

Living in



Balance

Spring 2003 The International Quarterly

Newsletter of Workaholics Anonymous

A Workaholic's Story, Part 2

... After a stint in the Air Force I finished law school, along the way becoming the only law student to argue and win a client's case before my state's supreme court. The latter won me fellowships for further legal studies. I relished the logic and rationality of the law. I was also in love with the most intelligent, talented, and beautiful woman I'd ever met: my wife. Once diagnosed an alcoholic, since we started going together in my view she had her drinking "completely under control."

The next five years I litigated criminal cases for and against the government in Washington, D.C., got an advanced law degree, and mentored law students in court for five city law schools. Proud at not taking a vacation during that entire time, I pitched myself day and night into preparing for and conducting trials. Relentless activity continued to anesthetize feelings of self-doubt, while the stakes involved provided me with the adrenalized, grandiose illusion that my work was a matter of life or death. On weekends I played rugby despite a history of numerous concussions and broken bones.

Near the end of this period my wife—who could easily limit herself to just two martinis—began a daily diet of marijuana. It told myself it was trendy and harmless; in fact, it was probably an integral part of her career as a successful novelist. It never occurred to me we'd fallen in love with each other's self images and were finding it difficult to sustain them past eight years of marriage. During our increasingly dysfunctional relationship we'd never let each other see our genuine emotions, how really scared and insecure we were most of the time.

This was also years before I realized the powerless, oppressed person I'd been defending in court was really the quaking little child buried deep with me; the causes I'd been championing stood for all the battles I'd never won as a boy; each law student I'd mentored with such loving parental care was really myself.

One day I was offered a law-book contract by a publishing firm and a law-teaching contract by a California school. Nearing burnout in the courtroom, I jumped at the chance to take what I later realized was a "geographic." My disease, of course, came with me and soon had me pitching myself into teaching, writing, and expanding the school's clinic with ceaseless, extravagant intensity. Evenings and weekends (after long-distance runs or pumping iron) allowed me to sweep my infant son into a gerry-carry and trudge off on mountain hikes; paternal bonding could take place—and fatherhood justified—only through strenuous activity.

Thanks to workaholism's blend of anesthesia and adrenaline, ten years of fatherhood passed by in a flash. I

continued on page 4

Upcoming WA Conference

Plans for the September 12-14, 2003, WA World Conference on the San Francisco Peninsula are moving ahead. The planning committee of San Francisco Bay Area members met at the conference site on March 7th and took a tour of Mercy Center and began setting up the program. All WA members are asked to submit ideas that they would like included on the agenda. Regular WA meetings are included and so is time off. Suggestions so far include discussions on WA literature and the WA reading list, considerations for modification of WA election procedure and possibly other parts of the bylaws, sponsorship, working the steps, and supporting and distributing the newsletter.

The committee members are in hopes of having a delegate from each of the U.S. meetings. The Palo Alto meeting found all their donations were going for rent. However, we found that, if we have a second can for group projects, we are able to collect funds for WA support. We recommend this for supporting a delegate to go to the Conference. Each meeting has one vote on any decisions coming before the WA members.

For many years we have had a few members in Germany who receive WA mailings and newsletters and participate in the elections. They call their groups AAS - Anonyme Arbeitssüchtige (<http://www.arbeitssucht.de/>). They are planning to send two representatives to the September conference!

Plans are also underway to collect stories for the upcoming WA 12 Step Book at the conference. Writing sessions are planned where members answer questions like: "How do you say 'no'?", "How do I stop procrastination?", "How do I prevent adrenaline rush?", "How do I recover from a binge?". The deadline for the stories has been extended until after the conference.

See enclosed flyer to sign up for the conference!

New WA Website

Check out our new website:

www.workaholics-anonymous.org

Inside This Issue . . .

Tool Review: Meetings

One of WA's First Members Describes His Voyage

Step Study: Step Three

Finding a New Employer . . . through Step 3 Writing

Board Notes: World Conference and More

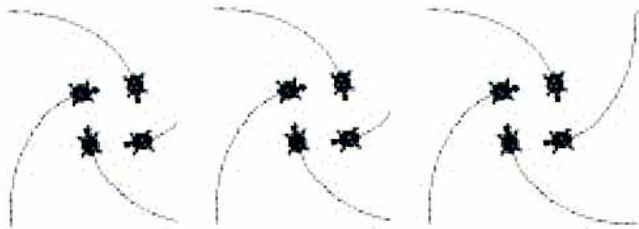
The Latest and Greatest from the WA-WSO Board

About Workaholics Anonymous

Workaholics Anonymous is a fellowship of individuals who share their experience, strength, and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from workaholism.

The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop working compulsively. There are no dues or fees for WA membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. W.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization, or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stop working compulsively and to carry the message of recovery to workaholics who still suffer.

Views and opinions expressed in this newsletter are personal and belong to the person who shared them. Take what you like and leave the rest. They do not necessarily represent official opinions or policies of WA-WSO.



About The WA Newsletter

This newsletter is published four times a year and is sent to all active WA groups in the US & abroad and to all "loners" who subscribe. Suggested subscription fee is \$8 per year payable to the WA World Service Organization--meetings are also welcome to subscribe! Please keep your group's address and contact information current with WA-WSO. We are eager for your stories, articles, artwork, book reviews, and submissions. Electronic submissions can be sent via email. Submission timeline for the Summer Issue is May 30th, 2003, and for the Autumn 2003 Newsletter, September 30th, 2003. Thank you!

Workaholics Anonymous World Service Organization

email: [wso at workaholics-anonymous.org](mailto:wso@workaholics-anonymous.org)
web: www.workaholics-anonymous.org

WA-WSO
PO Box 289
Menlo Park, California 94026-0289
510-273-9253

New Employer

Reprinted from OA's Lifeline Magazine, February 2002, by D.R., Las Vegas, Nevada, U.S.

Sometimes I have difficulty turning things over to my Higher Power. I usually do well with food, but those "people, places and things" are often trickier for me to release. Recently I felt overwhelmed with trying to do too much and feeling whatever I did was not enough. I knew I should surrender my entire will and life to my Higher Power, including my schedule and activities, but I couldn't do it. Finally, I realized that my life really was unmanageable, and I prayed for my Higher Power to show me how to let go.

Later that night I grabbed the AA *Big Book* and flipped it open. Without giving it much thought, I started reading Chapter 5, "How It Works." On page 63, I read a line that gave me new insight into the problem of surrendering my time. "We had a new employer."

I had read this before, but it had new meaning for me because I had just started a new job. Thinking of my HP as my "employer" and comparing my relationship with God to the way I do my job gave me a new way to surrender.

When I arrive at work in the morning, the first thing I do is check in with my supervisor to find out what I need to do that day. I then do my work to the best of my ability, without worrying about what I may have to do later. When I finish a task, I check with my supervisor again to see what I should do next, and then I do whatever that is. I don't have to worry about what everyone else is doing; I do my part and trust that the department is operating as it should, without my trying to control it.

At work, I realize that I'm new, and I don't have to be perfect. I don't expect to complete two week's worth of work in a day because I know that is impossible. Some days I do more than others, but that is okay. Whatever I do is enough. I also know that if I make a mistake, my supervisor will let me know, and I will have the chance to correct my mistake without beating myself up for being a failure.

Thinking about all this, I realized how easy it is for me to check in when I need to, do my part and let go of the rest. If I can do this at work, maybe I can do it with the rest of my life. This realization has helped me let go of the things I felt I had to control, especially my time and activities. Sometimes I forget to do it, but then I remember that I'm new at living the OA way, and I don't have to do it perfectly.

Board News

With this Newsletter you will likely receive a letter requesting group contact information for each group, asking members to **keep email and addresses current**. Please note if you are willing to have your phone number and email published on the website.

Submission deadline for the Summer Newsletter is May 30th—Theme is Step 4.

Treasury Report, February 2003: \$2983.79 at present in the treasury. Income was \$254. Expenses exceeded income. We want to make an approximate spending plan. We will raise money from the conference. It looks like a healthy treasury, but we are not accumulating funds for publishing our 12 Steps book.

Step 3 in Workaholics Anonymous

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

We had a new Employer....

When we sincerely took such a position [on Step 3], all sorts of remarkable things followed. We had a new Employer. Being all powerful, He provided what we needed, if we kept close to Him and performed His work well.

Third Step Prayer

God, I offer myself to Thee—to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of life. May I do Thy will always!

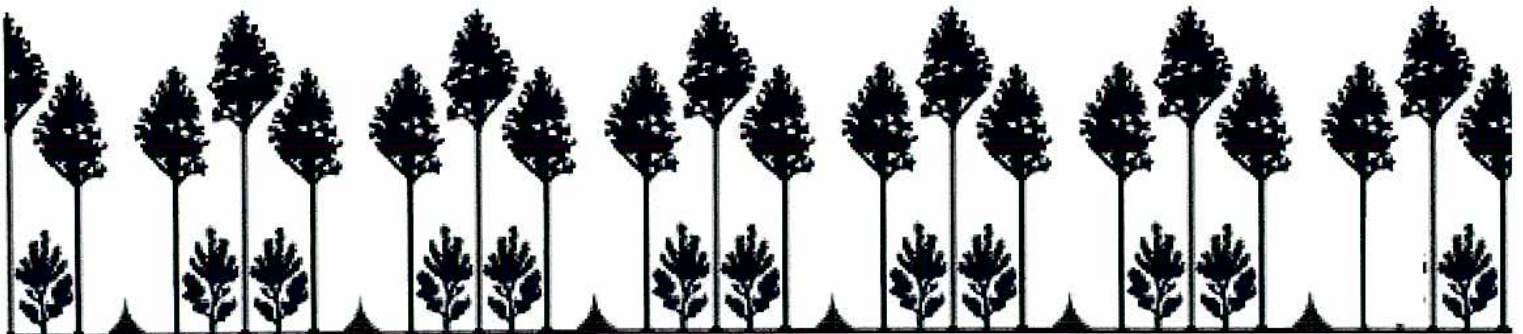
Both Quotes from page 63, the Chapter "How It Works" of the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous

Working the Third Step in WA

It is often recommended that people read through Step Three, pages 60-64 in the Big Book of AA, and the Chapter on Step Three in the AA Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions as preparation for doing step work writing on this step.

1. The key to success in starting Step Three is willingness to turn our lives over to the care of a loving Higher Power. "Let go and let God." This can be difficult for workaholics who are used to success depending on self will alone. In what ways am I willing to adopt a new attitude about work and business?
2. What barriers remain that block your relationship with a Higher Power? Anxiety over giving up self-determination? Difficulty trusting? Unworkable definition of a Higher Power? Old habits? No experience with a caring Higher Power?
3. Create a balance sheet. On one side list all the reasons for believing in God. On the other side list your reasons and beliefs that keep your Higher Power out of your life.
4. Write on dependence, on how dependence can lead to greater independence.
5. How do I "play God"?
6. What is the God of my understanding? Do I need a more loving, forgiving, available experience of Higher Power—what would that look like?
7. How do my work and activities create an illusion of power and control?
8. How does surrendering to a power greater than myself feel to me?
9. Am I still trying to handle each problem myself or am I asking for the help of coworkers and my Higher Power for guidance?
10. Name the signs when your are working from ego, willpower, and pressure. Name the signs when you are working having turned your will and your life over to the care of God.
11. Do you invite the presence of God by thinking of God as your employer? Do you begin each day with a prayer listing what you feel grateful for, asking how you can be of service? Do you take time to cultivate a relationship with your higher power? How do you use the serenity prayer: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference. Thy will, not mine be done."
12. Do you misuse willpower, bombarding your problems with it instead of attempting to bring it into agreement with God's universal wisdom? Do you pray for what you want rather than using meditation and other spiritual experiences to slip into a state teachable and supported by a caring Higher Power?

Please feel free to email the WA Big Book Committee with ideas, feedback, and stories.



A Workaholic's Story, Part 2, continued from page 1 . . .

worked in the office and classroom, updating my law book into a nationwide authority. My wife wrote at home, published novels, became a political activist, substituting dope's THC for the TLC I couldn't give her. Neither of us wanted to face the fact our lives and marriage were sliding into a joyless ritual.

One day my wife nearly killed herself and our second son while driving the car under the influence of marijuana. Next day she checked herself into a drug-rehabilitation center. That she was actually diagnosed as an alcoholic-addict was as shocking to me as discovering that I was her enabling codependent! Her courageous action, however, not only rescued her life and our marriage, but saved my life as well.

While participating in my wife's recovery program, it gradually dawned on me that descriptions of addicts' lives, thoughts, and feelings fit me perfectly. In addition to being a codependent enabler for my wife, I seemed to be a primary addict myself. All I had to do was substitute "compulsive working" for "compulsive drinking/using" and I was as much of an addict as any I'd ever met or read about.

While participating in my wife's recovery program, it gradually dawned on me that descriptions of addicts' lives, thoughts, and feelings fit me perfectly. In addition to being a codependent enabler for my wife, I seemed to be a primary addict myself. All I had to do was substitute "compulsive working" for "compulsive drinking/using" and I was as much of an addict as any I'd ever met or read about.

Finally, on 20 August 1983 (the day I consider the start of my recovery) I drafted a long letter to the rehabilitation clinic, described my symptoms, and asked if there were any treatment programs for workaholics. Weeks later a response arrived. Although not certain my request had been serious (the now familiar, "workaholism, a disease?!") this cutting-edge clinic for recovering addicts knew of no recovery programs for workaholics.

The next seven years I spent studying myself and the addictive process. I shared experiences with dozens of alcoholics, addicts, and other people with compulsive personalities. To a few friends I sent a booklet of my findings, urging the recognition of workaholism as a disease and detailing the voyage of my own addiction. Nearly all were supportive; some even thought I'd been living their lives.

During this period I attended meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous. When I introduced myself as either a "workaholic" or as a "political alcoholic" I got little sympathy. As the former I was another of those will-power people who'd been bashing alcoholics for centuries; as the latter I was some self-effacing weirdo in search of a social disease! Still, AA's twelve-step program seemed directly relevant and immensely beneficial. On the gut level of shame, fear, desperation, and self-esteem, the stories I heard at AA were my story.

Another recovering addict suggested I attend Overeaters Anonymous. It was a major breakthrough for me. Although I couldn't abstain from work altogether (like a recovering alcoholic from alcohol), perhaps I could learn to confront work non-compulsively—as a recovering overeater deals with food. Trying to unite the best of the wisdom of both AA and OA, I wrote a year's worth of daily meditations for recovering workaholics. But when I asked a dozen so-called recovery publishers if they'd like to distribute the book, their responses ranged from "Sorry, we're already committed" to "Sorry, workaholism's not an official disease."

Although I couldn't abstain from work altogether (like a recovering alcoholic from alcohol), perhaps I could learn to confront work non-compulsively—as a recovering overeater deals with food.

In 1990 I realized I couldn't recover alone and started a Workaholics Anonymous group in my city; in its first two years over a hundred people attended. I volunteered for WA's first World Service Organization. Getting to know scores of other recovering workaholics apprised me of the immensity of this insidious disease: its deep roots, its subtle forms, its range of rationalizations, and enormous cultural encouragement.

Nearly every day of recovery I unearth some new facet of my workaholism: how its fear of true feelings goad me toward activity and away from contemplation or uncensored feeling of emotions; how its dread of powerlessness tempts me to control (or at least understand) everything inside and outside my life; how its anxiety over the worth of my true self urges me to hide behind self-images, etc. I'm fully resigned to the fact that this cunning and baffling disease will never leave me. But at every WA meeting I encounter love, strength, and renewed hope; I hear some new wisdom I can apply to my life; I discover another useful tool of recovery.

Though my parents are still alive, I've accepted their inability to understand what they did to me, who I really was, or am now. I am discovering, accepting, and nurturing my true self by myself, and exposing it to be nourished by an honest relationship with my wife and other friends.

For the first time in my life I'm in touch with the awesome range of my genuine feelings—and gradually learning not to hide, channel, change, or flee them. On good days I experience incredible wonder and joy from just being alive. My sick, fictional life is finally over. Though it's arrival was a long time in coming, my real story's just begun.

