

WORKING WITH THOSE WHO CAN'T READ OR READ POORLY

The Big Book tells us in "Working with Others" to leave the new man our copy of the book to read and, the second time we see him, have him answer the query about whether he's willing to go to any lengths. But what if our person cannot read well or at all? I suggest that the serious twelfth stepper ask the newcomer directly: "How well do you read?" If the answer is "poorly" or "barely," it might be well to set up a schedule of get-togethers so that the twelfth stepper can read the book to the newcomer--at least the first 103 pages and selected appendices.

In fact, if the newcomer has heard the entire set of directions for all Twelve Steps, he will be ahead of most people found in AA meeting rooms today. He will know that the directions need to be followed in order to produce the specific spiritual awakening required for the kind of sobriety, which includes the Promises. The new person will also have a good idea at that point if he wants to hear the rest of the book.

I know from personal experience working with new AAs who have mental illness, multiple sclerosis, dyslexia, and other conditions that produce reading disorders that they feel much more comfortable within AA groups if they know what's in the book rather than having it be forever a mystery to them. Those who are illiterate or semi-illiterate may be further handicapped by shame and an unwillingness to admit their shortcoming, but they also need a chance to be introduced to the Big Book.

Should these people be given less of an opportunity to recover than the rest of us when the solution is so simple?

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