

HOW IT WORKS*

Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our *directions*. Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program, usually men and women who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves. There are such unfortunates. They are not at fault; they seem to have been born that way. They are naturally incapable of grasping and developing a *way of life* which demands rigorous honesty. Their chances are less than average. There are those, too, who suffer from grave emotional and mental disorders, but many of them do recover if they have the capacity to be honest.

Our stories disclose in a general way what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now. If you have decided you want what we have and are willing to go to any length to get it – then you are ready to *follow directions*.

At some of these *you may balk*. *You may think you can* find an easier, softer way. *We doubt if you can*. With all the earnestness at our command, we beg of you to be fearless and thorough from the very start. Some of us have tried to hold on to our old ideas and the result was nil until we let go absolutely.

Remember that *you are dealing* with alcohol – cunning, baffling, powerful! Without help it is too much for *you*. But there is One who has all power – that One is God. *You must find Him now!*

Half measures *will avail you* nothing. *You stand* at the turning point. *Throw yourself under* His protection and care with complete abandon.

Now we think you can take it! Here are the steps we took, which are suggested as *your* Program of Recovery:

1. Admitted we were powerless over alcohol – that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care *and direction* of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely *willing that* God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly, *on our knees*, asked Him to remove our shortcomings – *holding nothing back*.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make *complete* amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve *our contact* with God, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual *experience* as the result of *this course of action*, we tried to carry this message to *others, especially alcoholics*, and to practice these principles in all of our affairs.

You may exclaim, “What an order! I can’t go through with it.” Do not be discouraged. No one among us has been able to maintain anything like perfect adherence to these principles. We are not saints. The point is, that we are willing to grow along spiritual lines. The principles we have set down are guides to progress. We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection.

Our description of the alcoholic, the chapter to the agnostic, and our personal adventures before and after, *have been designed to sell you* three pertinent ideas:

- (a) That *you are* alcoholic and cannot manage *your* life.
- (b) That probably no human power *can relieve your* alcoholism.
- (c) That God *can and will*.

If you are not convinced on these vital issues, you ought to re-read the book to this point or else throw it away!

*From the pre-production multilith (1938). This is the opening of the Big Book’s Chapter Five in the original manuscript that was sent out to the fellowship a few months before the Big Book was published. This was written and re-written over thirty times and this is how it looked before the last changes were made. Differences are highlighted in bold print.