

# I listened for the similarities, not the differences

A friend of mine says there ought to be a hologram over every AI-Anon member's face whenever a newcomer comes to a meeting. The hologram would be an image of each member as he or she appeared at that first meeting. Mine would show me unkempt and panicked, perhaps with my arms crossed to keep people away. I think that hologram might comfort the people just coming in and let them know we've all been where they are.

I was so angry, afraid, and confused. I don't think I came in to find out how to get an alcoholic sober, because I had tried everything. A neighbor had suggested it might help me, because I was worried that the insanity I'd seen in my family might be contagious. I did not want to belong. I had no desire to "Keep Coming Back," and so I listened for the differences. He was affected by parents, she by a son, and you by a daughter. I had many people whose drinking bothered me. Your situations were different. You were different. I didn't fit in, and I certainly didn't belong. To be honest, I don't think I heard a thing in my first meeting without putting it through a "that's not me" filter.

I went back to my neighbor, and he told me about listening for the similarities. He urged me to try again. I went back and the miracles started. I heard the feelings, and they were *my* feelings. In my second meeting, I decided that you have been reading my mail. I still didn't want to belong. I was still angry, afraid, and confused. But there was another feeling that was born that day—hope. I discovered that hope was at the bottom of my Pandora's Box of feelings.

I kept coming. I was able to identify more feelings than anger, fear, and confusion. I was able to talk about them to other members, and I was able to let them go. For me, sharing was (and still is) perhaps the most powerful tool of the AI-Anon program. My concept of a Higher Power needed a lot of work. When I listened to members share, I got ideas on where I needed to adjust my understanding, and I heard my Higher Power in their words.

I kept coming. I was able to build healthy relationships, set boundaries, and love unconditionally. I learned all that. I kept coming. I started passing on what had been given to me for fun and for free. As I passed it on, I learned it. I really learned it. Thanks for letting me heal.

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