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**No. 13 Feb./Mar. 98**

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***It's About Time***

(editor's note: this piece is the first of what we hope to be an ongoing account of participation and observation of 20 years of Narcotics Anonymous)

I'm 50 years old. If I don't tell this story soon no-one will be left who can. And you, dear reader, will never know. The theme is my recovery; how I learned about recovery, what I was taught and when, and by whom, and where it happened. It's also about N.A.; from embryonic (600 "groups") to exploded (6000 groups) in little over two years. N.A....from a spirited fellowship of hopeful struggling service givers to an apathetic, misinformed mass of members with only corporate mentality to guide them. For years the title of this begged to be "DEATH of A DREAM". But now I think there's life in the hope that you will change things so that NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS can know and accept it's heritage, insuring that there won't be a hiding place for disease, evil, and manipulation ever again in structural service to our fellowship.

I won't try to reference this with specific quotations, my memory is my research. I may be wrong about when things happened. I may even be wrong about exactly what did happen. But I do know how it affected me. And I know how it affected our fellowship. Another thing I'm not going to do is try to make atrocities palatable. I won't be politically correct. The evil and disease of what has happened have limited lives and recoveries, squashed spirit in some of our most talented and surrendered members, and therefore killed people. Now is the time you knew where you came from, and what has really happened and what is really happening.

## 1 - MEMPHIS

Around the table there were no two exactly alike: there was a 'Dope fiend', an Addict/Alcoholic, a Cross-Addicted, a Drug Addict & an Alcoholic, etc. etc. ...I was disappointed, discouraged, and more than a little angry. I'd spent my own money to be a part of this event, flown to a strange city, helped someone get their business together so they could come along, and I had hoped to find what I needed, as well as, be allowed to help with this project. It came my turn to share, we were going around the table speaking to the topic of why we were here and what we hoped to accomplish. I burst out something like, " how do you people intend to write a BOOK for Narcotics Anonymous when you can't even be consistent describing who you are? My name is Jim, and I'm an addict."

In Memphis Tennessee, in February of 1981 most of what we now know as the philosophy of Narcotics Anonymous was written down definitively for the very first time. That should be known and celebrated, because the very course of history changed that week. Mankind did not have a truthful, clearly stated written program for recovery from addiction before the World Literature Conference in Feb.'81 at Memphis.

By the way, had you been around then and been a member of N.A., you would have been welcomed as a full participating member of the World Literature Committee just by coming to that conference and being willing to help.

## 2 - SPIRIT

There's a Spirit in our meetings, an energy, very real, yet intangible, fleeting, mercurial. Even the newest of newcomers, full of agony, and the most calloused of old-timer, cynical and pessimistic, feel it-the ebb and flow as we get honest and revert from denial. Some call it GOD--I do. And IT was so very there in Memphis.

Recently, I was sharing with a new friend about my perception of spirituality. *Knowing* that God is real and with me. 'God' is my shorthand for it. My actual, very real and very, very personal vivid perception of 'It' is quite complex and has to do with time, energy, spirit, and continuity. And I realized that perception in Memphis. The Spirit touched me, and guided my hand there. One of the most consistent topics of conversation was the intimate Spiritual guidance, no Spiritual control we each felt.

The strength of 'IT' filled me with awe. Words, phrases, and concepts came through people who swore they didn't write what they *did* write just moments previously. I was truly amazed. My surrender completed itself. Words can't accurately describe the experience. I genuinely came to believe.

Many people have criticized me for years for being too concerned with precision in language : *diction* is what I'd learned to call it, semantics is what they throw in my face. Maybe they are right but I don't think so. There's a conceptual difference between sobriety and recovery, and in a very personal way my life and it's quality depend on my

ability to embrace that difference. If I have one true spiritual goal in life it is to delete the word Alcoholism from the English language except as an archaic misnomer.

And drug-abuse, and co-dependent, and...well...etc. Addiction is the problem, and recovery is the solution. Period, end of concept. Memphis, and the Basic Text Narcotics Anonymous took the world one huge giant leap forward away from it's deadly Aloholicistic, substance abuse-istic, death dealing, life limiting, denial. Many, many years ago a visionary wrote "...half-truths avail us nothing..." and then perpetuated perhaps the most disastrous half-truth for people like us ever written - "...we admitted we were powerless over <substance>...".

*It really doesn't qualify as a half-truth, it's a downright lie, a misconception.* My passion stems from the fact that this lie almost killed me. I knew that I could not be powerless over an inanimate object (alcohol/drug/substance) however I was told that I must accept that or I would use and die. Which I almost did till the real truth caught up with me at an N.A. meeting. "We admitted we were powerless over ... addiction." The difference is huge, and lifesaving. And the real valid living TRUTH began to emerge at Memphis. Of the spirit through us.

It happened because we allowed it to happen, we just didn't know any better. We didn't know that what we were doing couldn't be done. The synthesis of a reasonably cohesive book, the definition of a philosophy was developed by a free and open committee where the only requirement for membership was the desire, the passion for truth, the desperate need to be there.



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## WORLD SERVICES SHAKES DOG UNTIL TAIL WAGS

Well, I have to look at the most recent developments of World Services in a new light. I used to think the function was tail wags dog, most of the time. The hard sell for doing World Services their way has become the popular theme in presentations. Now you get all or nothing CHOICES? Open wide, and choke this down, it's good for you. What ever happened to the veil of the fellowship making choices between options? Did they finally get the drift that there is no way for them to be interfered with, because after all THEY know best?

They sure are sending out the manpower to sell the farm to themselves. (As you can tell this is a us and them sort of article.)

Doing the things I witnessed at the CAR presentation in Michigan, shows me you have to put principles aside if you're going to do things the World Services way. The types of derogatory statements and ridicule from World Trusted Servants that motions received at that workshop--motions that had come from the efforts of entire regions--was a shameful sight. Especially when the Administration Committee is charged with helping regions accomplish what they hope to do with a particular motion. It seemed like some things that were unfavorable to what World Services wished, got set up for failure or even presented in a way to not have a fair chance of being considered. I even had a trustee label my concerns as stupid! But that's from a guy that used to bring motions to the region that came out of his head and not the committee he chaired. So if you want to go there and abandon our principles, you'll fit right in. More on that someday, if the rumors are true!

At lunch that day, perhaps the true indicator of what it's like showed through. One World Services servant turned to another to ask them how the hotel was in San Jose? The next comment was a complaint about layovers while traveling to be of service. Do you see any humility in that? Now everyone jump up and down and tell me that this is just a few of our servants. You're right that is true. But should it be any of them, instead of not many of them? You would have thought that they would split up and sit with different groups of people at lunch to share their experience, strength, and hope. No, three out of four sat in the same place. Poor image to give, and sorry, I have been around long enough to know that you can't blame all of this stuff on addiction.

I have a sponsee who was personally slandered this past fall from a World Services TRUSTED servants. It was done in public, all he asked for was an apology. Yet this guy, even though willing to apologize to my sponsee and agree to give a public apology has yet to do so. What kind of feelings does that leave behind? My sponsee didn't use over the incident, but he was as close as holding the bottle for an hour and giving up 11 years clean as anyone would want to be. Oh that's just who we are! Maybe you, maybe me, sometimes, but not with this sort of frequency and not from this many people, at this level of service.

I don't believe that World Services would have to shake us so hard if there was a different image of who THEY are. My belief is one that those representing us and traveling around the world should demonstrate in their every action, on our behalf, the principles of this program at it's finest. When we are this busy selling the game, we should have the trust that goes with it. Where does it come from when behaviors like this are being displayed?

Well so much for the rant. The shaking will continue, I have no doubt. The elite system WILL be sold and choked down by the unknowing. NAWIS Inc.-our new entity for World Services will be able to have ITs people as they choose to do the will of the Fellowship. Sure thing. Each will have the chance to do 20 years or so of service at this level with the pool and facilitator and board membership positions.

Soon there won't have to be a whole lot of shakin goin on. The cry for freedom will never die. In this program of growth and change, these two things will happen. We will grow and we will change and someday it won't be from force feeding, but from the simple understanding that it's just the thing to do. One day, those we choose to be our leaders will have the principles we hold out as goals for every addict to strive for, in place, and visible for all to follow.

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This Newsletter is being provided to any and all interested members of N.A. at COST please feel free to copy and give out as many of these as you like. We will be printing bi-monthly. Our cost is \$0.52 (includes postage) each so 1 yr, subscription would be \$3.12 (.72x6) Please send articles and newsletter money to:

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P.S. We also deal in the barter system if you would like to send supplies instead of \$, we need stamps, paper (#20 8 ½ x 11), ink cartridges for Lexmark WinWriter 150C.

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## Helping

Those of us who have friends or loved ones that are not in recovery sometimes tend to forget that these are the people who need us the most. I suppose it's easy to listen to a recovering addict, but our goal and promise and creed is to help the suffering addict. If we treat the recovering addict with respect and kindness but treat the using addict with less respect than those in the rooms, then what message are

*New Attitudes...*

*We shall attempt to print all articles promoting a change in our intolerance and indifference towards spiritual principles. We seek any and all ideas for this publication to become a venue for change. All materials shall be printed in a spirit of anonymity.*

*We encourage the use of humor and lampoon to stimulate thought and levity. Our hope is to find ways to transgress the perceived separation that exists amongst members of our society.*

we carrying? We say the only requirement is a desire to stop using.

How many of us still "look down" on those "pitiful lost causes" that won't try? If we really want to carry the message to the addict, we will help the ones who are still using, not just the ones who have come to the rooms.

An addict knows that unless someone else believes in them they have no hope. It's just part of the addiction. If we really care about giving away what we have found, then we will listen to the suffering addict even if they are too proud or stubborn to ask for our help.

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### **New Attitudes on-line!**

Yes kiddies, New Attitudes is now on the web.

The address is: <http://www.geocities.com/CollegePark/Campus/6416/>

Did you lose some issues? Have you not been subscribed since the beginning? Not to worry, there you can read all the issues on New Attitudes from #1 on. We put this on the internet as a means to allow more addicts to see our newsletter. We will, of course, continue to print and mail New Attitudes to all of you. This only allows us more ability to get the message out.

This has already spawned some letters to the editor and they are included below.

### **Letters to the editor:**

Dear New Attitudes,

This is ....., Addict, clean date May 18,1988. Please feel free to forward this to the WSO.

I have not (yet) used a meeting online as this computer was a Christmas present. However, I had a 12 step call today from someone whose only access to meetings on a daily basis is over the Internet. We have a total of three weekly meetings here and it's a 40 min drive one-way on snowy/icy conditions. Thank you but I didn't die using and I prefer not to drive in those conditions.

I have lived in very remote places and helped many newcomers. We used to have a meeting by lantern light and lots of bug spray for a couple guys that lived in caves along the Salmon River. No joke. We read the book and after we'd play guitars and sing. It was the best recovery experience I've ever had.



at meetings who gave there ignorant opinions, saying he was using and the N.A. Book says All drugs in order to recover. he got real upset and when we got home he said he wasnt taking the medication anymore, Well he got sick again and cut his wrists, and to Another Mental Hospital he went, 3rd opinion (Bi-Polar) I was very upset at the main person who kept on him about his taking medication, and told him how i felt, and that he needed to come set his ass at my house and take care of my husband the next time he Manic's out trashing the house breaking things, punching holes in the wall, and when he hits the down side and gets the razors out and cuts his wrists. he changed his attitude real fast... We are ADDICTS not DOCTORS.... when we have legal problems we go to a lawyer, when we have medical problems we go to the Doctor... When we want recovery we go to meetings, not just to stay clean....BUT TO LIVE...

NO ONE SHOULD EVER TELL ANYONE WITH A MENTAL DISORDER TO NOT TAKE MEDICATION, THEY COULD BE CARRING A MESSAGE OF DEATH, NOT RECOVERY OR LIVING....Thank God for the people who have been around for years, who went through the exact samething, who's brain cem. changed after being clean for years, they were able to help my husband, and he understands today IT's OK for him to take his Medication. AND LIVE...the N.A. WAY...today he has 5 years and 3 months clean... he could have easily drank, or used drugs to cover his pain going through all he has, after all he wanted to end his life anyway. but he had been working a good program for 3 1/2 years and he didnt pick up no matter what. What saved him? He never stoped praying, N.A. that was soaked into his head, and a few people who understood...and knew they were no longer GOD..

THANK YOU TO: N.A. GOD. OLD TIMERS WHO KEEP COMMING BACK. and TREATMENT CENTERS THAT RECOMEND N.A. AND UNDERSTAND THIS DISEASE.....

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### **Eternal Vigilance is the Price of Recovery**

There's a great old saying: "Whether the vase falls on the anvil, or the anvil falls on the vase -- Either way, it's going to go badly for the vase." This is a nice way of saying that fine things are fragile, whether they are on bottom or top. In a very similar way, spirituality -- and recovery -- are fragile, and can be quite easily cracked or smashed by unexpected blows.

Similarly, consider the great magician, Harry Houdini. He was an adept of physical training, and could brace his stomach muscles to withstand strong punches. He demonstrated this feat, on October 22, 1926, in Montreal at the Princess Theater. He was relaxing after a show on a couch backstage, when some utter moron, a young athlete from McGill University, decided to test him without giving him a chance to tense his muscles. The fool punched him hard and unexpectedly, rupturing his appendix; he died in Detroit



on October 31, 1926, Halloween, of peritonitis. Having escaped from every known confinement, Houdini was trapped and done in by aggressive stupidity. His greatness was destroyed by a momentary lapse of vigilance. (As a native Montrealer, it grieves and embarrasses me to relate the tale.)

We often point out that no addict, however long clean, becomes immune to the possibility of relapse; we have but a daily reprieve. We are sometimes shocked at how quickly the disease arises when provoked by anger, negativity, self-will, ill health, isolation, and of course, drugs. It seems as though the sheer weight of low and heavy things can drag us down easily, if we are not strongly vigilant and God-centered. And just as it is easier to stay clean than to get clean, so it is easier to stay serene than to get serene; to be wise than to become wise.

Similarly, innocence and trust, once lost, are not regained easily or automatically. This is especially worth considering by those in service. Over the years, addicts in all levels of service, (from first-time sponsor to grand-lord-high-muckity- muck,) have acted out as addicts do. Having made a mistake, and having been called on it, they tried to cover it up -- or justify it -- or paint those who criticized them as "traitors" trying to "tear NA apart." Then, rather than humbly making amends, they struck back defensively. For once they had created this false structure of pretense, they not only had to defend it, they had to attack those who were trying to expose it.

Then they had to make wrong into right in their own minds, to justify themselves internally. And when others, whether sponsees or opponents, saw this ugly transformation and drew back, or tried to tell the emperor to cover his nakedness, they were called appeasers and worse. Those who tried to make peace and heal divisions, were called sellouts and worse. It is always painful to watch someone we love develop a blind spot of insanity; we are less apt to trust their judgment afterward.

Sadly, the blind spot tends to grow; it can consume our whole mind and recovery, like a moral cancer.

Of course, this stuff goes on in families, in politics, in various organizations, even in religious bodies. But it is particularly vicious when addicts do it, because we're so good at it; and it's particularly dangerous for us, because it endangers the whole structure of our recovery and spirituality. And once knocked down and smashed, spirit-centeredness and conscious contact don't just re-coalesce or reassemble; they must be rebuilt.

And yes, all this has happened on both sides of every issue; though those who possess the gavel, the treasury, the press and the phone lines are inherently capable of more mischief and denial in a "service war" than those who stand by powerlessly.

Yet what addict, busy both in service and in service warfare, has time to reconstruct the edifice of spiritual self-awareness? What addict living a lie can afford to admit it -- especially when their sponsors and others they love have been living the same lie?

Rage, deceit, pretense, plotting and scheming, name-calling and character-assassination, political intrigue and hardball -- all these are so much a part of the addictive nature, that we easily may slip into these acts like a foot into a well-worn shoe. We usually don't even see it happening. The ones who do see it are often the ones we think are "enemies." So "obviously" they must have biased and wicked motives for offering us correction. If you're in service long enough, you'll see it all, including the display of addicts in full-circle denial, calling their vicious schemes "spiritual," and calling the efforts of others to talk them out of it "sick." Never underestimate the "lower power" of the disease of addiction.

Even many years into recovery, even having done everything in service, even having worked AND taught the Steps and Traditions, we recovering addicts are all still vulnerable to the sneaky influence of our disease, and to the denial that we are sliding into its clutches. Addicts can slip in and out of the disease seamlessly, ten times in five minutes; Sibyl has nothing on us.

Though working a rigorous, vigorous, vigilant program helps to forearm us against the disease's influence, none of us attain perfect immunity. The delicate structure, the still small voice, the inner poise and the humble grace -- all can be smashed like a vase on an anvil against the insistence of the disease: "I am right; they are wrong. And I can justify any bad behavior for the sake of truth and justice!"

There is a way out of this, of course. (No, it's not "Never get into service!" That's like saying "Don't get involved in life.") It's called "Working the Steps." Especially admitting our wrongs and making amends. Whenever we see ourselves getting bent out of shape, losing our serenity and reviling others for their folly, we need to know and remember that such loss of balance can't be God's will. When we find ourselves hating others or telling stories about them; when we are ready to say or do things that damage or poison others' reputations, plot against them or falsely accuse them of plots; when we feel like all our problems are due to someone else, and if they'd only disappear we'd be free of our problems -- we need to know and remember the principle of anonymity, and the urgent need to place principles before personalities, lest we destroy ourselves in aiming to destroy others.

Occasionally others try to draw me into litanies of complaint about others and their wrongdoings. A few times I've gotten sucked in, to my great remorse; but rather than join in a chorus of "Ain't it awful," I usually point out that there has been enough addiction to go around. I know what others have done, or been accused of doing; having to live with their anger and misery is already a great punishment; what's more important is what we have done to each other. All of us, on all sides of every issue, who have injected cruelty, thoughtlessness, meanness and vengeance into our structure, have done a great wrong -- not just to their opponents, but to the fellowship and to themselves. All of us need to make a collective amends, and participate in a collective cleansing. If we don't, the venom will just keep circulating until the whole body of NA is poisonous and weakened. All of us must come to pledge to ourselves, to God and to each other, "This vicious cycle ends here, with me."

I propose an annual day of prayer and fasting. (It could be New Year's Day, in commemoration of past blow-outs!) We need to atone for the "sins of service" that all of us have, at one time or another, slid into and never had the courage and wisdom to admit and rise above. Even the mean-spirited and snotty attitudes, designed not to illuminate but to embarrass and humiliate, have been service sins. Even inferring indirectly that those who hold peculiar views are hopeless morons, rather than simply saying "I respectfully disagree," has helped to lower the immune-response and raise the blood pressure of our recovering community. Even my angered and outraged replies to angry and unnecessary put-downs, has contributed to the general level of anger, which I greatly regret and for which I apologize. In spreading disease, we all get a little sicker. Likewise, in spreading recovery, we all get a little healthier.

If we can only restrain ourselves from attacking others, or even just replying angrily, we might arouse more light and less heat. Even when we know we are right and another is wrong, we need to put ourselves in their shoes, and correct them as gently as if our own feelings and public respect were on the line. And until we have true God-understanding, total command of the power of miracles and 12 guys following us everywhere, we ought never be so doggone sure that we know the whole truth, anyway! A little humility goes a long way in keeping things peaceful.

It is important for us to remember that our spirituality is fragile. A little denial, a little dishonesty, a little thoughtless cruelty, are often all it takes to switch off the connection and hide our souls from the light. Before we know it, we can be in a world of trouble and pain, and afraid to admit that we've lost it.

But service need not lead to moral or spiritual collapse. If we admit ahead of time that we are mortal, vulnerable and susceptible, we may brace ourselves spiritually, arm ourselves with love, humility and the support of others, and become entirely ready to deal with the inevitable friction of daily reality with humor and with God's help.

Since ALL have fallen short of divine wisdom and perfect grace, perhaps the best place to make our mutual amends is in the circle of recovery. It won't be easy to be restored to sanity, especially when we've been pretending to be sane! But if we all come together, asking each other's pardon and God's assistance, together we can.

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## **STEP SIX INPUT**

Having taken a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves, and then admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs, we are certainly aware of our defects of character, and what they cost us. But how do we approach this step?

Some of us think that we don't actually work this step as it is written, and our Basic Text, in fact, implies as much. This view sees the value of Step Six in our approach to it. With

an attitude of openness, we can become entirely ready to become entirely ready. Step Six is seen as a goal, something to aim for, a benchmark against which we can measure our spiritual progress. Surely, only the most humble, most spiritually advanced among us could ever hope to take Step Six literally.

Another view holds that we do work Step Six as written. This belief says that if we are truly in touch with our defects, it is only logical that we would acquire this state of complete readiness. The state of complete readiness arises naturally, for to admit a defect is to obligate us to change it. Perhaps the process of the preceding steps has awakened a longing deep within us to pursue God whatever the cost. This may be the complete readiness referred to in Step Six.

But to take another perspective on the matter, are these two views of Step Six mutually exclusive? Does believing in one preclude believing in the other? There may be another alternative--some of us find some truth in both viewpoints. Today, when we come upon this or any other contradiction, we can turn it over to God as we understand him, acknowledging that we can only comprehend so much with our little minds. We can live with some mystery today. Many times our past efforts to resolve what we saw as contradictory simply stirred up a great deal of dust but actually got us nowhere. It is ironic that we tend to run faster when we have lost our way.

Some of us who have persisted in the program have become increasingly aware of the phenomenon of grace, and looking back, observe that the significant thing about Step Six was what happened TO us rather than any effort we made with our own resources. We may have been humbled to the point where we experienced a heightened consciousness of the world outside ourselves. We may, for the first time, be able to accept ourselves as being part of a larger whole. We may integrate this as a fact and be okay with it, being okay with ourselves.

Yet another way to understand Step Six is to see it as a question: Am I entirely ready? Have I done all I can to get ready? Do I harbor any reservations? Are my motives correct? Do I harbor any hidden agendas? The integrity with which we answer these questions may very well determine the quality of our lives.

But if Step Six is a question, how on earth do we answer it? Can we answer it? It is paradoxical that the very value in asking certain questions may lie in the ASKING ITSELF. To answer with any degree of certainty would suggest that we are done growing, and we have done all of the self-improvement that we need to do. How many of us could make such a statement with a straight face?

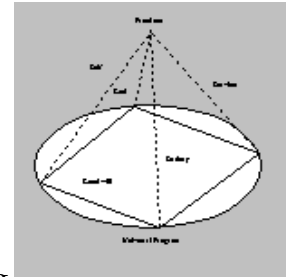
So, for many of us, this may be the value of Step Six: Examining ourselves in the light of perfect principle. Clearly, this is a project with which we will never be done completely.

We may wish to memorialize our efforts surrounding Step Six. We may do some reflective writing, or create some other external symbol to mark our passage through this phase of our recovery program. Some of us find prayer aloud in the presence of others to

be particularly meaningful. Others find external validation in some other form of ritual, or by creating a work of art.

Like so many of the Steps, it is, in a sense, a highly personal experience. We assign the meaning which we see in Step Six to it, ourselves. At the same time, we develop an assurance that we are becoming who we were meant to be. The hollow shell of falsity and lies falls away. We can stand in the light of day, and enjoy a sense of direction in our lives.

As we go along in our program, we find that our beliefs about Step Six are no less valid than anyone else's. We are all, in fact, in a state of continual learning and development, and our beliefs will likely evolve as we evolve. In the Narcotics Anonymous fellowship, this can happen on both an individual and group level. We can choose from the best, the truest, and most hopeful sentiments of various groups and individuals to build a personal recovery program that works for us. The individual extends his or her self to work the program, and in so doing the program extends itself to work with individuals. We believe that there is room for everyone that wants to join us, for we are in the Realm of the Spirit.



To sum it up, no one can tell us if we've worked Step Six or not (or whether Step Six has worked us). Ask anyone who has been through it how you will know when you've experienced Step Six, and they will likely respond that "YOU'LL know." Sincerely asking someone with more experience than you for help is, ironically, the hallmark of someone who IS working it.

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## Humor

So three addicts are sitting on death row as their execution day approaches. They're all NA members, and have been attending the death row H&I meetings regularly (brought in by the same member of a certain SF group for the last 103 yrs). The warden comes on the row to offer the condemned a last request, which is customary in this enlightened institution.

The warden asks the first addict about his last request. "Well, warden, I'd just like to have some quiet time for prayer and meditation...then I'll be ready." The warden says "OK, that's easy enough;" and goes to the next cell.

The warden asks the second addict the same question, second addict sez "Y'know, warden, just one last time I'd like to speak at a NA meeting. I wanna talk about all the dope I shot, all the rippin' and runnin', all the crimes I did, all the dope I shot, etc etc." ...warden says, "well, OK, I guess that's what you people do; we should be able to arrange for that," and moves on.

The warden asks the third addict about a last request, the condemned addict says,  
"Warden, if I'm gonna have to sit thru another meeting like that, you can kill me now."

NEW ATTITUDES  
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