



Life Actually By Kari Kampakis

The AA way: Lessons we all need

I’m not a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, but through random events I’ve met some amazing people who are.

They are funny, insightful and a joy to be around. The more time I spend with them, the more I realize what an incredible program AA is. Truth be told, I’m jealous of their connection and what they learn in group therapy because what AA boils down to is a healthy, wholesome way of life. It’s a philosophy anyone can benefit from, addict or not.

I can’t write about AA as an insider, but I can try to demystify the program. I can help eliminate negative connotations. At its core, AA is a blueprint for happiness. Following are a few lessons that can profoundly enrich anyone’s life.

LESSON #1: “We admitted we were powerless.” The first step to addiction recovery is surrendering your life to a higher power. The cornerstone of AA is a belief that only a spiritual experience can conquer the illness.

LESSON #2: “We must only sweep our side of the street.” AA believes in taking responsibility for things in your control. You can’t control someone else’s behavior, but you can control your reaction. You can let go

of frustrations beyond your power and focus straight ahead, continually asking, “What’s the next right thing I can do? What mess can I pick up?”

LESSON #3: “Resentment is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.” Harboring resentment makes you sick. AA believes it’s important to cleanse yourself of resentment by admitting your fault in each situation and working through your resentments daily. When it won’t cause more harm, you’re encouraged to approach the person you resent and admit your feelings.

LESSON #4: “Seek progress, not perfection.” The road to recovery is more about the journey than the destination. Sometimes it takes a few steps back to ultimately move forward. If you relapse, you’re urged not to throw it all away, but to get back on the wagon.

LESSON #5: “Gratitude is the best attitude.” Gratitude is big in AA, and so are gratitude lists. By writing a gratitude list, you add up small blessings that are important but easily forgotten. Since alcoholics and other addicts often feel they’ve wasted time, many are grateful to have a new lease on life and a clearer

view of what matters.

LESSON #6: “Life is best lived one day at a time.” There is holiness in the present that can’t be found looking back or ahead. Taking it “one day at a time” teaches you to live in the moment and not get overwhelmed by tomorrow. For an alcoholic or addict — who may struggle to abstain for a day, an hour, even a minute — this makes life manageable.

LESSON #7: “Be of service to others.” AA believes the best way to help yourself is to help others. An AA meeting is not an advice session — it’s a share session. Members share experiences without fear of judgment and among people who understand.

No matter how bad off you are, there’s always someone in deeper trouble. When you help a friend in the trenches, you distance yourself from your problems, get out of your head and see the bigger picture.

LESSON #8: “Pray.” AA relies heavily on prayer and meditation. Throughout the day you pray as needed, asking for the serenity to accept what you can’t change, the courage to change what you can and the wisdom to know the difference.

If you think you may have a problem, try visiting different AA meetings to find one that clicks with you. Each group has its own dynamics and demographics; it may take time to find the best fit.

Also, befriend the seasoned members: those with long sobriety histories, meaningful lives, humility and an appreciation for where they are despite their mistakes. Newcomers are advised to “stick with the winners” because, like any organization, there are some members who like to lead impressionable newcomers astray.

If you’re concerned about a loved one, contact Al-Anon, a support network for friends and family members of problem drinkers.

Addiction recovery is not easy. The addict must be motivated, for “willingness” is key to recovery. It’s easy for outsiders to judge, but remember that joining a 12-step program is an act of courage. It leads to lifestyle changes we could all benefit from — and unleashes the power of grace, forgiveness and the redemption to turn one’s life around.

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