

Overeaters Anonymous
2008 World Service Business Conference, May 4-10, 2008
Mike Bernard, Delegate – Final Report

The 2008 World Service Business Conference of Overeaters Anonymous, the 47th annual conference, in Albuquerque, New Mexico brought over 200 recovering compulsive overeaters together who conduct the business and act as the group conscience of the entire fellowship. It was an honor to be a part of the body to help make these decisions, exchange information, and bring back what I have learned.

WORKSHOPS

I purchased the CDs of most of the workshops, and am happy to lend them to anyone interested in hearing them.

“Bicycle Built for All” – Different Ways to Work the OA Program – May 5

- Questions asked:
 1. How can we agree to disagree?
 2. How can we respect different approaches in working the program, even if we think they won't work?
 3. How can we guide sponsorees who can be confused about different program styles?
- Some answers shared:
 1. Page 84-88 of the AA Big Book is the maintenance of recovery.
 2. Do a 10th Step continuously: watch, pray, tell, amend, help.
 3. The 10th Step promises are the hidden promises in the Big Book, p. 86-88
 4. I am neither cocky nor am I afraid.
 5. It's very important to work our steps, our food plans, and our program.
 6. Always give people information from www.aa.org for telephone and online meetings. This especially helps people in areas with few face-to-face meetings.
 7. Exercise and movement is helpful to health.
 8. We need to hang together or die separately (Tradition One).
 9. We all have the same disease. We can support each other by being open to learning from different recovery approaches.
 10. When we bash another's 12 Step program, we will only hurt ourselves.
 11. I must work the entire program: physical, emotional, and spiritual.
 12. As long as we use the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions, no matter the approach, we will be okay.
 13. Some of us have medical conditions that require different food plans. We must not judge as we do not know everyone's situation.
 14. Some people change first from the outside (by losing or gaining weight) and some change from the heart and mind first.
 15. Criticism of a sponsoree or member has no place. Listen, share, and accept.
 16. Don't confuse abstinence with a food plan.
 17. We blaze our own paths to abstinence and recovery. Sponsors can offer guidance along the way.
 18. I'm not the best sponsor for everyone. Not everyone is the best sponsor for me.
 19. If I can accept myself, I can accept you.
 20. A sponsor is a cheerleader. My role is to help a sponsoree to find the things that allow them to not eat in response to life.

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21. It is my job to develop my food plan and tell my sponsor what I will eat. My sponsor will make suggestions if it's not working.
22. Relapse does not have to be part of recovery.
23. Guilt, embarrassment, shame, and fear: the four walls built around oneself in relapse.
24. The quality of one's honesty determines the quality of recovery.
25. I'm going to go where I can get my truth.
26. Beware of compulsive sponsoring!
27. You have to put the food down and work the Steps. The Steps – not a sponsor, not another member – are what gives us recovery.

“How Sponsorship Helps our Program” – May 6

- Easy Does It...but DO it!
- My sponsor does not come to me...I do the work and go to my sponsor.
- It's good to have a sponsor who can think objectively without emotion or drama.
- Sponsors share their experience, strength, and hope up to the level of their recovery.
- Sponsors are most effective when abstinent.
- We always need more sponsors; “perfect” recovery is not required.
- Sponsorship Kits are available. They're good to have for each meeting and for people thinking about becoming sponsors.
- My most important sponsor is God.
- If I am open to messages, I'll receive the right messages.
- Co-sponsoring works. Both members are at similar recovery levels and will support each other.
- Be careful what you say, because you might need it the next day.
- What steps are you working? A better question is, “What step are you NOT working?” It gets people to think.
- I trust my sponsor to hear me, not judge me.
- “Pin them to the wall.” “Here's what I see...”
- It is possible to work a program without sponsors or being between sponsors. Don't wait!
- Release secrets, shame, and defects of character through your sponsor.
- My sponsor has brought me closer to God through the 12 Steps.
- Sponsorship has given me the gift to learn how to listen to other people.
- I get sponsorship gems from my sponsees and the things they say.
- Even if I can get someone started in the program when I am “full” of sponsees, I will.
- Any tool we pick up is a gift in our lives.
- If you're asked to do service and you can do service, do service.
- Come on, can you sponsor more than one person?
- Being a sponsor is a big part of what Step 12 is all about.
- Find someone who has what you want, ask how he or she is achieving it, then do it!
- Before I sponsored on the Steps, I did not get it, but when I did, I got it!
- An effective sponsee is able to receive insights.
- Your sponsor's sponsor's sponsor should have a sponsor.

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- One sponsor insists that on the 30th day that her sponsorees become available as a sponsor, no matter where they are in their program.
- Sponsors can assist sponsorees in setting boundaries.

“Recovery Through Literature” – May 6

- Questions asked:
 1. How have we used literature in the program? How is it used in our areas?
 2. Literature sales are a major part of OA revenue. Is this okay?
 3. Does your meeting have a literature service person?
- Some answers shared:
 1. Conference Approved literature carries the true meaning of OA.
 2. Members taught me how to use literature, not just have it.
 3. It’s easier to keep up a habit than to start one.
 4. The first two pieces of literature recommended for newcomers: the OA 12 Steps and 12 Traditions and the AA Big Book.
 5. When I have literature in my hands, I don’t have food in my hands.
 6. Military personnel are in great need of OA literature.
 7. Newcomer Packets are vital. Keep copies of the meeting list and local newsletter in them.
 8. Ask sponsoree to read the literature and pamphlets. Discuss the material and apply it to your own recovery work.
 9. Anything I need to know about the program I can read in the literature.
 10. We have to ask for direction because we don’t know which way to go. Literature is our map!
 11. The Big Book and the OA 12&12 are textbooks for sponsors to work with sponsorees. It takes pressure off the sponsor to “know” the entire program.
 12. Literature meetings deliver a strong, consistent, solid message of recovery.
 13. The AA Big Book, p. 112: “Read this book!”

“Bringing it Home” Carrying the Message of the WSBC – May 6

I was privileged to be one of the speakers for this workshop, which was developed after informal meetings on this subject in the previous two conferences. We discussed ways that we could bring the message of recovery from the Conference back to our service bodies, groups, and individual members. There aren’t many notes here as the other speaker and I wrote notes for the formal report to the Conference. A more extensive report on this and all workshops will be available in the final conference report that will be sent this summer from the World Service Office.

- One member writes a blog on his Intergroup’s website during the week of Conference, and people actually read it.
- The Strategic Plan of OA has to be relevant to Intergroups so that they buy in and set their goals that would fit the plan.
- The significance of the World Service Business Conference is that we discover that we are not alone, that there is OA all over the world!

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- Everything we do at the Conference is a part of us and all of OA. We write the literature, we make decisions; we carry the message from OA people to someone, somewhere in the world.
- The best service I can give is show up. The next best is to be abstinent.
- We must show everyone that we are bigger than our little home meetings, Intergroups, and Regions.

MEETINGS – Here are some tidbits that I heard from members attending these regular meetings, which were offered two to three times per day.

Keeping in Fit Spiritual Condition (p. 84-88 AA Big Book) – May 5

- Page 84 of the Big Book, paraphrased for OA, tells us that we have ceased fighting anything or anyone. We lose interest in the food. We are not fighting it or resisting temptation. The problem is removed for us. It happens automatically...as long as we keep it fit spiritual condition.
- I am a spiritual being that lives in a physical body.
- It's better to give than receive; better to be loved than to love.
- Whatever I put before my recovery, I lose.
- You do everything you judge.
- How tolerant and accepting am I?
- The best thing I can think of for my life is not even close to what my Higher Power has in mind for me, as long as I follow the spiritual path of this program.
- Just live the program. Others will see it. Don't force it upon them.
- We have to go out on a limb and trust God, especially in unfamiliar or unusual situations.
- People pleasing is selfish manipulating (I do what I want to "manipulate" them into liking me and to give me attention).

Working an Honest Program – May 5

- I first read the Steps; then practiced the Steps. Now I live the Steps.
- My week was rough, but I never put my OA program on the back burner.
- Blessings come when I get a sponsor and am honest with that person. I receive blessings beyond imagination.
- Service: what you put in you get ten times back.
- I have to be willing, like the Steps say.
- Why I have a life is that I'm in the OA program.
- Today, it's about taking an honest look at myself and my life and not judging what others say.

Asking for Help – May 6

- An incredible self-will drives compulsive eating.
- If I laugh at my foibles and insanities, I have power.
- To get help: pray!
- Make prayer a part of regular daily discipline. If I miss a day or don't want to, just pray anyway or get back to it ASAP. Don't get angry at yourself, we're human.

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- Prayer has given me a spiritual life that begins my abstinence.
- Ask God to answer the door of fear, don't answer it yourself.
- With abstinence, I still have abundance, but now it's not in my mouth (or hips), but in my life.
- If I ask for help when I am in trouble, help is there.
- I'm wearing the same clothes here that I did last year. That's a miracle!
- Sometimes a prayer is one word: "God..." and God knows the rest of the prayer.
- I don't have to worry about how God is defined or whether I doubt God's existence. I simply have to trust and do what is in front of me and ask God for help.
- Tidbits of God are all over the Big Book and from the mouths of recovering members.
- God's will for me is simpler than I would like it to be.
- The most cunning, baffling, and powerful part of my disease is that I'm acting on self-will and not even know it.
- My job is to get myself in spiritual fitness so I can better align myself to the will of my Higher Power.
- My God is the Good Orderly Direction of the 12 Steps.
- Make ourselves ready to receive the gift of recovery.
- Eating abstinently is a true spiritual experience.
- If we ever doubt we're compulsive overeaters, read page 133 of the AA Big Book.

An Acceptance Based Life – May 6

- There is a big difference between an acceptance-based life and a fear-based life.
- Acceptance helps resolve expectations, which increases serenity.
- "It is what it is" is a short version of the Serenity Prayer.
- There's no other place than OA where I get direction on how to live.
- I know that I am a completely new person today because of recovery.
- Acceptance helps when I am out of my comfort zone.
- A new slogan: "Oh, well!"
- I don't need a charmed life; all I need is a charmed attitude.
- At times of growth, I spend a lot more time in prayer and meditation.
- Acceptance formula: do the next right thing and don't pick up.

Working the Steps – May 7

- The solution is in the Steps, not the refrigerator.
- It doesn't matter if you like me. It matters that I like me.
- I carried around 200 extra pounds hiding who I am. Now I'm finding myself in the Steps.
- The further I got along in the Steps, the happier I got.

Joy and Miracles – May 10

- My joy comes from one-on-one sponsoring.
- My Higher Power is my cheering squad.
- I come to OA meetings to see miracles.

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- We are a manifestation of “How It Works.”
- I’m recovering from self-loathing and there is always work to do.
- Any day I want to, I can pick up “How It Works” and I can find what I need today.
- I must not get caught up in “what I want to do” and lose the knowledge of what my Higher Power wants me to do.
- I’m working on being still, not talking too much, and not forcing my opinion on others.
- I respect me and ask God to make me the person God wants me to be, and remove the character defects that stand in the way of being of maximum service.
- The disease almost took me out by my own hand, but that’s not an option today.
- The most important service I do every day is to be abstinent.

I attended other regular meetings, including a special focus gay and lesbian meeting, but did not take notes on what I heard during them.

“A PACK WITH NO LEADERS, AN ANONYMOUS PROGRAM BUT NOT A SECRET SOCIETY” – May 6

This workshop updated the progress of the Public Awareness Campaign (PAC) that was authorized by the 2007 World Service Business Conference. Seed money from the OA reserves in the amount of \$20,000 was authorized to be borrowed to launch the campaign. The fellowship would be asked to donate as they could to return the \$20,000. Members donated over twice that, and OA can now do more than they originally had hoped in the first year.

The speakers, Chairman of the Board of Trustees Dodie Hawkins and Trustee Cheryle Touchton shared their inspiration to start this campaign. Dodie described her first spiritual experience that got her into OA. She was at a workshop at University of California – San Francisco for the alcoholic elderly. The facilitator passed out the AA 15 Questions list, but she got a spiritual message to answer them in the context of food...14 were yes! Then several 12 Steps groups were discussed, including OA, which she had never heard of. She was at a meeting the next night. This random message saved her life. All these years later, Dodie realized that a more formal and focused carrying of the message would reach so many more than a random message would; hence, the PAC was conceived.

Cheryle described her desperate nights of binge eating. One middle-of-the-night binge with a massive dessert brought her to the television, where she saw a public service announcement asking people if they have problems with food and to try OA. She was amazed and found a meeting quickly, which began her recovery.

The World Service Office has hired a local public relations firm who is sensitive to the 12 Steps and the 12 Traditions. They are working with Bannion Co., the same firm that AA uses to create updated Public Service Announcements. Also, new podcasts are available to view at www.oa.org.

Dodie and Cheryle implored our service bodies to take advantage of the Public Service Announcements (PSA) and send them to our local media. They also said we must have strong

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meetings for newcomers who find OA through the PSAs, and suggest taking meeting inventories. Have newcomer packets and sponsors abundantly available.

There have been some random mentions of OA recently, including a sign pointing to an OA meeting in an episode of the television show “Desperate Housewives.”

Members then shared ideas for Public Awareness. One idea that was well received, and which I will propose that our Intergroup do as part of a comprehensive Public Information program, is to purchase space on placemats that are put out at diners and restaurants. Other suggestions were to purchase shopping cart ads, toilet stall ads, and bus ads. There are plenty of free opportunities for public awareness, such as grocery store bulletin board cards, online announcements, and newspaper listings.

It takes several “touches” to bring in new people. Multiple methods of public awareness must be utilized. It is exciting that a Public Information committee has formed in the Baltimore Area Intergroup, who will be open to new ideas for this service.

REGION FORUM – May 7

- The Region Chairs, including our Region 7 Chair, Janice J., presented information on the OA Strategic Plan, which has one, three, and five year goals in Public and Professional Awareness, Strong Meetings, Committed Service Bodies, and Financial Health.
- After the presentation, 20 groups of delegates addressed 20 separate questions related to the goals. My table addressed how individual groups can address financial health. Answers that came up was to show members how much the group contributes to 60/30/10, keep careful records, give regular Treasurer’s reports, and educate the members on the various levels of service bodies and how they help the fellowship.
- The presenters emphasized that there is no “they” in the fellowship. No one at any service body dictates to others. WE are all “they” and “they” are all we. We’re all compulsive eaters trying to recover from this disease. If we can work together well, we can carry the message more effectively.
- Also, it was generally agreed that with our current economy, those who can give more than \$2.00 per meeting at the 7th tradition do so. I will give \$3.00 to \$5.00 per meeting. I challenge others to increase their donations beyond a dollar or two.

COMMITTEE – UNITY WITH DIVERSITY – May 7 and May 10

- I am a member of this committee for a second year, and even though my term is up as a WSBC Delegate for our Intergroup, I am eligible to serve on this committee until May 2009. The four subcommittees – Cultural Diversity, Gender and Sexual Diversity, “Working the Program” Diversity, and the new “Manifestation of the Disease” Diversity – reviewed and revised short-term and long-term goals of action.
- Two of the long-term goals of the Gender and Sexual Diversity subcommittee, to which I belong, are to create a pamphlet on recovery and gender diversity and a book of collections of stories of experience, strength, and hope on recovery and sexuality and body image.

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- As a member of the Gender and Sexual Diversity subcommittee, Joe. A from Massachusetts and I are tasked with addressing current OA recovery resources for men, first to gather information with the later goal of suggesting expanded resources.
- The committee members have short-term goals that we'll act and report on during 2008, mainly on policy statements for diversity and solicitation of articles for a future Lifeline diversity issue.

LANGUAGE FORUM – May 8

Members from around the world shared their experiences in trying to carry the message to their fellows in their native languages. This powerful forum touched on the difficulties that non-English speaking members have in working in a Fellowship, whose original language is English, which is making a valiant attempt to become truly international. The issues discussed raised awareness that will certainly help meet that goal.

- Kathleen, the trustee for Region Nine, which serves Europe and Africa, says that for those who don't speak English, it's like not being able to take the outstretched hand of OA if literature is not in their language. Members lose their strength and vitality in service bodies and at the WSBC if their Intergroups do not have English-speaking members who can translate well. We will all lose out until we can find ways to communicate the message so the meaning is received. There are subtleties that could alter meaning and context from language to language.
- Ana from Costa Rica spoke in Spanish, which was translated to tell us how OA in Costa Rica started. Three people started meetings and they translated literature as best they could, but Ana discovered at her first convention in San Francisco that the official literature was quite different. There were concerns about copyrights and carrying the message. They decided to scrap their literature for the official OA literature, which is steadily being translated into Spanish.
- Esti, the soon-to-be elected Region Nine trustee brought official OA literature that was translated into Hebrew. There are 100 meetings in Israel, and ten years ago the groups began translations of literature with professionals. She also said that she finds it exhausting to communicate regularly in another language, as it takes lots of brain power to think in her native language, translate what she hears, and replies in another language.
- Gaston from Montreal said that their Intergroup website tries to emulate the official OA website in French. He has long been an advocate for multilingual services from the World Service Office, and has been frustrated at the slow progress. His intergroup translates Lifeline into French monthly. He sees language as a barrier to total OA unity and we must continue to work toward more translation services.
- Isabella from Stockholm, Sweden says that they need more literature in Swedish. They have the OA 12 and 12, some pamphlets, and a draft of the Public Information manual. They want to translate For Today and the OA Brown Book. She would like to see the meeting registration form become available in multiple languages, as it is available only in English right now.
- Veronica from Brazil says that most Brazilians don't speak English, and that the native language, Portuguese is vastly different from Spanish, contrary to popular belief. It's tough to translate literature as very few people know both Portuguese and English, as there is a social stigma against those who can speak English. They do have a website and

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some literature in Portuguese, however. A committee of members translates Lifeline, but many Brazilian members want to write articles but can't because of the language barrier. They feel left out.

- Yelisa from Spain says that her biggest issue is that most World Service paperwork is in English. 90% of the Spanish-speaking Intergroups, for example, were unable to act on the WSBC Agenda Questionnaire. There was not enough time to translate 60 pages of material, reproduce it for each service body, collect and translate responses, and communicate them effectively to the WSO.
- Stella, Region 9 Chair from the United Kingdom, says that there are so many languages spoken in the region that they can't carry the message to everyone, but language service boards have started in Poland and the Czech Republic who will start to translate literature.
- Celia and Pati from Mexico discussed their experiences of translating literature after asking the WSO for assistance. Initially the WSO suggested that they use literature translated in Spain, but the Castilian dialect was difficult to understand and translate.

BUSINESS MEETINGS – May 8-10

- In the first of the five business meetings, all delegates and trustees were introduced by state, province, and nation and welcomed. Volunteers were introduced. The motions, amendments to the motions, and their makers were introduced to the delegates.
- Five Region Trustees and two General Service Trustees were re-elected or elected, including our Region 7 Trustee, Donna Aulenbach.
- Proposal A-a - Conference Seal of Approval was granted to the updated pamphlet, "Treatment and Beyond."
- Proposal A – Motion to change procedure to discontinue pamphlets was adopted
- Proposals B, C, D, and E – Policies on Public Awareness were adopted.
- Proposal F – to create a Compulsive Overeaters Awareness Week was defeated.
- Proposal G – Motion to sell annual recovery coins from OA was adopted.
- Proposal H – Motion to create ad hoc committee to review racial make up of past trustee appointments was defeated – about 95% were against it.
- Proposal I – Motion to change "Unity with Diversity" policy title was not addressed as we ran out of time.
- Proposal J – was split into two motions:
 - J1 – add "people of various cultural backgrounds" to list of special focus groups was adopted
 - J2 – add request to avoid attending special focus meetings if another meeting was nearby was defeated.
- Proposal K – Motion to combine Public Information and Professional Outreach was defeated.
- Proposal L – Motion to change definition of abstinence was defeated – about 80% were against it.
- Various by-law amendments clarifying a word or phrase were adopted, as was a request by the Central Illinois intergroup to change region affiliation.
- Proposals 4-9 to define the place of Virtual Groups and how they will be served were resoundingly adopted.

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As always, this was a fantastic conference, full of inspiration, hope, incredible recovery, and service opportunities. I am most appreciative of the trust that the Intergroup has placed in me to represent our local meetings and thank you for the opportunity to give service.

Particularly, I thank each and every one of you who contributed to the WSBC Delegate Fund to send Wajeeha and me to the conference. It was humbling to be entrusted with such an investment. That this was my last conference as a WSBC delegate, this service position is now open. I ask that you consider running for the position of WSBC Delegate that would begin in May 2009. It's an experience beyond words. I'll be happy to tell you more.

Respectfully submitted,

Mike Bernard
A gratefully recovering compulsive overeater
Baltimore Area Intergroup
410-467-7472