

STORYLINE

From Workaholics Anonymous

DEC JAN FEB
2016-2017



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

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SHARING: PRAYER TO UNDERSTAND HOW TO BE IN THE PRESENT MOMENT

Good Sunday Morning, my name is Christy and I am a workaholic, new to WA and thirsty for the experience, strength, and hope from others who have suffered from the consequences of living a life consumed with this addiction.

I woke up this morning and TRIED to force myself to abstain from working. But my home office that I have worked very hard (hahahaha, of course I did) to make a happy sunny space calls me to do what I do every Sunday - prepare for work on Monday. I can't help myself and now here I am on my computer.

But sitting here, I feel frozen. I am now fearful of work and fearful I will not be able to work again, both at the same time. I have been taking a lot of time off, which just shifts undue burdens onto my staff, some of which they cannot cover because of my workaholic tendency to do too many things myself and not make sure there are written procedures. I mean, of course no one else can do it nearly as perfectly as I do, right? And who has time to write things down when they can be saving the world instead? And then I remembered the slogan: We don't have time to not have time.

The reality is that I heaped so much on myself that I haven't been doing anything right and now everyone around me is suffering because of that, professionally and personally. And since I now see myself as a failure here, I just want to be somewhere else, where I can do some good and regain my superhero-ness.

PRAYER:

Today I ask the group and my Higher Power to help me begin to understand how to be present in the moment, in order to complete everyday tasks at hand thoroughly and accurately, in order to be able to share those tasks/experiences with others, and in order to savor the experiences for the accomplishments and personal interactions they can be. I ask for help to be able to evaluate the past without being consumed by the guilt of it. And I ask for help to find ways not to worry about what the future may or may not have in store for me, my family, and my community.

--Thank you for allowing me to share on this glorious day.

--Christy

SHARING: POWERLESSNESS

STEP ONE: We admitted we were powerless over compulsive working and that our lives had become unmanageable

Dear W.A. friends,

In working through my Step One writing using the Book of Discovery, I have come to a place where I recognize my powerlessness over my addiction. I have a strong need to share my story with those who understand.

I spent 18 years beating myself into the ground, constantly juggling multiple jobs at once. At the time of my breakdown in 2010 I was working full-time for a company, had started my own business on the side, and was coaching at a local high school. Everything I did, whether cleaning the house, gardening, or getting together with friends, was done compulsively and with a sense of obligation.

My body had been giving me warning signs of my self-abuse (migraines, insomnia, muscle aches, and a myriad of digestive issues) which I tried to suppress with over-the-counter and prescription drugs. One day my body and soul had had enough and I broke down, un-able to stop crying, and unable to function, for days. I contemplated suicide for the first time in my life. Joy had gone out of my life and it was obvious that I could no longer continue with business as usual.

My blessing of a husband recognized the seriousness of my position and helped to change our financial situation so that I could let go of all my jobs except my own business by mid-2011. We even moved to the country to be in a peaceful place. This was a BIG help, and I thought that this would fix EVERYTHING. I thought that through sheer will power I could change the way I operated. As soon as I began to let things go, it was if the weight of the past came crashing down on me all at once. I began having a hard time doing much of anything at all. Getting out of bed in the morning was agonizing. I did manage to work on my business and keep it going for the next year and a half, but it was a half-hearted attempt. Meanwhile, my inner voice was constantly berating myself for being lazy.

Last year I was diagnosed with Adrenal Fatigue, and am now taking cortisol and a host of supplements that help me function (these remedies will eventually heal my adrenals in the long run). Where I find myself now is in a pattern of swinging back and forth between work avoidance and compulsive work. Having realized the destructiveness of my past behavior, I am terrified of falling back into the trap; therefore, I avoid work. I don't trust myself, and with good reason. When I do really get into something I am working on I end up working compulsively and neglecting my needs once again.

It is in this state of wild swings between compulsive working and work anorexia that I have realized my powerlessness over this addiction. After all this time, my own will power has done nothing to get me out of this rut. Perfectionism and the desire for recognition haunt me at every corner. My inner voice berates me constantly for laziness when I do care for myself and work a reasonable number of hours. My desire for quality over quantity is fighting with my desire to show people how fast I can work in order to beat their expectations of me. And yet people's expectations also feel like water threatening to drown me.

I have also realized that it is becoming increasingly difficult to be around friends and family who are workaholic, but are in denial. They really trigger me. It is like a siren song and I feel I either need to compete with them or convince them to change...even though I cannot. I imagine it is not unlike alcoholics in AA dealing with other alcoholics who are in denial. Have any of you experienced this sort of trigger? What do you do? Meanwhile, I am so thankful for W.A. and this safe place to share my experience, and to learn about yours.

--Sherri

SHARING: FROM LONELINESS TO MEETINGS

Signpost 5: Many of us grew up in chaotic homes. Stress and intensity feel normal to us. We seek out these conditions in the workplace. We create crises and get adrenaline highs by overworking to resolve them. Then we suffer withdrawals and become anxious and depressed. Such mood swings destroy our peace of mind.

Friends,

My childhood home was chaotic but mostly a lonely place. Oftentimes, I was home alone as my father worked, drank, caroused and gambled. When he was home sober, he was distant and quiet. My Mom was a workaholic and would never sit still. We would start a game and she would not be able to finish because she had something else to do. The house was extremely tidy, which I liked because she arranged everything for me. But eventually, she worked outside the home. Then she went nearly crazy from coming home to "a mess". She would yell, cuss, and cry. I felt so guilty and ashamed so I would hurry up and clean stuff. Otherwise, I generally stayed by myself.

To beat the feeling of intense loneliness and despair, I stayed active mostly outdoors and would go and go and go from morning till night. I hated going to bed because the dark terrified me, and I hated being really alone, as everyone else seemed to be sleeping. Bedtime still is hard for me. If I give up the day, I fear I will be nothing or realize no body loves me or cares about me --- which was how I felt growing up. Staying active gave me a sense of self.

So now, I am remembering recovery slogans and ideas I hear in meetings. Lately, I have been doing as little as possible in order to keep from doing too much. I have been accepting interruptions as opportunities to grow, and as invitations to practice living in the moment.

--Thanks, Tom

SHARING: WE TEND TO BE OVER-SERIOUS AND RESPONSIBLE

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.

I can definitely relate to this signpost, especially pre-WA recovery. Everything had to be purposeful. The type of work I did was on a scale of "acceptable" vs. "unacceptable." I had strict guidelines that I would only work for organizations that dealt with societal problems. That was commendable, to a point. But then I judged anything else as less valuable, not worthy of my attentions. And then all other aspects of my life, unless it helped me to do my work better, I did not want to engage.

That was such a constant hierarchy of judgment, control, competitiveness, over-responsibility, over-serious, energy draining. I either over-worked or, when feeling out of control and overwhelmed, I withdrew into work aversion. What a roller coaster. As I think back to those days, I get such a sense of gloom and doom.

In contrast, my five years in WA recovery help me feel light and airy and full of energy. Thank HP! I am so grateful for our tools and the support of our program. I am no longer chained to the workaholic attitudes and actions. I have found such strong support from fellow WAers. That has helped tremendously.

I remain amazed at the power of our online meetings. We reach out to each other across globe. Without our current technology, we couldn't do that. Sharing in our meetings and reaching out to recovery buddies by email help me to relax and just be. The shares and reaching out keep me out of denial plus remind me that I am not alone. We are in this together!

The rest of this signpost brings needed reminders about the power and importance of play and laughter. Even though this past week was really tough, due to WA's focus on the importance of these aspects in our lives, I kept a dinner engagement for Friday night. It was good to just relax with my aunt and a family friend. We laughed together. I also heard a lot of laughter throughout the restaurant. A birthday was being celebrated at the table behind us. We joined in when the restaurant staff sang happy birthday. That came on the heels of me recounting a story to our friend about how much my aunt enjoyed her 92nd birthday celebration in May, when the restaurant staff and fellow patrons sang happy birthday. She absolutely beamed and felt like a star! The memories were lovely to bring back to conscious awareness, and they resonated with our current engagement with the fellow patrons on Friday night.

And then after the dinner, my aunt and I went for a short walk. Even though I still had some work tasks to do, a neighbor asked me to stop by. I did so and even stayed an hour to visit. In the past, I would have fretted that entire 60 minutes while obsessing on the work I needed to get done. Having that time with our friend was important. It nurtured the two of us. I felt inspired to actually complete my work tasks when I got home. I am grateful that signpost 10 does not FULLY describe me anymore like it did when I first entered these WA rooms 5 1/2 years ago.

--Thanks for listening/reading!
--Peace and blessings,
--Tisa

SHARING: OUR FEARS LEAVE US

Promise 4: Fears that there won't be enough time, money, or love leave us.

I use a web site of personal development for monitoring my mood everyday. Nine times out of ten, my emotion of the moment is fear. I was shocked to recognize it, but it is the truth. I live in fear and I am used to fear being my normal state, even though most of the time I am not aware of it.

Sometimes when reading the feelings list, words related to fear jump out at me. I feel attracted to those words and my hands start typing about people, places, things that scare me. I need to explore this, as I am in a phase where I am becoming aware of the wreckage that workaholicism has done to my health, and my priority is to take notice and to repair myself before I do anything else.

I used to spend my time in search for 'ideas' for earning money or social status as a 'worker', which I'm currently not, worrying about the day when my parental leave for my fourth child will be over-- next year-- and I will make a decision about 'who I am'. In reality this decision will only be about 'who I am' in the eyes of other people, not mine, because in my disease I already know who I am. I just find it very very difficult as a workaholic to let other people *know* that I am someone that they might appreciate less, someone who doesn't have any ambition of a career or high income, who aims at a simple life that I want to dedicate to my children.

From the society's viewpoint I am not 'productive.' I'm saying this as there is no income for a mother that educates and cares for four children, and no recognition of this kind of activity for retirement not anything else. So choosing this path is for my ego the most painful thing because I fear losing all the recognition and validation that I painfully 'earned' during my education years, staying up all night and learning things I really didn't care about, and losing my health in the process, just so that people would see that I am someone who is valuable. And now I am dropping this false image, this image that is not me, and I am showing myself the way I am, just a mother and wife who does her best? I so much fear that this is not enough, that it doesn't make me enough (for whom? I don't know!) and this is my main fear and what I am struggling with.

I know I shouldn't care about what other people think. I know I shouldn't search for validation in the eyes of other people. I know, I know. But I am an addict, and these fears fuel my addiction. The self-judgment fuels my addiction, the distorted idea I have about values, and also about the fact that I'm the one who controls my life, when in reality my life belongs to the Universe and I don't get to choose, I just follow the plan that has been laid out for me. I am just listening and following the signals. All those false ideas learned in a workaholic home, which I am keeping because they make me adrenalize and my body can get 'its fix.' How tough it is to let them go, because I fear no one will ever appreciate me anymore if I do so.

I am tired of being afraid. But fear is my drug and I see how addicted I am to it. It's very painful. Today I can choose Awareness, hoping that Acceptance and Action will follow in the right time. I am praying for it.

--Gratefully,

--Iléana

SHARING: WHAT HAS CHANGED FOR ME

Every day I have a balanced plan to include time for my activities, my relationships with others, my creative projects, my humor, my spirituality, and my play—still difficult for me!

In the past, I believed that life had to be hard. Today, I think about what I might do that I would like to do or love to do. I feel pleasure more easily now than before.

I used to think only about pleasing others, but today I think about what I want to do to please myself.

I used to need stress to motivate me to do an activity. More and more I find activities I like without being stressed.

When I feel like procrastinating, I look at my action plan; I choose an activity from my plan.

When I notice I am working too quickly, I try to work more slowly. This helps me to keep my adrenaline level not too high.

Today I feel when my adrenaline is kicking in, and I slow down or stop. Sometimes that's difficult but I have noticed it is getting easier.

I see today when my desire for recognition is too high, and I try to lower it, or get help from someone who can give me the recognition I want.

i know that I have used work to avoid my emotional problems. Today, I address my emotional problems and I use the steps and other tools to resolve them.

One of my emotional problems has been my low self-esteem. I can use the slogans "easy does it" and "progress not perfection" to help me feel better about myself.

i don't feel like I am the WORST person anymore so I no longer need to be the BEST person. I am not perfect, but with my tools I am better than I have ever been. I remind myself that we are all human.

i want to live for myself, even when that is difficult.

I still feel anxious and nervous a lot because in my gut I still believe that I do not belong. I think of myself as either the least important person in the room, or else the most important person. Knowing this is what I think is already a good beginning!

---Thanks a lot for reading this,

--Love, Helene

SHARING: MY HOME IS MY HAVEN

Signpost 7: Instead of being a haven, our home is an extension of our workplace. Our family and friends often arrange their time with us around our work, vainly hoping we will finish it and then can be with them.

Actually, most of the time my home is a haven. I've been able to keep it as a place to rest and rejuvenate while trying to keep the outside world at bay. One way I've done that is to NOT get to know my neighbors very well. In the past, I was so overly involved with people in every aspect of my life, I needed a place where I could be a hermit. I rarely invited friends or family to my apartments. We met at their places or out somewhere.

My current living situation is different. One, I am now married so live with my husband (I married late in life and this is my first marriage). Plus, we have a dog. Walking our dog daily has been the catalyst to really get acquainted with our neighbors. At this point in my life (age 55), I am grateful, although every once in awhile I've felt that folks around me know too much about me.

At any rate, our condo complex really does feel like a neighborhood. I am really sad that our immediate neighbor just got told today that she must move out. The owners want to revamp the place and, no doubt, hike the rent. Several of our other close neighbors in the building have moved out for one reason or another in the last 6-12 months. That has actually been hard on me with so many other changes going on in my life. We still have a few folks in our building with whom we are close and we keep in touch with the ones who've moved. I appreciate the nurture of our neighbors, an important part of our home.

With this Signpost, I am also reminded that part of our apartment is my home office. So, at times, it is hard to have a boundary since I am working at home. However, my desk and all my file drawers and books and so on are in a specific part of the living room. When I am not working, I leave that space alone. That really helps. I am doing better about not checking my email incessantly from my smart phone when I am not working.

My father in law from out of town is visiting us this week. That means I have a lot more social time with others than I normally want. I am an introvert and need a certain amount of alone time and time at home. It also means more time with my aunt who joins us for most outings. I love them both and am grateful to be with them. But some days, it is just too much.

I found myself the other day doing just what this Signpost describes: arranging my time with family around my work time. I really wanted to keep on working last Wednesday rather than spend the evening with family, once again. I knew that my clinging to the work was a way to try to cope the stress of the increased social time along with some of the up-

in-the-air status in our lives (e.g., the date for my husband's surgery keeps changing. I think we are on the 3rd date. Hopefully this will be the final one. Sigh). I gently reminded myself about the importance of balance in my life and being able to give my full attention to the visits.

So, I did let go of my work for a few hours and I had a nice supper with my family. I was relieved to get home and back to my work, though. This was not in an addictive or avoiding stance this time, but simply to keep up with my client projects so that I don't procrastinate; I want to keep moving forward at a healthy pace. I am taking time off tomorrow afternoon to go to a movie with my husband and father in law plus, along with my aunt, in the evening we'll go for a drive in the mountains and out for supper. Whatever work tasks I have can be done before and after that planned family time.

--Thanks for listening/reading.

--Peace and blessings,

--Tisa

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, and poems: anything original that we can reproduce. Please submit what you have to share and encourage others to do so as well. Send contributions for to: storyline@workaholics-anonymous.org, with STORYLINE in the subject line.

As before, we are grateful for Harry's contributions and for the contributions from the finding balance email group FindingbalanceWA@yahoogroups.com Many shares are around a promise, signpost or step. We appreciate the honesty, vulnerability, and courage it takes for members to address their challenges and apply the program to their lives. If you are in an email group, please consider sending email shares directly to STORYLINE, storyline@workaholics-anonymous.org, either your shares or shares that others have written with their email address (we will seek their consent for printing), in order that these shares may be included in future issues.

Our distribution list is very long and very international. Some meetings use STORYLINE as literature to read in their meetings. STORYLINE is now bringing recovery to workaholics all over the world.

-Shelley, Chicago

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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: February 15, 2017.

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