

A.A. Myths: The Myth of Going to Meetings: Why 'Meeting Makers Don't Always Make It

The October 2013 Cover issue of the AA Grapevine prominently proclaims it's "Don't Drink and Go to Meetings" Message of Recovery. Variations of this theme include, "90 meetings in 90 days" and Meeting Makers Make It!".

Meetings, meetings, meetings! Are you going to a meeting? Feel like drinking....get your ass to a meeting. I hear at all the time. Our "Into Action" 12 Step Program of Recovery has been replaced by a program of "attending as many meetings as possible". I personally attend on average two meetings per week. I go to meetings for two reasons, 1) Camaraderie with fellow Big Book sponsors, and 2) to look for newcomers who want a Big Book solution to their dilemma.

Do "Meeting Makers" really make it?

In a study about treatment for cocaine addiction, it was found that addicts desiring recovery, who regularly got involved in 12 Step service activities ,but attended meetings inconsistently, were more likely to stay clean and sober than those addicts who attended meetings regularly but did not engage in 12 Step service activities (Moos 2008:396).

Clarence H. Snyder, founder of AA in Cleveland, Ohio (1939), remembered Dr. Bob once saying: *"There is an easy way and a hard way to recovery from alcoholism. The hard way is by just going to meetings."*

What does the Big Book of AA, our basic recovery text have to say on the subject of meetings?

"Seeing much of each other, scarce an evening passed that someone's home did not shelter a little gathering of men and women, happy in their release, and constantly thinking how they might present their discovery to some newcomer. In addition to these casual get-togethers, it became customary to set apart one night a week for a meeting to be attended by anyone or everyone interested in a spiritual way of life. Aside from fellowship and sociability, the prime object was to provide a time and place where new people might bring their problems." (A.A. p. 159-160)

The problem with many meetings today is that they have become a site for psychological casualties.

Where is the experience, strength and hope of recovered members that was once the benchmark of a healthy group?

Newcomers go to meetings in hope of finding a way out of their predicament, a way out with experience strength and hope and instead are inundated with war stories, drunk-a-logs, and the minutiae of they day. By the end of the meeting, the newcomer feels worse than ever and is more likely to use after attending one of these meetings than if he had never attend at all!

On page 86 of the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous it says, *But we must be careful not to drift into worry, remorse or morbid reflection, for that would diminish our usefulness to others.*

Why is it that we have so many "open discussion meetings" (OD) that permit "free-for-alls" where anyone can talk about any subject they wish to "spout-off" about. Subject matter can range from "pissing and moaning" about their day, to sharing feelings about unhappy relationships or complaining about a lousy job, telling tedious war-stories, making jokes, to sharing just plain nonsense.

*"Inheritors of the Big Book sponsorship tradition find themselves a minority perspective within the rapidly growing recovery culture. Generally, Big Book sponsors are unhappy with the prevailing presentation of the Twelve Steps. Some see the recovery culture as: proliferating victim groups, a sort of endless Oprah Winfrey show that claims the A.A. Twelve Step method as its inspiration, but in which the real meaning of the Twelfth Step is lost amid an incessant whine about the injured self."*Quoted in "A.A. at the Crossroads," by Andrew Delbanco and Thomas Delbanco. *The New Yorker*, March 20, 1995, p. 51

What does work? What is a high predictor of long-term sobriety?

A Baltimore, Maryland study of 500 former and current heroin and cocaine injection drug users over the course of one year indicated having an AA/NA sponsor was not correlated with any improvement in sustained abstinence rates than a non-sponsored group (Crape 2001:291). However, being a sponsor was found to be highly correlated with sustained abstinence. In fact, 75% of the sponsors group maintained abstinence over the one year period and showed the the most improved lifestyle changes (Crape 2001:298).

But if you are shaky you had better work with another alcoholic (addict) instead. (AA p. 102)

This seemed to prove that one alcoholic (addict) could affect another as no nonalcoholic (non- addict) could. It also indicated that strenuous work, one alcoholic (addict) with another, was vital to permanent recovery. (p. xvi - xvii, 4th ed.)

Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking (using, acting out) as intensive work with other alcoholics (addicts). It works when other activities fail. This is our twelfth suggestion: Carry this message to other alcoholics (addicts)! (Are you willing to do this - yes-no?) You can help when no one else can. You can secure their confidence when others fail. Remember they are very ill. (AA p. 89)

References:

Alcoholics Anonymous. New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 2001.

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Moos, Rudolf H. 2008. "How and Why Twelve Self-Help Groups are Effective." *Research on Alcoholics Anonymous and Spirituality in Addiction Recovery: Series: Recent Developments in Alcoholism*. Vol. 18. American Society of Addiction Medicine and Research Society on Alcoholism. Edited by Marc Galanter and Lee Kaskutas. 450 p. 22 illus.