

Recovery Times

A newsletter from Alcoholics Anonymous San Fernando Valley Central Office

VOL 33, NO. 1 JAN 2009

Why Be a Sourpuss?

*Finally it dawned on me—
I could stick out my hand and smile. I decided to risk it.*

Just the other day I was at a closed meeting of my home group when a newcomer came in, scared, shaky, and suspicious. He was not greeted by anyone at the door and no one was thoughtful enough to interrupt a conversation to welcome him, offer him a cup of coffee, or give him some literature.

I instantly remembered my first AA meeting. The people there were friendly, warm, and helpful. One man gave me his home telephone number and told me to call anytime day or night if I needed someone to talk to before I took a drink. I smiled when I remembered how he stressed *before*. He said he had no intention to listen to a crying, whining drunk at 3:00 A. M. But call him *before* I drank and he'd help me any way he could. I appreciated that man. I can't remember his name or what he looked like but he made me feel welcomed and I hadn't felt that way for a long, long time.

So there I sat, rabid over my group's lack of friendliness and compassion. I sat and fumed and looked around the room at the huddles of selfish people. There was "Mr. Big Shot" over there with his entourage of worshipers lapping up every word he said. And there was "Little Miss Sunshine" with her saccharin smile and bubbly personality proclaiming how wonderful it was to be sober. "I'll bet she never had to grovel like I did," I thought.

Looking back over the recent past I realized our whole group was detached and self-centered. Whatever happened to people like I met at my first AA meeting? The more I thought about it the madder I got. In fact, I was treated as an outsider too. I saw red.

Ten minutes had passed since our newcomer had entered the room and still no one had spoken to him. "If only we had a friendly person like that man who welcomed me," I thought. Finally it dawned on me—I could stick out my hand and smile. I decided to risk it.

I got up and headed straight at him. When I got close, he looked up and winced. I believe he thought I was going to hit him. Then I remembered to smile. I stuck out my hand and said, "I'm an alcoholic. Welcome to our group." He lit up like a Christmas tree. I've never seen so many teeth in one man's smile. I gave him my telephone number and told him to call anytime, day or night, *before* he took a drink.

I've thought of this incident many times and now can appreciate Dr. Bob's wisdom urging us all to keep it simple. We all need a little kindness or encouragement sometimes. It was easy for me to determine what my fellow members should do, but while I sat analyzing them I wasn't helping anyone either. On the contrary, I was hurting myself and my group with my sourpuss attitude.

When I got up off my tail and reached out to another suffering alcoholic, I got a warm feeling. It felt good. It helped me.

I see I can make a difference. When newcomers or visitors enter a meeting place, they are often as scared and lonely as I once was. And when anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I can be there.

Dan M., Statesboro, Georgia

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Calendar Events

Upcoming Events

34th Annual San Fernando Valley A.A. Convention
 January 30 - February 1, 2009
 Woodland Hills, CA
 Info: 818-734-0383
 Website: www.sfvaaconvention.org

Movie Matinee at the Hole In The Sky
 Presented by District 1, Area 93
 January 24, 2009, 2:30 PM – 5:30 PM
 7128 Owensmouth Avenue
 Canoga Park, CA
 Info: 818-481-3145

37th Annual ACYPAA
 March 12 - 15, 2009
 Irvine, CA
 Info: 949-230-9259
 Website: www.acypaa2009.org

32nd Annual San Diego Spring Round Up
 April 9 - 12, 2009
 San Diego, CA
 Registration Info: 760-583-1658
 Website: www.SanDiegoSpringRoundUp.com

25th Tri-State Round-Up
 May 14 - 17, 2009
 Laughlin, NV
 Registration Info: 928-753-6035
 Website: www.TriState-Roundup.com

Things We Cannot Change...

Obviously, the staff of Valley Central Office cannot know all the members of the local fellowship. If you have knowledge of the passing of one of our members, please notify us here at Central Office during literature sales hours or mail us the obituary from the local newspaper. You can also email us at sfvaanews@sbcglobal.net.

Service Committee Schedule

- January 19, 2009 **SFV H&I**
THIRD MONDAY
 8PM Business Meeting
 7PM Get Acquainted Workshop
 5657 Lindley Ave.

- February 2, 2009 **G.S. District #11**
FIRST MONDAY
 6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting
 315 W. Vine St., Glendale

- February 2, 2009 **G.S. District #16**
SECOND MONDAY
 6:15PM meeting
 15950 Chatsworth (church), Granada Hills

- February 2, 2009 **G.S. District #17**
FIRST MONDAY
 6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting
 5000 Colfax (church), N. Hollywood

- February 3, 2009 **G.S. District #2**
FIRST TUESDAY
 5:30PM, 4011 Dunsmore, La Crescenta

- February 4, 2009 **G.S. District #1**
FIRST WEDNESDAY
 6:30PM, 7552 Remmet, Canoga Park

- February 4, 2009 **SFV Board of Directors**
 6:30PM, Central Office

- February 14, 2009 **G.S. District #7**
SECOND SATURDAY
 9AM, Agua Dulce Woman's Club
 33201 Agua Dulce Cyn Rd

- February 9, 2009 **SFV Intergroup**
SECOND MONDAY
 6:30PM Orientation, 7PM Business Meeting
 St. Innocents Church
 5657 Lindley Ave., Tarzana

To All Meeting Secretaries

Help us keep your meeting information up to date.

If your meeting has changed its Location, Time of Meeting, Meeting Name or Type of Meeting, please update this information *as soon as possible* with your Central Office. Updates can be completed by mail or in person during Literature Sales Hours at San Fernando Valley Central Office. Our address is listed on the back cover of this newsletter. Meeting updates *must* be completed in writing. Any questions can be answered by calling your Central Office at (818) 988-3001 and asking for a staff member.

Valley Events

TO FIND OUT WHAT ELSE IS GOING ON
 YOU CAN:

COME TO CENTRAL OFFICE

CALL US AT 818-988-3001

VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT <http://www.sfvaa.org>

Opportunities for Service

Your Central Office needs
telephone volunteers for all shifts,
 especially the Overnight (12 Midnight - 9 AM) shift.

If you have one year or more of continuous sobriety, we invite you to join us and help your fellow alcoholics. You can sign up in the office or online at <http://www.sfvaa.org/involve.html>.

Service Opportunities & News

Service Opportunities in the San Fernando Valley

PUBLIC INFORMATION COMMITTEE -

Provides information to the general public about what A.A. does and does not do. Could always use volunteers, especially young people and Spanish speaking A.A.'s for health fairs and to speak at various schools and businesses. Contact Central Office (818) 988-3001.

HOSPITAL AND INSTITUTIONS COMMITTEE -

Carries the message of Alcoholics Anonymous into hospitals, prisons & treatment facilities to those who are unable to get out to meetings. Meets the third Monday of each month 8:00 pm (Get Acquainted Workshop, 7:00 pm) at St. Innocent's Church, 5657 Lindley Ave, Tarzana, CA. For more information, contact Central Office at 988-3001.

SAN FERNANDO VALLEY INTERGROUP -

Elected Intergroup representatives maintain and develop policies for Central Office, and inform other IG Reps about Alkathons, fund raisers, etc. Meets second Monday, monthly, St. Innocent's Church, 5657 Lindley Ave, Tarzana, CA. Orientation 6:30 pm, Meeting at 7:00 pm. Contact: Central Office at 988-3001.

SAN FERNANDO VALLEY CONVENTION -

Volunteers are welcome to participate in the planning of the 2009 Convention. The Committee meets the 3rd Tuesday of each month (except February and March); 7 pm at St. Innocent's Church, 5657 Lindley Ave, Tarzana, CA.

Central Office News

San Fernando Valley Central Office is On the Web

The SFV Central Office website is now available for Internet browsers. On the website, you can find a map to our office in Van Nuys, a listing of upcoming events in the Valley, service organization information and links to other cool A.A. websites. Our meeting schedule is also accessible on the website. Meetings are listed by day, Sunday through Saturday.

Check it out: <http://www.sfvaa.org>

Do you have an article for the Recovery Times?

Email it to us at: sfvaanews@sbcglobal.net

San Fernando Valley Central Office Intergroup Representatives Meeting December 8, 2008

Rick A. Chairperson – Meeting opened at 7:00 PM
Treasurer's Report: See Insert
*Service Committee information - see page 2 and 3
of the Recovery Times for more information*
Old Business: None.
New Business: None
*Birthdays: Brian - 2 yrs, George - 5 yrs,
Pat K. - 5 yrs, Dennis - 14 yrs, Di - 15 yrs,
Wayne - 25 yrs, Cheryl - 26 yrs, Cliff - 29 yrs.*

Motion to adjourn 7:26 PM
*The long form of the Intergroup Meeting Minutes
for December is available at Central Office
or at the Intergroup Meeting.*
*These minutes are pending approval on
January 12, 2009*
Next Meeting - January 12, 2009
Prepared and submitted by:
Dawn H., Recording Secretary

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

December 2008

Anonymous	20 years
Sarah M.	21 years
Cheryl M-A.	26 years
Reseda Big Book Study and Disc'n.	a number of years
Learning To Live Men's Stag	428 years

Your Birthday Gift to Central Office

Many A.A. members share their birthdays with those who need the same help and opportunity that A.A. gave to them.

By sending a donation to Central Office you share your birthday with Recovery Times readers. Send a dollar (\$1.00) a year - or \$1.00 for each year of your sobriety - or send as much as you wish to give to celebrate your birthday. The amount doesn't matter - it's the "counting" that counts.

May your special day be filled with joy from morning until night, and may the "24's" that lie ahead be especially glad and bright.

Live and Let Live

“...sponsorship, like everything in AA, is a personal matter.”

Nothing has been more helpful to me in staying sober and living a useful life than sponsorship. But in the beginning, I sometimes used my “authority” as a sponsor to bully my sponsees. I ridiculed their thinking and showed little compassion or patience if they acted in ways that I didn’t approve of. Where did this soberer-than-thou attitude come from? I think I brought it with me from the days of wine and roses.

Some of the things that I hear from new people who have recently acquired a sponsor or sponsee sound like this: “My sponsor told me to call him every day or he wouldn’t sponsor me.” “If my sponsee isn’t willing to go to any lengths, I will drop him (her).” “My sponsor told me I couldn’t share until I had done all Twelve Steps.”

The Preamble says that AA is a “fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope.” The operative word here is *share*. Didn’t Bill go looking for Bob? Wasn’t it Bill’s idea that he *needed* Bob to stay sober? Yet we often find sponsors dictating to sponsees what they can do, where they can go, and whom they can talk to. The sponsor does not call the sponsee; the sponsee is required to take all the initiative.

Of course, sponsorship, like everything in AA, is a personal matter. It is a kind of verbal spiritual contract between two people over a number of expectations. But many of these conditions fly in the face of AA’s Conference-approved pamphlet about sponsorship and much of our other literature. Bill says that “even the newest of newcomers can begin to carry the message.” AA started to grow when Bill and Dr. Bob went *looking* for a drunk to talk to. It is true that Bill and Bob asked the candidate some questions: First, do you believe you are powerless over alcohol? Second, do you believe in God? And third, are you willing to turn this problem over to God’s care?

I was very lucky in this regard because I did not believe in God, yet no one refused to talk to me. I didn’t know if I was powerless over alcohol, yet I got the same loving care that people who did get. When I was new in AA, there were no Step meetings in my area and sometimes a sponsor would just take his charge out to the golf course for an informal chat. There was no structure to the relationship. They were just buddies. The amazing thing is that many of these people stayed sober on this loose style of sponsorship. At the other extreme, however, the sponsor gave the newcomer a laundry list of things to do and dictated his every move. Some people said newcomers *need* this kind of sponsorship. But many of these people never left their sponsor’s side.

They didn’t branch out from the sponsor and his other charges, and they became a little clan, with everybody sounding like everybody else. Maybe that’s what some people needed. For me, it never would have worked.

My sponsor never told me to do a thing. He was a great listener. He asked questions. Having an older member actually listen to me was very healing because I was so unsure of what I thought. My sponsor listened carefully and asked pointed questions. Another sponsor I knew says, “If you teach a child everything, you deprive him of the opportunity of learning anything.” His style of sponsorship is very laid back and open. He looks at what his student is doing that shows promise, and encourages him to continue along those lines.

I have made a terrible mess of being a sponsor, and not just when I was new. I have made bad decisions long into sobriety. A sponsee was making a decision to break up his family after several years of sobriety. I came down hard on the side of his not doing this. But I had also told him from the beginning that he had to take responsibility for his own sober decisions. After I made my speech about why he should not leave his family for another woman, he said simply, “This is something I have to do.” A stricter sponsor might have “fired” him. I shook his hand and wished him good luck. He went through with the separation, got divorced, and moved on with his life, depending not on me, but on the whole Fellowship of AA.

I feel that I have done a good job as a sponsor if I talk myself out of a job. Many of the men I have sponsored are now old-timers and I rarely see or hear from them. They have families, jobs, and other interests besides AA. Sometimes I call them when I feel the need for a little guidance. Often they come out with things that I have never heard before, and it amazes me. “Where did he learn that? I never taught him that.” No, I didn’t. I taught him to learn on his own, making full use of the whole Fellowship.

We are made aware in Steps Eight and Nine of the danger of dependent relations. We learn that it is through “the twisted relations of family and friends that we have been most troubled.” We have been “especially stupid” about our personal relations. Why shouldn’t that same observation apply to our relations with our sponsor or sponsees?

I know I will continue to hear people who are spoon-fed AA by their sponsors. I will continue to hear people say “My sponsor told me I had nothing to say so I couldn’t speak,

continued →

Live and Let Live

continued

even at a discussion meeting.” Or, “My sponsor told me not to talk to others about my program.” Or, “My sponsor told me to throw out my medication.” Or, “My sponsor told me to get out of therapy.” And I know I will continue to see what strikes me as a bullying kind of sponsorship. But right along with that brand of sponsorship, I have the freedom to offer another approach. And I think a great part of our strength lies there: No one can tell us what to do, think, or feel. We are all in the same lifeboat. We are all sober under the grace of God. No one of us is any better than anyone else, though we sometimes like to think so.

But I don't believe a sponsor can do a sponsee harm. One of the wonderful things about our Fellowship is that there is somebody for everybody and we usually seek out people who seem to be a good fit. All of us in AA have a right to our own opinion, even if that opinion is that somebody else's opinion is not as good as ours. There is not a society on earth that places greater emphasis on the individual's right to think, say, and do what he or she pleases than AA. The whole structure of AA is based on a democratic spirit. There are no bosses or gurus. Nowhere on earth do we find such a wonderful society, extending so much freedom to so many people. If it works, don't fix it. We have grown from two people to two million, and we show no signs of getting smaller. We must be doing something right.

Jim N., West Springfield, Massachusetts
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Price Tag?

P.O. Box 1980

Quite recently I attended a meeting where the topic for discussion was “How do you value your sobriety?” The first person called upon said that his sobriety was worth \$100 a week. That is what he makes now and what he spent then, when drinking.

How can anyone who has attained sobriety, with any degree of honesty, possibly put a price tag on AA?

Can you put a price tag upon the things you gain through sobriety? I say no. How much is the return of clear thinking and self-respect worth? Can a value be put upon the respect of loved ones and friends—on reunited homes and the belief in a Higher Power?

And, on the other side, can we put a price on the things we did before gaining and maintaining this sobriety? Being a hard-headed drunk that had to lose everything—wife, home and job—I say no again. The heartaches and hurts, the broken homes and divorces, the loss of faith, self-respect and the respect of others cannot be measured on a cash register.

The only honest valuation of sobriety is life itself because I know that a lot of sober, happy alcoholics would not be with us today without AA and a gracious God. I am one of those and a very, very grateful alcoholic I am.

H. A.
San Anselmo, California
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*Co-founder
Quotes*

Bill W.

How often do we sit in AA meetings and hear the speaker declare, “But I haven't yet got the spiritual angle.” ... It is apparent to nearly everyone else present that he has received a great gift; and that this gift was all out of proportion to anything that might be expected from simple AA activity, such as the admission of alcoholism and the practice of Step Twelve. So we in the audience smile and say to ourselves, “Well, that guy is just reeking with the spiritual angle—except that he doesn't seem to know it yet!”

*Reprinted with permission from the AA Grapevine,
July 1962*

A Question of Safety

Tradition Four - Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or AA as a whole.

“I don’t feel safe,” someone at a meeting will share, or “Let’s keep AA a safe place.” And I will think, “Safe from whom? Safe from what? Safe from the outside world?” Perhaps, but it is more likely that the world needs to be kept safe from me should I pick up a drink, given my drinking history. *Safe*. Sometimes the word seems to float lonely, unattached, through the room, seeking a context. Sometimes, hearing the word, I feel, well, unsafe.

I noticed that the business meeting that normally followed the regularly scheduled meeting on the first Thursday of the month did not take place. The next month came and again no business meeting. The same thing the following month. I asked the chairperson about it. “We have business meetings when we feel like having business meetings,” he said. I went to another member of the group. “We’re not into business meetings,” he said.

The group began to seem different. A group officer wandered around with the collections from the previous three weeks seeking to know who the treasurer was. The chairperson’s personality seemed to intrude more on the meeting. Vacancies in some service positions went unfilled. The offerings on the literature table looked sparse. It became difficult to share simple things about sobriety at the meeting: the premium seemed to be on wit over sincerity.

Then, at the group’s monthly anniversary meeting, the celebrants shared their gratitude for their year or years of recovery. At the secretary’s break, the elderly manager of the center where we met asked for a few minutes of the group’s time. She spoke with pain and anger. She said that we weren’t cleaning up after ourselves. She said that time after time the meeting place was being left in disarray: chairs weren’t put away, garbage was not disposed of, the floors weren’t swept and mopped. She said that some group

members, when she sought to discuss the problem, gave her the runaround, that they tried to con her with flip answers. “Keep it up and I’m going to put you out of here,” she announced to the stunned group.

Each group has the right to be wrong (and the right to be right). Tradition Four tells us so. And yet, among the sweetest words I hear at any AA meeting these days are, “There’s a business meeting following our regular meeting tonight. All group officers are asked to attend, and members of the group are encouraged to do so as well.” A regularly scheduled business meeting increases the probability of group unity, of an informed group conscience rather than the whims of a few. It increases the probability that group officers will, along with the right to serve, have a sense of responsibility regarding their service commitment. A business meeting is a way of saying that we as members have a right to an accounting of our Seventh Tradition contributions with a treasurer’s report. It is a way of allowing the general service representative, through his or her report, to introduce into the consciousness of the group the idea that the group is not an end in itself but part of the service structure beyond it. It is a way of ensuring that we take our inventory so our hosts won’t have to. It is a way of saying we care.

Safe from each other and safe for each other, and safe for the person coming in behind us, the alcoholic who still suffers—that is what I think *safe* means. Safe through our Twelve Traditions from the irresponsibility that was such a feature of my active alcoholism.

*David S.
New York, New York*

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Humor from the Grapevine

You’re driving in a car at a constant speed. On your left is a valley and on your right is a fire engine traveling at the same speed as you.

In front of you is a galloping pig, but you cannot overtake it. Behind you is a helicopter also traveling at the same speed as you.

Q: What must you do to get out of this dangerous situation?

A: Get off the kid’s carousel and, next time, don’t drink so much.

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Then there is the tale of the galley-slave master who tells his charges, “I have good news and bad news.”

“The good news is that the queen has decided to give you the morning off and give you double rations for lunch.”

Everyone cheers.

“And now for the bad news,” says the galley master. “She wants to go water-skiing this afternoon.”

What the Traditions Mean in My Life

I believe the Traditions not only keep together the different groups within the AA community but are essential for me to apply to my own life. For example, the First Tradition refers to the common good and the concept of unity, and its message is that if I apply harmony, serenity, and unity in my workplace and within my family, life will have similar characteristics.

Keeping in mind that a Higher Power is above everything else (Second Tradition), if I act according to divine and natural law, nothing evil can destroy me.

Helping others in whatever way I can without prejudice or discrimination (Third Tradition) forces me to set fear aside and to give the best of myself to my fellow humans. Within my commitment to my job, my studies, or my group, I sustain my individuality but don't allow it to harm those around me (Fourth Tradition).

When I set a goal, I work toward it with perseverance, not letting outside influences steer me away from my primary purpose (Fifth Tradition).

I'm aware that when property, money, and prestige enter into my personal situation, I must walk a straight path, because I am susceptible to those temptations (Sixth Tradition). I try to be financially self-sustaining, not borrowing from others, practicing moderation in my

expenses, and balancing my budget (Seventh Tradition), always working toward keeping a prudent reserve in savings.

I don't know everything, so I seek the advice of others who know more than I do and that of professionals and specialists (Eighth Tradition). I can't do it all alone, and help from those wiser than I am can help me reach my objectives.

Delegating and sharing were habits I didn't have before I began to accept people, places, and things (Ninth Tradition). "Live and Let Live"—this axiom distances me from controversy and teaches me that it is best to keep quiet at opportune times than to win an unproductive battle (Tenth Tradition). When I have a good idea, I try to share it with those who might be interested in that concept, but I don't try to promote my ideas the way I did in bars and taverns (Eleventh Tradition).

Whether a task is big or small, the important thing is to keep it to myself, maintaining my anonymity even though it is hard to do so. After all, this is all about working toward perfection, and I am (Twelfth Tradition).

*Daniel Z.
Miami, Florida*

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*San Fernando Valley Central Office
7417-E Van Nuys Boulevard
Van Nuys, CA 91405*

Current Information

Name

Address.....

City..... St ZIP

New Additional Contribution

Renewal \$.....

Moving ???: We need your former address as well as your new address to correct our records. Fill out both forms and mail to the address above.

Former Address

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