



Living in Balance

April 2010 The International Newsletter of Workaholics Anonymous

“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 “The Book of Recovery”)

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REPORTS:

from our Treasurer:

The funds held by the WA-World Service Organization are used to serve the needs of our members. With these funds, we:

- Create and distribute literature
- Build and maintain our website and shopping portal
- Produce and deliver our on-line and paper newsletters
- Organize and run the annual member conference
- Provide outreach services
- Manage a database of the fellowship for communications purposes
- Many other large and small tasks

WA had a slight gain in total assets over the course of 2009 (as opposed to a \$ 3,000. decline in 2008).

WA had a \$ 2000. Increase in donations over the previous year, mostly in individual gifts. 7th tradition donations from meetings declined by about 5%.

This year’s conference brought in \$ 2,800 as opposed to a loss of \$ 570. the previous year.

We also hold about \$ 12,000. in book inventory (at cost). Book sales were \$ 7,470 in 2009, compared to \$ 6,387. the previous year.

We have \$ 12,508. in cash, including a prudent reserve of \$ 1,000.

From our TECH Committee chair:

Before I got involved in our Tech Committee, I thought that all the exposure to this technology I would ever need or use was to understand that it was based on “0’s” and “1’s”. As long as my desktop PC did what I needed when I needed it, I was satisfied. After all, I’d come from my Corona, through the IBM Selectric, up to the Canon with a 46 character by ½ inch screen, to an amazing dummy station networked to a bookcase sized server and two printers; and then even computers with USB ports and OMG, internet!

Five decades of working workaholically had taught me a few useful skills, but none of them lent itself to understanding what’s behind the monitor or in the box. The lifesaving recovery that became my experience in WA, likewise was not based on external hardware or human-developed software. When I sought to volunteer service as a small measure of my gratitude, our World Service Board graciously assured me “it would be fine – even if it wasn’t perfect”.

I’m given this opportunity, one year later, to express my gratitude for the Board’s confidence and support, and to contribute this brief report as chairperson of the WSO WA Technology Committee. I suppose that just like when my computer turns on and works right, it’s a measure of good; when we go to our website and it comes up and allows us to surf, read and order literature, and discover or confirm Meeting information, it’s a measure of wonderful. I wish I could take the credit.

It was through the valued service of the website’s original architect; our Webmaster, all of our Board members, our site host, and other dedicated and knowledgeable volunteers that this year saw a near seamless transition to a more reliable and powerful host, a more accurate and better functioning shopping cart, some almost unnoticeable but necessary cosmetic upgrades, and the presentation of the Book of Discovery “*A Guide to 12 Step Writing & Reflection*” as the newest major WA literature publication since our Book of Recovery. We have sorted out some of the problems people were having with our Registrar’s website forms, and identified (and nearly eliminated) a couple of dark holes where some technology balls had been dropped and lost. Working and Recovering together, we have seen some smoothing in the flow of our efforts and identified some action planned to do’s.

Our Committee always welcomes your feedback, and is grateful for your offers to help. When the 0’s and 1’s are working well (which is almost always) we receive our mail at the Tech Committee mailbox: technology@workaholics-anonymous.org.

Bruce A.

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From the first WA South Conference

Saturday – Sunday, march 20-21. Fifteen workaholics from throughout the South gathered in beautiful Asheville NC to share hope, strength and experience, have fun and discuss creating a WA South Service Board/Intergroup. Two members came from South Carolina, two from Nashville, one each from Charlotte, Raleigh and Edenton (NC) and five from the Asheville Fellowship which was founded after the Durham October WA Conference. One person drove all the way from York ME to attend. Two WA beard members flew in from Austin to participate in and support the gathering. Members who had planned to attend, but couldn’t sent regrets from Atlanta, Richmond, Ohio and Colorado. The idea and energy for the conference began at the October conference on noticing that there were several participants from the South that would’ve liked to have local face to face fellowships but did not have them and that Asheville was central enough to several locations that we could do a shorter conference with less travel time/expense. Five members ended up being the core committee, split up the work of conference and held each other to the theme (as well as workaholics could) of KEEP IT SIMPLE.

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Following a meal and fellowship, Lori led a workshop using Art Therapy techniques with the theme Art as Play. The workshop focused on how art can be used to engage another part of our brain to help us understand workaholism and enhance our recovery even more deeply. During the Art as Play session, we created art that represented us in our disease, and talked about why we thought of it this way and how it represented us (both good and bad). We also went through a non-dominant hand art segment to go deeper into recognizing our Inner Critics, and talked about ways we can use this deeper awareness to overcome the anxiety that many WA's feel when struggling with workaholism. The Art as Play session wrapped up with us sharing intentional compliments and praise with one another in random partnerships, and all of us took home the praise we had received during the session to remind us that we are worthy and valuable, regardless of our productivity levels.

Saturday's first session included a brother giving a first step and members sharing their own experiences. For some this was the first time to hear a WA first step and for all a powerful experience. Next, Meg (Asheville) and Lori (Nashville) led a workshop based on a writing assignment from the **Step 1** in the WA Book of Discovery. With colorful paper and markers, encouraging creativity and freedom, each person had 30 minutes to write "Insane" behaviors, current or past, what were they hoping to achieve and what were the feelings. And also what would be "Sane" behaviors, along with the feelings that come along. Then we used a therapy-based and "InterPlay" related activity to encourage sharing and discussion, where each person focused on their intention and purpose in attending the conference and focused on how their lives would be different when leaving. Each person shared with a partner one of their Insane and planned Sane behaviors, but spoke about the Sane behavior as if it had happened already, and then discussed what helped them to make that change. If the partners were not able to speak about the Sane behavior as if it had already happened, then they were encouraged to speak of the Sane behaviors with intention and purpose for how they were committing to change when returning home.

Following a meal and fellowship, Lori led a workshop on how art can be engage another part of our brain to help us understand our recovery even more deeply. Saturday night ended with Jeff (Asheville) and Meg facilitating an hour of "InterPlay" that had participants laughing while becoming seaweed, fake karate choppers, opera singers, and we created an improvised song at the end on "Play-It's OK!"

Sunday - while some of us got to know each other better (and others used the tool of "rest"), four WA members and one spouse who came to the conference did a Workanon share (and have since had a follow up phone meeting), with plans to continue once a month as well as participate as individuals on the already existing Workanon phone meeting. SWO member Michele (Austin) led a workshop on top and bottom lines. Finally WSO member Drew (Austin) and Steve (Raleigh) lead a workshop/discussion on building fellowships – new ones and ones already existing and finished with discussion of forming a WA-South service board/intergroup. Three people committed to continue the discussion through at least an additional phone meeting, and others said they'd participate as possible. ALL agreed they'd like to do another southern conference in addition to the International Conferences. Several participants gathered at the wonderful Salsa Caribbean restaurant in downtown Asheville as a yummy way to end the conference.

In addition to Lori, Meg, and Steve, Laura/SC and Ruth/Charlotte played major roles in organizing for the conference. We hope to keep you posted on other developments from the South.

From members of the Fellowship:

My name is Chris and I am a workaholic.

This past week, I was able to leave work on-time (within a few minutes of my scheduled end-time) three out of five work days. That is my Higher Power's accomplishment for (and in) me. I am so grateful to be able to take the necessary action of self-care that leaving on time required.

Now I need to watch that I don't fill up that "extra" time with stuff/activity. By the Grace of God, I hope..

from Chris B.

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A funny thing happened to me on the way to group today. I phoned a business associate about some business matter and he said he couldn't meet with me next week because he was going on vacation. I laughed and asked, "you can't go on vacation, can you?" Then he laughed back and said, "I'm just practicing what you've been telling me. I'm just gonna go on vacation and sit and relax."

At that point I realized that while I encourage others to take care of themselves, I had also made a joke out of his taking a vacation. I was sending a conflicting message. But wait. Resting and relaxing is no joke. Perhaps that's why I introduce myself at group the way I do. "Hi, I'm Bruce and I'm a work addict." The word "Workaholic" somehow came to be positive for me, rather than a character defect to ask Higher Power to remove from me.

I've been in recovery now for 18 years, but I frequently find myself powerless, and often back at step one. I've known for many years that I have a problem with work, overwork and activity. For years I was sought out for extra tasks because others knew I would get things done. I just accepted more and more work until I realized one day that this intensity was not a positive thing. In fact while going through just one more crisis in my life, I was also reading Dianne Fassel's "Working Ourselves to Death."

I realized that this "thing" (Work addiction) could and would kill me. To my way of thinking, the word "workaholic" had been mocked, trivialized and popularized to the point that it was almost humorous. But an addiction isn't! I "am" a work addict.

So I began my recovery. While I've often been sent back to square one by the realization that I am powerless, my Higher Power is always right there to encourage me. I can come to group and admit my powerless and no one laughs - especially me!

Even though I realize that overwork is no laughing matter, as recently as this morning I made a joke out of someone taking time off. So now I'm going to leave the computer and rest.

from Bruce F

Thoughts on the 4th Step

When I reached the 4th Step, I felt I was home. I had been struggling with anxiety and guilt much of my life, and I knew it. In my childhood, my parents used shaming instead of punishment, and I quickly learned to save the stress by doing it to myself. When I was 8-1/2 years old, my younger brother died as a result of a fire in our house and I became obsessed with the idea that I should have saved him. I carried that blame for years, which became part of a pattern of secret shame. By the time I was in my teens, I tried cautiously to approach these feelings and events instead of trying to hide from them. Although I was not able to do a complete job of it, I attempted to look at them squarely, sensing that my shame was crippling.

When I first read the 4th Step, it made sense to me right away, and a broad approach was called for, not just attending to the most obvious issues. Thinking back, these things stand out as being unexpectedly helpful:

I began to realize that to avoid feeling shame, I was trying to be perfect and saw that this was a horrible act of arrogance, denying that I was merely a human being like everyone else.

I took this to heart and began to feel a welcome humility. This was new for me, as I had equated humility with humiliation. This was a vast relief, as it allowed me to be relieved of the impossible burden I was trying to carry.

As I moved further into the process, I searched my past and re-found sources of shame that I had been trying to forget. Many of these were minor, but were part of a background of anxiety.

I also came to understand that life often presented me with two bad options, neither of which were positive. In these cases there was no way to come out looking and feeling good. I had been seeking the impossible.

I was able to see that shame was a kind of dark judge hanging over me, making me so cautious with others that I seemed remote and often felt alone.

I saw the need to accept myself, including my character flaws, as the only way I could be genuine and accept love from others as being deserved.

I began to feel cleaner and slowly began to accept that I was not perfect and was capable of making mistakes like all human beings. This did not mean that it was just fine to make errors, but they were not a permanent stain on my character.

I realized that I was so sensitive to criticism (which I experienced as shaming) that I would shut out important information about my effect on others. I was missing chances to learn about myself and others, which could give meaning and direction in my efforts to modify my behavior.

This was, of course, only an internal process and did not make the 5th Step unnecessary. In fact, it made the 5th Step a natural next thing to undertake.

from Harry W.

Notes on Step 5

Remember Step 4, where we made the fearless and moral inventory of ourselves? We found some good stuff and some not so good stuff. The identified “not so good stuff” is really about what blocks us from feeling God’s unconditional love for us. If I don’t feel that from my Creator, how can I feel that about myself and all other human beings? I like to think of Step 4 like this: when I was younger and living in my parents’ house, we would sometimes run late getting the garbage out to the street before the truck came. I remember hearing “Quick, go gather all the garbage in your room and the bathroom and meet me out front... I can hear the garbage truck down the street.” Now. As I viewed the garbage, I had no thought of, “Is this really something I want to get rid of, or shall I hold on to it a bit longer?” Nope, the garbage man was coming to take it away!

So, now we come to Step 5...why do I need to admit to God, to myself and another human being the exact nature of my wrongs? Because this action is the shame buster, the ego buster and is like a sledge hammer to those boulders in the soul that keep out the sunshine of God’s love. All the Steps ask us to go contrary to our natural desires. We are standing at the garbage truck, ready to throw it in, and then are asked to share what we want to throw out with God, ourselves and another human being. Now, I don’t know about you, but I would just as soon keep all that garbage wrapped up tightly, never to see the light of day. But that is not what working this step is about.

The benefits of this Step are quick to manifest in our lives. When we share that deepest, darkest part of ourselves with another, a “safe” other, we break the isolation that we feel. The self-loathing melts away as we realize that: 1) God already knows about it and loves us anyway, 2) the power of hearing our own voices telling our deepest secrets and realizing that if another told us the same things we would not be judging them the way we do ourselves and 3) witnessing the other person listening to us, not running away, not judging and berating us. This is practice for living our lives on the Spiritual Plane of loving acceptance of God’s love for us. When we are filled with that love we can no longer dislike or hate ourselves, or other people. We come to a place of self-acceptance and self love. Our Creator made us in love, as Love and with no blocks inside us we are then channels of love to ourselves, our loved ones and all others in our lives. This is truly living an abundant life of love.

It is wise to find a person you can trust explicitly with whom to share Step 5. This person could be a 12 Step sponsor, a spiritual advisor or a trusted counselor. Your listener may even share a part of themselves which will place you more at ease. Here is a quote from the “Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions” that I have found very valuable:

“Provided you hold back nothing, your sense of relief will mount from minute to minute. The dammed-up emotions of years break out of their confinement, and miraculously vanish as soon as they are exposed. As the pain subsides, a healing tranquility takes its place, and when serenity and humility are so combined, something else of great moment is apt to occur...the presence of God. This feeling of being at one with God and man, this emerging from isolation through the open and honest sharing of our terrible burden of guilt, brings us to a resting place where we may prepare ourselves for the following Steps (6 – 12) toward a full and meaningful sobriety.”

Living the Twelve Steps of Workaholics Anonymous truly gives me a new and beautiful experience of life and love, one day at a time.

From Sandi S.

A TRIBUTE TO CAMILLE (THE CAT)

“What we have once enjoyed, we never lose. All that we love deeply becomes a part of us.”
-Helen Keller

My dear cat Camille died a few months ago, after 15 vibrant years with my husband and I. Her valuable teachings helped me overcome workaholism, make a smooth emotional transition to retirement, and sculpt a new, less stressful lifestyle. When, for example, I'd spend too much time on the computer – or otherwise get worked up about something – she'd insist that we have a snuggle and purr (usually with her under a blanket on my lap). Her steadfast patience and devotion to this ritual taught me about surrendering with grace to the present moment, renewing daily through attention to self-care, and moving forward in life with the gentle strength that can come unexpectedly from peace of mind.

Over the years I developed a meditation practice, and every day Camille would jump up to sit with me. She took it very seriously, and of course was quite good at it herself. When I first began, I had a lot of anxiety while learning to be still. She taught me to accept and relax more with difficult feelings. Now that she's gone, the meditation reminds me of her calmness and kindness; and the serenity I can experience when I offer that to myself – even in the midst of the pain of losing her or uncertainty about the future.

Come to think of it, Camille was a model for many of the WA tools: play, humor, balance, prioritizing, relaxing, nurturing. Her caring and wisdom were treasured gifts. She was a support and fierce advocate for my recovery, and she'll always be with me. And my meditation practice provides a space for connecting with and honoring her -- as well as myself.

from Robyn Y.

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Two workaholics are talking:

- A. My sponsor thinks I need to slow down.
- B. Probably a good idea.
- A. Yes, but I'm going to have to sell my home.
- B. How come?
- A. My house is in the median of the freeway.
- B. Pretty convenient.
- A. **But I have to get out of my driveway at 60 MPH!!!**

Northern California Workaholics Anonymous Conference

Taking Your Recovery to the Next Level

April 17, 2010

Join us for inspiration, sharing, and fellowship at this year's Northern California conference. Our themes will be "Facets of Workaholism" and "Getting and Staying Abstinent." Get help on your abstinence plan and meet other Workaholics Anonymous members!

- Time: 12-6 pm
Location: Galleria Park Hotel, 191 Sutter St. (at Kearny), San Francisco, CA, 94104
(415.781.3060)
Cost: \$20 pre-registration through April 10th; \$25 at the door
Lunch: Please plan to have lunch before the conference; there are many restaurants close by
Dinner: 6:30 pm dinner and fellowship at a nearby restaurant (not included in conference fee; we will ask for individual checks)

Directions to the Galleria Park Hotel:

- BART: Exit Montgomery Station, go north one block on Montgomery to Sutter, left on Sutter one block, hotel is on the left just before Kearny
Caltrain: Transfer in Millbrae to BART
Parking: Sutter Stockton Garage, enter on Stockton between Sutter & Bush, or on Bush between Stockton and Grant; rates 6-7 hrs: \$21, 7-8 hrs: \$24, 8+ hrs: \$26; exit garage and walk 2 blocks East on Sutter, cross Kearny, hotel is on the right
Web site: http://www.jdvhotels.com/hotels/galleria_park

Registration:

Note: No one will be turned away for lack of funds. Please pay by cash or check at your Northern California regional meeting. For instructions on registering by mail or for more information, email sanfrancisco@workaholics-anonymous.org.

Registration Form for Northern California W.A. Conference, 4/17/2010

First name and last initial: _____
Phone number: _____ Email: _____
Pre-registration through April 10: \$20 _____
After April 10: \$25 _____
Method of payment: Cash _____ Check _____
Plan to attend dinner: Yes _____ No _____

Contributing to the WA “Living in Balance” Newsletter

Thank you, members of the fellowship, for your lively contributions to this issue!! This is what makes the newsletter interesting and worthwhile.

WSR’s, please bring this to your meetings and urge members to tell us about their struggles, successes and reflections. The next issue of Living in Balance will focus on “The Tools of Workaholics Anonymous”

Living in balance invites all WA members to submit stories, articles, **jokes** or artwork that share your experience, strength and hope with the WA fellowship around the world. Each of us has something to share that can help another workaholic abstain from compulsive working for one more day. Please send your submittals by email to newsletter@workaholics-anonymous.org or by USPS to WAWSO, PO Box 289, Menlo park, CA 94026. Please include your contact information and let us know if you would like to be included as author (first name and initial). We hope you will contribute your personal stories of your trials and successes in finding balance in your lives. Your contribution will make the newsletter more alive and improve your recovery by helping others. Please submit your material before May 20th, 2010.

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

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“ Recovery is like coming home to our original selves that we forgot: playful, joyful, appreciative and hopeful. Following the Steps and joining the W.A. fellowship brings us in touch with our inner wisdom and spirituality. As we learn to accept ourselves as we are, we experience a new attitude toward work and activity. We enjoy our work more and find ways to work more effectively. When work has its proper place, we find time to have fun and to nurture our health, relationships and creativity.”

(from page 10, “The Book of Recovery”)

Recovery:

Recovering what we've lost takes time and patience. So does learning new ideas – generally the opposite of what we believed:

We make haste by not being in a hurry.

We learn that efficiency is not effectiveness.

The more we take it easy, the more we accomplish.

The more overwhelmed we are, the more we need to take a break.

Worry causes problems, not vice versa.

The more we surrender to time, the more we become its master.

Freedom lies not in knowing we can do whatever we want, but in knowing we're doing what our heart leads us to.

The highest form of control is surrendering all control.

(from "The Book of Recovery" page 121)



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