

STORYLINE

From Workaholics Anonymous

SUMMER 2012



“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 OF LETTING GO: LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

A short time after I attended my first WA meeting, I started to strategize as to how to change my life. As usual, I went at it willfully, planning some structural changes, such as avoiding making mental lists of the next day's tasks before going to sleep, and not deciding just what came first until after breakfast. These changes gave me hope that change is attainable.

A few months later, I was invited to go on a camping trip with my daughter, her husband, and their two boys to the San Juan Islands off British Columbia, Canada. In line with my willful notions but informed by my WA meetings, I decided that I would adopt a new role for the week, and no longer be the father who was the decider and the planner.

So, when we got to our first stop, instead of setting up the tents, gathering the firewood, and starting dinner, I got a folding chair and sat down. As I watched, it became clear that the others knew what they were doing and that they were quite capable of handling the tasks. It was a strange experience, as though I was not there, but, rather, looking at a movie of the scene. It wasn't that uncomfortable, but I did feel odd. They didn't acknowledge or even seem to notice that I was being different.

The next day, I stuck to the new role. I helped a little, but was no longer the boss in my old way. I abstained from deciding where to camp, what to have for dinner, what time, etc. I felt ill at ease, perhaps obsolete, and a little sad. On the fourth or fifth evening, as I sat in my chair, I suddenly realized that tears were welling over and running down my cheeks. I thought that was strange: was I renewing the mourning of the death of my first wife? the prior alienation between me and my oldest daughter? the closing of my lifelong business? These events were real, but none of these seemed to be the cause. A couple of evenings later, a thought came to me: my transformation felt like the loss of an old and steady friend on whom I could always count, someone who could always cheer me up, and make me feel okay.

I knew I had a choice: to resume being in charge, working most of the time, versus living with this new sadness. I decided that the sadness wasn't so bad. It was a new experience, and I thought it might lead to a break in my long-standing addiction. I could always go back to the old way if it didn't work out. In the weeks ahead, the sadness abated. I began to feel for almost the first time how it felt to be an equal member of the group, instead of the employer who was always on the lookout for problems ahead, and the director in charge of every meeting, and the father who needed to have all the answers. The empty hole left by what I had given up gradually became smaller. I sensed that I had turned a corner, and I had begun to see light at the end of the tunnel.

--a member in WA

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. Here are some shares transcribed from members who have shared on emails and at meetings. The names may have been changed, to protect anonymity.

SHARING: FROM JANET

My dad used to tell me that he worried about me because I never seemed to have any fun. He was right--even when I thought I was having fun, I wasn't. It's weird, but I think that my whole life, I've always thought for some reason I had to do everything the hard way, that life was supposed to be tough or something.

So most notably, most recently, I've stayed in a job that I've absolutely detested. I've cried on my way to work, I've cried on my way home from work... and still worked 50-60 hours in slavish devotion (or so it seemed to me) to my employer. I've lost friends over my workaholicism, become distant from my family. For the last six years in my current job, and to a lesser extent in other jobs before this one.

I've been in therapy for about four years, off and on, and I'm happy to say that I think I've finally been able to break away from a lot of the bad habits and behaviors I used to have. I finally went to my boss and asked for a demotion to a lower level position in the city where my mom is, and while I think my boss is REALLY mad at me for it, she let me do it. So I've bought a tiny cheap house--for cash--in that city, am renting out my house here, and by doing that, I've kind of divorced myself, too, of that fear that if I lose my job I won't have any place to live or have any money. My biggest fear has always been that I will be a bag lady living on the street unless I continued to work really, really hard. Now that I have a paid-for house (a foreclosure sale that my higher power brought-- literally the price of a mid-sized car), as long as I can pay the taxes every year, I'm good. I have calculated that my worst-case scenario budget would be based on \$12K a year. There's something really freeing--for me--in experiencing that piece of security.

The hardest part was telling people that I was taking a lower level position. My pride and ego were SO involved!! I was incredibly surprised by the support I found in others for my decision. They told me that life is more important than my job, that I'd be fine, that I'd probably be happier, and they understood my decision. Such relief I feel!! Part of my disease, I think, is constantly worrying what "they" will think. I think I'm finally figuring out that "they" really don't care what I do!

I'm excited to be starting my new life and my new job, in my tiny new house. I'm planning my fun. Swimming is something that gives me great joy, and there are three lovely pools near my new house where I can swim. I'm planning to join a bike club to take advantage of the bike trails in the city. And I'm going to be near the dog park that I love to take my dogs to, and where I meet friends, and I'm going to cultivate those friendships more.

My therapist has encouraged me to have a plan for fun and for life outside of work, and I've enjoyed planning what I'm going to do. I'm going to try to incorporate more fun into my life, to listen to music more, to say "yes" to opportunities that come along, instead of saying "I have to work," or "I have this big project I should finish...." which is the way the workaholic in me always responds.

I wish you peace-- and fun!-- in your recovery. --Janet

SHARING: LAURA M

My dad retired several times before he finally really stopped doing paid work. Now he does free consultation and keeps a very full schedule. He tells me that people are grateful to him for his help, but that it helps him more than it helps them, because it gives his life relevance. While I like helping people, I hate the idea that my life is only relevant if I'm working, and if I'm being useful to others. I want to feel that my life has relevance, even if all I do is sit at home, crochet and visit with my pets.

I think my workaholism is not quite as motivated by this need to be relevant as it is by my need to be liked and respected by other people. I grew up with very low self-esteem and have depended on others to give me praise and make me feel like I was worth something. Hmmm, that actually sounds a lot like relevance - being worth something because of the admiration of others. I'll have to think about that more. I am now better about giving myself praise and love than I used to be, and about accepting and believing it when I say it! That's the hard part ;-). However, I still seek out praise, and much of the time I do this by overextending.

I also have a tendency to be a caretaker. I'll find someone who wants a lot of attention and I'll give and give and give. After a while, when I get nothing back (or feel that I've gotten nothing back), I get angry and resentful, and I feel used. This is true even when I have gone to that person to offer help. I have expectations of what I should get back, but I don't say them. Sometimes I'm not even conscious of them at the time.

I feel like I had a really big breakthrough recently on Step Three, and have been doing a better job of stepping out of the way and trusting that life will be good and that I will get good results, even if I don't control every little bit of my life, and even if I am not perfect. As I've been living with this change, I believe I've been seeing some of the changes that I have been wanting for years. (I had thought the changes would come from working on Step Six.)

I thought I'd turned my will and my life over to the care of a higher power, but I was still running my recovery as if I were the one who could decide what results I could get and when I could get them. It's amazing to have felt so stuck and frustrated, then to relax one day, and see some of the results I've been wishing for emerge in my life effortlessly, and without my doing anything, except getting out of the way!!!!

--Laura M.

PRAYER: NURTURE

nurture
my secret parts
and steady me for growth
and change through the steps of WA.
as my hidden parts emerge
and integrate
I grow.

--a member in WA

STORY : A PROBLEM WITH SEVERAL LAYERS

From early childhood, I have had to deal with the symptoms of attention deficit disorder: trying to do too many things at once, failing to focus or even pay attention while my mind was occupied with many other thoughts, interrupting others when my ideas pressed to be expressed, driven into almost constant action. As an adult, I still experience these challenges.

There are some striking similarities between these symptoms and those indicated in the WA “twenty questions.” Do I underestimate how long a project will take and then rush to complete it? YES. Do I believe that it is okay to work long hours if I love what I am doing? YES. Do I get more excited about work than about family or anything else? YES. The answers were all affirmative.

Studies suggest that attention deficit disorder (ADD) is hereditary, passed on by a cluster of genes that can show up in different ways in different individuals even of the same family. My family has six people with ADD over three generations, and we all show traits in some common, such as the inability to concentrate, agitation, difficulty in focusing and an almost constant need for action. Scientists believe that the disorder does not go away as we age, but it can be mitigated by various strategies, such as making lists of things that need doing and learning to prioritize, counting to ten before interrupting, making and keeping a time schedule, and finishing one project before starting another. Notice the similarity to our WA Tools.

Many people with ADD find that intense work allows them to at least somewhat relax their inner tension, and get some sense of relief from the constant distraction and inability to perform. Cocaine and other drugs can produce similar effects, and like, intense working, are easily addictive. Years ago I added another method: intense concentration that could block out distractions. As the only way I could be relieved of my agitation, this gradually became compulsive, a variant of compulsive working.

One of the problems for people with ADD is low self-esteem, which starts in childhood as an inability to follow the rules at home and at school. Work, highly praised in our society, offers a way to get the adulation that reduces the inner turmoil. This can create an all too easy progression from a child with attention deficit disorder to a workaholic adult.

Current scientific thinking indicates that behavior becomes “hard wired” when it is repeated over and over again. As with Pavlov’s famous dogs who salivated at the sound of the dinner bell, the behavior becomes fixed. This perhaps becomes the foundation for the addictive process, as it becomes progressively more ingrained each time it is repeated. These pathways cannot be removed by willpower; rather, they lose their grip in part by *not* being used with the passage of time. With longstanding abstinence, new neuronal channels grow, allowing for new behaviors to emerge. WA tools offer the opportunity to practice alternative ways of perceiving and responding to old stimuli; eventually new ways of living become established. In the WA program, we think of the change as “one step at a time,” as we relinquish the old hard-wiring running of our lives, while instituting new behaviors.

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STORY: A PROBLEM WITH SEVERAL LAYERS

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For a long time, I wanted to be more relaxed and present for people, to have fun, but without giving up my attention deficit disorder-workaholic behaviors. When finally I admitted that my life was not getting better by willfully, forcefully repeating my longstanding controlling behaviors, I experienced a deep sense of relief. Step One in the Twelve Steps of WA has allowed me start to give up an old "me," and to begin to experience *acceptance of who I am*. My stubborn nature, developed to cope initially with my attention deficit disorder and later with my work addiction, had imprisoned me and my spirituality behind a locked door. The Steps of WA, while practicing the tools of WA, have given me a key to this door, leading me to surrender my willfulness, and to the change in my attitudes and behavior I needed for achieving the serenity I experience today.

--a member in WA

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!**

Workaholics Anonymous Meditation Book

Call for contributions

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

STORY: HIGHER POWER LEADING BEFORE, TO, AND IN RECOVERY

As I reflect on my seventy-some years of life, I see that a higher power has always been guiding and supporting me fully, although I did not recognize it at the time. I was highly influenced by my workaholic parents teaching me to be self-sufficient from a very early age. My physical needs for clothing, food, and shelter were met. My spiritual needs may have been partially met through being raised Roman Catholic; however, because my emotional needs were never met, my feelings became frozen. One key unmet emotional need was the absence of playmates. Twelve years ago my higher power showed me this lack of playmates of my own age, when I was emotionally ready to experience the sadness and loss.

I was born into a life of rural America, which I came to loathe. As mother often said, "There was no 'farm boy' in me, I was a 'city boy'"; today I recognize that I was a fish out of water. I did receive encouragement from my third grade teacher who told me I could be whatever I wanted; this affirmation changed me from a C-student to a near A-student for the rest of my academic years.

Loathing the farm and having been bullied in my childhood, I sought to get away from those around me. To avoid High School Freshman Initiation Day, I thought about suicide and running away. My higher power gave me another idea: a desire to go into the seminary to become a Roman Catholic priest. I made known my interest in the Roman Catholic priesthood and, to my mother's delight, was accepted for my high school freshman year, and went away to the monastery about 170 miles from the farm. Because of medical reasons I finished my last three years of high school in the farm area. On leaving the seminary for the summer, I was told that if I dated I couldn't come back to the seminary, which impacted my interactions with my other classmates. I desired to become a priest; however, this not verbalized, and, in my isolation, my classmates thought I wanted to become a secondary education teacher.

Because I never felt wanted or accepted, I poured my energy into academics; my consequent isolation and developing workaholism is reflected in these short quips written in my high school year book:

Jerry seems to have the brains,
He gets his lessons without any pains,
No matter if it is rain or shine.
He likes to enter contests any old time.

Jerry when will you get your nose out of the books?? The girls might appreciate it.

My high school years laid the groundwork for my career in the physical sciences, where mental activity was paramount over interacting with others. Having fought to go to college, I went with the idea of becoming a secondary education teacher. I started with two majors, one in mathematics and the other in a physics/chemistry combination. To fulfill my desire to become a priest, I took two years from these studies to go back to the monastery, until my higher power indicated that this was not my calling, resulting in a feeling of a great burden lifted off me. Returning to my undergraduate studies, I found math relatively easy, and I switched to a major in physics. Thinking that I would like to get a Ph.D. in chemical physics, a new field at that time, I completed the undergraduate entrance requirements: a major in mathematics, physics or chemistry and a minor in each of the other two. Finishing at mid-year, I felt discouraged about going on to graduate school. With my low self-confidence, I was concerned I couldn't pass the graduate entrance qualifying exams. However, I later did get my masters of science in physics. Because of my heavy load of coursework, working to support myself through college (and later to pay back my loans), and already being a loner, I never developed close friends or confidants, and I continued the life style of a loner into my adult life.

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STORY: HIGHER POWER LEADING BEFORE, TO, AND IN RECOVERY*(continued from page 6)*

I made my decisions by myself and lived with them. Having learned that only the decisions of which others approved mattered rather than what I wanted or needed, sometimes I developed resentments against myself for not standing my ground and for people-pleasing others. When I entered what was expected to be an intimate relationship, it ultimately was destroyed from my undeveloped emotional and personal relationship skills.

To cope with the need for relationships, I offered to write courses or assist in ways to develop others in their knowledge. This often meant that I was very active outside of a normal work day, which significantly increased my stress levels, until my body revolted with different forms of psychosomatic illnesses. I would stop for a while, but I always fell back into this pattern. I continued this overworking into my retirement years.

As I was going through some old papers recently, I found a written admission of my weakness as a workaholic in my class notes for our 25th high school reunion. Nine years later, during a business trip flight, I read an article, "Workaholism, the Respectable Addiction," which motivated me to seek counseling. There, my counselor suggested that my alcohol use was significant, and that I needed to address it before I could be successful in overcoming my workaholism. So twenty years ago I stopped drinking alcohol, which helped to a degree, but, again, I didn't get what I wanted and needed. Having frozen emotions, I was unable to open up sufficiently to experience meaningful help.

My overworking, my resenting myself and my frozen emotions continued through my career and into retirement, until I sensed that I was about to lose everything that I had built up in my contract bridge club, and, more importantly, within myself. It was at this point that I decided that I should become involved with other recovering workaholics. The literature resonated very well with me, and so I began my recovery.

My reliance on my Higher Power grew out of my avocation of studying the *whys* and *wherefores* of the world's many religious systems. One of the tenets is that the Higher Power is master, and I am but a slave to this Higher Power. As I have listened to this Power, I have grown ever increasingly in reliance and trust that this entity has the best for me for spiritual growth and changes for living life on life's terms.

The major breakthrough came when my higher power showed me my emotional abandonment as a young child, and later as an adult. This led to reading the literature in my library that I had started to read, at least in part, nineteen years earlier. Although my recovery has not always followed the suggestions as outlined in the traditional twelve-step programs, I have made great strides in all areas of my life through the guidance of my higher power and using the principles and tools of these programs. For example, using the tool of not adding without subtracting (or even exercising an overall "activity subtraction"), I have been able to commit to serving as World Service Communications Coordinator for the past year, and I am looking forward to a second term.

I continue to develop my relationship with my higher power. Most rewarding has been following my higher power's lead to developing a meaningful relationship with my partner, who is also in other recovery programs, in our retirement years.

--Jerry S.

COMMENTARY: WORKAHOLISM

Because work in moderation is a healthy activity, recognizing the addiction may be difficult. It can be challenging to determine when working is healthy, versus when it is symptomatic of a pathologic process. Various symptoms have been noted, including working an extreme number of hours, difficulty engaging in a personal life and forming healthy relationships, and a general discomfort with and avoidance of non-work activities. The work addict may use layers of justifications for his or her over-focus on work, such as “needing the money,” or “I’ll get fired if I don’t work late.” The pressures are often legitimate as well as socially sanctioned; however, the particular circumstances can become triggers for the onset of the addictive process in a susceptible individual. Work becomes the primary focus for the work addict. These individuals are usually driven by some version of the belief, “If I am not productive, I have no right to exist;” the sense of self worth comes from work.

Recovering workaholics discover that working in healthy ways gives the best overall performance, while working harder and longer significantly decreases the quality if not also the quantity of the work produced. Even with high work demands, the best work usually comes when the subject’s work life is in balance with other aspects of life. Eventually, many recovering workaholics in recovery become capable of significantly enhanced productivity and creativity in their work when they experience supportive and loving relationships with their higher power, themselves and others. Please check the website or write us at StorylineATWA.org (use @ for AT) for more information. --a member in WA

EDITOR’S COMMENT

Storyline is the quarterly newsletter of Workaholics Anonymous, published in order to share our experience, strength and hope with each other through another medium, and to announce information about our fellowship. Please send your submissions for future editions to: storylineATworkaholics-anonymous.org (use @ for AT).

WA has been life-saving for me. My interest in being editor stems from my love of the twelve step programs, my love of writing and editing, and my love of communicating. I am thrilled with the stories that have been submitted for this Summer issue. I am hopeful that Storyline can continue to thrive. I have the vision that a copy of Storyline gets left on someone’s desk at work, and that a workaholic co-worker reads it, and from that, one more person enters recovery. Or that a somewhat discouraged workaholic in early recovery becomes heartened by a story and emboldened to continue with the program. Or, that others experience “a meeting between meetings,” reading an issue and getting what they need.

I feel honored to take up the position of editor, and I very much look forward to reading submissions from our members. I hope you enjoy this edition, and please pass it on to others who may be interested.

--Shelley, Chicago

ANNOUNCING THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE:

The Journey Begins with a Single Step...

Don't postpone wellness...join us on the journey of recovery

Sponsored by: Workaholics Anonymous World Service Organization

September 13-16, 2012

Menucha Retreat Center near Portland, Oregon

Visit a 100-acre sanctuary of conifers & river gorge views in the "ever-changing, renewing stillness." Rest and recuperate in the stunning natural beauty of the Columbia Gorge while taking the journey of recovery with fellow recovering workaholics. The annual international conference of recovery from work addiction features speakers and panels on recovery topics, step study, Recovery 101 for newcomers, abstinence planning, and conducting and writing meditations. Our retreat setting features healthy meals, beautiful surroundings for walking & hiking, fun & fellowship, swimming, volleyball, and a walking labyrinth on site.

Registration

(Registration forms are also available on the WA website : www.workaholics-anonymous.org)

Registration deadline is 8/20/12.

Late registration is subject to availability. Call 512-826-4686 if attempting to register after August 20. Bring your treasured items to donate for the silent auction. Special meals request forms are available on the Menucha website at <http://menucha.org/dining/alternatediet>

1. Contact Information

Name Email Address Phone

2. Registration (circle one)

Early Bird – By July 31st: **\$50** All Other Registration - **\$100**

3. Lodging & Food (circle what applies)

Pre-Conference On-Site **\$115** ; Main Conference On-Site **\$230**

OR Commuter (\$60/Calendar-Day)

Thursday (includes Dinner) \$60 Friday (includes Dinner) \$60 Saturday (Lunch & Dinner) \$75
 Sunday (includes Lunch) \$50; **ADD** Extra Commuter Meals? (\$10 per) # When? Total \$
ADD Special Needs Diets Fee (\$2/meal or \$6/meal-day) \$

Commuter Options

Commuter rates are \$60 per calendar-day for Thursday and for Friday, \$75 for Saturday, and \$50 for Sunday and does not include all meals. Commuter meals included are Thursday night for the pre-conference. Commuter meals for the conference are: Friday dinner, Saturday lunch and dinner, and Sunday lunch. Extra meals can be purchased for \$10. Please note special needs (including vegetarian meals) cost \$2 additional per meal and must be requested by August 20th to ensure accommodation.

OUR MISSION

- To produce a quarterly publication of news about W.A. 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 the next issue is: September 4, 2012.

Workaholics Anonymous World Service Organization

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storylineATworkaholics-anonymous.org (use @ for AT)

