

## ***Step One – the most often misquoted Step of AA's 12 Steps***

We sit in meetings emphasizing the importance of a complete and perfect First Step – and its Step One – that's one of the most often misquoted Steps -- of the 12 Steps.

**The word “and” is NOT in Step One.**

I hear it over and over and over again “We admitted that we were powerless over alcohol *AND* our lives had become unmanageable.”

**That’s NOT Step 1.**

**Step 1 is “We admitted we were powerless over alcohol – that our lives had become unmanageable.”**

I believe it fuels the fire that feeds resistance and confusion about Step One – Step 1 is NOT a “two-part” Step.

**Step One is an admission of alcoholism. (See page 30 of the Big Book).**

**It is an acknowledgement that we have become convinced in our inner-most selves that we are alcoholics.**

I made the error, too – in once thinking “Step One is a two-part Step.” It isn’t.

**When I read the descriptions of “what an alcoholic is” in the Big Book – I have yet to find any reference that “and an unmanageable life” has anything to do – with whether a person is alcoholic or non-alcoholic. It just isn’t there.**

For me – when I was new in A.A., part of the reason I was confused and could not become convinced that I was alcoholic – was because I was not convinced that “my life was unmanageable” had anything to do with whether I was alcoholic or not – like I was hearing meetings. I was alcoholic many years before my life became unmanageable. Some of those years I functioned well and thrived and ran several businesses.

Therefore, I concluded that “if my life is not unmanageable – then, I must not be an alcoholic.... yet.”

What did I do? I continued drinking and letting my life get progressively more screwed up and allowing my alcoholism to progress without treating it – until I could say, for real, that “my life is unmanageable!”

**Had I known the proper description of an alcoholic – and realized that the “and my life had become unmanageable” was not part of the description of an alcoholic – I may have had a better chance of grasping the concept of alcoholism and realize that I better do something about it before landing at the gates of insanity and death.**

**Why is this important?**

I believe some of the reasons that it is important are:

1. It's wrong. And it's confusing.
2. Using the word "and" is adding a "condition" to alcoholism, that just isn't there.
3. If we are to succeed in helping other alcoholics to 'raise their bottom' the easiest way to do that – would be to admit to our error and correct it.
4. We can better understand the meaning of Step One – by looking at it as it was written.

Notice in #4 above – where I used the dash (emdash).

To substitute the dash in #4 above, the thought and the sentence – wouldn't make sense. Substitute the word "and" for the "dash" and it makes no sense.

**Look at Step One. Do you see the word "and"? It isn't there.**

What we have is a "hyphen" -- a "dash".

*In our English language, when a hyphen is not used to break up a word, it is used to connect a thought -- or phrase.*

Often, we refer to it as a "dash".

A dash is the mark or sign (—) used to note an abrupt break or pause in a sentence or hesitation in an utterance, to begin and end a parenthetical word, phrase, or clause, to indicate the omission of letters or words, to divide a line, to substitute for certain uses of the colon, and to separate any of various elements of a sentence or series of sentences, as a question from its answer.

~From American Heritage New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, Third Edition - dash

A punctuation mark (—) used to indicate a sudden break in thought, to set off parenthetical material, or to take the place of such expressions as that is and namely: "He's running for reelection — if he lives until then"; "Very few people in this class — three, to be exact — have completed their projects"; "She joined the chorus for only one reason — she loves to sing." In the last example, where the parenthetical material comes at the end of the sentence rather than in the middle, a colon could be used instead of the dash.

**Step One: "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol – that our lives had become unmanageable."**

If I were to paraphrase Step One, as it is written, using the dash as a concluding thought, rather than an "and" -- I could say "I admitted that I am powerless over staying sober -- because I cannot manage to leave alcohol entirely alone." Or – "We admitted that we were powerless over alcohol – we could not manage to leave alcohol entirely alone." The

insanity of the first drink. The obsession that prevents us from leaving alcohol alone – while we are entirely sober!

**This, then means – that “my life had become unmanageable” – regardless of whether I was drinking or sober – because I cannot manage to leave alcohol entirely alone.** We know from the Doctor’s Opinion, and from our own experience – that it is not safe for us alcoholics to use alcohol in any form at all.

**If it is unsafe for us to use alcohol in any form at all, and we cannot manage to leave alcohol entirely alone – we are powerless over drinking alcohol. Simple. Complete. No argument.**

Those thoughts are more in line with our Big Book’s description of the alcoholic in Chapter Three More about alcoholism and in Chapter Four, We Agnostics.

*For references see pages 30, 24, and 44 of the Big Book - Alcoholics Anonymous.*

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