

“It Doesn’t Work”

One of the saddest statements I have ever heard is, “I’ve been to A.A. and it doesn’t work.” There is no way I can count the number of times over the past couple of decades I have found an alcoholic coming off a drunk who made that statement. Just today, one of my protégés called to tell me of a man, holed up in a cheap motel room, he was asked to locate and see if he could help him.

My protégé was successful in locating the suffering alcoholic and did what he had been instructed to do on a Twelve Step Call. He told him some of the story of his drinking and how he had come to know it to be an illness over which he had no control nor did the medical profession have a solution.

The suffering alcoholic finally said, “You’re doing to try to tell me about A.A. aren’t you?”

Jake said, “That is where I found my Solution.”

The sick one said, “I have gone to A.A. meetings for the last eight (8) months and did what they told me to do. It doesn’t work for me.”

Jake asked, “Did you take the Steps with a Sponsor who had been blessed with a spiritual experience as the result of having taken the Steps?”

The sick one said, “I think I did but the main thing they told me was just keep coming back and you’ll be OK. When I asked what else I should do, I was told, ‘Don’t drink and keep on going to more meetings.’ I did what they told me to do and A.A. just doesn’t work.”

A member of Alcoholics Anonymous found me near death in 1964 and told me he could help me. He said to me, “I understand. I have been where you are and I want to help you if you will let me.” I was willing to do anything. He took me to his A.A. Club and began sobering me up on Orange Juice with some honey mixed in it. When I began having Delirium Tremens, they added some Bay Rum to the mixture. There were no treatment centers in our area at that time and hospitals would not admit us for alcoholism. We either shook and sweat it out in jail or at an A.A. Club. By far, most of them made it to the end sober or they still are. I wasn’t one of them. I saw an opportunity to return my ego to its earlier level by getting involved in a new and exciting profession and so I went for it. Sixteen (16) years after my last drink; eleven (11) years after my last meeting, on a day without a cloud in the sky, I thought having a beer would be a good idea, so being in a very dry county, I drove seventy (70) miles for a Six-pack. It took me two (2) years to make it back to Alcoholics Anonymous very, very drunk.

But what a difference thirteen (13) years can make! There were no alcoholics laying around the Club with dry heaves. There were no blood shot eyes, sweating faces, no vibrating bodies, the aroma of alcoholism was missing. There was no orange juice in the refrigerator nor honey near the coffee pot. There was no Bay Rum in the file cabinet. It was no longer needed because almost everyone had gone to “treatment” and been medicated through the process of what is termed “de-tox.” They had missed those wonderful Golden Moments of the misery, suffering and pain of sobering up. At first, I thought the new approach was good but then I began to see the results. There was less and less commitment to the Group and the action necessary for long term emotional sobriety was being ignored.

There were very few Big Book Study or Speaker meetings but a large number of “Discussion/participation” meetings where everyone was given an opportunity to talk about whatever was on their mind whether or not they knew anything about alcoholism or recovery from alcoholism.

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There were even non-alcoholics participating in these meetings. This newer approach of learning to live with alcoholism was beginning to prove to be a dismal failure.

I heard a tape of Joe McQ. and later attended a weekend of Joe McQ. & Charlie P. presenting their “Big Book Comes Alive” program. It then became very clear why so many were returning to the bottle. Not only were we without sick alcoholics laying around the meeting places, there was so little Program in our meetings, it was almost hidden from the newcomers. No wonder so few were finding more than a few months of physical sobriety. They were denied what is required for long term emotional sobriety.

Without the sick alcoholics laying round the meeting place, I had to find a place where I could again see and smell alcoholism. I needed a frequent reminder of where I came from and what was waiting for me if I didn’t continue to pay the price for emotional sobriety. Over the years since I have been blessed to have been given another opportunity to survive the deadliest disease known to mankind, I have volunteered in many wind-up places where those coming off a drunk are present and available to talk with. Again and again, I heard that sickening statement, “I went to A.A. and it doesn’t work.”

Of course, they are right. Alcoholics Anonymous does not work! We MUST WORK IT! But they were not told the truth. My Basic Text reads, “Rarely, have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path” The “Path” being the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous as outlined in a book titled “Alcoholics Anonymous.” My Basic Text does not read, “Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of don’t drink and go to meetings...” It reads, “Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and practice these principles in all our affairs.”

Our real problem is ego driven sponsorship with very little if any real concern for the welfare of the newcomer. Proclaimed members of our Fellowship who have never taken the Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous will assume the responsibility for the life of a newcomer and will proudly announce the number of “sponsees” they have. As one of my dear friends said, “The manner in which we now fail our responsibility to the newcomer borders on slaughter.” The demise of our sense of responsibility to those seeking help for alcoholism is one of the greatest tragedies of our time in history. It works only if we work it!