

A Desire to Stop Drinking

We Pick the Fruit Before it's Ripe

By Rick R.

How disturbing it is to hear a member of AA with four- or five-years sobriety share at a meeting that Alcoholics Anonymous has an abysmal rate of success, and I wonder if he is in the same AA program that I am. I got sober in the late 60's and my copy of the Big Book (Alcoholics Anonymous) is the second edition and in the foreword to that issue it states that, "Of alcoholic who came to AA and really tried, 50% got sober at once and remained that way: 25% sobered up after some relapses", and it goes on to explain about the others. I'm not sure how scientific those numbers are but their estimates number over 75%. That sounds successful to me. The second edition was printed in 1955 and up to that time there was very little help for the alcoholic outside of AA. In 1956 the American Medical Association (AMA) declared Alcoholism a disease and sometime after that happened rehabilitation clinics were being funded and many alcoholics were being sent there whether they wanted to quit drinking or not. Before 1970, very few alcoholics under the age of 40 came to AA and I was the youngest member in my home group for quite a while. Major drug addiction didn't rear its ugly head at AA meetings until the middle 1970s and many of those that called themselves alcoholic/addicts were much younger than the typical alcoholic, and I recognized that drug addiction progresses much faster than most cases of alcoholism. Another dynamic that must be included in the equation is the court system. It seems that before an alcoholic is sent to jail these days, they are given the option to attend so many AA meeting in place of jail time. That overshadows the main requirement to become an AA member. " *The only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking.*" I believe that AA had been flooded with addict/alcoholics who have been sent to us long before they suffer the desperation and desire to stop drinking or using, and that we embrace them with this compassion and understanding. With that in mind, I believe that AA does more today than we did in the days when only those who had a serious desire to quit drinking showed up at our doors. I am sometimes misunderstood when I try to explain these things, as I see them, and I don't want to see AA being misrepresented. I believe that, of those who come to us with a desire to stop drinking, the success ratio remains the same as it always has been but, for those who have been sent here through the courts or the rehab programs, how many of them truly have a desire to stop drinking (or using)? When I greet a newcomer to a meeting, I usually ask him/her, " What brings you to AA?" About 9 out of ten will say the courts, or other influences. The one that says, "I just can't live this way anymore." I believe, has a 75% chance of staying sober for the rest of their life. We, in A.A; do not discriminate against those that are sent here through those outside programs. We welcome them with open arms and give the best we can. I believe that 4 out of five at any given meeting were initially introduced to A.A. just that way. The Meetings were much smaller before the influx from those outside programs, but the rate of relapse is much higher now. Consider the fact that many of those members may never have made it here on their own, and that would be truly tragic. An old country boy name Named Phil when asked, "Why do we have so many relapses in AA?" replied, "Well, sometimes we pick the fruit before it's ripe". That's exactly the point I wanted to make. We do, often pick the fruit before it's ripe but we never discard it.

