

HOW TO TAKE SOMEONE THROUGH THE STEPS

“Our chief responsibility to the newcomer is an adequate presentation of the program of Alcoholics Anonymous.” Bill Wilson (1941)

The goal of this presentation is to replicate what the founders did with the same sense of urgency. With the exception of making amends, Bill Wilson took the steps while hospitalized. He was in the hospital for seven days.

As of 2022, Alcoholics Anonymous is 87 years old and we have had the Big Book for 83 years. In this length of time, we should have sponsorship perfected to a degree that it cannot be improved, yet it is a major reason why alcoholics coming to us wanting help end up drinking again. Our present recovery rate pales in comparison to the founding days of AA.

In most cases we sponsor just like we were sponsored. Why? Because it worked for us! We who have taken the steps know that we don't recover from alcoholism until we have taken the steps. As a result of taking the steps, we are restored to sanity and the problem has been removed. Some of us take three months, six months or maybe a year or more to take the steps. The longer we take, the more likely we are to drink. Most of us struggled as newcomers. The length of time we struggled and the severity of our struggles are almost always directly attributed to how long we took to do the steps. Most of us would say that we wish we had done the steps quicker. How can we take someone through the steps quickly as our founders did? By understanding the Big Book, you can literally take most people through the first three steps and show them how to do a fourth step within an hour or two. By following this plan, you should have people doing their ninth step within the first week.

Keep in mind the Big Book was written to be mailed out. The alcoholic would get the book in the mail, read it and hopefully follow directions on how to recover. Nowadays, we carry the message to the newcomer instead of him reading the book to follow directions. If we read the Big Book daily, and read it with the mindset of gaining information to help the next alcoholic, we become familiar with the contents and we can rapidly take someone through the steps. It is not important for the newcomer to understand the 12 step program. It is much more important for us to understand it because it will enable us to be better at helping them. The newcomer will never understand it until he does it. As a sponsor, start reading at the Preface and read to page 164. When finished, start over and do it again and again. Even the chapters you may not like can be useful in helping another alcoholic. If you read a morning meditation book, put it aside and read the Big Book in its place and meditate on it or read a meditation book **in addition to and not instead of** the Big Book. Don't think doing this will stunt your spiritual growth or that you will lose touch with God. Contrary to this thinking, it will actually enhance and improve your spiritual growth and your relationship with God. The bottom of

page 14 tells us that spiritual growth comes from work and self-sacrifice for others. This is exactly what we are doing when we read the Big Book with the purpose of helping others. It takes a minute and a half to read a page in the Big Book. If we read two pages a day, we will read the book four times a year. This is only three minutes a day that we are self-sacrificing for the suffering alcoholic. Is this too much to ask? After reading, always remember to ask God to show you what you can do for the man who is still sick. The more familiar we are with the text of the Big Book, the better prepared we are in carrying the accurate message of Alcoholics Anonymous to the alcoholic. If we don't read and understand the book, we will only be carrying our experience, strength and hope to them. The Forward to the Third Edition states that recovery **begins** when one alcoholic talks to another alcoholic, sharing experience, strength and hope, but the text in the chapter, Working with Others, states, "**Carry this message to other alcoholics!**" If we are carrying any other message to the alcoholic besides what is contained in the Big Book, we are not carrying the AA message!

Objective of sponsoring anyone:

The main objective of sponsoring anyone is to get them through the steps as quickly as possible so they can recover from alcoholism and help someone else do the same. You will find that the AA member who is involved sponsoring someone has far less problems than the person who isn't. It will be advantageous if you get the newcomer into the book doing the steps before they become dependent on meetings to keep them sober. They will be more focused on the program of recovery and will begin to go to meetings to offer a solution to others. By doing this in a timely manner with them, you will have more time to work with additional alcoholics and you will also have more time to spend with your family, job or other affairs.

If asked to be a sponsor, do not simply say yes. Ask the protégé if they are willing to go to any length to recover from alcoholism. (You may have to remind them that they agreed at a later time) If they are willing, then agree to sponsor them. Again, keep in mind the book was written to be mailed out when there weren't meetings to go to everywhere. Chapters such as Bill's Story and the personal stories were put in the book for identification. If the newcomer has been properly 12 stepped or has attended a few meetings, they have identified already. They need the solution we have and they need it now!

How to take the new person through the steps:

After agreeing to be the sponsor, set up a time to meet and have the new person bring their book.

At the first meeting with them, go to the top of page 44 and ask the two qualifying questions. "If when you honestly want to, can you quit entirely? (mental obsession) If when drinking, can you control how much you drink? (physical allergy)

If they answer yes to either of them, they may not be alcoholic. They may be a drug addict or have some other problem other than alcoholism. This is when you will need to take them more

thoroughly through The Doctor's Opinion and the first 3 chapters for them to find out. If they answer no to both questions, they are suffering from alcoholism and it will require a spiritual experience to be conquered.

Title Page...*"Alcoholics Anonymous-The story of how many thousands of men and women have **recovered** from alcoholism."*

Have them highlight **recovered**. Let them know we do recover from alcoholism just like we recover from a broken leg that can be broken again.

Forward to the First Edition...*"To show others **precisely** how we have recovered is the main purpose of this book."*

Have them highlight **precisely**.

Page 20... *"If you are an alcoholic who wants to get over it, you may already be asking -What do I have to do? It is the purpose of this book to answer such questions **specifically**."*

Have them highlight **specifically**.

Page 29... *"Further on, **clear-cut** directions are given showing how we recovered."*

Have them highlight **clear-cut**.

Sum up to them that the program as laid out in the Big Book is **precise, specific** and **clear-cut** on how to recover from alcoholism.

The Alcoholic Allergy

Page xxviii... *“We believe, and so suggested a few years ago, that the action of alcohol on these chronic alcoholics is a manifestation of an allergy; that the phenomenon of craving is limited to this class and never occurs in the average temperate drinker. These allergic types can never safely use alcohol in any form at all; and once having formed the habit and found they cannot break it, once having lost their self-confidence, their reliance upon things human, their problems pile up on them and become astonishingly difficult to solve.”*

Explain that an allergy is merely an abnormal reaction to a substance harmless to most people. The allergic reaction for the alcoholic is a physical craving for more alcohol once we begin to drink. This **never** happens to a non-alcoholic. This is why we usually drink more than we intend to. Ask the alcoholic if this makes sense to them. It is important that they understand this physical factor.

Page xxviii... *“Men and women drink essentially because they like the effect produced by alcohol. The sensation is so elusive that, while they admit it is injurious, they cannot after a time differentiate the true from the false. To them, their alcoholic life seems the only normal one. They are restless, irritable and discontented, unless they can again experience the sense of ease and comfort which comes at once by taking a few drinks-drinks which they see others taking with impunity. After they have succumbed to the desire again, as so many do, and the phenomenon of craving develops, they pass through the well-known stages of a spree, emerging remorseful, with a firm resolution not to drink again. This is repeated over and over, and unless this person can experience an entire psychic change there is very little hope of his recovery.”*

If the person is alcoholic, this will match many of their own experiences. Remember, it is not how often we drink, it is what happens in our body when we do drink.

Page 21... *“But what about the real alcoholic? He may start off as a moderate drinker; he may or may not become a continuous hard drinker; but at some stage of his drinking career he begins to lose all control of his liquor consumption, once he starts to drink.”*

The real alcoholic has lost control of how much they drink, once they start, whether they drink once a month or every day. The allergic reaction prevents any control. This allergy is a permanent part of our makeup. If we never take the first drink, we will never trigger the allergic reaction. Therefore, the main problem centers in our mind, rather than in our body.

The Alcoholic Mental Obsession

Page 24...*“The fact is that most alcoholics, for reasons yet obscure, have lost the power of choice in drink. Our so-called will power becomes practically nonexistent. We are unable, at certain times, to bring into our consciousness with sufficient force the memory of the suffering and humiliation of even a week or a month ago. We are without defense against the first drink.”*

“The almost certain consequences that follow taking even a glass of beer do not crowd into the mind to deter us. If these thoughts occur, they are hazy and readily supplanted with the old threadbare idea that this time we shall handle ourselves like other people. There is a complete failure of the kind of defense that keeps one from putting his hand on a hot stove.”

Page 34...*“This is the baffling feature of alcoholism as we know it - this utter inability to leave it alone, no matter how great the necessity or the wish.”*

Page 37...*“Whatever the precise definition of the word may be, we call this plain insanity. How can such a lack of proportion, of the ability to think straight, be called anything else?”*

In conclusion, we as alcoholics have an obsession, or a form of insanity when we are not drinking that condemns us to take the first drink. This triggers the allergy that creates the physical craving for more, which ensures we drink ourselves into drunkenness. This is the deadly combination that progresses to the point of permanent insanity or death.

Unmanageability

By the time we reach AA, our problems pile up on us and become astonishingly difficult to solve. We think our external problems cause us to drink and if we could get them solved we wouldn't want to drink. However, it is our internal spiritual condition that fuels our alcoholism which causes us to take the first drink, not our external problems. This is why having a list of “triggers” has no effect on our alcoholism, other than give us a false sense that these things cause our drinking.

Page 52... *“We were having trouble with personal relationships, we couldn't control our emotional natures, we were a prey to misery and depression, we couldn't make a living, we had a feeling of uselessness, we were full of fear, we were unhappy, and we couldn't seem to be of real help to other people.”*

This is the unmanageability of alcoholism. These are also the symptoms of the spiritual malady we have. We have used alcohol to treat our unmanageability and it seemed to work for a long time, sometimes many years. As our illness progressed, so did our unmanageability.

Step One

We admitted we were powerless over alcohol-that our lives had become unmanageable.

We are powerless over alcohol **when not drinking** because our insanity causes us to take the first drink. We are powerless over alcohol **when drinking** because the first drink triggers the physical allergy which causes us to crave more and prevents any control over how much we drink. Our lives, or our emotions have become out of control or unmanageable.

Step Two

Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

Nothing can be done about our physical allergy, so our **problem** is our **insanity** that condemns us to drink when we are sober. If we are not restored to sanity, we will drink again, setting off the physical craving and active alcoholism.

Page 45... *“Lack of power, that was our dilemma. We had to find a power by which we could live, and it had to be a Power greater than ourselves. Obviously. But where and how were we to find this Power? Well, that's exactly what this book is about. Its main object is to enable you to find a Power greater than yourself which will solve your **problem**.”*

After the first paragraph on page 44 in *We Agnostics*, the purpose of the whole rest of the chapter is to try to convince the alcoholic to believe in God or be willing to believe in God. Ask the alcoholic if they believe in God or if they are willing to believe in God. If they say yes to either question, then move on to step three. They do not need to formulate a new concept of God. They already have a concept, however inadequate it may be. Don't be concerned with their concept because it will change as they take the actions of steps four through twelve. If they do not believe in God or they are not willing to believe in God, then you will have to go through chapter four with them in detail.

Step Three

Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

Page 60... *“Our description of the alcoholic, the chapter to the agnostic, and our personal adventures before and after make clear three pertinent ideas:*

- (a) That we were alcoholic and could not manage our own lives.*
- (b) That probably no human power could have relieved our alcoholism.*
- (c) That God could and would if He were sought.”*

“Being convinced, we were at Step Three, which is that we decided to turn our will and our life over to God as we understood Him.”

Being convinced of what? Being convinced of a, b and c. If they are convinced of a, b and c, they have taken steps one and two and are now at step three.

Continue to read with them page 60 through the first paragraph on page 63. Explain to them that we are not turning anything over to God in step three. Step three is making a decision and saying a prayer. Turning our will and life over to the care of God happens in steps four through nine.

Ask them if they are ready to do step three. If ready, say the third step prayer together.

Step Four

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

Page 63... *“Next we launched out on a course of vigorous action, the first step of which is a personal housecleaning, which many of us had never attempted. Though our **decision** was a vital and crucial step, it could have little permanent effect unless at once followed by a strenuous effort to face, and to be rid of, the things in ourselves which had been blocking us. Our liquor was but a symptom. So we had to get down to causes and conditions.”*

Step three was a **decision**. It will have little lasting effect because of the things in ourselves that are blocking us from God. The personal housecleaning is done by taking steps four through nine. Step four is an inventory to identify the things that are blocking us.

Show them how to do a fourth step. The actual time to do a fourth step should not be over three or four hours. Have them do it that day if possible. If not, it should be done as soon as possible. Set a time to meet to hear their fifth step.

Step Five

Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

Have them share their fourth step with you. As they share, make a list of the amends they will be doing later in step nine. When they are finished, ask them if they have any secrets they were going to take to the grave with them. This is the time to get it all out because our secrets will keep us spiritually sick.

After step five is completed, have them go home and do exactly what it says to do on the bottom of page 75.

Step Six

Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

In the inventory, we found we were selfish, dishonest, self-seeking, frightened and inconsiderate. These are the character defects that we need to be entirely ready for God to remove.

Step Seven

Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

We don't work on our defects of character. We ask God to remove them. We usually find that He removes them when we are involved helping others.

Page 76... *"When ready, we say something like this: "My Creator, I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do your bidding. Amen." We have then completed Step Seven."*

Step Eight

Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

Have them make a list of people they have harmed from their inventory and anyone they may have harmed that is not on the inventory. Also, take the names you listed when they did their fifth step and make sure they are on the list also.

Step Nine

Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

Have a copy of their amends list for you to keep. Start with two or three from the list and talk about how to approach each one. You will have to use the text from page 76 through 83 on how to go about each one. Put each one on an index card for them to refer to. When they finish the two or three you give them, give them two or three more. Continue this process until all of them have been done.

Step Ten

Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

Having done steps one through nine, the **problem**, which is **insanity**, has been removed. We have been restored to sanity. We may still have many problems, but we are no longer obsessed with alcohol as a solution to them. Step ten is a simple exercise to keep us in check and keep our spiritual life growing in understanding and effectiveness. Step ten is actually a continuation of steps four through nine, only now we don't have a long list of resentments, fears, etc. Our slate is clean, so we take care of them one at a time as they come up.

Page 84... *“Continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear. (step 4)
When these crop up, we ask God at once to remove them. (steps 6 & 7)
We discuss them with someone immediately (step 5)
and make amends quickly if we have harmed anyone.” (steps 8 & 9)
Then we resolutely turn our thoughts to someone we can help.”*

Turning our thoughts to someone we can help cannot be understated here. I can pray for God to remove my selfishness, dishonesty, resentment or fear, but it doesn't seem to go away until I turn my thoughts to someone I can help. This is the part of step ten that many of us fail to do and fail to emphasize to the new person. By not turning our thoughts to someone we can help, we are in a short time facing the same difficulties again.

Step Eleven

Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

When we do our nightly review, we survey our day and see if we have swept something under the rug that should have been taken care of by doing step ten. Did we have any selfishness, dishonesty, resentment or fear that we didn't process with step 10? Did we have our thoughts on others or ourselves? Remember, it tells us to **constructively, not destructively** review our day. So we look at these things objectively without any self-judgement involved because none of us will live a twenty-four hour period perfectly. It is not a time to beat ourselves up if we find we have made mistakes. We just need to see the truth about the stock in trade so we can be more useful.

Prayer works if we have the proper attitude and work at it. Praying with an attitude of improving my day or my life is not the proper attitude. Our praying attitude should be focused on what God would have us do, what we can do to contribute to life or who we can help. This is why the Big Book tells us to ask in our morning meditation what we can do for the man who is still sick. It never tells us to ask God to keep us sober or for another day of sobriety.

There are some very good suggestions on how to pray on pages 86 and 87.

In conclusion, prayer for us is never asking God to make external changes for us so our life will be better. It is always a plea for God to change us to fit ourselves to be of maximum service to Him and those about us. Without His help, we are constantly thinking of ourselves. Thinking of ourselves always results in being restless, irritable and discontented.

Step Twelve

Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Working with others is not an optional step we do for extra credit. If we aren't working with others, we aren't working the Twelve Steps. Working with others is so important that a whole chapter was written about it! Working with others is not making coffee, opening the meeting facility or attending AA meetings. It is carrying the AA message that is contained in the Big Book to the person you have been praying to God about who is still sick. Become familiar with chapter seven by reading it often. If you are seeing the person for the first time, read pages 91 through 95. These pages talk about how to go about your visit with them on the first day. If they want you to sponsor them, take them through the twelve steps. Remember, if you are unsure of exactly how to handle a situation, ask your sponsor. We are all here to help you help others. When working with a new person, don't get bogged down with their personal problems. **Keep them focused on the steps.** The personal problems will keep coming until they have had a psychic change and developed this new way of living and thinking. Remember, your goal is to get them through the steps so they can do the same for someone else.

Now that the new person has had a spiritual awakening through these steps, show them how to practice these principles in all their affairs. Let them know they are an example of Alcoholics Anonymous, good or bad. Show them how you practice AA in your home, occupation and affairs. This includes social media. When you see them complaining, let them know they are straying away from our principles. Most of all, be a good example for them to follow. If you are a bad example of AA, chances are they will be too. Remember, they will watch your actions more than they will listen to you. You will find that nothing compares to the feeling of knowing God has used you to help someone else who is now helping others.

In the ongoing relationship with the person you sponsor who comes to you with a new problem, listen carefully for the same things the fourth step, tenth step and evening review ask us to look for, which is selfishness, dishonesty, resentment and fear. Point these things out and have them do the instructions in step ten for the removal of these. Don't forget the last instruction, which is to turn our thoughts to someone we can help. This will become habit for them and you will get more calls about the improvements in their life than the problems in their life. The most exciting thing is to hear from them about how their new person is doing!

Page 100... *"Both you and the new man must walk day by day in the path of spiritual progress. If you persist, remarkable things will happen. When we look back, we realize that the things which came to us when we put ourselves in God's hands were better than anything we could have planned. Follow the dictates of a Higher Power and you will presently live in a new and wonderful world, no matter what your present circumstances!"*