

Carrying the A.A. Message Using New Technologies

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Imagine if you will Bill Wilson at six months sober, alone, and out of town on a failed business venture as he paces through a hotel lobby struggling not to join that happy crowd in the hotel bar. It's the year 1935. Bill cannot call a Central Office and find a meeting. He can't hop online on his iPad or SmartPhone and join an online meeting. He can't Foursquare his location inviting A.A.'s to an online Mayflower Hotel meeting. He can't write on his Facebook wall that he is lonely and thirsty. He can't open an app on his phone and read some A.A. literature. No, Bill has to look through a phone directory which doesn't have a search engine. Bill has to go through the alphabet and place nickel after nickel into a pay phone hoping and praying that someone will understand and help him in his plight to stay sober.

If I am the person answering Bill's call and plea for a drunk to talk to and it is 1935 I might either hang up or lead him to the insane asylum. Imagine receiving this call before A.A. is born, when alcoholism was a great stigma. Imagine Bill making the call. I don't know about you but I think I would have succumbed to that happy crowd in the hotel bar. In today's world if you are as desperate to stay sober as Bill was your options for finding help are many.

Today if you are backpacking your way across Southeast Asia, or in a very remote place in Kenya and you become lonely and thirsty the first thing most of us would do is look to see if we have a Wi-Fi connection. We might send out a text message or leave a voicemail with our sponsor. We might share our situation with our Facebook friends and within seconds they would provide us several ways to catch an online meeting or offer to do a virtual face to face meeting on Skype. Before we know it there are several of our friends in a chat room and through the advancement in technology we feel connected to our life saving program all while backpacking across a foreign country. And even if your internet connection is poor or absent you might notice a Big Book icon on your phone or change from music to speaker tapes on your iPod. The multitude of ways to carry and receive our message of hope is vast and growing.

The ways in which technology advancement have helped us reach and save lives since Bill's time is truly amazing. If Bill were alive today I'm certain he would want to be Skyped into meetings like this all over the world. I am also certain Bill would remind us of the importance of the face to face meeting at his coffee table with Ebby that began his, and our, journey to sobriety.

I am sure there a few in this room who have never worked with a wet drunk or in the least for most of us it has been many years since we have. My last wet drunk call was a little over a year ago. I had the privilege of answering a plea from the 12 Step Hotline in my Area. Ken was drunk when I picked him up and took him to a meeting. He kissed my neck as I dropped him off and told me he loved me. At first I was uncomfortable with a neck kiss and then I realized I'll take a neck kiss over vomit in my lap any day. Ken is not sober today but I think it's interesting how Ken came to A.A. Ken first contacted a Facebook friend who was in Arizona at the time. While she was on Facebook with Ken she contacted the Intergroup Hotline closest to Ken. The Hotline called me and then I called Ken. My face to face meeting with Ken started through a social networking site that is barely nine years old but lead to an old fashion face to face and "get in the car."

It seems to me that new technologies can enhance and dare I say in some ways replace the ways in which the new alcoholic is reached and the current member is helped. In fact in some ways without new technologies some people might not be sober. There are people in remote communities throughout the world that depend upon an internet connection to speak with another alcoholic. There are people today who have never sat down at a coffee table with their sponsor and yet the bond they feel with the person who saved their life using technology parallel's the bond I feel with my sponsor whom I've spent many face to face hours with. If Bill were alive I think he would embrace this technology and not be the least bit afraid of it. I think Bill would try to find ways to use it to its fullest. The importance should be placed on helping the conversation between two drunks happen instead of trying to make it happen a certain way.

Ken found A.A. through technology and in the old fashion way I picked him up most every night and took him to a meeting. We spent hours talking. The new technology created and old fashion one on one. I have a sponsee who did his fifth step with me via Skype while he was traveling the world. He might as well have been in my living room. I could see his face and hear his voice, nothing was lost.

Is there more we can do as a fellowship to embrace and use new technologies to carry the message? Yes, I believe there is and that begins with having more faith and less fear. I believe the growth of our fellowship depends upon finding ways to embrace and use new technologies to carry our life saving message to those still suffering inside and outside of our rooms. In the end it still takes two people wanting to stay sober. Bill found his and I pray you use whatever resources available to find your Dr. Bob too!