

The Matter of Low Attendance at Meetings

The attendance at Inner Peace meetings since they were re-established in January 2008 has varied from 4 to 10 members each night. This is close to what it was during the last few years while at St. Paul University. Previously around the mid 1990's the Inner Peace group which was holding it's meetings on Tuesdays at St. Paul saw a presence of between 25 to 30 each evening. Since the 1990's the organization's membership and number of meetings and locations has seen a steady decline. Many members have asked me why this organization does not attract more people to the meetings. I have no definite answers but can only offer my opinions. I will consider the question of why some individuals never decide to join.

First, I believe that many people have found their lives getting busier as we are getting more electronic devices and pursuits into our lives. Cell phones in particular are occupying more of our waking period, and this is robbing us of time to do other activities such as recovery meetings. The amount of travel time to attend the meeting can be a deterrence. ACA Recovery takes some time and a lot of effort. An individual must be willing to attend many evenings over than extended period to get any real benefit from the program. Designating a few hours a week (or every 2-3 weeks) must to be looked upon as being a good investment for your future recovery and happiness.

Second, many persons think that 12 step groups are about only religion and want nothing to do with it. This is not entirely true. Our meetings also have a secular option based on psychology and practical matters such as the adult child characteristics which members can focus on instead. The 12 steps are not aligned with any specific religion but are geared toward basic spirituality which may help some members. We will not force religion onto anyone.

Third, in this scientific and capitalistic society that we live in here in Canada, some individuals believe that by only going to a fully qualified psychologist or counsellor can you obtain dependable recovery. This is not necessarily true. An ACA group can provide a great deal of useful information for the recoveree. In fact, many of our members started to attend our meetings after their health care therapist recommended it so they can learn from other adult children also.

Fourth, In our ACA meetings, we ask only for an optional donation (usually less than \$5) to pay for our expenses like the room rental, supplies, etc. This is a lot cheaper than professional programs. Some people believe that to truly be committed to their recovery, there should be a significant amount of money tied to it. They don't want to waste their money. They may think that the more money they spend on a recovery program, the more effective it will be and thus inexpensive ACA meetings may not be very effective. This again is not necessarily true. Good therapists exist in all price ranges. Also, It should be noted that an ACA group is a support group and not an instructive therapy group. We are there to give encouragement, assistance, and friendship to each other while we recover.

Now I will reflect on some of the reasons why some members never stay more than a few months. Some members cannot find the time to commit weekly. They may be tired, must work, have a family to take care of, have no convenient means of travel, be sick, etc. Most members remain only as long as when they feel they still have something to gain from attending. They may go through a full cycle of either the steps or the characteristics and then decide to leave. However, many members find repeating these sessions can be very useful as a review.

The sharing period is a very important segment of the meeting. If the group is very small, it will mean that each person has more time to speak but less members to listen to and learn from. Conversely, during a large meeting, some individuals may feel dissatisfied with the very short period they have to express themselves with. The Inner Peace group tried to give each member at least 5 minutes to speak even if we had to divide the group into subgroups to do so. If the sharing period is too short, some people may leave as they feel it was not worthwhile.

Obviously, some members will complain that the meetings are too long, but the meeting needs to be long enough to get all the important sections in especially the sharing period to be useful to everyone.

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