterward."
(Tradition One, Long Form)

This Just In....

We were just about to get this letter out when we got a call from J.A. in Brunswick, Georgia, telling us about the new SA group there, which we didn't even know existed. She was sharing a recent experience with me and then read what she'd written during it. I asked her if she'd share it with all of us in this letter. It follows:

An Entity all its own,
It took from me everything that was near and dear.

The "rapacious creditor" sneaked into my mind like a thief in the night,
At first, very subtle, whispering sweet promises of complete fulfillment,
Reassuring me that my motives were justified -
Sincere delusion leading me into a hell that would devour my very soul;
At first a whisper, then becoming a clanging cymbal,
Deafening me to reality - to the "still small voice" within.

After years of feeding the insatiable appetite,
The noise in my head became too loud to bear.
With nowhere else to go and no one else to blame my raging on,
I cried out to SA for help;
And they understood
How powerless I was over Lust.

"I Am a Sexaholic"

What is this public aspect of surrender? First, it is being able to acknowledge what we are. It takes some of us weeks or months of coming to meetings before we can realize it at depth and say from the inside, "I am a sexaholic" or "I am a sex addict." Others seem to freely acknowledge this immediately.

The next stage is that we start talking honestly about ourselves; first, what we've done and thought in the lust/sex area, then, gradually, as more is revealed, our other defects. Typically, this is revealed progressively over time. It's as though we can't see the full extent of the power this thing has over us without first making a start at sharing it in the group. Then we begin to see more, and more comes out as we become part of the progressive honesty and self-disclosure of others.

A trust then begins to develop as we see that nothing is being held against us and that others are just like we are—and even more so. Trust deepens as we become mutually vulnerable by leading with our weakness. Leading with our weaknesses becomes the point of identification and union with each other. And it seems someone's self-disclosure has to start it off. Someone takes the risk because they have to, the pain is so bad. Then this helps pull away the curtain concealing the truth of our own lives and encourages us to do the same. The honesty of one encourages the honesty of others, as though we'd all been waiting for just such a fellowship where we could be on the outside what we really were on the inside all along.

All this takes time, but before we know it, there is "a shared honesty of mutual vulnerability openly acknowledged"(Kurtz, Not-God). This is the essence of the program. And this is why there must be those in our meetings who are hurting or who have hurt badly enough to break through into surrender and true honesty. Otherwise, a preponderance of those who are incapable of being honest (Alcoholics Anonymous Chap. 5) has the opposite effect of weakening the power of meetings, and the group's spiritual unity and very existence are threatened.

This much seems certain: Without an in-depth realization of what we really are and a willingness to reveal the truth about ourselves to other members, we can't seem to be able to connect with recovery. When we begin telling it like it really is, and was, from the inside out, we become part of. The spiritual Connection, it would appear, begins here—by first disconnecting from what we did. And how can we disconnect from it without sending it away from us as we tell it? This is the point of breakthrough.

The essence of honest sharing is that we want to be done with our sexual and other wrongs and are sending them away. Mere catharsis or even honest self-disclosure misses the mark if that's all it is. The aim is to bring our misdeeds to the light so we can be done with them. In a very real sense, we send them away by bringing them into the light. When done from such an attitude, it becomes a decisive spiritual experience, an entrance into the new way of life.

This is why "telling all" is not taking the First Step; it can be anything from boastful replay to anguished dumping or psychoanalysis. And even then, it's not really "all" and often only surface material. Thus, we don't "take" the First Step; it takes us. It overtakes us. And if it hasn't yet, hopefully it will; the disease and punishment it produces inside us keep working until we're ready to give up and let go.

Some members have found value in doing what has been called a written First Step inventory on their sexual history as a separate exercise. Based on the principle of the Fourth Step, it focuses on what we did in the lust/sex/relationship area. The inventory is then read either to the sponsor or to a group of seasoned sober members. The value of doing such an inventory without successful sobriety is questionable. There is also the danger that such an inventory will get ahead of one's willingness to be done with his old way of life and send it away. Some have found value in writing and giving away such an inventory later on in sobriety after a long enough time to see it in perspective.

The Second Half of Step One

For those who will recover through this program, the realization of powerlessness is coupled with dissatisfaction of self. For it is the self that is sick. If we would be content with ourselves, simply minus the compulsion, there can be no recovery.

Deep inside we always knew there were other things wrong with us, and it turns out our addictions were really trying to keep us from facing them. This is why, once the initial surrender of Steps One, Two, and Three is made, Steps Four through Ten—the heart of the program—then deal with exposing, confessing, and righting our wrongs.

In sobriety we quickly learn that we are just as powerless over these other defects that begin to surface as we ever were over lust, sex, and dependency. The fact that they aren't as omnipresent as lust would seduce us into the notion we're really okay. We seem to go for stretches of time without acting out on them—resentment, for example—but when things go wrong, watch out! They burst forth with a vengeance and fury fearsome to behold. Bad feelings boil up as if out of nowhere—feelings that are against others, that isolate us and force us back into the prison-house of the self. We'd rather believe that such outbursts are simply results of what others are doing to us; we seem unwilling to see that we think and act badly because there's something wrong inside us. As though bitter waters can spring up from a pure well.

What great relief to finally come to the place where we can say, not only "I'm powerless over lust," but "I'm powerless over ME!"

It's okay to be absolutely powerless over self. This is where we join the human race. And best of all, just as the admission of powerlessness over lust is the key to our sexual sobriety, so the admission of powerlessness over our defects is the key to our emotional sobriety. Victory through powerlessness by the grace of God! What a glorious liberating discovery!

This is the point at which our self-honesty begins to grow, where recovery begins. But thank God, these defects are revealed to us progressively in the fellowship of identification, acceptance, and forgiveness so we are able to bear the realization without destroying ourselves or resorting to one of our "drugs" for escape. Our God is patient and loving and kind with us; as we must be with our fellow members.

The program calls those who are tired and weighed down with the burden of self, those who want to be rid of the load but can't. It calls those who are trapped in the prison-house of the self but know no way out. A broken and contrite spirit—the spirit of the First Step—is the key that opens the door and sets us free.

Thank you for your request for information about Sexaholics Anonymous and please accept our regrets for any delay.

We are not making statements or granting interviews at this time.

In the past forty-five years, the relationship between Alcoholics Anonymous and the media has evolved into one of mutual understanding, trust, and respect. A.A. learned in the crucible of its early experiences that the principle of personal anonymity was essential to its survival. We in SA hope to follow in that same tradition, where our public relations policy will be based not on promotion, but rather on attraction. We too are committed to personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films, and TV. Although there is no organizational affiliation, the two programs are identical.

We hopefully look forward to the time when we will be better able to respond to your requests. In the meantime, we appreciate your forbearance and understanding in not providing coverage without our factual input.

Sincerely,

The General Service Board
Sexaholics Anonymous