

TRADITION THREE

DEVOTED CARE

The unity of Alcoholics Anonymous is the most cherished quality our society has. (12&12 pg. 129.) When we are introduced to the program, we come with a myriad of personality traits, driven by fear, and soon start to find fault with the people that do things differently than we would have done. We sometimes break off into clicks and point out their problems, and they do the same to us. We often think that we can read minds and think that they think like we think. All these mental games will need to be addressed if we plan to achieve what the program promises. It also says, " We believe there isn't a fellowship on earth that lavishes more devoted care upon its individual members." (devoted care)

I had a period in my career when I administered an aptitude test to people in order to see what career field they would be best suited for. I was amazed to discover how little I understood about people, and how different they were from what I would have guessed (from my first impression). I had the luxury of bringing that experience with me after I got sober. It translated into being careful not to judge a person based on his/her surface behavior. Most people come to us with a multitude of problems and few, if any, can be considered emotionally sober. Some people exhibit behaviors that are considered unacceptable to some, and often are criticized for it. Both the perpetrator and the critic are displaying symptoms of alcoholism, but if you questioned either of them about the matter, they would both have a perfectly valid and justified reason for doing what they do. How do I address these issues without being considered a critic myself?

A few years back, a man showed up, from out of town, and started attending our well-established AA meeting and it wasn't long before he started throwing his weight around. He was very intimidating to most of the members of the group. He even got physical a time or two. He started telling us how the meeting should be run. He became the topic of conversation for some of the members before and after the meetings, and it seemed perfectly justified to point out his faults. You get the picture. I wasn't intimidated by him, but rather looked at him as a project, so at every meeting, when given the opportunity, I would share openly that "I never judge a person by their surface behavior alone, but I try to have the strength to look for the deeper rooted problems, and when I discover what those are, I can only feel empathy for that person, as he is still plagued by those demons, and that I can't pile on when a person is so troubled". I also refer to the line in the St. Francis prayer in the 12&12 "TO UNDERSTAND RATHER THAN TO BE UNDERSTOOD", then I might throw in the "kill them with kindness" kicker.

I don't claim to be the solver of those kinds of problems, but I do know that the words I use mean something, so I try to give the perpetrator and the critic alike, a gentle and mature way to accept one another and to relax their adversarial postures. Emotional sobriety to me is just handling things in an adult manner. We cannot be selective about these things; we must stop fighting everyone and everything.

I also want to report that the big bully, slowly, over a period of time, laid down his arms, and the critics began to restrain their tongues and started treating him with a little more compassion, and things got so much better for everyone. The bully eventually turned into a big teddy bear. (Well almost).

The answers to all of our problems are in the Big Book, but it doesn't say that it will be easy to understand them. The distance between understanding our *emotions* and our *behavior* is often difficult to bridge, but not impossible. It comes easier to some of us and harder to others and the measure of my emotional sobriety is, often times, how well I respond to those others people. Do I become *threatening* and *intimidating* or, do I recognize that I have fears inside of me that cause me to be *aggressive*? Do I try to control my *emotions*, and talk to a trusted friend about these things? If I am *intimidated* or *threatened*, by another, do I gather with others and *criticize* and *plot* against the aggressor. Do I recognize the fear inside of him, that causes his behaviors, and talk to a trusted friend about the fears inside of me, and not about the behavior of the bully, and then, as hard as it may seem, try to find a way to *understand* and have *compassion* for him?

As long as we keep growing in the spirit of this tradition, I believe that AA is in good hands. Take the *high* road of happy destiny and be understanding to each other. Comfort the new comer and have compassion even when he is at his worst. It keeps me out of conflict.

Rick R.