

Reading 1 (non-sponsor)

What Is HOW?

HOW is a movement within Overeaters Anonymous whose basic principle is that abstinence is the only means to freedom from compulsive overeating and the beginning of a spiritual life.

Where and Why Did HOW Begin?

HOW began in Phoenix in 1981, as a means of reviving a group called OA VICTORIOUS. Its meeting format is taken from Rozanne's book, *I Put My Hand In Yours*, and centers around the concept of service. Many of the questions used in HOW sponsoring stem from OA Plus and Westminster groups. The outline of service came from the OA Suffolk County, New York sponsor's guide.

Reading 2 (non-sponsor)

The Only Requirement

Overeaters Anonymous respects the autonomy of each OA group. We do suggest, however, that any group that has requirements in addition to the suggested twelve steps and twelve traditions inform its members that these requirements are what that particular group has found effective in working the program and do not represent OA as a whole.

The members of this group have found the HOW concept to be effective in working the OA program. The opinions expressed here this afternoon by those who share, are their own and not necessarily those of OA. The Board of Trustees states: "We understand the third tradition to mean that individual ways of working one's program should not exclude any compulsive overeater from attendance and participation at OA meetings anywhere, anytime."

"The only requirement for membership is the desire to stop eating compulsively. Anyone who says he/she is a member; is a member. We of Overeaters Anonymous welcome all members with open arms."

Reading 3 (non-sponsor)

The HOW Concept

The Overeaters Anonymous HOW meetings have been formed to offer the compulsive overeater, who accepts the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions as a program of recovery, a disciplined and structured approach. HOW groups are formed in the belief that our disease is absolute, and that only absolute acceptance of the OA program will offer any sustained abstinence to those of us whose compulsion has reached a critical level. Therefore, we accept the nine tools of program and the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions as necessary for our recovery. In OA-HOW, our daily action plan is outlined in the structured use of each of the other tools.

Our meetings are dedicated to the concept of remaining honest, open-minded and willing to listen. This is the HOW of the program. We pray that the collective group conscience and love that these ideals offer us will promote a strong sense of security that will enable us to experience a new unity and wholeness with all those around us; and, that the HOW ideals will help us to progress in our program of recovery on a daily basis.

To be certain, much of our strength is found in the structure of meetings and in the daily adherence to the program as it is written in our literature.

The Tuesday evening meeting also firmly understands that, after our recovery has begun through abstinence and the taking of the first three steps, our further surrender to the additional steps of recovery offers us a promise of happiness, contentment and achievement in all areas of our lives.

We ensure our continued and sustained abstinence from compulsive overeating by being forever aware that God is doing for us what we have never been able to do for ourselves.

May God, as each of us understands Him, open our minds and our hearts to the love which is manifested on this meeting. Amen.

Reading 4 (non-sponsor)

Reflections for the Newcomer

Welcome to OA-HOW. We are all so glad that you have decided to become a part of our fellowship. You know that the HOW concept is a disciplined program. We believe that the discipline of weighing and measuring, of telephoning your sponsor at a particular time, of attending meetings and making phone calls; all lead to a life based on the Universal Discipline, which is accord rather than discord even with many things going on around us. Therefore, if there is a breakdown in any of these areas, the concept is threatened (as is the individual's abstinence).

We have found that the discipline must remain as constant for the beginner as for the sponsor. If the newcomer shies away from this life's responsibility, the sponsor may give the newcomer's time slot to someone more committed to recovery. This is not a personal affront, but a matter of necessity. So many who think they should recover, in fact, are not ready. If the newcomer should show lack of commitment, the sponsor may then offer the newcomer assistance in finding a new sponsor. The rationale here is, if the newcomer insists on picking up the food before the phone, then there is a breakdown in the level of communication between the sponsor and the newcomer. "Frothy emotional appeal seldom suffices" ("Doctor's Opinion," Big Book, p.XXVI, para.2). If a sponsor slips, get a new one. The pitfalls of self-deception cannot be overstressed if you are to recover, therefore, a sponsor, in all self-honesty, must release all sponsees to continue his own recovery. A sponsor cannot give what he does not experience.

Finally, you must believe that we need each other; all problems that arise can be worked on via the phone, or person-to-person contact. Only positive, upbeat recovery belongs at our meetings.

"A body badly burned by alcohol does not often recover overnight, nor do twisted thinking and depression vanish in a twinkling. We are convinced that a spiritual mode of living is a most powerful restorative." ("The Family Afterward," Big Book, p. 133, para. 2)

Good luck. Everyone in the fellowship is praying that you find the release from the obsession so many of us have. God bless. And no matter what, **KEEP COMING BACK!! WE'LL ALWAYS BE HERE FOR YOU!**

Reading 5 (non-sponsor)

Excerpt from Step 2 of The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous, pp. 9-11 (starting at paragraph 2)

When we look with complete honesty at our lives, we see that where eating is concerned we have acted in an extremely irrational and self-destructive manner. Under the compulsion to overeat, many of us have done things no sane person would think of doing. We have driven miles in the dead of night to satisfy a craving for food. We have eaten food that was frozen, burnt, stale, or even dangerously spoiled. We have eaten food off of other people's plates, off the floor, off the ground. We have dug food out of the garbage and eaten it.

We have frequently lied about what we have eaten - lied to others because we didn't want to face the truth ourselves. We have stolen food from our friends, family and employers, as well as from the grocery store. We have also stolen money to buy food. We have eaten beyond the point of being full, beyond the point of being sick of eating. We have continued to overeat, knowing all the while we were disfiguring and maiming our bodies. We have isolated ourselves to eat, damaging our relationships and denying ourselves a full social life. For the sake of our compulsive eating, we have turned ourselves into objects of ridicule and we have destroyed our health.

Then, horrified by what we were doing to ourselves with food, we became obsessed with diets. We spent hundreds of dollars on weight-loss schemes, we bought all sorts of appetite-control drugs, we joined diet clubs and spas, we had ourselves hypnotized and analyzed, we had major surgery on our digestive systems, we had our ears stapled or our jaws wired shut. All of this we did willingly, hoping we could someday "have our cake and eat it too."

Some of us went from doctor to doctor looking for a cure. The doctors gave us diets, but we had no better success with those than with the other diets we'd been on. The doctors gave us shots and pills. Those worked for a

while, but we inevitably lost control and overate again, putting back on the weight we had worked so hard to lose.

Many of us tried fasting, with and without a doctor's supervision. Usually we lost weight, but as soon as we started eating again, the compulsive eating behavior returned, along with the weight. Some of us learned to purge ourselves with vomiting, laxatives, or excessive exercise. We'd stuff food in our mouths until we were in physical pain, then we'd "get rid of it." We damaged our digestive systems and our teeth while we starved our bodies of nutrients needed to live.

Those of us who were overweight got plenty of advice from others about how to get to our "ideal" size, but nothing permanently solved our problem. We found that no matter what we did to ease our turmoil, our compulsive eating eventually returned. Over the long haul, our weight went up and our self-esteem went down. After a while we became battle-weary and discouraged. Still we could never accept our powerlessness. The prospect of being obese, sick, and out of control for the rest of our lives led some of us to conclude that life was simply not worth living. Many of us thought about suicide. Some of us tried it.

Most of us, however, never reached suicidal desperation. Instead we took comfort in a feeling that everything was all right as long as we got enough to eat. The only trouble was that as our compulsive eating progressed it became harder for us to get enough. Instead of bringing comfort, the overeating backfired. The more we ate the more we suffered, yet we continued to overeat. Our true insanity could be seen in the fact that we kept right on trying to find comfort in excess food, long after it began to cause us misery.

Reading 6 (non-sponsor)

CHAPTER 5 "HOW IT WORKS"

Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path. Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program; usually men and women who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves. There are such unfortunates. They are not at fault; they seem to have been born that way, they are naturally incapable of grasping and developing a manner of living which demands rigorous honesty. Their chances are less than average. There are those, too, who suffer from grave emotional and mental disorders, but many of them do recover if they have the capacity to be honest.

Our stories disclose in a general way what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now, If you have decided you want what we have and are willing to go to any length to get it - then you are ready to take certain steps.

At some of these we balked. We thought we could find an easier, softer way. But we could not. With all the earnestness at our command, we beg of you to be fearless and thorough from the very start. Some of us have tried to hold on to our old ideas and the result was nil until we let go absolutely.

Remember that we deal with alcohol - cunning, baffling, powerful. Without help it is too much for us. But there is One who has all power-that One is God. May you find Him now.

Half measures availed us nothing. We stood at the turning point. We asked His protection and care with complete abandon.

Here are the steps we took, which are suggested as a program of recovery.

Reading 7 (non-sponsor)

THE TWELVE STEPS of Overeaters Anonymous

1. We admitted we were powerless over food - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to compulsive overeaters and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

"Many of us exclaimed, 'What an order! I can't go through with it.' Do not be discouraged. No one among us has been able to maintain anything like perfect adherence to these principles.

We are not saints. The point is that we are willing to grow along spiritual lines. The principles we have set down are guides to progress. We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection." (Big Book, Chapter 5, page 60)

Reading 8 (non-sponsor)

THE TWELVE TRADITIONS of Overeaters Anonymous

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon OA unity.
2. For our group purpose, there is but one ultimate authority a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for OA membership is a desire to stop eating compulsively.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or OA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose - to carry its message to the compulsive overeater who still suffers.
6. An OA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the OA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every OA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Overeaters Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. OA as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Overeaters Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the OA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films, television, and other public media of communication.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all these traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

Reading 9 (non-sponsor)

Just for Today

- Just for Today I will try to live through this day only, and not tackle my whole life problem at once. I can do something for one day that would appall me if I felt I had to keep it up for a lifetime.
- Just for Today I will be happy. This assumes to be true what Abraham Lincoln said, that, "Most folks are as happy as they make up their minds to be."
- Just for Today I will adjust myself to what is and not try to adjust everything to my own desires. I will take my "luck" as it comes and fit myself to it.
- Just for Today I will try to strengthen my mind. I will study. I will learn something useful. I will not be a mental loafer. I will read something that requires effort, thought, and concentration.
- Just for Today I will exercise my soul in three ways. I will do somebody a good turn and not get found out; if anyone knows of it, it will not count. I will do at least two things I don't want to do, just for exercise. I will not show anyone that my feelings are hurt; they may be hurt, but today, I will not show it.
- Just for Today I will be agreeable. I will look as well as I can, dress becomingly, talk low, act courteously, criticize not one bit, not find fault with anything, and not try to improve or regulate anybody except myself.
- Just for Today I will have a program. I may not follow it exactly, but I will have it. I will save myself from two pests: hurry and indecision.
- Just for Today I will have a quiet half-hour all by myself and relax. During this half-hour, sometime, I will try to get a better perspective of my life.
- Just for Today I will be unafraid. Especially, I will not be afraid to enjoy what is beautiful, and to believe that as I give to the world, so the world will give to me.

TOOL 1: Plan of Eating (OA-HOW Sponsor)

A food plan is a commitment to recovery. The HOW disciplines were designed for food addicted people. We believe in a disciplined and structured approach. HOW abstainers do not modify their food plan to suit themselves and commit themselves to black and white abstinence. Deviations invite the return of many other problems.

A food plan is not a personal thing in HOW. This means that we depend upon each other for the strength and growth that we need to remain abstinent. We join together in an effort to free the compulsive overeater from the bondage of food through the use of a food plan, positive thinking, and the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous. We eat weighed and measured meals with nothing in between except sugar free beverages and sugar free gum. Food is written down, called in to our sponsor and committed, so that we can get on with our recovery and out of the food. We also believe that negative thinking is a large part of our disease, so we abstain from negative thinking.

Those of us who work the HOW program concepts use the following guidelines for food plans:

1. We do not write our own food plan. We use a food plan given to us by a doctor, nutritionist or dietician. We discuss it with our sponsor. We do not pick one that allows any of our binge foods. If some food on our plan becomes a problem, we avoid it.
2. Unless approved by a sponsor, we do not skip meals, switch meals or combine meals. We do not deviate or manipulate our food plan in any way. If we need to change our committed food during the day, we call a sponsor.
3. We weigh and measure all our portions so that there is no guesswork. We do not measure by eye. We use a measuring cup, spoon, and a scale. **(Verbally describe what you do with your abstinence kit: scale, cups/spoons, telephone, etc.)**
4. We weigh ourselves once a month until we reach goal weight and once a week on maintenance.
5. Unless advised otherwise by your doctor, we take a multi-vitamin and drink 64 oz. of water a day.
6. We do not drink alcohol.
7. We do not use foods containing sugar, except if sugar is listed 5th or beyond on the ingredients label.

Above all, we do not vacillate or water down the disciplined nature of the HOW program. It is not the extra string bean that counts; it is the decision to take it.

TOOL 2: Sponsorship (OA-HOW Sponsor)

Sponsors are OA members who are committed to abstinence and to living the twelve steps and twelve traditions to the best of their ability.

We ask a sponsor to guide us through our program of recovery on all three levels: physical, emotional and spiritual. In working with other members of OA and sharing their experience, strength and hope, sponsors continually renew and reaffirm their own sobriety. Sponsors share their program up to the level of their own experience. Ours is a program of attraction; find a sponsor who has what you want and ask how it was achieved. A member may work with more than one sponsor and may change sponsors at will.

A HOW sponsor is a compulsive overeater who has completed at least 70 days of back-to-back abstinence and who has taken the first three steps of the program. Sponsors have also completed at least 70 days of assignments.

REFLECTIONS TO THE SPONSOR - SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

No list of reflections and meditations are end-alls and be-alls for the newcomer. A sponsor must be attentive not only to what the new person is saying, but also to what the newcomer is not saying. There are many newcomers who are reticent to purchase books, and who are hesitant to throw themselves headlong into the program. Therefore, we have a list of precommitment assignments.

Above all, **DO NOT VACILLATE OR WATER DOWN THE DISCIPLINED NATURE OF THE HOW PROGRAM...** It is not the extra string bean that is the problem. It is the **DECISION** to have it that results in some trouble.

The HOW Concept is an alternative for people who have tried everything else- therefore, the program is an immutable triumvirate of tools, steps, and traditions. Using the tools of weighing and measuring our food, sponsors, meetings, phone calls, reading and writing, service, and anonymity, we follow the 12 Steps and the 12 Traditions of OA in order to free ourselves from the bondage of food addiction.

SPONSORS DO NOT HAVE THE RIGHT TO PLAY GOD.... WE HELP EACH OTHER.

TOOL 3: Anonymity (OA-HOW Sponsor)

Anonymity is a tool as well as a tradition because it guarantees that we will place principles before personalities. It offers each of us freedom of expression and protection against gossip. Anonymity assures us that only we as individual OA members have the right to make our membership known within our community.

Anonymity at the level of press, radio, films, television and other public media of communication means that we never allow our faces or last names to be used once we identify ourselves as OA members.

Within the fellowship, Anonymity means that whatever we share with another OA member will be held in respect and confidence. What we hear at meetings should remain there. It should be understood, however, that anonymity must not be used to limit our effectiveness within the fellowship. It is not a break of anonymity to give our names and addresses to the secretary of our group or to other service offices of OA for the purpose of conducting OA business, which is primarily twelfth-step work. It is likewise not a break of anonymity to enlist twelfth-step help for group members in trouble, provided we are careful to omit specific personal information. If their disease has reactivated and we persist in protecting their anonymity, we may, in effect, help kill them and their anonymity.

Anonymity is the part of the program that allows each of us to stand in front of our fellows and share for the first time... honestly, who we are... where we have been... and where we hope to go... without fear that our story will be told outside these rooms.

For many of us, the OA rooms are the first place where we have no fear being judged or criticized. We are accepted as we are at that moment. This is the first time for most of us that we experience sharing where we are not told what we did wrong.

We come into OA at rock bottom... mangled emotionally, physically and spiritually. We are supported back to health with honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness. We are encouraged to speak of our pain and we are lovingly told, "your secrets are safe". Come share our recovery... recovery on a three-fold level: physical, emotional, and spiritual.

Lastly, a word to newcomers * * * please join us * * *. However, if you decide that our program is not for you... please remember that our anonymity allows us to grow and recover from a very serious disease.

**WHOM YOU SEE HERE, WHAT YOU HEAR HERE, WHEN YOU LEAVE
HERE, LET IT STAY HERE.**

TOOL 4: Telephone (OA-HOW Sponsor)

Compulsive overeating is a disease of isolation. The telephone is a means of communicating with another compulsive overeater between meetings. It provides an immediate outlet for those hard-to-handle highs and lows we all experience. The telephone is also a daily link to our sponsors and, as part of the surrender process, is a tool by which we learn to ask for help, reach out and extend that same help to others.

In HOW we are asked to make at least 4 telephone calls a day; one to our sponsor and 3 more to other OA members. These calls give us an opportunity to "talk program" on a daily basis.

The telephone is our "lifeline."

TOOL 5: Meetings

(OA-HOW Sponsor)

Meetings are gatherings of two or more compulsive eaters who come together to share their experience before and after recovery and to share the strength and hope OA has given them. Meetings are an opportunity for us to identify and confirm our common problem by relating to one another and by sharing the gifts we receive through this program. We find that being on time for meetings enhances our recovery and provides service to the meeting. Though there are many kinds of meetings, fellowship is the basis of them all. As HOW members we attend at least one HOW meeting a week.

TOOLS 6 & 7: Literature & Writing (OA-HOW Sponsor)

Literature: We study the text book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, referred to as the **Big Book**, and the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, another AA book to reinforce our program. By substituting the words, "food" and "compulsive eating" for the words, "alcohol" and "alcoholism", we can identify closely. We also read OA literature: the OA book, *Overeaters Anonymous*, referred to as the **Brown Book**, the OA *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, *For Today*, for daily meditation, and *Lifeline*, our journal of recovery. Read on a daily basis, our literature impresses on us certain basic truths that we have found vital to our growth. Our literature and the AA books are an ever-available tool that gives insight into our problem, as well as the strength to deal with it and the very real hope that there is a solution for us.

Writing: In addition to our writing our inventories and the list of people we have harmed, most of us have found that writing has been an indispensable tool for working the steps. Further, putting our thoughts and feelings down on paper or describing a troubling incident, helps us to better understand our actions and reactions in a way that is often not revealed to us by simply thinking or talking about them. In the past, compulsive eating was our most common reaction to life. When we put our difficulties down on paper, it becomes easier to see situations more clearly and perhaps better discern any necessary action.

TOOL 8: Service

(OA-HOW Sponsor)

Carrying the message to the compulsive overeater who still suffers is the basic purpose of our Fellowship and therefore the most fundamental form of service. Any service, no matter how small, that will help reach a fellow sufferer adds to the quality of our own recovery. Putting away chairs, making coffee, talking to newcomers, doing whatever needs to be done in a group or for OA as a whole are ways in which we give back what we have so generously been given. Do what you can when you can. "A life of sane and happy usefulness" is what we are promised as the result of working the twelve steps. Service fulfills that promise.

Always to extend the hand and heart of OA to all who share my compulsion; for this I am responsible.