3 Using the 24 Hour Plan

In our drinking days, we often had such bad times that we swore, "Never again." We took pledges for as long as a year, or promised someone we would not touch the stuff for three weeks, or three months. And of course, we tried going on the wagon for various periods of time.

We were absolutely sincere when we voiced these declarations through gritted teeth. With all our hearts, we wanted never to be drunk again. We were determined. We swore off drinking altogether, intending to stay off alcohol well into some indefinite future.

Yet, in spite of our intentions, the outcome was almost inevitably the same. Eventually, the memory of the vows, and of the suffering that led to them, faded. We drank again, and we wound up in more trouble. Our dry "forever" had not lasted very long.

Some of us who took such pledges had a private reservation: We told ourselves that the promise not to drink applied only to "hard stuff," not to beer or wine. In that way we learned, if we did not already know it, that beer and wine could get us drunk, too—we just had to drink more of them to get the same effects we got on distilled spirits. We wound up as stoned on beer or wine as we had been before on the hard stuff.

Yes, others of us did give up alcohol completely and did keep our pledges exactly as promised, until the time was up.... Then we ended the drought by drinking again, and were soon right back in trouble, with an additional load of new guilt and remorse.

With such struggles behind us now, in AA we try to avoid the expressions "on the wagon" and "taking the pledge." They remind us of our failures.

Although we realize that alcoholism is a permanent, irreversible condition, our experience has taught us to make no long-term promises about staying sober. We have found it more realistic—and more successful—to say, "I am not taking a drink *just for today*."

Even if we drank yesterday, we can plan not to drink today. We may drink tomorrow—who knows whether we'll even be alive then?—but for *this* 24 hours, we decide not to drink. No matter what the temptation or provocation, we determine to go to any extremes necessary to avoid a drink *today*.

Our friends and families are understandably weary of hearing us vow "This time I really mean it," only to see us lurch home loaded. So we do not promise them, or even each other, not to drink. Each of us promises only herself or himself. It is, after all, our own health and life at stake. We, not our family or friends, have to take the necessary steps to stay well.

If the desire to drink is really strong, many of us chop the 24 hours down into smaller parts. We decide not to drink for, say, at least one hour. We can endure the temporary discomfort of not drinking for just one more hour; then one more, and so on. Many of us began our recovery in just this way. In fact, *every recovery from alcoholism began with one sober hour*.

One version of this is simply postponing the (next) drink.

(How about it? Still sipping soda? Have you really postponed that drink we mentioned back on page 1? If so, this can be the beginning of your recovery.)

The next drink will be available later, but right now, we postpone taking it at least for the present day, or moment (Say, for the rest of this page?)

The 24-hour plan is very flexible. We can start it afresh at any time, wherever we are. At home, at work, in a bar or in a hospital room, at 4:00 p.m. or at 3:00 a.m., we can decide right then not to take a drink during the forthcoming 24 hours, or five minutes.

Continually renewed, this plan avoids the weakness of such methods as going on the wagon or taking a pledge. A period on the wagon and a pledge both eventually came, as planned, to an end—so we felt free to drink again. But today is always here, life is daily; today is all we have; and anybody can go one day without drinking.

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First, we try living in the now just in order to stay sober—and it works. Once the idea has become a part of our thinking, we find that living life in 24-hour segments is an effective and satisfying way to handle many other matters as well.