

Gratitude in Action

July, 2011

Welcome to the latest edition of Gratitude in Action

What is Gratitude in Action?

It's a newsletter designed by the WSI 12th Step Committee to bring you the latest FA worldwide information, remind you of tools and resources available to you within FA, and highlight upcoming FA worldwide events. Gratitude in Action's primary purpose is to inspire you to get involved and do service so that you and others can be helped.

Service keeps us abstinent!

If you have feedback and/or comments you'd like to share with us that you feel would help us to improve our efforts, please email GIA@foodaddicts.org.

The FA World Service Business Convention in Danvers, Massachusetts opened June 4, 2011 with comments from Elissa P., FA World Service chair, and closed on June 5, 2011 with comments from Dave I., World Service vice-chair. Their comments are printed below and shared here with the FA fellowship.

Opening Remarks at the 2011 Business Convention **By Elissa**

Welcome to the 10th Annual FA World Service Business Convention. Even though we've had this gathering many times before, perhaps it is still useful to remind ourselves why we are here. Recently I learned some interesting AA history. In 1950, Bill W. and Dr. Bob realized that something needed to be done to ensure AA's future. At the time, all communication and decision-making basically led back to the two co-founders. The board of trustees consulted with them, the AA groups consulted with them, but there was very little interaction, if any at all, between the AA groups and the Board of Trustees.

After Dr. Bob was unfortunately diagnosed with a fatal illness, the two men realized that eventually they would both pass on. They wanted to make sure that, when it came to AA, there was a way to pass it on. And so it became that in 1951, the first annual AA Conference was held. Members from meeting groups all over the US and Canada attended, and the first Conference Charter emerged, thus giving the AA groups themselves, formal responsibility for all AA World Services.

Our annual FA World Service Business Convention serves a similar purpose. Each FA group who had one available, has sent a World Service Conference member from their meeting to offer a voice and a vote regarding all FA World Service activities. Of equal importance, many of you are here to attend WSI committee meetings or perhaps to observe, listen, and take-it-all in. Collectively, it is all for the greater good.

We are here at this convention ultimately to ensure the future of FA. Over the next two days we will address a variety of business that will allow FA as a whole to function more effectively. And most importantly, we are here to ensure that any person, suffering right now from food addiction, has a way to get help, and that every budding food addict who may suffer in the future, has a place to come when they realize their powerlessness over food.

When FA became incorporated on May 31, 1998 we had approximately 100 members. Today our membership includes over 4,000 individuals and nearly 500 meetings worldwide. Clearly something is working.

Why does FA thrive? There are many ways to answer this question. I'd like to share on one fundamental reason that I feel cannot be overlooked -- one that very recently, I nearly overlooked.

This past January, I was asked to speak at an FA Information Session. During the question and answer period, the moderator specifically asked me to respond to, "What is food addiction?" Oddly enough, I had trouble answering the question. Our meeting format rang in my head and all I could stammer out was, "Food addiction is a disease of isolation." My head went blank. I felt like a deer in the headlights. With G-d's help, I pulled myself together and described more about isolation and said something about loneliness. Loneliness was certainly something I experienced when I was a hundred pounds overweight and hurting myself with food, but loneliness and isolation aren't exactly the answer to this question.

Yes, food addiction is a disease of isolation, but most importantly, food addiction is simply a disease. I truly believe that acceptance of this statement is the basis for our recovery. I cannot afford to forget that I am here to recover from a life-threatening, fatal, and incurable illness.

Being in a right-sized body is very gratifying and I thank G-d for it everyday. Having developed close friendships within this fellowship has created a sense of belonging that I will always cherish. Having a relationship with my higher power offers me a feeling of peace that is indescribable. But, if I become complacent and stay in FA just to be thin, just to have friendships, just to be closer to a higher power, or even a combination of all three, that won't be enough. Accepting that I have the disease of addiction means being in FA first and foremost, because I know, with absolute certainty, that living in recovery is the only choice I have if I want contented sobriety. This understanding needs to forever serve as my personal foundation. I also believe it is the starting point for what will serve us best as a conference. If we are going to be effective and work together, then as individuals, we each have a personal responsibility to keep our own foundation strong, and to pass on a program that helps others build from this same place. For me, this ongoing endeavor evokes some basic questions:

Do I fully accept that I will never again be able to consume flour and sugar normally? Do I fully respect the meaning behind individual binge foods—am I eating or drinking anything that lights up for me or anything that could trigger a binge? Am I fully surrendered to the fact that this disease has the power to kill, and that this recovery is saving my life? And, do I sincerely desire to do whatever it takes to stop hurting myself with food, to stay stopped, and to help others to do the same?

When each one of us answers yes to these questions then we are unified as a fellowship. When each one of us practices recovery that is rooted in this common denominator of abstinence and surrender, then we will be spiritually united in our actions. Personal recovery depends on FA unity. Likewise, FA unity depends on personal recovery. With this as our way of life, we are able to follow G-d's guidance in our service efforts to carry the message, and to ever improve the FA organization. We reach this point being personally guided by the steps, and allowing our meetings to be guided by the Traditions. As a conference, we are guided by FA's Twelve Concepts. Many of us here were first introduced to the Concepts six years ago, shortly after they were presented at the 2005 World Service Business Convention. I wasn't able to attend that year because of a family wedding, but my sponsor, who had attended, knew the full value of the Concepts and actually took the time to explain them to me in great detail one afternoon later that summer. Despite her clarity, everything my sponsor said to me went completely over my head. In good addict form, I succumbed to the fear of being unable to understand them; I just politely smiled as she described them to me in earnest.

Time passed and I managed for several years to skirt around ever really studying the Concepts. It is humbling to admit that, despite having served on the board for the last five years, I've only just begun in the last five months to look at them closely. And, even having reread them now several times, I by no means understand them fully. But, I am grateful to understand the Concepts a little better, and I no longer feel afraid of them.

That being said, I'd like to summarize Concept Twelve, which states the spiritual practices that we the Conference agree to uphold. Bill W. calls them "a series of solemn undertakings." Basically we are asked to practice six principles: 1) to focus on our collective spiritual power, rather than on the supposed power of wealth and authority; 2) to make sound and prudent financial decisions; 3) to refrain from putting any one member on a pedestal; 4) to strive for substantial unanimity in our voting; 5) to have mutual respect for one another, free of words or actions that are punitive or may incite public controversy, and 6) to act democratically, refraining from any acts of government. In short, our fundamental duty as a Conference is to serve the will of FA members as a whole.

It is a bit daunting to try and figure out the will of over 4000 people. Lucky for us, we recovering addicts have learned that most answers are found, not in my will or your will, but rather, in G-d's will. Of course, we can't possibly know G-d's will for all, but there is one thing of which we can be undeniably sure: G-d's will, and the collective will of all those who sincerely want recovery-- this combined will rests in the decision to never again eat addictively and in the willingness to serve unremittingly.

The Big Book states that recovery works because we are all addicts helping other addicts. No physician, psychiatrist, or clergy has ever been able to do for a food addict what FA has done for us. So, we are quick to see where those disciplines are right, but ultimately we addicts serve one another. We serve those of us fortunate enough to already be in FA, and we organize ourselves so that we are able to reach those still in need.

Three months ago my husband got laid off from work. When he got the news, he was traveling, on business. He phoned to tell me what happened. It was the kind of call that is entirely unexpected and initially quite devastating. But, as usual service saved the day.

When the call came in, I was in the grocery store. Dumbfounded, I leaned against the shelves of produce behind me. To my surprise, another FA member came down the aisle. He stayed and talked, while I had a short cry, and helped me decide whether or not to carry on with my shopping. Ten minutes later in the seafood section my phone rang- my first friend, called another fellow-friend, who in turn called to offer his support. He helped me move onto the dairy aisle. In the check-out line, the reality of my \$300 bill made my stomach drop and the tears welled up again. As I signed my credit card slip, a third fellow came strolling by. She lovingly listened to my tale of woe and offered much needed reassurance.

Once back in the car, I called my sponsor from the parking lot, grateful for her soundness of mind. When I pulled into my driveway, the phone rang again. My husband had just landed back in Boston, and was returning to his office to clean out his desk. I felt so sad for him. I sat in the car to get my bearings, asking G-d for help. Seconds later a text message arrived from the WSI PI chair. It said, "Local Reporter wants to do a piece on FA. Can you please call him right now?"

I smiled, and thanked G-d. I let the groceries sit and went in to call the reporter. For 35 minutes I got to talk freely about this life-saving program. The reporter's questions brought me right back to basics, giving me a chance to remember the misery of my past, and a chance to recognize the miracle that had just occurred - in the face of shock and sadness in the grocery store, I had no need to go down the Twinkie aisle.

My husband is still unemployed, but G-d is definitely hard at work. Support and suggestions from this fellowship have kept pouring in for my husband and me, making it impossible for our faith to waiver and allowing us to trust that everything will work out. A day at a time, there's been no reason to eat, no reason to isolate, no reason not to keep giving back.

So, herein lies the great hope. As we are all afflicted with this disease, we are also all privy to the treatment for it - service. Service, both receiving it graciously and providing it freely, offers each of us a life filled with freedom, instead of a life filled with food. As Bill W. said, "Our freedom to serve is truly the freedom by which we live." On that note, let us let go, let us let G-d, let us live and let live, and let us get going!

Closing Remarks from the 2011 Business Convention From Dave I.

From the big book we read... "We are average [people]... who normally would not mix. But there exists among us a fellowship, 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."

My fellows, as we prepare to disperse from our 10th Annual FA World Service Business Convention, and hurriedly prepare to travel home to various locations around the world, let us stop for a few moments and reflect upon this fellowship, what holds us together, and this understanding among us that is "indescribably wonderful."

Service is, at times, hard work, and the path of service is not always the easier way, even though it's the better way. Keeping this lifeboat of recovery afloat and in good repair is not always enjoyable or comfortable, especially as this lifeboat is getting very large now and in need of continual upkeep and repair. But the service we render here and at our local level is the rent we pay for the program of recovery we have so generously been given. And with this service comes enormous growth!

I'm sure every one of us has had more than one reluctant thought about the personal and financial sacrifice it takes to be here. But when these thoughts come to me, I am now able to step back and remember where I have come from: on a Sunday morning before recovery, I would be in the middle of a weekend binge - walking aimlessly through the pantry, looking for something to fill that hole inside of me; feeling bloated, bleak, and hopeless from a night of eating, stuffing myself with more food to cover up the feelings of inadequacy from not being able to stay on whatever diet I was on; then sitting alone in front of the television, flipping through channels, hoping that something would lift me out of my self-centered depression. When nothing held my attention, I would then wander back into the kitchen to find something else to eat, knowing full well the answer wasn't there, but not having a clue where else to turn.

But I am standing here today in front of you, a part of something that is more important than my little ailments and complaints, being useful in my own small way, free of self-hatred and the depths of despair that I lived in for so many many years. The gratitude I feel today goes beyond words, and doesn't necessarily come from the results of the service that I render, but rather from the experience of being of service. Thank you all for being a part of my recovery that enables me to realize this.

So... as we head home I leave with you 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 life boat, how can you say that helping row the life boat for awhile 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 head table, it does not make our positions any more important than that of the person who sits at the registration table and greets the shy and nervous member coming to the convention for the first time. While I have deep respect and love for the enormous efforts that I have witnessed among my colleagues on this board, we all do good work and we each, in our small and sincere way, make a difference. For me, the real recognition comes not from the world but from God, such as when I retire at night and sit for a few moments of stillness and experience with gratitude, the peace and self-respect that comes from a day of abstinence and the choice of service over self-interest.

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 Vice-Chair. Business meetings, board meetings, dealing with motions, and learning to communicate in a clear and respectful way, are not easy for me. Even going to business meetings at the group level is not easy. 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.

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 service positions in FA, especially this year on this board, and I wish to publicly thank my fellows at the world service level who have graciously and respectfully tolerated me and grown with me during my first year in this position. My friendships and love have deepened with so many that I have come in contact with as a result of being in this position. Believe me, I'm a better person for having known and worked with you all this year. 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 this: Let us all remember how much we need each other. 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 and work on our own defects 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. It's not easy having a respectful conversation with a person in your fellowship who remains very heavy and yet continues to hold service positions. But 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 remains ever more vital. Bill W. once said that we "come together in our weakness, and grow together in our strength." 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.

I must admit that much of my recovery, especially in the early years, has been driven by fear – fear that if people at my meetings didn't do what I do, that somehow my program would be weakened. I was around in 1998 when we separated from OA, and I have been, at times, afraid that our fellowship will go back to OA. This fear inevitably results in judgments, rigidity, tension, and a "rule-based" recovery instead of a principle-based program. I go to meetings to get my medicine, but I've been so uptight at times that the medicine couldn't get to me.

After several AWOLs and trying to live honestly over the years, there are a few things I've learned and need to continuously be reminded of: There is no need to fear if I have let go and let God (the essence of this entire program). I know what kind of program I need, and I know what I need to do to keep my spiritual condition strong. I am enormously grateful that I have been given a program with such clarity, boundaries, and healthy structure – both for meeting the newcomer and for meeting the demands in my life. There is no need to fear, because no one is capable of taking my program away from me without my consent. When I let go of my fears and turn them over to the care of a God of my understanding, I am then free to listen to others with an open mind. And I make room to learn something! If I am judging, I am in fear. And if I am in fear, it means I have lost conscious contact with God. I recently experienced this in my own fellowship. There is a person there that I

have judged for some time. I judged her program. I judged her sponsor (even though I didn't even know who her sponsor was!). And I judged this person's character. She called me one day and I didn't want to return her call. But I let go of the fear and made a decision to be kind and loving when I called her back. In our conversation, I began to open up with her about a significant relationship challenge in my life. What I got back was actually a very helpful response. I discovered that she was a wise person, but until that moment my judgments had prevented me from accessing this wisdom.

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, judgment, and resentment? We need to seek first to understand. Through a desire to understand, and bringing an attitude of "letting go and letting God," my fears dissolve. Then, if there is an opening and willingness, we seek to be understood. 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, as of yesterday, we now have a unified definition of what an FA meeting is! I am thoroughly convinced that the way this motion came about, through the voice of sane individual and collective thinking – the wisdom of group conscience - was not driven by fear but by clarity. Like all important decisions in this fellowship (including the definition of abstinence), the definition of an FA meeting was not a board-driven mandate but rather a conference-lead decision. And third, we share a commitment to recovery – in our own unique, God-guided, weighed and measured way. As we set forth now to fulfill our responsibilities on our respective committees, boards, groups, and individual efforts, it is my hope that we each remember to be guided in every decision and every action by our primary purpose: to help reach the suffering newcomer. This is what we are ultimately all here for!

Safe travels, my friends, and until we meet again, may God bless, support, and sustain you all in this vital work.

Thank you.

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### ***Mark Your Calendars***

**The Fellowship Convention** is scheduled for **September 23rd - 25th, 2011**, at the San Francisco Airport Marriott in Burlingame, California. For registration and more information please refer to the FA website at [www.foodaddicts.org](http://www.foodaddicts.org), in early 2011.

**The 2012 Business Convention** will take place from **June 1rd -3rd, 2012**. It will be held again at the Coco Key Hotel and Water Resort (formerly known as the Sheraton Ferncroft Resort) in Danvers, Massachusetts. Please check the FA website at [www.foodaddicts.org](http://www.foodaddicts.org), to get more details and find out when registration begins.