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To: Conference Participants
From: World Board
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Re: Basic Text Index

Following this cover memo, you will find an example of the proposed new index for the Basic Text. We are still working on compiling the index, and we should have a complete draft for you at the conference. In the meantime, we are including a sample here, the entries for letters A through D, to give you an idea of what the index as a whole will look like. We are also enclosing A through D of the existing index to give you a sense of comparison.

We have learned a lot in the course of putting together this index. Most fundamentally, we have learned that there are two different ways of listing the terms in a book: an index and a concordance. A professionally created index generally has one or two references for each term and no more; it lists the “most important” times that word or concept appears. Another characteristic of an index is that most indexes are conceptual rather than literal, which means that they try to capture and list ideas even where they do not show up in exactly the same words as the topic within which they are listed. So, for instance, the phrase “willingness to do whatever it took to stay clean” might be indexed under the heading “willingness” and the subheading “to go to any lengths.”

A concordance, on the other hand, lists every single time a word occurs, and it is literal—that is, it lists words exactly as they appear in the text, every time they appear in the text.

The revision we are proposing is, in essence, a hybrid of an index and a concordance. We are listing every “meaningful” time a word occurs. The resulting long strings of numbers you will see after a particular word are not standard in most indexes. However, we felt this was a good approach for us, both because many people use the text in this way—a sponsor might advise “go to the Basic Text and look up every time it talks about ‘fear’”—and because this approach makes the process of putting together an index less subjective. Even so, for a word such as “help” or “living” we may include fewer instances because those words are used frequently in ways that have nothing to do with our recovery principles. As a hypothetical example, we would index “living” in the sentence “Living the program gives us a real sense of peace,” but we would not index “living” in the sentence “At the time I was living in Patagonia.”

Perhaps the biggest difference in the proposed index is that we are also using subheadings to help people find what they are looking for more easily. So, a main heading like “acceptance” now has subheadings such as “of addiction,” “in NA,” and “of ourselves.”

One other general guideline we should mention here is that most of the time a page is referenced under a main heading only once. So, if the term “recovery” appears on a page five times with five slightly different connotations, it is usually included just once under the main heading “recovery,” even if there are four or five different subheadings it could possibly fit under. We tried to minimize repetition in this way because to reference every single time a given word appears on a page would make the index quite unwieldy. You can see that the term “addiction,” to cite one example, is already quite dense with page references and subheadings. We felt that to repeat those page references over and over again would make the index less rather than more usable.

This index is also a hybrid in that much of the time we are treating terms literally, indexing words exactly as they appear, while at other times we are treating words and phrases more conceptually. We have, for instance, not combined entries for “Higher Power” and “God,” but have indexed those terms separately and literally as they occur. The same goes for “addiction” and “disease of addiction”; we are including these as separate entries in the index and referencing them exactly as they occur. On the other hand, under the heading “just for today” with the subheading “living,” we have included references to living “a day a time” or “in the here and now” when those passages have the same intention.

Also, we often include similar words under the same heading, so references under the heading “acceptance” include the word “accept,” and “willingness” includes instances when the word “willing” appears.

It would be impossible to list all of the individual decisions we have had to make in the process of putting together this index. Probably the most fundamental thing we have learned about creating a useful index is that it involves many, many small decisions. However, this cover memo should give you a sense of the main ideas that have governed our thinking, and the sample entries that follow should give you a good idea of what the finished index will look like.

We are excited at the prospect of including such a great new tool in the Basic Text. We hope you like it as much as we do. We will distribute the full index at the conference.

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