

PRINCIPLES AND LEADERSHIP IN NA SERVICE

Our Fourth Concept reminds us that we need to have effective leaders in our service system in order to best support our groups. Because we have seen so much success in our growth as a fellowship, it can sometimes seem that most of the work of NA has already been accomplished. When the doors to our meetings are open, it isn't always clear what more should be done to further our primary purpose. The truth of the matter is that all of our services need a constant influx of talent, creativity, and willingness from our members in order to continue helping our groups carry the NA message. Public relations campaigns, panels in institutions, phonelines, meeting schedules, and websites are just a few of the many services that support our groups. To accomplish these tasks, we need leaders and systems that support others' efforts and offer them guidance. The most effective leaders in NA service both encourage other members to get involved and look for ways to improve existing services and to find new and innovative methods to help spread the NA message.

Working with others is only the beginning of service work. NA service allows us to spend much of our time directly helping suffering addicts, as well as ensuring that Narcotics Anonymous itself survives. This way we keep what we have by giving it away.

Basic Text, "What Can I Do?"

ATTRACTING AND ENCOURAGING LEADERS

Our success in reaching still-suffering addicts depends completely on the members who step up and get involved. It has been said that ten percent of the people do ninety percent of the work in NA, but we believe we can do better to attract more members to get involved. Our recovery program calls upon all of us to carry our message to still-suffering addicts. Inspired by an awakening of the spirit and the gift of recovery we have been given, we are able to see the opportunity to

serve as both a privilege and a responsibility. Members come into NA service with a variety of skills and backgrounds that can be useful to our efforts. With that in mind, when we choose leaders we should pay special attention to leadership qualities based on our principles, such as integrity and humility, as well as communication and organizational skills. While there are many styles of leadership, the type that is most useful in NA service is based on the spiritual principles found in our steps, traditions, and concepts.

When we serve—and lead—with these principles in mind, we make service more attractive for all members. At times our service bodies can be disorganized and stressful. Members who take positions or just attend a committee meeting to see what it is about can leave frustrated and dispirited. We have a collective responsibility to infuse our service bodies with an atmosphere of recovery where people feel welcome and encouraged to grow. In such an atmosphere, our trusted servants are more likely to feel effective and productive, and our service bodies grow stronger. When we put aside our personality differences and work together to develop the best qualities in our members who are willing to serve, our areas, regions, and subcommittees become fertile ground for cultivation.

Having skilled leaders who embody our principles will go a long way to help us better cultivate leadership among other trusted servants. Such cultivation will benefit not only those who demonstrate natural leadership qualities, but any members who are willing to serve. All too often, members who would otherwise be willing to get involved in service can be put off by overwhelmingly extensive policies and procedures or tiresome debates and parliamentary gymnastics. Simple solutions such as having a tradition- and concept-study meeting before business meetings or conducting service learning days can help raise knowledge and awareness of our guiding principles. By discussing these principles together, our trusted servants can work toward common understandings of how to apply them in service environments. This will help us avoid many common challenges in our service efforts. An inviting atmosphere encourages members to contribute what they can, rather than to feel overwhelmed or under-qualified. When trusted servants who are well-versed in our guiding

principles hold positions of leadership, we often find that we can move from a culture of rigid guidelines and debate to one with more open discussion, inclusion, cooperation, and consensus-building.

QUALITIES OF EFFECTIVE LEADERS

Effective leadership can help to ensure a higher quality of NA services. Perhaps the most important role of an effective leader is to be an example of our principles in action. Our leaders demonstrate humility, for example, by following the direction of group conscience as called for in the Second Tradition. They embody the integrity and accountability called for in the Fifth and Eighth Concepts when they keep us informed about the tasks assigned to them. They demonstrate the integrity and anonymity called for in the Twelfth Tradition when they are consistent in their application of our principles, no matter what the circumstances.

In addition to being examples of our principles, our leaders need to be able to adequately perform some very specific tasks; for instance, facilitating discussions and business meetings. With skilled facilitation, our service bodies can hold open and frank discussions that allow everyone to participate and all viewpoints to be heard, as called for in Concepts Seven and Nine. Our facilitators need to be able to encourage all participants to express their concerns, as well as keep the body focused and moving forward. The decisions of the body can then better reflect true group conscience as called for in the Second Tradition and the Sixth Concept.

Another essential leadership quality is the ability to communicate information effectively between different audiences. As our Eighth Concept states, "Our service structure depends on the integrity and effectiveness of our communications." GSRs, RCMs, and RDs all play very important roles in our service system's communication network. They best demonstrate this by providing clear and candid reports about their work. These positions each involve interaction in at least two different levels of service, and knowledge and experience varies from one level to another. For that reason, it is important that we select members to serve who are able to explain things clearly and listen well. A good delegate, for example, will be able to

distill the essential points from a lengthy discussion and relay them to the region so that everyone understands. Another important communication skill is the ability to gauge the awareness and experience of the audience and to convey information accordingly.

Other leadership skills should be taken into consideration as well: accountability; integrity; honesty; and the abilities to educate and encourage other members, to make decisions, and to take action. The qualities of an effective leader are based both on the principles of our program and on the tasks relevant to the specific service position. All of these should be carefully considered when we choose the members who will take on leadership roles in NA service.

Leadership in NA is a service, not a class of membership.

It Works: How and Why, "Tradition Two"

SELECTING TRUSTED SERVANTS

The task of selecting leaders in our service bodies can be difficult at times. It might seem unkind to subject a member to intense scrutiny simply because that member has expressed a willingness to serve. In keeping with our Twelfth Tradition, our Fourth Concept calls upon us to consider leadership qualities carefully even if it feels uncomfortable to do so. We need to keep in mind that we are not judging our fellow recovering addicts' value as NA members or as people; we are simply evaluating their potential to be effective in a given trusted servant position. Many members in our fellowship are wonderful living examples of the principles of our program and have a variety of leadership qualities. If their particular skills and experience do not match those necessary for an open position, we should strive to help them find other ways to serve. To put a member in a position for which he or she is not well-suited does a disservice both to that member and to our service efforts.

To put principles before personalities, we match talent to task and leave our feelings out of it. That might mean making ourselves available for a position, even when we fear rejection. Or it could mean electing someone we don't like because we know he or she can do the job well. Even more challenging for most of us, putting principles before personalities may mean

not electing someone who is our friend because we know he or she is unsuited for a position. We practice anonymity by focusing solely on the job at hand and the qualifications of each candidate, and choosing the person who fits best to do the job. These sometimes challenging acts of conscience by each of us as individuals are the very building blocks of true group conscience.

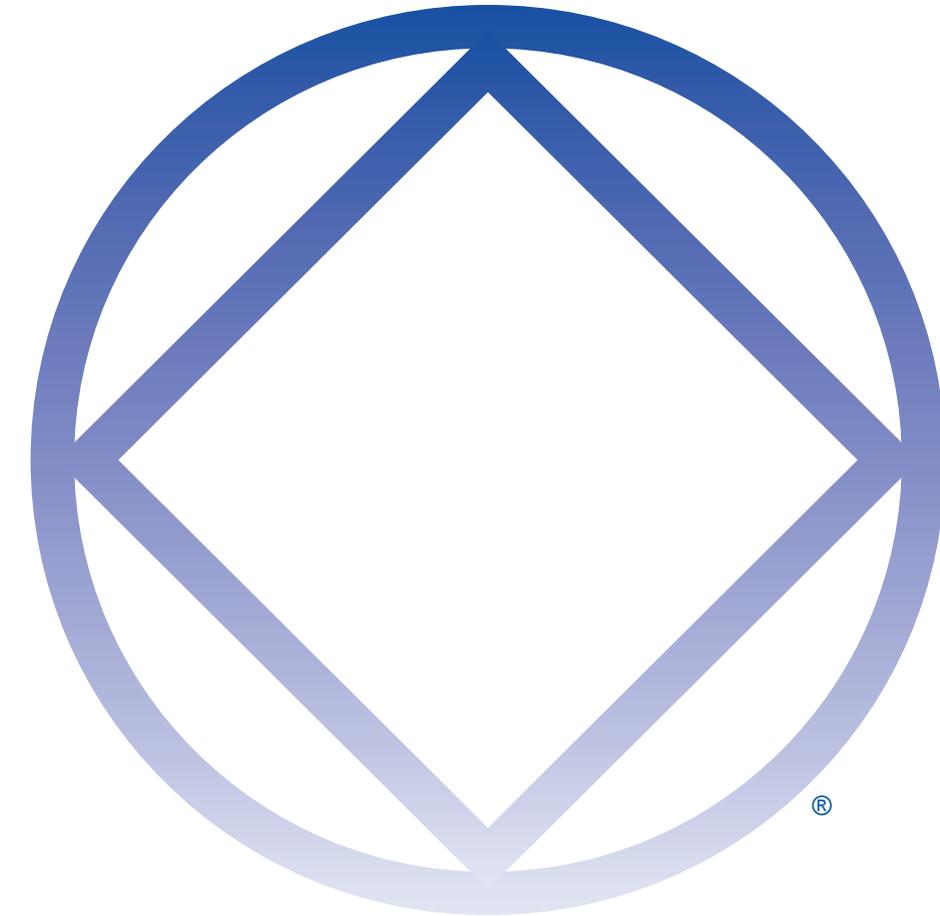
SUPPORTING THOSE WHO SERVE

When we choose trusted servants, we share in the responsibility for the job those trusted servants perform. As a service body, we must be willing to honestly assess members we select for leadership positions, and equip them with the tools and support they need to be successful in their roles. An ideal way to begin this is through proper orientation and mentoring. Wherever possible, we should strive to guide members into learning positions, such as vice or alternate roles, to allow for on-the-job training. Sometimes we overlook this opportunity and simply ask alternates to be willing to show up in the absence of their counterparts, missing the chance to provide them with valuable knowledge and guidance.

There are many ways we can help alternates make more productive use of their time. We can provide them with relevant service handbooks and guidelines or policies, as well as any locally-developed resources, and encourage them to study those resources. The current trusted servant can provide guidance for the alternate the way a sponsor works with a sponsee. They may choose to meet together between committee meetings to share experience, strength, and hope. However it is done, the task of mentorship is as much a part of any given position as any other aspect of the work. It is important that we select leaders who can commit to helping those who follow them, and that we remember that leadership development is an organic process and cannot necessarily be forced. In time, these efforts will become our system for encouraging the spirit of leadership in trusted servants, rather than relying solely on the “natural leaders” among us.

Cultivating leadership in NA is not limited to those who hold formal service positions. In some cases, sponsors who are unable to take positions themselves work hard to guide sponsees into service. In other cases, members with abundant knowledge or experience make themselves available as resources to trusted servants. Even for those who currently hold a title, leadership is not about position, it is about action. We must choose leaders who look beyond the tasks at hand to see a bigger picture. Effective leaders can help us not only to carry out our services effectively, but also to make lasting improvements so that we can better carry our message of hope to still-suffering addicts.

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