

The Big Book Workshop Format

Good evening, my name is _____, and I'm an alcoholic. Welcome to the *Big Book* Workshop. We as leaders do not consider ourselves to be the gurus of *The Big Book* of Alcoholics Anonymous. We do not consider ourselves to be experts in anything at all. For those who care to, please join me in a moment of silence to remind us of why we are here, and for the alcoholic who still suffers.

Please join me in the Serenity Prayer:

“God grant me the serenity, to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.”

And now please join me in the workshop prayer:

“God, let me set aside everything I think I know about you, AA, myself, and my disease, for an open mind and a new experience. Let me be honest and thorough. Amen.”

For the first couple of weeks we will go around the room and introduce ourselves in order to get to know one another.

Purpose: It is the purpose of this workshop to experience the recovery process as outlined in *The Big Book* of Alcoholics Anonymous, either for the first time or again, so that we may better carry out and understand our primary purpose; to stay sober and carry the message to the still-suffering alcoholic.

We are here to talk about recovery only and to go through the Twelve-Step process as outlined in *The Big Book* of Alcoholics Anonymous. This is not an emotional or intellectual exercise. This is a spiritual exercise so that we can all recover and experience the recovery process as we read it together. It is recommended that anything that you hear here that cannot be reconciled in *The Big Book*, *Twelve and Twelve*, or any other AA-approved literature be simply ignored.

THIS IS NOT A CROSS-TALK WORKSHOP.

WEEK ONE – INTRODUCTION, OBJECTIVES, AND GOALS

STEP STUDY OUTLINE AND ASSIGNMENT SHEETS

The following is a suggested assignment sheet as outlined for use by this Step Study Workshop. It is suggested that before the study is completed, each member completes Steps One through Twelve.

PRELIMINARY: During the first meeting we will review this outline regarding the purpose, plan, and meeting format of the workshop. It is important that the commitment section of this outline be carefully reviewed and that you thoroughly understand that you are committing to taking the Steps. It is most helpful that everyone attend and be present as much as possible. It is also suggested that the homework be done soon after the class and then reviewed with your sponsor before the next workshop meeting. We will not be completing or reviewing the homework in this workshop. You will need to do your homework with your sponsor in preparation for the following week's meeting.

1. PURPOSE:

- a. To provide the person who has not worked the Twelve Steps with motivation and assistance in taking the Twelve Steps.
- b. To provide those who have worked the Twelve Steps with an opportunity and the motivation to do it again and to help those who have not yet taken the Twelve Steps.

2. PLAN:

- a. There is no designated seating arrangement, but the seat you choose tonight will be where you sit throughout the entire workshop. Additionally, your communication (before and after the workshop meeting, NOT during) with the other members of your table is crucial to your success here.
- b. During the introductory meeting, all in attendance will:
 - i. **Commit** to stay with their table.
 - ii. **Commit** to do all the steps as suggested in *The Big Book*.
 - iii. Those who have previously done a workshop will be asked to **commit** to do it once more as part of their Twelfth Step.
 - iv. **Commit** to attend the meetings except on rare and extremely unusual circumstances. Each member really needs to attend and be present each week. If you cannot attend, notify a member of your table or another workshop member and advise them of your situation.
 - v. **Commit** to exchange phone numbers and making a phone call and/or personal contact with one or more members of their table during each week of the workshop and sharing your problems and/or experience with the assignment for that week.
- c. The time to complete the workshop is nineteen weeks.

STEP STUDY OUTLINE AND ASSIGNMENT SHEETS

3. MEETING FORMAT:

- a. The leader simply discusses the assigned material and shares their experience in applying it in their own life.
- b. It is suggested that each member come to the meeting having read and studied the assignment from the previous week pertaining to the portions of the *Big Book* and *Twelve and Twelve* as they relate to the Step under consideration.
- c. The function of the member is to apply the principles of each Step in their lives and share their experience in a discussion of each Step with their sponsor.
- d. It is suggested that each member obtain a 3-ring binder, an ink pen, a highlighter pen, and 3-hole paper or notebook to record your notes and complete assignments.

Meeting Reader Reads

The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous Preface states: “***This book has become the BASIC TEXT of our society***”. The forward to the first edition states: “***To show other alcoholics precisely how we have recovered***”, and additionally on page 29 in *The Big Book* it states, “***Further on, clear-cut directions are given showing how we recovered***”.

This is the task you are about to undertake!

PREFACE TO THE BIG BOOK OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS - HIGHLIGHTS

READ: Page xi, paragraphs 1 – 2

READ AFTER: Page xi, paragraph 2

BASIC TEXT: A “textbook” is a book that is used to transfer information from the mind of one human being through the written word, to the mind of another human being, thereby increasing the knowledge of the user of the textbook. A textbook is always written in a certain sequence. It assumes that the reader of the subject matter will know very little about it. It will start at a simple level and as the reader’s knowledge increases, the material presented becomes a little more difficult.

The Big Book is a textbook written in a standard textbook format. It assumes that we know nothing about the disease of alcoholism. It starts by describing what the problem is, then describes the solution, and finally gives us a program of action so we can find the solution.

We believe that “The Doctor’s Opinion” and the first four chapters in *The Big Book* prepare us for Chapter Five. If we go through *The Big Book* in this way, we will be able to see how each chapter dovetails into the next chapter, building information on information.

The other idea is that alcoholics haven’t changed since 1939. Alcohol hasn’t changed either. Therefore, we haven’t found it necessary to change the program of recovery.

Workshop leader reads this page aloud – Attendees see page 5 *Big Book* Goals

Let's take a look at the Table of Contents from the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, affectionately referred to as "**The Big Book**". *The Big Book* is structured and laid out in a very particular manner. When we read the "Doctor's Opinion" and "Chapter 1 – Bill's Story" we are looking at the problem. More is revealed further on in *The Big Book*, but most of the information about the problem is found here in these two chapters. If we can truly see the problem, then we will be able to see there are two parts: 1) the physical allergy, and 2) the obsession of the mind. We will be able to understand the powerless condition of mind and body and concede that we truly are powerless. This is **Step One**. Step One says we are **powerless**... if we are powerless then obviously the solution lies within **power**.

As we continue to study *The Big Book* we will learn there is nothing we can do about the physical allergy of the body; that our only hope of recovery is through the mind.

"Chapter 2 – There Is a Solution", "Chapter 3 – More About Alcoholism" and, "Chapter 4 – We Agnostics" gives us this information. From these chapters we learn that we might be able to come to believe that there is a Power greater than we are which can restore us to sanity. This is **Step Two**.

So, if the problem is that we are powerless and the solution is a Power greater than ourselves, then the only other thing we need to know is, how do you find this Power?

Again, *The Big Book* gives us what we need...**a Practical Program of Action** which is laid out in "Chapter 5 – How It Works", "Chapter 6 – Into Action", and "Chapter 7 – Working with Others". These three chapters contain the remaining suggested steps; **Steps Three through Twelve** which are the **Practical Program of Action**.

If we **apply** this **Practical Program of Action** (Steps Three through Twelve), **in our lives**, then **we will find the Power** which will overcome our powerless condition.

****It's just that simple!****

The Big Book is written in a specific sequence to convey certain ideas in a precise order so that we may recover from alcoholism which makes *Alcoholics Anonymous* an especially fascinating book!

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<i>A co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous. The birth of our Society dates from his first day of permanent sobriety, June 10, 1935.</i>	
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BIG BOOK GOALS

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Goal One: Problem

Doctor's Opinion Chapter 1: Bill's Story	STEP 1 POWERLESS
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Goal Two: Solution

Chapter 2: There is a Solution Chapter 3: More About Alcoholism Chapter 4: We Agnostics	STEP 2 POWER
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Goal Three: Action Necessary for Recovery

Chapter 5: How It Works Chapter 6: Into Action Chapter 7: Working With Others	STEPS 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 HOW TO FIND THE POWER
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FORWARD TO FIRST EDITION HIGHLIGHTS

READ AFTER: Page xiii, paragraph 1

The Big Book, "Forward to the First Edition" suggests two pertinent ideas:

1. This book was written by Bill W. and edited by forty sober people. When first published, there were more than 100 men and women who had recovered with the information as set forth in this book. They recovered from the same problems that we as alcoholics have today.

2. **To show other alcoholics precisely how we have recovered is the main purpose of this book.** Our book does not deal with membership or fellowship. It deals with **recovery only**. If we choose to do what the first 100 people did to recover, then we should expect the same results, which is recovery from the disease of alcoholism.

FORWARD TO THE SECOND EDITION DR. SILKWORTH'S DIAGNOSIS

READ AT: Page xvi, 9 lines from the top

From this doctor, the broker had learned the grave nature of alcoholism.

In 1933, Dr. Silkworth treated Bill W. and explained what he believed to be the disease of alcoholism. He believed:

1. It was **NOT Lack of Will Power**.
2. It was **NOT Lack of Moral Character**.
3. It was **NOT Sin**.

Dr. Silkworth said: "Bill, I believe **alcoholism is an actual disease** and a peculiar disease."

1. It is a disease of the **body** as well as
2. A disease of the **mind**.

The doctor said, "Bill, when people like you drink, they react entirely different than normal people. Normal people take a drink and they get a slightly warm, comfortable, relaxing feeling. They may have one or two drinks and that's all they want to drink. But people like you drink a drink and you get a **physical feeling** in your body that produces a **physical craving** that **demand more** of the same. When you start, instead of one or two, you end up with three, four, six, eight, ten, until you get **drunk, sick, and in trouble**. This is **abnormal** and it only happens to **one out of ten people**. Therefore Bill, I'll say that **physically** you have become **allergic** to alcohol and react abnormally to it."

"Also, you have developed an **obsession of the mind**. Normal people do not care if they drink or not. They can drink today, tomorrow, or a month from now and it is not a big deal to them. But, people like you, Bill, have developed an **obsession of the mind** to drink. That **obsession** is so strong that it will make you believe something that isn't true."

"From time to time, you have been told that you cannot drink, and from time to time, you've known you cannot drink. From time to time you've even sworn off drinking. But

the **obsession of the mind** is an idea that says you can now drink. This time it will be different. This time you will only take one drink. That **obsession** is so strong that it makes you believe you can drink and just before you drink you know it's going to be OK. It will always lead you back to taking a drink, then the drink will trigger the allergy, and then you will be unable to stop drinking. **People like you have become hopeless.**" After this conversation, Bill left a hospital and stayed sober for a while. But his **obsession of the mind** told him he could drink, and he did. One year later, he was put back into that hospital under Dr. Silkworth's care again and this time the doctor **pronounced him incurable**. He left in the summer of 1934, knowing he could not drink, and **fear kept him sober for a while**. On Armistice Day, 1934, his mind told him he could drink. He took a drink and triggered the allergy and couldn't stop.

EBBY THATCHER'S OPINION

Ebby, who had been in the Oxford Group, came to visit Bill and gave Bill two additional pieces of information. Dr. Silkworth had explained the **problem**. Ebby T. said: "Bill, the **solution** to that problem is **finding a power greater than human power**. People like us have become absolutely **powerless over alcohol**. If we are to recover, we have to find a **Power greater than alcohol**, greater than we are and greater than human power. If human power would have worked, we would have recovered a long time ago. Willpower would have done it, doctors would have done it, and ministers would have done it. But none of them have helped us. If we can **find the power greater than human power, then we can recover!** The Oxford Group has given me a **practical program of action** and they guarantee that if I **apply it in my life**, I would find that power and I wouldn't have to drink anymore. Look at me; I've been sober for two months."

Bill knew Ebby and how he drank. He knew a miracle had happened in Ebby's life. From these three pieces of information, he **recovered** from his disease!

1. He learned the **PROBLEM** from Dr. Silkworth.
2. He learned the **SOLUTION** from Ebby T. and the Oxford Group.
3. He received the **PRACTICAL PROGRAM OF ACTION**.

Bill applied the action in his life and found that Power and never had a drink again!

Bill W. got sober December 12, 1934 and passed away sober in January 1971, with thirty-five years of sobriety.

Closing: It is now time to end our meeting for this evening. After a moment of silence for the alcoholic who still suffers, please join me in reading "A Vision for You", found on page 164 of *The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous*.

THE BIG BOOK WORKSHOP HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

*****NOTE:** It is suggested that the homework be done soon after the workshop meeting and then reviewed with your sponsor before the next workshop meeting.

- 1) Read “**Step One**” in the *Twelve and Twelve* book – **HIGHLIGHT ANYTHING YOU CAN RELATE TO!**
- 2) Read “**The Doctor’s Opinion**” in *The Big Book* (1st Time) -- **USE HIGHLIGHTER!** (Just read and highlight the 1st time through the doctor's opinion.)
- 3) Read “**The Doctor’s Opinion**” in *The Big Book* (2nd Time). Answer the work assignment questions below. Begin to write “**How You Were Powerless over Alcohol**”. It is equally important to write any reservations you may have about the fact you are powerless over alcohol.

WORK ASSIGNMENT QUESTIONS "The Doctor’s Opinion"

Always answer in complete sentences and write an example !!!

Page xxv, paragraph 1

1. Are you interested in the doctor's estimate or the physical part of your disease...to discover the fact that you are powerless over alcohol after the first drink you take?
2. Was the testimony which came from medical men who have had experience with our suffering and our recovery helpful to you? **(MUST)**

Page xxv, paragraph 3

1. Are you the type who is hopeless? *(You want to quit and cannot stay quit. You drink when you are already drunk. You drink when you do not want to drink.)*

Page xxv, paragraph 5

1. Are you the type where other methods failed completely? (Nothing you tried worked?)

Page xxvi, paragraph 1

1. Are you willing to believe *The Big Book* as a remedy for you and can you rely on what these people who wrote the book say about themselves?

Page xxvi, paragraph 2

1. Do you believe that your body is as abnormal as your mind after the first drink? **(MUST)**
2. Did any explanation you got from yourself, or others, as to why you couldn't control your drinking satisfy you?
3. Did any picture view, which left out the physical factor, feel incomplete?

Page xxvi, paragraph 3

1. Does the doctor's theory that you have an allergy to alcohol and/or drugs interest you? Does it make good sense? Does it explain many things that you could not otherwise account for?

Page xxvi, paragraph 4

1. Do you believe that some form of a "spiritual experience" is of urgent importance to you?
2. Do you believe that any human can apply the power of good that is needed to produce this "spiritual experience"?

Page xxvii, paragraph 6

1. Can you believe that a Power greater than yourself is what is necessary to pull you back from the gates of death and as being the only possible solution?

Page xxviii, paragraph 1

1. Do you believe when you put alcohol and/or drugs in your body that the reaction is like an allergy and there is a craving for more? Has this craving happened to you with alcohol or drugs?
2. Can you safely use alcohol in any form? Did you form the habit? Could you break it? Did you lose your self-confidence? Did you lose your reliance upon things human? Did major problems pile up on you and become difficult to solve?

Page xxviii, paragraph 2

1. Did frothy emotional appeal from others work on you? Do you believe the message which can interest and hold you must have **depth and weight?** (depth = 'great detail' & weight = 'proof that it works'). Do you believe the message must be more than emotional? More than intellectual?
2. Do you believe that in order to re-create your life, your ideals must be **grounded in a Power greater than yourself? (MUST)**

Page xxviii, paragraph 4

1. Did you drink for the **effect** produced by alcohol?
Did this effect become so elusive that after a time, even though you knew it was injurious, you could not **differentiate the truth from the false?**
2. Did your life using alcohol seem to be the only normal one for you?
3. **Untreated**, are you restless, irritable and discontented? Do you believe that in recovery, you must experience the sense of ease and comfort you got from drinking, and if not, you will drink again? Do you believe there will be little hope for your recovery unless you experience an entire psychic change?

Page xxix, paragraph 1

1. Do you believe that to attain this psychic change, there will be effort necessary and you will have to meet a few requirements and follow a few simple rules?

Page xxix, paragraph 2

1. Can you stop on your own? Do you need help? **(2 MUSTS)**

Page xxix, paragraph 3

1. Do you believe that something more than human power is needed to produce the essential psychic change or do you still believe that you have the Power to quit drinking on your own?

Page xxix, paragraph 4

1. Do you believe your alcoholism is entirely a problem of mental control?

Page xxx, paragraph 1

1. Has this craving, at times become more important than all else?
Were there times you were not drinking to escape, but to overcome a craving beyond your mental control?
Were there situations which arose out of this craving which caused you to make the supreme sacrifice (to drink again) rather than to continue to fight?

Page xxx, paragraph 5

1. Have you identified your allergy to alcohol as a craving for more alcohol when you start drinking? Do you believe this allergy differentiates you and sets you apart as a distinct entity? Do you believe the only relief to this physical allergy is entire abstinence? Can you do that on your own?