

## BY THE NUMBERS

Alcoholism is a very complicated condition and we would like to be able to talk about it in simple terms. It has so many facets and we have to address each of them, one at a time, in order to prepare ourselves for the next level of understanding, and as we become more understanding, that prepares us to move on to the next level, and so on. For the person that is on the cusp of honestly accepting the fact that he is an alcoholic for the first time in his life, this is a tremendous undertaking. He is now faced with the challenge of questioning all of his thinking and his behaviors of the past and trying to make sense of it all then go about the business of accepting what he finds and adopting solid principles and actions to replace all of those faulty ideas and behaviors of the past.

Self honesty is the first thing on the list, and it sounds simple enough, until we consider the influence that our EGO has on our thinking, and that's when self honesty suffers its first setback. As we spend more and more time at the meetings and put some distance between us and our last drink, the pressure is off and the thoroughness suggested in the chapter five reading, starts to lose its importance and some of us get comfortable just attending meetings. Those that fall into that category may never drink again in their lives, but that could turn out to be a shame, because if he becomes complacent and doesn't continue to complete each of the steps to their intended conclusion he will be missing out on the most important gifts that this program offers; that of being at peace with ourselves and with the world around us.

Self justification is one of the lingering faults of the unfortunate person that settles for the half measures approach, and I know this because I was guilty of resting on my laurels when a friend of mine heard me criticizing another A.A. member and said: "all forms of criticism and character assassination stem from low self esteem". That caused me to take a second look at how thoroughly I was following this path and I started to find a better approach to how I judged other people. How could I gossip about another person and justify it and still be thoroughly following this path. When we were gossiping and pointing out the faults of others, we were guilty of the very things that we were accusing them of. I likened it to two old men in a convalescent home hitting each other with their canes because one wasn't walking fast enough for the other. Most of my mental problems came in the form of being judgmental of other people and of everything else in the world.

I had to step up to the plate and become strong enough to stop being judgmental and *look deeper into their motives and try to understand what was troubling them, and not be threatened by their outside behavior*. I cannot express in words the mental freedom that this principle has produced in me over a period of time. When I see someone acting out, my first thought is *not judgmental in nature but of empathy and compassion*. The next thought is "what I can do to help him or her". Over a period of time I have come to terms with all of the people that I inner act with on a day to day basis and I am no longer in conflict with anyone. To me, *they are all like kids just learning how to do life*. They all have problems and I Don't want to be one of their problems. I have replaced words like resentment, judgment, and criticism with empathy, understanding and compassion. Today I have no adversaries that I can think of, and *peace of mind is the natural result of this approach*. I find no exceptions to this principle and I

cannot be selective about who I apply it to. Everyone gets amnesty in my book. All of that mental gymnastics about *those other people* become a distant memory and I can't think of a single time that practicing this principle did not serve me well. When I hear the term "in all of my affairs" it reminds me of when, as a child, we used to try painting by the numbers and I was so proud of myself when the painting was complete. If however I only painted the numbered spaces that I wanted to paint, the resulting picture would not be a work of art. If I skimp on these principles, I am no work of art. Who am I to judge anyone? End of story.

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