

(1) What kept you **coming back** as a newcomer?

- Hearing the recovery in the rooms - from speaker meetings, and from people announcing their stats about recovery (weight release, length of abstinence, years in the rooms, change in their lives, etc.)
- Honesty in the room – kept me coming back
- Fear kept me coming back – the reason I came was I couldn't reach my goal weight – I was afraid I would gain it back.
- One thing that attracted me and I kept coming back was the following of the Traditions and there was no cross talk. I could speak without being interrupted and could share and listen and I felt so nourished by the listening I had experienced.
- When I came in I was a mess and I had no idea what I was getting myself into – but I was looking for another diet to lose weight. I remembered my first meeting – in a library – and people were talking about food issues and I started crying. I think the love I felt and the acceptance helped me feel safe – because I knew if I was going to recover, I had to share some pretty intense things. There was a lot of shame in disordered eating – what's wrong with me? The safety in the rooms, the honest of the people in the rooms – I really felt safe there. And I related to what everybody was saying. I wasn't even into the Steps yet – but that drew me in and I was sold.
- When I first came to a meeting I immediately heard my story - which was important because I had to be different or weirder - but I felt relief that other people had my story. I would go to a meeting or two – feel great – get abstinent – and go away for a few weeks. That went on for a couple of years. Then the secretary in my local group said they were closing the meeting because no one would step up for secretary. So, I decided to step up – and to be the secretary. I had to get a sponsor and work the steps. So, what kept me coming back was a combination of service and working the steps. And being secretary was the only thing that kept me coming to the rooms each week and getting real recovery.
- What kept me coming back was that someone I didn't know came up to me after the meeting and said – “Keep coming back”. I didn't know what she meant, but it felt very real to me, so I went to the next meeting and kept coming back.
- What kept me coming back – was I heard my story. I actually qualified for OA because I didn't have that anywhere else.
- What kept me coming back was desperation. OA was the last place I wanted to come. I was already in AA and thought I knew it all. I had preconceived wants and needs and I didn't want to have a food problem or identify. Then what kept me coming back was I kept trying to work my program from the other program (sharing about food problem in other 12 step meetings – they gave me grief). I needed the identification A LOT.
- I didn't want a spiritual solution. I wanted a diet plan and it was confusing to me. Then I stumbled into OA HOW – and there it was – the diet plan, the structure. Not to diss on OA HOW – but it helped me. It kept me here and brought me back to OA. I don't know what someone needs or if a newcomer is going to be all over the map (“What about the food?” – that's what I was all about). I really think about that when I'm talking to Newcomers or thinking about newcomers – and I have no idea what they need. I get all this fear going – which is distracting me from being a sponsor. But – it's not about me.

(2) What **stops you from reaching out** to a newcomer?

- My shyness and introversion - not liking to make phone calls. I find texts are better.
- I'm afraid I'm going to say the wrong thing – newcomers are so fragile. I'm afraid whatever they need, I don't have it – especially I've been struggling with my own abstinence over the last year. I know I have a

lot to offer, but I feel like I need to be perfect before I can give anything away. It does say in the Big Book – You cannot give away what you don't have. I know that refers to spirituality and Higher Power ...

- We've had a couple of men newcomers and I've tried calling them and talked for a little while, but I don't seem to relate well – and the meeting is just full of ladies. We have a small meeting. I'd like better ways to relate to men who come to a meeting full of women.
- (I can offer that there is a new men's group online. They have their own website - Oamen.org
- I'd like to speak about the diversity issue. What I find is that fellows feel – *What if I say the wrong thing – or I can't relate to you because I have anorexia and you don't, etc.* In my experience, when I first came in, I had to fight for my recovery. There were people in meetings who didn't see me as having a problem because I wasn't overweight. But I heard myself in their stories anyway. It would have been easy for me to leave but I was given the gift of desperation and I was going to stay – no one was going to kick me out. Look for what we have in common – and set aside anything that is different. It's our common problem that brings us together. And to reach that part inside – for some of us it's really deep in there, and in one of the readings, it talks about that space – deep inside – that no one can touch – that no one but a fellow sufferer can reach. And the level changes. As I met other anorexics in program there's an additional level of deepness in the bond. But we all have that common bond. My HP is helping me try to build my courage level to speak to people – that newcomer is there because that will help me grow my program and my relationships.
- To be honest, I get phone fatigue – I receive a ton of calls – sponsor – sponsee – newcomer – I don't want to scare them off, I want to attract them. Over the years, I learned to ask open questions; “How can I be helpful? Do you have any questions you want to ask?” And then I let them tell me. Someone gave me names to call in LA – mostly men – for LGBTQ. In a special interest meeting, they are going to be talking about how that affected them in their recovery. So, I asked them “What is it you find helpful in these special interest meetings?” I don't have an agenda – I just ask them open-ended questions. “Tell me what you need today ...”
- My hesitation in reaching out to newcomers is my own expectation to how they're going to react. I know I wouldn't be here in OA today if I hadn't received a phone call that evening from a fellow (after my first meeting). When I was a Newcomer Greeter, I would reach out by phone and that person didn't want anything to do with the program and that really shut me off. What I've learned is that reaching out – if I let go of the fear or expectation - that really helps.
- What is difficult for me is knowing what to say. For me – it's confusion about who OA is. I was in a meeting the other day in which they said the basic book we use in OA is the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions of OA. But when I think about who OA is – it's the Big Book. The obsession of the mind and the allergy of the body. I have trouble trying to merge together those two views – and the formula / recommendation - on how to follow those. Because I feel like one approach is Voices of Recovery and OA 12 x 12 and the other way that I'm more comfortable with is the Big Book and Visions Meeting – and I just can't integrate those, and I'm not sure what to say to the newcomer. So I'm hoping as we work together in the meeting that I attend, that I'll get more clarity on that, and I can be of more service to someone who is coming in.

(3) **What did you need** from OA when you were a newcomer?

- I needed to know that No. 1 there wasn't a prescribed food plan to follow and that I could find a plan that worked for me. I didn't initially work with a sponsor, but I agreed to 3 meals a day and 1 snack. I needed flexibility.
- I could define who my Higher Power was – and felt I had the option to explore my own spirituality and sense of power. I wouldn't have stayed without that.

- I didn't know it at the time, but I can say with my heart now, was that I needed to find my Higher Power. Thanks to OA I have a strong relationship to my Higher Power – and I need to carry that message. I'm here today because I'm sponsoring and need this information.
- I had no idea what I needed – but what I got from my first sponsor I think it what I needed. She is so affirming. She was absolutely accepting of me – and also so affirming – give me homework in the workbook and what I would bring back what I had written, “Oh that's really great – you really did a deep job with this and so happy to be with you on your recovery.” I was sure I wasn't as good as other people, but she kept feeling that I WAS good enough –and maybe I could recover. She was very spiritual and very religious. And at the end of every meeting, she would say, “May I pray with you?” We just took each other's hands and she would pray over me. I didn't think I could do it. Clearly, that was what I needed.

(4) **How can you carry the message** to a newcomer?

- I'd like to talk about this because there's a LOT to carrying the message. If we're talking about a newcomer, I have to remember what it was like when I was a newcomer. There's no rush – there's no train to catch – it's like slow / easy does it. You take the speed at which they can go. But carrying the message is a BIG proposition – talking about the steps, what the solution is, talking about program tools, etc. But I can talk to them about “where they are” – and they have no idea what OA is – so baby steps for baby feet. Get them to read the Doctor's Opinion – oh, who knew I had an obsession? Oh, I have no power over it. I kind of meet them where they are. If they're dragging their feet, that's another thing. Remember, they have some responsibility in this process. What do they need to find out while doing their own work. Each person is different – there's not really a template you can use for each person. We do the best we can, and if you know somebody who has more experience with a problem “You need to talk to Susie – she has more experience with anorexia.” “You should talk to Sally – she also lost a parent and is having trouble with overeating.”
- I don't always do it – but I try to say, “I am the message – my experience strength and hope” and also, by being there. It's critical to carry the message – to show what acceptance is, to live with spiritual principles of this program. Of course I can't do that alone. I have to do that in partnership. Last Saturday I heard harmony and cooperation with my Higher Power. And that's the process – letting go of the outcome. And expectations – but letting go of the outcome.
- If you think you have nothing to offer – you can offer sharing your struggle. Even with 25 years in the program, I still forget that HP is in charge – not me. I still think I'm in charge – and when I share that struggle, the other person reminds me. I do the footwork, and the results are up to God. When I do the footwork – when I remind myself that God is in charge, the words come to me. It's not about me. It's about giving service. I am a channel (St. Francis prayer) – that somehow my experience strength and hope will flow through in God's time. It took me a long time to learn that I am exactly who I'm supposed to be – and who am I to disregard the work of my Higher Power? So we all have something to offer. (“I've got to stop walking around thinking I am God – because He doesn't walk around thinking He's Harlan.”)
- In almost every meeting format, if you're a newcomer attend six meetings and look for a sponsor who has something that you want. That's our responsibility – to share in meetings – because they don't know what they are looking for – it takes a lot to walk up to someone and ask, will you be my sponsor. Part of carrying the message, is being the message in the meetings – so people can say “Hmm maybe I want her as my sponsor” We are always on display when there are newcomers around. When there are newcomers

in a meeting, I try to share something that is basic to recovery – because I know they’re there and they’re listening.

#### Possible suggestions and Q&A

- People in meetings (HOW) who talk about their recovery. How we talk about OA as a weight loss program – vs giving proof points. With those shares, the newcomer hears, “I had a struggle and I know where you’re coming from – and I have lost this weight with my HP, and the steps” This is a way to show newcomers that there is a way – and there is hope.
- Those stories could help a newcomer to identify – and when you hear someone saying they’ve been in the rooms since 2009 (I always wonder how to do that) – so any kind of guidance like that would be very useful. If you could speak to that (Alice).
- Writing your 3-minute elevator speech. Mention you’re a member, what OA is about and your story. That’s pretty much what you need.
- Alice - There was an entire workshop on sitting down, writing your speech and sharing it. (She will send that info to Danielle. She hasn’t been through it yet but perhaps we could do it again.)
- Alice, how would you feel if you sat in a meeting as an anorexic and people discuss recovery in terms of weight loss? Considering the diversity in the room and what people struggle with?
- Alice- As a newcomer it was more triggering than it is now. But there is a need for some people to hear someone was 300 lbs and the weight loss – but it’s about the steps – and our individual journey that gets us to recovery. Many symptoms – one solution. It’s important to point that out. Her sponsor had her go to an NA meeting – and she heard picking up so we don’t have to feel what we don’t want to feel – that’s the same no matter what your drug or behavior is. Now we have deeper focus meetings – so she can get a deeper acceptance e.g., people who have had surgery. My experience is that when I walked in, AB was an outside issue – “that has no place here” so I advocate strongly for people - that how they experience recovery is not up for issue. It’s not about me and what I need – it’s what OA needs as a whole – that is, for each of us shares experience, strength and hope. So when I came, I was underweight – and my disease got worse, not better, when I began to work the steps, because I was afraid to let go of my disease completely. It took six months to find an obsession-free abstinence where I felt a connection with my higher power. Now – I walk through my emotions – I feel them, I share them, and it’s your experience strength and hope that the group needs to hear. For me, I had to restore some weight to be in a healthy body so I could do God’s work in the world. Expressing your truth is what is needed in the meeting. To show up as I am. To cry through a meeting is okay – because that’s what I needed that do.
- About qualifying in meetings about amount of weight lost – and we also talk about anniversaries. But I’ve been in meetings, where at the end, “Will all those who have more than one year of abstinence, please raise your hands”
- I get uncomfortable with how long people have been abstinent. For me, it’s about what the program has done for me spiritually. Yes, I lost additional weight after coming into OA that I didn’t even know I needed to lose, and I’ve been stable at that weight for years. But more important, it helps me maintain serenity and a life of service and fullness that I didn’t have before – so I struggle with how many days of abstinence

and what's your recover date. It's more the big picture for me. How to do that in a 3-minute elevator speech might be difficult. But somehow it gives me a sense of why I keep coming back to meetings.

- Thanks everybody for your shares, although I'm always saying that I've slipped on sugar, or I'm not abstinent now – but I can still say, I've maintained a 100 pound weight loss. And that is reassuring for me. Rather than thinking I'm not doing it “right” – because I have maintained a 100-pound weight loss. And that is the point.