

The Worksheet Legend
By Anonymous

In 1938, A.A. had not yet begun to spread much beyond New York, Akron and Cleveland. Here in Little Rock, an insurance agent by the name of Sterling C., who had a reputation of being “bad to drink”, was trying once more to devise a plan by which he could stay sober and keep his job. He was an excellent insurance agent and he sincerely wanted to stay sober, but his experience had been that he could not and had lost several jobs. So when Sterling took a new job with Foster Cochran’s agency, he made a deal with his new boss. Sterling would be fired automatically if he got drunk on the job. His hope was that the threat of this would keep him from drinking.

Things went well for a while, but then that old craving began to return. Sterling went to his boss and confessed his fears. His boss told Sterling to take a few days off and see if he could find himself. So he hit the road and wound up in New Orleans talking at length with an Episcopal priest there who advised him to read the Common Sense of Drinking by George Peabody, and to pray for his sobriety.

Back home, he managed to get past this episode and stay sober. After a while, people began to notice the difference in him and one day a long-time furniture dealer told Sterling that he had a wonderful salesman, Harlan N., who he was going to have to fire because he would not stay sober on the job. He wondered if Sterling could perhaps help this man.

Sterling and Harlan started meeting together every day and keeping each other sober. By now, the AA Big Book had been published and these two men sent for it COD. However, when it arrived, neither had the money and it was returned. A little later, Sterling convinced his boss to order the book. The New York office wrote back asking why an insurance company wanted a copy of their book. It took some time for this to get unscrambled; but finally, the book arrived in Little Rock.

Sterling and Harlan read it and were amazed. They found not only everything they had been doing together, but also a whole lot more they did not know about. A mutual friend of theirs, Bud G., was up at the State Hospital (the Nut House, as they called it) once again for public intoxication, so they took the book to him there. Over the next week, Bud read the book three times, and when he was released, the three men started the oldest AA group west of the Mississippi River. The first AA group begun by mail, Little Rock’s 120 ½ Group, still exists to this day.

Since Bud was a newspaper reporter, he could get free classified advertising. This little group began running an ad saying, “If you have trouble with your drinking, call this telephone number.” After about a year, a small band of seven or eight men was staying sober together with the AA program.

Then the next wave of major national publicity hit about AA and all of a sudden, this group of Little Rock men was deluged with requests for help. There just were not enough of them to go around. They devised a plan where they would set themselves up in a “cafeteria line”. The newcomers would sit and listen to each man in the line one at a time, and when they had visited everyone, all of the sober men would be their sponsor. The only way they could handle the crowd were if all of the sober members sponsored all of the newcomers. It worked and they grew into a large, strong group.

Along with several other techniques, this group developed The Little Rock Approach Plan to Alcoholics Anonymous, which over the next decade became known nationally in AA. Eventually, there were so many sober members in Little Rock that there were too many men for a newcomer to visit and call sponsor. Advisers began to “match-up” selections of sober men with individual newcomers where there seemed to be a “good fit”. The selection of names made up the worksheet list and the new comer did a worksheet with each man on it.

To be sure, the “Little Rock Approach” was controversial, and the AA community around here drew up into two camps...the “hard-shells” and the “lilywhites”. Nevertheless, it all became moot when, in 1952, the State of Arkansas opened the first public detox and rehab center in Benton. Now you could put a newcomer into the hospital for medically supervised detoxification and initial instruction in the AA program. The “Little Rock Approach” had become obsolete.

It quickly died off and became just a memory. However, the practice of the worksheet talk assignments remained and has continued to this day. They have become a time-honored and sacred “tradition” around here. Not with everyone however; just with those people who were sponsored this way...the people whose sponsor’s sponsor gave them worksheets, and so on all the way back to the original group. Today there remains this dedicated little band of sober AA’s in Little Rock who keep this tradition going.

Accordingly, it is an honor and a privilege to be asked to do a worksheet talk with a newcomer. Because we are people who would not normally mix, the chances are that the people who are matched for a worksheet talk would probably never come to know each other in due course. A bond immediately occurs between these two...once you have done a worksheet with a sober member, you have begun a relationship and it always remains like that.

You do your worksheets and you immediately have a community of sober people you can draw upon for advice, recognize at meetings, and feel “a part of”, and be ushered into the group at large. While your individual sponsor cannot know the answers to everything, chances are that among all of your worksheet experiences, you will find it.

The worksheet talks continue to be one of the more meaningful experiences of newcomers around Little Rock AA. Miracles happen every day as a direct result of this practice. Our Higher Power, as we individually understand Him, must surely watch over this tradition because it works so well and does so much good for so many.