

WAYS & MEANS®

Spring 2005

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SPOTLIGHT:

“Springing” Forth To Clarity

Papers and Boxes and Bills, Oh My!

If you're like me, your mind races every day with messages from your “inner knower” or Higher Power about what you could do to move ahead in your life. When I don't listen to this voice, my anxiety level increases, and I can actually get into “freak out” mode.

Before I learned to really embrace the 12 Steps my perfectionism immobilized me. If I was going to do something, I was going to do it perfectly or not at all. And if I was going to do one thing perfectly, I would do everything perfectly, all at once! Well, obviously, I didn't get much done. Recovery has allowed me to experience progress in the absence of perfection.

So, when I'm faced with a myriad of challenges and obligations and bills and...well, you get the picture, how can I get organized? How can I get the clarity to identify “the next indicated thing?” Take this article, for example. It's so late I don't know if it will even get published, so it's definitely the next indicated thing.

Sorting Things Out

What I've learned is that many of the things I need to accomplish have corresponding pieces of paper, such as a bill or a business card or an address. I've also learned that these pieces of paper can accumu-

“Recovery has allowed me to experience progress in the absence of perfection...”

late into various piles that begin to take on more and more vagueness. So, here's my recipe for being able to identify the next indicated thing on a consistent basis:

Materials I use

File Folders
Small Index cards
One small filing box
Three large boxes
One Marker
One Pen

What I do

1. I label the three large boxes as follows: 1) Things to do soon; 2) Things to do sometimes; 3) Things to put away.
2. I go through all of my stacks of paper and sort them into the three boxes.
3. I label four file folders as follows: 1) Things to do today; 2) Things to do tomorrow; 3) Things to do this week; 4) Things to do next week.
4. I sort everything from the “Things to do soon” box into my new file folders.

5. Each day, I go through the “today” file and pick out one item that I believe is “the next indicated thing.” I keep doing this throughout the day. I re-sort anything that doesn't get done into the appropriate folder. On any given morning, or better yet, the night before, I transfer the “things to do tomorrow” into the “things to do today” folder.

6. I periodically go through the “Things to do sometime” box to see if anything needs to be transferred into the “soon” box.

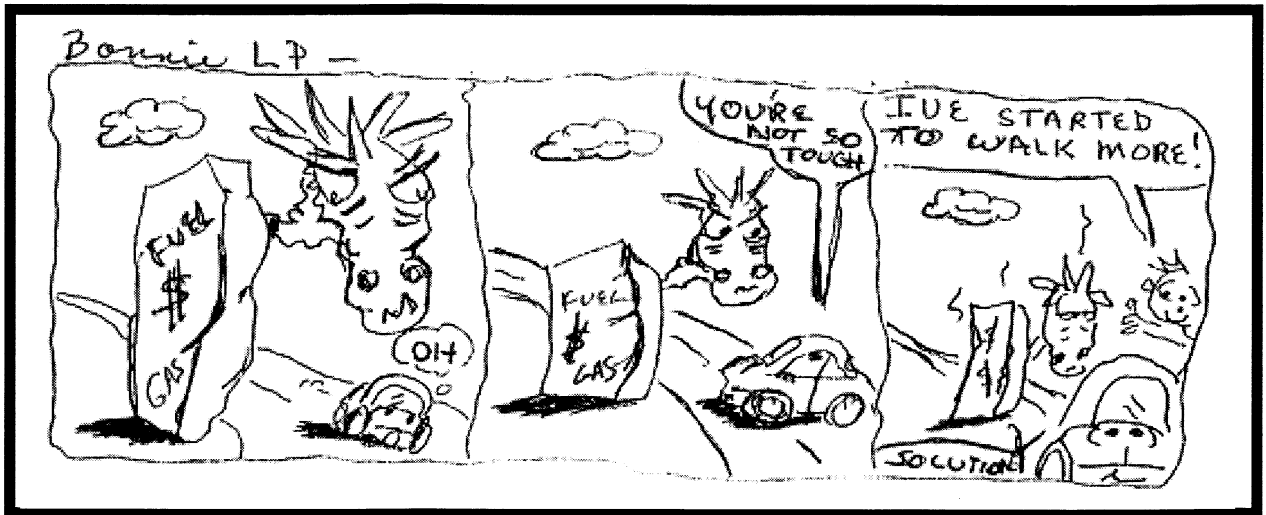
7. For items I want/need to do that don't have a corresponding piece of paper, I write the item down on an index card and put it in the appropriate box or folder.

Using this very basic process helps me to eliminate overwhelm and identify appropriate priorities in an environment of flexibility. This process is very simple and very liberating, and that's my experience, strength and hope for today. 🍀

Nicholas B.
(Los Angeles)

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Editor's Corner

Many of us in DA or BDA get paralyzed and overwhelmed by vagueness which leads to inaction. The clarity we gain by keeping our numbers and not debting one day at a time can yield recovery in all areas of our lives. It certainly builds our serenity because instead of feeling overwhelmed, we may gain a sense of spiritual purpose. This purpose, in turn, leads to a stronger sense of self-confidence. We come to recognize that we have gifts to share by being of service in the program and in our lives.

This current issue of Ways & Means focuses on spring-cleaning. The articles included here also have a heavy emphasis on action and service in DA recovery. As we look forward to the Summer 2005 conference issue, we are grateful for your continued participation in recovery by subscribing to, and reading, this meeting between meetings. ♥

Kieran K.
(Los Angeles)

Chicago Group Offers "Group Sponsorship"

A Chicago DA group is offering to have one of its members serve as a liaison with a member of a smaller group that feels isolated and needs support.

"Our vision for this group is that it be about a half a dozen or less [members], and that it's a group in a geographical area without much DA," says Jeff, the Chicago group's contact person. "Our hope would be to help this group get started, and to help DA as a whole by sharing the message to an area where DA has newer roots."

The Chicago group would assist the smaller group by sharing ideas about how to keep a meeting healthy and offering a phone list of members who are available to be contacted for Twelfth Step calls (the smaller "sponsee" group is requested to incur the charges for any calls).

Jeff can be reached at (773) 338-7740.



Ways & Means

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What is Debtors Anonymous?

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WAYS & MEANS

My name is Carol, and I am a debtor, free of incurring unsecured debt for 10 years, one day at a time, through working the Twelve Steps of DA. I have a question for the Fellowship to consider: What is Debtors Anonymous?

Does that sound like a silly question? According to its Preamble, Debtors Anonymous claims to be a fellowship of men and women who come together to solve their common problem and recover from the disease of compulsive debting. Over the years I've been in DA, it seems to me that this primary purpose has evolved to encompass other behaviors in addition to compulsive debting.

For example, members self-identify as "shopaholics," "paupers," "deprivation addicts," or "chronic underearners." Other members identify as "time debtors" or "self-debtors." Some members even say they don't have a problem with credit cards or aren't in debt; they don't consider themselves compulsive debtors, yet they still keep coming back to DA. Why? I have to wonder what they are getting from this program.

DA's library of pamphlets addresses this evolution away from DA's primary purpose -- or has it contributed to it? On my meeting's literature table, I see a pamphlet for underearning and another for recovery from compulsive shopping. There is a pamphlet called *Visions* for paupers and deprivation addicts. These pamphlets are among the top-sellers at my meeting. How-

ever, the issues of time debting and self-debting still seem "out of bounds" for some reason. Why? It's next to impossible for a newcomer (or a longtimer) to identify an "outside issue" in DA. If DA's primary purpose is to

"Do you think D.A. is trying to be all things to all people by not taking a stand on its ... primary purpose...?"

stop debting and to help other compulsive debtors to stop debting, then anything that doesn't focus on that primary purpose is, by definition, an outside issue. Using that guideline, compulsive shopping would be considered an outside issue. Under-earning would be considered an outside issue.

Members with some time in the program understand all too well that these behaviors can lead to debting. But so do other serious behaviors that are not addressed in the DA program such as codependency and overeating. Do we need literature for every situation that can trigger debting behavior? Where should the line be drawn? Who decides?

So I ask you my question again: "What is Debtors Anonymous?" What do we stand for? Do you think DA is trying to be all things to all people by not taking a stand on its current primary purpose as some in DA have suggested? Or is DA gradually (and unconsciously and unintentionally) creating a place where anyone who has a problem with

money can find a common solution?

The first Tradition of Debtors Anonymous states, "Our common welfare comes first; personal recovery depends upon DA unity." As it stands now, it seems to me that DA's primary purpose is being diluted, if not blatantly ignored, even in our Conference-approved literature. How unified is that?

I suppose there is a spiritual solution. What if DA as a whole came together to define itself under the guidance of the ultimate authority as He expresses Himself in the group conscience of our World Service Conference?

Some obvious possibilities come to mind: DA could expand its primary purpose to encompass more than just compulsive debting. Or here's another idea: DA could affirm its primary purpose as being *only* about compulsive debting. Or a third option could be to do nothing and just let the program unfold as it will, which is pretty much what is happening now.

If DA does nothing, what is happening now will probably continue. There will be slow or stagnant growth and an exodus of burned out longtimers, the ebb and flow of confused newcomers who latch on to the Tools and then leave without working the Steps, the lack of sponsors and lack of members willing to do service will, the tug-of-war between the terms "abstinence" and "solvency," and the general

2005 Fundraising For WSC

Tradition Five: "Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the debtor who still suffers."

Tradition Six: "A DA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the DA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose."

Tradition Seven: "Every DA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions."

The past two years Southern California's General Service Reps have held an annual Abundance Ball dance to raise funds for the DA World Service Office. Our goal was to raise money and to not debt doing it. The first event sent over \$700; the most recent event raised over \$1,000.

The yearly conference is where the work of DA is done, by us, the members of DA. Who else knows the needs of the still-suffering debtor better? Our recovery depends upon our 12th Step work. And when the GSRs and ISRs come back from the Conference, they bring their renewed enthusiasm back with them.

It's vital that as many General Service Representatives and Intergroup Service Representatives as possible attend the Conference—and that takes money. But raising money can be fun and strengthen the fellowship at the local level.

Here are some fundraising ideas that local meetings, Intergroups, and area GSRs have used:

- Pass a separate basket at meetings
- Dedicate a percentage of meeting's, Intergroup's, or area GSRs' general fund
- Donate profit from literature sales
- Request funds from groups not sending GSRs

More on the fun and fellowship side, organize:

- Fellowship Day, Step Day, Pressure Relief Day, Vision Mapping, and other workshops
- Sales of T-shirts
- Spaghetti dinners, pizza socials,



and picnics

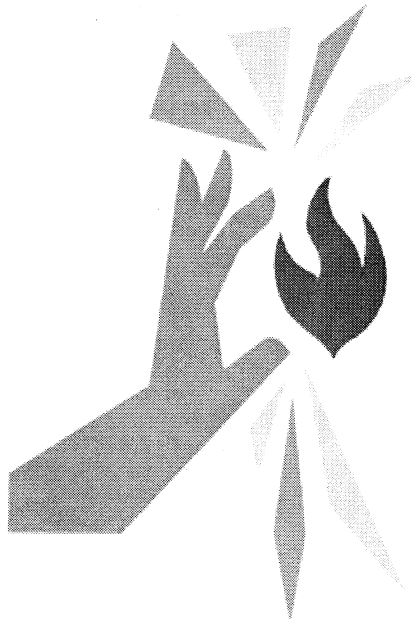
- Talent shows—As we say at the New York Share-A-Day, "No Talent Required"!
- Arts and crafts, bake sales

And remember—individual donations to the current \$5,000 level are welcome! ☺

[Editor's note: The maximum annual limit on personal donations is \$5000. Contact the General Service Office to make a donation.]

Jo G.

(Southern California)



What is DA? . . . (← page 3)

feeling that DA does not deliver on the "promise" of prosperity.

I think DA needs a clear definition of debting, guided by the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. This is not a decision that can be made by individual groups, or Intergroups, or by the Trustees. The *Fellowship* must define its primary purpose. What do you think Debtors Anony-

mous should stand for?

Ask your General Service Representative to carry your opinion to the next World Service Conference. Your personal recovery, my personal recovery—and the survival of the next newcomer who walks in the door—may depend on it. In the end, isn't that all the same thing?

Thanks for listening. ☺

Anonymous

So I Did That

My DA sponsor gives me regular reading assignments from AA and DA literature as I study and write on the Steps. This week's assignment was to read the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous (pp. 569-570) on a Spiritual Experience. I am working on my Second Step in DA as I go through the Steps for the second time.

The key points that I got from the reading of Appendix 2 were as follows:

- A personality change that brings about recovery is a spiritual experience;
- In order to recover, many acquire a "God-consciousness" followed at once by a vast change in feeling and outlook;
- Most have the "educational variety" personality change / spiritual experience that develops slowly over a period of time;
- Friends are aware of the difference long before the compulsive debtor is;
- Most find they have tapped an unsuspected inner resource which they presently identify with their own conception of a Power greater than themselves;
- Awareness of a Power greater than ourselves is the essence of spiritual experience;
- All alcoholic / compulsive debtors capable of honestly facing their problems can recover, provided they do not close their mind to all spiritual concepts;
- Willingness, honesty and open

mindedness are the essentials of recovery and are indispensable.

What is my experience with a spiritual experience or personality change?

... I remember one evening cutting up my credit cards and throwing them in a trash bag."

When I found the Spenders DA Registered Group 450 (online), I was hardly breathing. I know this because I had just come from, of all things, a breathing retreat where all we did for four days was breathe: I couldn't. The woman from a big research institution tried and tried to get me to stop panting, and to breathe into my diaphragm. She tried with a straw, and a bunch of other things, but I was just stuck.

I was so scared that my first share to the group was an email that said, "Hi, I am looking for meetings in ____." I must have gotten 30 emails the following day from the list. I was petrified that someone at work would find out that I was a member of DA, so I joined with a private email account. I am not sure I was really breathing yet, then.

One at a time, I read the posts and communicated off-line with the greeters. I honestly do not know how it happened, but I remember one evening cutting up my credit cards and throwing them in a trash bag. Several days

later, I did the same with my checkbooks, then sorting the bills and piles of unopened mail. It felt more like busy work than a spiritual experience. I also remember the day I realized what one of my trigger stops was, and bookended going there.

I finally went to a face-to-face meeting at the West Side Club on May 7, 2001. I heard the signposts and was in this room with 15 people and suddenly I noticed that I was breathing again.

I knew before I arrived at that meeting that: 1) I was committing myself to DA for life; and 2) DA would help me.

That day in May I started recording. I made a couple phone calls that week to people who had given me their numbers and left silly messages, "Hi, this is b, I am making a telephone call. Thanks (click)."

For me the spiritual experience became evident first around "time." Time suddenly became elastic. I still do not know how this happened.

I was working ten hours a day, I was dancing twenty hours per week and I got to a DA meeting per day for my first year and then some. The numbers do not add up, but there it is.

Every day I left at six pm from work and got to the 7 pm meeting, I went to Intergroup and a late night meeting in another fellowship which I am

So I Did . . . (← page 5)

not a member of during the week. Then I went to lunch time meetings every day, and let go of the evening meetings.

It was not a white light experience, but it was the most amazing thing I have ever experienced — time in fact became elastic.

The personality change that took place was willingness. I did anything and everything that was suggested by anyone I met who had any abstinence. I did exactly what they did. If someone who was abstinent used a spreadsheet, I used one to record and tally. Another person had done a 90-in-90; so I did that. Another went to a meeting a day: I did that. Another person always arrived five minutes early and stayed after meetings; so I did that. Another person went to Intergroup meetings; so I went to Intergroup. Another person programmed people's contact numbers into their cell phone; so did I. Another person made three program calls per day; so did I. Another person turned over her spending on the phone every morning; so did I. Another person read the DA pamphlets in alphabetical order; so did I. Another person always said "yes" to service; so I did too. Another person always had a Sponsor, a PRG couple, a back-up PRG team, and a couple of temp sponsors who could pinch-hit; so I did that. Another person read Step One every day until she was on Step Two: I did that. Another person read "On Awakening" every day: I did that too. While I like to "people-please" and be the "best" in class, what

happened to me in early DA was not about that. I know because it was never painful during my first year. Every year since 2001 has been a big, huge embrace.

I was so hungry for recovery, a change, peace, serenity, and also so beat. This is much more of the educational variety spiritual experience.

"I did ANYTHING and EVERYTHING that was suggested by anyone I met who had any abstinence."

First of all, I didn't internalize, until much later, that I wasn't breathing properly until that May meeting. I also did not say, "Oh wow, look how my days are endless!" I just went to a meeting a day and everything else fell in around that — it did not feel like a big deal at all at the time, though a lot of people asked how it was possible.

DAs remarked on my improved condition (like self-care stuff) and my PRG and Sponsor would remark that x or y was not a big deal for me this month when it had been the month before. They also commented on my awareness.

The most remarkable experience involving feedback occurred last Spring when a colleague asked me what had happened. He said that since he had met me over six years ago, I seemed "lighter" -- not physically -- but just lighter. Then I knew it was real because

he is not in program and had no reason to bring it up.

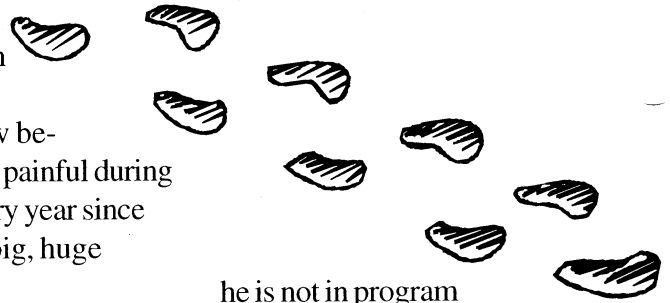
For me it was not an "unsuspected inner resource." I knew when I found DA that it was the only thing and that it would help. What I did not know was that recovery and not debting one day a time is the loving, easier, softer way.

I give DA and the collective wisdom, experience and strength all the credit. A Higher Power, which I sometimes think of as a lower power (from the earth) was in the mix. But I did not try to understand then. I guess I was still coming to believe. I just marveled at the miracle of living without debting, of living, paying my bills, feeling alive, and liking being alive. The miracle of not ending up debting when I thought I would have to because a gift certificate appeared, I found money, someone surprised me with a gift, or I was given the courage to just give a card, or to call and reschedule.

Today I definitely recognize the change in me, inside and out, to have been a spiritual experience and that there was a personality change. My evaluation at work improved, I started praying and thanking God, looking for God, and found God here in DA. ☺

B

(Washington, DC)





Announcements

Upcoming Events

WSC Fellowship Day

Saturday, August 27, 2005

Radisson Hotel, 915 Route 73, Mt. Laurel, NJ

Contact: 856-234-7300 Time: 1:00 pm - 5:45 pm

Intergroup Shares Wanted

We have set aside a space in W&M especially for Intergroups to share. What you are doing in your area. Have an amusing story or anecdote? What's on your events' calendar? Make W&M a true "meeting in print." Submit your articles or announcements to the Editor at waysandmeansda@hotmail.com.

Visit DA's website

Come learn more about DA at our website, www.debtorsanonymous.org. You'll find news about upcoming events, intergroup contact information, literature descriptions, and much more.

Your Help Wanted!

Ways & Means needs your contributions!

Send in your
DA jokes
DA cartoons
DA shares

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