

A Higher Purpose



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A Higher Power? How about a Higher Purpose?

By Wayne M.

I am an alcoholic and have been sober for over nine years. I am also an agnostic/atheist who attends AA on a regular basis.

Many people have asked how I as an agnostic can stay sober in AA even though I reject one of the fundamental premises of AA, that being a required belief in God or a Higher Power.

To put it simply, my sobriety depends not upon a “Higher Power” but instead is based upon a “higher purpose.”

I will explain that in a moment but first let me tell you a little about myself.

My problem with alcohol was so bad that between 1992 and 2004 I was in four different rehabs in the Toronto region.

The first two rehabs were not AA-based and that was why I went to them. I had gone to a few AA meetings and was appalled at the not too subtle religious overtones at them. I could not buy the God thing, or a Higher Power as an alternative. Sorry folks, same thing.

After three months at Halton Recovery House (October 1997 to January 1998) I managed to stay sober for a year and a half. I picked up a drink and the next thing I knew five years later I was in a psych ward. It was 2004 and I was jobless, homeless and friendless. Even my brother would not take a phone call from me.

It was there I decided that I did not want to die a drunk.

I knew I needed treatment to get started – again – and I chose Renascent Rehab.

My sobriety date is Sept 30, 2004. In November I entered Renascent and completed treatment.

Now, my higher purpose.

In the last two rehabs I discovered that I was self-obsessed, with no concern for other people. As Bill Wilson said, “The primary fact that we fail to recognize is our total inability to form a true partnership with another human being.” (*Twelve and Twelve*, p. 53) This is a brutal fact and one that would have been fatal for me, unless I took action.

My higher purpose is about as simple as I can make it (which is no small feat for an alcoholic). It is simply to be there and to share the experience of being human with other people. Even if I can't do anything to help, I need to be there if someone needs me. If I am using, I am not there for myself, let alone anyone else. This obviously requires I interact with others. I strongly believe that isolation in its many forms is one of the primary reasons we use and especially why we relapse.

I acknowledge that I am dependent on others for my sobriety. To do that on an ongoing basis, I must always endeavor to do the right thing.

AA was – and continues to be – my first line of defence against isolation. I know I can be honest and talk about real things in that environment. AA is not the only place where I can relate to others but it was a start. I also have people in my life outside of AA.

Now I am a part of, not apart from. So now that I am a part of the human race, how do I act and what do I do in this strange arena of the real world?

I believe we can't think our way into good behavior but we can behave our way into good thinking. What is good behaviour? It is doing the next right thing regardless of what I may feel like or think. This can be where the second use I make of AA can come in. For me the Steps are sign posts and guides on how to behave as a normal human being. They also act like idiot lights on my dashboard of life. If in a certain situation one of those steps keeps popping into my head, I know I need to look at something I am doing. For example, if I become resentful or angry I need to look at what my part is in this (Step 4) and if I am wrong I need to apologize and try to make it right (Step 10).

After being sober for more than a year, I started volunteering at Renascent.

As time went by and I always showed up and did well at what they gave me, they started offering me paid shifts. I was offered a full time job in 2007. It was to assess people that wanted to attend our treatment program. My job was to interview them and determine if they were a fit for us and, more importantly, if we were a fit for them.

To say I loved it would be the understatement of all time. For the first time in my life, I had a job that was not a job. It was what I did when I woke up. I could not wait to get there in the mornings.

You see, it was an ideal way for me to live my higher purpose. That way I could be a useful part of the human race.

Everything at my job was going more than well until 2010 when I checked myself into the hospital with crippling stomach pain. Operations (two within a week) found colon cancer which was removed.

No reprieve however. In February 2013, I was back in the hospital due to extreme hip pain. The diagnosis was lung cancer, which had spread to my pelvis area and taken away most of the bone structure on the left side of my hip. Hence the pain and for which there is no cure, only, hopefully, control. Renascent literally sent me home one day because they could not stand seeing the pain I was in trying to get around. I went home and again checked into St Mike's Hospital. That was last February, a year ago. Since then, I have gone through radiation therapy and several rounds of chemo. I just started another one recently.

I have had thoughts and even discussions of going back to work. No one can know how much I miss it.

You see this work is all about my higher purpose.

I can remember the first time I mentioned this higher purpose when I spoke at a meeting. I was surprised at how many people came to me after wanting to know more. This is still my core belief. It has a lot to do with recognizing the existence of others, not just my own.

Way back in a psych ward in 2004 I decided I did not want to die a drunk.

And I won't.

Because I have something new to me in recovery: a purpose.

Wayne died on Friday, March 21, 2014, twelve days after sharing this article on AA Agnostica. He kept his commitment: with nine years and five months (3,459 days) of continuous sobriety, he did not die a drunk.

He started drinking when he was 20 and quit at the age of 57. A brief video of Wayne was created in his last year: [It's Never Too Late](#).

