

[Click here to return](#) [Click here for the second half of this manual](#)

A Manual for Alcoholics Anonymous

THE AKRON MANUAL

**First published in
1939 or 1940**

Edit. This present text, available for printout at <http://hindsfoot.org> in the section on A.A. Historical Materials, was formatted for web by Glenn C. (South Bend IN) in January 2002; the editorial notes are his. His text was drawn from one prepared by Barefoot Bob, who scanned the text of an original copy of the pamphlet and reformatted it for web on May 15, 1997; see www.barefootsworld.net/aamanual.html.

Bob says that this little booklet was written and being distributed within one year of the publication of the Big Book, which would date it to late 1939 or early 1940. On the basis of a number of statements made within the text, it certainly could not have been produced much later than that. This pamphlet assumes hospitalization at St. Thomas Hospital under the care of Sister Ignatia and the overall supervision of Dr. Bob as the normal first step in recovery, and gives recommended readings (e.g. the *Upper Room* for your morning meditation) which dropped out of A.A. practice fairly soon thereafter, but parts of its advice are still very relevant, and it makes very fascinating reading even today. We must assume that Dr. Bob himself (and probably Sister Ignatia too) gave their approval to the statements made in this little booklet.

This is the first half of the manual, containing the most important introductory material. (The second half, which is

available at this site as a separate printout, contains a series of assorted thoughts on learning to live the program and a long section on meetings.)

Foreword

This booklet is intended to be a practical guide for new members and sponsors of new members of Alcoholics Anonymous.

TO THE NEWCOMER: The booklet is designed to give you a practical explanation of what to do and what not to do in your search for sobriety. The editors, too, were pretty bewildered by the program at first. They realize that very likely you are groping for answers and offer this pamphlet in order that it may make a little straighter and less confusing the highway you are about to travel.

TO THE SPONSOR: If you have never before brought anyone into A.A. the booklet attempts to tell you what your duties are by your "baby," how you should conduct yourself while visiting patients, and other odd bits of information, some of which may be new to you.

The booklet should be read in conjunction with the large book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, the Bible, the daily lesson, any other pamphlets that are published by the group, and other constructive literature. A list of suggestions will be found in the back pages of this pamphlet. It is desirable that members of A.A. furnish their prospective "babies" with this *Manual* as early as possible, particularly in the case of hospitalization.

The experience behind the writing and editing of this pamphlet adds up to hundreds of years of drinking, plus scores of years of recent sobriety. Every suggestion, every word, is backed up by hard experience.

The editors do not pretend any explanation of the spiritual or religious aspects of A.A. It is assumed that this phase of the work will be explained by sponsors. The booklet therefore deals solely with the physical aspects of getting sober and remaining sober.

A.A. in Akron is fortunate in having facilities for hospitalizing its patients. In many communities, however, hospitalization is not available. Although the pamphlet mentions hospitalization throughout, the methods described are effective if the patient is confined to his home, if he is in prison or a mental institution, or if he is attempting to learn A.A. principles and carry on his workaday job at the same time.

If your community has a hospital, either private or general, that has not accepted alcoholic patients in the past, it might be profitable to call on the officials of the institution and explain

Alcoholics Anonymous to them. Explain that we are not in the business of sobering up drunks merely to have them go on another bender. Explain that our aim is total and permanent sobriety. Hospital authorities should know, and if they do not, should be told, that an alcoholic is a sick man, just as sick as a diabetic or a consumptive. Perhaps his affliction will not bring death as quickly as diabetes or tuberculosis, but it will bring death or insanity eventually.

Alcoholism has had a vast amount of nationwide publicity in recent years. It has been discussed in medical journals, national magazines and newspapers. It is possible that a little sales talk will convince the hospital authorities in your community that they should make beds available for patients sponsored by Alcoholics Anonymous.

If the way is finally opened, it is urged that you guard your hospital privileges carefully. Be as certain as you possibly can that your patient sincerely wants A.A.

Above all, carefully observe all hospital rules.

It has been our experience that a succession of unruly patients or unruly visitors can bring a speedy termination of hospital privileges. And they will want no part of you or your patient in the future.

Once he starts to sober up, the average alcoholic makes a model hospital patient. He needs little or no nursing or medical care, and he is grateful for his opportunity.

I

Definition of an Alcoholic Anonymous: An Alcoholic Anonymous is an alcoholic who through application of and adherence to rules laid down by the organization, has completely foresworn the use of any and all alcoholic beverages. **The moment he wittingly drinks so much as a drop of beer, wine, spirits, or any other alcoholic drink he automatically loses all status as a member of Alcoholics Anonymous.**

A.A. is not interested in sobering up drunks who are not sincere in their desire to remain completely sober for all time. A.A. is not interested in alcoholics who want to sober up merely to go on another bender, sober up because of fear for their jobs, their wives, their social standing, or to clear up some trouble either real or imaginary. In other words, if a person is genuinely sincere in his desire for continued sobriety for his own good, is convinced in his heart that alcohol holds him in its power, and is willing to admit that he is an alcoholic, members of Alcoholics Anonymous will do all in their power, spend days of their time to guide him to a new, a happy, and a contented way of life.

It is utterly essential for the newcomer to say to himself sincerely and without any reservation, "I am doing this for myself and myself alone." Experience has proved in hundreds of cases that unless an alcoholic is sobering up for a purely personal and selfish motive, he will not remain sober for any great length of time. He may remain sober for a few weeks or a few months, but the moment the motivating element, usually fear of some sort, disappears, so disappears sobriety.

TO THE NEWCOMER: It is your life. It is your choice. If you are not completely convinced to your own satisfaction that you are an alcoholic, that your life has become unmanageable; if you are not ready to part with alcohol forever, it would be better for all concerned if you discontinue reading this and give up the idea of becoming a member of Alcoholics Anonymous.

For if you are not convinced, it is not only wasting your own time, but the time of scores of men and women who are genuinely interested in helping you.

II

TO THE LADIES: If we seem to slight you in this booklet it is not intentional. We merely use the masculine pronouns "he" and "him" for convenience. We fully realize that alcohol shows no partiality. It does not respect age, sex, nor estate. The millionaire drunk on the best Scotch and the poor man drunk on the cheapest rotgut look like twin brothers when they are in a hospital bed or the gutter. The only difference between a female and a male drunk is that the former is likely to be treated with a little more consideration and courtesy -- although generally she does not deserve it. Every word in this pamphlet applies to women as well as men. -- THE EDITORS

III

A WORD TO THE SPONSOR who is putting his first newcomer into a hospital or otherwise introducing him to this new way of life: You must assume full responsibility for this man. He trusts you, otherwise he would not submit to hospitalization. You must fulfill all pledges you make to him, either tangible or intangible. If you cannot fulfill a promise, do not make it. It is easy enough to promise a man that he will get his job back if he sobers up. But unless you are certain that it can be fulfilled, don't make that promise. Don't promise financial aid unless you are ready to fulfill your part of the bargain. If you don't know how he is going to pay his hospital bill, don't put him in the hospital unless you are willing to assume financial responsibility.

It is definitely your job to see that he has visitors, and you must visit him frequently yourself. If you hospitalize a man and then neglect him, he will naturally lose confidence in you, assume a "nobody loves me" attitude, and your half-hearted labors will be lost.

This is a very critical time in his life. He looks to you for courage, hope, comfort and guidance. He fears the past. He is uncertain of the future. And he is in a frame of mind that the least neglect on your part will fill him with resentment and self-pity. You have in your hands the most valuable property in the world -- the future of a fellow man. Treat his life as carefully as you would your own. You are literally responsible for his life.

Above all, don't coerce him into a hospital. Don't get him drunk and then throw him in while he is semi-conscious. Chances are he will waken wondering where he is, how he got there. And he won't last.

You should be able to judge if a man is sincere in his desire to quit drinking. Use this judgment. Otherwise you will find yourself needlessly bumping your head into a stone wall and wondering why your "babies" don't stay sober. Remember your own experience. You can remember many times when you would have done anything to get over that awful alcoholic sickness, although you had no desire in the world to give up drinking for good. It doesn't take much good health to inspire an alcoholic to go back and repeat the acts that made him sick. Men who have had pneumonia don't often wittingly expose themselves a second time. But an alcoholic will deliberately get sick over and over again with brief interludes of good health.

You should make it a point to supply your patient with the proper literature -- the big *Alcoholics Anonymous* book, this pamphlet, other available pamphlets, a Bible, and anything else that has helped you. Impress upon him the wisdom and necessity of reading and re-reading this literature. The more he learns about A.A. the easier the road to recovery.

Study the newcomer and decide who among your A.A. friends might have the best story and exert the best influence on him. There are all types in A.A. and regardless of whom you hospitalize, there are dozens who can help him. An hour on the telephone will produce callers. Don't depend on chance. Stray visitors may drop in, but twenty or thirty phone calls will clinch matters and remove uncertainty. It is your responsibility to conjure up callers.

Impress upon your patient that his visitors are not making purely social calls. Their conversation is similar to medicine. Urge him to listen carefully to all that is said, and then meditate upon it after his visitor leaves.

When your patient is out of the hospital your work has not ended. It is now your duty not only to him but to yourself to see that he starts out on the right foot.

Accompany him to his first meeting. Take him along with you when you call on the next patient. Telephone him when there are other patients. Drop in at his home occasionally. Telephone him as often as possible. Urge him to look up the new friends he has made. Counsel and advise him. There was a certain amount of glamour connected with being a patient in the hospital. He had many visitors. His time was occupied. But now that he has been discharged, the glamour has worn off. He probably will be lonely. He may be too timid to seek the companionship of his new friends.

Experience has proved this to be a very critical period. So your labors have not ended. Give him as much attention as you did when you first called on him -- until he can find the road by himself.

Remember, you depend on the newcomer to keep you sober as much as he depends on you. So never lose touch with your responsibility, which never ends.

Remember the old adage, "Two is company and three is a crowd." If you find a patient has one or more visitors don't go into the room. An alcoholic goes to the hospital for two reasons only -- to get sober and to learn how to keep sober. The former is easy. Cut off the alcohol and a person is bound to get sober. So the really important thing is to learn how to keep sober. Experience has taught that when more than three gather in a room, patient included, the talk turns to the World Series, politics, funny drunken incidents, and "I could drink more than you."

Such discussion is a waste of the patient's time and money. It is assumed that he wants to know

how you are managing to keep sober, and you won't hold his attention if there is a crowd in the room.

If you must enter the room when there is another visitor, do it quietly and unobtrusively. Sit down in a corner and be silent until the other visitor has concluded. If he wants any comments from you he will ask for them.

One more word. It is desirable that the patient's visitors be confined to members of Alcoholics Anonymous. Have a quiet talk with his wife or his family before he goes to the hospital. Explain that he will be in good hands and that it is only through kindness to him that his family and friends are asked to stay away. New members are likely to be a little shy. If they find a woman in the patient's room they are not inclined to "let down their hair." The older hands don't mind it, but a new member might unwittingly be kept from delivering a valuable message.

IV

TO THE NEWCOMER: Now you are in the hospital. Or perhaps you are learning to be an Alcoholic Anonymous the "hard way" by continuing at your job while undertaking sobriety.

You will have many callers. They will come singly and in pairs. They may arrive at all hours, from early morning to late night. Some you will like; some you will resent, some will seem stupid; others will strike you as silly, fanatic or slightly insane; some will tell you a story that will be "right down your alley." But remember this -- never for one minute forget it:

Every single one of them is a former drunk and every single one is trying to help you! Your visitor has had the very problems that you are facing now. In comparison with some, your problems are trifles. You have one thing in common with every visitor -- an alcoholic problem. Your caller may have been sober for a week or for half a decade. He still has an alcoholic problem, and if he for one moment forgets to follow any single rule for sober living, he may be occupying your hospital bed tomorrow.

Alcoholics Anonymous is one hundred percent effective for those who faithfully follow the rules. IT IS THOSE WHO TRY TO CUT CORNERS WHO FIND THEMSELVES BACK IN THEIR OLD DRUNKEN STATE.

Your visitor is going out of his way, taking up his time, perhaps missing a pleasant evening at home or at the theater by calling on you. His motives are twofold: He is selfish in that by calling on you he is taking out a little more "sobriety insurance" for himself; and secondly, he is genuinely anxious to pass along the peace and happiness a new way of life has brought him. He is also paying off a debt -- paying the people who led him to the path of sobriety by helping someone else. In a very short time you too will find yourself paying off your debt, by carrying the word to another.

Always bear in mind that your caller not so many days or months ago occupied the same bed you are in today.

And here we might, despite our promise earlier in the booklet, give you a hint on the spiritual

phase of Alcoholics Anonymous. You will be told to have faith in a Higher Power. First have faith in your visitor. He is sincere. He is not lying to you. He is not attempting to sell you a bill of goods. A.A. is given away, not sold. Believe him when he tells you what you must do to attain sobriety.

His very presence and appearance should be proof to you that the A.A. program really works. He is extending a helping hand and for himself asks nothing in return. Regardless of who he is or what he has to say, listen to him carefully and courteously. Your alcohol-befuddled mind may not absorb all he says in an hour's conversation, but you will find that when he leaves certain things he has said will come back to you. Ponder these things carefully. They may bring you salvation. It has been the history of A.A. that one never knows where lightning will strike. You may pick up the germ of an idea from the most unexpected source. That single idea may shape the course of your entire life, may be the start of an entirely new philosophy. So no matter who your caller is, or what he says, listen attentively.

Your problem has always seemed to be shared by no one else in this world. You cannot conceive of anyone else in your predicament.

Forget it! Your problem dates back to the very beginning of history. Some long-forgotten hero discovered that the juice of the grape made a pleasant drink that brought pleasant results. That same hero probably drank copiously until he suddenly discovered that he could not control his appetite for the juice of the grape. And then he found himself in the same predicament you are in now -- sick, worried, crazed with fear, and **extremely thirsty**.

Your caller once felt that he alone in the world had a drinking problem, and was amazed into sobriety when he discovered that countless thousands were sharing his troubles.

He also found out that when he brought his troubles out of their dark and secret hiding place and exposed them to the cleansing light of day, they were half conquered. And so it will be for you. Bring your problems out in the open and you will be amazed how they disappear.

It cannot be repeated too often: **Listen carefully and think over at great length.**

V

NOW YOU ARE ALONE. When you go to the hospital with typhoid fever your one thought is to be cured. When you go to the hospital as a chronic alcoholic your only thought should be to conquer a disease that is just as deadly if not so quick to kill. And rest assured that the disease is deadly. The mental hospitals are filled with chronic alcoholics. The vital statistics files in every community are filled with deaths due to acute alcoholism.

This is the most serious moment in your life. You can leave the hospital and resume an alcoholic road to an untimely grave or padded cell, or you can start upward to a life that is happy beyond any expectation.

It is your choice and your choice alone. Your newly found friends cannot police you to keep you sober. They have neither the time nor the inclination. They will go to unbelievable lengths to help you but there is a limit to all things.

Shortly after you leave the hospital you will be on your own. The Bible tells us to put "**first things first.**" Alcohol is obviously the first thing in your life. So concentrate on conquering it.

You could have gone through the mechanics of sobering up at home. Your new friends could have called on you in your own living room. But at home there would have been a hundred and one things to distract your attention -- the radio, the furnace, a broken screen door, a walk to the drug store, your own family affairs. Every one of these things would make you forget the most important thing in your life, the thing upon which depends life or death -- complete and endless sobriety. That is why you are in the hospital. You have time to think; you have time to read; you will have time to examine your life, past and present, and to reflect upon what it can be in the future. And don't be in a hurry to leave. Your sponsor knows best. Stay in the hospital until you have at least a rudimentary understanding of the program.

There is the Bible that you haven't opened for years. Get acquainted with it. Read it with an open mind. You will find things that will amaze you. You will be convinced that certain passages were written with you in mind. Read the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew V, VI, and VII). Read St. Paul's inspired essay on love (I Corinthians XIII). Read the Book of James. Read the Twenty-third and Ninety-first Psalms. These readings are brief but so important.

Read *Alcoholics Anonymous* and then read it again. You may find that it contains your own story. It will become your second Bible. Ask your callers to suggest other readings.

If you are puzzled, ask questions. One of your callers will know the answers. Get your sponsor to explain to you the Twelve Steps. If he is not too certain about them -- he may be new in this work -- ask someone else. The Twelve Steps are listed in the back of this booklet.

There is no standing still in A.A. You either forge ahead or slip backwards. Even the oldest members, the founders, learn something new almost every day.

You can never learn too much in the search for sobriety.

VI

NOW YOU ARE OUT OF THE HOSPITAL By this time you should know if you want to go along with A.A., or if you want to slip back into that old headache that you called life. You are physically sober and well -- a bit shaky, perhaps, but that will wear off in a short time. Reflect that you didn't get into this condition over night, and that you cannot expect to get out of it in a couple of hours or days.

You feel good enough to go on another bender, or good enough to try a different scheme of things -- **sobriety**.

You have decided to go along with Alcoholics Anonymous? Very well, you will never regret it.

First off, your day will have a new pattern. You will open the day with a quiet period. This will be explained by your sponsor. You will read the *Upper Room*, or whatever you think best for yourself. You will say a little prayer asking for help during the day. You will go about your daily work, and your associates will be surprised at you clear-eyed, the disappearance of that haunted

look and your willingness to make up for the past. Your sponsor may drop in to see you, or call you on the telephone. There may be a meeting of an A.A. group. Attend it without question. You have no valid excuse except sickness or being out of town, for not attending. You may call on a new patient. Don't wait until tomorrow to do this. You will find the work fascinating. You will find a kindred soul. And you will be giving yourself a new boost along the road to sobriety. Finally, at the end of the day you will say another little prayer of thanks and gratitude for a day of sobriety. You will have lived a full day -- a full, constructive day. **And you will be grateful.**

You feel that you have nothing to say to a new patient? No story to tell? **Nonsense!** You have been sober for a day, or for a week. Obviously, you must have done something to stay sober, even for that short length of time. That is your story. And believe it or not, the patient won't realize that you are nearly as much of a tyro as he is. Definitely you have something to say. And with each succeeding visit you will find that your story comes easier, that you have more confidence in your ability to be of help. The harder you work at sobriety the easier it is to remain sober.

Your sponsor will take you to your first meeting. You will find it new, but inspiring. You will find an atmosphere of peace and contentment that you didn't know existed.

After you have attended several meetings it will be your duty to get up on your feet and say something. You will have something to say, even if it is only to express gratitude to the group for having helped you. Before many months have passed you will be asked to lead a meeting. Don't try to put it off with excuses. It is part of the program. Even if you don't think highly of yourself as a public speaker, remember you are among friends, and that your friends also are ex-drunks.

Get in contact with your new friends. Call them up. Drop in at their homes or offices. The door is always open to a fellow-alcoholic.

Before long you will have a new thrill -- the thrill of helping someone else. There is no greater satisfaction in the world than watching the progress of a new Alcoholic Anonymous. When you first see him in his hospital bed he may be unshaved, bleary-eyed, dirty, incoherent. Perhaps the next day he has shaved and cleaned up. A day later his eyes are brighter, new color has come into his face. He talks more intelligently. He leaves the hospital, goes to work, and buys some new clothes. And in a month you will hardly recognize him as the derelict you first met in the hospital. No whisky in the world can give you this thrill.

Above all, remember this: keep the rules in mind. As long as you follow them you are on firm ground. But the least deviation -- and you are vulnerable.

AS A NEW MEMBER, remember that you are one of the most important cogs in the machinery of A.A. Without the work of the new member, A.A. could not have grown as it has. You will bring into this work a fresh enthusiasm, the zeal of a crusader. You will want everyone to share with you the blessings of this new life. You will be tireless in your efforts to help others. And it is a splendid enthusiasm! Cherish it as long as you can.

It is not likely that your fresh enthusiasm will last forever. You will find, however, that as initial enthusiasm wanes, it is replaced with a greater understanding, deeper sympathy, and more complete knowledge. You will eventually become an "elder statesman" of A.A. and you will be

able to use your knowledge to help not only brand new members, but those who have been members for a year or more, but who still have perplexing problems. And as a new member, do not hesitate to bring your problems to these "elder statesmen." They may be able to solve your headaches and make easier your pain.

And now you are ready to go back and read Part III of this booklet. For you are ready to sponsor some other poor alcoholic who is desperately in need of help, both human and Divine.

So God bless you and keep you.

Yardstick for Alcoholics

THE PROSPECTIVE MEMBER of A.A. may have some doubts if he is actually an alcoholic. A.A. in Akron has found a yardstick prepared by psychiatrists of Johns Hopkins University to be very valuable in helping the alcoholic decide for himself.

Have your prospect answer the following questions, being as honest as possible with himself in deciding the answers. If he answers YES to one of the questions, there is a definite warning that he MAY be an alcoholic. If he answers YES to any two, the chances are that he IS an alcoholic. If he answers YES to any three or more, he IS DEFINITELY an alcoholic and in need of help. **The questions:**

1. Do you lose time from work due to drinking?
2. Is drinking making your home life unhappy?
3. Do you drink because you are shy with other people?
4. Is drinking affecting your reputation?
5. Have you gotten into financial difficulties as a result of drinking?
6. Have you ever stolen, pawned property, or "borrowed" to get money for alcoholic beverages?
7. Do you turn to lower companions and an inferior environment when drinking?
8. Does your drinking make you careless of your family's welfare?
9. Has your ambition decreased since drinking?
10. Do you crave a drink at a definite time daily?
11. Do you want a drink the next morning?
12. Does drinking cause you to have difficulty in sleeping?
13. Has your efficiency decreased since drinking?
14. Is drinking jeopardizing your job or business?
15. Do you drink to escape from worries or troubles?

16. Do you drink alone?
17. Have you ever had a complete loss of memory as a result of drinking?
18. Has your physician ever treated you for drinking?
19. Do you drink to build up your self-confidence?
20. Have you ever been to a hospital or institution on account of drinking?

[Click here for the second half of this manual](#)