

FA Forum 2018 Highlights

Were you unable to attend the 2018 Forum at the Business Convention? If so, here are some highlights from each of the sessions. There were four sessions: the Traditions, LSGs and PI, Reaching out to the Frontier, and why we do what we do. All sessions started with the statement: "The forums are not about teaching, we are not experts. The forums are about sharing experience to help. We are just fellow addicts."

Opening Session

Three speakers welcomed the community of FA participants and shared the history of the Forum and the focus for Friday afternoon. Please note that this is a small excerpt. The entire script can be found online in the "Forum Opening and Closing Remarks".

History of the Forum:

The first Forum at the World Service Convention was on the Friday afternoon of the 2006 Convention. It took place in part to provide support for the then 5 chapters that were part of EAI and to support pre-chapter activities around the world. Today, Maine is the one remaining chapter and the pre-chapter activities have been transformed into Local Service Groups. The focus of the Service Group Support Committee is to support Intergroups, Local Service Groups, and meetings. Sponsoring the Forum is one of the ways we support the fellowship.

The theme of the Forum is *Working Together to Strengthen Our Fellowship*. The Forum gives us the opportunity to share with each other.

A Day in Life on the Frontier

Definition of "the frontier": An FA member is on the frontier if they are far away from an established fellowship.

There were 4 speakers responding to the base questions:

- How do I learn about how FA works when I am on the frontier?
- How do I build FA connections?
- How do I get phone lists?
- How do I start to build a fellowship?

Here are actions that worked for at least one of the speakers.

- Get MP3 files (or CDs) and listen to them. If there is one you really connect with, call the FA office and ask them for the name and number of the speaker on the MP3 file (or CD) and give that person a call.
- Go to the conventions. There is always a phone list provided of those who attended. Call the folks you met and perhaps some you didn't meet!
- Be willing to travel far to get to an FA meeting. One speaker drove 11 hours one way because she knew her life depended on it.
- Do service wherever you can.

- Ask others what they do to stay abstinent. Do the same.
- Join a phone AWOL where you can meet others and form a connection. Call them in between AWOL meetings.
- Let the FA office know you are here! Open your home to any traveling FA members.
- Get your name and number on the Frontier list (call the FA office).
- Put recovery first and arrange your life around recovery activities.
- Learn who is in which time zones. Let people know what time zone you're in when you call.
- When people come into the program, offer to sponsor them. If you have too many sponsees, connect them with a sponsor who has solid experience working with people on the frontier.
- Take suggestions from your sponsor.
- Once you can sponsor, get on the Long-Distance Sponsor List.
- Travel to an FA meeting whenever you can.
- When you start a meeting, remember it is not for your convenience. Start one in a location good for your area – easily accessible and at the best time to meet the needs of most. Try a Saturday morning meeting at a central location.

Additional comments from those who attended this session.

- One person who attended AA meetings asked how to handle it when asked to share since she didn't have her 90 days yet. Another suggested she just tell them that her sponsor asked her to come and listen.
- Talk about FA whenever it's appropriate. Be willing to be open and share.
- Do service locally and with your intergroup or World Service.
- Several said they needed to be willing to drive a long distance to attend meeting or to meet another FA member.
- Connect with people who have been in FA for a long time.
- If you have a need, such as needing literature in another language, let the Literature appropriate committee know.
- If you are having trouble connecting, contact the 12th Step Committee and ask for help.

Meetings Working Together to Reach the Newcomer: LSG-Driven PI

Three speakers shared on how a Local Service Group (LSG) developed in their area and shared activities that have been completed.

The first speaker shared that he LSG started out as a Chapter and then re-organized to an LSG. They have assembled newcomer packets, set up tables at 12-step events, coordinated fellowship days, and managed FA tables at health fairs. There are about 15 regular members out of 30 meetings in their area.

The second speaker went to an intergroup meeting and asked how many people would like to see more newcomers at their meetings. Most of those present raised their hands. Then he presented the basic concept of an LSG. Initially 4 LSGs were started. Over time, two have remained strong and another third has just started.

They announce LSG meetings at their regular FA meetings. They rotate service positions monthly, so people don't get burned out. One LSG meets after their regularly scheduled FA meeting on Saturday.

At their LSG meetings, they discuss the prior month's service activities and discuss options for upcoming activities. They have placed racks, posted FA meetings on the internet and in church bulletins. They participate in the monthly SGSC calls.

The third speaker focused on potential internet-related activities for an LSG. Suggestions included:

- Check hospitals, churches and community centers to see if you can get a link on their website or post FA meetings to their website.
- Add FA meeting announcements online for local radio stations.
- Submit meeting announcements to local TV stations online.
- United Way 211 directories allow you to add FA meetings. If you need help, ask the weblinks committee.
- Do you work for a large corporation? Do they have a website? Can you add an FA link to their wellness site?

If you need help with posting FA meetings online or adding an FA link, contact weblinks@foodaddicts.org for help.

General sharing:

- The most efficient way to get PI work done is to have several meetings working together (LSG). That way people don't get burned out. It also helps unite the fellowships in general and strengthens meetings.
- In Florida, they organized an information session that had 22 newcomers. They held it on Saturday afternoon and had FA members in the parking lot to greet folks in case there were some too nervous to enter.
- Bringing people together in an LSG makes individual meetings stronger.
- One LSG started just because someone came home from the convention convinced she needed to do more service. She sent out an email to everyone in her area asking if there was interest. There was and the LSG opened and grew.
- A smaller fellowship (3 meetings) just wanted to bring in more newcomers and more service. They started working together and started doing a rack program. Isolated members feel more connected now and it's strengthened their fellowship.
- Start small and keep it simple.
- The LSG is not super-organized. It's just focused on doing service.
- LSGs don't issue edicts to meetings. They just focus on service and reaching out to the newcomer.

- What's the biggest benefit of being in an LSG? Working together makes it more manageable and more fun. It doesn't feel like work. People don't get burned out.

The FA Solution: Why We Do What We Do

There were 3 speakers. The facilitator made general comments and the three speakers focused on abstinence, meetings, and quiet time.

Facilitator general highlights:

Food addiction is real. This program is perfectly designed for the food addict. She has to remember to keep it simple and use the tools.

First speaker: Topic of abstinence

Food addiction is life threatening. This knowledge helps her go to any lengths for her recovery.

"Being in active addiction was painful and humiliating. My body suffered. I kept thinking, this time I'm going to control it but I did it again. It was awful not wanting to eat but having to. Such a terrible place to be, with no control.

I was kicked out of school before recovery and then went back in 1983. I was in a dorm and I would call my sponsor from a pay phone to commit my food. She would answer and then she would call me back. I had no car and no phone, but I really wanted this program. My sponsor helped me to build a strong foundation for my recovery and I gained the experience of not eating a day at a time. In the early days I did not talk much on the phone, my sponsors helped me along, but I had abstinence and meetings. I learned to take care of myself in the most basic of ways and I built air tight boundaries around my abstinence.

My abstinence kept me at a healthy weight and provided a way to eat that is very practical. I kept things simple and was encouraged to do so in order to keep fewer of my brain waves thinking about food, to make room to think about other things.

While in recovery I have had two pregnancies, one being a twin pregnancy, and three surgeries, and through these experiences and more, I didn't eat.

My dad passed away three years ago and when I received the call that he had just collapsed and was being rushed to the hospital, I sat down to eat my dinner before going to see him. People who are not in this program might not understand that. I knew that I wanted to have dinner behind me so that it would be off of my mind and I would be completely available for my father.

I needed a spiritual solution for a spiritual problem. Anything other than FA was like a band aid for a broken leg, not enough. I saw myself changing through each conversation with my sponsor."

Second speaker: Topic of meetings

“Meetings are important to me, to hear the message of recovery. I was beaten by food despite concern and warning from loved ones and my doctors. I was 430lbs. At my FA meetings I saw a solution. I saw members walking to the front of the room in a normal body size and with that glow that we all cherish. As a newcomer withdrawing from sugar and flour I wanted to hear how the others got through it. Today I share how I stay stopped as I still face the dragon three times a day.

Meetings are often repetitive, and I have heard new comers complain about that. I repeated many things over and over before this program, like telling myself I would start a diet on Monday. Repetition is the mother of learning and hearing the tools and slogans of the program in meetings helped me.

Meetings help me not to isolate. I wanted to hide as a newcomer, pull the shades down, and turn the phone off. There would be tears and eating. I don't do humans well, but meetings help me get out of myself. I know that I might say something that would help someone else.

I value the auditorium style seating in our meetings. When I am sharing it is a good feeling to look out and see nods and looks of understanding. Standing and facing everyone also helps me to have humility and get out of myself.

I realize the importance of my meetings being committed meetings. When I was new, I had no discipline. I had excuses not to show up and procrastinate. I schedule my life around my meetings today. My family knows my meeting schedule and they know that I won't be available when I have my meetings. My wedding was on a Saturday and I still went to my 10am FA meeting. I felt like not going to it would have set up a bad pattern for me and I wanted to start my marriage off right”.

Third speaker: Topic of quiet time

“I have a spiritual disease that needs a spiritual solution. At 51 years old, I was over 300 pounds. I felt bloodied and beaten and at the end stages of my life when I found FA. The idea of a higher power, abstinence, and working the program all go against my nature as a food addict. Coming here and standing in front of you is hard and I almost said no to doing this, thinking I wouldn't have anything to offer.

Quiet time helps me to build a relationship with God. I am restless, irritable, and discontent with a busy mind. Quiet time helps my thinking to stay pure and helps me to get my food right. In taking quiet time I listen to my higher power more and more opposed to just talking to God. In quiet time I can ask, “what's the next right action?”.

I am recently retired. I had an idea of where I wanted to move upon retirement, but it wasn't working out. I didn't force it and I gradually ended up where I am today. My sponsor talks about looking for red and green lights from my higher power like signs saying go ahead or move to something else. This way of thinking really helps me.

Moving slowly and taking quiet time have helped me to be rested for this convention, something I felt was very important. More important than anything I get here, is the fact that I go back home abstinently.

Quiet time helps me to stay out of my head and out of negativity, obsession, fear, anxiety, and panic. When I get into my heart, I can hear that all will work out and that I am safe. I can hear "what's the rush?", "pause", "relax", "trust". I can see subtle changes in myself because of quiet time. I can feel an internal shift and more internal peace."

General Sharing: Note that most of this just happened to be in question/response form.

Q: I was trained in transcendental meditation. Should we use that?

R: I keep it simple and consistent. I show up and trust. I get quiet and just surrender to that half hour.

R: In talking with someone recently it came up that quiet time is a place to go to find out what to do in a situation, or what I am trying to run from. Other times I can see what it is I can do to be helpful. Quiet time is a place where I can let go of insecurities and remember I am safe. I take things that are troubling me to quiet time and ask my higher power to show me what I should do. It is uncomfortable sometimes because life is uncomfortable, but I don't have to run from it. I can relax in quietness. I think of quiet time as a tool specific to FA.

I am recently recovering from tongue Cancer and even though I couldn't eat at certain points, I needed to remember ever day who I am, a food addict who needs a higher power. It was hard to start eating again but I prayed for abstinence.

Q: When a newcomer asks us why we do what we do and asks about other ways to eat, other programs, why we attend so many committed meetings, how do we gently explain these things to them?

R: The core of my program is explaining these things to a newcomer. The newcomer is desperate. I say this is what I do, and this is what helps me. I don't argue. I share what helps me keep an open mind. I share the things that were said to me when I was new and that helps me remember what the root of my recovery is. It's my job to steer someone toward their higher power and show them what helped me get abstinent. I share, this is what I do. It has saved my life.

R: I got a lot of help from my sponsor who explained I needed to keep my food simple so that my brain doesn't stay focused on food any more than it has to. When food addicts focus too much on food we have more cravings. It was a kindness of my sponsor to simplify my food.

R: I came from another fellowship where people ate more meals than my sponsor was suggesting for me in FA. My sponsor shared with me how meals worked for her. She shared what has kept her abstinent. It was recommended that I weigh and measure my food and call people. When I did call people, I thought they were lying when they said they had never weighed out a bit more than what they were told to have. I tell sponsees that it is okay to be angry and that they should call people in the program for FA support.

As for quiet time, when I was new, I suggested to my sponsor that I do coffee time with God or maybe take a bath during my quiet time. She suggested I just sit in a chair and be quiet. I heard once that "God is good, God is great, God makes the most perfect date." I started thinking of my Higher Power as someone special that I just wanted to spend quiet time with. It worked. It was suggested that whatever my higher power is, I get to know it and I set a clock for a half of an hour each morning just to be together.

R: I started on the frontier. In quiet time I saw that I should move to a bigger area. When I got there, I wanted to go to all of the FA meetings. It was explained to me that meetings needed to be committed because without the commitment I would make excuses. My sponsor helped me to build a solid foundation in this program. She suggested I come to the convention at 6 months abstinent and I thought she was crazy, but I came, and it was great. With new comers today, all I have to do is share my experience. Those who want what I have will do it if they are desperate.

R: I really think there is something so special about just sharing our experience. When I was new I was living on Martha's Vineyard which is an island off of the coast on Massachusetts. I was a low bottom food addict. I had no vehicle and no job. Meetings were limited to none on the island. I was in one of two caravans of people who left the island to make it to an 8am AWOL in Chelsea and I share that experience with newcomers. I was grateful that no one said to just go to AA or get on the phone. My trips were 24-hour trips. I spent a long time with fellows and eating meals with them and sitting in traffic. It wasn't easy, but I did it. I did the fundamental basics of this program and there is no comparison to the basics. I am glad I didn't have another option.

R: I have been abstinent for 7 years and 9 months and I am grateful. I live about two hours north of Sydney Australia and the closest FA meetings are two hours away. I am coming from 15 years in another program and I was 300 pounds. I go to meetings three times a week while working full time. My husband died 15 months ago and the night I knew he was dying I ate my dinner. I wanted to be available when he passed. He died 5 minutes after I finished, and I know he waited for me to finish my dinner. I know that sounds weird. I tell new comers my experience. They often don't want to do what I do. I have to wear people like loose garments. People come and go into this program, meetings change. Newcomers do not know what it feels like on the inside to be abstinent. They want to water the program down, but it doesn't matter. My family works around my meetings as well. They know how important this program is to me.

Demystifying the 12 Traditions

There were 3 speakers who shared some of their experience with the Traditions. Then participants discussed specific situations and which Traditions would possibly apply to the situations.

The first speaker explained she is in a small fellowship and an FA fellow wanted to change her meeting because of an individual wearing a tee shirt that endorsed a particular candidate. In another situation, a newcomer was in tears because a FA fellow was using a particular name for a Higher Power, (HP) and the newcomer felt she could not be a member because her HP was called something else.

She noted that Traditions 1, 5 and 10 applied to these situations because politics and religious affiliation are divisive issues even when spoken of during the break. She noted in example 1 with the political tee shirt, that addicts are sensitive people, and want to fit in. When these issues present themselves, we say to ourselves, "I don't belong here". Also, wearing a tee shirt of a certain political party it may be interpreted as an FA position. We need to make sure our conversation and sharing even during the break are on recovery. She also stated that applying the Traditions help her keep the meeting healthy,

The second speaker shared that early in her recovery she distributed fliers for an outside event during the break, which was contrary to our primary purpose, (to be present and available for newcomers and to carry the message of recovery.) (Tradition 5)

She also shared that when she shares from the front of the room, that she needs to focus on recovery. Sharing about other issues can be a distraction. Relaying our worldly accomplishments is not practicing true humility, which is how we are guided by Tradition 12.

The third speaker shared that at a meeting, the arrangement of the chairs faced a religious symbol. The suggestion was made in the business meeting to face the chairs in another direction, so fellows didn't look at the religious object during the meeting. A vote was held and members turned the chairs around. (Tradition 1: our common welfare comes first.)

General sharing of other possible issues involving Traditions:

Issue: A person said someone in her meeting threatened another fellow.

R: Someone else suggested that this would be a good referral to the Meeting Effectiveness Safety and Accessibility (MESA) committee, because this situation goes beyond Traditions and may have to involve law enforcement. Yes, we need to look at the Traditions, but the safety of

the members is always important. This is where the Meeting Guidelines documents are used to maintain a healthy meeting.

R: A member related a situation where someone was very disruptive at her meeting. A member spoke with the person, but it got out of hand, so law enforcement was called. The way to handle these issues is to start with the business meeting then talk to their sponsor and then pray.

Issue: Some fellows want anyone to speak from the front of the room whether they have 90 days or not.

R: This is not a traditions issue, but it is related directly to following the group conscience of the conference members. Conference members decided several years ago that there are things that FA meeting should have in common. Not speaking until you have 90 days is one of them.

This is in document 1. In order to be registered as an FA meeting, you must follow document 1.

R: When a meeting registers, they are asked to review document 1 and agree to follow it. It is a requirement for meeting registration.

R: If you have people speak who don't have 90 days, you can be un-registered as an FA meeting.

Issue: Some fellows in the FA group are members of indigenous people and want to say the Serenity prayer in their original language. In reading AA Comes of Age unity is important, and each meeting is autonomous. We use Tradition 2 and abide by the decision of the group conscience.

R: The meeting contacted the Traditions committee which recommended that since the majority of the members speak English, not Maori, that the group should continue using English in support of Tradition 5 (since a newcomer will probably not know the Maori language and may feel very uncomfortable when part of the format is in another language). Eventually, a Maori-speaking meeting may be able to start when multiple Maori-speaking members have enough abstinence to start a meeting. In the meantime, if a non-English speaking member comes to the meeting, the MESA (Meeting Effectiveness, Safety & Accessibility 12th Step) committee can be asked for assistance. This committee has helped other meetings who have a member who does not speak the language.

Q: A member said the Traditions are not discussed enough in FA and how can we get people to more informed?

R: The Traditions Committee reviews situations and provide a response. Sometimes they are in the GIA (Gratitude in Action which is a free quarterly newsletter you get when you register on the FA site). There are also issues and responses in the quarterly WSB reports.

R: Take a look at the meeting documents online to learn best practices and ways to bring the Traditions into focus at meetings. When there is a possible Traditions issue at a meeting, it is best to contact the traditions review committee and ask for guidance. The Traditions Review committee is not a governing body. The healthy meeting position came from best practices to keep meetings healthy.

R: Another member noted that the Traditions committee has developed an index for the various questions and answers that have been presented and fellows will be able to view the

responses. (Note: the index was demonstrated at the convention and will be available online within the next few months.)

R: A member said she learns about the Traditions in her AWOL and referred to the AA Traditions Illustrated pamphlet.

R: A member shared that her AWOL decided to study the Traditions before the AWOL closed. That way more people participate in the sharing about Traditions.

Q: A member asked for Traditions guidelines for health fairs.

R: This would be referred to the PI committee. Refer to the PI kit online for guidance.

Q: A member said that one person makes all the decisions at her meeting.

R: Someone suggested she send an inquiry to the Traditions Review Committee (TRC).

Q: What do you do if someone violates the Traditions at a meeting

R: A member suggested that if there is a violation of the Traditions, speak to the fellow first. If the issue is brought up at the business meeting, it could humiliate them. If the person is not open to suggestions, you can email the TRC.

Closing session

All participants gathered together to share impressions and highlights. Here are some comments:

- Went to the frontier session. Sharing with the frontier is so important. Calling and speaking there is so important.
- People on the Frontier need calls from those who aren't!
- So many comments made, so much more depth we could have gotten too. We could have used even more time to discuss topics in a deeper way.
- Thank you so much for all the sharing and help. Frontier list is very helpful. So many people on the list need our help.
- Q: What do we do to help someone with 600 pounds on his body? R: You can take a meeting to someone's home if they are unable to be transported.
- My job as a sponsor is to help sponsees stay abstinent. Grateful today for everyone's experience.
- All the things I had to do were so hard. But my sponsor and fellowship helped so much.
- I'm from a small fellowship. I'm so grateful we had this session and we could hear from people who are on the frontier. So appreciative of people who share at our meetings. Long term abstinence helps.
- I'm on the frontier and am alone a lot. I do much service, do a lot of reading and to stay abstinent. I'm so grateful.
- My job as a sponsor is to help bring my sponsees closer to their Higher Power.
- Thank you for the people who organized this forum. Reaching out to the frontier is so important.

- Quiet time has been so important to me in this program. I have a busy brain. FA was the first program to emphasize it. After 10 years I still see there are places to go with it. I can see how I need relationships. Don't leave before the miracle happens.
- Unity. This afternoon all of us in this room all hear the same thing. This is a solution for a food addiction and it works.
- Next year, do the same thing – have speakers with good experience.
- The Forum provides a great opportunity for us to show our unity regardless of which session we attend.
- Speakers, for the most part, stuck to a short time frame and were specific and to the point.
- This reinforced how important this program is to my survival.
- Everyone was respectful.
- I liked hearing practical tips not just theory.
- I heard many practical suggestions!
- People shared experience not instruction.
- The forum was well-organized.
- Speakers were articulate and well-prepared.
- Speakers were committed to recovery.
- I liked that people responded to difficult questions – they weren't ignored!
- Lots of diverse people shared.
- LOVED audience sharing. Time for participants to share should be extended.
- I received useful tools on sponsoring the newcomer during the FA solution sharing.
- The Forum brought us all together.
- I liked that speakers had long term recovery.
- Speakers were focused on one topic – not all over the place.
- The forum was a lot better than I thought it was going to be.
- Nice to see people from all over the country as speakers instead of the same folks.
- Loved having a panel to start us off and give us some direction.

Closing Remarks:

Please note that this is a small excerpt. The entire script can be found online in "Forum Opening and Closing Remarks".

I want to thank all of you who showed up today. There is no Forum without you. You shared your experience, your strength and your hope with all of us and we will take that into the rest of our weekend together and back to our respective fellowships when the Convention is over.

So, in closing I am a grateful food addict. Working this program is so much better than seeking, in the next bite, the peace my sick soul seemed to crave and could never find. This has been a truly humbling experience and it most definitely was a privilege to be given an opportunity to be part of it. Have a great weekend!

The session closed with the Serenity Prayer.