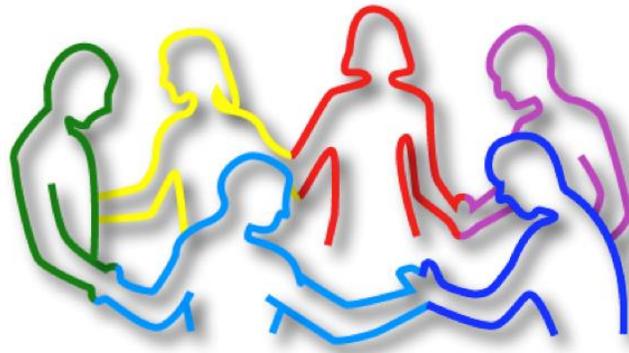


STORYLINE

From Workaholics Anonymous
MARCH APRIL MAY
2016



“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: WE ARE MORE THAN OUR JOB

About 10 years ago I moved to a new city. I had impressive credentials and could not believe it was taking so long to get a job! I took all the steps I knew to take and was not getting any offers.

I got really depressed being home so much, as I really like the structure of work. A program friend suggested I make myself a schedule for each day, just to add some structure, for job searching, phone calls, exercise, etc. I remember standing on the edge of town at night, looking out over the city and wondering where my new job would be. I would pray, 'Lead me where you need me, God, and I will follow.'

I took a temp job, that I thought was 'below' me. I did some data entry at a senior center and met some nice people. It gave me something to do. I did some contract work. I started feeling better. I did some volunteer work at my church and that felt better. I walked my dog every morning. I went to a networking event, which was uncomfortable, but I went

I learned more about how to market myself. I saw an ad about a company's project and called for an information interview. It turned out, the owner needed help with his website and marketing his company. I was there for about six months and was laid off. I've now been with my current employer since nine years. I've worked in three different departments. Thank you for the reminder to be grateful for what I have, even though I grumble at times!

I recommend that you give yourself credit for every little thing that you do. Put up a poster and add stickers for each thing. Reward yourself for milestone accomplishments. Read books. Take a class. Get out there and meet people.

Be patient and love yourself anyway. You are more than your job.

-- from Linda

SHARING: NEW INFORMATION FROM SOMEWHERE OUTSIDE MYSELF

What keeps us from changing our inappropriate and faulty attitudes and behaviors? The Twelve Steps teach that it is not a lack of will. In fact, our will gets in the way of making changes. When we try to make changes through will, we draw on the exact old methods we used to get us where we are.

Recently, during a careful eye examination the technician shone a bright light into my eye from the side in order to inspect my retina. When this was happening, I suddenly saw a tracery resembling the veins of a leaf. I asked what this was and was told that this was a light source I was not used to, so I was able to see the pattern of capillaries feeding the retina. I asked why I was unable to see this pattern in ordinary circumstances. The answer is that my brain is totally used to this phenomenon and filters it out as useless information.

This leads me to understand that I only see what my brain wants me to see. This is an impediment to learning new things, where my brain seeks what is understandable, what fits in with the existing framework of my perceptions. When I am seeking to adopt new ways of being in my life, merely being “willing” to see new alternatives does not make them visible.

In order to get a new perspective on my problems and to find new solutions, something has to enter from outside. When I cease trying to make changes through will alone, I open a door that had been tightly closed just a crack, and allow something new to enter. This can be seen as a Higher Power, intuition or an inner guide that was not perceptible before. In any case, it is clear that the new view comes from “elsewhere”, from outside my regular consciousness.

--from Harry W.

SHARING: NEW TOOLS

FROM THE AUTHOR: The “Tools” of WA have been very helpful to me. They are practical, down to earth ways to aid in managing an otherwise compulsive life. Since finding WA years ago, I have also found some other tools that have been particularly useful in levering me out of persistent attitudes and behavior.

1.

Don't repeat old unsuccessful strategies. We tend to try the same thing over and over, thinking that this time it will work. This is our willfulness getting in the way, which is what got us into overworking in the first place. If we can stop trying so hard, giving space for a higher power to come to the rescue, we will discover new attitudes and patience that will lead us toward the serenity we seek.

2.

Get a new look at our problem by making some structural changes. Change the location of the desk, the timing of routines, our facial expression when we look in the mirror. These are changes that are easy to make as a first step toward recovery. This can give our brains a chance to look at things differently. What we need is a fresh take on our problems and shortcomings which are often just in a rut.

3.

Make the problem a friend, not an enemy. By building a wall between ourselves and our problem, we lose the opportunity to learn from it. It can be painful or depressing to bring it out into the light of day, but by accepting it and bringing it closer, we detoxify it and lower our fear. This way we can move beyond it and get on with our lives.

4.

Slow down and pay attention. When we are rushing to get results, measuring our output to justify our existence, we lose track of the things that matter most, including time with family and friends, constructive

feedback from associates and the rest we need to feel serenity. When we really pay attention to others and abandon the myth of multitasking, we can offer ourselves and others a window into who we really are.

5.

We must give ourselves praise for even small improvements in our outlook and our behavior. By focusing on our shortcomings we become rigid and unable to be creative, compassionate and forgiving. When we notice only our failings, we are deepening our habits and increasing our low sense of self worth. When we celebrate even small successes, we are breaking old habits and adding to our recovery.

6.

Pay careful attention to inner feelings, they can tell us things that our brainpower cannot. These messages are not in words and communicate with us in ways that our verbal and matter-of-fact brains can miss. Workaholics are often overly rational and miss important information. We struggle with problems worrying and hesitating, but when we finally see our way clear, we find that our feelings had arrived there long before.

7.

Gaining self-esteem is a two handed game. We cannot repair low self-esteem in isolation. Self-esteem comes from being trusted and accepted by those we respect. Only by earning and receiving trust do we come to believe we are truly OK. "If you want self-esteem, do esteemable things." Receiving praise and rewards that are not offered truthfully leave us only more aware of our isolation. "People pleasing" is a fruitless effort, as we are seldom appreciated for the right reasons or in the right amount. Many of us are seeking to fill an inner void of isolation by working long hours and trying to avoid being judged but this draws us away from the very thing we need.

8.

Get close to nature. In nature there are no workaholics. Rain or shine

we can benefit by getting away from the hot buttons that turn on our workaholism. Here we can find harmony and renewal that does not struggle to stop time. By concentrating on the very act of breathing we get into a rhythm that clearly exists only in the here and now.

9.

Get connected. Reach out to friends and family. Making new friends enlarges our knowledge of humanity and ourselves. We find we are not alone. The long history of mankind shows that starting with very primitive societies, loneliness is seen as unhealthy. Human beings are social animals. When we see a smiling baby, only a few days old, it is obvious that we are built to relate to each other.

10.

Write a mission statement. This is a way to re-think our core values. This is commonly used by businesses to help in measuring choices, to sort out conflicting goals and to set standards for success. For individuals it can be helpful in clarifying how to use the Serenity Prayer and in setting our borders and the extent of our compassion.

11.

We need to ask ourselves: “Is this the way I want to spend the rest of my life?” Each day is the first day of the future, but with our nose to the grindstone, it is easy to forget that today is precious. We pretend that “there is plenty of time” to change course, to start repairing relationships, and to stop seeing life as a job. Procrastination is a terrible waste of our time on earth. Acknowledging our mortality brings the need for change into action.

--Harry W.

SHARING: SIGNPOST ONE

Signpost 1: We find it hard to love and accept ourselves. Work has become our means of gaining approval, finding our identity, and justifying our existence.

I am amazed at how deeply this signpost has been ingrained within me. Not only has my identity been all wrapped up around work, I've had strict ideas of *what kind of work* was "good enough" to justify my existence. If my work did not help me help people, then that type of work did not count. I really have had to explore the many facets of this signpost in my WA recovery.

Sometimes I have to repeat to myself over and over again: "Work is NOT my identity. Work does NOT determine my value. I have value simply because I exist, and because I am a human being." When my identity is my work, whenever I receive some feedback or critique that I judge as negative, my entire being is being judged harshly, not just those actions that the other person targets. That is another healthy reason to let go of this association.

I've branched out into a new arena of my small business in the past few months. This has meant my continually getting many new clients. Most are very happy with my work. I've been surprised to find others who have been displeased with my work. That has been difficult to accept. With this latest situation, a good friend kept reminding me to NOT take the judgment personally. The problem was usually a mere difference of opinion. That has helped. Being in this new stage of my career has meant being more vulnerable and taking more chances. Having people displeased with my work is part of the normal process. Remembering that helps me, too, in not taking negative feedback personally. I also employ the slogan: "Take what you like and leave the rest." That reminds me that I am the one who determines what fits for me and what does not. The phrase also helps me see what lessons may be in each situation. For instance, recently the client wanted a refund. Even though we had already discussed that issue and I had told her, "no refunds," I do want to leave on a good note so we reached a compromised. One of my lessons is that I will develop a refund policy and most likely post it on my website.

I am dealing with this issue in a new, more personal way right now. My

husband had emergency surgery two weeks ago. He was in the hospital for 10 days. He is home now with some outside care (for example, a nurse stops by each day to attend to his incision, and a physical therapist was here yesterday). That will end in a week or two but then we have 6 more months of intensive, follow up treatments.

We've only been married for three years and this is my first marriage. I'm still kind of finding my way and my identity as a wife. Part of the stereotype in my head is that in order to be a good wife, I must do EVERYTHING to help my husband. I must be in control of it all.

Well, that's crazy. At first, I realize I was afraid my in-laws would judge me harshly if I didn't do everything perfectly. I was allowing my identity to be caught up in this unrealistic idea. Actually, my in-laws have done the exact opposite. They keep asking me how I am and they keep reminding me to take care of myself. That is such a gift!

Friends keep reminding me to do the same, plus they keep offering to help out. I actually did do too much that first week and then ended up at home, sick, with a bad cold. Fortunately, I recovered from that sooner than I usually do, but I can still feel that it will come back quickly if I don't care for myself, especially in getting enough sleep and drinking adequate water.

In all this, I am realizing, once again, that I AM not the perfect wife: there is no such thing. I am Tisa and I am the wife my husband chose and married. I am surrounded by people who love me as I am, NOT for what I can do for them. It is a strength, not a weakness, to be NOT in control, to NOT try to do it all, and TO ask for and receive help.

Thanks for listening/reading. Love and blessings to you,

-from Tisa

SHARING: SIGNPOST TEN

Signpost 10: “We tend to be over-serious and responsible. All activity must be purposeful. We find it hard to relax and just be; we feel guilty and restless when not working. Because we often work at our play, we rarely experience re-creation and renewal. We neglect our sense of humor and rarely enjoy the healing power of laughter”.

This is a good description of what I was and can still be. I know over-responsibility well. I have taken responsibility for all the people in my life. I needed to avoid conflict, because I believed that conflict created separation and abandonment. That was in the past. I needed to take care of everyone and attempt to please them. I had created a “false self” and I believed it was truly me. Today I know it was not the real me I had created; I believe I needed that false self in order to survive.

Now I try to let go of this “over-responsibility.” It kept me procrastinating and not doing what I needed to do. I try to take one day at a time and to listen to my true self and to my body. I practice the WA recovery program.

I no longer see everything as a life or death issue, and I no longer try to control the results of everything I do. I relax when I need to. I no longer keep working all day long, which I did in order to hide. I live now for “the right purpose.” I play and try to not turn my play into work. In my daily action plan, I include things to laugh about and my laughter helps me a lot.

-Love in Fellowship

-from Helene

SHARING: I AM STARTING TO WORK THE STEPS

Hello! I am new here and to 12 step programs, and just a few months into a local WA meeting. I am here starting to work the steps because I am a workaholic. For me that means:

- * I think of work as my "purpose" in life
- * I am constantly feeling stressed, including physical symptoms of tense shoulders and sometimes a cramped stomach
- * I am somewhat obsessed with status in my field and what others think of me
- * I am obsessed with efficiency
- * I generally can't relax and enjoy weekends, evenings, or vacations, feeling I don't "deserve" them
- * I am a perfectionist
- * I am constantly telling myself that I'm in trouble, and I need to work more
- * My stress often spills over into irritability and poor treatment of loved ones, which, at its worst, borders on emotional abuse
- * I have very little gratitude, despite having a rich life and a lot to be grateful for (such as health, loving friends and family, an interesting job, and financial stability)
- * I have a strong desire to stand out in my field and believe that I could stand out if only I worked harder
- * When I'm not beating myself up, I feel "unique" and perhaps indispensable, thinking I am blessed with special gifts and insight that few others in my field possess
- * Hobbies that I have put significant effort into (such as playing piano, dancing, and games) lose their joy as I start comparing myself to others, feeling bad about not being "better" at them than I am
- * I rarely can sit still, and there is always something I "should" do

* My work strategy for success was always to work much harder and longer than everyone else, which I can't really keep up like I used to, especially with a family

As a young person I felt disliked and out of place. I learned that I could escape this experience and get positive attention by diving into tasks and mastering things. I think that's a big part of how I ended up like this.

These issues are all very deeply ingrained in my life. Despite the shame surrounding many of the things mentioned above, I sometimes wonder and fear about who I would "be" if I were not like this, and that I would lose my identity. From this sort of self talk I realize, with some sadness, that part of me doesn't even want to be relieved of this. At some deep level I am afraid that not "standing out" will translate into a lack of friendship and love in my life.

My previous attempts to fix myself have not solved the problem (such as yoga, meditation, therapy, and forced limits on time I spend working), although they may have helped somewhat.

My main concern and fear with WA is that it might not work, and that I'll put a big effort into it and still have all these problems. That said, my experiences so far with the program seem to be having a positive effect.

--from Steve

SHARING: LETTERS TO MY CHARACTER TRAITS

Per one sponsor's suggestion, Andrew wrote up letters to some of his character defects to say good-bye. Perhaps this will inspire other STORYLINE readers to work STEP SIX in this way. Please submit your letters to STORYLINE.

EGO: Ego, you are no longer welcome. I'll let you back in a little bit if you behave and stay in the backseat. Your childish behavior has become a major obstacle. I know I can't operate completely without you, as you've been around as long as I have, but you are not welcome in the driver's seat. Relax back there and I'll leave you alone.

MR. CONTOLLER: Mr. Controller, get off at the next stop! I don't need the fare you pay and your incessant demands are not producing the life I am looking for. Your instructions were often contradictory and way too bossy. I'm glad to have you off my back.

MS. WORRY: Goodbye Ms. Worry. I have found that your efforts never saved me from anything, as you were always looking for the wrong things so problems came along anyway. You have become excess baggage. I'll take my chances with accepting what life reveals to me.

MONSIEUR RUSHING: Adieu, Monsieur Rushing. Speed has not brought more satisfactions and has detracted from enjoyment of the present. Your foot on the pedal has been way too heavy and I've missed too much as I sped by. I was running out of fuel anyway.

LONELINESS AND ISOLATION: So long Loneliness and Isolation, I have some new pals. You made it too easy to work beyond health

and reason. I've now been meeting some amazing people and have no use for you anymore.

FALSE HUMILITY: Goodbye False Humility! You and I used to play a game of disguised pride and it even fooled me. The game was to forgive behavior in others that I couldn't stand to see in myself. I finally discovered that this is actually arrogance, as though I could be perfect while others were merely mortal humans who sometimes make mistakes. Without you, I can forgive my own humanity.

SELF-CENTEREDNESS: Farewell Self-centeredness. What a boring picture, viewing and reviewing my problems, frustrations and disappointments. I've learned to lift my head and look around and have found a marvelous landscape. You are no longer the blinders that kept me from seeing the sunshine.

COMPASSION: Hello Compassion! Where were you hanging out all those years? Thanks for waiting for me to wake up to experience forgiveness and empathy. I didn't have to do anything to let you in, I just opened the door a crack, that's all that was needed.

--from Andrew

NOTE RE REFERENCE SUGGESTIONS: Please contact us at sjschicago@juno.com with WORK ADDICTION REFERENCES in the subject line if you would like reference suggestions for special purposes.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *These meditations have been submitted to appear in our new meditation book. Perhaps you would write a meditation and submit it to the Committee (please see the invitation on page 12) or to STORYLINE.*

MEDITATION: LIVING IN THE NOW

We realize we are where our higher power wants us to be - in the here and now.

My feelings were in turmoil. I felt misjudged, disbelieved and unacknowledged from all directions. I was unable to see through the turmoil to know what was proportionate or what were flawed perceptions due to lack of sleep, what I could change, and what I was powerless over.

So I sat by the sea. I looked up at the infinite expanse of the sky. I watched the flowing, evolving beauty of the clouds. I let the light reflecting off the water sparkle across my vision. I felt the breeze, gentle on my skin and heard the rhythmic, endless sound of the waves. And I could feel the earth, constant beneath me.

As I let my awareness drift into the beauty and magnitude of my surroundings, I remembered my Higher Power knows who I am, and will bring me through any turbulence.

A conscious connection with the infinite can wondrously transform my experience of the here and now.

--from Morrie

MEDITATION: SPONSORSHIP

Sponsorship is a valuable and essential part of the WA program, both for the sponsor and the sponsee. Does this mean we should agree to sponsor whenever we are given the opportunity? The more sponsorship, the better?

Just like the rest of our recovery, sponsorship works best when carried out in a balanced way. Leading by example is generally more effective than a lot of advice.

So, when asked to sponsor, we could truly 'practice these principles in all our affairs' and ask some questions. How often will we talk, or meet? What are the expectations or needs of the sponsee? How negotiable are these? How will we use the tool of substitution in this instance?

When we take the time to ask these questions, and then consult with our sponsor, our friends, and our Higher Power about making a commitment-- whether the answer is yes or no-- we will have carried the message of recovery by example.

--from Morrie

MEDITATION: REST

Rest is the most important 'activity' we do. Most workaholics either discount or ignore rest.

As part of my workaholism, I have discounted or ignored rest. Although I knew I had a physical need for sleep, I believed rest to be blank and empty time, waiting to be filled. I treated it that way, cramming more activity into any rest time, so that I could get more done.

This left me with a continual feeling of living my life with my soul lagging several days behind me, wondering what on earth was going on.

So now I rest.

Sometimes, if the rest is overdue, I feel the sensation of recent events replaying through my consciousness as I wait for my soul to catch up. It is not always comfortable, but I welcome this chance for integration.

And then, finally, I am whole again.

I am fully present in my moment, with my mind, body and soul. And life becomes richer and more joyful.

--from Morrie

MEDITATION: CONSTANT CONTACT

[We] sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact...

Prayer and meditation can be a great comfort to us, and be invaluable in preparing ourselves for a day out in the world, where we may often encounter some quite painful and distressing defects of character - both other people's and our own.

We can go inside ourselves and connect with that strong, centered part of ourselves, the part that is secure in our own value and in the love of our higher power.

Connecting to a higher power, letting our higher power fill us, not only to protect us from this situation or that person's issues, but because that is a blessed and glorious way to be, can be a very strong, pure and healing prayer.

Higher power, please help me to shift my focus away from my fears, and on to Your all-encompassing presence.

--from Morrie

EDITOR'S COMMENTARY

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 welcome shares, stories, commentaries, quotes from our literature, and poems: anything we can reproduce. Please submit what you have to share and encourage others to do so as well. Send us your own work, and if you see something you like in your email group written by someone else, please secure permission from the author and send it in or include their email address. Send contributions for to: storyline@workaholics-anonymous.org, with STORYLINE in the subject line.

We are grateful that some new features are becoming standard in our newsletter: Stories, Sharing, Letters to our Character Traits, and Meditations. Our creativity abounds, and we hope you will enjoy reading these, and perhaps even become inspired to use them as models for your own writing.

Please know that STORYLINE needs help. We invite not only stories, shares, and other written contributions, but also administrative help editing, assistant editing, proof-reading, and outreach to get more contributions. Let us know if you are available to help with any of these or with other tasks of your choosing. We truly support any abstinence that is part of your sobriety, but note that reading the submissions and collaborating with others enhances my recovery. I find working on STORYLINE to be interesting, creative, and gratifying.

-Shelley, Chicago

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For STORYLINE: Shelley storyline@workaholics-anonymous.org

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For literature ordering questions: Sandi fulfillment@workaholics-anonymous.org

For technology matters: Ken technology@workaholics-anonymous.org

General mailbox: wso@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

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, 2016.

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