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Some Suggested Book and Program Evaluation Guidelines

SA members are constantly asking me for my views on this or that book or program. In the past, I've often evaded the questions, treating them as an "outside issue," on which SA is to have no opinion. However, some of these issues bear directly on our fellowship and are often within it, and questions are being raised about endorsement and affiliation.

Since what is really at issue here is the very essence of what SA is and stands for, I would like to take a personal stand. Rather than expressing an opinion directly on any specific issue, I thought it better to put forth in question form some of the guidelines I see as applicable.

Of course, your feedback is welcome. Only—please!—think and pray and discuss and let it simmer awhile before you write. And if you feel strongly enough to comment, then it should be in writing (typewritten if at all possible) for the record. I'm sure some of you can add to the following list and help us, under God, guard the principles of our program and "KEEP IT SIMPLE!"

As these questions may relate to evaluate a book, for example, keep in mind that the question is not what purpose it may serve the world at large or even sex addicts in describing the problem, but, What is the real message it carries for the solution? What is its real program of recovery?

On first reading, we may not see the hidden implications. What's often required is another careful reading, measuring it against the principles of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions.

Guideline Questions

- o What is the real aim and goal of the book or program? Is it sexual sobriety by means of a spiritual awakening, or merely a therapeutic support setting where people can learn to feel better about themselves or control their addiction?
- o What is at the center of the book or program? On what does it rely for the power to get and maintain sexual sobriety? On belief, knowledge, therapy, or God? Is man at the center or God?
- o What place is God given? First place, as in the true AA program and literature, or lip service only?
- o What place is the 12 Step program given? First place or lip service?
- o Is it psychology, with the 12 Step program merely used as support, or is it first and foremost the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions as originally wrought out in AA with nothing added? Does it really know and use the 12 Step program, or is it brought in after the fact to fit into and support the theories presented?

- o Does it unequivocally state that the 12 Steps, when worked, will give victory over the obsession and compulsion and lead to a spiritual awakening, or does it imply something else should be added?
 - o Does the program or approach taken in the book depend in any way on professionals or on professional help or knowledge? Does it imply I need therapy to get sexually sober? If so, it cannot lay claim to being in the tradition of the original 12 Step program. The program either works or it doesn't. If I'm not staying sober, the first priority for me is to see whether in fact I am actually working the Steps. I understand that Bill W. of AA was once asked what he would change if he were writing the Big Book again. His answer: "I'd only change one word—'rarely' to 'never.'" He was referring to the opening line to Chapter 5: "Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path." The co-founder of this program was telling the world he never once saw the Steps to fail when they were worked thoroughly. (Why do we run so eagerly to what appears to be the easier softer way?)
 - o Does it imply that sexual addiction is primarily a function of the contributions of culture and family, or primarily the result of my own wrong attitudes and actions? Does it mask over my own responsibility for my condition? Does it cause me to think of myself as a victim, or does it show me how my attitude responding to those conditions made me what I am? Does it shift responsibility from me to "them"?
 - o Does it look on sex drunks as unfortunates, who basically need a lot of understanding, nurturing, and care, or does it see them as self-obsessed rebels, usurping the rightful place of God in their lives?
 - o Is it based on the promise that right thinking leads to right acting, or on the time-tested AA premise that right acting must come first, which then leads to right thinking? In my opinion, "Knowledge saves" (that is, knowledge of what "caused" my condition or knowledge of what my correct attitude should be) is one of the fundamental misconceptions of modern psychology, tincturing most everything it touches.
"If I can only get to know enough of what 'caused' me to be this way, I'll be free."
or
"If I can only get in touch with the real me...."
All my beliefs and knowledge, about myself and all those other good things, true though they may have been, never got me sober and can't keep me sober.
 - o Is it loaded with information on how to practice the disease, or does it concentrate on telling me how to stop acting out and get victory over lust?
 - o Does it concentrate on descriptions of the more socially unacceptable manifestations of sexaholism and more on the forms of acting out rather than addressing the underlying problem of lust?
 - o Does it imply we did nothing wrong to feel bad about and have to correct?
 - o Does the appeal to gaining knowledge of the contributions of culture and family imply we have the power within ourselves to expell the obsession? Does it imply we must shed the AA concept of powerlessness?
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- o Does it, in providing a psychological rationale for sex addiction, blind us to the true spiritual nature of our malady and hence to the true spiritual source of our recovery?

Conclusion

Such books or programs may serve a useful purpose in helping educate the general public—and even sex addicts— into seeing sex addiction as a fact. However, we should be very careful and jealous of our program principles before letting something so very close to the truth into our fellowship and have it seduce us away from the power it has.

God either is or he isn't. The 12 Step program either works or it doesn't. God can either loose the sexaholic from the power of lust or he can't. If he can't, we're wasting our time. If this program can't get me through and over my acting-out, what's it good for? Conversely, if therapy can give me sexual sobriety and victory over lust, who needs the program? (This is not to say therapy does not have its place.)

There are 12 simple (not easy!) Steps and 12 Traditions that have, by the grace of God, been given to us through the trial-by-fire of men and women who were helpless, "uncurable," and hopelessly enslaved to alcohol. Those Steps worked for them and are still working wherever they are worked.

