

Welcome to Business Debtors Anonymous (BDA)

A 12-Step Program of Recovery from Debting & Underearning for Business Owners

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PREAMBLE

Debtors Anonymous (DA) is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with one another that they may solve their common problem and help others recover from compulsive debting. The only requirement for membership in DA is a desire to stop incurring unsecured debt. There are no dues or fees for DA membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. DA 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 debting one day at a time and to help other compulsive debtors to stop incurring unsecured debt.

What is Business Debtors Anonymous?

Business Debtors Anonymous (BDA) is a distinct and dynamic but not separate part of DA, created to focus on the recovery of members of the fellowship who are business owners. Together, members of BDA support one another in applying the DA principles and tools when owning and running a business. However, as part of DA, there is no separate membership for attending Business Debtors Anonymous meetings. It is understood that paying bills for goods and services rendered according to agreed upon terms does not constitute debting.

How do you know if you are a compulsively debting business owner? Some of the experiences and behaviors that led to compulsive debting were:

- We neither knew when bills or taxes were due, nor did we remember if and what we had paid or still owed.
- We confused our personal finances with our business finances.
- We often did not know the exact costs of our overhead, operating expenses or profit margins.
- We had no business plan.
- We lived in a state of deprivation for the sake of our business.
- We under valued and under priced our goods and services.

In BDA we learn to operate our business along spiritual lines and find that operating in integrity and being of service is profitable. We accumulate cash reserves, pay our bills and employees on time, and build a thriving, prosperous, debt-free and financially solvent business.

Additional tools for Business Debtors Anonymous:

- We keep separate professional and personal financial records and bank accounts.
- We keep clean, orderly and accurate financial records.
- We pay ourselves a salary.
- We pay our bills and invoice our clients promptly.
- We remain mindful that dollars spent should generate revenue, and compare prices before making purchases.

NOTES TO NEWCOMERS

Welcome to Debtors Anonymous! Here you can find a new way of living that offers recovery from compulsive debting and hope for a healthier, happier, more prosperous life. We suggest that you keep an open mind and attend at least six meetings as soon as possible. If you do not like one meeting, attend another. The important thing is to keep coming back.

Here are some suggestions to help you get started:

- First and foremost, we suggest that you stop incurring any new unsecured debt, one day at a time. Unsecured debt is any debt not backed up by some form of collateral. Although refraining from compulsive debting may be difficult and painful, it establishes a solid foundation for our recovery.
- To gain clarity about how we use money, we record our expenses and our income. A good way to do this is to buy a small notebook or planner that is easy to carry. Throughout each Day, we write down everything we spend and any income we receive, no matter how small the amount. Do not be discouraged if you cannot keep perfect records. If you lose track, begin again as soon as you can. We believe in progress, not perfection.
- We recommend purchasing and reading DA literature, where you may find useful suggestions and new insights. We also find it helpful to read these books: A Currency of Hope, Alcoholics Anonymous, and The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous. When you read AA literature, we suggest substituting the words debt and debting for alcohol and drinking.
- We suggest that you begin by working the Twelve Steps and by practicing the DA Tools because we did not arrive overnight at the circumstances that brought us to DA, so solving our problems has required time and effort. While using the Tools of DA provides some relief from compulsive debting, working the Steps leads to recovery.
- We suggest that you work the Twelve Steps in order, preferably with a sponsor or an experienced DA member who has worked and continues to work the Steps to the best of his or her ability. For us, true, long-lasting recovery results from a spiritual experience gained by working the Steps.
- We recommend beginning with Step One. The sense of despair or "hitting bottom" we felt when we first came to DA was the first step in our recovery. We saw that our own attempts to scheme and manipulate our debts did not work. We admitted that we were powerless over debt. We were ready to ask for help.
- To help you work the program, we suggest asking someone who lives the recovery you want to be your sponsor. Sponsors help us work the 12 Steps, use the DA Tools and carry out our Action Plans.
- After you have recorded your income and expenses for (preferably) 30-45 Days, attended at least six meetings, and made a commitment to DA, we suggest that you ask two members of DA, (usually a man and a woman) to meet with you in a Pressure Relief Meeting. These two DA members should have abstained from incurring unsecured debt for

at least 90 Days and had two Pressure Relief Meetings, and if possible they should have recovery from issues similar to yours. As the members of your Pressure Relief Group, they will help you review your situation and formulate a Spending Plan and an Action Plan.

- We suggest that you practice the principle of anonymity. Who we see and what we hear at meetings and in private conversations is kept confidential. This principle allows all members the freedom to speak openly and honestly without fear that our words or deeds may be used to harm us. Please respect the anonymity of all DA members.

If you decide that DA is not for you, keep us in mind for the future. You are always welcome. Debtors Anonymous will be here when you need it.

BDA BEGINNER'S TOOLKIT

We have found the following suggestions helpful in recovery through Business Debtors Anonymous:

1. Create a personal spending plan via Debtors Anonymous
2. Work out a 12 month business plan: include all costs, projected revenue, and payroll—be sure to include you own salary.
3. Review the Business Plan with a Business Pressure Relief Group meeting.
4. Open and maintain a separate business checking account. Separate personal from business finances.
5. Create an action plan to ensure the business bookkeeping records are clean, orderly and accurate.
6. Be willing to be both in charge and responsible for all aspects of your business. Professional help—accountants, lawyers and consultants—are working for you and are not your business' higher power
7. Show up for your business and keep your focus on generating revenue. Your business collars and time spent should generate revenue.
8. Be very clear about your profit. Know your profit margins on each and every business transaction whether it involves a product or service. Write it down, use your calculator, run a tape, double check the numbers.
9. Detach from difficult personalities: clients, partners, employees, and your own DIS-ease. Remember in all your business transactions its principles before personalities.
10. If you have a problem with record keeping, billing or collections: BOOKEND. Bookending is a very valuable tool for you and the person you call. It's a form of service and commitment to recovery for all parties involved.
11. Be aware of the competition, but don't worry about it. There is enough for everybody. It is and abundant universe. Consider your competition as a valuable teacher. Don't compare your business insides with your competitor's outside.
12. If you feel either high or low when closing "deals" or financial commitments: BOOKEND. Try not to dramatize!
13. Pay bills promptly and get payments due to you promptly.
14. Put all your business agreements in writing. To save money and confusion, write your own letters of agreement before seeking legal advise.
15. Take care of yourself. Remember HALT: don't get too Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired.
16. Begin building cash reserves—no matter how humble.
17. Compare prices before contracting, giving an order, or signing a check. When it's time write a check, stop all other activities and THINK.
18. Don't debt "one Day at a time" and keep coming back to DA and BDA

BDA DEBTING SIGNALS

As business owners, we knew we were heading for problems:

- when we paid invoices prematurely instead of according to agreed-upon terms.
- when payments were not made within agreed-upon terms.
- when we borrowed from personal funds for business expenses.
- when financial commitments were made on anticipated sales.
- when we held on to clients who were slow or bad payers.
- when a reasonable and comfortable profit margin was not factored into our pricing
- when we did not know the exact costs of our overhead and running expenses.
- when we cut our salaries in order to save the business money.
- when we operated without a comprehensive business plan.
- when we started missing BDA meetings and lost contact with our business Pressure Relief Group.

BDA RECOVERY ISSUES

Our goal is to be willing and able to build a prosperous, debt-free and solvent business using the principles of the program in all our business and personal affairs. To accomplish this, we took the following actions:

1. We detached from the business with a renewed commitment to the business.
2. We surrendered to the idea that we are neither our business nor our debts.
3. We made a commitment to ourselves, to God and our pressure Relief Groups to repay all our creditors.
4. We maintained a prosperous cash flow to meet our business needs.
5. We took charge of all our business affairs and obligations.
6. We structured a supportive and reasonable overhead for the business, sufficient to meet our needs.
7. We monitored all our business expenses with clarity, being in charge of all our accountants, bookkeepers and other financial and legal advisors.
8. Over time, we built and maintained prudent cash reserves.
9. We took the salaries, benefits and vacation time due us on a regular basis, just as we expected our employees to do.
10. We took responsibility for maintenance of our business records.
11. We worked spiritually with other people—employees, vendors, clients, and competitors—remembering that it is principles before personalities.
12. We came to know that through business highs and business lows, we were going nowhere unless we were on our spiritual track.

THE 12 SIGNS OF COMPULSIVE DEBTING

1. Being unclear about your financial situation. Not knowing account balances, monthly expenses, loan interest rates, fees, fines, or contractual obligations.
2. Frequently "borrowing" items such as books, pens, or small amounts of money from friends and others, and failing to return them.

3. Poor saving habits. Not planning for taxes, retirement or other not-recurring but predictable items, and then feeling surprised when they come due; a "live for today, don't worry about tomorrow" attitude."
4. Compulsive shopping: Being unable to pass up a "good deal"; making impulsive purchases; leaving price tags on clothes so they can be returned; not using items you've purchased.
5. Difficulty in meeting basic financial or personal obligations, and/or an inordinate sense of accomplishment when such obligations are met.
6. A different feeling when buying things on credit than when paying cash, a feeling of being in the club, of being accepted, of being grown up.
7. Living in chaos and drama around money: Using one credit card to pay another; bouncing checks; always having a financial crisis to contend with.
8. A tendency to live on the edge: Living paycheck to paycheck; taking risks with health and car insurance coverage; writing checks hoping money will appear to cover them.
9. Unwarranted inhibition and embarrassment in what should be a normal discussion of money.
10. Overworking or underearning: Working extra hours to earn money to pay creditors; using time inefficiently; taking jobs below your skill and education level.
11. An unwillingness to care for and value yourself: Living in self-imposed deprivation; denying your basic needs in order to pay your creditors.
12. A feeling or hope that someone will take care of you if necessary, so that you won't really get into serious financial trouble, that there will always be someone you can turn to.

THE 12 TOOLS OF DEBTORS ANONYMOUS

Recovery from compulsive debting begins when we stop incurring new, unsecured debt, one Day at a time. (Unsecured debt is any debt that is not backed up by some form of collateral, such as a house or other asset.) We attain a daily reprieve from compulsive debting by practicing the Twelve Steps and by using the following Tools.

1. **Meetings** - We attend meetings at which we share our experience, strength, and hope with one another. Unless we give to newcomers what we have received from DA, we cannot keep it ourselves.
2. **Record Maintenance** - We maintain records of our daily income and expenses, of our savings, and of the retirement of any portions of our outstanding debts.
3. **Sponsorship** - We have found it essential to our recovery to have a sponsor and to be a sponsor. A sponsor is a recovering debtor who guides us through the Twelve Steps and shares his or her own experience, strength, and recovery.
4. **Pressure Relief Groups and Pressure Relief Meetings** - After we have gained some familiarity with the DA program, we organize Pressure Relief Groups consisting of ourselves and two other recovering debtors who have not incurred unsecured debt for at least 90 Days and who usually have more experience in the program. The group meets in a series of Pressure Relief Meetings to review our financial situation. These meetings typically result in the formulation of a spending plan and an action plan.
5. **Spending Plan** - The spending plan puts our needs first and gives us clarity and balance in our spending. It includes categories for income, spending, debt payment, and savings (to help us build cash reserves, however humble). The income plan helps us focus on increasing our income. The debt payment category guides us in

- making realistic payment arrangements without depriving ourselves. Savings can include prudent reserve, retirement, and special purchases.
6. **Action Plan** - With the help of our Pressure Relief Group, we develop a list of specific actions for resolving our debts, improving our financial situation, and achieving our goals without incurring unsecured debt.
 7. **The Telephone and the Internet** - We maintain frequent contact with other DA members by using the telephone, e-mail, and other forms of communication. We make a point of talking to other DA members before and after taking difficult steps in our recovery.
 8. **DA and A.A. Literature** - We study the literature of Debtors Anonymous and of Alcoholics Anonymous to strengthen our understanding of compulsive disease and of recovery from compulsive debting. In A.A. literature we can identify with many of the situations described by substituting the words “compulsive debt” for “alcohol.”
 9. **Awareness** - We maintain awareness of the danger of compulsive debt by taking note of bank, loan company, and credit card advertising and their effects on us. We also remain aware of our personal finances in order to avoid vagueness, which can lead to compulsive debting or spending.
 10. **Business Meetings** - We attend business meetings that are held monthly. Many of us have long harbored feelings that “business” was not a part of our lives but for others more qualified. Yet participation in running our own program teaches us how our organization operates, and also helps us to become responsible for our own recovery.
 11. **Service** - We perform service at every level: personal, meeting, Intergroup, and World Service. Service is vital to our recovery. Only through service can we give to others what so generously has been given to us.
 12. **Anonymity** - We practice anonymity, which allows us freedom of expression by assuring us that what we say at meetings or to other DA members at any time will not be repeated.

THE 12 STEPS OF DEBTORS ANONYMOUS

1. We admitted we were powerless over debt—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 Him.
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. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him 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 Him, praying only for knowledge of His 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 compulsive debtors, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF DEBTORS ANONYMOUS

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon DA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority--a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for DA membership is a desire to stop incurring unsecured debt.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or DA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose--to carry its message to the debtor who still suffers.
6. A DA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the DA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every DA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Debtors Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. DA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Debtors Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the DA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

THE 12 PROMISES OF DEBTORS ANONYMOUS

In the program of Debtors Anonymous, we come together to share our experience, strength and hope so that we may recover from the disease of compulsive debting. When we work D.A.'s Twelve Steps and use the DA Tools, we begin to receive these gifts of the program:

1. Where once we felt despair, we will experience a newfound hope.
2. Clarity will replace vagueness; we will intuitively know how to handle situations that used to baffle us.
3. We will live within our means, yet our means will not define us.
4. We will begin to live a prosperous life, unencumbered by fear, worry, resentment or debt.
5. We will realize that we are enough; we will value ourselves and our contributions.
6. Isolation will give way to fellowship; faith will replace fear.
7. We will recognize that there is enough; our resources will be generous and we will share them with others and with DA .

8. We will cease to compare ourselves to others; jealousy and envy will fade.
9. Acceptance and Gratitude will replace regret, self pity and longing.
10. We will no longer fear the truth; we will move from hiding in denial to living in reality.
11. Honesty will guide our actions towards a rich life filled with meaning and purpose.
12. We will recognize a Power Greater than ourselves as the source of our abundance nce; we realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Are these extravagant promises? *We think not*; they are well within our means. When we work this program with integrity and to the best of our ability, one day at a time, a life of prosperity and serenity will be ours.

ANONYMITY & LITERATURE

Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities. — Twelfth Tradition of Debtors Anonymous

Anonymity is an important principle in the Debtors Anonymous program of recovery; it takes on different meanings depending on the circumstances. On a personal level, anonymity means that DA members do not reveal the names of anyone we see at meetings nor what is shared at meetings. This safeguard protects all members from identification as compulsive debtors and provides the assurance that what we share is not repeated. This is very important for all of us, and is usually a newcomer's special concern.

At the media level, anonymity means we do not disclose our membership in DA in the press, TV, film, or any other media. On this level, anonymity promotes the equality of all members in the fellowship and helps to further develop the humility that is so important to our recovery.

As a spiritual principle, anonymity is part of the practice of humility and gratitude. "Principles before personalities" is a statement of our willingness to trust that we are equal and that our higher power speaks through all of us, without judgment. No one person speaks as an authority on the program. No position in society exemplifies spiritual principles better than others.

DA Literature - DA does not endorse any literature outside of its own World Service Conference-approved literature – which assures that our message will be clear, consistent and will reflect the principles of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of DA .

It is not the purpose of DA to acquaint its members with all the approaches to the problem of compulsive debting—only our approach. Conference-approved literature keeps the focus on our spiritual message. As our program grows we each benefit in many ways. We are able to attend meetings anywhere in the world, knowing that the DA message of hope and help will be consistent and uniform.

Outside literature has a place in the recovery process, but can conflict with the DA message and divert us from our primary purpose.

DA literature is available at meetings and from the Debtors Anonymous General Service Office: Box 920888, Needham, MA 02492-0009. 781-453-2743 Visit the DA website at: www.debtorsanonymous.org.