



**TOGETHER
WE CAN ...**

KEEP COMING BACK!

Membership Retention

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.

“I need OA to be there for me. Therefore, it is my responsibility to keep OA healthy. A smile, a touch, a word of support can keep someone coming back ...”

OA works. A Gallup survey of OA’s Fellowship reports that 86 percent of our members experienced improvements in our physical health, our emotional and mental well-being, and our spiritual lives. Yet, many in OA’s current Fellowship are newcomers rather than ongoing members or “old-timers.”

With all that OA offers us in emotional, spiritual and physical recovery, what are some of the reasons why we, or other members, don’t keep coming back? If we want to continue to attain the many benefits OA has to offer, and reach out a hand to those who still suffer, we need to understand some of the reasons behind wanting to leave. This pamphlet, with its many quotes from OA members around the world, was inspired by a recent presentation and discussion at OA’s World Service Business Conference. It provides insight into what we can do for ourselves and others by examining the four key areas of membership retention:

- Newcomers
- Meetings
- Relapse
- Service

Each of the four areas provides encouragement and suggestions to the group and to each individual member to keep coming back.

Newcomers

“I feel strongly that newcomers need at least three ‘basics’ from each member and the group as a whole: identification, a feeling of belonging and hope, and, most important of all, to see and hear recovery of all kinds at many different levels.”

When newcomers first attend an OA meeting, they have their own special set of needs. For some, just making it to that first meeting requires courage and a “leap of faith.” If newcomers do not return to meetings, perhaps they have become discouraged. To help newcomers acclimate to the environment of an OA meeting and to make it more inviting, groups can:

- Have greeters at the door.
- Make sure meeting information given over the phone is current, and phone lists and other information provided are accurate.
- Encourage each individual group member to welcome members they’ve never seen before.
- Offer a welcome package of pamphlets and other OA-approved literature.
- Create a “we care” follow-up list, and use it to keep in touch with newcomers.
- Offer rides or transportation to those in need.
- Take time at the beginning of a meeting to discuss the three levels of recovery, as well as the Steps, Traditions and tools. Sometime during the meeting, provide newcomers with information regarding sponsors. Sponsors can then explain the program in more detail.
- Encourage current members of the group to be sponsors, and encourage sponsorship by mail.

As newcomers, we kept coming back because we saw recovery happening on all three levels—physical, emotional and spiritual—at our first meetings. However, nobody is perfect, so tell

newcomers not to panic if they have minor setbacks; they can be a natural part of the recovery process. Individually or in a group, members can also provide suggestions as to some of the common setbacks and what to do if they occur. Share, but don't compare! Also, let newcomers know that each group is different, and encourage them to attend other meetings in the area until they find one at which they feel comfortable ... just like we did.

And remember, if your group is having difficulty retaining newcomers, ask for input from other groups in your area at your local intergroup meeting.

“One of the major dramatic things that happened to me as a newcomer was somebody at the meeting called me shortly after I came into the program, just to say hello. And to this day, I will never forget that person.”

Meetings

“One expression I've heard that I disagree with is, ‘Well, he or she wasn't ready for OA.’ My questions are: ‘Was OA ready for him or her? What happened when that person went to that first meeting or the other meetings after that?’ What makes a big difference in members coming back is what goes on in those meetings.”

Each individual's attendance at OA meetings is paramount to her or his recovery and to the group's strength. Therefore, meetings that abound in love, support and encouragement are safe havens for OA members and will foster continued attendance. We need this type of atmosphere to work our program because that's when the program works.

As individuals and as a group, keep in touch with the needs of every member attending. Remember to listen to everyone, not just hear them out. Avoid cross talk and avoid “dumping.” While it is important for us to share our pain and

experiences as compulsive overeaters, don't forget that it is also crucial for us to share our strength and hope. If you or another individual have personal problems that warrant further discussion, your sponsor can help. When you share, remember to include one or two positive actions that you can take to help advance your program, and encourage others to do the same.

“I want to hear your experiences. I want to know that you struggle sometimes and experience life's ups and downs. It lets me know that we are both human, and that when I experience one of life's downs, it doesn't mean I am not working my program or that I am a bad person. But, I also need to hear what you are doing about it ... today!”

As members, we can support our groups by providing support to those who have stopped attending. A simple phone call expressing concern and love can make all the difference in the world. Not only will the group be stronger for it, but so will we.

“In one case, I spent a year dropping off notes and cards ... without any expectations. That person is once again attending meetings.”

A group also has to realize that some of us stop attending meetings simply because we get bored or are too busy. Perhaps we have reached our target weight and don't recognize the usefulness of the meetings in maintaining our recovery. Or, maybe we just need some variety to keep up our interest and hope, especially if we are long-time members.

A number of solutions exist to make sure each group and its meetings are prepared to support all of our members' needs:

- Discuss and offer service opportunities. Service in any shape or form brings its own reward.
- If long-time members begin to experience “service burn-out,” suggest a break from

serving others for awhile, allowing themselves to refocus and revitalize. Letting others help you is a form of service, too.

- Inject some humor into your meetings; laughter is healing to the spirit. Use the “Sidedishes” from *Lifeline* magazine or other OA-approved material.
- Set up a suggestion box for members to submit their own ideas for meeting locations, topics or other activities.
- Promote long-time member meetings to address their unique needs and concerns.
- Focus part of a meeting on the far-reaching impact that the program has on the rest of our lives, and the importance of making OA a priority.

Relapse

“Don’t underestimate the importance of providing support for members who are floundering. Relapse is fairly common in OA. My own experience tells me that I will recover from a relapse more quickly if I continue attending meetings than if I leave.”

Relapse is one of the primary reasons some of us might be tempted to discontinue our recovery in OA. When we relapse, we may experience the same feelings we had when we first came to an OA meeting; these include shame, embarrassment, self-recrimination, failure, depression, isolation, frustration and even hopelessness. When relapse occurs, the most important action we as individuals and the group can take is to keep the lines of communication open.

If someone in the group relapses, we can keep in touch and encourage that member not to retreat into isolation. We can ask how others are doing, letting them know that we care and that their participation in the group is valued. Everyone’s attendance at meetings makes a difference in each member’s personal recovery and adds to the

group as a whole. The courage that it takes to return even in the face of a setback will surely be an inspiration to those of us who may in the future face similar obstacles.

When a member does return after relapse, welcome her or him warmly; support and encouragement are especially crucial at this time. And most importantly, DON'T JUDGE THEM! When we judge fellow members, we are inviting them to leave.

“When I gained weight in abstinence, certain people stopped speaking to me; they would not look me in the eye. They walked away when I approached. Where is it written that weight loss is the main ‘judge’ of what kind of program we are working? Before OA I lived my life in shame, always knowing that I was never good enough.”

Everyone is “good enough” to be in OA, no matter what. So don't judge another's recovery. Each person's program is unique, just like each of us.

There are many ways all of us, as groups and as individuals, can support those in relapse:

- At meetings, discourage cross talk and judgment of others or their individual programs. It may take some members longer than others to find physical recovery. Meanwhile, they may have other kinds of “recovery” that everyone should listen to. Remind everyone that there are many paths to recovery. And, always remember that relapse is not contagious, but recovery is.
- Focus part of a meeting or have a retreat on the topic of relapse. Ask those who are recovering from relapse to share their experiences. Ask them how they got through it and what other members did to help. Provide a safe environment for members to share.
- Offer rides to and from meetings to isolating members or those who need transportation. Provide a phone list for members to

call. And, make a special effort to invite members back to meetings, or invite them out for coffee after meetings.

- We can provide service by extending our hands and hearts, so that those in relapse and our groups as a whole will take comfort in an atmosphere of love and acceptance.

Service

“Any service, no matter how small, that will help reach a fellow sufferer adds to the quality of our own recovery. Getting to meetings, putting away chairs, putting out literature, talking to newcomers, doing whatever needs to be done in a group or for OA as a whole, are ways in which we give back what we have so generously been given. We are encouraged to do what we can when we can.”

—*The Tools of Recovery*

Of the four key areas of membership retention, service is the one area to which each of us can contribute the most. Why is service such an important component of retaining membership? Whether it’s making coffee for a meeting, sponsoring a fellow member, heading up the literature committee or helping to plan a retreat, the opportunities and gifts of service are many.

If you are still unsure, ask a sponsor what it was like to support a fellow member through relapse to the joy of recovery, and you will learn what a difference service can make. Being accountable to others empowers us in our own abstinence, while at the same time supports others in theirs. That is why having the opportunity to serve is a gift in itself. One member’s story illustrates this point:

“Within a week or so [after my first meeting], someone had thrown the literature bag at me and asked me to bring it along to every meeting. It was heavy, and it was

quite a walk from the car; but, every week for two years, I carried that bag religiously. Even when I was tired, or thought I did not need OA, you guessed it ... that wretched bag kept me coming back!”

Nothing is more enlivening than being a part of someone else’s recovery, whatever that part happens to be. And, service to newcomers and long-time members alike ensures that this Fellowship will be here for all of us in the future.

It is crucial that in our commitment to carry the message of recovery to other compulsive overeaters, we treat others the way we, ourselves, would want to be treated. Each one of us—with a smile, a hug, a phone call or a hand extended—can make a difference in our own well-being and that of our fellow members, keeping all of us coming back to an atmosphere of love, acceptance and support.

“It was long-timers and newcomers; it was short people and tall people; and it was big people and small people who loved me into the miracle of abstinence and the miracle of this Fellowship. Our responsibility pledge states, ‘Always to extend the hand and heart of OA to all who share my compulsion; for this I am responsible.’ We need to do whatever we can do to keep everybody coming back and to spread the word of OA.”

Overeaters Anonymous does work when we keep coming back.

For further information, please refer to the
“Guidelines for Membership Retention”
in the OA Guidelines kit.

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. Every 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.



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