

CHAPTER FIVE

Our Program and How it Works

We compulsive overeaters have followed many programs of reducing and weight control and have found that no amount of willpower or self-determination can make us stick to a sensible program of eating for any length of time.

We have found that self-reliance failed us. Self-reliance is good, as far as it goes, but it doesn't go far enough. Some of us once had self-confidence, but that didn't solve our eating problem either.

We have felt the need and have been asking about a solution to our dilemma. We instinctively knew that the food obsession was only the outward manifestation of a deeper problem.

For us the OA-HOW program has been the answer.

Rarely has a person failed who has thoroughly followed our path. Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program, usually men and women who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves. There are such unfortunates. They are not at fault. They seem to have been born that way. They are naturally incapable of grasping and developing a manner of living which demands rigorous honesty. Their chances are less than average. There are those, too, who suffer from grave emotional and mental disorders, but many of them do recovery if they have the capacity to be honest.

Our stories disclose in a general way what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now. If you have decided you want what we have and are willing to go to any length to get it – then you are ready to take certain steps. At some of these we balked. We thought we could find an easier, softer way. But we could not. With all the earnestness at our command, we beg of you to be fearless and thorough from the very start. Some of us have tried to hold on to our old ideas and the result was nil until we let go absolutely.

Remember that we deal with food – cunning, baffling, powerful! Without help it is too much for us. But there is One who has all power – that One is God. May you find Him now!

Half measures availed us nothing. We stood at the turning point. We asked His protection and care with complete abandon. Here are the steps we took, which are suggested as a program of recovery.

THE TWELVE STEPS

1. We admitted we were powerless over food – that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to compulsive overeaters and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Many of us exclaimed, “What an order! I can’t go through with it.” Do not be discouraged. No one among us has been able to maintain anything like perfect adherence to these principles. We are not saints. The point is, that we are willing to grow along spiritual lines. The principles we have set down are guides to progress. We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection.

Our description of the compulsive overeater, the chapter to the agnostic, and our personal adventures before and after make clear three pertinent ideas:

- a) That we were compulsive overeaters and could not manage our own lives.
- b) That probably no human power could have relieved our compulsive overeating.
- c) That God could and would if He were sought.

THE TWELVE TRADITIONS

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon OA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority – a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for OA membership is a desire to stop eating compulsively.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or OA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the compulsive overeater who still suffers.
6. An OA group ought never endorse, finance or lend the OA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. An OA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Overeaters Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. OA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Overeaters Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the OA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films, television and other public media of communication.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all these traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

THE H.O.W. CONCEPT

The Overeaters Anonymous HOW Concept has been formed to offer the compulsive overeater (who accepts the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions as a program of recovery) a disciplined and structured approach. The OA-HOW groups have been formed in the belief that our disease is absolute and therefore only absolute acceptance of the OA-HOW program will offer any sustained abstinence to those of us whose compulsion has reached a critical level.

Therefore, the OA-How plan of eating, steps, traditions and tools of recovery are not suggested. Rather, we accept them as requirements for our recovery.

Meetings are dedicated to the concept of remaining Honest, Open-minded and Willing to listen...this is the HOW of the program. We pray that the collective group conscience and love that these ideals offer us will promote a strong sense of security that will enable us to experience a new unity and wholeness with all those around us. And that the HOW ideal will help us to progress in our program of recovery on a daily basis.

To be certain, much of our strength is found in the structure of meetings and in the daily adherence to the program as it is written in our literature.

Each group also firmly understands that after our recovery has begun—through abstinence and the taking of the first three steps—our further surrender to the additional steps of recovery offers us a promise of happiness, contentment and achievement in all areas of our lives.

We insure our continued and sustained abstinence from compulsive overeating by being forever aware that God is doing for us what we have never been able to do for ourselves.

May God, as each of us understands Him, open our minds and heart to the love which is manifest in this room.

Amen

THE SEVEN TOOLS

TOOLS

As defined by Webster, a tool is “any person or thing used as a means to get something done.” We have many tools of the program that help us recover on a daily basis. Tools are essential to get the job done, and they work for us. Here are a few:

HOW ABSTINENCE PLAN OF EATING

Three meals daily, weighed and measured, with nothing in between except sugar-free soda, no-calorie beverages, and diet gum. Food is written down, called in and committed, so we can get on with our recovery and “out” of the food. It is recommended that you obtain your physician’s approval before beginning your abstinence using the HOW food plan. Any recommendations your physician makes will be accepted.

LITERATURE AND WRITING

We use the “Alcoholics Anonymous” (Big Book) and the “Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions.” When we substitute the words “compulsive overeater” for “alcoholic” and “food” for “alcohol”, we feel we identify absolutely; our writing assignments for the first thirty days are taken from them. We use the “A.A. Big Book” and the “12 and 12” as a tool of examination and release. We also believe that negative thinking is a large part of our disease; so we are learning, one day at a time, to abstain from negative thinking.

ANONYMITY

Who you see here, what you hear here, when you leave here, let it stay here. When we meet another member in the outside world, we do not mention that they are members of OA-HOW.

TELEPHONE CALLS

We are required to make four calls a day – one to our sponsor and three to other OA-HOW members. The phone is like a lifeline; we need the contact; it can be like a mini-meeting.

MEETINGS

You must attend three meetings a week. It is recommended that each member commit to one specific meeting as his or her home group.

SERVICE

Service is abstinence – the greatest service to yourself. Service is coming to meetings on time; being a leader or speaker; volunteering to be a service person (such as a program chairperson, coffee person, treasurer, secretary, literature person, intergroup representative) etc. Service is OA-HOW. Service is putting away chairs when necessary, picking up after the meeting, being quiet when a member is sharing. Service is one way to get involved in the program. Service is needed at all levels and at every meeting. Service is giving of yourself to help OA-HOW continue to function. Let’s all get involved to help OA-HOW because we all know that “Service is freedom from the bondage of self.”

SPONSORSHIP

A sponsor will help the newcomer through their first thirty days. A sponsor is a compulsive overeater who initially completed 30 days of back-to-back HOW abstinence, completed thirty days of questions and took the first three steps. To take on new sponsees (or lead a meeting) a sponsor MUST have at least fourteen days of current back-to-back HOW abstinence and be actively working the HOW program.

Will all OA-HOW Sponsors please stand now, introduce yourselves, qualify as to the length of your time in the HOW program, the amount of weight reduction, the kind of sponsor you are – Food, Inventory, Step, or Maintenance – and whether or not you are available. To save time, we ask that you hold all applause until the last sponsor has qualified.

A VISION FOR YOU

Our book is meant to be suggestive only. We realize we know only a little. God will constantly disclose more to you and to us. Ask Him in your morning meditation what you can do each day for the man who is still sick. The answers will come, if your own house is in order. But obviously you cannot transmit something you haven't got. See to it that your relationship with Him is right and great events will come to pass for you and countless others. This is the Great Fact for us.

Abandon yourself to God as you understand God. Admit your faults to Him and to your fellows. Clear away the wreckage of your past. Give freely of what you find and join us. We shall be with you in the fellowship of the Spirit and you will surely meet some of us as you trudge the road of happy destiny.

May God bless you and keep you – until then.

JUST FOR TODAY

Just for today... I will try to live through this day only and not tackle my whole life's problems at once. I can do something for one day that would appall me if I felt I had to keep it up for a lifetime.

Just for today... I will be happy. This assumes to be true what Abraham Lincoln said, "Most folks are as happy as they make up their minds to be."

Just for today... I will adjust myself to what is and not try to adjust everything to my own desires. I will take my "luck" as it comes and fit myself to it.

Just for today... I will try to strengthen my mind. I will study. I will learn something useful. I will not be a mental loafer. I will read something that requires effort, thought and concentration.

Just for today... I will exercise my soul in three ways: I will do somebody a good turn and not get found out; if anyone knows of it, it will not count. I will do at least two things I don't want to do, just for exercise. I will not show anyone that my feelings are hurt; they may be hurt, but today I will not show it.

Just for today... I will be agreeable. I will look as good as I can, dress becomingly, talk low, act courteously, criticize not one bit, not find fault with anything, and not try to improve or regulate anybody except myself.

Just for today... I will have a program. I may not follow it exactly, but I will have it. I will save myself from two pests: hurry and indecision.

Just for today... I will have a quiet half-hour all by myself and relax. Sometime during his half-hour I will try to get a better perspective of my life.

Just for today... I will be unafraid. Especially, I will not be afraid to enjoy what is beautiful and to believe that as I give to the world, so the world will give to me.