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Follow the Directions

I HAD READ the first sentence on page 58 of the Big Book: "Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path." Yet I took no action, for I had no understanding. I was without a drink from my first AA meeting on, but it took me twenty-seven months to begin my first attempt at Steps Four and Five. I realized at the completion of these Steps, ten months later, that they were written for a defiant, grandiose, sensitive, childish, stupid, and stubborn drunk like me.

Having skipped these Steps for so long, I almost picked up that first drink. I even had it poured out into a glass. I had read, reread, and underlined the Big Book and the "Twelve and Twelve," yet at that crucial moment, I could remember not one spiritual principle they contained. I had memorized a few passages of the Big Book so I could grandstand my great memorizing ability. I showed off in some of my entertaining pitches at the meetings in Hollywood and on skid row downtown. I was a comedian who almost got drunk because of my grandiosity, while at

the same time feeling inferior.

I forgot I was the drunken mailman who lost a U.S. mail truck at Christmastime. But I did remember one thing when I was about to take that first drink: I had been told at my first AA meeting, "Get phone numbers. Call someone before you drink the drink." I had Bob's phone number and called him. He told me to read pages 58 through 76 of the Big Book and said, "Follow the clear-cut directions." He did not waste time and words with me. He said goodbye and hung up quickly. I was peeved no little! But I poured the drink back into the bottle and began on the AA path.

It's nine years and some now without a drink. That drink was going to be a "deliberate drink" aimed at my wife. We had been separated eight years. At the end of the first year of my sobriety, we were reunited. After a three-month second honeymoon, "the stuff hit the fan." Fortunately, my wife is in Al-Anon. "But for the Grace of God," AA, and Al-Anon, we could not have made it this far. Had I thoroughly followed the AA

path in the beginning, I could have saved both of us much mental and emotional stress and strain.

It grieves me to hear more experienced members of AA tell newcomers they need not hurry along the AA path of the Twelve Steps. I sometimes hear statements to new people like "Take your time," "God will tell you when," "Don't let your sponsor rush you." Hell, when I first came through the doors of AA, I knew it was time to do *something* — and quickly! ("Quick" and "quickly" are used many times in the Big Book, "Twelve and Twelve," and other AA literature.) But in those days, I was often guilty of telling the new prospect he or she did not have to hurry. Being a rationalizer, justifier, and qualifier, also a manager, arranger,

and regulator, I couldn't see that I was a liar, cheat, and thief — an alcoholic affected spiritually, mentally, and emotionally by the disease of alcoholism. I was in no shape to lead a prospect onto the true path of AA.

To know a principle of the AA path, but not realize what it means and fail to take action, can be disastrous for a recovering alcoholic like me. The words know, realize, and understand embodied in the principles of AA are very meaningful to me and my growth in sobriety. They tell me that my Higher Power, God as I understand Him, works in a mysterious way performing wonders among us in our Fellowship. All I need do, one day at a time, is to follow the AA path quickly and thoroughly.

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