

Principles of Recovery

Back in the late 1980's a woman came to a Step and Tradition meeting in Texas stating that there were 12 principles of AA and had a card stating so. I wrote G.S.O. in N.Y. and asked them where that came from. The reply from G.S.O. was that someone in Beaumont TX had come up with a principle associated with each Step and then the Houston Intergroup had made copies to give out. You can also sometimes see these 12 principles hanging on the walls of AA groups. I told G.S.O. that, unless I was mistaken, I thought that the principles of AA are the Steps as so plainly put in the 12th Step. G.S.O. told me that the Steps ARE the principles of AA. (Inez from Tx.)

Different versions of the 12 principles of the Steps:

1. Surrender
2. Hope
3. Commitment
4. Honesty
5. Truth
6. Willingness
7. Humility
8. Reflection
9. Amendment
10. Vigilance
11. Attunement
12. Service

1. Honesty
2. Hope
3. Faith
4. Courage
5. Integrity
6. Willingness
7. Humility
8. Brotherly Love
9. Self-discipline
10. Perseverance
11. Awareness of God
12. Service

1. Honesty
2. Hope
3. Faith
4. Courage
5. Integrity
6. Willingness
7. Humility
8. Brotherly Love
9. Justice
10. Perseverance
11. Spiritual
12. Service

Awakening to Principles

(from <http://www.sober.org/Principl.html>)

Most A.A. groups read the first 77 lines of Big Book chapter 5, How It Works, at the beginning of their meetings. While reading the 12 Steps one encounters...

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these **principles** in all our affairs. [Big Book, page 60, line 3]

Some of us have asked, "What are *these principles*?" Anticipating this to be anything but a trivial question, we searched the book for the word **principle**. It must be important to the program of recovery because it is used 36 times. Appendix II (below) displays all 36 references.

Definition of Principle. Thus aroused, we then explored. The next thing we did was to investigate the definition of **principle** in our dictionary. Definitions herein were extracted from Webster's New International Dictionary, Second Edition, published in 1935. It should be a reliable source for word usage as understood over 50 years ago by the authors of the Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous, which was first published in April, 1939.

The dictionary on PRINCIPLE

Principle, *n* [fr ...Latin *principium* beginning, foundation...]

2. A source, or origin; that from which anything proceeds; fundamental substance or energy; primordial; ultimate basis or cause....

4. A fundamental truth; a comprehensive law or doctrine from which others are derived, or on which others are founded; a general truth; an elementary proposition or fundamental assumption; a maxim; an axiom; a postulate.

5. A settled rule of action; a governing law of conduct; an opinion, attitude or belief which exercises a directing influence on the life and behavior; a rule (usually a right rule) of conduct consistently directing one's actions...

One might distill these definitions of **principle** down to basic rules of action. However, some of our members are opposed to rules, so we adopted the following short definition:

a principle is a basic action guideline:

Searching the Big Book on the word "Principle". What are the **principles** of the A.A. program of recovery? Five of the 36 uses of the word **principle** are clearly statements of principles: (Numbers 1 through 36 below refer to the order in which the statement appears in the Big Book)

22) The first **principle** of success is that you should never be angry. [Big Book, page 111, line 1] (Although we alcoholics are not saints, it seem the authors of the Big Book thought that our spouses should be. It is obvious that this **principle** is AVOID anger.) 28) Another **principle** we observe carefully is that we do not relate intimate experiences of another person unless we are sure he would approve. [Big Book, page 125, line 18] (This **principle** is that we respect the privacy of others, especially fellow members of AA.) 29) Giving, rather than getting, will become the guiding **principle**. [Big Book, page 128, line 2] (We practice service of others rather than self-service.) 35) & 36) "There is a **principle** which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all arguments and which cannot fail to keep a man in everlasting ignorance-that **principle** is contempt prior to investigation." -HERBERT SPENCER [Big Book, Appendix II, page 570, lines 16 & 19] (The **principle** for us is open-mindedness.)

These are the five easy ones. Another of our 36 examples below contains *three principles*:

25) Your new courage, good nature and lack of self-consciousness will do wonders for you socially. The same **principle** applies in dealing with the children. [Big Book, page 115, line 20] (Our relationships with others will be vastly improved when we display courage and good nature, just as when we do not display self-consciousness.)

Five additional examples make direct reference to the steps and traditions of A.A. as being **principles**:

The **STEPS** of A.A. are **principles** (and a listing of these appears soon):

9) 12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these **principles** in all our affairs.. [Big Book, page 60, line 3]

10) No one among us has been able to maintain anything like perfect adherence to these **principles**. [Big Book, page 60, line 8]

11) The **principles** we have set down are guides to progress. We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection. [Big Book, page 60, line 9]

The **TRADITIONS** of A.A. are **principles**:

1 & 2) As we discovered the **principles** by which the individual alcoholic could live, so we had to evolve **principles** by which the A.A. groups and A.A. as a whole could survive and function effectively. [Big Book, page xix, lines 8 & 9]

3) Though none of these **principles** had the force of rules or laws, they had become so widely accepted by 1950 that they were confirmed by our first International Conference held at Cleveland. [Big Book, page xix, line 27]

Thus far we may have uncovered 31 of A.A.'s **principles**. Four were the easy uses of the word **principle** in examples 22), 28), 29, and 36). Three more were found in 25), and there are 12 Steps and 12 Traditions, each being a **principle**.

Principles of the 12 Steps:

STEP: (The Steps are printed on pages 59 & 60 of the Big Book.)

1. Surrender. (Give in to hopelessness.)
2. Hope. (Step 2 is the mirror image or opposite of Step 1. In Step 1 we admit that alcohol is our higher power, and that our lives are unmanageable. In Step 2, we find a *different* Higher Power who we hope will bring about a return to sanity in management of our lives.)
3. Commitment. (The key word in Step 3 is *decision*.)
4. Honesty. (An inventory of *self*.)
5. Truth. (Candid *confession* to God and another human being.)
6. Willingness. (Choosing to *abandon* defects of character.)
7. Humility. (Standing naked before God, with nothing to hide, and asking that our flaws-in His eyes-be removed.)
8. Reflection. (Who have we harmed? Are we ready to amend?)
9. Amendment. (Making direct amends/restitution/correction, etc.)
10. Vigilance. (Exercising self-discovery, honesty, abandonment, humility, reflection and amendment on a moment-by-moment, daily, and periodic basis.)
11. Attunement. (Becoming as one with our Creator.)
12. Service. (Awakening into sober usefulness.)

You may have good reason to believe the above distillation could be improved upon. Please do so! The purpose of this activity is to sharpen up our thinking about the nature of A.A. recovery. Honest inquiry and loving debate are essential to deep learning.

Principles of the *TRADITIONS*; perhaps you should take a shot at these if you wish. Let us know what you come up with.

And Down to Business. Now for the fun. We have uncovered 36 instances of the word **principle** in the Big Book. From these we have discovered 31 **principles** of A.A. recovery. You may have noticed that in eight instances we are talking specifically about "spiritual **principles**".

But, the "**principles**" addressed thus far are but a few of the **principles** that should guide our lives. For example:

Patience, tolerance, understanding and love are the watchwords. [Big Book, page 118 line 13]

You are going to have an exciting time identifying A.A.'s **principles**. It is suggested that you and some friends start with the first printed page in the Big Book, and that you each read a paragraph while the others ask themselves if the paragraph contains any basic action guidelines for recovery from alcoholism. If so, write them down. You may wish to use the following list (Appendix I) to get started:

Appendix I IDENTIFIED A.A. PRINCIPLES (*BASIC ACTION GUIDELINES*)

Abandonment
 Abstinence
 Acceptance
 Activity
 Altruism
 Amendment
 Anonymity
 Clean Thinking
 Compassion
 Confession
 Consideration *
 Constructiveness
 Courage
 Discovery
 Energy
 Faith Forgiveness
 Generosity *
 Good nature
 Health

Helpfulness *
 High-Mindedness
 Honesty *
 Hope
 Humility *
 Integrity
 Justice
 Kindness *
 Love *
 Meditation
 Moderation
 Modesty *
 Open-mindedness
 Optimism
 Patience *
 Prayer
 Perseverance
 Positive-Thinking
 Promptness
 Recovery
 Reflection
 Responsibility
 Restitution
 Self-control
 Self-discovery
 Self-forgetfulness
 Self-Sacrifice *
 Self -valuation
 Selflessness
 Sensibility *
 Service
 Simplicity
 Sobriety *
 Spirituality
 Straightforwardness
 Surrender
 Tactfulness *
 Tolerance *
 Trust
 Truthfulness
 Understanding *
 Unity
 Willingness

Appendix II

USE OF THE WORD PRINCIPLE IN THE BIG BOOK

Here are the 36 instances of "**principle**" in the Big Book.

1 & 2) As we discovered the **principles** by which the individual alcoholic could live, so we had to evolve **principles** by which the A.A. groups and A.A. as a whole could survive and function effectively. [Big Book, page xix, lines 8 & 9] 3) Though none of these **principles** had the force of rules or laws, they had become so widely accepted by 1950 that they were confirmed by our first International Conference held at Cleveland. [Big Book, page xix, line 27] 4) The basic **principles** of the A.A. program, it appears, hold good for individuals with many different life-styles, just as the program has brought recovery to those of many different nationalities. [Big Book, page xxii, line 13] 5) My friend had emphasized the absolute necessity of demonstrating these **principles** in all my affairs. [Big Book, page 14, line 29] 6) We feel elimination of our drinking is but a beginning. A much more important demonstration of our **principles** lies before us in our respective homes, occupations and affairs. [Big Book, page 19, line 7] 7) "Quite as important was the discovery that spiritual **principles** would solve all my problems. [Big Book, page 42, line 32] 8) That was great news to us, for we had assumed we could not make use of spiritual **principles** unless we accepted many things on faith which seemed difficult to believe. [Big Book, page 47, line 23] 9) 12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry

this message to alcoholics, and to practice these **principles** in all our affairs.. [Big Book, page 60, line 3] 10) No one among us has been able to maintain anything like perfect adherence to these **principles**. [Big Book, page 60, line 8] 11) The **principles** we have set down are guides to progress. We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection. [Big Book, page 60, line 9] 12) We listed people, institutions or **principles** with whom we were angry. We asked ourselves why we were angry. [Big Book, page 64, line 30] 13) Although these reparations take innumerable forms, there are some general **principles** which we find guiding. [Big Book, page 79, line 6] 14) Unless one's family expresses a desire to live upon spiritual **principles** we think we ought not to urge them. [Big Book, page 83, line 13] 15) If not members of religious bodies, we sometimes select and memorize a few set prayers which emphasize the **principles** we have been discussing. [Big Book, page 87, line 26] 16) The main thing is that he be willing to believe in a Power greater than himself and that he live by spiritual **principles**. [Big Book, page 93, line 10] 17) When dealing with such a person, you had better use everyday language to describe spiritual **principles**. [Big Book, page 93, line 12] 18) We are dealing only with general **principles** common to most denominations. [Big Book, page 93, line 12] 19) Should they accept and practice spiritual **principles**, there is a much better chance that the head of the family will recover. [Big Book, page 97, line 29] 20 & 21) When your prospect has made such reparation as he can to his family, and has thoroughly explained to them the new **principles** by which he is living, he should proceed to put those **principles** into action at home. [Big Book, page 98, lines 26 & 28] 22) The first **principle** of success is that you should never be angry. [Big Book, page 111, line 1] 23) If you act upon these **principles**, your husband may stop or moderate. [Big Book, page 112, line 20] 24) The same **principles** which apply to husband number one should be practiced. [Big Book, page 112, line 22] 25) Your new courage, good nature and lack of self-consciousness will do wonders for you socially. The same **principle** applies in dealing with the children. [Big Book, page 115, line 20] 26) Now we try to put spiritual **principles** to work in every department of our lives.. [Big Book, page 116, line 30] 27) Though it is entirely separate from Alcoholics Anonymous, it uses the general **principles** of the A.A. program as a guide for husbands, wives, relatives, friends, and others close to alcoholics. [Big Book, page 121, footnote line 3] 28) Another **principle** we observe carefully is that we do not relate intimate experiences of another person unless we are sure he would approve. [Big Book, page 125, line 18] 29) Giving, rather than getting, will become the guiding **principle**. [Big Book, page 128, line 2] 30) Whether the family has spiritual convictions or not, they may do well to examine the **principles** by which the alcoholic member is trying to live. [Big Book, page 130, line 21] 31) They can hardly fail to approve these simple **principles**, though the head of the house still fails somewhat in practicing them. [Big Book, page 130, line 23] 32) Without much ado, he accepted the **principles** and procedure that had helped us. [Big Book, page 139, line 5] 33) The use of spiritual **principles** in such cases was not so well understood as it is now. [Big Book, page 156, line 33] 34) Twelve-Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place **principles** before personalities." [Big Book, Appendix I, page 564, line 32] 35) & 36) "There is a **principle** which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all arguments and which cannot fail to keep a man in everlasting ignorance- that **principle** is contempt prior to investigation." -HERBERT SPENCER [Big Book, Appendix II, page 570, lines 16 & 19]