

The Death of a 12 Step Group...An Obituary on What Went Wrong?



"There is only one thing more contagious than enthusiasm and that is a lack of it!"

Recently I heard of a 12 Step Group closing its doors due to lack of support and attendance. Those few remaining members expressed a sincere sadness that the group was no longer. Other members in the fellowship commented that it was sad for them too, because it was the first group they attended when they came into the fellowship.

Factors that cause a 12 Step Group to close its doors

Twelve Step Groups are dynamic entities--members come and go as the please, they relapse, move away, join other groups, pass away, or just stop coming to meetings altogether. There are other reasons for a Group to close it doors, perhaps it holds its meeting at a inconvenient time or day of the week or is located "off-the-beaten path". These reasons should be considered when a Group notices its membership dwindling--prudent action is for a Group to take regular Group inventory.

Many groups periodically take a "group inventory," for an honest and fearless discussion of the group's weaknesses-and strengths. Questions may include:

- What is the basic purpose of the group?
- What more can the group do to carry the message?
- Considering the number of alcoholics or addicts in our community, are we reaching enough people?
- What has the group done lately to bring the 12 Step message to the attention of physicians, judges, members of the clergy, and others who can be helpful in reaching those who need help?

- Is the group attracting only a certain kind of alcoholic, or addict or are we getting a good cross section of our community?
- Do new members stick with us, or does turnover seem excessive?
- How effective is our sponsorship? How can it be improved?
- Has everything practical been done to provide an attractive meeting place?
- Has enough effort been made to explain to all members the need and value of kitchen and housekeeping work and other services to the group?
- Is adequate opportunity given to all members to speak and participate in other group activities?
- Are group officers picked with care and consideration on the basis that officership is a great responsibility and opportunity for Twelfth Step work?
- Does the group carry its fair share of the job of helping out at the Intergroup/Area?
- Do we give all members their fair chance of keeping informed about the whole of 12 Step Recovery, Unity, and Service?

Carry the message **NOT** the addict

Another reason many Groups close their doors is because they have lost focus on Tradition Five: Each group has but one primary purpose -- to carry its message to the alcoholic (addict) who still suffers. Furthermore, Tradition Five (Long): Each Alcoholics Anonymous group ought to be a spiritual entity having but one primary purpose--that of carrying its message to the alcoholic (addict) who still suffers.



"Our AA meeting turned ugly!"

One aspect of this focus is the "message" that a group carries. "It has been my experience that too many times a group turns into a social club or an hour-long rap session. Many newcomers have been taught in treatment centers that it is a good thing to talk over your problems, to let it out. Don't let them or even veterans of the program turn your meetings into a whining session...we all need to remember our primary purpose, the core of our being. The one thing we all have in common and know will work, regardless of where we came from or what is going on in our lives at the moment. We need to always talk the solution and not the problem. We need to find within our groups those with the time and desire to reach out. To 'carry the message to the addict who still suffers.'" (CA NewsGram, Second Quarter 2004, Vol. 20 No. 2 "Carry the Message not the Wreckage")

Our Sole Purpose

A.A. Co-founder, Bill W. says in his book, *As Bill Sees It*, pg. 79: "A group cannot take on the personal problems of its members--the primary responsibility for the solutions of all their problems of living and growing rest squarely upon the individual themselves. Should a group attempt this sort of help, its effectiveness and energies would be hopelessly dissipated. Sobriety -- FREEDOM from the obsessive thoughts, compulsive feelings, and physical cravings that ruled our lives, through the teaching and practice of the Twelve Steps, is the SOLE PURPOSE of the group. If we don't stick to this cardinal principal, we shall almost certainly collapse, and if we collapse, we can't help anyone." 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." Furthermore, when members are focused on Tradition Five it says on page 89 of the *Big Book of Alcoholics*: "Life will take on new meaning. To watch people recover, to see them help others, to watch loneliness vanish, to see a fellowship grow up about you, to have a host of friends -- this is an experience you must not miss. We know you will not want to miss it. Frequent contact with newcomers and with each other is the bright spot of our lives."

P.S. Dead Groups serve no one.