A Sample Size of One

The inability to rely on an unseen higher power is a stumbling block to many in the program. In my short time here, I have noticed that people with scientific backgrounds seem to be especially prone to getting stuck on this point. I speak from experience as one such person. Thankfully, in my early days I did not let this deter me from doing the work. I was sufficiently fearful of a relapse that I was willing to cast aside my doubts and give the steps a try.

The irony is not lost on me that I was still following the scientific method, despite thinking I had placed it on temporary hold. As both the subject and observer in this experiment, the only way for me to learn anything tangible is to enter with an open mind. To do otherwise is to let the observer bias the results. However, when I unwittingly let go of any preconceived notions, I opened the door to doing the steps in a more effective way. There was no way I could pretend to reach a given outcome nor fake the results since I did not know what was coming.

Thus, as a sample size of one I proceeded methodically through the steps with my sponsor. Once complete, I attempted to live by these principles, both inside and outside the rooms of the program. About six months later I was afforded the gift of hindsight. I realized I was in a position to make as scientific a comparison as one can make with a sample size of one:

*Is my life better now than before working the steps?*

The answer for me was a resounding Yes. Further, I realized that no amount of reading nor other intellectual pursuits could have yielded the same results. Being honest and vulnerable in the presence of another human being is the medicine that worked.

An analogy drives this point home for me, one of a diabetic (a person that requires daily insulin shots to survive). I think of this often when I struggle to take necessary action. Consider a diabetic that also happens to be a doctor, one with deep knowledge of the contents of an insulin shot. If that person sits and contemplates the materials within the syringe, but takes no action, then they remain unchanged. Contrast that with a five-year-old child that scrunches up her face, takes the shot, and gains a day’s worth of relief. She had no understanding of molecular biology nor any other details about how insulin does its work. Yet the child got relief, but the doctor did not.

*Knowledge of the solution is no substitute for action.*

While this comparison may seem far-fetched, it maps directly to my experience in the program. If I only read the books and listen passively during meetings then I am the doctor staring at the syringe, taking no medicine. When I tell the unvarnished truth and become vulnerable, only then do I put the medicine into my body and spirit. For alcoholics like me, telling the truth is an action verb. There is one other important message of hope that can be derived from this analogy:

*Experience does not require understanding.*

This is crucial for someone with my mental wiring to acknowledge. I can experience the solution even if I have no idea why it works. This means that I do not have to share a similar background with anyone here, and it will still work. I do not have to share a concept of a higher power, and it will still work. I do not need to join any particular religion, and it will still work. I do not even have to like the steps, and they will still work.

That conclusion is utterly massive to me. I do not have to meet any bar set by any other human, and I can still get sober if I do the steps. Even better than that, I can live with joy and serenity. It is this message of total inclusion that I find so full of hope.

The second irony that is also not lost on me is that nothing I write here can directly heal anyone else. Yet I feel compelled to share. My hope is that something in my story will resonate loudly enough with someone that it helps get them unstuck. *‘Maybe that could work for me too.’* The best possible outcome is that a reader somewhere gains the motivation and courage to go ask a sponsor to take them through the steps.

Or perhaps if you are wired like me and enjoy a challenge, consider the gauntlet thrown down. Challenge yourself to do the steps and live them for half a year, then compare your life ‘before’ versus ‘after.’ Be a sample size of one, and enter the process as a blank slate. Go on, I double dare you. If your results are anything like mine, your only regret will be not having started sooner.