

ABSTINENCE

The W.A. Principles define abstinence in the following way:

“To abstain from compulsive working, activity, worry, and work avoidance. For many workaholics, abstinence means far more than relief from compulsive working on a physical level. It also means an attitude that comes as a result of surrendering to something greater than ourselves. Abstinence means not only freedom from compulsive working but also freedom from compulsive thinking and worrying. Each of us is free to determine our own way of being abstinent according to personal needs and preferences.”

Unlike substance addictions where abstinence is clearly defined by stopping the use of the substance, work addiction takes many different forms. Workaholism may manifest in blatant and subtle ways.

How do we know when we are abstinent and when we have lapsed into active addiction? Each workaholic needs to define abstinence for him or herself. Bottom lines are a helpful tool in defining individual abstinence.

BOTTOM LINES

Bottom lines define the point where we cross over from abstinence to work addiction.

The behaviors that trigger and signal workaholism are different in different people. The first step in developing our own list of bottom lines is to go back to Step One: we

admitted we were powerless over work and activity. We sit quietly and write a list of the unmanageable behaviors or actions that we take or have taken when we are active in our workaholism. It is helpful to go over this list with a sponsor or other W.A. member.

The next step is to pick one or two items from our list and create bottom lines that will give us guidelines for abstinence.

Here are some examples of bottom lines for abstinence that workaholics have surrendered to:

- I do not work including housework and volunteer work more than six out of seven days.
- I do not work more than forty five hours per week.
- I do not start work and will stop work when I am hungry, angry, lonely or tired “H.A.L.T.” .
- I do not schedule a new commitment without checking with another W.A. member first.
- I do not bring work to the table during mealtimes.
- I do not allow work to encroach upon the time I commit to be with my family.
- I do not blame others for my stress.
- I do not rush or drive unsafely, even if I am late.
- I do not take on a new commitment without giving up an old commitment. A specific bottom line example of this might be: I do not take on any new commitment greater than a one time, two hour commitment

without putting it on a “72 hour hold” during which time I pray and speak with my sponsor, creating a plan to substitute out something else of equivalent time and energy.

Bottom lines can also be written in the affirmative to capture baseline behavior that we learn is critical to sustaining our abstinence:

- I sleep at least seven hours a night.
- I pray and meditate every day.
- I attend at least one meeting per week.
- I read literature for at least ten minutes per day.
- I meet with my sponsor at least once per month to go over step work.
- I make a program call at least five times per week.

As the principle of practicing gentleness reminds us, we are gentle with ourselves and patient in our efforts, knowing that our new way of living requires much practice. Bottom lines are meant as a guide to help us see when our behavior has crossed the boundary from healthier to less healthy. We don't use our lapses as excuses to beat ourselves up; rather, we view them as reminders that we are not perfect and must continue to work our programs one day at a time.

As workaholics, it is important that we not follow our program of recovery with the same blind zeal for work that brought us to our knees in the first place. We start simply; we

can always add more bottom lines as our awareness grows.

When we create our first list of bottom line behaviors with the help of our Higher Power and program friends, we select actions that are achievable for us at the current time. If we find we are consistently unable to achieve one of the behaviors on our list, we adjust it to reflect that we can, with Higher Power's help, live in the here and now. Bottom lines should be hallmarks of our success rather than set ups for failure.

Our bottom line behaviors will change over time, as we grow in our recovery and more becomes possible. We have found that recovery is contagious: the more we have, the more we will want.

TOP LINES

Top line behaviors represent our goals and visions. For example, a person with a bottom line of “I do not work more than six out of seven days” might have a top line of “I will take off two days a week.”

Top lines represent our aspirations. They give us goals to work toward. Our success with our bottom lines gives us hope that we will, in time, reach our top lines.

Over time, top lines become bottom lines. For the W.A. in the previous example, “I will not work more than five out of seven days” may shift from being a top line to an easily achievable bottom line. The new top line might be “I will work

no more than four out of seven days.”

Some examples of top lines are:

- I will take a vacation that has nothing to do with work of any kind.
- I will spend one whole day every week doing something fun with my children.
- I will put my health before my work.
- I will sleep at least eight hours every night.
- I will eat my meals sitting down in a relaxed manner.
- I will have at least one day each week with no to do list.
- I will have two days off in a row per week.
- I will not work more than nine hours in a day or more than forty hours in a week.

CONCLUSION

While we workaholics find we have much in common with each other in our disease, the actions and behaviors that lead each of us into our addiction are different.

Bottom lines are the signposts guiding us toward abstinence. Top lines are the signposts marking our paths toward recovery and freedom from worry. Top lines are important because they show us where the path of recovery is heading. While our bottom lines help free us from pain, our top lines promise joy and fulfillment.

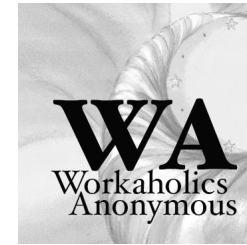
Bottom lines and top lines allow us to create a structure within our program of recovery that is tailored

to our individual patterns. We follow the direction shown to us by our evolving top and bottom lines with the help of a Higher Power, a supportive W.A. community, a sponsor or co sponsor, and our own desire for sanity and serenity.

The Twelve Steps of W.A.

1. We admitted we were powerless over work that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood God*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Became entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood God*, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to workaholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

The W.A. Twelve Steps were adapted from the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous © 1939 by A.A. World Services, Inc.



Workaholics Anonymous is a fellowship of individuals who share their experience, strength, and hope with each other that they may solve their common problems and help others to recover from workaholism.

The only requirement for membership is the desire to stop working compulsively. There are no dues or fees for W.A. membership; we are self supporting through our own contributions. W.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stop working compulsively and to carry the message of recovery to workaholics who still suffer.

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Abstinence in Workaholics Anonymous

Top Lines and Bottom Lines