

Debtors Anonymous

How to Keep Your Meeting Alive

When a new Debtors Anonymous meeting is started in a city or town that formerly had none, a sense of hope and enthusiasm motivates the founding members for some months. These individuals feel that the answer to their money problems is at hand. They rightfully believe that meetings can relieve them of the overwhelming debt in which they find themselves. Although they are not exactly sure how this miracle will happen, these sincere newcomers make a commitment to their recovery and to starting a meeting.

Sometimes the group is fortunate enough to have an experienced D.A. member move to their community from an area with a large number of Debtors Anonymous meetings. This member will often bring a solid knowledge of the recovery process to the meeting and the meeting thrives as time passes.

Not all groups are this fortunate. Some groups do their best to build their meeting, but over time the

group stays small and eventually closes. The founders of the meeting complain "I started a meeting but no one came." This comment raises two questions. Were the efforts to reach a core group of still-suffering debtor thorough and persistent? If the answer is unequivocally "Yes," then we must ask "Why are we not retaining members?"

In answering these two questions, we can focus on the dynamics that prevent the closing of groups. They have worked for other DA meetings, and will work for your group. Both the externals of the meeting and the internal spiritual condition of the founding members are important to consider.

External factors

One factor that makes a meeting successful is as simple as making sure the meeting is easy to find. Can people get to your meeting easily, and when they find you, is parking available? Is the meeting at a time and place that is convenient for members? Is there a sign placed on

the correct entrance and other signs directing people to the correct room?

Has the meeting been announced in the community pages of the newspaper or on cable TV giving the time, place, and a one line description of DA? Is the room the right size for the group? When a group of six to eight people meet in an large auditorium, it emphasizes the smallness of the group. For this reason alone, people may not return.

When people first arrive at the meeting, does someone greet them and introduce them to other members? Is there literature for them to take away? The General Service Office has available a leaflet called *Notes to Newcomers* which can be duplicated by groups and given away for free. Do members of the group give newcomers personal attention and encouragement?

Some ways to do this are: a) appoint greeters for each meeting who can talk to newcomers during the break or after the meeting;

b) offer transportation help, if needed; c) encourage the newcomer to join you for coffee after the meeting; d) befriend the newcomer even if they don't ask you to be their sponsor; e) help newcomers get involved in service as soon as possible; let them know how they can help the meeting thrive.

(Over)

Questions to Consider

- Why do meetings disband?
- What specific precautions against meeting death can a meeting take?
- Does my behavior drive newcomers away?
- Do I introduce myself to the newcomer and let them know they can recover?
- Do we take a collection and contribute to area group, intergroup, and GSO?

How to Keep Your Meeting Alive (continued)

If the meeting is at night, would refreshments meet the needs of those attending? One Friday night meeting that attracts members from a 50-mile radius serves coffee and food at the meeting. Debtors will return to a meeting that recognizes their need for hospitality and welcome.

Do members give out their phone numbers and take the phone numbers of newcomers, giving them a friendly call during the week? This service increases the likelihood that the newcomer will return. Some groups develop a written and duplicated phone list giving first name and last initial, phone number, and best time to call. These are available for newcomers. One of the most powerful indicators of whether a group will survive is if the members call each other between meetings.

It is very tempting to neglect the collection of a Seventh Tradition when the group is small and meeting in a private home. This will doom the group to certain failure as it perpetuates individual debting at a group level. A second vital practice for group survival is the development of a group spending plan. Even if the group collects less than two dollars a week, a spending plan can be developed that meets the group's expenses of rent, contributions to the General Service Office or local intergroup.

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By creating a spending plan for the group we are demonstrating recovery from the vagueness of debting.

Internal factors

What if many efforts to reach debtors in the community have been made, yet individuals come a few times and then fall away?

A second group of factors to consider is concerned with the internal condition of the core members.

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When potential members do not return, is it because they do not see or hear in us examples of what recovery from compulsive debting looks like? Do they hear a litany of problems and a refrain of negative remarks about creditors or life in general? Do we sound like victims or victors? Do we talk about the problem or do we remember to present the solution in our sharing? Yes, we all have problems, but if we will remember to describe how the tools and the steps of the program have improved our lives, newcomers will see in us an exciting picture of recovery from debting.

Some D.A. members are overly responsible and try to help every person who walks in the door.

If you recognize this in yourself and are too busy to sponsor a newcomer who approaches you, introduce him/her to other members of the group who may help. If a newcomer does not follow through, don't take it personally. Are we realistic about the times we tell a member to call? If we are never home at night, does it make sense to imply that we will be available for them? If a person stops calling, find out why by calling them. Perhaps they feel they have failed the group or program and you can reassure them.

Sometimes, the founding member of a group gives in to the temptation to dominate the group, driving away those who are sensitive or resistant to control. It is understandable that an individual member who has donated a great deal of time, energy, and passion in starting and maintaining a meeting would feel that group decisions should go his or her way. This can be identified by working Steps Four through Nine, and must be resisted at all costs.

Conclusion

Recovery from debting does not take place in a vacuum. Meetings are the vehicle for debtors to find the help they need to stop debting, share their successes and problems, laugh at their compulsion, and give to others what they have received from the program and their Higher Power. Every meeting can be a strong meeting.