

# 12 steps programs - help or hinder



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

1. 12 Steps Programs - Help or Hinder The room in which the AA meeting took place was overheated, compensating for the biting November cold outside, and illuminated with stark strip lighting. About 20 people were seated in mismatched chairs, offering varying degrees of comfort, forming a circle, above which floated a thick, drifting cloud of cigarette smoke. The aroma of good, strong coffee vied with the scent of some expensive perfumes, but the tobacco won. I was surprised at the mix of people, there a man in denim, here an impeccably suited businessman of middle age. Three older women had placed themselves in neighboring chairs, their body language signaling support and sisterhood. Designer chic and thrift shop dowdy, all seemed to have abandoned one addiction and were now desperately pursuing another, nicotine. Except for one small, dumpy woman, nervously polishing, replacing, then polishing again, her tinted eyeglasses, and a skinny guy with big ears, which he kept pulling at.

Some unseen signal brought the buzz of conversation to total silence, and a man calling himself Dave quietly stated that the meeting should get started. " Hi, everybody, my name's Dave and I am an alcoholic. We have two new members to welcome tonight. Mandy and John are gonna tell us their stories."

He smiled and gestured to the nervous woman.

What followed was awful to observe. The little woman stood up, shook and stuttered and exposed her heart, life and soul in painful, gut-wrenching honesty to these complete strangers. She had just taken Step 1. Everybody applauded, several approached her and hugged her. She was crying and smiling at the same time, but no longer shook or twitched with nerves, she seemed more peaceful, as if relieved of a big burden. It was clear she felt

better, cherished and a part of things. Poor John could only mutter his name, hanging his head as he labeled himself an alcoholic, then collapsing in tears into his chair.

As things progressed, it was obvious the long-term members had really absorbed the 12 Step messages. They had no inhibitions in exposing failure, that doing so was good, because God, or

2.

individual perceptions of Him, would make it all better. But it was always all about alcohol, nothing else seemed to be taken into account, it was so single-minded, so controlled that the reality of any individual's life was missing. I felt that the person was not seen or appreciated as a whole, only in relation to alcohol and whether they had moved on in the Steps or backslid. Yet everyone was applauded, thanked, encouraged and I thought that the sincere warmth of the group's response definitely made people feel better. But I wondered how hard it was for people when away from this structured environment.

It was difficult for me to accept that in order to progress, no matter what beliefs a person might hold, the expectation to be "entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character"

(Al-Anon's Twelve Steps, copyright 1996, Step 6) and that they "sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him." (Step 11). Many people I know would have the same difficulty. I asked myself did this mean non-believers had no chance of overcoming addiction Would they be stigmatized or required to abandon their beliefs in order to qualify for help This seemed unfair, elitist and dogmatic, putting more pressure on those with enough troubles already. The

<https://assignbuster.com/12-steps-programs-help-or-hinder/>

idea that being an addict signifies "defects of character", that God could remove "shortcomings" was hard to accept, when my friends and I consider addiction to be sometimes a physical disease and sometimes the result of dreadful life circumstances. I think there is a need to allow people to examine these factors and look to themselves.

The 12 Steps denies the existence of the differences in human beings and the reality of their lives. By changing that reality, or learning ways to deal with it better, the causes of addiction may be overcome. This seemed not to be fully considered and should be. The religious aspect too, is disempowering, though not for everybody, I accept, as I observed at the meeting. Everybody was welcomed, accepted and supported. The difficulty lies in not being able to break the circle, to be out of step, to be other than an alcoholic. That is when you trip and fall. A more holistic approach is needed and the whole person explored and valued, something the 12 Steps does not do.

#### References

Al-Anon's Twelve Steps (1996) by Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters Inc.