

STORY LINE

from Workaholics Anonymous
January 2012



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

(from The W.A. Preamble, page 3, “Workaholics Anonymous Book of Recovery”)



This is the first issue of our reconfigured WA newsletter. It is now being sent via email at no cost to everyone in the fellowship who has “opted-in” to receive communications from WAWSO (Workaholics Anonymous World Service Organization). We hope you will appreciate our emphasis on real stories from real people, which provides sharing to workaholics who do not have a meeting to attend. Together, we can make this happen only with your participation. Please send your stories to: storyline@workaholics-anonymous.org

WA NEWS

* There were several new meetings started in 2011:

- New Orleans, LA
- Christchurch, New Zealand
- Lublin, Poland
- Seattle, WA
- Osterbro (Copenhagen), Denmark
- South Adelaide, Australia
- Los Angeles, CA
- Vancouver, British Columbia
- Phone meeting: Friday morning (check www.workaholics-anonymous.org for a full list of telephone and voice chat meetings)
- There are also several new catalysts looking to start a meeting (check our website for details)

* Los Angeles has volunteered to host the 2012 WA World Conference. The location is to be the Serra Retreat Center in Malibu (www.serraretreat.com). The dates are October 27-8-9). More detailed information will follow as planning progresses.

* A new WA book is in process: 365 Meditations. All writing is to originate with members of the fellowship. If you would like to contribute, contact: literature "AT" workaholics-anonymous.org

* We are moving ahead with development of our website. An analysis of our needs is being completed with the goal of seeking competitive bids on this work.

* WA is considering producing PSA's (Public Service Announcements), which can be used free of cost on Radio and TV. If any of you have experience or interest in this development, contact us: WSO@workaholics-anonymous.org

* We are hoping to have a second annual 7th Tradition fund raising effort in the spring to finance the various expansion plans of WAWSO.



Stories from members of our fellowship

Reflections on One Year (as of Nov-16-2011)

When I got to my first WA meeting a year and two months ago, it was clear that something needed to change. My marriage was on the verge of breaking-up, I was losing my mind trying to complete an over-stretched daily to-do list and juggling a full-time career with raising a young child while moving into a new home. From morning to late at night, my days were an endless treadmill. There was no respite. I would come back home after a full day at work, get some dinner, and head right back to my home office to check tasks of my list.

I felt that the responsibility of holding together my family fell solely on me, and had little trust in my spouse's ability or willingness to play his part. He, in turn, reciprocated by resenting my "love affair" with the computer and the long hours I spent online during evenings and weekends. I righteously responded that I was "doing this for the family's sake" and because "someone had to do it." I had the same excuse ready to shoot back to him on weekends, when he asked why I could not just relax and sit down for a minute instead of constantly doing something: washing dishes, raking leaves, polishing furniture, emptying the dishwasher.

My denial was so thick that I couldn't see my powerlessness over my need for constant activity and achievement. I was acutely aware of the unmanageability of my life, and especially saddened by the unraveling of my marriage and the isolation I found myself in at work, logging hours away in a dark, windowless, office which I hated almost as much as I hated my job and the politics of my organization.

I had no problem introducing myself as a workaholic at my first meeting. I immediately saw the recovery in long-time abstinent members, who had successfully set boundaries at work and created time to thrive in their personal lives. Yes, I wanted what they had!

Step 1 was not overly difficult. It was obvious to me that some of my behaviors around work and activity were causing the unmanageability of my life, such as routinely "time-debting": borrowing from my work or sleep time to complete my personal to-do list. A first, and strong, bottom line for me was to stop doing personal business on my work time.

It took me longer to establish a night time routine which did not involve logging on the computer after dinner. But I have now succeeded in letting go of the compulsion to accomplish in the evenings and get "caught up."

There is still tremendous fear and trepidation at seeing items pile up on my to-do list. Knowing the third, fourth, and fifth order consequences of yielding to the compulsion of the computer after dinner, I abstain, sit tight, and pray to God that everything will turn out OK. More recently, I fired my to-do list as my Higher Power. I use instead a daily plan of action which takes into account my needs for health and personal recovery, and includes a stop time for activity at 9:30p. Establishing strong boundaries at work is an ongoing challenge. I am slowly learning to ask for help from my Higher Power, whom I choose to call God (or Goddess). This humble call for help usually takes the form of sitting in meditation and prayer for 5-10 minutes in the morning. On days when I do so, the rest of the day seems more bearable. My compulsions over food, work, activity, and worry are lessened. I am less controlling and manipulating with co-workers, and less afraid to come out of hiding and be who I am at work.

(continues on page 4)

This summer, God gave me a beautiful, new, sunlit office. I am forever grateful for this gift, and I try to treat my work space as a sacred space – a space where I would not be ashamed to invite my HP to visit. This means I keep it clean, organized, and free of clutter. My soul still feels depleted at the end of the work day, but at least I am able to come home and let it go. Other gifts of my first year of recovery: my marriage is thriving again; my sleep has been restored; my nails and skins are wonderfully healthy; and even though I still lose hair, I trust that if I continue this program, this too shall be restored.

I have learned that we all have the same amount of time – rich or poor, smart or stupid, gifted or slow. And that “time stuffing” (multitasking) does not work.

I practice the tool of substituting. As a result, I do much less than I used to. And the fear is constant (of losing my job, getting a bad performance review, upsetting people by not doing things for them). I am still too new to recovery to fully trust that I will be OK doing less. So far though, I have been OK, and nothing horrible has happened. In some instances, such as planning date nights and buying Christmas gifts, my husband has picked up the slack.

I try every day to remember Step 1 - that I am powerless over work and my life has become unmanageable. This helps me a lot when the temptation to forge ahead through my action plan and “get it all done” rears its head (and it does so often). Most times, I am able to let it go, and hold on instead to what I truly want: a life of meaning and purpose, and of being rather than doing.

- from H., recovering WA in DC.



Now visible

I often continue with thinking and behaviors that I am trying to change, but if there were an easy way to make the necessary changes, I would already have made them. There is a phenomenon that when an optician shines a bright light obliquely into my eye, I suddenly can see the capillaries that feed the retina, which I did not see before. When I asked why, it was explained that the brain filters out this scrim as it has decided that this is useless information. My brain was making this decision on its own. A way of putting this is that I only see what I want to see and am unable to perceive the rest. This applies to looking at my problems. Merely "willing" to see does not make a difference, I need to get a new perspective. I believe that in life new ways of seeing happen when I am not applying will and logic, but leave myself open to something else (Higher Power? intuition? free association? luck?: take your pick). When I entered WA, the Steps felt challenging but I took them on, sensing that I needed to struggle with each Step in order to make it meaningful for me. Out of this struggle, new ways of seeing appeared that I had been blind to but now have become visible.

- from a member of our fellowship



My name is June

My name is June and I am a workaholic.” I first made that statement on June 11th, 2010. I can't say it was exactly a relief, but it was the beginning of a series of recognitions. Why did I go to a WA meeting now? I have been a member of another 12 step program for over 30 years and have benefited greatly from it. I honestly thought I had gotten as close to my “core” addiction as could reasonably be expected. I counted my blessings and they were many. I had experienced many of the promises. The need for the WA program came totally out of left field. After having a series of jobs over the years, (though never longer than four years at a time due to having children or moving or going to school), I finally landed a job five minutes from my house. It was in a field I greatly believed in and that used a lot of my talents from those previous jobs, and had a decent salary. I thought I had it made and put my “commuting time” in at work, staying up to 10-12 hrs/day on occasion, something I had never done before in a job.

After a few years if I had been honest with myself, I would have noticed that the initial joy I felt in the job had faded, but that kind of thinking was not yet on my radar screen. The job was demanding and as a “coordinator” with very little direct supervision I could do as much as I wanted (rarely was it as little, I was a “good” girl, honest to a fault). Another member was added to the team, a very high energy person who started taking over some of my functions, all with hazy directions from her manager. At first I was just thankful for the help, but when someone said to me, “Oh, has so and so taken over your job?” the jealousy started and the self-doubts escalated. I knew I couldn't do what she did (I was much more fearful) and I knew I couldn't work any harder, but my pride was stung. This continued for over a year and I vacillated back and forth, trying to use my program to get some peace about the situation. I talked about the “heaviness” I felt from my job at my regular meetings and finally one day a woman said to me, “Why don't you try Workaholics Anonymous?” I had never heard of it. I went to the website and saw only four meetings in the entire state, one of them on a Friday night an hour drive away. That is the first meeting I attended. Because I was tired and the rush hour traffic to get to the Friday night meeting was daunting, I tried phone meetings. But I found the phone meetings hard to connect with because I was basically shy. Realizing I was not progressing, I did two things right, got a sponsor whom I met that first Friday night and explored starting a new face-to-face meeting. My sponsor had to check with her sponsor to make sure another commitment was a good idea, a novel idea to me. She also warned me that I couldn't force not being a workaholic and that changes would come from the inside as I grew. I heard her, but went along in my usual get things done fashion, not knowing any other way to proceed.

The more I read the literature and talked with her I realized to my dismay not only had I been a workaholic or had no limits (as a student) since elementary school, but that I owned the other side of the coin as well, the procrastination/work avoidance side. These were not welcome realizations or the fact that I had been so blind for so many years. In my other program I had been a young “success,” avoiding years of dysfunction compared to others I saw around me, or so I thought. Now I knew that 1) accomplishing things meant too much to me because of how I felt about myself from a very early age, 2) adrenalizing as a source of pleasure was a life-long activity, 3) I was not supposed to go around feeling the weight of the world on my shoulders, and 4) procrastination was a significant issue for me.

I recently had major surgery and have been forced to recuperate at home for six weeks (still doing it). I find that I am tripping over myself again and again, realizing I have to slow down even more, take things a minute at a time, and learn to guard my energy for survival. I have not been able to attend the meeting I helped start and grow, now in its 11th month, thankfully continuing without me.

Yesterday I read the story in *The Book of Recovery* about the doctor who had to stop work for six weeks after injuring his shoulder and how hard it was for him. Sigh. I have people not in WA telling me what a great opportunity this time off can be for me, that before I was always charging around, walking (while I talked on my cell phone), and setting up activities for me and other people. Part of me agrees with this assessment, but then I say no I have changed! But have I really learned to accept the gift of rest? All I do know is that timing is everything, before this past year I would not have been open to the program because I had not hurt enough. Now that statement seems so ludicrous, I have been hurting from these excesses since a child. I also deeply know how grateful I am for this reprieve from myself and hope and trust that with the program I can continue to grow with only the sky being the limit.

- from June Z.



Dear Dad

[This is a letter I wrote to my father, long after his death. Before I found WA and the 12 Steps, I could not have seen the need, had the awakening, nor imagined the healing that I experienced by writing this.]

Dear Dad,

There was always a gap between us. I was hyper and emotional; you were quiet and the only emotion I remember was occasional anger. In short, we did not resonate together. An early memory is watching Bob [my older brother] and you playing catch with a hardball and gloves in our back yard. There was no question of my participating: I couldn't throw and I couldn't catch. I felt left out. Although I knew you "loved" me, I seemed to be constantly getting on your nerves. I gradually developed a mindset where I didn't want to depend on you for attention or affection. It seems to me that you were afraid for me, that my sensitivity and compulsive expression of feelings would be a disability in my life. I was only nine years old when we had the fire in our house and Richard [my younger brother] died. I thought I should have saved him and was deeply disturbed with guilt and shame. I know you felt the trauma too, but no one in our family ever talked about it. I was all alone and felt that I could not depend on anyone for help. Still, our relationship was not without warmth. Sometimes, on Sunday mornings, I remember you would come into my room in your bathrobe, sit on the side of my bed and put an arm around me. No words were needed, and as I grew up, the exchange of words only got us in trouble. Our being together was not hostile, only cautious and withdrawn.

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Now I want to tell you about a much later time. I left home to go to college and later moved out West To help start a cooperative community. I was sure you would not understand what was driving me and selfishly didn't try to explain, which had been a pattern over the years. About this time, Bob [my brother] announced he was getting married. Suddenly, it hit me that this was actually an important shift; that if the family loyalties and feelings were to survive it would be up to the two of us in the long run. I wrote Bob a letter saying this and expressing that I felt that although I was loved, I was not respected nor understood. Notice, that I had not given you guys much of a chance to understand me. Bob showed you my letter and you were shocked. Shocked, that I seemed to question your love or the central importance of family. You then wrote me a six-page letter, which I still have, and which has surfaced in my life on three very separate occasions over sixty years, with my understanding of it changing vastly each time I read it.

When you wrote, I was 22 years old, I was teaching myself the craft of woodworking and the skill of business 2000 miles from home and was totally absorbed in it. When I read your letter that first time, I was unable to hear the main message of your love and longing for a better relationship. I felt you were trying to draw me back into the fold and into my constant fight with what I felt would never fit me. In the letter, you suggested that when I came home for the wedding, I stay for a few weeks so we could get to know each other better, make up for lost time. I think I read the letter once and put it down as too much to deal with just then. I did go home for the wedding and returned westward almost immediately afterward. I was outward bound and didn't have the stomach for looking into what I felt was a lost cause.

Many years later, I found your letter again. Chrissie [my wife of 43 years] had just died and in a box of her personal things, I found the letter, long after your death. I was astounded that she had kept this letter, somehow knowing that it was essential for me to understand. I looked at it with dread. It was too late. It was too painful, especially in the state of grief I was experiencing. I tried to read it, and was overcome by feelings of loss, the loss of my wife and the loss of my father. In that state, I still could not let it in, would not let it in. I had the excuse of Chrissie's death, but I was still turning away from accepting your reaching out to me and ashamed of my indifference. Although I read the letter, I still couldn't take it in. It was more than I could handle.

17 years later, just a few weeks ago, I was clearing out a room in preparation for painting, when I re-discovered the box with your letter. This time, I pounced on the letter and really read it. It was like a body blow to see how out of touch I had been before, how I had been insulating myself from self-discovery and healing. Now I saw how much you had understood me and how you regretted your painful reluctance to reach out sooner. The love you expressed was like a flood. I was overcome with loss that we had never hugged and wept together. I was able to piece together your own rough childhood and connect to the culture of reserve that had been formed by the many generations of oppression your family had experienced in Russia. I wept for you. I wept for us.

Eight years ago, I found Workaholics Anonymous and discovered what was keeping me from making peace between us. First, I needed to admit I had been powerless to change and second to abandon using will to try to solve all my problems. I needed to develop a concept of a Higher Power, and then to start cleaning out the rat's nest of guilt, shame, and resentments in my attic. Only by following these steps was I able to slow down, pay attention and allow compassion to rise in me. I became able to read your letter, and actually get what you were saying. Your emotions had been bottled up for all your life and you had been unable to express them and I had been blind. This was an awakening, very sad but beautiful.

Looking back, the three readings of that letter let me see how I had grown in an openness that had been lacking in me. I had been blinded by my pell-mell rush through life and had suffered from a cold refusal to look deeper into myself. I had developed an addiction to work to avoid acknowledging the hurt and resentments I was carrying. My first step was to slow down and notice the things I had been missing: family, friends, my own body and the burden I had been carrying. At the same time, I became willing to experience the feelings of loss and pain from which I had been hiding. I had to face the shame of being an equal party in our failure to become close. Now I am in a place where I could be the son you wanted and you the father that I wanted. It is too late, but not too late to cleanse the wounds so that healing can happen inside me. I can't speak to you except this way, but I hope, late in the game, to show this new way of being to my family, my friends and everyone I meet.

Thankfully,

Your Son

- from a member of our fellowship



Tradition 12: Anonymity

Writing and sharing my thoughts with others is reverential activity. Before I begin I ask God to keep my writing Honest, Pure, Unselfish and Loving. The 12 Steps help us gain personal recovery. But, the Twelve Traditions help us get along with each other in a group, thus creating unity. We humans have many qualities. To name four, we are Hierarchical, Territorial, Ritualistic and Deceitful. These four (4) qualities are controlled by the "Reptilian Brain" the million year old part of our brain. It acts to ensure our survival. Now what does the above statement have to do with Anonymity?

Often, Anonymity is defined as you must keep in confidence what you see and hear at the meetings. Others believe that we must not promote the Workaholics Anonymous program in the media. But, when I came into the 12 Steps Program 18 years ago I believed that it meant that when I speak of my experience, strength and hope that I not include my occupation. This belief was reinforced by others at the meetings. At the time I had retired from a high status and high profile occupation. For me to keep my mouth shut about what I did for a living, meant that I was being silent about who I thought I was as a person. Feelings of invisibility and averageness overcame me. The exceptional person I thought I was disappeared. I did not want to be average Jane. I had specifically chosen my occupation to stand out in the crowd, to be special. To not have my clothes on. Imagine my shock and dismay when I accepted that definition. It was an extremely humbling experience to not have the trappings of my ego or "my clothes." I often was tempted to strut into a meeting and announce proudly that I was the Superintendent of Dog Catchers at the local pound. I wanted to remind people often of my prestigious title, accomplishments, awards and honors. Now mind you, I may not be able to leave my Rolls Royce, Maserati or souped-up BMW at the door of the meeting, but I forced myself to walk in (continues on page 9)

humbly and leave my “clothes” at the door. My “clothes” provided me with false pride. You may say, how can this be done in a Workaholics Anonymous meeting? Isn't the problem our work? In the first page of the Book of Discovery, the problem is multifaceted. By being engulfed by false-pride feelings of superiority, inferiority, exceptionalism, inflated self-esteem or low self-esteem plagued me. Even though Anonymity is seen as the spiritual foundation for all our Traditions, it was supposed to bring me Humility. Both humility and spirituality eluded me.

Once I worked in a hospital where the janitors/custodians, cafeteria workers were treated very well by the doctors, nurses & hospital administrators. They were treated like gold. I found out later that the reason for this was because many of these people came from homes where their parents were janitors/custodians and maids. It was an egalitarian environment where everyone was treated equally in respect to social, political & economic affairs.

Wouldn't it be nice if every Workaholics Anonymous meeting promoted Anonymity and got rid of the hierarchal trappings of our job titles. A welcoming environment would result where egalitarian principles dominated. My belief is that true humility as expressed in the concept of Anonymity means you do not gossip about others and you also do not gossip about your false self, just being present at the meetings. It is possible to talk principles and not let the personalities get in the way. As per the 3rd Step Prayer we are to be relieved from the “bondage of self.” That means the bondage of our false self, which leads to false pride which distances people. We owe to the newcomer to foster a more egalitarian environment where they feel welcome no matter what their station in life. My interpretation of Anonymity 18 years ago caused me to painfully keep my false self at bay and attempt to fit in to a world where I was just another average member of the meeting. Titles aside, I was able to grow as a human being.

Tradition Twelve

“And finally, we of Alcoholics Anonymous believe that the principle of anonymity has an immense spiritual significance. It reminds us that we are to place principles before personalities; that we are actually to practice a genuine humility. This to the end that our great blessings may never spoil us; that we shall forever live in thankful contemplation of Him who presides over us all.”

Long form - written in 1946 (page 565 AA Big Book)

- from Monica B.



From the Austin Conference

One of the most helpful experiences of the WA World Conference was hearing the particular tools, practices, and top and bottom lines that have helped other WA's to recover. That inspired me to share a couple of mine through this newsletter:
(continues on page 10)

When I began the WA program, exhausted from poor sleeping (days too long and nights too short) my sponsor iterated sleep as a physical and mental health priority. My first bottom line was six hours of sleep; eight was my top line. This felt so good and necessary that nine hours have become my standard. I enjoy naps too! It helps “legitimize” the hours in bed, knowing my sponsor would be applauding. I now consider sleep not as an optional indulgence but instead, as a wise, kind way to cultivate time not focused on productivity.

A tool I developed with my sponsor is that I email her early each workday. I report Whether I’ve meditated, prayed and surrendered my day, which ensures that I do these valuable, recovery-affirming practices. Then I let HP dictate my G.O.D. (Good Orderly Direction) for the day. I list tasks, plans and priorities in the email. This gives me the gift of clarity and relieves ricocheting around like a pinball.

Growing awareness of when I’m in the disease and when I’m in recovery, as well as listening in meetings to others’ processes and successes helps me develop tools and practices with the support of my sponsor and the guidance of HP.

- from Carolyn V.



From your Editor

Dear WA members,

In the October WA newsletter, I announced that this would be the last newsletter for which I had full responsibility. The time has now arrived for me to give this up. I have been editor for over two years and have found it fulfilling to be of service, and gratifying to feel closer to the fellowship. I have also become aware that with workaholics, when someone takes on a job, others tend to back away. After all, one of our problems is that we are too quick to say “yes”; we are prone to becoming overcommitted. This has left the WA organization short of involved people. I have hoped to bring new life into our publication with the revamped design and mission of emphasizing stories and by sending it to over 1000 of the WA fellowship at no cost. I also hope that reaching this larger audience will elicit more written contributions. But the publication needs to stand on its own two feet. If it is really of value, others must step up, as I am stepping down. I strongly believe that the best way to avoid the traps we set for ourselves as workaholics is to **ask for help**. We tend to be loners, who think we can work better alone, and be more productive.

I believe that putting together this publication can be done in a less workaholic way by a team who can rotate or share the duties. Here are some ways that that the jobs can be parceled out:

1. One person could be the reporter: finding out about new meetings, what new literature is being planned or any other new developments.
2. One person could network with the fellowship at large to encourage submission of stories.

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3. One person could take care of the database, adding new names to the mailing list and screening email bounces.
4. One person could be the assembler/editor, who puts the actual text together.
5. Another person could do proofreading.
6. Another could act as intermediary to the WA Board.

In this way, the actual time required from each would be minimal, in that STORY LINE is produced only quarterly. Any and all who want STORY LINE to survive by offering to participate in its production are welcome. I am willing to stay on as a mentor, but not as a solo operator. If you are willing, please contact me: [storyline"AT"workaholics-anonymous.org](mailto:storyline)

Sincerely,

Harry W.

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STORY LINE invites WA members to share your experience, strength and hope, as well as JOKES with the WA fellowship around the world. Each of us has something to share that can help another workaholic to abstain from compulsive working one more day. Please send your submittals by email to: [storyline "AT" workaholics-anonymous.org](mailto:storyline). Include your contact information and let us know if you would like your first name and initial included as author. Your contribution will make this publication more alive and improve your recovery by helping others. Please submit your materials before March 20th.

Note that materials submitted are assumed to be intended for publication, are subject to editing and become the property of WAWSO, which may publish them in any format in any Workaholics Anonymous literature.

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