Beyond 90 days

"On the road of our recovery we are confronted by many obstacles, some are obvious and some are harder to spot, they even come disguised as assets."

GAMBLERS ANONYMOUS

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Introduction - Keep an open mind.

Keep an open mind—it does not hurt and who knows, it could change your life, "one day at a time".

This booklet is for those of us who have been in the fellowship more than 90 days, in some cases for many years. Having said that, 20 years away from a bet does not mean it will be 20 years before we have another.

On the road of our recovery we are confronted by many obstacles, some are obvious and some are harder to spot, they even come disguised as assets.

We, the authors of this booklet, have tried to cover some of these obstacles. They are all based on our own experiences. We ask you to have an open mind, and sincerely hope that it will help you in your resolve to stay away from the next bet one day at a time.

Keep an open mind. - You will hear this statement often in GA meetings. It can easily be misunderstood by those who are still in that

frame of mind of not wanting to be told what to do, or of simply being afraid of the consequences.

For example newer members are often recommended to put all their salary into the home so that their partner should know exactly what they earn and so that a proper budget can be implemented. "No way!" is the immediate thought, "If I give all my earnings to my partner I will be left with nothing."

Or you will hear the suggestion that a member should look a little closer at the Recovery Programme and try to add some of it to their lives. Once again, comes the negative thought, "Who needs this programme? I am doing OK, I don't gamble, I attend meetings, what more do they want?" What "they" want is the best for you.

An open mind means being prepared to believe that the other person could be right. It also means having a willingness to try, within reason, methods that GA members may suggest to you.

Over a period of many years GA has developed methods that have proved successful

for many compulsive gamblers. In the first step of our Recovery Programme we admit that we are powerless over gambling and that our lives had become unmanageable and so "keeping an open mind" means being ready to accept help to get back the management of our lives.

We only have to listen to ourselves speaking in our therapy to agree that our old way of thinking was wrong and that maybe the GA way as suggested in this booklet is the right way.

Short Memory

Keep telling your story at your GA meeting and remind yourself of what brought you through the doors in the first place.

We assume that you have passed the "90 day" mark. You may or may not be free of gambling at this time, but let's assume that you are.

Life is a little bit better—the pain that brought you to GA is beginning to ease. Very soon, if

you are not careful, you will wonder if it was ever there at all. You will forget the pain. If you get to this stage there is a real danger that you will go back out there and get some more pain. So many times we have heard members say to a new member at his or her first meeting, "If only I could keep your therapy on tape and play it back to you when your memory fades."

The Short memory seems to be a characteristic of the compulsive gambler. How many times did we gamble all our money away, suffer the pain of defeat and the agony of reality only to be lifted to the highest levels full of sheer joy when we laid our hands on more money or had the occasional win. Instantly our past troubles were forgotten. "This time it will be different." It never is. It always ends with the same result—misery and pain.

Complacency

There are three times when we should pay this illness all the respect that it is due. The first is when we feel good and strong and things are going well for us. The second is when we are down and things are not going our way. The third is all the times between.

At any GA meeting, ask the members present the following question; "Stand up those of you who are not complacent?" Everyone will jump to their feet. Strange condition this complacency! No one admits to being complacent. Isn't this the very nature of complacency itself, to never believe you are complacent but to easily identify it in others?

Ask yourself these questions.

Do you still continue to look in the Q & A booklet, and review the Recovery Programme? Is your answer that you used to look at it daily, but now you are more experienced and no longer need to? That's complacency.

Do you feel that you are ahead of the newer member in understanding of the GA way, and cannot learn from them? That's complacency!

Do you believe that you have learnt more than some of the older members, forgetting that it was they who helped in your early recovery? That's complacency!

There are so many different faces of complacency, One thing for sure about complacency is that it is very easy to spot in others—but difficult to spot (or accept) in ourselves.

No Short Cuts to Recovery

Don't look for shortcuts. You don't need any. Enjoy recovery, *one day at a time*.

Common to all compulsive gamblers is *impatience*. We wanted all the good things in life yesterday. We were always on the lookout for short cuts, the easy way to get things, hence

we took the easiest way we knew—gambling, and always fell flat on our faces.

Recovery within our fellowship requires a different attitude. It can't be had overnight—there are no short cuts.

Look at members who have been several years free from gambling, one may even be your sponsor. Their life is good, they have peace of mind, their relationships are good, and they seem to have the answers to most situations and conduct themselves in a calm confident manner. You can't help but admire members such as this, and you can't help wanting what they have got. Have you taken the shortcut and simply *pretend* to be like them?

This is truly a shortcut back to gambling.

Others, the fortunate ones, discover that the only way to a lasting recovery is to take the long route, which requires an honest effort and a desire to get the Recovery Programme into their lives.

Some wise person once said, "There is no gain without pain." Ask any member who has had some genuine recovery in their lives and they

will tell you, they took the tried and tested route. They made the changes, however long it took. They made amends wherever possible. They took the Steps of Recovery starting with Number One and worked their way through them all one by one.

At this point you may be thinking to yourself, "But I came into this fellowship to get some peace and happiness back into my life, some respect and self-respect, now you are telling me it will take years of hard work."

Don't be despondent. You will find if you are on the true road to recovery, that each day will bring you joy, each achievement however small will strengthen your resolve to do more and the rewards will touch every department of your life.

Involvement

There is so much work to be done for this fellowship that anyone wanting involvement can be guaranteed as much or as little work as they want for as long as they want.

"Get involved"

"Involvement is the answer"

"Why don't you get involved?"

These words are often heard in GA meetings and members who are not involved themselves nod in agreement, without having a clue what "involvement" means. They think to themselves, "Where is this involvement? What is it? How do I get involved?" or sadly, "What's the benefit to me of involvement?"

One member told us about his early days in the fellowship. He wanted to be involved but his life as a compulsive gambler had warped his way of thinking so much that he thought that those members who were involved on committees etc., were hand picked by some unknown bunch of elders. He could not believe that they would let him become involved.

So he set out to get involved in smaller ways. He helped to get the room ready for meetings; he made the tea, and helped clear up afterwards. He learnt how to give talks by going with older members. He went on Twelve Step calls. He visited other groups. He made phone calls. He wrote to our monthly magazine. Eventually he began to feel a part of this fellowship.

As the years passed he went on from being group secretary to doing almost every job in the fellowship right up to National Secretary.

He is still gambling free and will tell you how much his achievement came from this involvement. He will tell you today that involvement is there for anyone who wants it, all you have to do is ask someone you see who is enjoying his or her involvement. They will welcome you with open arms.

Comparison—Envy

Comparison is for competitors, but in this fellowship of ours there is no place for competition, no prize for the top dog, and no dismissal for those of us who are not *yet* free from gambling.

No matter how long we have been in this fellowship and no matter how long we have been free from gambling we still find ourselves comparing ourselves with others.

"No harm in this", you may say, "comparison is natural—everybody does it." But everybody does *not* have the complex make-up of the compulsive gambler.

Suppose we compare ourselves to one of those very fortunate members for whom everything seems to go very well. A long time free from gambling, stable home life, successful at work, and all the trappings of success - nice home, holidays abroad, money in the bank, in other words very secure.

If we don't match up we may ask ourselves, "Why? I work hard at my programme, I work

hard every day at my job, and I work hard at building relationships with my family. In other words I give it my all and yet I don't get the rewards this other member gets, it's not fair."

If we get to this kind of thinking, we are in trouble, we are discontented, we are envious, we are full of self-pity. These are conditions a compulsive gambler must avoid. Instead, lets open our eyes to the many blessings we *do* have and not be blinded by the glitter of the other person's gold.

On the other hand, we may compare ourselves to the member who has very little in the way of material things and whose home life seems to be in regular turmoil. There are frequent bouts of gambling and in general this member is *not* very successful at what we call recovery. If we put in any effort, however slight, it is not very hard to come out in a favourable light when we compare ourselves to this member.

Remember there will always be greater and lesser persons than us. We should enjoy our own achievements and be glad for those who have achieved greater things, and for those less fortunate than ourselves we should put out the

hand of friendship and offer them the knowledge of our experience.

Responsibility

We have been irresponsible for a long time and it takes some time to get back on the right road. There is an old saying in GA: "Nothing is forever."

"I've stopped gambling for a while, so where is all the money I used to have for gambling? Why am I no better off?"

Throughout our gambling years most of us ignored the responsibilities of life, interested only in our own devious means of feeding our addiction. We were oblivious to the facts that bills had to be paid, children (if we had them) had to be fed and clothed, and all the other responsibilities had to be faced.

Have we overlooked the fact that a lot of the money we used for gambling was stolen, or that

it was money that should have been used to pay the household bills, etc?

So, as part of our recovery, we need to re-educate ourselves in the art of handling our finances and responsibilities.

In the early days some of us were so far out of touch we did not know where or how to begin. Our partner or someone close to us was a great help. Some of us started our recovery by handling no money at all, gradually easing into it as we began our recovery on a daily basis.

Recovery is not about abdicating from our responsibilities and shoving them upon someone else's shoulders.

We must learn to become responsible members of society, but we must be careful in the early days, not rushing it, not becoming overconfident. Getting help from our partner (if we have one), our sponsor and other GA members.

Honesty

Take it easy—honesty *will* come into your life if you let it.

Dishonesty and compulsive gambling go hand in hand. Have you or anyone else ever seen an active compulsive gambler who is honest? We doubt it.

In GA rooms all over the world you will hear the word "honesty" a lot, it is a virtue we feel we should strive for, and yet it is difficult to bring it into our lives.

Bringing honesty into your life is not easy—think just how long you have lived comfortably with dishonesty.

In any GA meeting you could find twenty different degrees of honesty—everyone recovers at their own pace. Each person is at a different stage of recovery and the degrees of honesty will vary from one member to another.

The general opinion of most GA members is that we must first of all be honest with ourselves. This is at least a starting point. As each of us recovers on a daily basis, and at our

own pace, we find that in spite of ourselves we are making gradual changes in our lives. These changes affect every department of our lives, our thoughts, our attitude, our emotions, and finally our honesty. These changes are from within so they are long lasting.

One member told us that when she was gambling and even for a spell after she came to GA and stopped gambling, she still could not stop stealing from her husband's jacket. She also told us that there came a point in her recovery when she knew she was making some progress because she no longer went looking for his jacket. Eventually she stopped stealing.

Another member, free from gambling, told us that he would go home in the evening and tell stories of his fantastic day when in reality his day had been pretty dull and ordinary. Gradually as recovery and honesty came in to his life he would go home and if he described a fantastic day, then this time it was true!

Believe us, we need all the friends we can get.

So far in this booklet we have touched on some of the dangers to your recovery. This one we believe, through our experience is one of the most dangerous.

So many members over the years have left the fellowship and trundled back down that road that leads to misery using the excuse, whether real or not, of a bad personality clash.

In any event it is something we do not need. As we have said before, we compulsive gamblers are complex characters, we can be very immature, we sometimes suffer from self-pity and we become resentful at the drop of a hat. Mix all these character defects and add a few more, and what have your got?

Someone who is looking for a personality to clash with.

What steps can *you* take to ensure that you don't fall victim to this dangerous situation? Firstly you must try to keep an open mind. If

you disagree with another member either at a GA meeting or outside, don't go away and stew on if for a few days thinking only from your point of view. If you do this, you may get even angrier and before you know it you are bang in the middle of a personality clash. This can lead to all sorts of problems.

You may decide to avoid the meetings the other member attends and if the member attends many meetings in your area you have an even bigger problem. You may decide to seek them out at a meeting for another verbal attack and succeed only in disrupting the meeting. The meeting will no doubt let you know! You may then clash with the whole group. And on and on it goes until it is *you against the world* once more.

The best way to deal with this is to approach the member in person or on the telephone, keeping an *open mind* and seeing the issue from both sides.

Make a friend of this member.

Compassion

Compassion comes from knowing how the other person feels and who more than us know how a new or struggling member feels. Carry this message well and you will be rewarded in the same way as we were, when we carried the message to you.

You may be one of the very fortunate members who came into the fellowship just at the right time in your life, when you had reached rock bottom and had a real desire to stop gambling.

You will be keen to carry this newfound message of hope to others less fortunate than yourself. You have a rare gift, a gift that kings, queens and heads of state rarely possess. You have been there. You have walked in your brother's shoes. Handle it with great care or you could lose it.

In attempting to carry this message to a fellow sufferer we give a lot of ourselves in the process and sometimes when we don't get the expected feedback we get very frustrated and when this frustration turns to anger we almost always lose the ability to help this particular member.

Remember each GA member is an individual. We are not all clones of each other. We all respond in different ways to different things.

We *must* have compassion when we are dealing with a new or struggling member. Without this essential ingredient we are cold and this is conveyed to the other member. When this happens we find we have been of little or no help.

Remember some are sicker than others, it may take them a little more time to get this programme into their lives. In helping others your inner strength will grow and in turn your compassion will deepen.

***Tell it as it is*. And your recovery will be steady and sure.**

You suffer from an illness that progressively got worse until you reached your personal rock bottom and sought help from GA. Your recovery is also gradual—progressing on a daily basis. This means that your character defects won't go away overnight, they will still be there and it is your task to work away at them *one day at a time* and to be satisfied with your progress.

But, be warned not to fall into the trap of telling other members how to run their lives and rid themselves of certain character defects, allowing them to believe that you yourself have overcome these problems. Don't preach a brand of honesty that you don't have yourself. You are one in the glass; you know how it is, so tell it that way.

Admit that you struggle in certain areas of your life. You are amongst people who have been there, or are there, and they will only admire your honesty. Also, you can do untold damage to other members if they discover you have been

telling lies, you can undermine the whole fellowship for them, they ask themselves, "If this member is lying who else is?"

Higher Power

These doors are open to anyone with a desire to stop gambling, churchgoers, atheists or agnostics; this programme works equally well for all types, including *you*.

The mere mention of God or a Higher Power seems to frighten some newer members. Why? Well we believe that they may think that GA is a religious fellowship and that we will eventually get around to preaching to them.

Nothing could be further from the truth. When we speak of a Higher Power we mean a power greater than us and lets face it, when we come through the doors of GA that would not be hard

to find. In the first step of recovery we admitted that we were *powerless* over gambling, so obviously gambling was a power greater than us. On entering GA, we find ourselves amongst a group of people who are together beating gambling on a daily basis, surely there is a power at work here. In step two we eventually come to believe that this power can restore us to a normal way of thinking and living, and in step three we are asked to make a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of this power. Maybe you will ask yourself, "Is this power GA itself?" If you are comfortable with this then so be it.

This fellowship is designed for you and your needs. Whatever your beliefs there is a place for you. No one demands that you believe in a God – if you do that's fine too. No one will argue with you.

Gam-Anon Resentment

One member we spoke to said he would be eternally grateful to GamAnon for they have given him a wife and partner with whom he can share his life on an equal basis, and we believe that that is the way it should be.

Gam-Anon is a fellowship made up of those who have lived with or have been seriously affected by the gambling problem. They may be wives, husbands, parents, partners or relatives of the gambler. Within GamAnon they learn how to live with or live without the gambler who is affecting them.

Currently the majority of GamAnon members are wives of male compulsive gamblers, and it is this group of male members we are addressing here. The comments are however equally true for any partners where one is a GA member and the other GamAnon.

For many of us, when we joined GA, it was a bonus that our wives also joined GamAnon. It was a sign to us that they were going to stand by us, give us another chance.

Let's assume then that we came with an honest desire to stop gambling and lead more productive lives. The fact that our wives were right behind us was an added strength to our recovery. As the weeks and months passed we began to notice changes in our wives. No longer were they willing to accept every word we said without question. No longer did they share our depression when we were not feeling good. No longer would they accept our abdication from responsibility.

This was a whole new ball game. We were not used to this, after all we were the dominant partners, we called the shots, whether the issue was physical, mental, spiritual, or financial.

Whether or not they or we liked to admit it, while gambling, our wives had become extensions of us. When we cried they cried. When we laughed they laughed. In fact our wives had become in some cases like small children with little or no control over their own lives and emotions. But now they attended GamAnon meetings we were faced with wives who were demanding their *rights* as a wife and more important as a human being. A wife who

was growing in strength and character, beginning to discover her strengths and work on her weaknesses. We became frustrated, angry, confused. Not only did we have to face the facts about ourselves, we had to cope with the fact that we had another adult *human being* living with us and worse, an adult human being who was developing a mind of her own.

What was causing all these changes? She was never like this before, we told ourselves. We could always get our own way before on any issue. The answer was easy—it was that GamAnon! It was they who were changing her. "Busybodies!"

As time passed we continued living with our resentment until it became a real problem affecting our home life and our recovery. Most of us did not talk to anyone about this problem initially, continuing to build on our resentment until it turned to hate for a fellowship that was moulding a human being who could stand up on her own and make her own decisions. What a bonus and yet we could not see it that way.

Unfortunately this problem has taken some of our members back out the door and back to their

addiction to gambling. Where they are today is anybody's guess. As for the rest of us we spoke about this problem to our meeting, to our sponsors and to GamAnon members and got answers that helped us overcome our resentment to GamAnon.

Procrastination

Get it done today, because this is the only day there is.

"Never do today what you can leave until tomorrow." Some very unwise person once made this statement.

Procrastination is something everyone suffers from, from time to time. Strangely enough some of the greatest procrastinators we know are compulsive gamblers (I wonder why we left this article to last!). Changes–I will change later. Debts–I will see to them tomorrow. An extra

meeting–I will get one in next week. And so on and so on, always another day.

When we join GA those of us who had a genuine desire for a better life free from gambling seemed to get down to tackling the major problems from the outset, but many of us neglected those "little" problems saying we would deal with them later. But little problems to a compulsive gambler have a habit of developing into big problems.

Procrastinators will use any excuse: I am too tired; I am too busy; I am not in the right frame of mind just now. Some cunning ones will even say, "I practise one day at a time." Just let me get through this one day without any hassle and I will do it all tomorrow.

The best and most rewarding way is to deal with each little problem as it arises, and be in control of your life. You won't have those little problems niggling away at your brain. You won't have people, partners, sponsors, and GA members constantly asking you if you have done this or that *yet*. And most importantly you won't have little problems growing into big problems that you can't face and possibly leading you back to gambling.

Just for Today I will have a programme

Providing we do not gamble we have nothing to fear in our new life.

By having a daily programme of things to do we can avoid the problems of forgetfulness, indecision and haste. It is very important that we keep ourselves occupied so that we do not become bored and seek excitement by going back to gambling. If by the end of the day we have not accomplished all of the items on our list, then these should be put at the top of the next day's schedule.

Just for Today I will have a quiet half-hour all by myself and relax.

It is important, in the hectic world in which we live that we make time each day to relax and try to get a better perspective of our lives. During this half-hour we can try to get an understanding of our illness and what is required to maintain and improve our recovery. This means looking not only at the areas of weakness but also our strengths.

Just for Today I will be unafraid

Fear is a negative emotion that can stifle our recovery. When we were afraid it prevented us from being able to do a thorough financial and moral inventory of ourselves. It stopped us making the list of all those we had harmed, and from actually making amends. We could not accept the concept of a higher power, let alone be able to hand over our will and lives to it. Fear of rejection hampered our willingness to be honest and to be open about ourselves to those around us. This led to even more problems when the truth eventually came out.

Yes, this fellowship works. It takes irresponsible, immature, compulsive gamblers and moulds them into decent, responsible human beings. Yes, this fellowship works—if you want it to work.

One thing we had in abundance when we were at our peak in gambling was faith—faith in our own ability as gamblers. Our skill at gambling would take us out of our present troubles and lead us on to better lives, secure in the fact that the next big win was just around the corner. It was this unshakeable faith that kept most of us sane.

Sadly, again for most of us, this faith was shattered when we found ourselves in the depth of misery, with nowhere to turn except Gamblers Anonymous.

In the world of gambling there are very very few about whom you can say, "They have a marvellous life due to gambling", they are very much in the minority.

In the world of compulsive gamblers there is no one about whom you can say, "They have a

good life." Most of them are in financial difficulties, they have serious problems in their relationships, and they hardly ever accept responsibility or reality, in short their lives are unmanageable.

Take a good look around you at the compulsive gamblers in this fellowship. Do they look unhappy, do they look as if they are in financial difficulty? Ask them about their home lives, their relationships and how they feel within themselves. The vast majority of them lead happy productive lives now that they have arrested gambling on a daily basis. Yet when you listen to their therapies you will find that they came from the same hell and misery as yourself.

Summary

In this booklet we have covered just some of the obstacles with which we are faced on our road of recovery. We have not given **all** the answers to these problems simply because we don't yet know all the answers. We are compulsive gamblers still learning, still maturing and still trying to stay away from the first bet. If in some way we have made your journey a little easier then we will have done what we intended.

We hope you have read through the pages with an open mind and will put into practice the things you have read.

For instance, referring to the article on involvement, you may ask, "Who wrote this booklet?"

We will tell you—it has been written by some ordinary members who want some involvement and want to give a little back in gratitude for what they have received.

Some other valuable GA booklets:

Deviations on the Road to Recovery

The Twelve Steps of Recovery

The Twelve Steps of Unity

Who Am I?

Towards the first 90 days

Towards Recovery in Prison

God grant me the serenity
to accept the things
I cannot change...
Courage to change
the things I can...
and wisdom
to know the difference.