

Beware: Hard Drinkers & Fakers Inside!

[by Floyd Henderson](#)

We in AA have signs posted everywhere, each with slogans, such as: "Think" (as if my thinking didn't get me here and still can't kill me, even to this day); or "One Day At A Time" (like I can make it without total commitment allowing for some future "reservation"); and "Easy Does It," (which is advice offered in the Book to wife/husband whose spouse is beginning recovery, not to the alcoholic). None of those pieces of advice are in the original program of recovery. Yet we do not post the signs we should, such as ("The eye of the adulterer...disguises his face"); or (Beware: Hard Drinkers Inside"). Indeed, if you are a real alcoholic, the hard drinker may be a greater danger to you than alcohol itself.

I base that thesis on two comments from Bill Wilson himself. First, Bill said, in response to the rising rate of recovery failures that he began to see as a result of the message in the Book being warped through poor oral communication: "We cannot well content ourselves with the view that all these recovery failures were entirely the fault of the newcomer. Perhaps a great many did not receive the kind and amount of sponsorship that they so sorely needed. We did not communicate when we might have done so. So we AA's failed them." He also said that we must be ever vigilant to maintain the purity of our message, noting that "if AA is ever destroyed, it will be from within." Bill also warned us that the Washingtonian recovery program, which was quite successful long before AA ever existed, was ultimately destroyed from within because they had neither rules (Traditions) nor a basic text ("The Big Book") that could prevent the message from being twisted through oral communication.

So what problem can the hard drinkers cause us real alcoholics? Why can the killing things that are happening in AA be traced either to them or to alcoholics suffering from untreated alcoholism? First, early AA's, like Earl T. and Paul M., report that the 75% success rate reported in the Big Book continues throughout their early years as well. So why do fewer than 6% of real alcoholics stay around long enough to get a 10 year chip nowadays? Research shows that 20% of the American population suffer from serious drinking problems, but only about half of those problem drinkers are real alcoholics. That means that we in America have as many hard drinkers as we have real alcoholics, and since it is easier for them to "stop or moderate", we may well have more of them surviving in the fellowship than we have real alcoholics in recovery (program). And they offer opinions (instead of Book-based facts) and their opinions will kill us if we listen to them and follow their advice instead of the Book's. They do not have to adhere to the "rules" (as we must) in order to live. Their strain of the disease is not necessarily fatal--as is ours--if we do not follow the rules precisely. With our fellows dying at such high rates and with the fellowship suffering such a low rate of success, isn't it time we pay attention to our Traditions and the teachings of our program so that hard drinkers and alcoholics suffering the spiritual malady do not dominate our meetings with their lies?

Some drinkers can stay sober by choice (pages 20-21 for the "moderate drinker" and the "hard drinker"). Furthermore, the Book says that a moderate or hard drinker "can quit upon a non-spiritual basis", depending upon "the extent to which he has lost the power to choose whether he will drink or not". So I ask: if they can do it on their own; and if they are not here to work the steps; and if they are not helping guide others to a spiritual experience, what the heck are they doing hanging our around us? I don't have cancer, so I don't hang out on a cancer ward. If I did, I might be sicker, in fact, than the people there with cancer who don't have a choice. Why would I want to associate with sick people in a cancer recovery program if I don't have a fatal form of cancer? Several possibilities exist to explain why

I'm on that ward if I'm not dying of cancer. Maybe I overcame a mild form of cancer and now I want to tell them how they should treat their severe, fatal form --maybe I like the "expert" role that I think that allows me. Maybe my social skills have been so poorly developed that I am not welcome among the well people in our society--I need a captive audience of sick people who won't walk out on me, no matter how obnoxious I might be. Maybe I sincerely think I can do them some good, though my mild form of the disease gives me no real understanding of their illness and what they really need to get well. Maybe I'm hanging out on the cancer ward because I just can't handle life's daily issues and I need someone to talk to. Maybe they even have free therapy sessions that I like to sit in on rather than pay a therapist myself. Maybe I'm even looking for someone to get into a relationship with, and it seems like a good place to look (now that is really a strange belief system, isn't it? I'm going to go where people are dying to find me a life-long relationship! Man--I'm sicker than I thought, if I'm doing that.)

The danger in my roaming the cancer ward rests in the false information I might spread. I might say, since I had a mild form of cancer, "Hey--you really don't have to do everything the doctor says. And you don't have to do everything precisely or specifically the way he tells you to do it. In fact, let me share with you my opinions about treatment because this is all I had to do to get well, and it's an easier, softer way than the way the doctors are telling you". I might even tell them: "And forget this holistic approach to recovery--I did not have to pray. I did not have to turn to God. That part of their recovery program is really not needed--I'm living proof of that. Just treat the physical aspect of the disease." My gosh. Simply by what I'm saying, simply by virtue of the words coming out of my mouth, I would be doing killing things on that ward, wouldn't I? And don't you think the people in charge would run my butt out of there in seconds? They would not sit by idly and let me spread information that will kill the people who are there seeking recovery.

The fact is that our hard drinkers (and some of our alcoholics suffering from untreated alcoholism) do all of that--they often use AA for social or self-serving purposes rather than for the purpose of working steps to "continued spiritual growth". Like us real alcoholics, they, too, were told in their old drinking days to "Get out!". Then they find AA (by some route) and we say, "Come back". Wow--that's new...that's neat. So they also use AA as a Lonely Hearts Club, or for \$1/hour therapy instead of \$150/hour therapy, or for a place "to vent--to share--to air their issues". They can live without evidencing a spiritual experience (they do not have to--they are not real alcoholics) and they do not extend true compassion for the struggle to do what they were able to do in a much easier fashion. Their attitude: "Hey, it was easy for me--so the heck with you. But keep coming back, O sick alky. It'll get better". (So what is the sign to those judgmental, pompous asses when I get better? Do I become like them? Are they the model? The prototype? I'm starting to feel the need for a new Fourth Step just thinking about them!). Though we real alcoholics at first glance might look just like the hard drinkers, we are, in truth, very different. We must meet "requirements"--hard drinkers do not have to. We real alcoholics must do the work "precisely" and "specifically" and "Thoroughly"--hard drinkers do not have to. We must have a "psychic change"--they do not. We must undergo a "revolutionary change"--they do not have to. We are told that we have a "necessary element; namely, we are "required" to follow a "few simple rules"--they don't have to. We are on a "life and death errand"--they aren't. We must seek it "like a drowning man"--they do not have to. Thus comes the danger of being in a meeting with them: we hear from them the exact opposite of what we need to hear, the opposite of what our Book tells us. We hear statements and opinions that may be the truth for them but are fatal lies for us.

Who, therefore, needs to be wary of the hard drinkers, the "adulterers of AA?" Anyone who is a real alcoholic, for these wolves in sheep's clothing are indeed the ones telling real alcoholics the lies, the myths, the fiction, the "middle-of-the-road-solutions" that we hear around the tables. And too often, we

real alcoholics who (when sober) were withdrawn, were loners, were not comfortable speaking before crowds, find ourselves taking a back seat in AA to those more vocal, more self-assured, more authoritative hard drinkers who, though they may mean well, are really a danger to your chances at recovery and the very existence of our fellowship, too. If hard drinkers are not a part of the "common welfare", carrying the common message--the "common solution", then they have not met the requirements for AA membership. How long shall we sit by and forfeit ownership of our program through inaction? So if we need to be wary of them, how do we identify the hard drinkers? Actually, they can help us identify them, if we are observant. First, the hard drinker often presents himself as the "Model AA". (In reality, he is, because a "model" is defined as "an imitation of the real thing". He will say to the newcomer, "I feel your pain", but he will not roll up his sleeves and offer the many hours of service called for to sit-one-on-one with that newcomer and take him through the Book page by page. He is the guy in his second decade of sobriety who recently scoffed at those of us who get up earlier than usual each day for prayer and meditation. He is the one who I heard say recently to a real alcoholic: "I'm sick of your relapsing, and I'm sick of hearing you say you need more help than you're getting. I don't even want to be around you". He is the one who I heard say recently: "I have double-digit sobriety, I worked the steps once when I came in 17 years ago, and my sponsor had me take it slow and easy, working the steps when I was comfortable". (The hard drinker can do that--we real alcoholics, on the other hand, will die if we wait until we get comfortable before taking action). The hard drinker is the one with advanced years in the fellowship who says he "chose not to drink this morning". He may be telling the truth. We, on the other hand, don't have that privilege.

Additionally, he is the one who stays sober even as he contradicts the information in the Book. He says the Book is subject to "interpretation" (what he really means is "mis-interpretation"). He may be the one who has ordained himself the group's elder statesman. He is the one who does not take his proteges from the cover to page 164, explaining every sentence and doing everything that the Book says exactly as prescribed in the Book's "precise, specific, clear-cut directions". He is the one who said recently, "That is not the way I work my program". (Interesting...since when did he create a program? Can his program guarantee fulfillment of promises to us real alcoholics as the program of AA can?) Note: if any who are making those statements above happen to be real alcoholics, they are suffering untreated alcoholism again and need to get back to working the steps so that God's love can be seen through their service and through their comments. So if we hear those same comments from a real alcoholic, he is back to suffering from untreated alcoholism, from the spiritual malady, from allowing unmanageability to creep back into his life because he stopped working the steps in a circular fashion, as was intended originally. How, then, can we tell the two groups apart? Know that we need to, because if the real alcoholic is suffering from untreated alcoholism, we can help him. The hard drinker, on the other hand, can hurt us. We need to tell them apart. The alcoholic not working the steps will eventually separate himself from the hard drinker in several ways:

- a. he will meet the description of the untreated alcoholic in the middle paragraph of page 52;
- b. he will eventually go out and drink; or
- c. he will commit suicide, that event occurring at a rate among us that is 75 times higher than among the general population. Remember: the hard drinker is the one who can stay sober while contradicting (through thought, word and deed) the instructions presented in the Book.

Why do I think I know so much about them? Because their advice dang near killed me. I listened to them long enough that I got "comfortable" at 7-1/2 years. In truth, I was the most uncomfortable since coming in, because I let them convince me to let up on the work. I heard so many of them pontificating about how they were doing it in their double-digit years (without having to do the work continuously)

that I fell for it. Heck, if they can do it that way, I can too. They appealed to my "softer-easier-way-mentality". I no longer worried about those contingencies required for my daily reprieve. They helped reconstruct my ego ("We can do it on our own") and I stopped looking at them honestly and failed to realize that I don't want what they have, even if it is easier. I was at fault for I allowed them to influence me, and I DAMN NEAR DIED!!! Today, I know that because I am a real alcoholic, the continuous working of the steps is "vital" (that is, "necessary for life")--not for them, but definitely for me. And since that is my experience, please let me share: please stay vigilant, for I have learned the hard way that the enemy who brings a false message is as cunning and baffling and powerful as the disease itself. So, if you are a real alcoholic, know the criteria; watch out for the overblown war stories they use to convince you they are one of us; look out for the statements that are truth for the hard drinkers but are lies for the real alcoholics. Know that we real alcoholics have no choice--we have no control and never will. Know that the only hope for us--continued work and spiritual growth--is not required for those vocal hard drinkers. Know that only by working the steps vigorously can we continue to have the renewed spiritual experience that we must have on a daily basis in order to remain sober and happy and joyous and free. And always beware the message coming from the mouth of the hard drinker (or any non-alcoholic in our groups), for he "disguises his face". He is seated next to you, and though what he shares is really the truth as he sees it, he will unconsciously try to kill you when you're least suspecting. That is my experience, so if you are a real alcoholic, I urge you to beware. If you are a real alcoholic, do it the way the Book says; do it the way the Book says; do it the way the Book says!

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