

May 2018 - Region One OA Conference Call – FOCUS ON STRONG MEETINGS

Members were asked to share their experience, strength and hope on the following questions:

1. What is a "strong meeting" for you?
2. If someone told you that their meeting was not doing well, what specific suggestions would you offer to help them strengthen their meeting?
3. What actions might you be willing to take to help a struggling meeting or to strengthen a meeting you attend?

Here is a summary of their shares:

1. Meetings I consider strong are fully self-supporting. There is rotation of leadership, long-term abstinence and lots of sponsors. If your meeting is not doing well, I'd say get connected – if you're not connected to intergroup, get connected. If you're not connected to region, get connected. Actions I could take to help a meeting is to go and share my experience of service, because I know how important it is to me in having a strong program. And the strong meetings I attend are the ones where lots of people are involved in service. There are lots of different ways to do service, but I think what's especially important is sponsorship and service above the meeting level.
2. A strong meeting for me always has to do with people willing to be honest with themselves, and to tell the truth about what's going on. It's been my experience that the more someone is speaking up to say what's going on, where they are, which requires a lot of humility and willingness – on a spiritual level it seems to go out in some waves and other people end up calling them. I was involved with a meeting that was always just two or three people for several years. We were always teetering on the edge. We talked about wanting to do public information, reaching out to doctors and others that might encourage people to come to the meeting, but I believe it's always a spiritual thing, a God thing. There's a reason why some meetings don't make it. But one of the issues is having people who are willing to commit. In our meeting, for years there were just three of us. We came no matter what. We hung in there. One thing that strengthened us was that we got on a text string. We were always communicating with each other – "who's going to be there today?" or "I'm running late." We texted each other with what was going on during the week. The more we kept this up, and the more we kept being willing to show up – the waves went out there. Our meeting now has six to eight people on a regular basis now. You keep doing what you can. You need people with good abstinence, too, and strong sponsorship.
3. My home meeting is a rural, with a growing elderly population and people have moved away. The meeting is dwindling. One of the things I started just today was to have it be a call-in meeting through freeconferencecall.com as well as a face to face meeting. I'm hoping that will strengthen our meeting.
4. At our meeting, what is helping us is that everyone participates. At each meeting everyone reads, everyone shares. We have ongoing contact with each other, we work our programs together. I think if anyone needed help they would find people willing to get together so they could open up.

We have this strength in our group, the action of listening to each other really helps. Participation is the biggest thing. It's working for our group, we're getting better and better. We've also tried to rotate things that we do – right now on the fifth meeting of the month we have a speaker meeting, not necessarily someone from outside the meeting. It can be someone from our group. The idea of keeping something going here is really a big privilege for us.

5. We have about a 300 mile wide intergroup. I became Chair in February, and my goal was to get to every meeting. So far I've made it to ten, so there are a few left. I try to bring another OA member along with me on these visits, and now some people from the Mountain meetings are coming down to the Boise meetings that I recommended to them. Their meetings are only two or three people. But I think that that cross-pollination has been really positive. We're having a workshop next week, and I'm going to encourage our meetings if they're going on vacation, or making a day trip, go to one of our other meetings. It has been such fun to get to and encourage the smaller meetings. Now they feel they have a face and a name from intergroup. People are driving two to four hours now to get to a different meeting. So we're getting fresh faces, fresh stories.
6. For meetings not doing well, I'd suggest that you host a Skype speaker meeting. It will connect you with the rest of Region and you'll get an opportunity to see what it is that you have to offer. I know that the meeting that recently hosted the Region Skype meeting is benefiting from that experience.
7. If your meeting is a "hybrid" (face-to-face with call-in option) meeting, you can go to the OA website and edit your meeting details at <https://oa.org/groupsservice-bodies/meeting-changes/edit-a-meeting/>. Add the call-in number and access code into the meeting notes. This would make it visible to everyone. You could also ask Region One to put this information on our website, and you can post a notice on the Region One Yahoo Group. Use the "Tupperware Bowl" method to help hear people who have called in on a cell phone – put the phone in a bowl and it will amplify the sound. You can also have sharing around the circle, in order, passing the phone so that the person on the phone can hear all the shares. Put the caller on speaker phone so the meeting can hear them share.
8. We have a secretary who has lent some structure to our meetings, and for some reason, this has really helped. We now have a sign-up calendar for leading the meeting, so the leader has (hopefully) given a bit of thought and preparation to their share. The leader shares for five minutes, and the format asks that they share specifically on how they use the steps, traditions and tools to abstain from compulsive eating. Sponsors are identified. The format asks those willing to stay five minutes after the meeting to help someone work out a plan for abstinence for the day.
9. I read an article in Lifeline that suggested actually assigning a person to follow up with newcomers. We realized that none of our meetings were doing that – we had no plan for follow-up. We gave them our phone numbers, but we know that ninety percent of the time they didn't call. At one of my meetings, we now have a person assigned to call that newcomer during the week. When we all had the responsibility, no one called. We were missing the opportunity to encourage them.

10. One thing that I find myself saying sometimes when I don't think a meeting is very strong, is "Geez, I don't hear anyone sharing about xxx. Then one day I realized that I was saying that, but that I wasn't making those kinds of shares, either. If I thought that people should start sharing more about recovery or how they worked through specific problems, instead of being critical of others, that I should be sharing that kind of thing, and that other people would probably follow. Maybe I should do the thing I'm being critical of others for not doing. And, about newcomers, sometimes I've called newcomers in their first week, they don't have a question. I just offer to share my experience if they do have any questions. People have been very receptive.
11. We go over the Strong Meeting Checklist in my meeting every six months.
12. My home meeting got stronger when we started doing a Big Book study the 2nd and 4th Tuesday during the meeting time. When we finished the study, we started over, listening to tapes of Joe and Charlie's Big Book study every 2nd and 4th Tuesday leaving half an hour of the meeting for group sharing. (This share was received via email).
13. Here is another suggestion I have especially for small meetings, in small towns. I suggest using a rotating format – do a step study one meeting per month; a Tradition study one meeting per month, a podcast speaker meeting once a month, and a literature meeting - check out the pamphlets or Lifeline magazine to read and share about. If there is a 5th meeting of the month have it be leaders choice or something else. I attended a very strong 3 person meeting for years with a podcast speaker at every meeting – all 3 of the people had more than 10 years in program but just couldn't seem to grow. Then due to some unforeseen circumstances we changed the location and all of a sudden this meeting has grown to having 7 – 10 people on a regular basis. Those of us who used to come, still come and sometimes we sit back and marvel at the growth. (This share was received via email).

Thank you, everyone, for your shares on this topic!

More ideas on strong meetings??? Please email me at chairr1@gmail.com. I would love to hear from you, and I want to collect shares on this topic to use as a resource in Region one.

Please consider taking these questions back to your meeting. Posing these questions can raise awareness and be a type of 10th Step for our meetings.