



## **ABSTINENCE IN WORKAHOLICS ANONYMOUS**

### **TOP LINES & BOTTOM LINES**

#### **Abstinence**

The W.A. Principles define abstinence in the following way:

**“To abstain from compulsive working, activity, worry, and work avoidance. For many workaholics, abstinence means far more than relief from compulsive working on a physical level.**

**It also means an attitude that comes as a result of surrendering to something greater than ourselves. Abstinence means not only freedom from compulsive working but also freedom from compulsive thinking and worrying. Each of us is free to determine our own way of being abstinent according to personal needs and preferences.”**

Unlike substance addictions where abstinence is clearly defined as the absolute cessation of use of problem mood-changers, work addiction is a process addiction that can take many different forms. We cannot simply label one or more behaviors unacceptable across the board as even the most

common manifestations of the disease may present in ways that are more blatant or subtle depending upon individual circumstances. Further, we have found that it is often the motives, attitudes, and energy that we bring to a particular situation that render our behavior compulsive rather than the nature of the activity itself. How then do we know when we are abstinent versus when we have lapsed into active addiction? Each workaholic must define personalized boundaries and goals for their own recovery. These guidelines then serve as a helpful tool to measure our progress as we work the steps.

## **Bottom Lines**

**Bottom lines define the point where we cross over from abstinence to work addiction.**

The triggers and behaviors that signal active workaholism are different from person to person. The first task in developing our own list of bottom lines is to reflect upon Step One—our powerlessness over the addiction and the chaos it has caused in our lives. We sit quietly and write a list of the unmanageable behaviors that we take or have taken in the past when lost in our disease. It is helpful to then share this exercise with a sponsor or other W.A. member for feedback and support.

The next step is to prioritize the list, picking one or two items from which to define our initial bottom line abstinence. Here are some examples of bottom lines that workaholics have surrendered to:

- I do not work (or do chores or service) more than 6 days per week.
- I do not work more than 45 hours per week.

- I do not start – and will stop – working when I feel hungry, angry, lonely, or tired (H.A.L.T.).
- I do not bring work to the table during meals.
- I do not allow work to encroach upon the time I commit to be with my family.
- I do not rush or drive unsafely, even if I am late.
- I do not blame others for my stress.
- I do not schedule a new commitment without first discussing it with another W.A. member.
- I do not take on a new commitment without giving up an old commitment. (Or, more specifically, I do not take on anything greater than a non-recurring 2- hour commitment without first putting it on a “72-hour hold” – during which time I pray, speak with my sponsor, and create a plan to substitute out something else of equivalent time and energy.)

Bottom lines can also be written in the affirmative to capture baseline behavior that we learn is critical to sustaining our sanity and serenity:

- I sleep at least 7 hours per night.
- I pray and meditate daily.
- I attend a meeting at least once per week.
- I read literature for at least 10 minutes per day.
- I connect with my sponsor at least once per month to go over stepwork.
- I make outreach calls to at least 5 other W.A. members per week.

As the principle of gentleness suggests, we are kind to ourselves and patient in our efforts – knowing that our new way of living requires much practice. Bottom lines signal when our behavior has strayed from healthy to potentially harmful, however, we don't use lapses as excuses to beat ourselves up; rather, we view them as welcome reminders of our human imperfections and the need to continue practicing the steps and using the tools one day at a time. As workaholics, it is important that we not “work” the program with the same blind zeal that brought us to our knees in the first place. We start simply, knowing that we can always add more bottom lines as our awareness grows.

As we create a concept of abstinence with the help of our Higher Power and program friend(s), we strive to set bottom lines that are realistic for us to maintain at the present time.

If we then find that we are consistently unable to honor one of these commitments, we adjust it to better reflect what we can do – knowing that we will continue to make progress with Higher Power's help. Bottom lines should be hallmarks of our success rather than set-ups for failure. Our bottom lines will change over time as we grow spiritually and more becomes possible. We have found that recovery is habit-forming as well: the more we have, the more we will want.

## **Top Lines**

**Top line behaviors represent our goals and visions.**

Top lines are aspirational, giving us a sense of direction and ongoing purpose in the individual recovery process. For example, a workaholic with a bottom line of “I do not work more than 6 days per week” might have a top line of “I will take off 2 days per week.” Our success with bottom lines gives us hope that we will, in time, achieve our top lines.

Eventually, our top lines become bottom lines, and we develop new top lines like “I will take off 3 days per week.” Here are some examples of top lines:

- I will not work more than 9 hours per day or more than 40 hours per week.
- I will take off 2 days in a row per week.
- I will enjoy a day with no to-do list at least once per week.
- I will sleep at least 8 hours per night.
- I will spend a day doing something fun with my children at least once per week.
- I will take an annual vacation that has nothing to do with work of any kind.
- I will eat my meals sitting down in a relaxed manner.
- I will always put my health before my work.

## **Conclusion**

While we workaholics find we have much in common with each other, our precise disease triggers and the behaviors that constitute active addiction may differ. Bottom lines are the markers of abstinence. Top lines are the signposts on our paths toward recovery and freedom from worry. Both are important because they show us where we came from as well as where we hope to be heading. While our bottom lines help free us from pain, our top lines promise joy and fulfillment.

Bottom lines and top lines allow us to create structure within our program of recovery that is tailored to our individual patterns. We follow the direction of our evolving bottom and top lines

with the help of a Higher Power, a sponsor or co-sponsor, a supportive W.A. fellowship, and our own desire for sanity and serenity.

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