

The First Step

I Am Powerless... Or Am I?

Stacey U.

Raises hand. "Hello. I'm Stacey, and I am powerless over alcohol-- I'm in my first 30 days of sobriety, and my life, well it is sort of messy." No! Wait! I'm not an alcoholic! Am I an alcoholic!? Really?? I'm gonna go do some research...

Let's try this again. YES! *Raises hand.* "Hello. I'm Stacey, and I am powerless over alcohol-- I'm in my first 30 days of sobriety, and my life, well it's looking increasingly messy." Wait... No! I'm not an alcoholic. What am I thinking?! No way. I don't believe it, I can't believe it, and I refuse to accept it!

Let's try this again. And again... And again... Okay, I give up!!! *sigh* "Hello. I'm Stacey, and I am Powerless over alcohol-- I'm in my first 90 days of sobriety, and my life, well it has become a total mess and completely unmanageable."

This has been my experience in reaching and accepting Step One of this program, leading up to my sobriety date of February 7, 2009. It has been a long and heavy road, filled with denial and ego. I started drinking and using mood-altering substances at a fairly young age, and my first drunk was at 15. To say that my life slowly became unmanageable would be an outright lie; I was born unmanageable. I have been shy and uncomfortable in my own skin ever

since I can remember, and have acted out in very unhealthy, obsessive and impulsive ways as a result, my entire life.

Once I discovered alcohol and drugs, I spent 15 miserable years chasing peace and serenity in a bottle, pipe or pill. Let me tell you, peace and serenity have Never come to me in those forms, but MAN did I try! During these 15 years, I suffered many consequences as a direct result of my drinking. I must admit, jails and institutions just made me feel sort of cool; they did not scare me. I thought being a drunken druggie mess with several warrants out for my arrest was cool. That is, until it wasn't...

In 1997 I overdosed on Xanax to kill the pain in my psyche because I had run out of booze, only to end up in a coma and then an institution-- that really wasn't "cool." For some years preceding this, I skipped out on several court dates and community service obligations after my third DUI, evading the law, having several warrants out for my arrest, being jailed several times because of this, and eventually losing my driving privileges for over 6 years-- that wasn't "cool" either. But was I an alcoholic? Nah... Just a screw-up. That is what I figured, and that is what I took comfort in. "At least there is a reason for all of this; I'm just a loser, a pointless loser." If I had really cared to understand the disease of alcoholism and the fact that I have this disease, I may have spared myself more years of pain and suffering.

My point is, These Things Did Not Stop Me from drinking for several more years. I came to AA three years ago because I felt desperate and I didn't want to die. I had slowly progressed from drinking in my trashed, hole-in-the-wall apartment 4-5 nights a week to drinking a bottle of vodka every evening, with a strict routine of 2-3 shots in the morning to get me out of the house and to work; and another 2-3 shots come 3:00, at work, to get me home. I finally saw, through the blur of my miserable existence, that I had absolutely NO power over alcohol, and no defense against the first drink.

Upon entering the program of AA, I quickly admitted that yes, I was an alcoholic and my life was unmanageable. Absolutely, without a doubt! I have relapsed several times since then. I have come to realize that for me, admitting I was an alcoholic and that my life had become unmanageable, well that just hasn't been enough. I have admitted it several times, and then promptly reversed my decision at the first sign of willfulness. What I have been unable to do until earlier this year is Accept the fact that I am powerless over alcohol, and that my life has become unmanageable. A few people have asked me after meetings over the past two years, upon my return from a relapse, "Why do you think you keep drinking, Stacey?" I never had an answer for them; I didn't know. My answer now would be "because I wasn't ready to accept that I was an alcoholic, and I was defenseless."

Accepting Step One, my sponsor, the rooms, you people; these things have given me something I am finally willing to receive, and never thought possible-- HOPE for a decent existence. I have no delusions of grandeur; I just want to be better at Living. Step one is only a beginning...

SO: Hello. I'm Stacey, and I am Powerless over alcohol-- I'm in my first 90 days of sobriety, and my life, well it has become a total mess and completely unmanageable.

And today, I can accept that.

New paths in the jungle of life

Rick H.

I just celebrated 19 years of continuous sobriety. I am very grateful and happy to tell you that. I have a tradition that was given to me, that has me going to all of my regular meetings plus those special "extra" meetings that I attend when I can. And, as usually happens with attending all of these meetings, I'm in a really good spot. Spiritually filled. On the "AA Beam" again. Spending time giving leads, chairing beginners meetings, talking with newcomers after the meetings... Doing these things really puts me in a good place. Not surprising, since I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing-- as the twelfth step "suggests" to us. Give back what was freely given to us. Simple. Clear. Powerful. Great antidote to the "root of our problem"-- selfishness and self-centeredness-- a condition I continue to battle with.

I've recently been sharing an analogy that came to me in a very clear way;

one which helps me understand why it is so difficult to stay sober, especially in the early part of our recovery.

Here it is:

When we started into our drinking and drugging, and hit the jungle of life-- with all of its worries, fears, challenges, opportunities, etc.--we figuratively carved out pathways to get through all of these events. The paths we made were built fast and easy; wide and smooth, no growth through pain and struggle, no real learning about how to build relationships, how to be a good friend or a contributing family member. Just easy paths on how to get through the jungle of life; not feeling, not caring, not growing up, just surviving to go on to the next day down these wide, easy paths. These paths, of course, were built around the temporary and destructive power of alcohol and drugs; they were hollow, empty, lonely, dark-- even when the music was playing and others were laughing. Worst of all they led us to a hell on earth where there were no "danger" road signs, no flashing red lights, no alarms ringing to warn us of the dreadful pit we were all once headed...

So... we hit bottom. The walls crumbled and caved in. We got kicked out and thrown right back to where we started. Older, scarred, and spiritually, mentally, physically and emotionally bankrupt. (That is really a dismal report card, isn't it?) Once again, looking directly at the jungle of life in front of us, this time being asked to face it with no mind-altering substances. Clearly, the old paths are available... Right in our face, easily accessible; a quick drink, a hit of something, a bottle of something else; in other words, the easy way... wide, inviting and representing temporary relief from the pain of early recovery. But there is another option that has been given to us. One we never had before. Our new friends

in AA suggest we start building new paths through the jungle of life. Strong paths, solid paths, built through the wisdom of all that has been experienced in the program of AA, past and present. There is something different about how we go about building these new paths, however. It takes a lot of work, discipline, willingness, openness and honesty. The path building work is simple but definitely not easy-- and so frustrating at times.

We go to meetings many days a week, rain or snow, feeling good or bad. We get a sponsor even though we don't know exactly what that means. They begin by asking us to do very unselfish and small things. Things such as making coffee and putting chairs up while greeting newcomers hours before the meeting starts. We are walked through each of the twelve steps deeply, thoroughly, and point by point; requested to tell our stories in front of large crowds, even though we are nervous and would rather sit in the corner and just listen; asked to go on weekend retreats without knowing what they are for; and to make amends to people we just plain don't like. We are asked to find a God that we can't quite understand and then struggle getting comfortable with having Him manage our lives (since we still think at times we can do it better by ourselves). We are asked to teach newcomers all we were taught, even though we are saying to ourselves "How can I help this person when I'm just barely hanging on myself?"

So hacking our way through every inch of recovery is definitely quite opposite of the way we created the old easy paths in our years of addiction. For it's not our nature to replace the pleasure and relief of immediate gratification with disciplined, long term character. However, we know from listening and hearing the stories of relapse and recovery, we are just

not going to make it unless we have a firm foundation; one based on the solid, clean, powerful handiwork of our twelve step program of recovery, crafted by the Hand of God and delivered through the people of AA.

Quotes from Bill W.

"Is sobriety all that we are to expect of a spiritual awakening? No, sobriety is only a bare beginning; it is only the first gift of the first awakening. If more gifts are to be received, our awakening has to go on. As it goes on, we find that bit by bit we can discard the old life—the one that did not work—for a new life that can and does work under any conditions whatever. "

Intervention

Rick S.

About a month ago I was asked to be part of an "intervention" for a relative. I'd like to share some of what this was like.

Dan is my 19-year old nephew. He lives with his parents and younger sister in an affluent suburb of a large city on the East Coast. I usually see Dan only a few times a year but I had always found him to be very intelligent and personable. Like everyone else in the family, I thought Dan was capable of doing very good things in life.

About two years ago Dan's parents found out he was smoking pot. He said all the usual things. It was no big deal. Everybody was doing it. He could handle it. And so on... You know the drill. His family noticed that he was hanging out with a different crowd. They saw less of his old childhood friends. His sister described the new crowd as something less than reputable. An arrest on a minor drug charge led to a court-ordered drug rehab pro-

gram. It turned out Dan had moved on from pot to other drugs. He came out of rehab saying all the right things and his family hoped that this was a phase that had run its course. However, it was soon apparent that Dan was using again and more heavily than before. During his senior year of high school Dan's grades plummeted and he barely graduated. Despite this, he did exceptionally well on his SATs, winning a National Merit Scholarship and was accepted at an Ivy League university.

Over last summer it became obvious to Dan's parents and, grudgingly, to Dan himself that he wasn't ready to go away to college, let alone deal with the pressure and demands of a top university. Instead he enrolled in a local junior college but never really attended classes and soon dropped out. He has spent the rest of the past year living at home, sleeping most of the day, staying out all night and not bothering to conceal or deny his drug use. At some point it became clear that Dan was also dealing to support his drug use and was involved in some dangerous things. There were telephone threats to Dan and vandalism to their house and cars.

I won't go into everything Dan's parents tried. I know they did everything they could think of to help him, but the situation just continued to get worse. They decided that the only course left was for Dan to agree to get help and get clean or leave the house for good. To this end they chose to do an intervention.

I knew about interventions mostly as the inspiration for a bad cable TV show. There are, I learned, actual professional interventionists. In this case, his name was Ted. He was a recovering addict himself, had worked for one of the major rehab chains and now had his own business doing interventions. The whole group, extended family and some friends, about 12 of us, met the night before to get information and

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our instructions from Ted and to figure out a “battle plan.” Like the TV show, everyone was asked to write a letter to Dan telling him our feelings for him and describing how his addiction was affecting our lives. The next morning we would gather at Dan’s house. A friend and a relative go to Dan’s room and tell him that his family and some friends had gathered downstairs and would like to talk with him. If he joined us, we would read our letters to him. Dan’s parents would give him the bottom line— go to the rehab clinic they had chosen or pack up his things and move out. We offer Dan our love and support. If all went according to script, Dan and Ted would leave for the rehab clinic immediately.

I was asked to bat lead-off in the line-up of speakers. I guess because I had “been there and back” my testimony might carry more weight. I was a bit conflicted about this intervention process. It seemed to me that we were being asked to take inventory on Dan and then tell him to get help. This didn’t seem to be the AA way but I very much wanted to help. I thought back to that time when I was coming to realize my powerlessness over alcohol but was not ready to turn my will over to a higher power. I could say something about what it was like for me. We were asked to be brief and to the point. This is what I came up with:

“I am an alcoholic. I knew this and could admit this to myself long before I could say it to others. For a long time I truly believed that this was a problem I could handle by myself. I tried, most times half-heartedly but some times with great determination, and I failed. Everyone close to me wanted me to get help. I knew I needed it and, more and more, I wanted it. But I was afraid that if I really committed to getting sober, got help, did all the things people told me to do, I might find out that I couldn’t do it. And then where would I be? The End. Game over. The notion of getting help was a faint glimmer of

hope on the horizon. With it, the miserable life I now had was just barely tolerable. A final day of reckoning and failure would make this life permanent.

At the same time (and this will sound foolish to everyone else here) I was afraid that if I really tried to get sober I’d find out that I could do it. And what is that? A friend of mine pictured that life as walking down a long gray corridor with closed gray doors to either side, everything gray and just stretching out to eternity. I had something worse than that now but I also had alcohol. Nothing could touch those first moments when the booze lit up my world and for a brief time each day I had colors in my life. I resigned myself to a colorless world some day; not today, but I was in no rush to get there.

Quitting drinking was a horrible f@#!ing experience. One day at a time, sometimes minute-by-minute, it did seem to stretch out to eternity. But at some point that I still can’t exactly pin down, I knew that I could do it. It still seemed that each day crawled along, but this helped. Things got better, easier.

I haven’t had a drink for about 4 years now and what is that like for me? In the beginning (and even now at times) I would sit in meetings and people would talk about how great things were now, how their lives were better than they could’ve ever imagined. I’d feel like shouting, “This is all crap! Just shut the f@#! up and leave me alone. Let me suffer in peace.” Now I am one of those people.

Still, I told myself I would never say those things to anyone else. I didn’t want to hear it then. I didn’t believe it and I suspect that you don’t either. So I won’t tell you things are better but I will say they get different. For me, most of the difference took awhile to happen and it’s still evolving today. But one difference I got for free and I got it right away; I don’t have to hide. I don’t

have to deny anything. I don’t have to lie to anyone about anything. Ever. Think about that. Now I will shut the f@#! up.”

The intervention didn’t go according to plan. Dan and Ted did not ride off into the sunset to rehab. I didn’t get to say these things. Dan had seen the TV show too and didn’t want any part of it. Dan walked out. Later that night he came back, packed up and moved out. He hugged us all good-bye. I told him good luck no matter what he decided.

So, did we do any good? I think family and friends left that night with a feeling of loss but also with a sense of greater unity and understanding. Maybe Dan’s mother, father and sister could now restore some order to their lives and try to move forward. As for Dan? I am a big believer in planting the seed, as the Big Book says. Maybe a seed was planted. Later that week Dan called home. A week to the day after the intervention, Dan and Ted did ride off to rehab. As of this writing, Dan is still in in-patient treatment.

That’s all I have. I’ll keep coming back.

Sobriety

EKG

Although we begin our journey to recovery at Step One and I had gotten started many years before, I did not understand at all what “and that our lives had become unmanageable” really meant.

For many years I attended Cecilia’s 11th step meeting at the “Seed.” One thing she consistently told us was that in order to get sober you have to be dry and that the minimum detox is five years. She went on to say that dry is painful. I always thought putting the bottle down was what this is all about. Being a Pollyanna, I was sure that at any moment I was to reach that exalted sober state with little effort on

my part simply due to the fact that I had not taken a drink and worked the steps in twice that amount of time.

I finally looked up the word sober in a dictionary and began to have a better understanding of what she was trying to tell us. The "Sober" definition included: not intoxicated, straightforward in character, and not garish: sober attire. It further stated: devoid of frivolity, excess, exaggeration or speculative imagination, that is; gave a sober assessment of the situation. Sober is characterized by self-control or sanity and reasonableness.

Haven't we heard all along that we need to change through repeated efforts on the step, being fearless and thorough? In a recent talk, the speaker mentioned how we need to eat daily- that we couldn't exist on what we ate five years ago; and so it is with our efforts on the steps, no matter how long we have been dry or sober. With these items in mind I have a better understanding of what the difference is between dry (unmanageable) and sober. A perfect Step One, for me, requires a daily effort.

As I continue to do my Tenth Step, also on a daily basis, I attempt to consider these values. If falling short, I need to look at those seven deadly sins as they are the root of the problem. For me the biggest problem has been fear, which I believe is behind all those seven deadly sins. Celia had us repeat them out loud with her at each meeting: Pride, Anger, Greed, Lust, Envy, Sloth and Gluttony. I remember her looking at me when we said sloth and feeling shocked- who me?

Dealing with my foibles is best when I can turn to the Power greater than I and face my fears, acknowledge them and ask for His help. It is my understanding and experience that I am the one who has to do the footwork. I had to give up my reliance on "things human." The answers are in the Big Book!

The ABC's of How It Works: A. That we were alcoholic and could not manage our own lives; B. That probably no human power could have relieved our alcoholism; C. That God could and would if He were sought.

It works!

Committee Report

By Bill K.,

Correctional Facilities Chairperson

HH: What is the function of your committee?

Bill: The committee takes AA meetings into jails and prisons. We provide written correspondence with inmates while they are incarcerated. We also have a new inmate re-entry program that provides prisoners involved in AA while incarcerated contact with AA volunteers on the outside.

Six months prior to release they establish written correspondence, and immediately upon release the AA volunteer will partner up with another AA volunteer and meet with the ex-offender and help him find and get into AA meetings. This is basically the same as making a 12th step call. Getting ex-offenders plugged into AA right away gives them a much better chance of staying sober and from returning to prison.

HH: What are some of the challenges this committee faces as you see them?

Bill: Getting volunteers willing to work with ex-offenders. Unfortunately, some AA members think ex-offenders are either dangerous or unworthy of their time. These men and women are alcoholics just like you and I and deserve a chance to have AA turn their lives

around. If the people in AA had not accepted me and made me feel welcome, I certainly would not have stuck around. It is the same for ex-offenders. Our Higher Power brings these men and women to us and it is our responsibility to be there for them.

HH: How has your participation in this committee affected your sobriety?

Bill: I feel this committee is one of the few that actually works directly with the still suffering alcoholic. This is every alcoholic's primary purpose. Bringing meetings in behind the wall has given me great joy. I feel this is what my Higher Power had planned for me when he saved my life. Now it is my turn to repay him by doing service work with the rest of the corrections committee.

HH: Do you need volunteers for this committee? If so, is there a sobriety requirement?

Bill: We are in need of volunteers for all areas of the services we provide. To go behind the walls, you must have 1 year of sobriety, have worked all the steps and have a sponsor.

HH: When and where do you meet?

Bill: Our committee meets the last Wednesday of every month at the downtown office at 7 pm. If you are interested in this type of service work, please come to the meeting, regardless of how long you have been sober. There are many opportunities to help out. We are in the process of putting together a newsletter. We are looking for people who have skills in this area.

Please contact Bill K @ 708-903-1471 or cfc@chicagoaa.org for more information.

A Note From CASO ...

May 8, 2009

Please accept my warmest greetings from the Chicago Area Service Office. We recently received the following memo from A.A. World Services, informing us of a price increase on all A.A.W.S. literature:

“As I am sure you all know, A.A. is not immune to current economic conditions. At the G.S.O. we have seen increases in costs for operations, warehousing and shipping. The A.A. World Services Board asked management to come up with solutions to help keep our prudent reserve at an acceptable level. We presented scenarios for making changes to our shipping and handling charges, and for increasing literature prices. After long discussion, the board approved increasing book prices, while keeping our shipping and handling charge practices the same.” – Christopher C., Publications Director, AAWS

As it is our practice to sell all A.A. World Services literature at list price, we too will increase our prices as of July 1, 2009, in accordance with the AAWS price increase price schedule. We have included A.A. World Services new price list for your review which goes into effect on July 1, 2009. Any orders placed between now and July 1, 2009 will be honored at the current lower prices.

As always thank you for choosing to purchase your A.A. literature from the Chicago Area Service Office Bookstore. We always strive to provide you with the best possible service.

Should you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me at (312) 346-1475.



Laura Gonzalez
Chicago Area Service Office
Manager

A.A. World Services, Inc
New Book Prices
Effective July 1, 2009

Code	Title	New Price	Increase
B-1	Alcoholics Anonymous	\$8.00	\$2.00
B-30	Alcoholics Anonymous (soft-cover)	\$7.60	\$2.00
B-16	Alcoholics Anonymous (large-print)	\$8.30	\$2.00
B-35	Alcoholics Anonymous (pocket-sized)	\$4.00	\$0.50
B-2	Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions	\$7.40	\$1.00
B-4	Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions (gift)	\$7.25	\$1.00
B-15	Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions (soft-cover)	\$7.00	\$1.00
B-14	Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions (large-print)	\$7.75	\$1.00
B-17	Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions (pocket-size)	\$5.50	\$1.00
B-3	A.A. Comes of Age	\$8.50	\$1.00
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The corresponding French, Spanish and foreign language editions will carry the same prices

Non-AA price add \$1.00 as per usual CASO pricing.

*You Are More Than Good
Enough*

Polly R.

You are more than good enough today.
 You are smart enough.
 You are pretty enough.
 Your house is clean enough.
 Your outfit is chic enough,
 and your hair and makeup too.

You are more than good enough today.

You make enough money.
 Your address is posh enough.
 Your alma-mater is enough acclaimed.
 Your job is good enough,
 and you work hard enough too.

It may be hard to hear,
 You are more than good enough today.
 The amount of courage you have is
 enough today.
 The amount of insight you possess is
 enough today.
 The amount of change you make today,
 no matter how small, is good enough.

You may try to disagree, but
 Even if you ate an extra doughnut at the
 office,
 Even if you don't have an office to go to,
 And even if you have a donut around your
 middle,

You are more than good enough today.

No matter what other people do,
 No matter what other people say,
 No matter what other people have,

Whether you knew it or not, be reassured,
 You are more than enough today.

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