

NEW ATTITUDES, The NORVANA Newsletter

January 2010

Editor: I got three responses from my piece last month about working the steps one time or many times. Thanks to these people, two of whom wish to remain anonymous.

The Monthly Quiz will take a break this month and return in February.

Recovery Haiku:

Piles and piles of snow
All my neighbors shoveling
Clean again today.

Step Work A Second Time Around

I appreciated the opportunity to discuss working the Steps a second (or more) time(s). My experience is that working the Steps again has been quite illuminating and productive. Yet nowhere does our literature say “Once Step 12 is done, start again at Step 1!” Granted, the last two sentences of Step 12, “The Steps do not end here. The Steps are a new beginning!” can be read that way, but these are hardly clear instructions to begin again. My experience reinforces my agreement with the quote “The Steps are our solution. They are our survival kit.” (from the introduction just prior to Step 1 in our Basic Text). I find I want an up to date survival kit and a solution for current problems, which then leads me back into Step 1.

‘Powerless over my addiction’ and ‘life had become unmanageable’ no longer mean what they used to mean. I am a long way from using drugs, and freedom from active ‘drug’ addiction is not a solution I currently seek. Yet addiction is not an ‘out there’ kind of thing, it is an ‘inside me’ kind of thing. Today I seek freedom from my addict self, because freedom from my internal addict keeps me away from the drugs that were the most obvious symptom of my disease of addiction.

Freedom from my addict-self requires surviving in a world I chose to perceive as fully supportive of my active drug addiction; that’s why I continue going to NA meetings regularly. Perhaps I overestimate the availability of attractive drugs, although where I live crack-cocaine is sold in 3 or 4 places between here and the closest alcohol selling store. Perhaps I also overestimate my likelihood to turn to drugs as a solution to any particular problem. Yet I can clearly remember times when I have backed myself into corners from which using seemed like the best available exit strategy. Stepwork is what encouraged me to pay the higher price required to leave my corner clean.

I also rework the Steps because I want to encourage my sponsees and others to work the Steps. When I was new it seemed hollow to me to hear an oldtimer recommend Stepwork as a solution to a problem when I felt they were years, or decades, away from working any Steps. Stepwork is emotionally difficult. Except for Steps 11 and 12, the Steps require facing truths I find uncomfortable. Step 1 reminds me that I am still an addict; Step 2 that I need help finding sanity; etc. The pain of facing these truths needs to be current for me to relate to newcomers or other still suffering addicts, and for them to feel my empathy. **[continued on page 2]**

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[continued] For these reasons and others I rework the Steps – in order and on paper. I suppose to be honest, looking back, I was only partially honest the last time (and certainly the first time!) I worked through my Steps. Ignorance played a big part. I did not know many of the feelings I had as a result of my actions, and therefore minimized both the feelings and the actions. As I learned more about my defects in Step 6 and learned forgiveness in Step 9, I realized that my Step 4 really needed to be revisited. As I developed a conscious contact in Step 11 and a passion for Recovery in Step 12, I found that Step 3 held new meaning for me. Perhaps even more significantly, every time a Sponsee works a Step with me, I realize something about myself relating to that Step.

So Jim, this (in about a single page) is my experience with reworking my Stepwork in Recovery. I readily acknowledge that the first or second time around I was being competitive and somehow felt that reworking the Steps means that I was winning the ‘game’ of Recovery. That’s all past, however, and I still rework my Steps in order at about 12 every 24-36 months. I have a lot of respect for you and the Recovery you demonstrate in service and elsewhere, so obviously there is no ‘my way is better than yours’ going on here! It’s just different.

(Anonymous)

Another View

I have heard it said that the steps are like a clock, when it gets to 12 it goes to one. It is continually in motion. I know that there is always something that is comes to the surface every time I work a step with my sponsor. I have formally worked 44 steps with 4 different sponsors and they all have done it a little differently. My current sponsor and I have done 20 steps together and have worked through the entire Step Working Guide. He has me on a 3 month schedule, that means that every 3rd month we get together to go over my work on whatever step I am on. I couldn't imagine doing just one first step, because the unmanageability that surrounds active using was the focus of that first one. It was hard to write about anything else because the pain of using was so fresh. The second question in the SWG is" How has your disease been active recently?" I hadn't even made the leap that my disease was more than my inability to control my drug use. Our first step deals with the disease and not the drugs but my awareness wasn't at the level of understanding it was the second time I did the first step which was at 5 years clean. You see at 5 years clean I hadn't used drugs in some time, but there was still a lot of anger and pain in my life The pain wasn't at the level it was in active addiction but it was affecting the quality of my life. On my second time through the focus was more on how my disease had manifested itself in other areas of my life and how I could use the same spiritual principles. There is one promise in our program and that is freedom from active addiction. However as I worked through the steps I gained some other freedoms. In the second first step the freedoms were from the areas I wasn't aware of, or wasn't willing to surrender the first time around. My ego told me I was powerful enough to control my gambling, or my dishonesty, or my infidelity. These were the main areas my disease had manifested itself after years of abstinence. At least this is what has come to the surface so far, we take care of what is killing us the most first. The first time I didn't understand how woven my disease was into the fabric of my personality. It was almost impossible to cover everything in my first 4th step as there are always going to be memory bubbles. These are things that for whatever reason weren't remembered in my first 4th step. **[continued on page 3]**

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[continued] My second 4th step centered strictly around my relationships with GOD, myself and other people. I was searching and fearless to the best of my ability at that time of my recovery. I can't say enough about the second 6th and 7th step, I have come to realize that there will always be an area of my behavior or personality that I could improve on .I learned that I am perfectly imperfect and that I am going to make mistakes, the step working process provides a avenue to live a happy, joyous and free life. For example my degree of honesty has continued to move toward that "cash register honesty" level that is talked about in our program. My integrity has continued to evolve to the degree of doing that right thing even when no one is watching. Since I have started working the 12 steps of N.A. I have not lived a saint like life, there have been situations where I have hurt other people or myself. Therefore when I did my second 8th and 9th step there were new names and amends to be made, some that I had forgotten about in the first one. In 10,11, and 12 it could be argued that these 3 steps are the reason we don't cycle through. I don't buy into that. I have been working steps continuously since I came to N.A. If I didn't work any steps after completing all 12 what would my sponsor become but a part of my network. After all isn't that the only job of a sponsor to guide me through the steps. Does that mean his work is done. I believe that working the 12 steps is an ongoing process that requires vigilance and perseverance. Every time I have worked a step with a sponsor I get something out of it. A newfound understanding or knowledge of how to integrate what I have learned into my life, and the willingness to implement my knowledge into all aspects of my life. In closing, ,to my knowledge there is no guidance or direction in our literature that clearly answer the question of what happens when you get to and complete Step 12. Yes, if I worked a perfect program I wouldn't have to cycle through..You see the program is designed as a process to be completed one step at a time. If I worked every step every day perfectly there would be no need to formally work any of the steps with a sponsor again. I could work it once, gain the knowledge, and then apply it to my life daily. However I have not perfected that process. There is no wrong or right way to do this, so it is left up to the individual. It is between you, the GOD of your understanding, and your sponsor. **TODAY IS THE FIRST DAY OF THE REST OF YOUR LIFE!!!!** (Anonymous)

A thousand not enough, or HOW it works for me

When I got clean in Seattle, I remember attending a new meeting that was formed. I went every week for over a month, and the theme was always the same; the first step. Finally, I complained, "We can't just stay on the first step forever, we have to move on at some point." After the meeting, it was pointed out to me that it was a first step meeting. Just the same, as a recovering punk rocker, I see the folly of the dance 'the pogo'. It doesn't get you anywhere, you have to move on to a two step if you want to get any closer to the event you've been glimpsing at the peak of every bounce. I remember the first three steps in those days being paraphrased as Honest, Open and Willing. I have to be honest enough to admit I have a problem, open to the possibility of a solution, and willing to take the steps to achieve that solution. These days, we often hear "I can't, God can, I'll let him". I often find myself overwhelmed, and hear myself cry "I can't do it". Bingo! **[continued on page 4]**

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[continued] When I started using, that was how it was, I was using drugs. By the end, the drugs were using me. Likewise, when I started in recovery, I had to work the steps; these days, the steps can work me. So, when I hear myself cry "I can't do it", I move right into "He can". Not to imply my higher power is masculine, just a figure of speech. If your HP has a gender, that's fine, as long as it is loving and caring.

So, when I hear myself cry "I can't", I move on to "He can", then "I'll let him". Three steps in three seconds. Sometimes, that's not enough, so I have to go back to the honesty, and ask "what's really going on here?" Fourth step! Probably, one of my character defects is causing me to re-act in an unhealthy way, and that won't change if I am unaware of it.

I am not a good judge of character, particularly my own character. I see myself as a terrible person beyond help, and/or a perfect person with no faults. So, I better get open enough to get a reality check. I ask myself, my higher power, and someone I trust, "is this really what's going on?" Now, I need to be willing to do the next right thing. If I am reacting out of fear, I may find courage in remembering how I got thru a similar situation. If not, having done *my* best, I need to be honest enough to admit I can't solve it, and ask for God's help. 1) I can't (honest) 2) He can (open), 3) I'll let him, (willing) 4) what is wrong? (honest) 5) is that really it? (open) 6) what can I do? (willing). See where I'm going with this?

Now that I have been honest enough to admit I need help, I need to open enough to see what wreckage my behavior is causing in other peoples lives. Then, willing to make that right. I continue to honestly evaluate my behavior, open to hearing my higher power's will, and willing to carry that out, and carry the message.

After 5 years clean, I learned that I can do all 12 steps in under 60 seconds. This does not belittle the value of spending a whole year on one step if I have to. All this year, I have been feeling the pain of the sixth step regarding my unhealthy social attitudes and behaviors. But with practice, I have found that I can benefit greatly from working all 12 steps on anything that troubles me, often in a matter of minutes.

When I got clean, I often heard "if you don't know what step you're on, then you're on the first step". By the time I got ten years, I found if I didn't know what step I was on, I was on the 12th, practicing these principles in all my affairs. That doesn't mean I don't have to continue working step one, two and three, the NA waltz is a beautiful dance. If I lose my place, I can march thru the rest, and find my way back to the 12th step. If the obsessions of my disease are overwhelming, and leading to the compulsion to act out on my defects, the best way out of myself is helping another.

In Loving Service,
Jmu

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