

Singleness of Purpose

Does it really matter whether I'm actually powerless over alcohol,
or is it just ok for me to be here because I like AA better.?

I believe we have a lot of regular AA members claiming to be alcoholic, but having chatted with them alone and in depth, they eventually say something like "Well, I'm not really powerless over alcohol, that was never really my thing. I really couldn't control my _____ use, but I like AA better so I say I'm alcoholic out of respect for AA." I have had this conversation with countless AA members.

More recently there have been a couple of lively AA meetings where one of my AA friends has had to point out that AA's singleness of purpose IS an important principle, and asked people who share in a closed meeting to please identify themselves as alcoholic. It is not acceptable in a closed AA meeting to say "Hi, my name is _____, I'm an addict" and then proceed to share on how to recover from alcoholism. I have backed my friend in this matter, and participated in several lively discussions with many AA's recently about the singleness of purpose issue, AA's traditions, history, and what our future may hold. Everyone involved in these discussions has been energized and enthusiastic about AA, our principles and traditions, and it seems to have had a really positive effect on the membership.

So, is there really a problem here? Yes, we may have the occasional rebel who won't say they're alcoholic before sharing. Yes, there are a few members who are really just addicts, but what is the harm in that? Besides, AA can't tell anybody what to do, so even if some of these actions aren't very good for AA as a whole, there's really nothing we can do about it anyway. So why bring the whole thing up? Aren't we powerless here? Shouldn't we just let go and let God?

That is in fact what we have been doing, I think. I don't think we have been speaking up, talking about singleness of purpose, discussing why it is not just important, but *Vital to the survival of AA!*

Let us start at the beginning. Dr. Bob is going to give this guy he (nor anybody else) has never heard of before, 5 minutes to talk to him. That's it, 5 minutes! They talk for over four hours! Why? Dr. Bob has met a man he can identify with, a man who understands exactly how he feels, and most importantly, why he drinks. The principle is so important we have a closed meeting statement to emphasize the point. Most of us have seen or heard this statement countless times. Here's what took me by surprise. While I was digging around looking for a copy of this paragraph, I learned it's actually called the "Blue card" and also contains this statement!

From Alcoholics Anonymous Information Bulletin F-2

Many treatment centers today combine alcoholism and drug addiction under “substance abuse” or “chemical dependence.” Patients (both alcoholic and nonalcoholic) are introduced to A.A. and encouraged to attend A.A. meetings when they leave. As stated earlier, *anyone* may attend *open* A.A. meetings. But only those with a *drinking* problem may attend closed meetings or become A.A. *members*. People with problems other than alcoholism are eligible for A.A. membership *only* if they have a drinking problem.

Dr. Vincent Dole, a pioneer in methadone treatment for heroin addicts and for several years a trustee on the General Service Board of A.A., made the following statement: “The source of strength in A.A. is its single-mindedness. The mission of A.A. is to help alcoholics. A.A. limits what it is demanding of itself and its associates, and its success lies in its limited target. To believe that the process that is successful in one line guarantees success for another would be a very serious mistake.” Consequently, we welcome the opportunity to share A.A. experience with those who would like to develop Twelve Step/Twelve Tradition programs for the nonalcoholic addict by using A.A. methods.

Ten years ago I ask a friend to give the lead at a speaker meeting, 20 minute story/ 1st step, followed by group discussion/identification. I was stunned during the meeting as I realized I couldn't identify with anything she was saying. It wasn't until some days later when I realized (and had “known”) she wasn't really an alcoholic. She had at some time or other mentioned to me her addiction. It wasn't until years later that I came to fully understand what had really happened, and NOT happened, that day. I wonder, sometimes, if there was a newcomer at that meeting that decided *not* to stay because they couldn't identify. I don't really want to know though. I hope God will spare me from that bit of knowledge.