

# STORYLINE

## From Workaholics Anonymous MAR APR MAY 2014



**“Our primary purpose is to stop working compulsively and to carry the message of recovery to those who still suffer.”**

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***STORY: DOING WHAT I'M GOOD AT***

I was a classic workaholic when I was running my own manufacturing business, which I did for over 40 years. I was weak at delegating and sharing responsibility and the way I operated was to lunge at any challenge like a hungry trout and I never asked myself if this was something I really wanted to do or what I might be good at.

The payoff for accepting these challenges was the adrenaline (or dopamine) rush that could come if I could pull it off. Pulling it off only meant that I could get through the job without abject failure, not a measure of how long it took, or that it drew me away from my loved ones, or that if I had hired an expert I would actually have been ahead of the game. Also, I did not consider the physical and mental stress of always being in water that was just over my head.

This fit in with another aspect of my style, which was not trusting others to do a thorough job or to be intelligent enough to ask for help, which was probably true. True: because I often was not clear in my mind just what result I was seeking and so was unable to give good instructions.

I was addicted to snapping up challenges and the thrill of the fear of failure. All this dysfunction did not cause me to alter my behavior. When I was quite young and did not understand it, my mother joked: "You can get used to anything, even hanging, if you start out gently and keep it up long enough." I almost succeeded in learning to hang. My addiction to hanging comes under the general heading of workaholism, but had the added lethal twist of going close to an edge. I lied about it, both to myself and to my wife.

Sanity tells me that I should be doing what I love and am good at and get others to do what I'm not. That this is not only sane, but also practical, totally escaped me in those years. Fortunately, we are all good at some things, but not everything, and I'm no different. I love the things I'm good at and get the dopamine jolt without the adrenaline when I'm in the areas of my competence and creativity. I can still reach out to learn new things when not much hinges on the amount or depth of any success. Stubbornness and not being willing to give up are not useless aspects of my personality, but I had been carrying this to absurdity. I don't want to shy away from seeking new skills and following new interests, but it needs to be done with moderation and balance.

A beginning of my progress in the Twelve Steps was the admission that my life was unmanageable, which opened the door to asking for help and no longer automatically assuming that anything new needed my personal attention. This key unlocked me from my addiction. It was the realization that I could get more done and get more joy out of it if I limited myself to "DOING WHAT I'M GOOD AT".

*--Harry W. 6/12/13*

**STORY: MY CRISIS AND WORKAHOLICS ANONYMOUS**

Even the simplest of life forms, such as bacteria, are averse to discomfort and pain. It is the same with people. We dare to change only when it is even more uncomfortable to stay where we are, rather than take the risk of the new. Most change is made as the result of some kind of crisis. In WA, we know about “burn out,” both mental and physical, trouble in our relationships and elsewhere. Many of us have been able to manage our addictive behavior by a fretful balancing act lacking in stability, such as procrastination followed by all-nighters.

I was “successfully” managing to keep up the appearance of sanity while working almost all the time. There came a time when I asked myself this question: “Is this the way I want to spend the rest of my life?” The answer was clearly NO. To motivate myself to look into WA I needed to amplify the question into a life or death choice. I had to get my own attention and focus by creating an emotional experience of crisis.

I had been able to survive with my compulsive working because I had a strong constitution, a family that was patient, and a spouse who put up with it, even though I knew that my behavior was extremely abnormal. I thought that was just the way I was made and that I could get by without changing. When I looked at the prospects for the rest of my life, however, I knew it was up to me to change, and that I had a choice.

But I did not understand that my usual willful approach was not going to help, that this was what got me where I was in the first place. My tendency to try to control obscured a softer way of living, beyond my imagining. I had become successful at avoiding the experience of pain by becoming accustomed to numbness. Of course, “being used to it” was diametrically opposed to paying attention and being in the “now.”

My ability to stay just out of reach of crisis left me stuck in a rigid, isolated, and arid place in life. Without my self-invented crisis, I would not have taken Step One, or even the step before that, which was to look into WA. This coming together of urgency and WA helped me listen to a part of myself that I had been ignoring.

---Harry W

**NOTE ON SHARING:** *At meetings, time is generally allotted for individual sharing. No one speaks for WA, but we recover by sharing our experience, strength and hope with each other, that we may solve our common problem and help others recover. Please submit pieces from members who have shared on emails and at meetings. The names can be changed, to protect anonymity.*

**SHARING: A LOVING HIGHER POWER**

When I initially came into the twelve step rooms over 20 years ago in another fellowship, I had trouble believing in a loving God as our ultimate authority. The higher power of my experience, up to that point, had been a domineering, mean, judgmental male deity; it was not a loving one, and not one to be trusted.

I kept coming back to the rooms because of the love I saw and experienced with my twelve step fellows. Through the sharing at meetings, I also began to understand that their higher powers were nothing like that of my youth, and I wanted what they had. It still took a few years for me to believe in my heart that a loving God existed, one who wanted all of us to be happy, healthy, and free.

In about my eighth year of recovery, I finally fully embraced the program. Up until then, there was a small part of me that was scared that this program would disappoint me, too, and that the promises really were empty. But the longer I was in the program, the more health and recovery I experienced within myself and my colleagues. At that point, I fully allowed the program into my being. I have never regretted that decision. A fundamental aspect was the experience of a loving God which I experienced back then, and, also, now, in WA.

--Tisa

**SHARING: WORKAHOLISM**

I just joined this group, having come to my knees of sorts from workaholism. For me, Step Two reminds me that I am not God or my higher power, and neither is any other human. One of my character defects is making other people my higher power. I have been in other 12 step groups since 2002, so I have some awareness of how this defect has affected my body image and self-esteem; however it's new to me to see how my skewed thinking affects my work.

Part of my workaholism is that I do not allow myself to have needs. In my family I was the fixer and falsely empowered child: "she who knows all." It took me a long time to understand that this false empowerment is actually a form of abuse. It made me believe that I had all the answers, that I had to be good at everything, that rules didn't apply to me, and that I didn't have needs of "normies." It made me feel alternatively "better than" and also "worse than."

Today I am seeking serenity in all areas of my life, especially as a single mother and business owner. I am trying to do life differently, more thoroughly, less rushed, and more present. This means discarding much of what my upbringing taught me to be: manic, impatient, ruthless, arrogant, cheating, highest status, and a know-it-all. Today I pray for the willingness to be humble, patient, present, kind and open to others' ideas. Thanks for letting me share.

--- Jennifer

**SHARING: SELF-ESTEEM AND SERVICE**

I have been wondering why it seems to “feel” good when I am doing service work but I have run across some interesting ideas. For millions of years our ancestors relied on being accepted and trusted by a small group of peers for sheer survival. They could not survive alone in such a difficult world. So, it isn’t hard to believe that the ones who were best at achieving partnership would have a survival advantage and this has been incorporated into our DNA.

For partnership to bear fruit requires that trust and acceptance be developed between the partners. Performing service is a tangible way to earn trust and to know it is deserved. A consequence of this is that it enhances our self-esteem, which we usually think of as an interior problem, not immediately dependent on others. But self-esteem is not a result of material or intellectual achievement, it is based on our knowing we are genuinely respectful of others and are trusted for that very reason. We cannot build self-esteem while being out of touch with our families, friends or co-workers. Many workaholics are working extremely hard in order to overcome feelings of low self-worth, leaving little time or energy for others. The isolation of over-working adds nothing to the feeling of connectedness and thus, nothing to our need for self-esteem.

Sponsorship is a fine example of being closely connected to another person. It requires careful attention and listening, with neither giving advice nor becoming immersed in the sponsee’s drama. This fills our need to feel trusted and accepted and is not dependent on the ultimate outcome of the sponsorship relationship. Co-sponsorship has most of the same positive effects.

*--from Harry W. 6/17/12*

**QUOTE: FEAR**

**The fearless are merely fearless, those who act in spite of their fear are truly brave.**

*--Anonymous*

**SHARING: CALL FOR SPONSORSHIP**

I have been receiving emails from workaholics that are looking for a telephone sponsor. Unfortunately I have all that I can handle just now, and I feel bad that there are not enough sponsor volunteers to go around.

In my view, when someone is looking for a sponsor, the person is primed to actively seek a breakthrough, so that is the time when it is most valuable to make this connection. They have come to the point where they are “entirely ready” to take, at least, the 1<sup>st</sup> Step. This is a very important moment in the lives of newcomer workaholics. Readiness only comes when the workaholic is beginning to give up on the many strategies she/he has tried in order to achieve balance, has run out of the excuses of denial, lying and avoidance. A real crisis of health, employment or relationships is often what is generating the search for a sponsor. There is urgency in the request.

There are also special benefits for the sponsor, as service is a primary tool for staying focused on one’s own recovery and sponsorship is perhaps the highest form of service available. Bill W. makes this very clear in the AA literature, and our program is a very close parallel. In my own experience, being a sponsor has led to new insights into my own struggle, allowed me to feel useful and connected and at the same time brought home the teaching that I cannot fix anyone except myself.

In this process, I am constantly reminded that recovery is never done and I find that a return to the 1<sup>st</sup> Step is needed to restart what has become tangled and confusing. With this in mind, I have great respect for the concept of co-sponsorship, as who among us is so far down the road of recovery that they can feel expert? Instead of filling in the role of expert, the sponsor can explore the usefulness of the Steps with the sponsee, offering only the sum of his/her experience, strength and hope at whatever stage it is.

I hope all who read this take it to heart as an opportunity for growth and service by volunteering to take this role.

--Harry W.

**STORY: VOLUNTEER WORK AS A CHARACTER DEFECT**

Overdoing it with volunteer and service work can become one of my character defects. This dynamic feeds into both my workaholism and codependency. Before WA recovery, I almost felt that I could not say "no" to requests of my time, personally with family, professionally with organizations where I volunteered. I also viewed different kinds of daily tasks in a hierarchy: some were "legitimate," "good enough for my time and attention," and "valuable." Volunteerism fit into that category. Self-care and tasks like housekeeping were inferior. I'm so grateful that WA helps me see that all tasks have value. I need balance in my life. As such, I do better now with accepting mundane tasks as valuable and worthy of my time.

I actually burned out with volunteerism for a particular organization a few years ago. Prior to the burnout, I got fired from a paying job in 2010. Due to me putting too much time and energy into volunteerism, I didn't complete two major projects. I rightly was fired. That was my bottoming out with workaholism. I could no longer deny that I had a problem.

I got into WA in February, 2011 but I did not have the courage to withdraw from that volunteer organization until November, 2011. The organization did not accept my withdrawal at the time so I needed to go through a more formal process of resigning one year later. Even then, the group failed to remove me from their website as the contact or the checking person, so I had to put more effort forward to request they do those withdrawal tasks. I still have a box of company records that were supposed to be picked up this past summer, but never were. I realize I have looked at that organization through addictive eyes and mainly saw holes that I have tried to plug up. I have communicated my boundaries; if the Board President does not act, I will move forward. I no longer want to be anyone's or any group's savior!

I guard my time and energy very closely these days. One of the red flags for me when I am overdoing it is when I start to become resentful. I am very careful about taking on any additional service work with either my twelve step program or my outside volunteerism. Right now I am at my healthy limit in both arenas. When asked by others to do more, I am at a point where I can put forth guilt-free "no's." If I'm not sure, then I ask for time to ponder the request.

*-- from Tisa*

**QUOTE: BUSYNESS**

Busyness serves as a kind of existential reassurance, a hedge against emptiness; obviously your life cannot possibly be silly or trivial or meaningless if you are so busy, completely booked, in demand every hour of the day. (Reference: Tim Kreider, *New York Times*, 2012)

*--submitted by Peggy*

**SHARING: NEW PATHWAYS**

In reading the latest discoveries about how the brain works, I came across this concept: “neurons that fire together, wire together.” Communication within the brain occurs when neurons fire a tiny electrical charge from one to another. In acquiring knowledge and forming memories, neuronal pathways form; these allow us to process information extremely rapidly, and store the results. An analogy would be sledding down a newly snow-covered hill. The first trip leaves a trace, which easily becomes a pathway through repeated use. This explains how our habits and addictions come about, such as an adrenaline high.

A related notion is: “use it or lose it”, which means that when neuronal pathways are not used, they gradually “unwire,” or, at the very least, become less automatic. This explains why abstinence is so important in dealing with addiction. Each time we “fall off the wagon”, we reinforce the old pathway. Applying these concepts to workaholic patterns where total abstinence is often not possible or desirable, we need to abstain from workaholic patterns. We also need to develop new ways of getting satisfaction in order to create new neuronal connections. An example could be quitting work at the planned time, creating a brand new pathway of: “I can do it!” (Reference: Doidge, Norman. *The Brain That Changes Itself*)

--Harry W. 3/10/13



**SHARING: TRADITION TWELVE**

*Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.*

Every time I hear the twelfth tradition, a song by Shania Twain comes to mind called "That don't impress me much." It goes, "So you're a rocket scientist. That don't impress me much." Out in the world people try to impress me with their status, their achievements, their fame, their money, their smarts, and they expect me to show them reverence. I live by principles before personalities, as stated in Tradition Twelve.

I'd rather see what kind of person someone is. If they have good values, if they live by their word, if they walk the walk (not just talk the talk), if they are kind and willing to help out, if they do their share of the voluntary work: these are what matter. We don't earn a seat on the speaker circuit or on Intergroup because we are a "big wig" out in the world or because we own half the town. We do service with humility, and we are glad God saw us fit to use us in His work to help our fellows.

In twelve step programs we get to live by our principles of honesty, hope, faith, courage, integrity, willingness, humility, self-discipline, love, perseverance, spiritual awareness, service, unity, trust, open-mindedness, responsibility, acceptance, equality, fellowship, and other good principles. We live with a beautiful foundation in which nepotism has no place. We do not vote on important issues the same way our friends or sponsors vote simply to please them. We stick to our own conscience. We live in a way that we can look ourselves in the eyes and feel good about our actions.

Years ago, I heard an anecdote. In a meeting, a man shared, "This is blue, has always been blue and will always be blue, and that's what I believe." Another man shared, "this is red, will always be red, and that's what I believe." After they both had shared, they sat for a while. One of them got up, turned to the other, and said, "I'm getting another coffee, do you want one, too?" This may not happen outside our fellowship, but because we practice the twelfth tradition, we can get someone a coffee, even if they believe the direct opposite of us.

One evening at my book group meeting the pre-meeting discussion turned to our political leader at the time. One of the ladies mentioned that she thought this leader was great. I mentioned that I thought the leader was the worst we had ever had. There was a deathly silence in the room. Then, I looked at her and said: "And it's fine with me that you like this leader, I love you just the same." There was an audible sigh of relief in the room. I can love someone even if they believe differently from me, because I love them as a person. Tradition Twelve has given me that. Thank you for letting me share.

*-- from Anylength*

**STORY: EGO**

There is something in me that gets in the way of being what I want to be. I want to be compassionate, fair, loyal, trustworthy, humble and at the same time kind-hearted and having a sense of humor. It is difficult to exactly pin down, but the obstacle seems to be my ego, which comes forward to protect some "inner me" from disappointments, loss, frustration and anger.

My ego has led me to turn away from painful or stressful situations and people, to figuratively try to make them disappear. In so doing, I am left with a residue of resentment and rigidity and a failure to learn from my experiences. That part of me that I am trying to protect is easily hurt and full of self-doubt. This makes me hesitant to reach out for help and companionship. The result has been feelings of weakness and loneliness.

To some, a lack of ego might look like low self-esteem, but actually it is when my ego is in the driver's seat that I am the most vulnerable. What could be seen as a source of strength saps my confidence and poise. So, what to do with this self-defeating "asset"? To wish it away is like trying to tell my history to go away.

Perhaps it must be fed, so that its hungry edge can be appeased; or perhaps it could take a nap, or go on vacation. I once believed that I might starve it into submission, but it always seemed to be lurking in the dark, waiting for a chance to wreck my equanimity. How can I feed ego, without becoming a boor, without becoming arrogant and insensitive? Some philosophies and theologies seem to be telling me to practice starving it into submission. But my hungry ego still sits in my darker side, seemingly waiting for a chance to get out and wreck my equanimity. From a practical point of view, these philosophies are not easily grasped or practiced, and failure to feed the beast leaves an unsatisfied hunger that won't go away.

The Twelve Steps did not tame my ego directly, but the call for giving up willfulness and allowing a Higher Power to provide solutions paved the way for humility, which has acted as an antidote to my ego. Taking and sharing my inventory has helped my guilt to lose its edge. A newfound humility and acceptance of my past has soothed my ego back into its shell, probably still lying in wait, but lacking the power to take over. Only by reaching out to nurture active, intimate, authentic relationships can I reliably get out of my self-centeredness to see the infinitely small scale of my existence. Then there is room for my jokes and self-mockery. And that's a good start.

*--from Tisa*

**STORYLINE REFERENCE LIST**

STORYLINE is developing a list to create a comprehensive and extensive list of references on workaholism, and we encourage input from our readership. These items have not been recommended as conference approved literature, and they are not endorsed by WAWSO or Workaholics Anonymous. However, individual members are invited to refer to them according to their personal and professional interests.

**Work Addiction and Work Anorexia Reference List**

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*Workaholics Anonymous Book of Discovery*

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Sussman, S., Lisha, N., & Griffiths, M. (2011, March). Prevalence of the addictions: A problem of the majority or the minority? *Evaluation & the Health Professions, 34(1), 3-56.* doi: 10.1777/0163278710380124

### **MEDIA SPOTLIGHT**

<http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2013/12/23/indonesian-ad-industry-under-scrutiny-workaholic-death>

"Indonesian ad industry under scrutiny for 'workaholic' death"; and a January 2014 article in Huffington Post "Workaholics May Face Poor Physical And Mental Well-Being, Study Suggests".

[http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2014-01-28/features/sc-fam-0128-work-and-love-20140128\\_1\\_disorder-first-study-children](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2014-01-28/features/sc-fam-0128-work-and-love-20140128_1_disorder-first-study-children)

Addicted to work, at the cost of love  
Chicago Tribune, 28 January 2014

<http://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/life/when-a-passion-for-work-careers-into-an-addiction-20140125-31ext.html>

When passion for work careers into an addiction  
Sydney Morning Herald, 26 January 2014

TO OUR READERS: Have you read about workaholism in the news? Send us articles and links that are of interest to you.

#### CALL FOR BOOK REVIEWS

Readers are invited to submit a review of any book of interest to our readers. The review might be about two paragraphs.

#### **ANNOUNCEMENT: NEW ONLINE WA MEETING**

##### **Topic: Recovery through the Steps**

We will initially work through the questions for Steps One through Three using the questions from the WA yellow and blue books. If you need to boost your recovery or want to finally get started with your step work, this is a group that will intensively focus on just the first three steps.

This new meeting is a great place to connect with others who are serious about their step work, want to share it with others and/or to find new recovery buddies. Whether you work through the questions just in the group or also send your writing to your sponsor is up to you. Either way your participation in the group will kick-start or re-start your recovery.

As the meeting will start on a Wednesday, the posts occur on the Wednesday of each week. This posting schedule balances two other email meetings which post on Sundays, enabling those participants to continue with their existing meetings and also plug into more recovery actions midweek.

This meeting intends to comply fully with WA traditions. We have set up a sound structure with at least two owners/moderators. We are open for more moderators to join us who can participate in the welcoming of new members and/or posting on a rotational basis.

You can join here: [http://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/WA-Recovery\\_through\\_the\\_Steps/info](http://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/WA-Recovery_through_the_Steps/info) (click Join Group) or alternatively via email:

Subscribe: [wa-recovery\\_through\\_the\\_steps-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:wa-recovery_through_the_steps-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

For questions or to contribute thoughts about the format, please contact me directly at [anylength@optusnet.com.au](mailto:anylength@optusnet.com.au). We would love to hear from you with any feedback you might have.

#### **ANNOUNCEMENT: ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

##### **WA ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

**July 31-August 3, 2014**

**Serra Retreat Center**

**Malibu, California**

*for more information:*

**[www.workaholics-anonymous.org](http://www.workaholics-anonymous.org)**

**ANNOUNCEMENT AND INVITATION: NEW MEDITATION BOOK**

The W.A.W.S.O. Literature Committee is creating a meditations book. We would like all the meditations to come from the fellowship, so . . . **We need your help!**

All members are welcome to write and submit meditations for publication. These can be submitted individually, or as a group. Consider having a writing play day for your home group. Not only would this activity provide opportunities for reflection and meditation, but it would also allow group members to make contributions to a book that will serve the needs of the whole fellowship.

A suggested meeting format for writing meditations is available at the WA website. For more details about submitting meditations, please visit: <http://www.workaholics-anonymous.org/page.php?page=bookofmeditations>

Also, a suggested meeting format for writing meditations is available at the WA website at: <http://www.workaholics-anonymous.org/pdf/MeetingTypes.pdf>

We look forward to receiving your meditations!!  
Have fun with us!!

Your trusted servants,  
W.A.W.S.O. Literature Committee

**EDITOR'S COMMENTS**

Storyline is the quarterly newsletter of Workaholics Anonymous, published in order to share our experience, strength and hope with each other, and to announce information about our fellowship. We are grateful for all the submissions for this issue, including thoughtful pieces on service and sponsorship.

Storyline is created by all of us. We welcome shares, stories, commentaries, quotes, and poems...anything that we can reproduce. Peggy, from Australia, has joined our staff and has contributed great new ideas. Notice that in this issue we have added: A STORYLINE REFERENCE LIST, MEDIA SPOTLIGHT, and a CALL FOR BOOK REVIEWS. We invite you to contribute to these sections and participate in expanding STORYLINE.

Send your contributions for future editions to: [storyline@workaholics-anonymous.org](mailto:storyline@workaholics-anonymous.org), with STORYLINE in the subject line.

--Shelley, Chicago

## STORYLINE: OUR MISSION

- To produce a quarterly publication of news about WA in a way that serves as an example of balance between service and our program.
- To provide a space for people of the fellowship to share their experience, strength and hope with the broader membership.
- To provide real stories from real people to those in our fellowship who do not have access to a local meeting.
- To bridge the gap between the fellowship and the WA Board, and aid in replenishing the Board with new members as the trustees' terms run out.

STORY LINE invites WA members to share their experience, strength and hope with the WA fellowship around the world. Each of us has something to share that can help another workaholic to abstain from compulsive working. Please send your submittals by email to: **storyline@workaholics-anonymous.org**, with **SL** in the SUBJECT LINE. Include your contact information and please also let us know if we can include your first name as author. Your contribution will make this publication more alive, while improving your recovery by helping others.

*Note that materials submitted are assumed to be intended for publication, are subject to editing to provide conformity for the newsletter. They become the property of WAWSO, which may publish them in any format in any Workaholics Anonymous literature. The tentative deadline for submissions for our next issue is: May 15, 2014.*

### **Workaholics Anonymous World Service Organization**

**PO Box 289 Menlo Park CA 94026**

**Telephone: 510-273-9253**

**[www.workaholics-anonymous.org](http://www.workaholics-anonymous.org) [storyline@workaholics-anonymous.org](mailto:storyline@workaholics-anonymous.org)**



