



## Slogans can inspire us all for the New Year

There's a story sometimes told by members of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA): A mountain climber stumbles off the edge of a cliff. He manages to break his fall by grabbing a branch on a tree that overlooks the ravine. Hanging for his life, he calls up to heaven. "If there's anybody up there, help me--please!"

A thunderous voice booms from the clouds: "Let go, and I will protect you."

The man pauses for a moment to think. Finally he shouts, "Is there anyone else I can talk to?"

For many of us, the prospect of a new year calls forth pious resolutions to change our behavior. AA offers a program based on the paradox of personal change--that transformation comes only when we let go of our futile efforts to control what we cannot control. Unlike the man hanging from the tree, we can learn to accept direction from outside ourselves.

Over the years, AA members have shared many slogans to capture this philosophy of life in a nutshell. These pithy sayings offer direction for people in recovery from addiction--and anyone else who cares to live with serenity. Following are some examples to help you ring in the New Year.

**"Accept life on life's terms."** Many of us wish that the people and circumstances in our lives were different. This slogan reminds us to retreat from the world of our personal fantasies and deal with people and things as they are right now. Instead of trying to reform other people and remake the world in our own image, we can focus on changing our own behavior. *Life* is not changeable, but we are. A related slogan puts it this way: "If you pray for a Porsche and God sends you a jackass, ride it."

**"Live and let live."** Tolerance, a fundamental value in AA, means that we acknowledge our personal shortcomings while letting others have their own. We focus on our similarities with other people rather than resenting our differences.

**"Progress, not perfection."** Alcoholics can be grandiose, holding that they must be right at all times. Bill Wilson, cofounder of AA, wrote, "We are all perfectionists who, failing perfection, have gone to the other extreme and settled for the bottle and the blackout." A saner alternative is to make one simple change in our attitudes or behavior for today. Over time, small changes create major progress.

**"This, too, shall pass."** We suffer when we try to seek permanent fulfillment from things that are impermanent. People will pass into and out of our lives, and circumstances change constantly. But this fact also gives us strength. No feeling or experience, however painful, can last forever. Time passes and we move on to heal.

**"Easy does it . . . but do it."** People in early recovery sometimes feel frantic about everything they want to do. Unconsciously, they operate with the attitude that they must change everything about their lives--and change it now. This slogan reminds us to calm down and tackle one task at a time. We don't have to accomplish everything on our to-do list today.

"Easy does it" is a slogan in itself, yet AA members like to add "but do it." The latter phrase reminds us that we still have goals to meet and responsibilities to handle. Pacing ourselves is different than procrastinating.

**"Let go and let God."** AA is a spiritual, not religious, program that allows people to define their higher power in their own way. G.O.D., according to another slogan, stands for Good Orderly Direction--a source of guidance that goes beyond our self-centered opinions and selfish desires. "Letting God"

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means accepting direction from that source, however we personally define it.

**"Keep it simple."** AA is sometimes called a simple program for complex people. This slogan reminds us to remember the basics: Don't drink. Go to AA meetings. Do the next right thing. Our problems can be solved one step at a time, one day at a time.

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Alive & Free is a health column that provides information to help prevent substance abuse problems and address such problems. It is created by Hazelden, a nonprofit agency based in Center City, Minn., that offers a wide range of information and services on addiction. For more resources, [email](#) or call Hazelden at 800-257-7810 (outside the US 651-213-4200).