

# STORYLINE

From Workaholics Anonymous  
SEPTEMBER OCTOBER NOVEMBER  
2015



**“Our primary purpose is to stop working compulsively and to carry the message of recovery to those who still suffer.”**

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**STORY: SAYING NO**

*SIGNPOST TWELVE: Many of us are concerned with image. We think that looking busy makes people think we are important and gains their admiration. By seeking others' approval of us, we lose ourselves.*

In my workaholism, I did not just *look* busy, I *was* busy with overcommitted tasks. My self esteem was connected to people pleasing, as Signpost Twelve tells us. Unless I was taking on more and more activities, involving myself in what I considered to be very important work, my actions had no value. In order to boost my self esteem, I needed to aggressively boost my work, commitments, and responsibilities. I received many accolades from folks who thought what I was doing in this world was wonderful; yet, deep inside, I was angry and resentful about what was being asked of me, fed by my inability to say "no." The overwork led to work avoidance and burnout that lasted several years. When I was in the midst of the burnout, I didn't realize it, however; only by looking back at those years through the eyes of WA recovery can I see with clarity.

Learning to say guilt-free *no's* has been key for me in breaking the chain of people pleasing. Saying "no" to new requests for service and/or volunteerism is fairly simple now, as I have a realistic grasp on my abilities and limitations. For example, WA helped me to have the courage to resign from a five-year volunteer position that I had. I thought I had done that in 2011; what I still struggle with a bit is some of the old clean up that I'm doing now. One year later, in 2012 when I wrote to the Board President of the Board of that organization to check on things, she told me that I needed to resign if that was still my intent. So, I again officially resigned. But then I had to reengage with the Board President six months later as the organization had never removed me from the bank accounts or from their website. In summer, the President was supposed to pick up the organizational files from me but never did. So I reengaged again a month or so ago about those. I placed a healthy boundary, and I told her that she needed to make arrangements by such and such a date. After that, I will recycle the paper.

I am grateful to WA for helping me change these life-draining habits! I feel like a new person! But I cannot do this alone and I can relapse at any time. Thus, I need to stay the course of WA recovery, and continually reach out to my fellows for support and help along the way. Thank you for being here, for reading/listening now.

Peace, blessings, and support,  
Tisa

***STORY: TRUSTING A POWER GREATER THAN OURSELVES***

*Step Two: Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.*

Some time ago I was in a treatment center and was taken, by taxi, to a face to-face meeting seemingly in the middle of nowhere. No phone, no cash, no one else from the center at this meeting, as everyone else was in treatment for other issues.

It was World Cup time and I was told the meeting was smaller than usual, as many were watching the championship matches on the television. After a while, no one had anything else to share, so the meeting ended early, by agreement. The others there asked me whether I would be all right but the taxi driver had reassured me he would be there to pick me up. I said it was okay to lock up and leave me to wait.

Half an hour after the taxi was meant to be there, I started to panic. It had started raining, twice strangers (who did not seem remotely safe) offered me a lift, and still no sign of my taxi. I had no idea where to head to find houses, someone with a phone, or whatever. I felt completely insane: What was I doing there in such a vulnerable position? How could I have trusted others to drop me off when I had no idea where I was? Who were the strangers offering me a lift? I was trying to decide in which direction to start walking to seek help when I stopped. I decided to try trusting in a power greater than myself instead. Peace came over me as I decided there was nothing rational that I could do but to trust. Then, on this country lane in the middle of nowhere, a black cab came into sight, with its light on! It wasn't the cab that had agreed to come back, so I had no idea what this cab was doing there, but it picked me up and took me back to the treatment center, while I left the staff to sort out payment.

Now, whenever I start feeling myself going back to experience insanity, I remind myself of that experience. I'm not saying a solution always comes along in such a dramatic way but reminding myself of my personal powerlessness, that God can restore me to sanity if I let Him, and deciding to turn whatever it is over to Him brings me that same peace. The sense of calm is, in itself, miraculous!

--Sarah

**SHARING: THE FIXER**

*Step 2: Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.*

One of my character defects is making other people my Higher Power. For me, the second step reminds me that I am not God, and neither is any human. I have been in other 12 step groups since 2002 so I have some awareness of how this defect has affected my body image and self-esteem; however it's new to me to see how my skewed thinking affects my workaholism.

Part of my workaholism is that I do not allow myself to have needs. In my family I was a falsely empowered child. My role was the fixer, "She who knows all." It took me a long time to understand that this false empowerment was actually a form of abuse. It led to several myths. I believed I had all the answers. I felt bad about myself when I didn't. I believed I had to be good at everything. I thought rules didn't apply to me. I thought I didn't have needs. I oscillated between feeling superior and inferior, both better and worse than what is realistic.

I am seeking serenity in all areas of my life, especially as a single mother and business owner. I am trying to do life differently: more thoroughly, less rushed, and more present. WA is helping me discard much of what my upbringing taught me to be: manic, impatient, ruthless, arrogant, cheating, highest status, and know-it-all. Today I pray for the willingness to be humble, patient, present, kind, and open to the ideas of others.

---Jennifer

**SHARING: ADD AND ADDICTION**

It is interesting that both ADD and addiction words start with “ADD”. The behavior of ADD, an acronym for Attention Deficit Disorder, offers the reward of adrenaline, a brain chemical that produces a mental and physical state of alertness. ADD-afflicted people have a thirst for stimulation, which is the primary way that people with ADD can focus; adrenaline fills this need. It starts out as a management tool. Losing car keys, eyeglasses, or wallet releases the chemical so that the mind feels more coherent. However, adrenaline is probably physiologically and certainly psychologically addictive. A result of the clear focus generated is that we feel more in control, have almost no doubts about our abilities and life’s purpose. When events call up this brain chemical, its presence affects both mind and body to make us more efficient and poised, ready for anything. The ADD mind calls on this chemical many, many times a day, leading to feelings of power and control and potentially becoming addictive, sometimes outside our consciousness.

Alcoholics find that the alcohol is a mental and physical anesthetic creating similar feelings of being OK. Unfortunately, the feelings are temporary and create a need for more of the stuff, which ultimately cannot be satisfied no matter how much of the “drug” we inject into our systems. Both alcoholism and attention deficit disorder have a genetic beginning which is hijacked by the substances and do not go away with the passage of time. A further factor in this pattern is that children with ADD are often treated in ways that promote low self-esteem, which can be forgotten when high on adrenaline. This self-estimation is moderated when moving swiftly, getting a lot done, feeling good. Like the alcoholic, when the activity and the stimulation of the chemicals wear off, the low feelings return stronger than before.

Our WA tools can offer a moderating approach to adrenaline addiction. An example is to make a daily action plan, following it and checking back to it frequently. This avoids the adrenaline rush, while providing the well-deserved satisfaction of completing a task. Focusing on the pleasure of completing a task can release other brain chemicals that replace the need for adrenaline. Another is to find environments that do not have a built-in tendency to create crises and distractions. Finding work that uses our own unique talents, instead of making us feel constantly out of our depth, can moderate the fear-based release of adrenaline. Pauses to meditate or just breathe can tone down the system that produces adrenaline. Physicians can also prescribe medications that increase focus. The ultimate goal is to accept that we are different and to develop our special skills that come along with being ADD.

From Harry W.

**SHARING: USING OUR TRADITIONS**

*Tradition 10: WA has no opinion on outside issues; hence the WA name ought never to be drawn into public controversy.*

I very much appreciate the traditions for their guidance for us in our meetings and in our recovery. They especially help us with our organizational boundaries and limits. As suggested in Tradition Four, the primary purpose of WA, as we know, is to help people recover from workaholism by offering the tools and support necessary for the recovery journey. As we become increasingly empowered in our individual lives and we become involved in whatever causes and projects that have meaning for us, we are cautioned by this tradition to participate in those experiences as individuals rather than as a group. We do not drag our WA fellowship into our causes.

I'm reminded of some outside critique of twelve step programs that I heard about 15 years ago: that sometimes we stop short due to our intense focus on our individual recoveries, and we do not do enough in the world. Well, those folks don't know quite how our fellowship works! Service is an embedded aspect and a tool of all the twelve step programs. We provide service to WA. Further, our recovery gives us the tools to volunteer in our communities as we feel called to do, when can do so in a healthy manner. WA does not have a specific step demanding that we go out into the world and be more active. It is up to each of us to move forward with service in and beyond the program, according to our own discretion. There is no need for WA to be involved in other social issues or programs. Tradition Six is also relevant here: *A Workaholics Anonymous group ought never endorse, finance or lend the W.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.*

I indeed am grateful for Tradition Ten along with all the others. I also appreciate that we have the traditions as our topic in our meetings to remind us of their role in our organizational structure and personal recoveries.

Peace, blessings, and support,  
Tisa

**STORY: OVERDOING AND NON-DOING**

My “over-doing” comes from being “never enough”. I do, do, do, do and it is never enough. I do too much for others, which gives me a false sense of emotional security. I do too much in order to get money, which also gives a false sense of financial security.

This morning I experienced a situation at work, where I was very stressed. My co-worker, often rigid and nervous, was telling me what to do. Suddenly I felt very stressed as well, as though I had to follow what he told me, otherwise I was “stupid.” I felt pressured and also very nervous, frightened of being “guilty” if I was doing the job a different way from what he was asking.

Then, I thought, “Oh, he is so stressed” and immediately all that I described above flew away, as though I was accepting the situation. I was not taking his words on my shoulders. I then felt okay, not burdened.

I remember that anytime I have decided not to follow instructions, I felt stressed and was afraid of feeling “faulty” or guilty. I thought I had to always be perfect, so I would be sure I made no mistakes. Sometimes the only thing possible seems to be being perfect, so that nobody can say that I am “wrong”. And, because I need to be perfect, I tend to take on doing everything. I work alone and still tend to do too much.

Sometimes I have preferred to do anything except work, because work always created these feelings of stress, with this fear of being guilty or at fault all the time. Trying to be perfect is highly stressful, because it takes too much energy, another reason to avoid doing what I want. My “non-doing” is to avoid feelings of guilt. I would do anything to avoid this feeling, even doing nothing. But I realize now that *not working* is not a solution. I now see that this is the cause of my procrastination. It is not a solution because when I stop doing something to avoid stress, I also avoid the pleasure that can be had in the situation.

So I acknowledge my powerlessness over my two workaholisms (over-doing and non-doing), and I sometimes feel like my life is insane. My Higher Power today is my WA recovery group, which helps me every week to behave in another way, to live another way, and to understand what has been happening in my life, my thoughts and my experiences.

Love in fellowship,

Hel

**SHARING: HELPING AND ASKING FOR HELP**

Promise Eleven: We ask for help and reach out to help others.

Promise Eleven is short yet contains great wisdom. For most of my life, it was very, very hard for me to ask for help let alone actually accept that help. I felt that, to be a "proper" adult, I needed to be self sufficient and strong, not needing anyone except in emergencies. I considered asking for help to be a weakness.

I am grateful for WA and my other 12 step fellowships in helping me to understand that it is okay for me NOT have to be strong all the time. This realization allows me to fully be human: one who has great strengths, one who has a shadow side, and one who has limits. Before I could more easily accept this help, I needed to be okay with being vulnerable. It has taken many of years in twelve step program to learn to trust myself, others, and my HP. I am learning now who to ask and also who NOT to ask. The healthy action is to ask for help when I need it, and then to graciously accept that assistance.

My healing in the "reach out to help others" aspect of this promise is that I've had to pull back from helping too much! As a recovering codependent, I must be careful about taking on service and assisting others only when that feels right for me. Always, always, I am asked to help out more than I can possibly *ever* do in this lifetime. The old, over-volunteering led to very unhealthy and skewed relationships with family members, some friends, and even some of my professional organizations. I was overly responsible while others were under-responsible. I am doing better about saying "no," and doing so guilt-free. In doing that, I have healthier relationships all around, with self, HP, and others. In my WA home group, at the beginning of each meeting, we share our WA victories. I particularly love to share when I've said "no" and kept healthy boundaries in this arena.

Peace, blessings, and support,  
Tisa



## **EDITOR'S COMMENTARY**

Storyline is the quarterly newsletter of Workaholics Anonymous, published in order to share our experience, strength and hope with each other, and to announce information about our fellowship. We welcome shares, stories, commentaries, quotes, and poems: anything we can reproduce. Please submit what you have to share and encourage others to do so as well. Send us your own work, and if you see something you like in your email group written by someone else, please secure permission from the author and send it in or include their email address. Send contributions for to: [storyline@workaholics-anonymous.org](mailto:storyline@workaholics-anonymous.org), with STORYLINE in the subject line.

This issue features commentary on the steps, signposts, tools, and promises taken from Finding Balance email group. Instructions on joining this group may be found on the WA website, and we are grateful for the authors supporting STORYLINE with these beautiful and honest contributions.

Please know that STORYLINE needs help. We invite not only stories, shares, and other written contributions, but also administrative help editing, assistant editing, proof-reading, and outreach to get more contributions. Let us know if you are available to help with any of these or with other tasks of your choosing. We truly support any abstinence that is part of your sobriety, but note that reading the submissions and collaborating with others enhances my recovery. I find working on STORYLINE to be educational, creative, and highly gratifying.

*-Shelley, Chicago*

### ***CONTACT INFORMATION: EMAIL WAWSO***

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## **STORYLINE REFERENCE LIST**

*STORYLINE is developing a comprehensive list of references on workaholism. We encourage input from our readership. Members of our fellowship may offer suggestions of reading materials that have helped them in their recovery. Some of the materials are not WA Conference approved; the authors, publishers, presenters, and distributors of these materials are not endorsed by WA, but individual members are invited to refer to them according to their personal and professional interests. As we often say, "Please take what you like, and leave the rest."*

### **Conference Approved Literature**

*Workaholics Anonymous. (2005/1996). Book of Recovery. Menlo Park, CA: Workaholics Anonymous World Conference.*

*Workaholics Anonymous Book of Discovery*

### **Work Addiction and Work Anorexia Reference List**

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### **Research Reference List**

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Sussman, S., Lisha, N., & Griffiths, M. (2011, March). Prevalence of the addictions: A problem of the majority or the minority? *Evaluation & the Health Professions, 34*(1), 3-56. doi: 10.1177/0163278710380124

### **MEDIA SPOTLIGHT**

Have you read about workaholism in the news? Send us articles and links that are of interest to you.

[Are You a Workaholic or a High Achiever? 3 Ways to Tell](#)  
Care2.com, 26 January 2015

[Work too much? Tips for balancing professional, family life](#)  
Daytona Beach News-Journal, 16 January 2015

[Advice From a Recovering Workaholic: Make a Shift to 'Less Is More'](#)

Entrepreneur, 1 January 2015

[Be resolved: here's how to really live and turn off obsessive thoughts of work.](#)

Monterey County Weekly, 1 January 2015

[4 Subtle Differences Between Workaholics And High Performers](#)

Business Insider Australia, 2 January 2015

[You're a workaholic in banking. What's so wrong with that?](#)

eFinancialCareers, 17 December 2014

[Workaholism: the modern workplace danger](#)

The New Daily, 8 December 2014

#### **CALL FOR BOOK REVIEWS**

Readers are invited to submit a review of any book of interest to our readers. The review might be about two paragraphs.

#### ***ANNOUNCEMENT AND INVITATION: NEW MEDITATION BOOK***

The W.A.W.S.O. Literature Committee is creating a meditations book. We would like all the meditations to come from the fellowship, so . . . **We need your help!**

All members are welcome to write and submit meditations for publication. These can be submitted individually, or as a group. Consider having a writing play day for your home group. Not only would this activity provide opportunities for reflection and meditation, but it would also allow group members to make contributions to a book that will serve the needs of the whole fellowship.

A suggested meeting format for writing meditations is available at the WA website. For more details about submitting meditations, please visit: <http://www.workaholics-anonymous.org/page.php?page=bookofmeditations>

Also, a suggested meeting format for writing meditations is available at the WA website at: <http://www.workaholics-anonymous.org/pdf/MeetingTypes.pdf>

We look forward to receiving your meditations!!  
Have fun with us!!

Your trusted servants,  
W.A.W.S.O. Literature Committee



**STORYLINE: OUR MISSION**

- To produce a quarterly publication of news about WA in a way that serves as an example of balance between service and our program.
- To provide a space for people of the fellowship to share their experience, strength and hope with the broader membership.
- To provide real stories from real people to those in our fellowship who do not have access to a local meeting.
- To bridge the gap between the fellowship and the WA Board, and aid in replenishing the Board with new members as the trustees' terms run out.

STORY LINE invites WA members to share their experience, strength and hope with the WA fellowship around the world. Each of us has something to share that can help another workaholic to abstain from compulsive working. Please send your submittals by email to: **storyline@workaholics-anonymous.org**, with **SL** in the SUBJECT LINE. Include your contact information and please also let us know if we can include your first name as author. Your contribution will make this publication more alive, while improving your recovery by helping others.

*Note that materials submitted are assumed to be intended for publication, are subject to editing to provide conformity for the newsletter. They become the property of WAWSO, which may publish them in any format in any Workaholics Anonymous literature. The tentative deadline for submissions for our next issue is: November 15, 2015.*

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