

Recovery Times

A newsletter from Alcoholics Anonymous San Fernando Valley Central Office VOL 31, NO. 7 JULY 2007

Get With the Program

“Son of a gun, the Steps are the program!”

When I first got to AA, I heard a lot of talk centering around the word “program” —as in, “That’s how I work my program. “But what the heck *was* a program, anyway? I knew I needed one, so I decided to ask someone about it. I asked Jane who was setting up chairs and making the coffee for our evening meeting.

“Jane,” I asked, “What’s your program?”

“I go to fourteen meetings a week, I’m secretary for five of them, I answer phones at the central office three nights a week, I have one sponsor for each of my character defects, plus a Big Book sponsor, and a backup to help me when the others aren’t around.”

“Incredible!” I said. “How long have you been sober?”

“Ninety-three days, nineteen hours, and twenty-seven minutes,” she said. “And I’m doing just great!”

Well, I loved to hear what Jane said at meetings but I was exhausted just watching her go by. So I did what most of us do when a question is beyond us—I called my sponsor.

“Read the Big Book,” he said. “Chapter five says something about ‘program.’ See if you can find it.”

I somehow failed to see it but I sure came to love that chapter. Then, one crisp fall day as I was driving to work and listening to one of my AA tapes, I finally heard it: “Here are the Steps we took, which are suggested as a program of recovery.” Son of a gun, the Steps *are* the program!

One of the dictionary definitions of the word “program” is “any organized list of procedures; schedule.” And that’s exactly what the Steps came to be for me.

First of all, nothing can begin unless I take *Step One*. I haven’t yet figured out what happened the day I finally went to my first meeting—that hadn’t happened in the previous twenty years—but I went, and I’m still here. I had to take Step One and quit drinking to start the

process of physical, mental, and spiritual recovery.

Step Two was the next logical place to go. I started to understand that while I didn’t believe in churches, I had to see that something or someone was working in my life that hadn’t been there before. The insanity part wasn’t hard to grasp—I had scars on my arms and news clippings in my desk to prove it. Then, as my mind further unclouded, I could accept that my life had gotten on track and that the new “engineer” was doing better than I ever had. *Step Three* fit into the schedule perfectly.

Step Four follows Three because, with someone like a Higher Power on my side, what could I possibly be afraid of? While doing Four, I wrote about meeting my soon-to-be ex-wife. My mind was thinking that she was attractive and had many personality traits that complemented mine as my pencil wrote, “I was looking for someone to take the place of my mother.” I dropped the pencil! Those words hadn’t been in my conscious mind. “For heaven’s sake,” I thought, “She even *looks* like my mother. Five foot three, brown hair and eyes, little dusting of freckles. Well, I’ll be. . .”

Step Five is fantastic. Once I had the character defects identified I *wanted* to do Five. With all this stuff out in the open, no one could trip me up with some awful discovery of something in my past. What a feeling of relief. Now *Six* and *Seven* became possible and necessary. I very much wanted to get rid of the stuff that didn’t work. That’s the stuff that hurts! I wanted to become a friend among friends, a worker among workers—a contributing member of the human race.

The first Seven Steps, then, got me okay with me and with this Higher Power character. But I discovered that I still lived in a world of people I had to face every day. . .and there were problems in this. *Step Eight* would identify those problems and get me ready for *Nine*. Eight was my preparation for speaking to persons I had harmed, which was a really big task for me. These were the folks that I dreaded seeing. And of course it was in seeing *them* that my greatest healing was realized.

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Calendar Events

Upcoming Events

6th Tehachapi Mountain Roundup

July 13 – 15, 2007
Tehachapi, CA
Info: Andi (661) 823-0591 Kent (661) 823-0518
Website: www.tehachapiroundup.com

Rafters Group 33rd Annual Alcañon

August 3 - 5, 2007
Newhall, CA

Pacoima Group Annual Alcañon

August 10 - 12, 2007
Pacoima, CA
Info: (818) 899-0404

The Great Outdoor Beaver Meeting

August 30 - September 2, 2007
Beaver, UT
Info: Greg B. (818) 890-0110
Email: jojopelli@gmail.com

49th Annual ICYPAA

August 30 - September 2, 2007
Los Angeles, CA
Info: (310) 216-8771
Website: www.49thICYPAA.org

56th Annual Southern California AA Convention

September 21 - 23, 2007
Garden Grove, CA
Website: www.aasocal.com

23rd Annual Santa Barbara Convention

October 12 - 14, 2007
Goleta, CA
Website: www.sbaaconvention.org

4rd Annual Santa Clarita Valley Convention of AA

October 19 - 21, 2007
Valencia, CA
Info: 661-310-0384
Website: www.scvaaconvention.org

Service Committee Schedule

- July 16, 2007 **SFV H&I**
THIRD MONDAY
8PM Business Meeting
7PM Get Acquainted Workshop
5657 Lindley Ave.

- August 6, 2007 **G.S. District #11**
FIRST MONDAY
6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30PM meeting
315 W. Vine St., Glendale

- August 6, 2007 **G.S. District #16**
FIRST MONDAY
6:15PM meeting
15950 Chatsworth (church), Granada Hills

- August 6, 2007 **G.S. District #17**
FIRST MONDAY
6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30PM meeting
5000 Colfax (church), N. Hollywood

- August 7, 2007 **G.S. District #2**
FIRST TUESDAY
5:30PM, 4011 Dunsmore, La Crescenta

- August 8, 2007 **G.S. District #1**
FIRST WEDNESDAY
6:30PM, 7552 Remmet, Canoga Park

- August 8, 2007 **SFV Board of Directors**
6:30PM, Central Office

- August 11, 2007 **G.S. District #7**
SECOND SATURDAY
9AM, Agua Dulce Woman's Club
33201 Agua Dulce Cyn Rd

- August 13, 2007 **SFV Intergroup**
SECOND MONDAY
6:30PM Orientation
7PM Business Meeting
St. Innocents Church
5657 Lindley Ave., Tarzana

Opportunities for Service

Your Central Office needs **telephone volunteers** for the Late Evening (9PM - 12 Midnight) shift and the Overnight (12 midnight - 9AM) shift.

If you have one year or more of continuous sobriety, you can sign up to do a shift (from your home!) once per month and help your fellow alcoholics.

Free Podium

available to a group or club in need of one. Please contact Central Office for more information.

Valley Events

TO FIND OUT WHAT ELSE IS GOING ON YOU CAN:

COME TO CENTRAL OFFICE

CALL US AT 818-988-3001

VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT <http://www.sfvaa.org>

Service Opportunities & News

Service Opportunities in the San Fernando Valley

PUBLIC INFORMATION COMMITTEE -

Provides information to the general public about what A.A. does and does not do. Could always use volunteers, especially young people and Spanish speaking A.A.'s for health fairs and to speak at various schools and businesses. Contact Central Office (818) 988-3001.

HOSPITAL AND INSTITUTIONS COMMITTEE -

Carries the message of Alcoholics Anonymous into hospitals, prisons & treatment facilities to those who are unable to get out to meetings. Meets the third Monday of each month 8:00 PM (Get Acquainted Workshop, 7:00 PM) at St. Innocent's Church, 5657 Lindley Ave, Tarzana, CA. For more information, contact Central Office at 988-3001.

SAN FERNANDO VALLEY INTERGROUP -

Elected Intergroup representatives maintain and develop policies for Central Office, and inform other IG Reps about Alkathons, fund raisers, etc. Meets second Monday, monthly, St. Innocent's Church, 5657 Lindley Ave, Tarzana, CA. Orientation 6:30 PM, Meeting at 7:00 PM. Contact: Central Office at 988-3001.

SAN FERNANDO VALLEY CONVENTION -

Volunteers are welcome to participate in the planning of the 2008 Convention. The Committee meets the 3rd Tuesday of each month (except February and March); 7 PM at St. Innocent's Church, 5657 Lindley Ave, Tarzana, CA.

Central Office News

San Fernando Valley Central Office is On the Web

The SFV Central Office website is now available for Internet browsers. On the website, you can find a map to our office in Van Nuys, a listing of upcoming events in the Valley, service organization information and links to other cool A.A. websites. Our meeting schedule is also accessible on the website. Meetings are listed by day, Sunday through Saturday. Check it out: <http://www.sfvaa.org>

Do you have an article for the Recovery Times?

Email it to us at: sfvaanews@sbcglobal.net

San Fernando Valley Central Office Intergroup Representatives Meeting June 11, 2007

Rosanne L. Chairperson – Meeting opened at 7:00 PM
Treasurer's Report: See Insert
Service Committee information - see page 2 and 3 of the Recovery Times for more information
Old Business: None.
New Business: None

Birthdays: Diane - 4 yrs, Dave - 9 yrs,
Josh - 16 yrs, Shelley - 36 yrs.

Motion to adjourn 7:33 PM

The long form of the Intergroup Meeting Minutes for January is available at Central Office or at the Intergroup Meeting.

These minutes are pending approval on July 9, 2007

Next Meeting - July 9, 2007

Prepared and submitted by:

Dawn H., Recording Secretary

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

June 2007

<i>Belinda T.</i>	<i>2 years</i>
<i>Anonymous</i>	<i>13 years</i>
<i>Paul D.</i>	<i>14 years</i>
<i>Roger P.</i>	<i>18 years</i>
<i>Doug R.</i>	<i>20 years</i>
<i>Tony R.</i>	<i>20 years</i>
<i>Linda K.</i>	<i>25 years</i>
<i>Maggie M.</i>	<i>25 years</i>
<i>Steve M.</i>	<i>25 years</i>
<i>Bob O.</i>	<i>39 years</i>
<i>Reseda BB Study</i>	<i>?? years</i>

Your Birthday Gift to Central Office

Many A.A. members share their birthdays with those who need the same help and opportunity that A.A. gave to them.

By sending a donation to Central Office you share your birthday with Recovery Times readers. Send a dollar (\$1.00) a year - or \$1.00 for each year of your sobriety - or send as much as you wish to give to celebrate your birthday. The amount doesn't matter - it's the "counting" that counts.

May your special day be filled with joy from morning until night, and may the "24's" that lie ahead be especially glad and bright.

Playing God

An easy, and bad,
habit to fall into

We, too, have this question asked: “Where do we fail with new members?”

I cannot answer for others, of course. I can only say why, in my own judgment, I do not have better luck.

In the first place, we cannot pass on to others what we do not have ourselves. I haven’t got much myself, and I don’t think any of us have anything to write home about. That’s our first problem, self.

In the second place, we depend upon God for our own sobriety, yet, when we go to help someone else, we get the idea somehow that we can do the job ourselves; and, before we know it, pride, egotism, and self-sufficiency are running riot. What a chance to show how much we know! We’ve got the answer to everything, so we think. Well, we, ourselves, haven’t got the answer to anything! nor will mere knowledge do the job. So, we don’t accomplish much, and our pride is hurt. And then we want to judge and condemn, and castoff as not being ready. Or we become resentful and try to force ourselves and our ideas on to the prospect, anyway.

What we are really doing is playing God ourselves.

It is a funny thing that though we are absolutely dependent upon God for our own sobriety, we do not seem to need him at all when we go to help others: we become entirely self-sufficient and, incidentally, self-willed, all in a moment. Somehow, we get the idea that God has told us how to do this job; and now we will go do it. He may have given us some insight into the need, but never how to do it alone. He has never told us we are self-sufficient in anything. God did it for us; why should we think a lesser person can do it for somebody else?

How, then, can we best help God do the job? This calls for *deep humility*, first and last. The only way God can use us is when we humble ourselves, and look for and depend upon his light and guidance. Otherwise, we block Him from getting through us with our pride and egotism.

I don’t think I am ever humble, but I notice that at times when I am caught off guard, and don’t have time to rationalize a situation, God seems to step in and put words in my mouth, and I talk without effort. On these rare occasions I never come away ashamed, or burdened with care.

The case may not turn out as I had hoped, but it is in safe hands. God has spoken; the response is up to the other fellow.

G. B. W.

Martinsville, Virginia

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Comfort in Action

*The winners are those who do things
because it makes them feel better*

One of the sayings a newcomer soon hears, upon arrival in AA, is “Stick with the winners.” When a newcomer asks for a definition of a winner, he is sometimes told that a winner is an AA who is “comfortably active and actively comfortable” in the program. I like that description, for, if the name of the game in AA is comfort in our lives, then these winners are probably the best examples.

A newcomer, full of confusion and fear, comes into AA with the idea that *he* must manage to control everything in his life, otherwise it won’t work. At our local AA intergroup office, we have a lady who is fond of telling newcomers that this feeling is natural, since we alcoholics seem to be the doers of this world. As we look at the successful, happy, sober AAs around us, we see that these are the people who are completely involved in the program. They run; they help; they see to it that things are in order for the good of the group.

I think, from what I have seen, that the *doing* alone accounts for only half of their success. Of course, the mere taking of action keeps these AAs from feeling bored with themselves, by keeping them involved with the people around them, so that they don’t get tripped up by a lonely-self-pity problem. But the real secret—what makes them “winners”—seems to lie in the *attitude* with which they serve.

Here is the real test, the true measure for an alcoholic in AA. If I am asked to help, can I do so and not take notice of the result? Can I lose enough of my ego to just *do* the job, regardless of its fruits? After all, if my real motive in an action is the reward other people will give me, the action probably isn’t worth taking.

One asset this program has given me, for which I will always be grateful, is the sure knowledge that I don’t have to live my life to satisfy the wants of everyone around me! Now that I don’t have to be concerned with the other guy’s opinion, I don’t have to count on his praise, either! We all know what happens to us when we try to live our lives as others expect us to. In my drinking years, I had to bat a thousand; any degree of failure was too much for me to handle. Today, I don’t have to do that any more. Even though there are still plenty of people who know how to live my life better than I, today I live for me, not for them.

Over the months that it’s taken me to get this through my head, I’ve had a chance to see a change in *my* attitude toward service. I must admit, the job of Regional Trustee on the AA General Service Board looked mighty inviting when I heard the applause those Trustees got at our International Convention last summer. I’ve always been a pushover for applause, anyway. So, when the spirit moved me to look ⇨

Program

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I don't work *Step Ten*; it works me, especially when I'm screwing something up! My stomach starts to tighten and I can't put it off to the end of a day. I've got to stop right there and take a different tack or I'm going to be absolutely miserable until I do. A visitor to my home group meeting once said that Step Ten allows him "to clean up the wreckage of the present." That's pretty on the mark in my experience.

Ten has to come before *Step Eleven* because I can't get quiet to meditate or pray until I've dealt with lingering problems from the day just past.

Prayer and meditation. Talking to God, as you understand God, and then listening for the answers. Amazing! You just kind of know the folks who work this Step by who they are. They have an inner calm about them that tells everyone they're actually connected to a power greater than themselves. I'm getting there but I've still got quite a way to go.

Now for *Step Twelve*. My "spiritual awakening" is still underway and will be for the rest of my life. Sometimes I "carry the message" by just being a sober presence in an AA meeting, a presence that says to another alcoholic that there *is* hope. And the practice of "these principles" is evident in my daily doing of whatever I do in a manner that doesn't harm myself or others.

The single greatest thing I've gotten from following this program is the relationship I have with a Higher Power as I now understand it. At a meeting, I overheard a lady saying that "AA is like a wagon train. Some of us drive wagons and some of us are scouts. And whenever the scouts come back, they tell us it's really bad out there. But if you ask the wagon-master for help, then you can drive a wagon—and you don't have to be a scout." I think she's on to something and I intend to keep coming back until I find out what it is!

Dennis O. Reprinted with permission of the AA Grapevine.

Comfort

continued

around and see what I could do to help the Fellowship, naturally I looked right to the top! Since then, while my sobriety has continued to run its emotional obstacle course, I've been able to become a little more realistic. Somewhere along the line, I got the message that, even if I *could* be a Trustee, I would still be one more drunk, working together in partnership with my Higher Power and a bunch of other drunks—just so we could all stay alive!

Why not, I asked myself, just get busy in my own group, do what I can, and forget the glory? It's much simpler, for I have to lose my egocentric attitude if I expect to be any good to anybody—even to myself. Being sorry for myself because I'm not getting enough attention, feeling thoroughly bored

because my ego won't let me look outside myself—that's not the answer. Getting active—extending my hand to a newcomer, making coffee, and doing it all because *it makes me feel better*—this seems like a better way to comfortable sobriety.

The "winners" are the people I see contributing without any thought of themselves at all. If I, too, can learn to be a selfless contributor, I don't think I'll miss the applause one little bit.

R. S. Queens, New York Reprinted with permission of the AA Grapevine.



Co-founder Quotes

Dr. Bob on the Fundamentals

We've all seen the new member who stays sober for a time, largely through sponsor-worship. Then maybe the sponsor gets drunk and you know what usually happens.

Left without a human prop, the new member gets drunk too. He has been glorifying an individual instead of following the Program.
Grapevine, Sept. 1948

Bill on the Steps & Traditions

Each of us must conform reasonably well to AA's Steps and Traditions, or else we shall go mad or die of alcoholism. Therefore, the compulsion among most of us to survive and to grow soon becomes far stronger than the temptation to drink or to misbehave. Literally, we must "do or die." So we make the choice to live.
Grapevine, May 1960

Restraint of Tongue and Pen

“when sharing in the rooms, I have learned to keep my opinions to myself. Instead, I have been taught to share my experience, strength, and hope—in a general way.”

I have been a little distressed lately by some of the sharing at discussion meetings I have attended. On several occasions, I have listened as AA members shared their anger or frustration regarding religious, racial, sexual, and political issues, that they apparently felt had contributed to their suffering. From the back of the room, I watched as people began to twist in their chairs and felt the tension rise in the room.

Through the grace of my Higher Power and the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, I am sober today and have been for over eight years. One night, in early sobriety, while riding to a meeting with some of my new friends, an old-timer shared with us his belief that there are certain areas of discussion we should carefully avoid getting into at AA meetings. These are topics that relate directly to religious, political, racial, and sexual opinions.

He went on to explain that the avoidance of these topics is based on the following Traditions:

Tradition One: Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon AA unity.

Tradition Three: The only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking.

Tradition Ten: AA has no opinion on outside issues; hence the AA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

There is only one problem that we all have in common—that is our problem with alcohol. It is this problem that gave us our unity in the first place. Once we begin to move beyond our alcoholism, we are talking about the things that make us different—things that can serve to separate us, divide us, even rip us apart.

AA members come from vastly different backgrounds and experiences which directly affect our views of the world. Many people come into the AA Fellowship with very strong feelings regarding these areas of life. Sometimes there are deep-rooted feelings of anger, resentment, and even outright hatred. These are potential powder kegs that could go off at any time.

The plain and simple fact is that we are never going to be able to solve these kinds of larger problems from the inside

of an AA meeting. The only problem we have a real chance of solving is our common problem with alcohol, and we can only solve that one day at a time.

The world’s worst bigot, regardless of how one defines that term, has the same requirement for AA membership as the rest of us: a desire to stop drinking. Within the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, we are all supposed to be equals. What if members feel they have the right to espouse their viewpoints on these matters? Are we prepared to open a door that we might later find impossible to shut? In a very short time, we could be at each other’s throats and the unity that we so desperately need would be gone.

This is something that I myself have been guilty of. One night after sharing at a meeting, I was approached by a friend who said: “I see you’re still bashing in your religion.” I was angry and he was right. After five years of sobriety, I had forgotten what that old-timer had taught me. I was still blaming my problems to some degree on the religion that I had been raised in. More importantly, by being specific about the denomination, I was being insensitive to the other members in the room. It is more than likely that some of those in attendance were adherents of that religion and the effect of my comments was to belittle their religious beliefs.

The portion in the Big Book on “How It Works” says: “Our stories disclose in a general way, what we used to be like, what happened and what we are like now.” When with friends, inside or outside of the program, I am free to divulge my personal opinions on any issue; but when sharing in the rooms, I have learned to keep my opinions to myself. Instead, I have been taught to share my experience, strength, and hope—in a general way.

In turn, I have benefited from the experience, strength, and hope of alcoholics of every persuasion. Part of being open-minded for me today is subjugating my own points of view in order that I may continue to learn and grow in sobriety.

That old-timer concluded his remarks by saying: “Unity, unity, unity. Look at the first three letters of that word. It tells us that *You and I* can do together what we cannot do alone. We need each other.”

Pat M., Albany, New York

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Complicating a hug

My name is Dick; I'm an alcoholic. In the beginning of my sobriety, I was told to stop trying to analyze and simply to utilize. Then, when I had it all together, I should pass it on. The gist was this: Don't drink; go to meetings; read the book(s); and use the phone. The instructions were clear, concise, and free of confusing and meaningless psychobabble.

But now, I hear a lot of stuff like this: "To make it work, you've got to want what we have; but first you've got to want to want it. But it won't work unless you really want to want to want it. And you must be willing to go to any length to get it. But unless you're willing to be willing, you won't want to want it enough. So you've got to be willing to want to want to be willing to want what we have. . . ." Etc.

Some people could complicate a hug.

I have stayed sober for several years by not drinking, going to meetings as regularly as I can, and reading frequently from the Big Book and "Twelve and Twelve." I use the phone a lot, and now I'm trying to pass it on.

Keep it simple. Please.

Dick E.

Shelbyville, Illinois

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Grapevine Humor

A carpenter confessed to a priest that he had stolen some lumber and sold it to buy liquor. He was sternly warned not to do it again but returned the following week admitting the same sin, and was given a tongue-lashing by the clergyman. When he came back for the third time and confessed to the theft of more lumber, the priest was furious.

"There is only one solution," he admonished. "You will have to make a novena!"

"I never made one, father," said the culprit, "but if you'll give me the blueprints, I know where I can get the lumber."

« « « » » »

To become an old-timer in AA you only have to do two things: don't drink and don't die.

« « « » » »

A certain lush was caught stealing a ham and some sides of bacon from a smokehouse and was sentenced to jail.

A few weeks later, his wife went to the judge and pleaded for her spouse's release, stating that he was needed at home. "Why do you want a drunk like him around?" asked the judge.

"Well, for one thing," she replied, "we're nearly out of meat again." . . .

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San Fernando Valley Central Office
7417-E Van Nuys Boulevard
Van Nuys, CA 91405

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New Renewal
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Moving ???: *We need your former address as well as your new address to correct our records. Fill out both forms and mail to the address above.*

Former Address

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ St _____ ZIP _____