

Steps and Service Workshop

2002 | Part 6 | Reading edition

FORMAT	DURATION	RECORDING ID
Transcript PDF	01:16:14	DP-2002-RICHMOND_06

Automated draft. Timestamps have been removed for readability. Names, specialized terms, and unclear passages require human review.

[Listen to the original audio source](#)

Transcript

Timestamp-free reading edition | Automated draft; human review required

That was an awfully good succession that Donald did this morning that was extremely well done. I don't think I've ever heard a man's dealt with in a more sound spiritual kind of way. That whole process of restoration that comes out of that was good. And it does set up well, I'd kind of like to lead us toward this morning. What he was talking about was that thing of getting ready to engage in life and he gave a lot of examples of how to do it.

And I'd like to kind of focus around the last three steps of the program. And particularly in terms of how that gets us into the business of living, some people refer to those steps as maintenance steps. I don't. But I think there are tremendous action steps that spell out a real route and a direction for putting the program into maximum use. And let me just stick one little thought in your mind to worry around a little bit.

We used it last night in the discussion we had at meeting after the meeting. And it sort of has some meaning for me. And it's about, some people would call it thinking out of the box, but I like to think of the idea is thinking beyond the circle of my personal magic. Thinking beyond the circle of you so often we look at things in terms of what I believe, what I feel, what I do, how I work with somebody. And if we're going to really be effective in trying to be of maximum service to God knows around us, I believe that we have to get beyond that circle of personal magic of just what I personally do.

And start seeing how the fellowship as a whole, the group as a whole are part and parcel of what my effectiveness will be about. If I think of it only in terms of what I personally do, it'll be an extremely limited thing. And so I have to find ways to get locked in and married in to the things that make that effectiveness growth. And so just keep that in mind a little bit as we're going along. I'm not sure exactly how it is to spell out. I don't have it written up.

But I want to get into some tangible issues that have to do with making that stuff happen. I like to just kind of hit the steps and then we're going to get in it. The 10th step to me is it does a number of things. One, I think one of the basic functions is the 10th step is slip prevention. And it has a way of assuring that I'm on solid ground doing what I'm supposed to do so that I stay constantly aware of what's happening and don't let those things start cropping up that rob me of my sobriety of peace of mind and my well-being.

So it has a very practical value in that. To me it also has a tremendous value in terms of taking a look at how I'm plugging this way of life into being a way of life. What I do at a practical level is when I review normally at the end of the day, I review what that day has been. The emphasis is looking for places where we were wrong and where we've got some stuff that we need to straighten out. But I think written in that very heavily is the notion of taking stock of what was right as well.

And so today when I do that at the end of my day, it's a rare day when I am not absolutely overwhelmed with the tremendous things that have happened in my life. Just by practicing the principles. And my buddy Steve back there is probably as much a past master at doing what I'm talking about as anybody I know. And it's just simply loosening up and trying to add a little something to the people around us. If Donald was talking about it a little

bit that when I'm focused on doing things for other people, mine is a given that I absolutely can't give.

I can't give more than I get. Every day just a couple of things that I'm talking about. And this is daily stuff. This is not once in a while. This is daily stuff that comes from just simply being free to be responsive to opportunities to be of service. I start my day normally. I don't have a rote prayer, but I basically start my day by asking God to help me go through the day in a way that would seem worthy of the gift I've been given.

Tell me what kind of an attitude I want to have. And then very importantly to be sensitive to opportunities to be of service. Because my God do everywhere, but often I don't see him. I don't look at him. If I see him, I don't acknowledge him. And so what I want to do is be sensitive to opportunities to be of service. And they're everywhere. And like I'll tell you one thing that I ran into that just a couple of examples.

There was a place where I was working. I'm unemployed now, but when I was working. And before I started loafing, I used to go for lunch. I either go full boar or not at all. And once in a while I would slip next door to another office building and get some emergency rations. You know, just some real cheese sandwich or something just to sort of keep the wolf out. And one day I went over there and went into the place. And there was a little little mousy girl that was working.

And she looked like she had been beaten by every weapon known to men. I mean she just was a beat up to shovel a little gap. And she needed somebody just to sort of lift it up a little bit. I was there. I figured I'd do it. And so I just started messing with her a little bit. You know, just playing a little bit about stuff. And it just, I don't know what, didn't matter what. Just any human interaction was good news to her.

It didn't look like she'd had any for a good while. And so we started doing a thing. And she said, well, what do you want? I said, toon a sandwich. And I like toon a pretty good. And it's a good thing. Because when she fixed that tuna sandwich, I mean that sucker was running off the plate. I had toon on me. I mean you just got carried away with that thing. And that was her way of responding. Now I'm not looking for an overdose of tuna.

I'm just trying to help a little gal out. But the point is that you can't give away more than you get. And about six months later, I went back over there for another dose. She was still there. And when I walked in the door, you'd have thought that the guy from the \$10 million sweepstakes walked in. Because she still starts grinning. And she grabs that bread and starts sleeping. I wanted a ham sandwich. But that's what happened.

If I just turn loose and sort of engage in the business of living and try to be in service. Just lighten it up for somebody. Whoever it is. Amazing what happens. Amazing what happens. What happens is that the world I live in becomes a different place. If I let myself do it, I could start being anxious about the world I live in. Because I live in the same world everybody lives in. Most people tend to sense real hostility and lack of civility.

I know it's there. Once in a while, I'll run into a jerk. But I've got enough sense to get away from. And most of the time, what I run into is incredibly good folks who respond well to decent treatment. Like Donald, I spend a lot of time in airports. And I don't like it one bit. The fun went out of flying for me a little over 30 years ago. And so I have absolutely no joy in that activity. And since the stuff has happened and that security nightmare started to happen, I enjoy it even less.

So it's not a pleasant thing. I know the first weekend after the New York thing, I went to the airport, prepared

for the worst. And I wasn't prepared enough because it was worse than I expected. And so it went in there. And it was just pure battle. I mean, it took an hour to get in the terminal. They were mine on the plane. And when I was in line, I was watching a little gal. Well, little gal is not the right term. But she was a lady.

And she, if you thought we had trouble, you should have seen what she was doing. This gal was having to handle every passenger who were routinely disgruntled. They were already mad about being marched around with a newsy. And she had to not only handle the people. Then she had to take the suitcase and carry it, or cases, and carry it a considerable distance and search the thing, then search the people while somebody else getting mad at the counter.

And this girl was sweating. I made big time. And so I got up to her. And I said, my god, girl, you look like you're not having a whole lot of fun with this thing. I said, why don't you work on to a quitting time and take the rest of the day off? And she said, you better, I will. And I ain't gonna be here tomorrow either. I'm going on vacation. You go, girl. That's exactly what you ought to do. Thanks for talking. Well, I will just mess it around with her.

And so we get through with that. If she finally met somebody that wasn't mad. And so we just had a nice little deal there. And I started walking away. And she called after me. She said, hey, wait a minute. Come back here. And I went back. Now I'm talking about a nut house scene. She kicked me to first class. Most people couldn't even get on the plane. But she couldn't. Now I can just imagine whoever this New York business man was that said, we're full in first class.

You got to move to coach. I didn't look for him at all. But you should have done it. And that's not manipulation. It's just what happens when I do things that for no real reason other than to just practice principles in the way I live. And what a difference it makes. That is not just squishy kind of stuff for waiting for mystical things to happen. That if I put it in place, my God, what a difference it makes in the way I live.

And I don't know about you, but that's the kind of world I want to live in. I don't want to live in a world that's full of anger and distance and coldness. I want to live in a place where there's a good, warm kind of working relationship with people. And that's what I find everywhere I go. You know, people tell me that every city I go in is the worst one in the country. But I swear to God, I can't find out why. If people tell me California, you're just at high risk to even get off the plane.

And I have never had anything but a cordial, helpful interaction with people. But amazing. And the only difference, I'm the same guy who used to have antagonistic relationships with everybody. And so that simple thing is not just the 10th step. That we talk about these steps being connected. It's kind of like I mentioned yesterday, this whole process is connected. They're not isolated activities that we do mechanically.

It's a way of life that if practiced as a way of life changes the quality of their life. And so 10th step is just a way of putting it in place and reviewing whether it's happening or not. And it's enormously gratifying to me to be able to see that. What I have to recognize is that the way I live my life is the most important message I'll ever deliver to anybody. It's not wisdom. It's not a whole bunch of knowledge about stuff.

It's the way that I live my life. It's amazing how much, you know, certainly as you get older in the program,

it's amazing how much people watch what you do. So that's how they evaluate you. I was at an assembly a while back and we were voting on something. And it's voting. And Jesus, if you've ever been to assembly, you know, it's not like making sausage. It is not a pretty process. And we just have an amazing faculty to take an issue and gum it to death.

We'll beat it forever. So we were voting on this goofy issue. And I didn't agree with it. I thought it was dumb, well intended, but anyway. So I was voting against it for about the fourth time. And then I did some math. And I said shoot this thing and go nowhere, but I won't get it off the floor if I can. So the next time I came up, I voted for it. Well, I didn't think it was going to pay attention to that. I'll bet you I had at least six or eight people going to be, why'd you change your vote?

And I tired of messing with the dumb thing. That's what happened. But people watch that. And so the way I live my life is a tremendous amount of what I'm about. You know, like, I'm kind of careful about where I hang out. My wife is not an alcoholic and she doesn't do much drinking. She's giving up on that. But we'll have companies sometimes and she likes to have some booze for some of her wealthy relatives from up in Canada.

She wants me to go get it. Well, I'm an obedient husband. You know, so I go over there. I swear to God, every time I'm grown, you know, I haven't been carted for a long, long time. But every time I walk in an ABC store, I want to sort of put a bag on my head and something else. Because my thought is, suppose some guy that I just had in a newcomer group last night watches me going in and says, oh, I see how this works.

You don't drink on Tuesday, but on Wednesday you come down here and load up. I've doubted very many are going to say, oh, I understand his wife sent him on a mission. Now, the way I live, I'm free to do whatever I want to, but I'm responsible to do things that will be attractive if I want to be effective. And so how I live my life is a critically important thing in terms of that thing we're talking about on how to be effective and also how to get the real rewards that come in our culture now.

We'll go through this kind of quick like that. A lot of time, and when I first started looking at 11, I really thought of it as a go-stare-your-nable step, where you go off and find some secluded place and think great thoughts and all of that. And certainly there's a place for that. There's truly a place for feeding the soul, you know, for just quietly finding a place. Like I'm a guy that loves water, and I don't like to get in it all that much, but I just like to be around it.

And there's nothing to be more restful or soothing than to get around moving water. I just love kind of getting rapids and stuff like that in waterfalls. And I wanted a pond for a number of years. And I thought about building it, but I'm not smart enough. And so I finally wound up getting somebody to, I wanted it, but I didn't want to take that money. And so I gave it to my wife for her 33rd wedding anniversary. And I thought of being real slick.

And I talked to her for 10 years about how much I wanted that thing. And I said, it's yours. She's starting to like it a little bit. But that was something I really wanted. And so my morning deal, and that, where I do a lot of the meditation and stuff like that, I sit out with that pond, you know, the beast and I sit out there and have my coffee and read the paper and stuff like that. So I like that. You know, there's a great place for just sort of getting spiritually prepared to do stuff.

But when I look at 11, I find it now to be one of the most powerful action steps in the program. If I'm really wanting to let this program become the guide for my way of life, because what it says is that there are a couple components that one certainly is to sit about a pond and think heavy thoughts and to get spiritually connected and to prove that relationship. Very, very important. But for what purpose? And right in the middle of the step, it says, praying only for knowledge of his will.

When I'm seeking through prayer and meditation, praying only for knowledge of his will, for me and the power to carry that out. And therein lies my purpose. And I don't think it comes in just one failed swoop of saying, okay, you're supposed to go do a workshop in Virginia. I don't think it happens like that. But it does open me up to being willing to serve. And so that step to me becomes a powerful thing where I am now willing, now that I'm able, you know, now that I've gotten rid of the baggage, now that I've gotten open to be in a service, I think this is where it starts to formulate a plan of action.

And that I'm responsive to the things that come along. I want to know the knowledge of God's will for me and the power to carry that out. And my God does it ever happen. Does it ever happen? The minute I become willing. And from the time that I became willing, it's been a long, long time. Since I've had an empty agenda, I mean a long, long. I've been doing stuff like we're doing here. I don't mean a workshop, but it's up here for 40 years.

For 40 years I've been doing it. And first, somebody reminded me yesterday, the first conference I ever spoke at was a Virginia State convention. In 1962, at a quality end on Highway 64, not that I remember, or in County, but in 1962, at over by, it got normal. It got normal. And from that time to this, I've done a lot of this kind of thing, and a lot of stuff in A.A. beyond. I've made it a practice. Don said it this morning, that I never say no.

To a genuine request for service. The way I look at it, these steps help me to get a new manager in my life. And if I'm going to be the guy who's the resident critic of what the directions are to come, what the opportunity is to come, if I'm going to pick and choose on the basis of what I think fits me best, and contradicting the whole process. So I've made it a practice of never saying no. And it's a phenomenal thing in a way, this stuff of getting on airplanes and doing things.

In 40 years, I've never had to miss one single commitment, except one, that one. And I'm not mystical about stuff, but I was out in Tennessee, and I was doing a little traditions thing at an assembly. And then, of course, some brought it up, and I mentioned that I had never missed a commitment. I never had to go to the buildings, weather, broke planes or anything. It's always worked out. And I said, gee, well, not to said that, because that'll have to miss the next one.

Well, next week, I'm supposed to go to Florida. And we had two feet of snow in North Carolina. We don't get two feet of snow in North Carolina. And when we do, we sure don't know what to do with it. It was absolutely nothing moving in North Carolina. I could get out of my driveway for three hours. And I really was an important lesson for me in that thing. I was on the phone with the guy that was in my contact in Florida.

It was about like the death watch from the guy waiting on the call from the governor. And I'm calling down there saying, I'm trying to Amtrak. And then Lilia callback didn't work. We're going to try this. Well, I tried everything and nothing was there. Finally accepted the fact that I wasn't going. So I called him up like I'm

delivering. In fact, I'm sorry, man. We're going to have to unplug the life support. And then I'm just not going to be able to do it.

And nothing's smoking, getting out of here. And he said, oh, what the hell? I thought that was absolutely perfect. It was absolutely perfect. It was totally appropriate that I was highly concerned about that. It was even more appropriate that it didn't make that much difference. It didn't make much difference. In fact, he told me later they already had an us be a great lineup. They knew I wasn't going to. But they let me go through all of that stuff to do what I was doing.

So that, to me, is the way I like to look at how I want to be available. To carry out God's plans for me. So that when I find out what God's will, I don't get in the way out. I mentioned yesterday about paying attention to hunches. And when I get a hunch about something, I have to take it pretty seriously because it normally has some real weight to it. And so being available to service, being available for God's plan, my belief is this.

It's just mine. It doesn't make it right. But my belief is that for every one of us who goes through this program or recovery, whether it be, hey, Al-Anon, Alateen, whoever, if we work these steps and they become a way of life, I believe an avenue of service will open up. And it may be many things, many things, but it'll open up. And I will personally believe that without any question, the quality of my recovery will hinge on how I respond to that.

If I'm able to just take a look at the avenues of service that open up and walk away, I'm the loser. I'm the loser. And when I do that and walk away, I'm diminished in the process. If I can take a look at a need that needs to be addressed, and I'm capable of addressing it, and I walk away, I lose. I lose. And so it's critical for me in terms of becoming a real functioning, well-rewarded member of the world and member of AA that when those opportunities come that are doing it.

I think everybody in the world has a story that somebody needs to hear. You've got a story that somebody needs to hear. They don't need to hear mine. They need to hear yours. And when I selfishly withhold that, I lose big time. And so a real action step of finding a way to serve, of being open for those kinds of experiences that bring me out of myself. Get you into some deep water. I tell you this, that even though that has been my track record, I have never yet taken on an activity that I feel perfectly comfortable to do.

Never have. Now, even though I bet you I've talked 10,000 times in AA, I have never done it without a certain level of tension and anxiety. It's not like the first time I did it when I got blacked out. I mean, I didn't. Right now, the first time I ever spoke. And it's always there. And I personally think it always should. I've sort of got it in the back of my mind. If I ever get to the point that I can just comfortably get up in front of a group and talk with no neurons firing, I think I'm going to sit back down.

Because that means that it's moved to my head instead of my heart. And there's something intimate and personal about what we do in AA, or else it loses its meaning. And so I think that's really appropriate. It was also appropriate that when I responded to those things, I recognize that I had to step through the field, but recognize the value of stepping through the field. If I live within my comfort zone, I'll never go anywhere.

And so it's really important for me to be in the spiritual condition that I'm ready and willing to serve and I'll become able, awfully important for me. And in the 12th, we're talking about the stuff of really making this a way

of life, where having done these things, there's 200 words in the steps, and having done what's laid out there. What it says to me is that I'm going to have a spiritual awakening. I'll have an awakened spirit.

I'll have a different way of looking at things. This mind of this chronic alcoholic will be geared a different way. And that's, to me, is a real promise that's embodied in what we do. And then having had that happen, we do a couple of things. One is we try to carry this message to other alcoholics, about whatever method that we possibly can, no matter what it is. It's like what we're doing here today. I've been watching the stuff that's going on.

You're done and I've done the visible part of it. But the stuff that's behind this, what a powerful service that is. Now I watched how those things appeared on that table back there. I watched how they had them yesterday. Tremendous service involved in that thing. Somebody got this hall. I watched people straighten up these chairs. All of those are really valuable services to help make something happen. So opportunities to serve, opportunities to carry a message, go far beyond just what I can personally do.

And so I think it opens up. And so our task is laid out in there is to try to carry this message by any message, a method that we can. And then practice the principles in our affairs. That's the kind of thing I was talking about in 10. It sounds easy. He said, I'm going to. Oh, here it is. I thought I lost my coffee. It sounds kind of cliché like to say that practice is very small and fair. And I don't want to skim by that too lightly.

And I'll just touch on this thing and maybe come back to it a little bit when we get into this other part. I think it's awfully, awfully important for these principles to be engaged in this process to keep from self-destructing. We can self-destruct in this program if the principles aren't solidly in place. And there's an important thing that I think it was important for me is to understand the difference between real, purposeful action in our autonomous and activity.

Big difference in that. You know, purposeful action as opposed to activity. You know, when I was first in the program and I didn't even know what purposeful action meant, I was a guy who was fantastically active. And I don't second guess that one bit today because it served as purpose. You know, it protected me from myself. It kept me too busy to get in trouble. It kept me getting out of myself and getting acquainted with other people and learning about the program.

I don't question it. I know that I was hid in that activity for a while and it helped me get the muscles to start engaging in life. So nothing wrong with that. But if I see a guy with a good number of years of sobriety who's still frantically making seven meetings a week, I'd be about as concerned about that person as it was somebody making one meeting a week because there's something really out of whack with that. The learning the difference between activity and action is tremendously important.

Don talked about a thing about how we get trust in the people that we enter or we're really closely related to. Think about this a minute. We say sometimes. I used to say it, but I don't say it now. That AA has to come first. It has to come before everything else. I don't say that anymore because I don't believe that anymore because when I try to operate under that banner, I set up some real red flag conditions in the life of me and the people who are close to me.

If I say to my wife, if she doesn't understand the difference between what I'm committed to and what I'm just doing, I've got a lot of trouble. If I say to my wife that, well, Wednesday I'm going to run over here and I'm going to do this, and she's got some trouble with that. And I say, well, you know AA's got to come first. Well, there'll be a fight at my house. I don't believe that there'll be a fight because there are other things that are important.

So what I have to do, that's critically important for me, and I am an extremely active member of AA, and it's doubly important for an extremely active member, and I know some of you all. My family fully understands, everybody who knows me understands that I have some commitments that are not negotiable. They're not negotiable. My own group is a commitment that's not negotiable. And if I'm not there, it's because I've got some, I either cannot get there, or I've got some service that I'm doing that I think is worth making the move to do.

But otherwise, it's an absolute commitment. And like Don was saying, if you want to find Tom Ivester, you go to More County and you say, where is that boy? If it's Monday, they'll tell you to go over to Baptist Church, Southern Pine, you'll find him. If it's Thursday, they'll tell you the same thing. Now that's important in terms of being trustworthy. If my family understands that that's a commitment, and there's absolutely no conflict.

That's who I am. And you can trust me that that's exactly what I do. And so I'd rather day my son came to town. And it was a very unique experience. He wanted to take us to dinner. And he's been a struggling medical student for a lot of years, and he's now self-supporting as a young physician out in Tennessee. And he could finally afford to take us to dinner. And so he said, Dad, well, to take you guys to dinner, I said, that's great.

And the only thing is that he caught a little look in my eye. And he caught himself. I didn't have to say a word. He said, oh, wait a minute. This is me tonight. He said, we'll do a different time. Yeah. No problem. But suppose I said to my young visiting physician, I'm sorry, son. I got something to do today, and that's more important to you, because that's got to come first. You know what I'm talking about? Just a simple thing of letting people know who I am and what my commitments are.

Not what my values are about them as opposed to this. So when I say to somebody, hey, you've got to come first. That's an insult to somebody. And it's a contradiction of practicing principles. They're also principles involved in a marriage. They're principles involved in a parental relationship, in a work relationship. Sometimes we get into a box of trying to compartmentalize our lives. You know, people talk about balance, and they'll use some sort of graphic demonstration of so much time for work and so much time for play and so much time for AA.

And it's not real bad thinking. It's just sort of misses a very important point. Is that if I'm doing it right, if I'm practicing these principles as a way of life, AA does not compete with anything in my life. It does not compete with anything in my life. If it does, I'm not doing it right. If it doesn't make me a better employee where I work, if it doesn't make me a better parent, a better husband, a better employer, not doing it right.

Because this is a way of life. It's not an activity. It's not something that I go do and get what I need and then get on with my life. It undergirds and makes happen everything in my life. And so that's what's so important to me about having real commitments about what I do in this program and then having commitments to other things as well, so that I can have a well-balanced life. And so if I do it that way, I'm not running into opposition and roadblocks and creating friction and things.

I can resolve that on the basis of the principle. And so I go into that a little bit because it lives to stuff that when you start thinking beyond your level of what I call it, the circle of your personal magic. When we start thinking beyond that, you've got to get into broader issues that just how I do my sobriety and how I do my home group. And then when we start thinking in those terms, it starts looking at some expanded kinds of activities, expanded kind of thinking.

And it's awfully important to me to be well-grounded and to understand that difference about committed actions as opposed to just forensic activity. When I look at what I want to get done, as an A member, I guess if I had to identify a mission and you probably got your own, if I wanted to identify a mission of what is it that I really want to contribute to alcoholics and honors, in gratitude for what's been given there, it would be something very much like this.

I want to do everything that I possibly can, contribute everything that I can to ensuring that the next man, woman, boy, girl who comes through that door gets as good as was given to me. I don't think I can do any less than that. And that's what I want to do. Now that's a tall order. Certainly what I do in the circle of my own personal magic is a vital part of that. Certainly there's a contribution to be made. Like I welcome people to alcoholics and honors.

I don't care where I am. I guarantee you I do it in my home group. If somebody gets out of my home group without me wrestling with them, you can bet that they hit. Because I'm going to get that turkey if he walks in. Home group members, everybody. I'm going to make sure that everybody who walks in there knows they're welcome or they're going to know that they've been harassed one of the others. That is their choice. So I can do that.

I can do that. And that has this value. One of the minimum values that it has is that it makes every meeting I attend a warm and welcoming place. Because it starts with me. And so I'm not somebody who hides in corners and this kind of stuff. I'm somebody who gets right out into the mainstream of the action and so I can do that. But that's limited. That's limited. That's just one little thing. It's valuable. Like I went in to speak at a little meeting down below where I live.

And I just did my usual thing. You know, just walking around shaking hands and poking and all that stuff. And I met some lady I didn't know. And she came over afterwards. She said, can I ask you a personal question? Sure. What? She said, what do you sell? I said, well, I said, wait a minute. I said, I sell recovery and I got one hell of a deal on that. And that's true. That's true. Because if I want to be somebody who contributes to the attraction of our carcinomas, I can do that.

And do that. And it'll have some value. So that's one of the things I do. But that's the limited thing. And so if I want alcoholics anonymous to be a place where somebody can count on getting as good as I was given, that's one little contribution. But it's time. So what I do beyond that? I'm somebody who believes that a home group, a home group, is a vital, not only a vital, but the most vital, single ingredient in alcoholics anonymous.

We call it the basic building block. And I believe that it absolutely starts with a home group. See, my personal, my circle of personal magic is going to have influence, but limited influence. And when I meet with somebody, where I'm doing it individually or whatever, I can do my thing. But if I don't have a group that

delivers on what I promise, I've sold them a bill of goods. And I have to recognize that my personal magic is only going to go so far.

And so I've got to have a group that I can trust to deliver the goods. And so when I take them in there, I want that group to be a place where alcoholics have a good chance to get well. A good chance to know that they're in the right place. And so I have to think bigger than just me and my magic. I've got to think about my dependence on a group to get what I need and to be sure that folks get what they need. I tell you what's important.

Well, I don't need to tell you. You know what's important about that. I had a 12 step call one day, and I messed with Phil all day long, and he was actually agreeing with some stuff. And I got him to a meeting. And I wanted to take him to a newcomer meeting for obvious reasons. And I remember the group that had a newcomer meeting, and I went over them. They're a huge group. And they announced how they were going to break up.

And the newcomer meeting was going to stay where we had convened. And then others were going to scatter out the other meetings. Well, I bet 85 people stayed in a newcomer. I said, my God, they've had an epidemic up here. Everybody's drunk. Well, all it was was just people hanging out. In an ill-defined newcomer meeting, you'll get a lot of mixed baggage. You'll get some newcomers. And there were a couple in there, I think.

You get a lot of people that want to hide somewhere to keep from doing anything. And you've got some that want to beat up newcomers to get an opportunity. And here we sat, 85 people, and I got a brand new drunk sitting with me. And they start some almost saying like a who's got a profitable meeting. And we were just going into some mundane kind of conversation. And I'm sitting there talking about throwing up. Let's talk about something that makes sense to a newcomer.

And I mean, it wasn't nothing happening. Nothing happened. And this guy was born green dead than I was. And normally, I'm not somebody that just likes to speak up in a meeting. I just don't like that. I learned not to volunteer very much. And so I just don't like it a bit. But that time I did. I figured if I wanted him to hear it, I'd better say it. Well, you've been listening to me all day. I wanted somebody else to say it.

So I took my hand up, and I started talking newcomer stuff. You know, an amazing thing happened. You know, I just said a few words, and you could see people turn around looking like, where'd this guy come from? It started listening because I was not the only guy in there that was totally frustrated by a newcomer meeting. It wasn't a newcomer meeting. And such a simple little action can make a difference. Now, you're not going to make a permanent difference.

But it made a difference in that meeting. From that point forward, I didn't chew anybody out and say, y'all are just representing. I just started demonstrating what ought to happen in a newcomer meeting. And then people jumped right in the meeting and never went back to what it had been before. Now, that's not a major solution. But at least it's an action. And the point is that if I want my group to be effective, I've got to be careful that it's a group that has the capacity to be effective.

If it's a newcomer meeting, it needs to be a newcomer meeting that actually does newcomer stuff so that when somebody comes in, I can count on that resource being delivered effectively as we're capable of doing. And that's part of that thing about thinking beyond just my own limitations, my own personal circle of my own

personal matters. But starting to think about how the group becomes a huge resource. You know, I want to be sure that when somebody comes into my group, they know it's a meeting about college and honors.

I don't want them to have to guess what we're meeting about. I want them to know. Now, that sounds like a throwaway. But I'll guarantee you, I've walked into many meetings in this country that would have defied Bill Wilson to interpret it as a meeting about quite a long time. You couldn't tell what it was. Well, I'm handled that matter. But suppose I'm a brand new person that's trying to see if there's any hope for me that the last stop on the bus line.

And I walk into a meeting that's so ill to find that you can't tell what it is. And that's a very real issue in this country, a very real issue. And so part of what I can do is try to be sure that my place talks alcoholics and honors. That it's not myriad problems and honors, it's alcoholics and honors. That's what it's about. And recognize that we've got a clear purpose to be served here. They're like one of the things that we deal with enormously now and have for a number of years is this thing about, I guess it all sort of came from time when we started doing wholesale treatment of folks.

And we started getting just various people sort of shifted into alcoholics and honors. The thing of dual addiction or just addiction is an enormous problem around this country. And when I get off an airplane in most, any city that I go, there are two problems that are paranoid. When I start asking how things are, one is the thing of dual addiction. That we just don't have real alcoholics anymore, we've got hybrid types and we've got such an influx of addicts that we just don't know how to deal with them.

It's a huge, huge problem around the country. There are places where it's no longer an issue folks have just given up. Just given up. And let it become whatever it is. I would suggest to you that that is a tremendously piece of bad news. Tremendously piece of tremendously bad news. When we start giving up any pretense of being what we say we are, some people are tired of fighting. And just giving up. I had a good friend, he died a while back, an old timer.

That was a, he was just almost a heart and soul of the group in Norfolk and a central group in Norfolk. And he, I've been talking with him one day and he said that he was no longer in the central group. And I said, why? My God, man, you've been there since day one, why? And he said it got so bad I couldn't stand it. And he did that white flight thing, you know, like he ran out of the city and hid in the suburbs. Now I can understand that, I can understand getting frustrated with the fight.

But that's what happens, you know, when we start to give up the battle. So what happens to folks who go into central group now? That kind of issue is the kind of thing where I think it's awfully important for those of us who want to serve effectively to recognize some responsibility in how we deal with this. And how do we do it? And so in my home group, I can be sure that we do, as much as I'm capable of doing, to see that we have a genuine meeting about Christ knows.

So that when the person walks in who's alcoholic, he can have that sense of trust that he's in a place where folks understand. And not walk in and have to guess at what the agenda is. That's like a minor thing. And I tell you a thing that happened, and so we were chatting about it a little bit last night. That we, a group I was in, in fact I think it was the one, a different group and I was growing down and talking about it.

It was every one night and a guy came to me after me and said, Tom, we need a group inventory. I'm asking an unusual kind of thing for somebody to say. I said, why? He said, you've got too many addicts in you. I said, well you talking about it, so he told me it. And what it turned out, I said, let me take a look, see if I see the same thing you do. And so I took a look at what it was. There was an adolescent treatment center there in town that had a bunch of youngsters.

And they were, they're herding them up and bringing them over to the group. And people at that point didn't have a clue what they were. They just knew that they were kids in trouble. That's all they knew. And they knew the catchphrases that they'd heard. They didn't know if they're alcoholics, addicts, or outer space marshmallows. So they come in and the problems that happened were mostly created by us. In order to try to make them feel welcome, we would have them get up and read something.

Well, that's a little bit of a contradiction when you've got a 16-year-old drug addict doing the presentation looks like. And it ain't me. And that's what it was. So we had a exterior committee meeting and said, let's see what we do about this. Talked about it. And they decided that somebody ought to go over to the facility and talk to people about the problem. They asked me if I'd do it. And I said he went over and met with the director of the facility.

And nice lady, nice lady. She'd never heard of a closed meeting. She just knew her day. The place she said, people problems. And so I explained to her what the problem was. She said, oh my gosh, yeah, we'll take care of that. No problem. Nobody had ever bothered to tell her. But we were about, we just expected her to magically understand. Yeah. And then we want to get mad at them and go burn their place down because you're kidding.

Yeah. But if I want to do something about it, how do I do it? And so that was one thing. But that was the least important thing. The problem wasn't them. The problem was how we dealt with it. And so what we did is we set up a newcomer program that is an open meeting. And we don't care what he is when he comes in there. Because we recognize that when somebody comes out of halfway houses or treatment facilities or jails, there's a good chance that they're going to be thoroughly confused about what a label fits them.

And so what we don't want to do is have that resolved at the public level by embarrassing them in front of a crowd of people. We think that a person who finds themselves in our college anonymous at a minimum ought to get a warm welcome and guidance about where they need to be. They don't need some angry old man like me humiliating him. And that's what happens sometimes. We'll try to deal with these things rather than having a responsible way of dealing with it and helping folks figure out how to deal with their problems.

If they can't get a warm welcome from us, it's a pretty bad news message. And so that newcomer program, what a tremendous resource. It's been one of the most valuable additions to our group. I mean now, I doubt that I'll ever be in another group that I don't really be hard to have that as part of it. Because it's a way of effectively dealing with that. In all of the years that we've been doing that with that newcomer deal, there have only been two incidents where there was any kind of an unpleasant exchange.

You know like an argument over so. Only two times. Both times it was caused by our member who didn't know how to communicate something and anything less than negative care. But we precipitated our own problem. And that's been a tremendous resource. So when I start thinking about certain, I can't go out and change

the world in that regard. But I can doggone will change the way I deal with it. And I can contribute to how our group deals with it.

So that you're in one place where somebody can come in and they can clearly understand that this is a program that is for them. And so we have that open ticket every one of our meetings so that we can deal with that. So when I want somebody to get as good as I was given, that's one of the things I can do. And by the way, anybody wants to join in any time or just throw anything up, just have at it. You know I won't try to tease you out of it.

It says to jump on. How do my group is a tremendous contribution. That isn't enough. It's important for me to recognize that it's a sneaky kind of a thing. But I'm glad that I belong to a strong group. I'm really glad that I belong to a strong group. But it's important for me to recognize that that by itself isn't enough. I have to recognize that it's no better than the group next door. I have to recognize that most alcoholics in my county will not come to my group.

They're going to go somewhere else. So while I value having a sound in solid group, part of what I want to evaluate is what kind of a neighbor are we to the next group? Is our contribution holding ourselves in contrast and saying, geez, you ought to be like us? Is that the way I approach it? Or do I approach it in a way of how can we contribute to this community? How can we contribute to the group's around us? The autonomy doesn't mean isolation.

Our tradition about that says we are autonomous except in matters affecting other groups. Or A as a whole. So if all I can do is just sort of pump up with how wonderful we are to have a little impact. I suspect it does. I suspect it does. And sometimes those of us who get into good strong groups like that get carried away with that kind of arrogant sense of self-righteousness or whatever. So it's very important for me to be connected and recognize that I'm a part of alcoholics norms as a whole.

And just being one sound member or one sound group is not going to do it. I've got to be connected to other things. Another thing that I can do and do is to be connected to alcoholics norms as a whole. I'm the alternate D.C.M. in my district. And it's a good job. I don't really have any responsibility. I've got a lot of work. I sponsored a D.C.M. in my job to make you look good. And so we do some stuff. We do some stuff at a district level that can help us be a good neighbor.

So I can contribute that way. I can try to be a well-informed member who's conscientious about what this fellowship is about. And I can try to be of service at the various levels that I can contribute. I'm the area chair, the state chair for a correction. And it's not, it's not, I'm not heroic particularly. It's just that, it's kind of like I said earlier, I saw a contribution that I could make. You probably get it from done.

I had a long career corrections. And I retired a year and a half ago. And the day I retired, I had already been elected to be the chair of AA corrections the day I retired. So it did be legal then. And so the only thing I did, I just retired and all I quit doing was getting a paycheck. And moved to the other side of the fence. There were two reasons I did that. And I hope that you'll think of this in terms of your realm of influence, the realm of where you can have impact.

When I retired, I'd been for 39 years dealing with problems that are related to corrections and I had watched what we do in corrections on a daily basis. And if there was anybody in the country that understood the frustrations and difficulties of trying to work with corrections, it had to be this kind. And so when I left, I knew that I was in a unique position to be able to make a contribution. And the system, I was the oldest employee in the system, knew practically everybody in there.

And that hired half of them and seemed like that's where the guys, most of them were folks that I'd known when they were in the orchestra. And so when I walked out, I knew that I had access to that system like nobody else ever would have. And I knew that there were tremendous problems associated with AA members trying to work in corrections. And I thought, my God, man, how can I take a look at that and walk off and not do something about it?

And so I took on a job. It's a two-year commitment. I'll finish it up about 150 days from now in December. And there'll be two things that I will hope to contribute to getting done in that two-year period. And then I will phase out of that and move on to something else or whatever I do. The point is that what I said earlier, if I could have looked at that situation, now certainly after 39 years, you know that the last thing I wanted to hear was a door slam behind me.

You know that. But if I could have looked at that level of need and my ability to contribute to it and walk the way, I doubt that you would have wanted me to be here this weekend. Because that would say an awful lot about me. If I can take a look at a need and then just back away and say, gee, somebody ought to do something and not step up to the plate, I'm the loser in that. And so when I look at effectiveness and how I can do something in this program, very important for me to recognize that it's kind of like I mentioned earlier.

And I would get so locked in to looking for excellence in our personal recovery. It will get into sort of an endless series of workshops and studies and things like this. And if we don't watch it, that can be a real narrow world, a narrow world where I'm spending my life checking my emotional pulse on a regular basis. And so tremendously important for me, the vision is how can I start thinking, figure the net, and how can I start being participant in things that will truly make a difference.

And so to me that's a lot of where when I look at effectiveness, that's the kind of things I've got. There's a thousand more. But let's stop. And now you see any kinds of reactions, questions, comments or whatever. I'll take a drink of coffee. Yes? Well, being a good neighbor, what she was talking about was this idea of a strong group being a good neighbor to the other groups around. And it's just like being a good neighbor in the neighborhood, being friendly with the folk around.

And to be kind in our thoughts. A lot of times we want to criticize. Like I was pretty critical of the stuff I was saying earlier about meetings that very little say, hey, but if I went there, I would try to go with an open mind and make a contribution. Last Saturday we had something I was scheduled to do, canceled, and I wound up not going anywhere. And so we got a bunch of folk from our group and just broke out some groceries and you'll always gather a crowd if you break out groceries.

So we got that much folks show up. And so we picked out and goofed around, went to swimming pool, chase horses and stuff. Then we bunched up and went to a local meeting. And we just dropped in. We weren't there to

tell them how to do anything. We were just there to be a good neighbor. You know, we just sort of went in there and they were so thrilled that we were like double the size that they're meeting that night. Because we just gave in and ate up all the donuts.

You know, simple things like that. You know, of just being and not getting caught up into that sort of subtle superiority that we're doing it right and they ain't. What I have to keep in mind is that we don't have a quality control department in our college numbers. And nobody can tell you when it's right. We're about as generous as any organization could possibly be. That any time two or more of us bunch up and our purpose is to stay sober, we can call ourselves an AA group.

And nobody has to approve that. We can meet for the purpose of trying to get an insurrection against our college not if we want to. Nobody is going to be able to challenge our right to function. So even though I talk about the variations of quality, nobody can say what is or is not a group. From my personal standpoint, some of the things have no semblance to what I think a group is. But that's not my business really.

Mine is to try to contribute however I can in the ways I describe you. How I can make a good strong group. How I can provide some leadership in helping to tie that into the groups around us. How I can contribute overall. And so if I approach it with how to be a good neighbor, how to be helpful to folks, the ways come out including folks in. I have nothing to do with that. I won't go into all of it. But one of the things we have to do is deliberately avoid taking over our district.

We have to avoid that. Because when we go in, if you don't watch it, we'll have every office. Whether we intend to or not. And so we have to deliberately manage so that we don't take over the district. And so things like that are just kind of thoughtful things to do. Anybody else? Definitely. We have an agenda. We don't throw it up for grabs. We don't just have a free for all, you know, unless all talk didn't reason together.

We have an agenda and that's not a school. But it's a thing built around introductory stuff and stuff. What we asked people to when we revised it last time was remember when you came in. What did you really need to know? What did you really need to get? And so our agenda is our memories of what we needed. And so it's got specific things on there. We repeat it for I think three cycles. I believe that we repeat. We do the thing for a cycle and then we repeat the same thing over.

So it's the structure of that way. We try to involve the folk somewhat in the meeting. But it's not a discussion meeting. It's to give that information and then to engage them just like this. We did a whole bunch of presentations. A little bit of interaction. But that's what it is. It's just introductory material based on what we believe we needed when we came in. And the other folk and I can be radically different. It really works well.

Yeah. Go ahead. Say what Steve? Yeah, it does. It's a good package. We've used it, or Steve was saying that there's in the literature and there's a listing for it. That one is, we quit using it, not that there's anything wrong with it. But because there were some things that just were not adequately addressed in it. So we use a little something different now. But that's a great package for if you look at introductory material, it's right there in print.

And it's cheap too. I always think about that. Yeah, thanks Steve. Anybody else? Name it and claim it. What

we're talking about, I don't know maybe it's the stuff that you need to think about. But what we talk about, to me it's a tremendously important dimension to gain in our collection. I just say this and we'll wrap it up. I think there's a lot of tremendous junctures and turning points in the program. For those of you that are Friday night, I think I alluded a little bit to one of the junctures in going through the steps is when we get to the through with inventory and there's a real critical decision point of deciding to move forward and do the rest of the program.

An awful lot of people never get past that juncture and opt out and wind up seeing alcoholics anonymous is just a place to go and get what I need. And you can absolutely go to the bank on it, I believe, that people who make that decision are going to have a time limited recovery. Because it's only a matter of time until you start getting saturated. If that's all you can see, it is a place to get what you need. And if I don't get to a point where I become an active channel and carrying this to other people and into to getting those things straightened out in my life, that I'm not going to have a good time in alcoholics anonymous.

And there's another juncture and I think it's the one we're talking about right now. Where this program has to shift from a me focus to a we focus. Buddy of mine in Raleigh used to say, well, that it's the strangest kind, it is a selfish program, no question about it. No little examples I gave about the kind of selfish. You can't give away more than you get. The guy used to say it's the strangest selfishness in the world.

It's about 10% give me. And about 90% give. And if I don't learn that, I'm going to have difficulty in alcoholics. I have to get to a point where I can recognize that my greatest insurance is how well I can actively try to serve others. And then the process, I get more than I can possibly imagine. But if I don't learn it, if my motivation is always on what can I get, I miss the whole spirit of what this thing's about.

And that's what it's about this morning. It's about seeing that it's great for me to be a decent sponsor to the guys I work with. It's great for me to do the best against something like this. But I have to recognize that it's got to be bigger. And so if I can't tie in and see how I can attribute to this thing as a whole, I'm not going to get much effectiveness done. But lastly, well, I agree with Donald. Y'all been a great bunch.

Had a good time here this weekend. Yeah. Same. So I was wondering how that could be approached. I was wondering how that could be approached. And I'm wondering why it's like, I think it's not an proportion of high-performance. I was wondering why it's a other candidate, but it's not very. That we've been talking about folks that have a whole bunch of agendas, different agendas than this. That's, you know, it's tricky.

And there's no real simple kind of a response to that other than to say this. The surest resolution for those kind of conflicts, I know, is focused on the primary purpose as stated, you know, that the primary, that each group had one primary purpose carries, messaged alcohol, it's still severed. When you start trying to handle it at the personal belief level, it's always a big fight. But the more you can focus on the principle, the principle of the primary purpose, that starts to define what moves toward it and what doesn't.

And so I think you've got to do it. And in the planning, it's like the correctional facility thing we're going to do this afternoon. We'll be talking about the primary purpose there. If we got into individual fine-tuning about how we do it, each one does it. But what we'll try to do is come to that primary purpose. And so what I'm suggesting is that the personal level is not always the best place to attack that. It's to get it in a neutral gun like if you've got a treatment facility committee.

If you get that committee to put that on the agenda, and the agenda is the primary purpose, what are we doing to satisfy the primary purpose? If you start trying to do it just on the basis of personal debate, it's always a real sticky wicket. And so that's one of the places I think we have to broaden the agenda a bit. Or just have the committee meeting around the primary purpose. You know, review what you're doing. It's like we did a newcomer visit where we set an agenda on the basis of the collective experience of what a cheese of primary.

You know, it doesn't need a workshop. I think workshop stuff to death. Sometimes you just take the principle and then try to work around it. You know, how do we get this thing accomplished? It's this thing that way I would go at something like that. You got to broaden it from just that personal kind of combat thing. Committee of death. Okay. Thanks, guys. Thank you very much.