

Do We Need a 5th Edition and/or a plain language Big Book?

Good morning, My name is David and I'm a recovered alcoholic, sobriety date 12/6/1995. I am from Washington State East Area 92 and my home group is the Primary Purpose Big Book Study Group in District 8 Coeur d' Alene, ID. I want to thank the 2019 PNC Committee for asking me to speak on the topic, "Do we need a 5th edition Big Book?"

I want to begin with a disclaimer, I'm not an expert on any topic and this talk is filtered through personal experience, therefore it is only my story and that is the only research I have to bolster my statement on this question, personal experience.

I do not think that a 5th Edition Big Book is necessary. I say this because when I finally sobered up on 12/6/95 I was willing to start following direction. I was finally willing to do what was necessary to recover from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body, and I certainly was feeling hopeless at that time.

The answer to the question, filtered through personal experience of course, on whether or not we should publish a 5th Edition Big Book, can be found on several pages throughout our Basic Text, starting with the Title Page, "The Story of How Many Thousands of People Have Recovered From Alcoholism."

Moving forward, in the Forward to the First Edition, "We of Alcoholics Anonymous are more than 100 people who have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body. To show other alcoholics precisely how we have recovered is the main purpose of this book"(p. xiii). And finally, in Chapter Two there are a few sentences that I found to be of paramount importance, when I was a newcomer and especially today: "Doubtless you are curious to discover how, in the face of expert opinion to the contrary, we have recovered from a hopeless condition of mind and body. If you are an alcoholic who wants to get over it, you may already be asking-What do I have to do? It is the purpose of this book to answer such questions specifically."

When I finally arrived at the "jumping off place" and was experiencing pitiful and incomprehensible demoralization as only a late stage alcoholic can, I was ready and willing to become teachable. John Barleycorn had beaten me into a state of reasonableness, especially concerning spiritual matters. All excuses were exhausted! Hence I had no problem relating to the subject matter in our Basic Text.

Still some may say, "David, how about updating the stories in the back of the Big Book? Practical experience shows that when old stories are removed from the Big Book, to make room for new stories, they are relegated to the dust bin of archival history where most newcomers, or alcoholics who have been around awhile, will never see them unless they become interested enough in A.A. history to start researching our past. For example, how many people have read Hank Parkhurst' story from the 1st Edition? Hank P was vital to the publishing of the 1st Edition

Big Book and wrote chapter 10, "To Employers." Lois Wilson once said, "The Big Book could have been written without Bill but could have never been published without Hank."

The point is, with a good dictionary and with the help of a good recovered alcoholic teacher, I was able to open up my mind to new ideas and concepts and slowly started letting go of old ideas that had been holding me back.

It is true that social norms have changed over the years; however one constant in my life the past 23 years has been the Big Book. I have absolutely no problem relating to Bill's Story, Doctor Bob's Nightmare, or any of the old pioneer stories in the first 3 Editions of the Big Book. In fact, I use a 2nd Edition Big Book daily! I have a 3rd and 4th Edition but since the 2nd Edition works just fine I see no need to place it on a shelf to start collecting dust. Early on, my "teacher" encouraged me daily to focus on similarities, not differences when studying the Book or listening to someone share in a meeting.

Instead of going through the process of publishing a 5th Edition Big Book, and with spiritual parity in thought and heart, I would prefer to do whatever it takes to fully translate in Spanish from cover to cover, the 4th Edition Big Book. Now that would be a great project!

Social customs and practices have changed over the years. I think today we need to get back to basics, one alcoholic speaking with another, the "Language of the Heart." Today we have pamphlets on all sorts of controversial outside issues that have little to do with carrying the message to the still suffering alcoholic. Although our intentions may be a good, are we not dividing ourselves by engaging in these topics? Do we really need all the sundry special interest meetings? These are questions I have reflected on of late. Our basic text, Alcoholics Anonymous, is the one constant in life that helps keep me grounded. I can read the stories in the back of the Book, seeking similarities rather than differences, and absolutely relate. The Book is working just great, we don't need to fix it.

Thank you for letting me share!

David R
12/6/1995