



THE FIRING LINE

103 “MUSTS” IN THE BIG BOOK

From the Cover to Page 164

If you go to enough meetings, you’ll hear it said that in AA, “there are no MUSTs, only suggestions”. Well, like most half-truths in A.A., if you hear them long enough you begin to believe them. But what does the Program have to say about this? It says in the Big Book on page 19, “We have concluded to publish an anonymous volume setting forth the problem as we see it. We shall bring to task our combined experience and knowledge. This should suggest a useful program for anyone concerned with a drinking problem.” Then, in “How It Works” it says, “Here are the steps we took, which are suggested as a Program of Recovery.”

So, it’s the WHOLE Program that is suggested. It’s sort of like making a pie. I once ate a really great pie at my Grandmother’s house, and asked for the recipe. If I use the **same** ingredients, with the **same** proportions, in the **same** baking sequence, then—AND ONLY THEN—will I get the full, desired result. AA says that we have a way out that works very well for us.

There may be another method you might think brings about recovery from alcoholism, and if you so choose, have at it.

You don’t have to take the A.A. Program, only **“if you want what we have AND are willing to go to any length to get it.”** And if you **do** want what we have, the Big Book is very clear that the Program has some **very definite requirements**. It says, “To show other alcoholics **PRECISELY HOW WE HAVE RECOVERED** is the main purpose of this book” (page xiii), “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**. We shall tell you what we have done” (page 20), and **“CLEAR-CUT DIRECTIONS** are given showing how we recovered” (page 29).

AA’s Big Book, by it’s own admission, offers us specific instructions for recovery from alcoholism called “the Program of AA”. Remember, half measures DO NOT avail us half results; “half measures avail us NOTHING” (and NO measures avail us less!). The suggestion we have to offer is our WHOLE Program, and the AA Program **does include MUSTs, have to’s, and requirements** (IF you want the full, desired result).

But remember, the process is very much worth it because just one of the promises of working AA’s Program **IN ITS ENTIRETY** is that we will **“know happiness, peace, and usefulness, in a way of life that is incredibly more wonderful as time passes”** (page 8)!

Some of the phrases below don’t contain the word **MUST**, but the wording indicates a **MUST** Condition.



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Excluding the stories, here's the list:

1. Convincing testimony MUST surely come from medical men who have had experience with the sufferings of our members and have witnessed our return to health.(xxiii)
2. “Doctor, I cannot go on like this! I have everything to live for! I MUST stop, but I cannot! You MUST help me!” (xxvii)
3. Faced with this problem, if a doctor is honest with himself, he MUST sometimes feel his own inadequacy. (xxvii)
4. Though the aggregate of recoveries resulting from psychiatric effort is considerable, we physicians MUST admit we have made little impression upon the problem as a whole. (xxvii)
5. In the course of his third treatment he acquired certain ideas concerning a possible means of recovery. As part of his rehabilitation he (Bill W.) commenced to present his conceptions to other alcoholics, impressing upon them that they MUST do likewise with still others. This has become the basis of a rapidly growing fellowship of these men and their families. This man and over one hundred others appear to have recovered. (xxiii)
6. In this statement he (Dr. Silkworth) confirms what we who have suffered alcoholic torture MUST believe that the body of the alcoholic is quite as abnormal as his mind. (xxiv)
7. More often than not, it is IMPERATIVE that a man’s brain be cleared before he is approached, as he has then a better chance of understanding and accepting what we have to offer. (xxiv)
8. The message which can interest and hold these alcoholic people MUST have depth and weight. In nearly all cases, their ideals MUST be grounded in a power greater than themselves if they are to re-create their lives. (xxvi)
9. I SIMPLY HAD TO believe in a Spirit of the Universe, who knew neither time nor limitation (10)
10. I MUST turn in all things to the Father of Light who presides over us all.(14)
11. Particularly was it IMPERATIVE to work with others.(14)
12. Of NECESSITY there will have to be discussion of matters medical, psychiatric, social, and religious.(19)



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13. Our very lives, as ex-problem drinkers, **DEPEND** upon our constant thought of others and how we may help meet their needs. (19)
14. Almost none of us liked the self-searching, the leveling of our pride, the confession of shortcomings which the process **REQUIRES** for its successful consummation.(25)
15. There was **NOTHING LEFT FOR US** but to pick up the simple kit of spiritual tools laid at our Feet. (25)
16. It is only by fully disclosing ourselves and our problems that they will be persuaded to say, “Yes, I am one of them too; I **MUST** have this thing.” (29)
17. We learned that we had to **FULLY CONCEDE** to our innermost selves that we were alcoholics. This is the first step in recovery. The delusion that we are like other people, or presently may be, **HAS TO BE** smashed. (30)
18. If we are planning to stop drinking, there **MUST** be no reservation of any kind, nor any lurking notion that someday we will be immune to alcohol. (33)
19. But after a while we had to face the fact that we **MUST** find a spiritual basis of Life - or else.(44)
20. We **HAD TO** find a power by which we could live, and it **HAD TO BE** a Power greater than ourselves. (45)
21. **DO NOT** let any prejudice you may have against spiritual terms deter you from honestly asking yourself what they mean to you. (47)
22. Many of us have been so touchy that even casual reference to spiritual things made us bristle with antagonism. This sort of thinking **HAD TO BE** abandoned. (48)
23. We **HAD TO** ask ourselves why we shouldn’t apply to our human problems this same readiness to change our point of view. (52)
24. When we saw others solve their problems by a simple reliance upon the Spirit of the Universe, we **HAD TO** stop doubting the power of God. Our ideas did not work. But the God idea did. (52)
25. When we became alcoholics, crushed by a self-imposed crisis we could not postpone or evade, we **HAD TO** fearlessly face the proposition that either God is everything or else He is nothing. God either is, or He isn’t. (53)



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26. Sometimes we HAD TO search fearlessly, but He was there. He was as much a fact as we were. We found the Great Reality deep down within us. In the last analysis it is only there that He may be found. It was so with us. (55)
27. The first requirement is that we BE CONVINCED that any life run on self-will can hardly be a success. (60)
28. Above everything, we alcoholics MUST be rid of this selfishness. We MUST, or it kills us! (62)
29. We HAD TO have God's help.(62)
30. First of all, we HAD TO quit playing God. (62)
31. Our liquor was but a symptom. We HAD TO get down to causes and conditions. (64)
32. If we were to live, we HAD TO be free of anger. (66)
33. We saw that these resentments MUST be mastered. (66)
34. Whatever our ideal turns out to be, we MUST be willing to grow toward it. We MUST be willing to make amends where we have done harm, provided that we do not bring about still more harm in so doing. (69)
35. We MUST be entirely honest with somebody if we expect to live long or happily in this world. (73)
36. Those of us belonging to a religious denomination which requires confession MUST, and of course, will want to go to the properly appointed authority whose duty it is to receive it. (74)
37. The rule is we MUST be hard on ourself, but always considerate of others. (74)
38. It is important that he be able to keep a confidence; that he fully understand and approve what we are driving at; that he will not try to change our plan. But we MUST not use this as a mere excuse to postpone. (75)
39. We have emphasized willingness as being INDISPENSABLE. (76)
40. UNDER NO CONDITION do we criticize such a person or argue. (77)
41. We MUST lose our fear of creditors no matter how far we have to go, for we are liable to drink if we are afraid to face them. (78)



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42. We may lose our position or reputation or face jail, but we are willing. We have to be. We **MUST** not shrink at anything. (79)
43. Before taking drastic action which might implicate other people we secure their consent. If we have obtained permission, have consulted with others, asked God to help and the drastic step is indicated we **MUST** not shrink. (80)
44. Sometimes we hear an alcoholic say that the only thing he needs to do is to keep sober. Certainly he **MUST** keep sober, for there will be no home if he doesn't. But he is yet a long way from making good to the wife or parents whom for years he has so shockingly treated. (82)
45. Yes, there is a long period of reconstruction ahead. We **MUST** take the lead. (83)
46. The spiritual life is not a theory. **WE HAVE TO LIVE IT.** (83)
47. We **MUST** remember that ten or twenty years of drunkenness would make a skeptic out of anyone. (83)
48. Every day is a day when we **MUST** carry the vision of God's will into all of our activities. (85)
49. "How can I best serve Thee - Thy will (not mine) be done." These are thoughts which **MUST** go with us constantly. (85)
50. If we have carefully followed directions, we have begun to sense the flow of His Spirit into us. To some extent we have become God-conscious. We have begun to develop this vital sixth sense. But we **MUST** go further and that means more action. (85)
51. But we **MUST** be careful not to drift into worry, remorse or morbid reflection, for that would diminish our usefulness to others. (86)
52. To watch people recover, to see them help others, to watch loneliness vanish, to see a fellowship grow up about you, to have a host of friends-this is an experience you **MUST** not miss. (89)
53. The family **MUST** decide these things. (90)
54. To be vital, faith **MUST** be accompanied by self sacrifice and unselfish, constructive action. (93)
55. **NEVER** talk down to an alcoholic from any moral or spiritual hilltop; simply lay out the kit of spiritual tools for his inspection. (95)



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56. If he is sincerely interested and wants to see you again, ask him to read this book in the interval. After doing that, he **MUST** decide for himself whether he wants to go on. (95)
57. He should not be pushed or prodded by you, his wife, or his friends. If he is to find God, the desire **MUST** come from within. (95)
58. **NEVER** avoid these responsibilities, but be sure you are doing the right thing if you assume them. (97)
59. A kindly act once in a while isn't enough. You **HAVE TO** act the Good Samaritan every day, if need be. (97)
60. Argument and fault-finding are to be avoided like the plague. In many homes this is a difficult thing to do, but it **MUST** be done if any results are to be expected. (98)
61. But we **MUST** try to repair the damage immediately lest we pay the penalty by a spree.(99)
62. If their old relationship is to be resumed it **MUST** be on a better basis, since the former did not work. (99)
63. Both you and the new man **MUST** walk day by day in the path of spiritual progress.(100)
64. People have said we **MUST** not go where liquor is served; we **MUST** not have it in our homes; we **MUST** shun friends who drink; we **MUST** avoid moving pictures which show drinking scenes; we **MUST** not go into bars; our friends **MUST** hide their bottles if we go to their houses; we **MUSTn't** think or be reminded about alcohol at all. Our experience shows that this is not necessarily so. (101)
65. But some of us think we should not serve liquor to anyone. We **NEVER** argue this question. (102)
66. We are careful **NEVER** to show intolerance or hatred of drinking as an institution. (103)
67. Besides, we have stopped fighting anybody or anything. We **HAVE TO!** (103)
68. Wait until repeated stumbling convinces him he **MUST** act, for the more you hurry him the longer his recovery may be delayed. (113)
69. But sometimes you **MUST** start life anew. (114)
70. While you need not discuss your husband at length, you can quietly let your friends know the nature of his illness. But you **MUST** be on guard not to embarrass or harm your husband. (115)



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71. You will no longer be self-conscious or feel that you MUST apologize as though your husband were a weak character. (115)
72. These family dissensions are very dangerous, especially to your husband. Often you MUST carry the burden of avoiding them or keeping them under control. (117)
73. NEVER forget that resentment is a deadly hazard to an alcoholic. (117)
74. Your husband knows he owes you more than sobriety. He wants to make good. Yet you MUST not expect too much. (118)
75. Though it is infinitely better that he have no relapse at all, as has been true with many of our men, it is by no means a bad thing in some cases. Your husband will see at once that he MUST redouble his spiritual activities if he expects to survive.(120)
76. We NEVER, NEVER try to arrange a man's life so as to shield him from temptation; The slightest disposition on your part to guide his appointments or his affairs so he will not be tempted will be noticed. (120)
77. The family MUST realize that dad, though marvelously improved, is still convalescing. They should be thankful he is sober and able to be of this world once more. (127)
78. He can scarcely square the account in his lifetime. But he MUST see the danger of over-concentration on financial success. Although financial recovery is on the way for many of us, we found we could not place money first. For us, material well-being always followed spiritual progress; it never preceded. (127)
79. We know there are difficult wives and families, but the man who is getting over alcoholism MUST remember he did much to make them so. (127)
80. We have come to believe He would like us to keep our heads in the clouds with Him, but that our feet ought to be firmly planted on earth. That is where our fellow travelers are, and that is where our work MUST be done. These are the realities for us. We have found nothing incompatible between a powerful spiritual experience and a life of sane and happy usefulness. (130)
81. Whether the family goes on a spiritual basis or not, the alcoholic member HAS TO if he would recover. The others MUST be convinced of his new status beyond the shadow of a doubt. Seeing is believing to most families who have lived with a drinker. (135)
82. State that you know about his drinking, and that it MUST stop. You might say you appreciate his abilities, would like to keep him, but cannot if he continues to drink. (141)



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83. For most alcoholics who are drinking, or who are just getting over a spree, a certain amount of physical treatment is desirable, even IMPERATIVE. (142)
84. Though you are providing him with the best possible medical attention, he should understand that he MUST undergo a change of heart. To get over drinking will REQUIRE a transformation of thought and attitude. We all HAD TO PLACE RECOVERY ABOVE EVERYTHING, for without recovery we would have lost both home and business. (143)
85. While on the subject of confidence, can you adopt the attitude that so far as you are concerned this will be a STRICTLY personal matter, that his alcoholic derelictions, the treatment about to be undertaken, will NEVER be discussed without his consent? (143)
86. When the man is presented with this volume it is best that no one tell him he must abide by its suggestions. The man MUST decide for himself. (144)
87. An alcoholic who has recovered, but holds a relatively unimportant job, can talk to a man with a better position. Being on a radically different basis of life, he will NEVER take advantage of the situation.(146)
88. For he knows he MUST be honest if he would live at all. (146)
89. The old pleasures were gone. They were but memories. NEVER could we recapture the great moments of the past. (151)
90. I know I MUST get along without liquor, but how can I? Have you a sufficient substitute?" Yes, there is a substitute and it is vastly more than that. It is a fellowship in Alcoholics Anonymous. 152)
91. They will approach still other sick ones and fellowships of Alcoholics Anonymous may spring up in each city and hamlet, havens for those who MUST find a way out. (153)
92. But what about his responsibilities - his family and the men who would die because they would not know how to get well, ah-yes, those other alcoholics? There MUST be many such in this town. He would phone a clergyman. His sanity returned and he thanked God. (154)
93. He saw that he would HAVE TO face his problems squarely that God might give him mastery. (155)
94. Both saw that they MUST keep spiritually active. (156)



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95. Though they knew they MUST help other alcoholics if they would remain sober, that motive became secondary. It was transcended by the happiness they found in giving themselves for others. (159)
96. God will determine that, so you MUST remember that your real reliance is always upon Him. He will show you how to create the fellowship you crave. (164)
97. We alcoholics see that we MUST work together and hang together, else most of us will finally die alone. (563)
98. A.A. MUST continue to live or most of us will surely die. (565)
99. Yet it is true that our first printing gave many readers the impression that these personality changes, or religious experiences, MUST be in the nature of sudden and spectacular upheavals. (569)
100. Though it was not our intention to create such an impression, many alcoholics have nevertheless concluded that in order to recover they MUST acquire an immediate and overwhelming “God-consciousness” followed at once by a vast change in feeling and outlook. (569)
101. I think our profession MUST take appreciative cognizance of this great therapeutic weapon. (571)
102. Any therapeutic or philosophic procedure which can prove a recovery rate of 50% to 60% MUST merit our consideration. (571)
103. They know that they MUST never drink. (572)