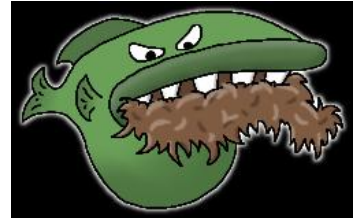


# Foreword—For Piranhas Only!



No nice way to say it: This thing really SUCKS!

In 2006, Pam Woll wrote a dangerous little booklet called *How to Get the Piranhas Out of Your Head*. She's been selling copies to innocent people who think having piranhas in their heads is some sort of PROBLEM! Therapists have been buying it for their clients. People have been buying it for themselves, their friends, their families, and their employees. Now she's written this Leader's Guide, to make it easier for people to use the booklet in group discussions, training, mentorship, and therapy. GIVE ME A BREAK!

Never mind the fact that the color cartoon illustrations in the booklet aren't even pictures of real piranhas! The content is TOTALLY misleading. It's true, she's mapped out our territory and feeding patterns pretty accurately. But she's totally wrong about our motives, our purpose in life. She makes us out to be some kind of PREDATORS, when all we really want to do is HELP.

Where do I start? The so-called "Piranha Principles" are way too namby-pamby. As we all know, you can't make people perfect—or prepare them to make others perfect—if you coddle them. The discussion questions are insulting to piranhas. The Literature Review Abstract reads like something out of the *Journal of Polymorphous Perversity*. And the so-called "tools"—the workbook exercises and the Progress Chart pages—these are just flat-out dangerous.

Your leaders in the Piranha Empowerment Enclave (PEE) are looking at this Guide and the original booklet to see if there's any grounds for a lawsuit. The author once wrote a manual on Cultural Competence, but these two documents are not at all competent in their approach toward the PIRANHA culture. They're biased, inflammatory, and full of stereotypes. They don't even refer to us as "consumers"—and if ANYBODY has earned the right to be called "consumers," we have!

In the meantime, I urge you to use your considerable influence to get your humans (and I use the term loosely) to put down these books. Tell them they have better things to do with their time. Tell them the booklet is silly, misleading—nobody has piranhas in their head! Please do whatever you can to help stop the spread of this dangerous stuff!

Bon appetit!

Harry P. Ranha, President  
Piranha Empowerment Enclave

# Introduction



*How to Get the Piranhas Out of Your Head* is a short (19 small pages), color-illustrated, easy-to-read booklet designed to help people understand and detach from counterproductive self-talk and reaction patterns. It does this through humor and an extended metaphor, the life and feeding patterns of the species Brain Piranha.

*How to Get the Piranhas Out of Your Head* follows the life cycle of the Brain Piranha from an infancy nourished on our expectations, our Absolutes (the stuff we think is certain, perfect, and permanent), and the drama in our lives. It describes the endless cycles we navigate, pursued by piranhas, as we try to cope—or avoid coping—with life. It ends with ten practical suggestions for coping effectively, finding peace, and keeping the piranhas at bay.

With its silly illustrations and tongue-in-cheek humor, *Piranhas* takes a positive, entertaining, non-threatening, but never simplistic look at some very serious aspects of being human—and the strengths and resources we can use to make more courageous and constructive choices.

## The Piranha Leader's Guide

This Leader's Guide answers the question, "Okay, so this is fun, but what do I **do** with it?" How can I use it in my life, with a group, or in a counseling session?" A piranha leader can be anyone—from a professional therapist to an individual trying to become a better guide for his or her own life. So the Piranha Leader's Guide has many possible audiences:

- People who like the piranha booklet and want to get more out of it
- People who are thinking of using the booklet in formal or informal discussion groups
- Recovery group sponsors who are thinking of using it with their sponsees
- Peer mentors and recovery coaches who are thinking of using it with their mentees
- Teachers, trainers, or group leaders in schools, prevention, or health promotion programs who are thinking of using it in life-skills training
- Therapists or counselors who are thinking of using it in group or individual therapy

Neither the booklet nor the Piranha Leader's Guide is a substitute for a recovery program, therapy, or medical treatment for people who need these forms of help. But the piranha materials can be good things to work on in recovery and/or therapy, and they're compatible with many recovery and therapeutic approaches.

Tools in this Leader’s Guide include all the materials in Part I:

- A. **Piranha Principles:** These are guidelines for making sure the piranha booklet and Leader’s Guide are used in positive, safe, accepting, and respectful ways. This section is for people who are using the booklet in discussion groups, sponsorship or mentoring relationships, training, or therapy.
- B. **Discussion Guides for the Introductory Chapters:** These are questions to help people reflect on the ideas in the first five short chapters of the piranha booklet. You can write your answers down or just talk through the answers in discussion sessions.
- C. **Tools for the Ten Suggestions:** This is the biggest part of the Leader’s Guide. It includes:
  - Workbook Exercises for exploring the way our piranhas tend to act and ways of finding and making other choices. You can do the Workbook Exercises by yourself, or you can use them to prepare for group discussions, sessions with a sponsor or mentor, or therapy sessions.
  - Discussion Guides, questions to help you reflect on the ideas in the booklet. Again, you can write your answers down or just talk through the answers in discussions.
  - Progress Charts for mapping your progress in moving toward more healthy choices. You might want to fill out this sheet for each of the Ten Suggestions when you finish working on that suggestion, then go back to it and update it as you make more progress. Some sponsors, mentors, counselors, or therapists will want to help their sponsees, mentees, or clients think through these pages. Counselors and therapists might also want to pull information from these to use in their progress notes.

Part II provides a few more resources:

- D. **Note to Discussion Group Leaders, Trainers, Mentors, and Sponsors:** This gives basic advice for spotting and referring any challenges that might come up in sessions—challenges that are beyond the scope of these roles. (Counselors and therapists who are already trained in crisis management won’t need the basic referral suggestions in this section.)
- E. **Compatibility With Recovery and Therapeutic Approaches:** This is a brief look at the way the piranha materials fit in with 12-Step recovery principles and some popular evidence-based therapeutic approaches. This Section can provide a very brief introduction for people who aren’t familiar with these approaches. It can also help sponsors and therapists figure out if they want to use the piranha materials as tools in their work.
- F. **Proposed DSM Diagnostic Criteria:** A look at what the folks at the American Psychiatric Association would say about “Piranha Brain Syndrome” in their *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*—if they’d ever heard of it!
- G. **Abstract of Literature Review:** A tongue-in-cheek look at what the (imaginary) “experts” have to say about Piranha Brain Syndrome, including (Yikes!) its etiology, transmission, epidemiology, and neurobiology. This is for people who are sick of reading professional psychiatry and psychology articles.