

OPENING SESSION

Speakers: Pam K., Paul B., David I.

Greeting by Pam:

Good afternoon, everyone.

Welcome to the Forum. I hope you are as pleased as I am that a decision was made after many years to bring the Forum back. You'll hear more about that decision in a few minutes. I'm grateful to be here and grateful we have come together in the spirit of service.

There are four interesting, interactive breakout sessions to choose from today. I look forward to hearing from many of you as we share our experience, strength and hope as it relates to the session topics.

We've got a full few hours planned, so we are going to get started. The two fellows sitting up here will join me in welcoming you but first please join us in a two-minute quiet time followed by the Serenity Prayer.

Quiet Time

Paul:

Serenity Prayer

History and Why We are Bringing Back the Forum:

The purpose of this forum is to provide the fellowship with an exchange of topics focused on recovery and service. In the past it was offered on the Friday before the convention giving the fellowship an opportunity to engage in some non-business activities. The original Forum came from the EAI Chapter Support Committee.

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 now renamed Service Group Support Committee is to support Intergroups and Local Service Groups and their meetings.

Why are we doing this Forum. I can answer that simply by saying we have a fellowship that has a foundation based in “best practices”. Our sponsors have passed on these ‘best practices’ to the new generation of food addicts. This 20 year young fellowship has a history of being unified in our definition of abstinence and the need to have a disciplined program of action. Our unity asks us to come together this weekend to communicate with each other so we can keep our program of strong recovery. It’s all about action.

Purpose of Forum:

1. To discuss ideas that unifies us.
2. To continue face-to-face, open communication with FA members from around the world.
3. To pass on “best practices”.
4. And best of all, to have fun.

Especially to have fun, by working together, exchanging ideas in a public place and to pass our program on to the still suffering food addict.

Paul introduced Dave.

Dave:

I am grateful to have been asked to open this Forum on behalf of the World Service Board.

First off, I want to tell you just how much I have always loved this Forum. While we have taken a hiatus for the past few years I am immensely grateful to Paul and Pam and your committee for taking the leadership to bring it back. Between 2006 and 2009 the Forum was a highlight of the convention for me. It was a time to come and learn and mingle with people and share best practices for building strong groups and reaching suffering food addicts.

I am also inspired by your theme, *Working Together to Strengthen Our Fellowship*. This topic is near and dear to me and speaks to the ultimate reason for coming together this afternoon.

From the big book we read... “We are average [people]... who normally would not mix. But there exists among us a fellowship, a friendliness, and an understanding which is indescribably wonderful. We are like the passengers of a great liner the moment after rescue from shipwreck when camaraderie, joyousness and democracy pervade the vessel. The feeling of having shared in a common peril is one element in the powerful cement which binds us. But that in itself would never have held us together as we are now joined.

The tremendous fact for every one of us is that we have discovered a common solution. We have a way out on which we can absolutely agree, and upon which we can join in harmonious action.”

I want to kick off this Forum with three simple messages:

First - there are no small service positions. No service positions in this room and in this program are more important than any others. Going back to the Big Book’s analogy of the lifeboat, how can you say that helping row the lifeboat for a while is any more important than repairing a hole in the bottom of the boat where water is seeping in? Just because some of us sit at the table leading a meeting, it does not make our positions any more important than that of the newcomer who serves by coming to that meeting with an open mind. After all, without someone sitting in the chairs, what kind of a meeting would we even have?

The second message I’d like to leave you with is to remember why we do this. As we are reminded in our meetings, we are not saints. We are simply growing along spiritual lines. We claim spiritual *progress*, not perfection. Our service here this weekend and beyond is obviously helpful to our fellowship, but it’s also immensely important to us as individuals. I do this work to strengthen my *own* recovery. I accepted this position on the board for the opportunity to grow. To be perfectly honest, it’s easier for me to work with newcomers than to serve as chair or to even be a secretary at the group level. Business meetings, board meetings, dealing with motions, and learning to communicate in a clear and respectful way, do not come easy to me. It’s uncomfortable for me to be in relationships where my defects will inevitably surface. But self-respect doesn’t come from doing what’s easy. It comes from doing what’s *right* and what’s *needed*. As I learned from a new member in our fellowship recently: “*If it doesn’t challenge you, it won’t change you.*”

And all this service is far better than living a life of isolation, unaware that I even *have* defects, or clueless about what to do with them! Needless to say, I continue to grow enormously in all the service positions I step into in FA.

We learn from the 24 Hour-Day book that, “*material things have no permanence.*” But the peace that comes from doing this work does in fact sustain me, as an individual, and also sustains all of us, collectively, as a fellowship.

The third message I leave you with is to remember how much we need each other. Unity comes from focusing on our similarities, not on our differences. Unity comes from *respecting* others, not *changing* others. Unity comes from being at peace with ourselves – to being unified from within.

Let’s remember that it’s not always easy to continue to weigh and measure our food in a world that wonders why we keep doing this. How do you explain to an in-law that eating one appetizer could eventually send you to a psychiatric hospital? It’s not easy to take the high road of personal responsibility for our defects that are manifested in a relationship - rather than blaming, complaining, or spreading gossip. It’s not easy to sustain an adequate spiritual condition in order to maintain freedom from food in a world where food is so pervasive. But thankfully we are not alone in these challenges and growth opportunities! Not only do we need a God of our own understanding in our lives and the structure of the 12 Steps to make that Power real, we also need each other. You can’t sink half a ship, and you can’t sink half a lifeboat. What each of us does affects each and everyone one of us.

The good news is we aren’t sinking! We are growing. We are, indeed, stumbling forward, with and through the grace of God, and as we grow, the need for unity and service remains ever more vital. How true for all of us here this weekend, and in the FA fellowship worldwide. Think about why you came into FA, and why you stay in FA. It’s messed up relationships—with ourselves and with others—that bring people here, and it’s relationships—healthy ones now that we are in recovery—that *keep* people here. Living an abstinent life, free of food and fear, and working toward freedom from our defects, is inspiring – at least to those who are ready for the message.

When I let go of my fears and insecurities, especially about being around people, and turn these over to the care of a God of my understanding, I am then free to listen to others with an open, caring mind. And I make room to learn something! Judgment, I have learned, is a defense against my own fear and inadequacies.

What we need in our fellowship is *conversations*, not *condemnation*. How can we possibly be a spirit of attraction to a newcomer, much less live a

peaceful life, when we are in fear and judgment? Through a desire to understand and be vulnerable, and by bringing an attitude of “live and let live,” fears begin dissolving. We can be a *light*, rather than a *judge*. We can *decide* to assume that every person who comes to a meeting comes with good motives, and our actions will flow from that decision to practice love, rather than fear. Every challenge is God’s way of providing us with an opportunity to grow.

So... to return to my original quote from the Big Book, what is this common way that we can all absolutely agree upon? What is it that we share?

First, we share the disease of food addiction, and the awareness that this is a *disease*, not a moral weakness.

Second, we share a unified definition of abstinence.

And third, we share a commitment to recovery – in our own unique, God-guided, weighed and measured way.

As we go forward with this Forum, I, once again, want to thank those of you who have worked so hard to organize this event for us. Let’s all do our part to create a great afternoon of sharing and learning better ways to work together to bring this message of hope and recovery to those who still suffer from this horrible illness.

Thank you so much.

Pam:

Thank you, Paul and Dave.

Paul, thank you for giving us the history of the Forum and for reminding us of the importance of passing on the best practices so generously given to us.

Dave, like you I am inspired by the theme of this year’s Forum. Thank you for pointing out what an invaluable opportunity we are being given to bolster our personal recovery and strengthen our FA fellowship here today.

You can find the Forum Agenda in your Registration Package but here’s a quick recap of what’s in store. There are a total of four 45-minute breakout sessions and a closing session today. There is a short room-change break between each session.

Starting at 1:25 are Meetings Working Together To Reach The Newcomer: LSG-Driven Public Information in the room next door and A Day In The Life On The Frontier here in this room.

At 2:20 you will have the choice of attending a session called Demystifying the 12 Traditions of FA in the room next door or coming back to this room for FA Solutions: Why We Do What We Do.

At 3:15 please join everyone back in this room for our 35-minute-Share-Your-Forum Experience session. I understand from fellows who have attended the Forum in previous years that this session is a beneficial way to enhance our time together, so please plan to attend. We will end that session promptly at 3:50 so that those who are going to the qualification recordings can be there by 4:00. Just before that session ends you will be asked to complete an evaluation, so as you spend your afternoon keep things in mind you want to share with the Committee.

As I mentioned earlier, we have a full afternoon planned so we want to thank you in advance for being on time for the sessions you are attending as we need to begin and end the breakouts on schedule.

We have four fellows who have agreed to shepherd for us today. They are Cindy, Galit, Kathy and Sarah. Would the 4 of you please stand so everyone can see who you are. These 4 women will be in the hall between sessions and are ready to help if you have any questions. Thank you.

Enough from me. As we head into the rest of our afternoon please keep in mind no one among us is an expert. We are all a group of food addicts who know that we stay abstinent by giving away what has so generously been given. As Dave said earlier, let's take the idea of conversation, not condemnation with us. And, let's also remember to have fun! Thanks, Paul, for that reminder.

Enjoy your breakout sessions. I look forward to hearing from you at our closing session back here at 3:15. Thank you and see you later!

CLOSING SESSION

SHARING- Monitored by Pam

Welcome back! I hope you all enjoyed today as much as I did. If you want to share about your Forum experience, have 90 days or more of continuous abstinence and are working with an FA sponsor please raise your hand and someone will bring you a microphone. In order for us to hear from as many people as possible, please limit your share to 3 minutes. We have a timekeeper in the front row to help you.

Who wants to go first?

Fellow 1: Went to the frontier session. Sharing with the frontier is so important. Calling and speaking there is so important.

Fellow 2: So many comments made, so much more depth we could have gotten too. We need more time to discuss topics in a deeper way.

Fellow 3: Thank you so much for all the sharing and help. Frontier list is very helpful. So many people on the list need our help.

Fellow 4: What do we do to help someone with 600 pounds on his body? I need help.

Fellow 5: Responded one day at time. For 7 years they had someone in Florida who came in at 600 pounds. The fellowship turned did much service for her. She lost 400 pounds and kept it off for 7 years. No longer in the program.

Fellow 6: My job for my sponsees is to stay abstinent. Grateful today for everyone's experience.

Fellow 7: All the things I had to do were so hard. But my sponsor and fellowship helped so much.

Fellow 8: I'm Vancouver 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.

Fellow 9: I'm alone a lot. I do much service, do a lot of reading and to stay abstinent. I'm so grateful.

Fellow 10: Thank you for the people who organized this forum. Reaching out to the frontier is so important.

Fellow 11: 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.

Fellow 12: 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.

CLOSING REMARKS

Pam:

Hello again. My name is Pam and I'm a food addict. Thank you to all who shared your Forum experience with us. As always, thought-provoking and inspiring.

When I first came into program, my sponsor would say he was grateful to be a food addict. How ridiculous I thought. How could anyone be grateful to be an addict? The idea of it was beyond my grasp. Not any more. The FA Solution helped me empty my cup of self pity and misery and fill it with gratitude - grateful that my Higher Power led me here to spend the day in conversation with you, my fellows, who understand me in a way no one else in my life can possibly understand.

Having said all that, I sometimes forget to live in gratitude for my recovery. That is why I must continue to work with others, go to meetings, to be of some service to the world around me – not because these make me a good person, but rather so that once again I can be stimulated into feelings of gratitude for the life I have been given. So, when I was asked to Chair the Forum Planning Committee, my fear went on high alert and it was suggested I take some time to pause, pray and come back with an answer later. I prayed for the willingness to hear my Higher Power and to trust what I was hearing. What I heard was I was being asked to give back what I had so generously been given. So, I said yes and what I learned from this experience has been invaluable.

I learned that fear is okay as long as long as I trust my Higher Power and walk through it. I learned it's okay to admit that I don't have all the answers and to ask for help. I learned that service pours Miracle Grow on my character defects so I need to continue to humbly ask God to remove those shortcomings. I learned that on days I wanted to run, letting go of my ego was far more beneficial than running. I learned that although this is my 6th Business Convention, I hadn't REALLY stopped to acknowledge that many hands make light work and that it takes a fairly substantial village to do to the type of service it takes to put on this weekend.

So, I want to thank everyone who put forth a hand to make working on the Forum both light and enjoyable. Over a number of months they put in many hours coming together often on conference calls so that we could benefit from a day like today. I want to acknowledge those people now. I agonized about whether I should name them or ask them to stand or just give you the number of people involved. More fear about a misstep. But when I stopped agonizing and prayed for an answer, here's where I've been led.

If you were on the Forum Planning Committee will you please stand and stay standing. If you were a facilitator, speaker, note taker, time keeper, room monitor, shepherd, mic runner would you please stand. Thank you all for your service.

A special thanks too to the Convention Planning Committee for all their hard work on our behalf and for sharing their immeasurable planning experience with me.

I also 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.

Now, on to the evaluation. Before, we close with a Serenity Prayer just before 3:50 would you please take the next few minutes to complete the evaluation. We are going to use your answers as part of our final Forum Report and to plan where the Forum goes from here. A couple of our fellows will be at the back of the room to collect evaluations. Please be sure to hand it to one of them before you leave.

Thank you all for being here today. Enjoy the rest of the weekend. Please join me in a moment of silence and the Serenity Prayer.