

# First, Stop the Bleeding.

In A Sea of Confusion.

By Rick R.

When greeting newcomers, we all want to do what we can for them with the hope that they will all get sober, and live happily ever after, but oftentimes, that's not what happens. In the grip of the withdraw symptoms and the awful awakening to face the hideous four horsemen, the new member is often swimming in a sea of confusion and bewilderment, wondering what they have gotten themselves into and wishing they could have a few drinks to settle their nerves, but they know that never turned out well. In my earlier days in AA I would have started by talking about the steps, higher power, one day at a time, and all the other clichés I knew, to pull them out of their hopeless state of mind. That was the best I had to offer at that time. Today I realize that they are already mentally overwhelmed and it's unlikely that they will translate those ideas into anything constructive in the mental state they are in. I remember how I felt on the day that I came to my first encounter with those who welcomed me. They were Kind, Considerate, Compassionate, Understanding, Patient, and Comforting.

Today, when I have the opportunity to greet a newcomer, I want that person to experience the same safe harbor that I experienced. First, I ask them if they've been here before, and if they say "no" I have a chance to make their first experience in AA one of hope. I do a lot of listening, so I can get a fix on exactly what they are dealing with at the time, be it, divorce, DUI, loss of job, financial problems, or whatever else they are dealing with that has driven them to AA. Next, I offer them a cup of coffee and find a comfortable place for them to sit and experience their first meeting. I assure them that they will probably have a different perspective after the meeting is over, as most of us do. I let them know that most of us have been where they are and, as impossible as it seems, we all got through it in fine shape and that most of us are comfortable in our own skin. I don't start giving them advice, other than to sit back and enjoy sharing. I find it better to let them form their own idea of what we do, by not giving them my opinion of what they should get out of it.

After the meeting is over, I might ask if they enjoyed what they heard and whether it was different than what they had expected. It usually is and they usually experience the sincerity of the people who shared it, and it doesn't feel that they are being sold a bill of goods. I make sure they have a meeting list before they leave, and I might ask if they have transportation and if they plan to come back for a second helping. I may offer him some literature and even a Big Book, if I feel that it's appropriate. If they do come back for his second meeting, they won't feel uncomfortable and, if nothing else, they should see some friendly faces and my main goal is to let them know that we can be trusted. Our only agenda is to help.

When I was in the Navy, they sent us to First Aid classes. The first thing they taught us was, when we arrive on the scene of a personal injury, was, to "First, Stop the Bleeding". All the rest is useless if he bleeds out. That analogy seems appropriate for our new members, and I always want to, First, Stop the Bleeding, and make them feel comfortable and safe. I want them to want to come back. The collective sharing of the group will be more effective than any one person's opinion. Sponsors and mentors will come in due time and only after they understand what they need.