

How it (Really) Works

What Principles?

By Rick R.

When I first heard the term "*practice these principles in all our affairs*", in Step Twelve, I was waiting for someone to hand me a list of the principles, but it never happened the way I thought it would. I then thought that *the Steps* were what they were referring to when they spoke of *these principles*, but that never settled into my satisfaction either. Someone once suggested that the Saint Francis Prayer, being in Step Eleven may be the principles they were pointing out in Step 12; Close, but no cigar. I've never heard a clear, definite answer to this personal dilemma, but it never stopped me from searching for a clear understanding of what "these *principles*" are. After hearing thousands of members sharing on hundreds of topics in Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) meetings for many years, and reading the Big Book, (Alcoholics Anonymous) and the 12&12, (Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions) innumerable times, a slow but sure picture started to come in to focus. I realized that the 12 Steps were just the framework for a miraculous set of values that would set me free from all the doubts, fears, guilt, shame, and all the other negative emotions that cause all that mental chaos of Alcoholism. Tradition Two in the 12&12, Bill talks about his dilemma when someone suggested he go professional with the A.A. recovery program and the group advised against it. The principle of ethics caused him to go against his natural instincts. The Golden Rule is a principle that could have been incorporated into the steps, and who could have argued with the virtue of that, if it weren't crossing the line that the Oxford Group had mistakenly crossed which may have been their undoing. Today I live by The Golden Rule even though I have never seen it suggested in A.A. literature. The principles that we adopt in A.A. meetings are sprinkled throughout the Big Book and the 12&12, and there are far more than 12 of them. We assimilate them into our understanding sometimes without even being aware of it. On page 112 in the 12&12 for example, it asks "*Can we bring the same spirit of love and tolerance into our sometimes-deranged family lives that we bring to our A.A. group*"? This implies that love and tolerance is a principle or a mindset that we should practice in and outside the rooms of A.A. The program is made up of many principles that we learned long before we came into the program. Our problem was largely due to our inability to live by those principles. Our EGOs made the rules. Today, my Conscience outweighs my EGO. My unselfishness outweighs my greed. My compassion outweighs my resentments.... Today most everything I do is opposite to what it was Before A.A. and I have learned to find a principle that applies to every shortcoming that had plagued me in the past and I have learned to live by them. It takes all the guess work out of my decision making. The common denominator in all these principles that I value today is that they are all unselfish in nature. They are also common in all meaningful philosophies of life, and not exclusive to A.A. I no longer need to create my own version of these principles they are opposite to all my negative principles of the past. A noted writer once said, "When a person lives by principles, 99 percent of their decisions are already made for them." Today, I live by the dictates of my Conscience. Take that Mr. EGO.