

OUR PRIMARY PURPOSE - ES&H OR E&K?

When the Text Book for Alcoholics Anonymous was introduced to the public in April 1939, Bill W. stated the primary purpose of this book as follows:

“We, OF Alcoholics Anonymous, are more than one hundred men and women who have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body. **To show other alcoholics *PRECISELY HOW WE HAVE RECOVERED* is the main purpose of this book.** For them, we hope these pages will prove so convincing that no further authentication will be necessary. We think this account of our experiences will help everyone to better understand the alcoholic. Many do not comprehend that the alcoholic is a very sick person. And besides, we are sure that our way of living has its advantages for all.” A.A., pg xiii

He then laid out some general guidelines followed by Doctor Silkworth’s opinion regarding alcoholism. His opinion has since been found to be medically sound.

Interestingly enough, “The Doctor’s Opinion” is the only opinion to be found in the Basic Text. The Authors recognized that expression of “opinions,” not based on fact, could kill alcoholics. They therefore made clear what would be found in this Book regarding the Problem – alcoholism; the Solution - God as we understood Him and - the practical Program of Action which promises recovery. They declared they would share only their **EXPERIENCE and KNOWLEDGE**. That declaration is found on page 19 of what members of Alcoholics Anonymous call their Basic Text, “The Big Book.” It is:

“We have concluded to publish an anonymous volume setting forth the problem as **WE** see it. We shall bring to the task **OUR COMBINED EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE** which should suggest a useful program for anyone concerned with a drinking problem.”

Of course, “setting forth the problem as **WE** see it” would be based on the experience and knowledge of recovered alcoholics, not as seen by untreated alcoholics or non-alcoholics. Unfortunately, a great deal of how “they” see it has filtered into our meeting rooms. Since understanding the problem, alcoholism, as **WE** see it is absolutely essential to being willing to surrender to the Program of Recovery, we must rely on the “Doctor’s Opinion” for a clear statement of the Problem and the demonstration of that Problem as is seen in the stories of recovered alcoholics.

Those who accepted the responsibility for the lives of newcomers restricted their “teaching” to the content of that Book. The result was most who were seriously seeking help found lasting sobriety.

In 1947, a member of the editorial staff of the “Grapevine” authored the presently used “Grapevine Preamble.” It reads, in part, “Alcoholics Anonymous is a Fellowship of men and women who share their **EXPERIENCE, STRENGTH AND HOPE** with each other that they may solve their common problems and help others to recover from alcoholism.” Only those who had been blessed with a spiritual awakening as the result of the Steps were permitted to talk in the meetings. The newcomer listened to the **EXPERIENCE** of the recovered alcoholic (what they were like, what happened), the obvious **STRENGTH AND POWER** (and what they are like now) s/he had received as the result of having taken the Steps and the **HOPE** the recovered alcoholic had for his/her future, the future of our Fellowship and for the future of the newcomer. The newcomer could then take a look at what was required to recover and see the results in those who had achieved that goal. They could then decide if they were, in fact, willing to go to any length to survive.

With the initiation of discussion/participation meetings in the late 1960’s, the content of the meetings began to focus more and more on the experience of untreated alcoholics and even non-alcoholics. More and more, the topics of meetings were the problems unique to the person stating their personal problem rather than the common problems of alcoholics. There was less and less sharing of the strength of recovery as well and any hope for the future. The decrease in the effectiveness of the meetings was offset for a number of years by the great influx of persons referred to Alcoholics Anonymous by members of the treatment industry and the professionals who attempted to guide those who had come to them for help. In the format of these meetings, there was no longer a focus on the **EXPERIENCE, STRENGTH AND HOPE** from the recovered alcoholic based on their **EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE** of the Program of recovery. The result of which has been and continues to be a shrinking number of alcoholics who have approached Alcoholics Anonymous in hope of escaping death or permanent insanity by drinking being denied the information that is vital to survival.

The real underlying source of this tragic situation is weak and ineffective sponsorship. All too often, members of the Fellowship who are not drinking but have never attempted to take the Steps will assume the responsibility for the life of the innocent newcomer. They have no understanding of the simple but highly effective set of instructions for leading a newcomer to the Solution for all their problems as outlined in the Chapter, “Working With Others.”

Step Twelve reads, “Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.”

In Step Twelve is stated the **REAL PURPOSE** of the Program of Alcoholics Anonymous; “Our **REAL PURPOSE** is to fit ourselves to be of maximum service to God and the people about us.” Within our **REAL PURPOSE** is our **PRIMARY PURPOSE**, “we tried to carry this message to alcoholics.” The question is, are we trying

to carry this message in our meetings or are we feeding the misery?

Bill W. wrote,

“In the years ahead A.A. will, of course, make mistakes. Experience has taught us that we need have no fear of doing this, **providing that we always remain willing to admit our faults and to correct them promptly.** Our growth as individuals has depended upon this healthy process of trial and error. So will our growth as a fellowship.

Let us always remember that any society of men and women that cannot freely correct its own faults must surely fall into decay if not into collapse. Such is the universal penalty for the failure to go on growing. Just as each A.A. must continue to take his moral inventory and act upon it, so must our whole Society if we are to survive and if we are to serve usefully and well.” (A.A. Comes of Age, pg 231)

We now know what the problem is and we know what the solution is. Unfortunately, **we have not remained willing to admit our faults and to correct them promptly.** We have been and are plagued with large doses of apathy and complacency. The problem we are trying to live with is needlessly killing alcoholics. The solution promises recovery for those who are willing to follow the clear-cut directions in the Big Book. **So, let's make certain the ES&H we share is limited to the E&K of OUR Program of Recovery as is outlined in our Basic Text, “ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS.”**

Do you want to be a part of the problem or a part of the solution? Simple, but not easy; A price has to be paid.

Many discussion meetings are a lot of talk but recovery is a very short walk; the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, that is!
