

# STORYLINE

From Workaholics Anonymous

JUNE JULY AUGUST

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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**SHARING: ON REPRIORITIZING MY VALUES**

The first tool I called on when I entered WA in February, 2011 was *prioritization*. I started considering my professional tasks. I was all screwed up back then, placing unpaid volunteerism before my billable hours. Due to that poor prioritization, I had been fired from my paid position. I was too busy "shining" as a brilliant volunteer who could not pay her bills, because she didn't finish vital projects at work. Talk about humbling.

That actually was my bottoming out and the time when I could no longer deny that I was a workaholic. So, my first change of values was to have billable hours at the top of my priority list. I followed this with my professional writing and THEN volunteerism. Within the service category, WA has also given the tools and support to let go of that old volunteer position where I was doing too much, and I am now very careful about not taking on too much. I've had to say "no" to several requests for my pro bono time. Even though it was and is hard for me to disappoint the people and organizations who ask, in declining these request I am less resentful and I feel more free. The over-volunteerism contributed greatly to my under-earning. The WA tools also help me better value my work skills and work products. Little by little, I am improving in this arena as well.

In my early months of WA recovery, I realized that I never took a day off from work. Even if I just worked 15 minutes in any given day, my mind was constantly on my projects, unrealistic goals, and checking off those tasks from my numerous to-do lists. So, I decided to start taking every Sunday off. My primary instructions, then and now, are: NO billable hours, NO professional writing, and no volunteerism other than a few 12 step service tasks. In the beginning, I was highly uncomfortable with so much free time. Once I moved passed what I could NOT do, I began to see so many wonderful things I wanted to do. Mostly, I now crave that day off from any and all commitments. I sometimes allow some type of social time such as Easter dinner at our home. I'm grateful for some time right now to write this. My husband and I will then enjoy time with my aunt as we eat the delicious meal that he cooks for us. After I clean up, my aunt and I will go for a walk. And then this evening, I'll be able to just chill out. I look forward to that.

My reprioritization of values now extends beyond the professional tasks. I really get that relationships, spirituality, self care, and other aspects of life are on the same level as work, whereas in the past, everything was inferior and subordinate to work. Now, when I am with my family and friends, I am present to them. Even when I'm doing housework, I value that task as a way to make our home pleasant for us.

Thanks for reading/listening. May we move forward with deep breaths and just focused on each *next right action*, one at a time.

*Peace, blessings, and support,  
Tisa*

**SHARING: ON WAITING**

*SIGNPOST ELEVEN: Waiting is hard for us. We are more interested in results than process, in quantity than quality. Our impatience often distorts our work by not allowing it proper timing.*

I often feel anxious, frustrated and angry when i have to wait.

Waiting for the words to come  
Waiting for the job to arrive  
Waiting for my partner to do what he says he will do,  
or what I think he should do.  
Waiting for healing  
Waiting for the morning  
Waiting for my creativity and ideas to come  
Waiting for the cue to go down  
Waiting for my turn

Waiting is painful for me: I want things now. Its as if I don't understand why I have to wait - having to wait is difficult to accept. But from a recovery point of view, waiting becomes a gift. Like waiting for bread to rise. Waiting for pasta sauce or great stew to infuse with all the goodness of blending a range of tastes. I have noticed in my recovery that healing comes when circumstances are ready and I am really ready. I do not understand - but it comes. The words come, the healing comes, the creativity comes.

While I am waiting I must take care of myself. Breathing, smiling, laughing, bathing, walking in the beautiful countryside, or seeing some art. I must wait and take care of myself in the waiting. I can rest and smell the flowers.

*With loving fellowship,  
Helen*

**SHARING: ON STEP FOUR**

*STEP FOUR: Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.*

When I reached the 4<sup>th</sup> Step, I felt I was home. I had been struggling with anxiety and guilt most of my life, and I knew it. In my childhood, my parents used shaming instead of punishment; I learned to save myself from that stress by shaming and punishing myself. When I was 8-1/2 years old, my younger brother died as a result of a fire in our house. I became obsessed with the idea that I should have saved him. I carried that blame for years, which became part of a pattern of secret shame. By the time I was in my teens, I tried cautiously to approach these feelings and events instead of trying to hide

from them. Although I was not able to do a complete job of it, I attempted to look at them squarely, sensing that my shame was crippling.

When I first read the 4<sup>th</sup> Step, it made sense to me right away, and a broad approach was called for, not just attending to the most obvious issues. Thinking back, these things stand out as being unexpectedly helpful:

- I began to realize that to avoid feeling shame, I was trying to be perfect. I saw this as a horrible act of arrogance. I was not accepting that I am merely a human being, like everyone else.
- I also came to understand that I had been seeking the impossible. Life often presented me with challenges, and I only gave myself two bad options, neither of which were positive. In these cases there was no way to come out looking and feeling good.
- I took this to heart and began to feel a welcome humility. This was a vast relief, as it allowed me to be relieved of the impossible burden I was trying to carry. This was also new for me, as I had confused humility with humiliation.
- As I moved further into the process, I searched my past and re-found sources of shame that I had been trying to forget. Many of these were not dramatic, but were nevertheless part of a background of anxiety.
- I was able to see that shame was a kind of dark judge hanging over me, making me so cautious with others that I seemed remote and often felt alone.
- I saw the need to accept myself, including my character flaws, as the only way I could be genuine. This necessary to experience the love from others as deserved.
- I began to feel cleaner. I slowly began to accept that I was not perfect and that I was capable of making mistakes like all human beings. This did not mean that it was just fine to make errors, but errors were no longer a permanent stain on my character.
- I realized that I was so sensitive to criticism (which I mentally experienced as shaming) that I would shut out important information about my effect on others. I was missing chances to learn about myself and others, which could give meaning and direction in modifying my behavior.

This was, of course, only an internal process and did not make the 5<sup>th</sup> Step unnecessary. In fact, it made the 5<sup>th</sup> Step a natural next thing to undertake.

*--from Harry*

**SHARING: ON A BALANCED PLAN OF ACTION**

*PROMISE THREE: We have a daily plan of action that faces the realities of time, priorities, health, and relationships.*

This promise is one of the parts of WA that affirms balance in my life of recovery. Before WA, the work took priority over all of this. I still so clearly remember one job when I was so busy working, I didn't keep up with my preventive health care even though I had full health care coverage, I even had sick leave for medical appointments but I figured if I took that time off, I would have to work overtime to make up for tasks not done. How utterly crazy this was in so many ways! Well, I am doing better about keeping up with my medical appointments and proactive care of my mind, body, and spirit. My husband is not very good with his care, either, so I encourage him as well, especially since he has some serious issues that need daily care.

I call upon the tool of *prioritization* to help me with my daily *plan of action*. I've learned to plan lightly, using the tool of *under-scheduling*, rather than following my old habit of trying to squeeze too much into any given day. This helps me accept the limits of time while assisting me in naming my priorities and following through with them.

I'm grateful that I now place relationships on at least an equal value with work. In the past, I viewed everything as inferior to work. This coming week, my oldest niece and her family are visiting from out of town. I took one full day off from work to be with them, plus one of my flexible days, so I have two days to be with them. I just found out yesterday that they are arriving one day early. This frustrates me a bit as I would like to spend more time with them, but can't. However, I did have plans to meet a friend for supper on Monday night. In calling upon our tool of *substitution*, I asked my colleague if we could meet one week later because of these changes in my niece's plans. My friend was fine with that. Thus, I still get to see my friend and I also will have an extra evening with my darling niece and her delightful family, her husband and my precious great nieces.

*Peace, blessings, and support,  
Tisa*

**SHARING: ON OUR CONCERN WITH IMAGE**

*Signpost 12: 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.*

I am totally concerned with image at the moment. The perfectionist mother and wife in me wants everything to be perfect and everyone to be happy as every marvelous family that we see in the movies. Unfortunately, nothing seems to go as planned and I am feeling totally incompetent. I associate my image with everything concerning the other family members, that is, if everyone is happy and well, I am a good mother and wife. Otherwise, I am unworthy. I have a lot of unmet expectations of others which ends up making me very frustrated.

For example, I want the children to be totally thrilled with their toys, play with them a lot, and avoid ever breaking them. I have a tendency to react with anger if my children's toys get broken, or if they are not well taken care of, which is usually the case: With three little devils around nothing lasts too long! I realize I consider this a proof of my inadequacy to teach them the value of things and I am beating myself up for it. If a toy proves to be of low quality, I feel unworthy. If one of the kids is not happy with his toy, I feel unworthy. If they are not interested in what I offer them (even without showing any contempt, they are just not interested) I feel unworthy. My self image is fed with my children's reactions and actions, as if everything around me reflects me, my value, my worth.

On top of all that, I am very sick today (along with my newborn) and I haven't been able to cook. We just bought stuff the last few days--nobody complained--but buying pre-made food made me feel unworthy, of course. I have such an idealistic image of a perfect mother who is supposed to instantly put a smile on everyone's face and do everything by herself and never be tired and never be sick and be everywhere and do everything and have 10 arms and 10 legs ...!

I don't know why am I inflicting myself with such high standards, and why I continue to harm myself with this huge pressure. I guess since I have four children I think everyone expects me to be a mother who is always mastering every situation. I have shown my worthiness by having my children and now I have to keep lifting myself up to the ever-increasing standards that I create myself.

The more I do as a mother the more I expect myself to do. The more I accomplish, the higher my standards become. I push myself more and more. Meanwhile, I never acknowledge anything I do, and I always have an attitude of 'you did this, ok, now you can do much more than this next time'. I am an awful boss for myself! I recognize this pattern from my family of origin, where every accomplishment was followed by immediately raising the standard, so that the accomplishment was minimized the minute anyone achieved it. I guess my parents treated me the same way they treated themselves. (They

eventually went into WA.) I am powerless over my parent's workaholism and I am powerless over my reactions. I soon as I had my fourth baby, I started expecting myself to be able to manage everything much better and more efficiently than before, as if my label of becoming a mother of four made me more qualified for the job. More children actually meant more pressure, although the pressure did not come from the children: It came from me.

I have always thought that children should be happy, joyful, sane, thrilled and well brought up and my job to be peaceful no matter what is happening. Everybody expects that mothers of large families are superwoman, even though we are just as human as before and, in fact, we are confronted with more difficulties, more unpredictability, and more mistakes than are mothers of fewer children. My old views get challenged very often. My HP had a lot of fun giving me, a workaholic, this job.

I can see this situation is a test of my recovery, and luckily I have my recovery program. I was going through my diary yesterday and I noticed that eight months ago I was totally unable to identify the emotion that I felt, and I had to write a whole page before I was able to say what my emotion was. Today, I can generally do that without any writing. I don't always have a recovery action to help with my emotions. I tell myself: Progress not perfection.

I can't seem to be able to make everything fit into a weekly routine as I would like to, so I am following my inner guide as to what work I should do for any given day. Yes, I have lost myself because of outside image-related issues, but I am searching to find myself right now. And I will progressively find myself, living one day at a time.

*In fellowship,  
Iléana*

**SHARING: ON OVERWORKING**

*SIGNPOST THREE: By overworking, we neglect our health, relationships, recreation and spirituality. Even when we are not working, we are thinking of our next task. Most of our activities are work-related. We deny ourselves the enjoyment of a balanced and varied life.*

I'm grateful when we read in my face-to-face WA meeting. I'm reminded of where I've been, the progress I've made, and areas needing improvement in my future. Before WA, I NEVER gave myself a full day off. I can't believe it! No wonder I was always feeling anxious, fearful and near burn out.

Even when I only worked 15 minutes on a given day, that totally would break the rest cycle and get me back into thinking about work and work projects. So, one of the first things I did when coming to WA was to take Sundays off. I do not allow myself to do any billable hours, no professional writing, and no volunteerism (a few 12 step service tasks are the exception!).

I had difficulty at first on those days off. They seemed so unproductive and I felt so useless. But now, four years later, I guard these Sundays. It is such a joy to just chill out and do what I want; usually just relaxing at home. Once in awhile I'll plan a social outing with my husband or a friend. I find this a good day to catch up by phone with some folks and by email with others. However, if I'm low on energy, I just focus on me and my relaxation time.

I've had a stressful last two weeks, including not sleeping very well. I was looking forward to my day off. Then it was hard to settle down. I just wanted to get back into the work to calm my emotions. I wouldn't let myself do that. I tried to take a nap, which didn't work very well. My walk with my doggie and my neighbor helped a lot. We had a nice day to enjoy together, and I am glad.

This signpost also reminds me about the importance of having balance in my life and considering the friends and relatives who make valuable contributions to that balance.

*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. Please 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, yet reading the submissions and collaborating with others often enhances recovery. I find working on STORYLINE to be educational, creative, and highly gratifying; I am grateful and honored by the opportunity.

*-Shelley, Chicago*

## **CONTACT INFORMATION: EMAIL WAWSO**

For any Program issue, concern, initiative, suggestion, etc.:

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**ANNOUNCEMENT: WA ONLINE LITERATURE STUDY MEETING**

If you feel your WA recovery could do with a boost or you find that you just do not pick up the WA literature enough for your recovery to keep growing this new online WA literature meeting could be just the ticket for you.

The basic idea is that we will post a paragraph or two from the WA literature each week and members can share their experience, strength and hope on it. You might even find a special connection with someone else in the meeting who may become a recovery buddy or co-sponsor. The meeting would be a no feedback, no cross-talk meeting similar to the current step study and adhere closely to the 12 Traditions of WA. Members are welcome to contact each other privately outside the meeting. We will only use WA printed literature.

If you are interested in helping to start this online WA literature based meeting or would like to be sent an invitation when it starts please send an email to: [anylength@optusnet.com.au](mailto:anylength@optusnet.com.au) Please say in your email if you are willing to become part of the meeting's service structure(i.e. do the posting once a month, help with files, moderating, etc.) or are just interested in joining when it's up and running. We will need at least a couple of people willing to help before we can start this meeting.

*-from Anylength*

**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 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. 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."*

**Work Addiction and Work Anorexia Reference List**

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*Workaholics Anonymous Book of Discovery*

### **Research Reference List**

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### **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.

**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: August 15, 2015.*

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