

STEPS FOR RECOVERY

"90 meetings in 90 days? – That sounds like every day"

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If you have made a decision that you might benefit from stopping drinking or using addictive substances, and are considering the 12 step programs as a potential solution to your problem, I must say from personal experience you are definitely barking up the right tree. I made the same decision 20 years ago and have been sober ever since. The starting point is to begin going to the meetings as soon as possible. At these meetings you will hear what others have done to achieve successful recovery. It is also at these meetings that you will begin to develop your sober support system. Meetings can be found by simply calling the central office of the program of your choice and asking where and when the local meetings are held. Telephone numbers for Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) can typically be found in the phone book. If you want to contact one of the other anonymous programs, the AA or NA office will usually be able to direct you to them. You can also get the numbers by calling your local alcohol and drug treatment center – also found in the phone book. Meetings can be found in most cities at multiple times during the day and evening hours. When you go to a meeting, pick up a meeting directory so you can plan which meetings you will go to next.

The most common suggestion regarding the number of meetings a newcomer should attend is 90 meetings in your first 90 days. This was suggested to me in my early recovery and I complied because, by the time I got to the program, I was truly ready to follow direction from those who knew more than I about sobriety. Some of the reasoning behind this suggestion is that in the first three months of daily meeting attendance you will learn what you need to know to stay sober. Another reason that was presented to me is it takes ten to twelve weeks to develop new habits. Developing the habit of addressing my recovery on a daily basis was very important for me as I have a tendency to become easily distracted.

If you have just recently made a decision to begin a program of recovery, such a commitment might seem overwhelming to you. It was helpful for me to apply the commonly used phrase in AA, "One Day at a Time." Using this principle, instead of "90 in 90," it becomes just a meeting today. So all you have to do to keep this commitment is to go to a meeting today. Worry about tomorrow's meeting tomorrow. Also, if you can buy into the necessity of making sobriety your number one priority (I have found that to be necessary for successful long-term sobriety), an hour and a half out of your day for something so important should not be asking too much of yourself.

Another very important reason for daily meetings in early recovery is it is much easier to adjust down the amount of meetings you are attending than to adjust up:

When I completed my "90 in 90", I went to my sponsor (a mentor or guide in recovery) and asked "What now?" He asked me if I was sure I was ready to cut down on my meetings; after all, things were going well and I had not relapsed. I felt he made a good point and decided not to make a change yet. After another month, I decided it was time to cut down and my sponsor agreed. He suggested I try six meetings weekly for a while to see how I felt. I did this for three weeks and my sponsor and I agreed that I could drop down to five weekly. When I eventually dropped down to four meetings per week, it did not feel quite right so I stepped it back up to five weekly and again felt comfortable. It was easy for me to step back up to five since I had created room in my life for daily meetings previously. Had I only started off going to three meetings weekly and decided my comfort zone was not adequate, it would have been much more difficult for me to adjust my schedule enough to increase my attendance. Daily meetings also allowed me to begin my sobriety at a higher comfort level so I knew what kind of serenity was available to me.

Finally, I make this suggestion based not only on the experience of my personal recovery, but on my professional experience as well. When patients enter our treatment center, one of the most important goals I have is to get them to see the importance of daily meetings and to convince them to do 90 in 90. This is due to the fact I have seen that those who do so seem to have higher rates of success than those who don't. As

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mentioned above, most people who enter recovery eventually relapse. I realize this is a very scary thought, but the chances for long-term, relapse-free recovery is much higher for those who follow such suggestions. Again, my intent in bringing this up is to motivate you enough to be in the group that gets it the first time. It is truly in your grasp if you are willing to take direction. (Next month I'll have more on meetings and sponsorship.)

God Bless,

Bob

(Excerpts taken from Bob's award-winning book, *Enough Already!: A Guide to Recovery from Alcohol and Drug Addiction*. Available at amazon.com)

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