Attentiveness, Entry 1 of 2

*Each of us has something to offer. We don’t need specialized training to carry the message; all we need to do is pay attention.*

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Eight, Opening Meditation

We all have something to give in NA, and we don’t need to be professionals to do it. There’s no NA University where we take classes like Sharing 101, Advanced Sponsorship, or a graduate-level seminar in Hospitals and Institutions Strategy. We learn as we go. Some of us sponsor others following the way we’ve been sponsored. Or we improvise. We aren’t professional recovering addicts or sponsors or trusted servants. We pay attention to how others do it, and we consult our sponsor and our Higher Power, attentively listening for what rings true for us. It’s the therapeutic value of one addict helping another.

Paying attention to our surroundings should come easy for us. In our old lives, situational awareness was necessary for survival. We were always watching our backs, measuring up others, and doing what we had to do to get through every hairy situation we found ourselves in. Those same skills can help us read a room. We can see where our help is needed: Are there people sitting alone before the meeting? Greet them. Does the secretary need help passing out the readings? Done!

Perhaps most importantly, we pay attention to what is happening in real-time as we share with other addicts. We truly listen when others share. Rather than guessing what we think someone might need to hear, we simply listen. When we’re moved to do so, we share our relevant experience. When we are present and attentive to the process, we realize we don’t need to control things. Humility, prudence, and attentiveness—to our own assets and to the needs of those around us—help us make better decisions.

*Since there’s no such thing as a professional recovering addict, I’ll do my best to carry the message the NA way. I’ll do so by being attentive to the needs of NA, especially the still-suffering addicts.*
Attentiveness, Entry 2 of 2

_Hearing addicts share their experience, seeing recovery in action, feeling the love in the room—all this is as much a part of the process as the work we do on the Steps._

—Guiding Principles, Tradition Eleven, Opening Essay

The “attraction, rather than promotion” that’s evident in the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous is often what keeps us coming back in early recovery. If we smelled promotion, it would be a major turnoff. Many of us may start out skeptical, but desperation forces us to pay close attention. At first, the Steps, as read in “How It Works” at many meetings, may not resonate—they’re not what we had in mind as our solution. But the stories we hear, the warmth we experience, takes hold.

Witnessing recovering addicts being their full selves is remarkable, absorbing, and keeps us coming back. Someone identifies themselves as brand new—“This is my first meeting ever”—and receives a genuine, hospitable welcome. A member celebrates two years clean, made so precious by the fact that it took way longer than that for them to reach this milestone. Another shares their story of losing connection to NA due to family responsibilities and then rekindling their bond to the Fellowship, thanks to members staying in touch. Others speak about their addictive relationship with food, sex or money, and about illness, loss, or lapses in judgment that have ugly consequences. And many others talk honestly about their struggles with stuff we can’t control: a psycho first date, a mean boss, traffic, and the weather.

We are paying attention to all these stories, their unique threads, and common messages—and their shared solutions often found in the Twelve Steps. When we work the Steps to the best of our ability, they help us undergo the profound change that allows us to stay clean and more free from the self-centered fear that can bog us down. But that’s never to discount the importance of all the hard-won experience and wisdom we pick up from other members. Recovery isn’t just what happens on our own with our stepwork. It’s what we hear, see, and feel from each other. It’s all of the elements of the program in concert.

Yes, I am committed to the solutions contained in the Steps. I’m also here to pay attention to my fellow addicts and enrich my recovery.
Autonomy offers us the freedom to try new things, and we demonstrate courage when we make new efforts to better carry our message.

—Guiding Principles, Tradition Four, “For Groups”

When Tradition Four says that “Each group should be autonomous,” it opens the gate for creative expressions of our primary purpose. What comes next— “except in matters affecting other groups or NA as a whole”—defines the path beyond that gate. The other eleven Traditions and our spiritual principles guide us along that path. They offer direction to ensure the best possible conditions for our journey and mark potential trouble to keep us from wandering off a cliff.

“We don’t just do as we please. We do what’s right,” as one member put it. “At our business meetings, my home group considers two questions: ‘How do our actions carry the message?’ and ‘What else can we do to improve the atmosphere of recovery?’” Keeping our primary purpose foremost in mind has a clarifying effect. It ensures that each innovation is motivated by our desire to carry the message more effectively.

Changes in society, in the neighborhood, or in the law can impact our meetings and often call for us to innovate. We do our best to let go of that “this is the way we’ve always done it” mindset, which can undermine the courage we need to exercise group autonomy. It may be helpful to distinguish between the capital “T” Traditions that guide all of our efforts in NA and the small “t” traditions—local customs or norms—that sometimes feel as important. Long-time members remind us to strive for unity, not uniformity, and tell stories of the early days when meetings in their NA community were uniform in everything from length to format. “The first proposals to change anything were met with skepticism or worse. Since then, we’ve learned that we won’t break this thing by thinking a bit outside of the box. We can practice our autonomy and pay attention to the ties that bind. When we do that we find that—as assured—all will be well.”

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I will appreciate both the freedom that group autonomy offers and the continuity that our guiding principles provide.
Autonomy, Entry 2 of 5

*Autonomy allows us to express who we are with integrity and to carry a message: the truth of our own experience, in our own way.*

—Guiding Principles, Tradition Four, Opening Meditation

The autonomy spoken of in Tradition Four has a strong appeal to many of us in NA. We are people who tend to put a pretty high value on self-determination. In active addiction, insistence on doing things our way often led to bad results, usually because “our way” had a lot to do with self-centeredness, rather than integrity. In recovery, autonomy becomes an asset rather than a liability—as our Basic Text puts it, “Our real value is in being ourselves.”

It’s the second half of Tradition Four that keeps us on track: “except in matters affecting other groups or NA as a whole.” For NA groups, this means we think about our role as part of the Fellowship, not just what our own group wants. As individual recovering addicts, we balance our right to do as we please with our responsibilities to those around us: family, friends, the Fellowship, society. One way we begin to learn that balance is in how we share in meetings.

“As a newcomer, my sharing was super aggressive and put some people on edge,” a member wrote. “My justification was, ‘hey, this is who I am!’ After a while, I tried to mimic the way others shared, but it wasn’t my own voice, and it always came out wrong. Eventually, I got comfortable being me while also thinking about the feelings of those around me… I finally started to connect.”

If any group of people can sniff out a fake, it’s addicts. Authenticity is a message that lasts, whether it comes in the form of a riveting performance or an understated, soft-spoken share. Whether we’re trying to reach a still-suffering addict or save our own life, we try to strike the right balance between autonomy and responsibility, freedom and self-control, self-determination and connection.

Being autonomous doesn’t mean disregarding those around me. I will practice balancing personal freedom with social responsibility.
We define ourselves by our choices.

—living clean, chapter 2, “connection to others”

None of us chose to have the disease of addiction. We also didn’t choose our upbringing or the demographic groups we belong to, our identity or culture, or to have our particular set of character defects (and assets). But these aspects of ourselves don’t tell our whole story, not nearly. This truth also doesn’t negate responsibility for our personal autonomy, our free will to make decisions that may in many ways be informed by the above characteristics. Personal autonomy is having the capacity and willingness to act on our own behalf. As recovering addicts, our goal for personal autonomy is to have the capacity and willingness to do so while living by spiritual principles—as opposed to the self-centeredness that drove a lot of our decision-making in active addiction.

Through the twelve steps of na, we investigate the hand we were dealt and what we did with those cards. This work opens many doors for us to make choices—with self-awareness—that align with our true values and a higher purpose. “In step four, I had an epiphany many of us have, realizing that holding on to my resentments was a choice that was holding me back,” a member wrote. “And my experience with seven shows me that when I’m about to act out on a shortcoming, I have a choice. For me, autonomy is that moment of grace where I pray, ‘Help me choose differently, because I want to live differently.’”

We are as we do, not as we feel or think we are. We aren’t all our outsides or insides. We can be kind without feeling kind. We can feel kind and not act on it. Our choices reflect our priorities—how we treat the people in our lives (from our sponsor to someone we want to date to a server in a café), how we spend our time and money, how we act when no one’s looking. We’re no longer living by default, or vicariously through others—we’ve carved out who we are authentically and can make choices that reflect that version of us. We are autonomous, responsible for our own feelings, words, and actions. And just as no one can ‘make’ us do anything, we can’t make choices for others either.

My autonomy, my willingness. My choice. Now, what do I prioritize today that reflects how I want to live?
Allowing our partners and ourselves to experience personal autonomy means we can grow and change at our own pace . . .

—Living Clean, Chapter 5, “Romantic Relationships”

Being a member of NA gives us plenty of chances to learn about relationships. For most of us, that starts with a sponsor and a home group, both of which offer lessons about autonomy. Every sponsor in NA, after all, eventually gets the opportunity to tell a sponsee: “Well, you’re going to do what you’re going to do, so…” Whether that comes from a place of loving acceptance or frustrated sarcasm—or a mix of both—our sponsors affirm that we are responsible for our own recovery. (And our consequences.) When we’re ready, we’ll change. And, as we often say, that might mean when we’ve had enough pain, we’ll change.

The same is true in our groups. We offer one another experience, strength, and hope; the choice of whether to accept what is offered belongs to each of us as individuals. “Honestly, I was getting really tired of a home group member who kept sharing about the same thing all the time,” a member shared. “I got tired of being annoyed so I just let it go and gave them space. Months later, they had a breakthrough and began to change. Today, we’re very close. I was so glad I didn’t have to wait for their breakthrough in order to feel better myself!”

The ability to keep our own pace and allow others to keep theirs is valuable in all of our relationships, including romantic ones. Whether our spouses or significant others are in recovery or not, a sign of an honest relationship is not being in 100% agreement on everything. It makes sense to experience discomfort in our relationships when we have differences of opinions, differing values, or different levels of willingness to practice principles. Practicing autonomy means knowing what we need to hold onto and what we need to let go of. If the answer to that isn’t obvious, we can look to our group and our sponsor for guidance.

I will practice autonomy by taking responsibility for my own life and recovery and allowing others the space to do the same.
Autonomy, Entry 5 of 5

Autonomy encourages groups to become strong and lively but also reminds them that they are a vital part of a greater whole: the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous.

—It Works, Tradition Four

We addicts can be pretty creative in how we deliver our simple message of recovery. We’re free to develop all kinds of meetings that focus on particular areas of recovery or literature, at any time of day. Autonomy gives us leeway to establish a meeting that addresses an unmet local need, has a unique format, or targets a particular group of addicts who may feel safer accessing and delivering our primary purpose together. The possibilities are endless as our Fellowship continues to evolve, strengthen, and reach an even wider geographic scope. How inspiring!

But let’s not forget the latter half of Tradition Four: “except in matters affecting other groups or NA as a whole.” This warns of the pitfalls of using autonomy to divide us. Expressing complaints about important issues, such as finances, area guidelines, and Traditions “violations,” and then declining to be part of the solution is unproductive and creates disunity. Autonomy is not a mic drop. Instead, we can choose to examine our urge to raise an issue, asking ourselves if we want a solution or do we just want to make a statement.

Open-minded communication allows us to make reality-based decisions, unencumbered by personal opinions. Some members think that service bodies have undue power over groups, and others may believe that all NA decisions must be made with group buy-in. We hear a lot about what they are doing. But WE are they. With autonomy comes responsibility: as seen on NA buttons and t-shirts: “Be the we!” In reality, we are accountable to each other, to NA as a whole, and to communicating our disagreements, as well as our message, with as much respect as we can muster.

Freedom should be balanced with accountability and responsibility. I will respect our interconnectedness and play a role in creating a Fellowship that is united, loving and diverse.
Breakfast, Entry 1 of 1

_I discovered that breakfast is a spiritual principle: With honesty, open-mindedness, willingness, and breakfast, we’re well on our way._

—Basic Text, “Life on Life’s Terms”

Breakfast? A spiritual principle? It won’t be the first that comes to mind, but food can be as much a part of our daily recovery routine as prayer or meditation. And although we’re not all breakfast eaters, mornings are a good time to reflect on our lives and contemplate the day ahead.

Breakfast can be a ritual at the beginning of the day when we take time to prepare food and consciously reflect on the abundance recovery has brought to our lives. We may use breakfast as the time to set an intention for the day, do a daily reading, or just relax and play on our phones. The contrast between a life in recovery and a life of active addiction is clear to see, whatever our morning ritual may involve. If we think about the breakfast times we experienced before we found recovery, we might remember feeling sick and desperate, or cold and hungry. The NA program—sometimes contemplated over a meal—gives us a way out of that dark night and into a day full of possibilities.

NA is a practical program that we use in every area of our lives. Sometimes this means nurturing our physical selves or contemplating HALTS as suggested in the Basic Text: “Are we too hungry, angry, lonely or tired? Are we taking ourselves too seriously?” It’s easy to forget that the state of our body can deeply affect our sense of well-being. Whether it is a full English on a Sunday morning with the whole family, a bagel and a cup of coffee in the car on the way to work, or a tamale from a street vendor, breakfast can represent self-care and a new attitude toward ourselves. For some of us, taking time for breakfast is as essential as “wearing my seatbelt or having a home group,” in the experience of one member, and for others, it is simply the best meal of the day. However we feel about breakfast, we can always take a moment to find gratitude in the simple benefits of recovery, like food in the cupboard and a safe place to eat it.

_I will contemplate my physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being and reinvigorate my morning routine—whether or not that includes eating breakfast!_
Caring, Entry 1 of 2

We need to develop empathy and concern for others, and to let go of self-obsession without losing sight of ourselves.

—Living Clean, Chapter 5, “Friendship”

Negotiating a balance between caring for ourselves and for others takes much self-awareness. It requires ongoing focus, discernment, and thoughtful action. Finding that combination of loving generosity in helping others while maintaining appropriate boundaries—the healthy interplay between independence and interdependence—is a lifelong pursuit for a recovering addict.

Through the work we do on ourselves, our bent toward self-obsessiveness lessens as our empathy for others tends to deepen. What used to be a single-minded concern for “this addict” often becomes tempered with a genuine concern for other NA members. Many of us roll up our sleeves and get to work helping new members, because we want them to experience the relief and connection as we did. We have found a new way of life and want to share with them how we did it. Fair enough. But we may end up feeling like we need to save them and that we are the only ones who can do it. We take it personally when our suggestions are rebuffed. We mistakenly blame ourselves if they don’t stay clean.

This perspective is detrimental to our own recovery, reflecting a bit of that self-obsession we thought we had exchanged for kindness. We must show ourselves some care—and demonstrate some humility, even self-respect, often by taking a step back while still making ourselves available to help when asked. Knowing where support ends and enabling begins can be a baffling process that we revisit again and again throughout our recovery. Some of us develop excellent instincts in this regard and can support other addicts through the process of discovery for themselves.

I can care about others while still caring for myself. I can help others find what I’m finding in NA while maintaining my self-respect and being pragmatic about my powerlessness over other people.
Even with many years clean, separating and reconciling what’s in our heart and what’s in our head doesn’t come automatically. We need another set of eyes; we need a caring, attentive listener to help us sort things out.

—Living Clean, Chapter 5, “Romantic Relationships”

Our relationships with other addicts in NA can teach us a lot about how to practice care in the way we relate to the people in our life, including our romantic relationships. Most of us have distorted ideas about love and care when we get here, due both to our self-centeredness and to the poor examples we’ve had. Whatever issues we might have with caring when we arrive, we improve our ability to give and receive care by practicing with other addicts.

Having a sponsor teaches us about letting others care for us. When we find a sponsor who’s right for us, we soon get the chance to experience the type of genuine care described in the quotation above. Sponsors are often able to balance compassion with honesty as they help us to reconcile what’s in our head with what’s in our heart. We get to know what it feels like not to be in control of how another person demonstrates their care for us, which can be surprisingly freeing. Letting others care for us in their own way is something we can continue to practice in all of our relationships, including the romantic ones.

Similarly, showing our concern for newcomers or sponsees can teach us how to practice care in other relationships. Deep down, we know that we truly want others to feel the hope and experience the freedom we’ve received in NA. Our care for newer members helps us listen deeply and then share our relevant experience. We learn to do our part and leave the results to a power greater than ourselves. We hone our talents for being a caring, attentive listener for others, rather than simply remaining quiet until the other person stops talking so we can proceed with forcing our opinion on the situation.

These lessons profoundly enhance our ability to show our care for others. We allow people to be there for us, and we offer them love in a caring manner.

Giving and receiving care is a skill I can constantly improve upon. I will practice being a caring and attentive listener in my relationships.
We learn when to speak the truth, and when silence is the wiser choice.
—Guiding Principles, Tradition Ten, "For Members"

Being in recovery can do wonders for our ability to communicate with those around us. For many of us, simply getting clean eliminates the need to sneak around, hide our motives and true intentions, and keep secrets. Learning to share honestly with our sponsor and other addicts helps us get more comfortable telling the truth to other people in our lives.

While some of us do still keep secrets or play our cards close to our chest, others of us might take it to another extreme and become chronic over-sharers. One addict shared, “I realized that even if my physician needed detailed information about my bowel movements, the other patients in the waiting room didn’t.”

Learning when to keep things to ourselves is personal to each of us, but Tradition Ten does offer us helpful guidance. The quotation above is a reminder that NA doesn’t express opinions on outside issues. As a Fellowship, our shared view is that our program works; we might not have Fellowship-wide agreement on much else. The willingness to refrain from taking or expressing a stance on an issue requires some discipline. With practice, we may find that we have greater harmony with others than we have when we say everything that comes to mind.

Still, there are times it is important to speak our mind. With effort and consideration, we can strike a good balance. A member wrote, “I saw a poster in my kid’s classroom that said, ‘THINK before you speak: is it true, helpful, important, necessary, and kind?’ I started practicing that in service meetings and found that I talked less but enjoyed the meetings quite a bit more.”

Good communication sometimes means keeping thoughts to myself. When it comes to knowing when to speak and when to remain silent, I will seek the wisdom to know the difference.
Conscience, Entry 1 of 4

We learn to listen to our conscience—that still, small voice within that tells us if we’re heading in the right direction.

—Living Clean, Chapter 3, “Spirituality Is Practical”

Some of us might argue that the solutions to our problems, the answers to our moment-to-moment decisions and our big life choices have always been within our reach. We just haven’t been listening to our conscience. We’ve been unable to hear it because of the competing, confusing cacophony of noise in our heads, a squeaky hamster wheel of thoughts that we can’t get off of. Others of us feel as if we never had a conscience and that it’s something we develop only once we become abstinent and start to work a program. We come to the opinion that our disease speaks to us—in our own voice, no less!—and is the sole influence for our bad decision-making. Conversely, our conscience, as an expression of our Higher Power, is the source of positive influence.

Whatever our opinions are about the origin story of our conscience, we can probably all agree that we can do a lot to cultivate our sensitivity to the voice of our higher self. We get clean and become humble enough to ask for help. We listen to each other’s experiences of recovery. The work we do on ourselves through the Steps and for others through service awakens us enough to experience our conscience. Many of us would say that our conscience has become clearer, more distinct and dependable as we’ve grown in recovery. It becomes easier to access, because we’re able to turn down the static brought on by its evil twin, our disease. We learn to quiet our minds—and, through prayer and meditation, we gain a lot of practice in not just being able to hear it but listening to what it has to say.

“My conscience is my inner guide,” wrote a member, “It’s a driving force that gives me what I need to make an honest decision. I still can’t control outcomes just because I’m choosing wisely, but I come to my decisions with integrity.”

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I will practice staying conscious of my conscience. It’s there for me when I listen, helping me to stay connected to living this new way of life.
Conscience, Entry 2 of 4

We come to know our intentions. We get better at hearing our own voice, our own conscience.

—Living Clean, Chapter 5, “Conscious Contact”.

Even those of us who were raised by wolves were taught the difference between right and wrong. The code of ethics we inherited may have been a bit twisted, but it gave us a point of reference nonetheless. As a result, many of us suffered from a guilty conscience when we screwed up or caused harm early in our using careers. At some point, though, we made a choice—knowingly or not—to behave in ways that were contrary to the values we had internalized. It’s not that we lacked a moral compass; we’d just put it away for a bit. On those occasions when we still felt bad, we turned to denial, defensiveness, and drugs—lots of drugs—to help us stuff the discomfort of a guilty conscience.

Our awareness of that still, quiet voice within starts to return almost as soon as we put down the drugs. Our first reunion with our conscience can feel pretty distressing. Without drugs to mask our feelings, many of us experience an uncut dose of the shame we’d been stuffing for years. We’re relieved to read that “we are not responsible for our disease,” in the Basic Text. People who know their way around the Twelve Steps assure us that the second half of that sentence, “we are responsible for our recovery,” will help us make peace with the past and develop our own conscience.

We begin to tune into what’s right for us and focus on acting in accordance with our own values. We learn—sometimes through trial and error—to behave in ways we can be proud of. Not wanting to pay a spiritual price, we’re slower to act out on our most basic urges and selfish desires, so do so less frequently. We can even observe our impulses without acting on them—who knew? With practice, we recalibrate our value system and develop a code of behavior that reflects our intentions.

I will listen for the reawakened voice of my conscience knowing that it reflects my beliefs and intentions.
Conscience, Entry 3 of 4

We need to stay in tune with the voice of our conscience and listen to what it’s telling us. When we get a nagging feeling that something isn’t quite right, we should pay attention to it.

—It Works, Step Ten

Thanks to the NA program, our days of justifying our own bad behavior are mostly behind us. Sure, we still make mistakes, sometimes big ones, but we’re quicker to clean up our messes. Instead of doubling down or making excuses when we lash out or self-destruct, we let our missteps remind us that we remain acutely human and in need of regular spiritual maintenance.

“That’s the thing about being in recovery, innit?” a member shared. “I’m aware of myself and the world around me. When I screw up, I can’t pretend that everything’s hunky dory—though sometimes I still try.” A short memory can seem like an appealing proxy for a clear conscience. It’s not. Too often this leads us to reaching for new distractions to help us forget. Fortunately—though it may sometimes seem otherwise—we can’t unknow what we know about ourselves. We recognize our part in all of our difficulties and can spot our shortcomings even as they appear in new disguises. Try as we might to shut down and soldier on, we’ve developed a conscience.

Instead of waiting for a 3:00 AM wake-up call from our conscience, Step Ten offers us a way to stay clear and current. We get into—and sometimes, get back to—the habit of regular reflection, taking the time to stay in tune with the internal gauge of our conscience. We examine our behavior with empathy, asking ourselves, “Have I treated others as I would like to be treated?” We tell ourselves the truth, taking note of when we’ve responded admirably and where we need to work out a better approach for next time. Cultivating a conscience takes practice but living a conscience-guided life is worth the effort.

I will live according to my conscience today, taking time to develop it further as I reflect on my mistakes and enjoy the good that come from living by my values.
Conscience, Entry 4 of 4

In the end, we are the ones who must live with our conscience. In order to do so comfortably, we must decide what is, and what is not, morally acceptable in our lives.

— It Works, Step Ten

There’s some irony in the fact that self-centeredness can make it difficult to stay in our own lane. In some cases, we disregard our own principles to give all our attention to what others think of us. Other times, we overlook our own behavior and focus instead on how other people fail to live up to our standards. Daily inventories help us focus on our own actions and motivations. We often find more clarity about our values and, as a result, the voice of our conscience becomes stronger and clearer. Whether or not we consider our own morals in making decisions, our actions place our principles out in the open for all to see.

Many of us come to NA with some baggage around the word moral. Much of what we know about morals and morality comes from family, society, or religion, and may not ring true for us. Maybe we misunderstood what we were taught, or it was communicated poorly. Maybe our values truly differ. In any case, getting to know ourselves better through Steps Four and Five helps many of us realign our own moral compass. We continue that work through regular inventory in Step Ten. We learn to tap into our own inner wisdom and allow our conscience to guide our actions.

Where once our differing moral values may have led us to be defiant or judgmental, recovery allows us the courage and confidence to live according to the values that ring true for us. We might not always know the right thing to do, but as one member shared, “when I honestly check in with myself, I can at least figure out what the wrong thing is so I can not do that.” Along with the guidance of our sponsor and our Higher Power, regular inventory helps us continually improve on our ability to live by our conscience.

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Daily inventory can be a form of conscious contact with my own conscience. I will work to maintain that connection today.
Consistency, Entry 1 of 3

... [A] group needs the consistent commitment of its members to show up and take part in its meetings. Upon that commitment rests the group’s stability; without it, no group can survive long.

—It Works, Tradition Seven

Consistency is a key part of the messages we first receive in NA. Keep coming back. 90 meetings in 90 days. Meeting makers make it. It’s suggested that we find a home group—and join that group, not merely visit it. We’re encouraged to get a service commitment there—and to show up for that commitment.

When we lack consistency in our groups, when we’re not kept informed by our service body reps, when we don’t provide the human or financial resources needed to carry out our requests, our groups and services aren’t as strong. NA suffers as a result, and opportunities to help newcomers potentially are missed.

The direct impact of our consistency may occur beyond the walls of a meeting. Many of us live in densely populated areas with plenty of groups to participate in. Many other NA communities are limited: only a few meetings, sometimes days and considerable distance apart—and perhaps too few members to fill service positions. Many groups thrive for decades, never dark for any reason; others burn bright, then falter; others struggle to stay afloat week by week. At times, it’s a real misfortune to lose a group. Other times, a loss blooms into a new opportunity.

There are way too many home-group scenarios to describe here, but one thing we know is true: it takes reliable and committed NA members to turn and keep the lights on at any meeting, service committee, or NA event. And it’s no exaggeration to say that being consistent saves addicts’ lives, including our own. To carry the message of recovery and to conduct necessary NA business, we need to show up with our time, funds, skills, and willingness. We take on tasks of all sizes and shapes, and, in the spirit of rotation, we mentor others to step up.

How willing am I to take more responsibility to keep my group more stable? In the spirit of rotation, can I also guide others to step up, creating opportunities for them to practice consistency?
Consistency, Entry 2 of 3

_In the Tenth Step, we use all the principles and actions we learned in the previous steps, applying them to our lives on a consistent basis._

—It Works, Step Ten

Left unexamined, fear and resentment can bring out the worst in us. Character defects we’d once honed into survival skills stand ready to “help.” It’s no surprise that they spring to mind first when we’re faced with a challenge. We’ve relied on manipulation, self-pity, intolerance, dishonesty, perfectionism, arrogance, and the rest for as long as we can remember. But now that we’re in recovery, it seems increasingly clear that they’re not such a good fit for our new lives.

The lessons of Steps Four through Nine help us see those crusty old tools in a new light. We’ve become deeply familiar with the damage we caused in the past, have surrendered aspects of our character that shaped hurtful words and actions, and have humbly gone about owning our messes and cleaning them up. Understanding how we’ve operated in the past sets us up for a better way, but it will take consistent effort for our new ways to become second nature.

Step Ten gets us in the habit of viewing our lives through the lens of the Steps. Consistent practice helps us integrate their principles into our lives. Here’s one member’s experience with doing just that: “My regular inventories read like letters to my Higher Power. They begin with ‘Dear HP’—my reminder that I’m not alone in this process. Then I jot down the fears and resentments that are popping off, the defects that are calling me, and the spiritual principles I need to keep handy instead. I end with ‘I am ready for you to remove my shortcomings and clear the way for my loving service.’”

There are many ways to practice Step Ten, of course. How we go about it is far less important than the fact that we do! Reflecting on our progress helps us integrate the principles into our lives and live consistently by our values.

_Does my habit of self-reflection encourage consistency between my beliefs and behavior? How can I integrate the Steps and their principles into my practice of Step Ten?_
Consistency, Entry 3 of 3

_When we attend meetings regularly, people get to know us and see us over time._
—Living Clean, Chapter 2, “Connection to Others”

The principle of consistency offers great benefits at any phase in our recovery, even though how it might look in practice evolves over time. Early on, consistency tends to mean a meeting a day for the first 90 days, as our Basic Text suggests. A likely outcome of completing a “90 in 90” challenge is knowing and being known by quite a few other NA members. Making ourselves visible in this way exposes our disease to people who see it for what it is. The compassion, concern, and care we receive from other members is a vital part of knowing that we are not alone, especially in early recovery. Consistency allows people to know and care for us, and it can save our lives.

The value of practicing consistency changes the longer we’re around. Our lives improve, and we are able to practice consistency in other areas: NA service, family relationships, friendships, and any other place we go. Those of us who were able to show up physically for our family and friends find, over time, that we are able to be more fully present in the spaces we inhabit. “I used to just send someone who looked like me,” one speaker recalled. “My family got a person with my face, my eyes, my smile. But behind all that was empty. Showing up for real in NA taught me how to bring the real me to other places I go. I’m not sending the imposter anymore.”

The magic of consistency in NA goes beyond just showing up. Simply dragging our body to meetings on a regular basis, whether that’s daily or slightly less regular, wouldn’t be enough on its own. Something special happens in our meetings, though—we see and recognize each other beyond the surface level. We hear others share and we relate; we share with others and tell on our disease. Consistency helps keep us from going back into hiding, physically, spiritually, and emotionally. Our recovery depends on it.

_Simply having my butt in a seat at a meeting won’t keep me clean or magically make me recover. But it’s a damn good place to start!_
Cooperation, Entry 1 of 2

It’s essential in whatever way we give back that we are able to share with others and to cooperate, and these are not skills most of us bring to the rooms with us.
—Living Clean, Chapter 7, “Principles, Practice, and Perspective”

Sharing and cooperation are generally taught to us as children as a core social value. A lot of us, however, didn’t quite absorb the critical lessons of sharing what you have, playing nice with others, and being helpful. Some version of “Together we can”—prioritizing the greater good and the concept of common welfare—is posted on schoolroom walls all over the world, just like the Twelve Traditions are often on display in our meeting rooms.

If we didn’t learn the lesson then, we can learn it now—and help other addicts to follow suit. The NA Fellowship is built on cooperation, mutual support, and shared leadership. True cooperation requires that we have respect for each individual with an eye toward acting in the group’s best interest. What is freely given is freely shared. We share our skills as well as our experience, strength, and hope.

In keeping with Tradition One, we can learn to disagree without being disagreeable. Taking disagreements personally is a threat to practicing cooperation and puts our common welfare at risk. Working the Twelve Steps helps us to be up to the challenge of sharing space, serving, and cooperating with those we don’t agree with. We pitch in even when we’re not happy with the group’s conscience, or at the very least, we don’t just quit when things don’t go the way we wanted.

Our cooperative participation helps deliver NA’s message to the still-suffering addict, and it helps our own recovery. We grow and thrive when we participate. We need each other, and NA needs us, too.

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I am committed to overcoming my self-centered tendencies today by cooperating with other addicts to fulfill our purpose of carrying the message of recovery.
Cooperation, Entry 2 of 2

*Time and time again, in crises we have set aside our differences and worked for the common good.*

—Basic Text, Tradition One

Cooperation is fundamental to what we do in NA, starting from the moment when the message is first carried to us. “I didn’t get clean because of my own Step One,” an addict shared. “I got clean because of someone else’s Step Twelve.” Whether we first heard the message from one member, a group, or a piece of literature, carrying the message to a using addict requires cooperation. We are clean because other members cooperated with each other—and we cooperated by listening and believing that recovery was possible for us, too.

Our cooperation in NA continues well beyond that first moment of willingness to listen and receive a message of hope. As we stay clean and get to know our fellow members better, we cooperate with each other and keep the doors open for the addicts yet to come. We’re sure to see or experience friction at some point, but addicts in recovery can be surprising in their ability to come together when it really matters.

“I got clean in a small town, and there were only two addicts at my first meeting,” a member wrote. “They carried a message to me that night. I thought they were best friends. Later, I learned that they couldn’t stand each other. I never would have known it from my first night clean.”

Some differences are more extensive than just a personality clash. “Our city was divided on racial/ethnic lines,” a group wrote. “We had two areas with big overlaps, and they didn’t get along. Some members finally had enough and created an annual unity event bringing both areas together. It was sort of controversial at first, but every year it gets bigger and better. Since it started, our areas have started collaborating on H&I and public relations service, too.”

*Placing principles before personalities means cooperating whether I get along with someone or not. I will do my best to set aside differences for NA unity.*
Curiosity, Entry 1 of 1

We keep learning and growing, finding ways to live and to use our experience to help others. No matter how long we have been clean, there is still more for us to learn and more for us to share.

—Living Clean, Chapter 7, “Love”

Active addiction shrinks our worlds, and our curiosity often withers from inactivity. For many of us, that first exposure to NA wakes up a dormant sense of curiosity. We may be somewhat puzzled by what we observe at our first encounters with the Fellowship, but we find it pretty compelling. As one member put it, “Looking back now, I could tell that you all had experienced the agony of addiction and then found a way to live clean and still be yourselves.” Curiosity about how NA makes that possible is one of the factors that keeps us coming back.

Without the constant numbing of drug use, our curiosity is reinvigorated. It may seem like a minor player given all the changes we experience, especially early on, but it’s also a consistent, reverberating background to our awakening. In retrospect, we can see that curiosity nudged us onto this new road of discovery. As we make our way down this road, again and again, curiosity helps us find the necessary courage to ask for help and learn from others.

The NA message starts with abstinence and ends with “find a new way to live.” The meaning of this final phrase evolves just as we do. It applies to every stage of our growth and change as we place one foot in front of the other on the path of recovery. We get older, yes, and that beats the alternative. We meet each phase of life head-on, curious to see where our journey will take us and how our assets and abilities lead us to serve in new ways. “Even as she was dying, she was teaching us how to live,” one member shared about her beloved sponsor.

The road narrows as we become less inclined to follow the dead ends of our old escape mechanisms. But a leaner road opens up to a world of genuinely nourishing practices and healthy connections. We follow our curiosity along interesting back streets and we’re set free to find a new way of life that fits our current chapter.

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I will cultivate a curious and open mindset and keep on discovering what I need to navigate each phase of this new way of life.
Encouragement, Entry 1 of 2

As a group, it’s our job to be tolerant, listen well, hear the message through the mess, and encourage newer members to grow.

—Guiding Principles, Tradition Ten, “For Groups”

Practicing encouragement, especially with newer members, is a job not to be taken lightly. Encouragement breeds hope, which leads to a willingness to change, which leads to courageous action, which leads to growth that can be miraculous to witness. When we consider the importance of encouragement, we realize that policing the message, or the messenger, is likely not helpful. We all hope to be met with empathy and encouragement, not an explanation about outside issues. We can overlook when a newcomer misspeaks. When we’re tempted to correct the way someone shared, maybe we offer a hug instead, and our phone number.

The share that hits the marks of solution-oriented, message-carrying, and utterly authentic—all before the bell goes off—may not happen every day. And is that even our goal? Many of us believe that sharing honestly is the solution—and that actively listening for the message reflects our empathy and encourages others to speak honestly. We can validate each other—and also model how to connect the dots between what’s happening in our individual lives and the process of recovery we all share. When we provide each other with support and encouragement, we’re more inspired to be part of each other's growth.

Encouragement is living by example, as much as it is the words we utter. Rather than critique a group member’s way of handling a problem, we share our experience with a similar situation. Through it all, we witness each other’s courage to endure some unimaginable conflict and strife and stay clean through it. “NA members’ encouragement has provided the nudge I needed to take one more step forward,” a member recounted. “I was told not to quit before the miracle. My suggestion is to not quit during or after either!”

We’ve all shared a “mess” at some point. Heck, we’ve all BEEN a mess! But the encouragement I received gave me the courage to learn and grow. I’m committed to doing that for others today.
Encouragement, Entry 2 of 2

We are inspired by one another’s journeys. Being present to one another’s growth gives us the tools and inspiration to move forward ourselves.

—Living Clean, Chapter 2, “Connection to Others”).

Starting from our first day clean, one of the most amazing gifts we find in NA is people who truly believe in us. Some of us are hesitant to believe in their belief, especially after disappointing so many people for so long. Still, there’s something so genuine in the way members tell us, “you never have to use again, even if you want to,” and that encouragement can be all that it takes to get us to our next meeting clean.

We change a lot in our first weeks, months, and years of recovery. “I laugh about it now, but they told me when I got clean not to make any major life changes during my first year,” one addict shared from the podium. “My entire life was turned around and flipped inside out—what could be more major than that?!” As time goes by, many of us settle into a more stable version of ourselves. A member with decades clean shared, “It’s a reservation in my Second Step if I believe I can’t still change just because I’ve been clean so long. If a newcomer can stop using drugs, I sure as hell can get help with a character defect.”

Even though our early recovery often sees the most dramatic change in our lives, there is always room for improvement. “It is the most amazing gift to witness people in my recovery network grow,” one member wrote. “No matter how long I’m clean, seeing others change reminds me that I can, too.” Being present to others’ growth means being present physically, showing up regularly. It also means truly listening to where our fellow members are at—mentally, emotionally, spiritually—and sharing honestly with them. The vulnerability, intimacy, and presence we practice in NA inspires growth among us all.

No change is too small or too big for my recovery. I will be present to the process and accept encouragement from other addicts.
Equality, Entry 1 of 1

*It doesn’t matter who is doing the giving or the taking. We are all equally entitled to ask and to provide, and wherever we are in the exchange, we benefit.*

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 7: “Being of Service”

Many of us had our sponsor tell us, “when you call, I am probably getting more out of it than you are.” This type of statement is right in line with paradoxes mentioned in our literature, such as keeping what we have by giving it away or loving ourselves more by thinking of ourselves less. Some members have even expressed discomfort with the implied hierarchy of the terms sponsor and sponsee. “I am not above my sponsees or ahead of them,” one sponsor shared. “I walk this path beside them, benefiting from them as they do from me.”

The principle of equality is a high ideal, and not one that comes automatically to most of us. “It’s beautiful and aspirational to say that we excluded no one,” a member reflected. “Our lofty goals require practical strategies so that when people do feel excluded or unequal, we have actionable steps to take.” In our groups, coming up with practical strategies can mean thinking of specific actions to help all addicts feel welcome and included. Creating a greeter position or asking whether there are any out-of-town visitors are a couple of simple examples of how some groups try to include everyone.

As individuals, practicing equality can be a little trickier. With more time clean and more Steps worked, our self-centeredness can try to use those as excuses to deny our equality with other members. One member wrote, “I started using service as an ego booster, patting myself on the back for helping those poor addicts. My experience with recovery may be valuable, but it doesn’t mean I am more valuable than other addicts. If I’m not still learning, I’ve got problems.”

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*The member with 40 years or 40 hours clean might share, one after another, and we never know which one will say the thing we need to hear. I will practice equality in how I share and listen today.*
Equanimity, Entry 1 of 1

When we feel dignity, we are not turned by a passing breeze, and we no longer need to defend ourselves from every shadow.

—Guiding Principles, Tradition One, Opening Meditation

When we were using, we adapted to the dangerous and hostile environments around us by developing survival skills. Even once we leave that life, we take these defenses with us. Early in our recovery, everything can seem like a threat to our wellbeing. Our responses are often knee-jerk, reactive, and based on a life we are no longer living, not our present-tense recovery journey.

Over time, we find our emotional and spiritual footing. Equanimity is the art of maintaining this steadiness. We are not so easily thrown off balance by whatever waves may come our way. We find ourselves less drawn to drama, and we don’t view challenges as crises so often. The tide comes in and goes out, and we acquire, through our own and others’ experiences, a deep-seated belief that we can get through this—that we will be okay no matter what.

The emotional wobbliness we have when we first come to NA subsides as we gain perspective. How we see the world changes and how we respond to what we see changes. True difficulties may emerge, but we can respond differently. When we are rigid, we are apt to get knocked down every time there is a storm at sea. In recovery, we learn to adjust our sails as we acquire “the wisdom to know the difference.”

We get more comfortable being who we are without justifying or explaining our feelings, thoughts, and actions. We relax into a new relationship with life and no longer need to be on guard, defensive, or reactive. Through the Eleventh Step, we learn to pause before reacting. In service, instead of acting impulsively, we can make choices that benefit NA’s common welfare. Meditation teaches us to slow down and listen. We don’t have to fix everything. We’re more open to the world as it is and to solutions that we may not have anticipated. We learn to be fully present and less guarded. We can stand in the middle of what is.

Being part of something bigger than myself can serve as a life preserver. When I am tired of swimming, I can lean back and float. I can’t always see what’s under the water but can trust my buoyancy.
Fidelity, Entry 1 of 2

Fidelity suggests that we are true and faithful to our message, that it is consistent on all occasions.


As a spiritual principle, fidelity signifies loyalty and commitment. We clarify our shared understanding of the disease of addiction and our common solution when we share the NA message with fidelity. Translators think similarly about fidelity as a concept in their work. In translations—NA or otherwise—fidelity refers to how well a translated document corresponds to the original. Although computers can substitute the words of one language with those of another, the results often make little sense. It takes the human touch and the work of skilled translators to convey the meaning, style, and tone of any piece of writing. They do more than transcribe; they interpret.

In Narcotics Anonymous, local translations committees and their professional partners assure that translated literature is faithful to our message. That’s no easy task. Each new language group has to grapple with words and phrases like “addict,” “clean,” and “the disease of addiction,” to figure out how to capture their meaning and spirit in the target language. NA members serving on local translations committees play an important role in ensuring fidelity. Their experience with the NA program and often impressive language skills helps to ensure that translated NA literature precisely reflects the ideas and spirit of the original.

Whether translating literature, speaking at a unity day celebration, or sharing with our home group, we strive to use NA language with the same precision. A clear NA message is about more than avoiding certain words. Clarity comes from living the NA way and addressing the disease of addiction with our program of recovery. When our predecessors wrote, “We admitted we were powerless over our addiction…” they focused Step One on the disease, not the drugs. This stroke of genius makes the First Step relevant to members at any phase of recovery. When we use NA language to convey our experience with fidelity, we contribute to an atmosphere of identification for all to hear.

My experience, our experience, is reflected by the NA message. I will try to draw those connections when I share and make a mental note of unspoken links as I listen to others.
As we practice honesty, integrity, and fidelity, we no longer have to keep track of our stories or cover our tracks.

—Living Clean, Chapter 3, “A Spiritual Path”

While addiction puts a serious strain on our ability to maintain fidelity to the people who matter to us, recovery allows us to show up for our loved ones in ways we may never have thought possible. Freedom from active addiction takes away one incredibly large barrier to our fidelity— the use of drugs. Once the drugs are out of the way, it is common in early recovery to wonder why our family and friends may hesitate to trust us completely. As we stay clean longer and gain greater relief from self-centeredness, we begin to see that the drugs weren’t the only barrier to our fidelity, and we need more than simple abstinence to be able to truly be present for the people in our lives.

If we focus more on what we’re not doing—using drugs, cheating, stealing, telling blatant lies—it might be easy to think that we are being more faithful and loyal in our relationships than we actually are. Our character defects, even when they aren’t glaring, can still get in the way of our ability to truly connect to the people in our lives.

“Step Six was eye-opening for me,” a member wrote. “I had a lousy track record with relationships, and I kept thinking I was just meeting all the wrong people. My sponsor helped me identify some character defects, and I realized it wasn’t them—it was me! Thank goodness for stepwork.”

Putting our behavior under the Step Six microscope can be a bit nauseating at times. Especially when we’ve been oblivious to a particular defect, it is disturbing to see it as a pattern and notice it in action again and again, as often happens when working Step Six. The path to fidelity—to being who we want and need to be in our relationships—is in becoming entirely ready to let go of patterns that stand in the way, and humbly asking for help in doing so.

Practicing fidelity allows me to be the truest version of myself for those I love. With the help of my sponsor, I will work to bring the best of myself into my relationships today.
Generosity, Entry 1 of 5

*Giving generously of ourselves, especially when we are in pain, is a path through some of our sorrow and confusion.*

— *Living Clean*, Chapter 4, “Death, Dying, and Living with Grief”

The connection between generosity and pain may not seem obvious right away. However, early recovery is a good example of how giving of ourselves can help us endure pain and discomfort. When we first get clean, some of us find we’re grieving many losses: our self-respect, our sense of self, the lifestyle and image that defined us, our relationships with drugs, and people we used with. Some of us come to NA mourning the loss of friends or family members to the disease. No one arrives to NA pain-free, but all of us who stay find some relief—usually by our active participation in NA.

“I hardly knew what to do with myself when I got clean,” one member shared. “I felt like an exposed nerve. Before and after meetings, I’d help with anything that needed to be done—handing out reading cards, taking out the trash, stacking chairs. Helping the trusted servants made me feel better.”

Generosity gets us out of ourselves. We stop focusing on our every thought and emotion and instead turn our attention to those around us. Even when we’re in pain or discomfort, generosity helps us do something good when we don’t know what else to do. Giving as a diversion from desperation is not necessarily the whole solution. Postponing feelings doesn’t make them go away, but a brief respite can renew our energy or refresh our thinking so that we can apply other solutions as well. Perhaps most importantly, in helping others, we can find the willingness to accept help. Life is difficult, but we are not alone—we have each other.

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*Grief, pain, hardship, and sorrow are all natural parts of life. To find my way through difficulties, I will embrace the spirit of generosity I find in NA. I will help others and allow them to help me.*
Generosity, Entry 2 of 5

*Generosity is an antidote to fear, and when we give freely, our hearts are filled.*

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Seven, Closing Meditation

Addiction is a greedy disease. Even without drugs, it leaves us looking outside ourselves for fulfillment. We buy too much (or steal!), overindulge, siphon off and manipulate our way into *more*. More ego, more material possessions, more people—and ultimately more debt and more unhappiness. The fear that we won’t get what we want plagues us. We hunger, we consume, yet we aren’t filled. If *more* won’t fulfill us, what will?

We hear a lot in meetings about gratitude being a spiritual antidote to fear, but have we thought about generosity as another? If gratitude is expressing our thankfulness, then generosity is a demonstration of that gratitude. In times of pain, difficulty, or even complacency, one ideal default strategy is generosity. When in doubt, or in self-centered fear, or self-obsession, we tell each other: “Reach outside yourself and *give*. Be of service. Call another addict. Get a commitment. Up the dough we throw in the 7th tradition kitty. Contribute.”

Practicing generosity by contributing to NA does more than fill our hearts. It gives us perspective, too, and reminds us to be humble. We ask ourselves: *how can I be useful?* Instead of armoring up with fear or indifference, we connect to others through our actions. Generosity isn’t dependent on our fearlessness. It’s being willing to give of ourselves even if we don’t know how to perform the commitment perfectly, say the perfect thing, or put in the perfect amount of time or money.

“I think about generosity in terms of freedom. It’s a physical as well as an emotional shift,” an addict shared, demonstrating with their body. “Fear is closed off and protective, grasping and hoarding. When we’re generous, we’re open. The channels of mutual giving are unblocked, we’re exposed to each other, and we’re freer and more fulfilled because of it.”

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*I’m willing to focus on giving as the way out of my fear and self-centeredness today. I’ll let the spirit of generosity fill my heart and share love and gratitude with another addict.*
Generosity, Entry 3 of 5

When we allow another person to step up and help us, we give them a chance to express their own love and generosity.

—Living Clean, Chapter Seven, “Being of Service”).

Railroading newcomers into service is an age-old tradition in NA. We do it with love, remembering our own reluctance to volunteer and with gratitude for what early service opportunities gave us. We complied back then since the people suggesting that we make coffee, set out literature, or greet people at the door were clean, after all. We trusted that they knew a thing or two, so we surrender to doing as they suggest.

Years later, we’re the ones nominating newcomers for those same life-saving commitments. By then, we recognize that some of the benefits we derive from service come from practicing love and generosity. Service often gives us our first sustained exposure to the good feelings that come with giving of ourselves. As we support other members, meetings, and service bodies—and roping others into doing the same—our generosity is evident in our contributions.

Long-time members assure us that this is no accident. Generously serving each other and NA develops our capacity; we grow as human beings, and NA grows as a Fellowship. We open doors for others to practice generosity; in turn, they reach out to bring others along. An interlinked series of relationships define the history of almost every NA community.

We are the direct beneficiaries of our predecessors’ vision and generosity. And yet, the names of those still with us might not come to mind when we need to recruit panelists for H&I, hosts for the convention’s hospitality room, or facilitators for the newcomer orientation. We may assume that our most seasoned members are above such tasks or that they’d volunteer if they were interested. One member had this to say: “I’ve grown old in NA—which beats the alternative— but I’m not as plugged into what’s happening in NA beyond my home group and sponsees. My phone doesn’t ring like it used to. But I’ll tell you this: Being asked to help never gets old. I still have more to give.”

I will practice generosity by inviting another member—new, old, or in-between—to help me or to serve NA.
Generosity, Entry 4 of 5

One small act of generosity can work wonders...
—It Works, Step Twelve

When we talk about “keeping what we have by giving it away” in NA, many of us are thinking about the way we freely share our experience, strength, and hope. After all, sharing is one of the most obvious ways in which we carry our message. But it isn’t the only way. We often don’t realize how we affect others simply by showing up and being ourselves.

“I sometimes go to an out-of-town meeting when I’m visiting family,” a member wrote. “A woman I didn’t recognize celebrated two years clean. She came up to me after the meeting and told me I remembered her name at her first meeting two years ago. She said she felt seen for the first time in a long time, and that’s why she kept coming back.”

Experiences like this are incredibly common in NA. Most of us still have a memory of a small act of kindness shown to us in our early recovery. We carry that kindness and generosity forward—sometimes without even noticing that we are doing it. Other times, it’s very much a purposeful and deliberate choice we make to ensure that newcomers have a chance to feel the love that we felt. “I can’t tell you how many Basic Texts I have bought in all the years I’ve been clean. And I still have just a single copy.”

Giving of ourselves in acts of empathy is what we do in NA. We carry the message when we share in meetings, and we carry the message by being who we are in all that we do as members of NA. Whether it’s holding the door open for someone coming into a meeting for the first time, holding a friend’s hand as they share about a difficulty they are going through, or holding space for others to hear the message in their own time—our generosity can work wonders.

Part of recovery is giving generously and expecting nothing in return. I will give freely today, knowing I might not see the reach of my generosity.
Generosity, Entry 5 of 5

_Recovery is a gift, given freely, passed from hand to hand and heart to heart._

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Eight, Opening Meditation

While it can be easy to think of our Traditions as nothing more than rules or guidelines to keep us in check, the truth is that they describe the way our Fellowship is able to enjoy tremendous freedom. The NA approach allows us to carry our message in whatever way suits us best; no degrees or specialized training necessary—simply our personal experience shared in our own way. One speaker laughed about our Traditions, “I heard ‘nonprofessional’ and ‘ought never be organized,’ and I knew I was in the right place! Then I had the experience of sharing a total mess, crying and cussing and crazy, and people came up afterward and told me that they got a lot out of what I shared.”

Sharing who we are and where we are—no fronts, no filters—is an act of generosity. Especially for secretive addicts like us, giving other people a chance to glance behind the curtain and see what’s really going on can be a precious gift. We are able to do so much for other addicts when we get honest this way. When we tell on ourselves, we let other members see that they’re not alone in what they’re going through. “They told me I can’t save my face and my ass at the same time,” one addict wrote. “I realized later that if I try to save face while I help an addict, I won’t do a very good job doing either.”

We never really know which of our words or actions will break through and reach the addict who is suffering. It could be that one kind gesture, a hug, a particular experience shared, or all of them taken together. NA isn’t treatment or therapy or any other type of place where professionals can offer a diagnosis and plan. Instead, we share freely the way other addicts shared with us, and we connect with others on a heart-to-heart level.

Getting vulnerable when I share opens my heart to other addicts. I will freely give what was given to me: the gift of recovery.
Honesty, Entry 1 of 1

As our thinking becomes clearer, our ability to be honest increases.
—Guiding Principles, Tradition Ten, Opening Meditation

We think an awful lot when we’re newly clean, and many of those thoughts are indeed awful. The idea that we’d give voice to what’s going on in our heads is frightening for many of us. What will people think? Better to say what we believe others will want to hear—doesn’t matter if it’s true. Others of us have no filter and we spew whatever opinion we have at the moment—doesn’t matter if we really believe it. Clarity in thought, word, and deed is generally not the place we’re operating from. When our connection to reality isn’t exactly strong, dishonesty comes naturally. Thankfully, we’ve come to the right place to get some clarity.

We are better able to be honest once we gain a better understanding of what’s true. The Steps help us to sort out what we did versus who we are. They give us valuable perspectives on our experience, so we’re better able to understand it and articulate it. Our story changes, because our relationship to the truth changes. We lie less, because we understand more. We speak as ourselves, not for other addicts and not for NA. Some begin their share with, “I’m not here representing NA. The program is in the book. This is my experience, including how I work the program in the book.”

A clearer understanding of the outside issues referred to in Tradition Ten helps us stick to sharing more clearly. Although stirring controversy may be quite appealing to many of us, we try to put our common welfare first. When we’re honest with ourselves, we can discern what’s relevant, how to navigate choppy waters, and what may not be recovery material. The clarity we gain in NA includes the fact that, as individuals, we can (and do) have plenty of opinions about outside issues—and we may need to share about how they affect our recovery. We also come to understand that NA doesn’t share our opinions on outside issues, because, unlike us, it doesn’t have any.

I’m willing to be more honest today than I was yesterday. That starts with gaining clarity about what’s actually true for me and deciding what part of that is helpful to share.
Honor, Entry 1 of 1

We learn to trust our intuition and honor our feelings.
—Living Clean, Chapter 5, “Conscious Contact”

The concept of honor comes with some baggage. It brings to mind ideas about virtue and morality that resonate with some members but aren’t really our thing within NA. Another form of honor refers to expressions of admiration and respect. That might mean awards and fanfare in some walks of life. But honor doesn’t require big, bold, public recognition; in fact, we find that practicing honor as a spiritual principle is often pretty quiet. Although many of us are no strangers to spectacle, we intuitively know that for honor to serve a spiritual purpose, it might be best to dial down the drama and draw on humility instead.

Thinking about what it means to honor our feelings and experience gives the concept of honor a new purpose and reveals its utility as a spiritual principle. In the experience of at least one member, “This is the kind of low-key honor that feeds my soul.” We practice honor in this classic, low-key, NA way when we approach recovery with a healthy degree of respect and humility. For many of us, that starts with conceding that those who came before us were onto something. When we give the Steps, NA literature, and each other an honest try, it’s a choice to set aside thoughts of going it alone. We honor the process and the path cleared by our predecessors when we pick up a book or two, consult with our sponsor and friends in recovery, dive in, and find some relief.

The same process that brings relief also allows us to access feelings anew. We may find this uncomfortable, but it’s worth the effort. We honor our feelings by feeling the full range of human emotions. We resist the urge to repress the unpleasant ones or deny ourselves the benefits of sharing our emotional burdens by being “fine” all the time. Because we’ve honored our recovery process, we know ourselves and can truly be ourselves.

I will practice honor the NA way: by engaging with the recovery process, connecting with my emotions, and sharing my feelings and experience with someone else.
Humility, Entry 1 of 1

_Balancing willingness and humility means that we are able to step up to the work we are able to do, and also admit that sometimes we need help._

—Guiding Principles, Tradition Eight, “Spiritual Principles”

Seeing our principles at work in NA service helps many of us learn how to apply them in our personal lives. Tradition Eight is a good example, reminding our groups to practice humility and prudence by being realistic about what we can and cannot accomplish through our voluntary service efforts. Some tasks or projects might require more time, energy, or expertise than we have available in our group or service body. In some cases, we pay someone else to carry out the work on our behalf, like printing T-shirts or serving a banquet meal at the convention. Much of what we do can be done by trusted servants; humility helps us sort out the difference.

Our personal recovery offers us many chances to step into a realistic view of who we are. For example, our humility deepens when we admit powerlessness in Step One, accept help in Steps Three and Seven, and embrace our strengths and limitations in Steps Four and Ten. We continually gain experience sorting out what we can and cannot do for ourselves. Sometimes, we simply embrace our strengths or expand our capabilities. Other times, we accept our limitations.

“I wanted to save money on a plumber by fixing a leak myself,” a member recalled. “My partner reminded me that I’d made several valiant attempts at home projects in the past year, and none turned out very well. If I want to become a fix-it person, I can make the time to take a class or get help from a friend. But while the water is leaking, I might just need to call an actual plumber.”

_I don’t have to be capable of everything. If my needs or desires outweigh my ability, I will practice humility by asking for help._
Independence, Entry 1 of 2

*Learning to make decisions for ourselves also means accepting responsibility for those decisions.*

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 6, “Finding Our Place in the World”

We aren’t alone, and we can’t recover alone. But our commitment to mutual support doesn’t negate our independence or the responsibility that attaining it—and sustaining it—demands. Even with all the apt suggestions we provide each other, our decisions about how we live are our own. And learning to live with those choices is its own beast!

Some members define responsibility as the willingness to accept the consequences of our actions. Even clean, we have to keep learning the lesson that our choices aren’t made in a vacuum. They affect those around us. When we find ourselves thinking once again, *I’m only hurting myself,* it’s time for a closer look. We may want to exercise freedom of choice with more awareness and care.

And other members say, “Careful what you pray for—you just might get it.” Often when we do get what we want, it’s a whole other world of responsibility that is ours to manage. A romantic partnership, getting our kids back, a career, property, a new puppy—all of these are gifts that we must care for in order to sustain. “We keep what we have only with vigilance”—and also with commitment, discipline, patience, acceptance, passion, and a lot of love.

Another aspect of taking responsibility for our independence is when, inevitably, we are faced with other people’s opinions about a new direction we choose. At times that “I told you so” reaction we get makes us defensively dig ourselves further into a bad choice—or someone else’s response spurs us to run from a good one. Blaming others gets us nowhere. Practicing independence requires an honest assessment of our choices in the face of others’ reactions. We’ve also heard members say, “The more I make new mistakes rather than repeating old ones, the more I know I’m making headway in my life.”

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*I’m doing the best I can at living fully and owning my independence. I can live with my choices, and, if not, I can make different ones!*
Independence, Entry 2 of 2

We find that we can be happy in our own skin if we are willing to let go—not in the old sense of neglecting ourselves, but allowing ourselves to experience our freedom.

—Living Clean, Chapter 4, “Letting Ourselves Go”

Independence comes in many forms in NA. The most obvious comes in the form of freedom from active addiction. Waiting to feel like we can truly make choices for ourselves, independent of our disease, can be like watching a pot before it boils. We get a little freedom when we stop using drugs, but we gain a greater sense of independence by actively participating in our new way of life. We go to meetings, share with other addicts, and read literature. Many of us have shared that we don’t even recall losing the desire to use. “I kept coming back, and I followed suggestions,” one member wrote. “At some point, I realized it had been weeks since the last time I felt like getting high.”

Independence in other areas often comes about in a similar way. Many of us had become dependent on so much more than just the substances we used. We relied on defense mechanisms, escapist behaviors, antisocial tendencies, and much more. We may have relied on others to steer our life choices, even in recovery. Steps Six and Seven help us break our dependence by showing us what keeps us from making our own choices. An addict shared about gaining independence by asking, “What would my life look like if I weren’t afraid?”

Practicing independence allows us to be creative. “In early recovery, freedom sometimes felt like a punishment or a chore because I didn’t know what to do with myself,” one member wrote. “Deciding to get serious about recovery was one of my first truly independent choices. I got the courage to take responsibility for my life, gain stability, become a part of society. I used to depend on others for everything. Now, people in my life can depend on me!”

Practicing independence helps us embrace our freedom. Rather than letting the open horizon scare me, I will take the wheel—and trust my higher power to navigate.
Individuality, Entry 1 of 3

_We are mindful of our behavior and our surroundings without giving up our individuality._

— *Living Clean*, Chapter 6, “Moving Beyond ‘Social Acceptability’”

Rock bottom means different things to different addicts. We come to NA in various states of unwellness, some more visible than others. No matter what kind of shape we appear to be in when we get here, we each find ourselves at the edge of our own learning curve. Although our minds may try to get ahead of us with all kinds of knotty questions, our journeys almost always start with going to meetings and staying clean between them.

It may occur to us that we wouldn’t have used with a lot of these people— unless it was their stuff, of course; no need to be rude. We can’t imagine them using with each other either, but there they go again, hanging out together in the parking lot an hour after the meeting. We find this mildly troubling. As using addicts, we thought we could suss out any situation and be who we needed to be. Here...what? *Am I supposed to be myself? That seems to be the idea. Yikes!*

In fact, that’s part of our charge: To figure out who we are and be that on purpose. We read about the value of our diversity and the “rough-and-tumble liveliness” found in NA; this rings true. We’re told that there’s no one right way to be an addict in recovery. This seems reassuring or disconcerting, depending on our mood. We aspire to be as comfortable in our uniqueness as some of those eccentric oldtimers. Like them, we grow secure in our own individuality and learn to express it in context-appropriate ways.

Accepting that our value lies in being ourselves frees up all that energy we used to spend shapeshifting. We no longer feel a need to blend in with the wallpaper or shine like the brightest star. We get to be ourselves, each of us uniquely contributing to the lively whole. We don’t need to fit in—because we belong.

__Knowing that my individuality contributes to the liveliness of the NA Fellowship encourages me to be wholly myself, which I’ll do to the best of my ability.__
Individuality, Entry 2 of 3

The idea of a spiritual awakening takes many different forms in the different personalities that we find in the Fellowship.

—Basic Text, Chapter 4: How It Works, Step Twelve

Step Twelve speaks of the spiritual awakening we have as a result of working the Steps. By the time most of us begin our work on Step Twelve, we have typically had any number of awakenings of a spiritual nature. Some awakenings might seem small, like recognizing an asset we’ve never noticed when we write our Step Four inventory. Other awakenings are more deep and profound, like realizing how a handful of behavior patterns all trace back to a particular character defect that we are just now coming to understand. As long as we keep moving through the Steps, we will continue learning about ourselves.

The Basic Text mentions that we differ in degree of sickness and rate of recovery, so it stands to reason that the types of awakenings each of us needs may be quite different, as well. We all have our own stories, including how we got here and where we are going. Hearing others share about their awakenings can be inspiring and instructive, but having our own experiences—even if they differ from what we hear others share—is what really matters. If we wait to have the same experience we hear others share, we may be disappointed. Worse yet, we may miss what’s happening in our own heart and spirit if we look only for what others have described to us, rather than seeing what we see for ourselves.

The prospect of having a spiritual awakening that is truly our own can be both awe-inspiring and intimidating. While our awakenings may not be identical to anyone else’s, the better we get to know the truth of our own experiences, the better we will be able to recognize the truth shared with us by fellow addicts. We are each on our own journey, but much of the terrain we cover is the same.

The awakenings we experience in the Steps may be different, but the message we carry is the same. I will honor the truth of my own awakenings as well as those shared by fellow NA members.
Individuality, Entry 3 of 3

*Each one of us finds our way to live spiritually, and that allows us freedom to make choices about how we live.*


Throughout our literature, in meetings, from the podium, over a coffee or tea, during late-night phone calls, alone in quiet meditation or prayer, we’re reminded that NA is a spiritual program. Whatever our individual beliefs or practices or methods or paths are or aren’t—whether they be secular, religious, or do not fit within that binary—we can’t deny that spirituality is central to a life of recovery in NA. Who we are spiritually and how we express that aspect of our individuality is unique to us, though we may use elements from all kinds of traditions, or none at all. Many of us can—and will—easily explain our relationship with our Higher Power. For many others, it’s not intelligible through words. And it’s private, something we’d rather not share about in a specific way.

For NA members, the road to recovery is paved by the same Twelve Steps, yet the journey we choose is varied. Our path to living spiritually is personal, though there’s some commonality and mutual understanding derived from the principles that appear throughout this book. Application of these principles is based on our individual needs and desires. We respond differently to everyday situations; we see through our own lenses and react to events in our own ways. And how we connect to the program—and its principles and spiritual nature—most often doesn’t look the same when we’re new as when we’ve become more comfortable in our own skins, or as we undergo life’s upswings and tragedies. As we continue our recovery journey, we find that the Steps prepare each of us to meet our individual circumstances.

Reciprocity is important here, too, as described by a member: “You have your own spiritual expression and your beliefs, and I have mine. That I can be my own person in NA reminds me that as you let me be me, I must let you be you.”

*My aim is to be open to the rich mosaic of spiritual expression I find in NA. I’ll explore and nurture my own beliefs as I apply the principles in our Steps.*
Interdependence, Entry 1 of 4

*Just as we learned in early recovery that we need each other to stay clean, we come to believe that all of us, every NA meeting and group, are interdependent.*

— _It Works_, Tradition One

Interdependence may not be a word that many of us use, but expressions of this principle in Narcotics Anonymous are very familiar. Our program is one of mutual aid, recognizing the therapeutic value of one addict helping another. As per Tradition One, our individual recovery is uplifted, enriched, secured by—and dependent upon—unity in purpose and a simple message of recovery. A worldwide network of meetings, groups, and service bodies are a part of the same whole. We need each other to stay clean and to carry our message using all the strategies we have to do so, such as H&I, helplines, public relations, creation of new literature, translations, and fellowship development—all over the globe.

Working this spiritual principle is, in large part, coming to the understanding and acknowledging that we are already practicing interdependence—by being a member of NA and participating in our recovery. We recognize that healthy relationships inside and outside of NA aren’t unidirectional. They’re reciprocal, mutually beneficial. One prime example is that sponsors help sponsees, and sponsees help sponsors. The ‘coming to believe’ in the quotation above is a result of the broadening of our experience of recovery in NA. We start to better comprehend the role of service and the interconnectedness among our local meetings and beyond—as our group’s conscience combines with others through various layers of NA services.

Interdependence knows no borders; it is the tie that binds us. It’s the ripple effect that empathy and participation have on our Fellowship. It’s the integrity of our movement to help addicts heal from the disease of addiction and to increase our connection to each other, to our surroundings, and to a life worth living.

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*I need others to practice interdependence, so I’ll connect with other addicts today. I’ll contribute to the recovery of others and participate in my own, recognizing that they are intricately linked.*
Interdependence, Entry 2 of 4

*Recovery doesn’t happen in a vacuum, we need one another.*
—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5: Relationships

Many meetings start with some readings from our Basic Text. They provide the nuts and bolts of the NA program: who, what, how, why, and other staples. As newcomers, we may find it heartening to hear that we’re the most important people in the rooms. As we stay clean, we may notice that the newcomer’s significance—according to “What is the NA Program?”—stems from what having new members in the room does for the rest of us: “because we can only keep what we had by giving it away.” This gem of a line from our Basic Text captures our interdependence as members of NA. We rely on each other, and our mutual needs fit like hand in glove.

We all have a lot to learn and not just at the start of recovery. Surrender and humility keep us teachable. We can take comfort in the fact that others have faced the same steep learning curve, stayed clean, and have experiences they’re willing to share. The addict who suffers—new or otherwise—invigorates our purpose and reinforces the bonds of interdependence. We all get a turn in the barrel, and asking for help is our greatest strength. Other days bring a chance to serve; we get to articulate what worked for us and fortify our ties.

We need each other—for the whole of our recovery—and our interdependence makes us better together. One member compared the strength that springs from our interdependence to the sound produced by a band: “I love a lead guitar, but it sounds even better accompanied by a rhythm guitar, a bass, and some drums. Add some vocals and a horn section and now we’re cooking. Sure, there’s a place for a drum solo or a wicked sax, but a great solo makes more sense in the context of the band—not in a vacuum.” Likewise, in NA, our strength relies, in part, on our interdependence. When we let others lean on us, when we ask for help from another member, when we cheer on each other’s solo performances, we build on the strengths of our interdependence.

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*I will contemplate the web of interdependence that I am a part of today. How can I foster interdependence within my NA community?*
Interdependence, Entry 3 of 4

As a member of an NA group, we take part in developing a conscience about how the group will meet its responsibilities and participate in the life of the larger Fellowship.

—Guiding Principles, Tradition Seven, “For Members”

Actively participating in NA can help us find a balance between the extremes of trying to do everything ourselves and utter dependence on those around us. For some of us, learning about that balance can start with seeing the Seventh Tradition collection take place in a recovery meeting. “The first time I got interested in service,” one addict wrote, “was when I saw the group treasurer counting money at one of my earliest meetings. I wanted to know who was spending that money and what they were going to buy!”

No matter what inspires us to come to our first group business meeting—or any other service meeting—NA service can teach us a great deal about self-support and interdependence. The money we give is just one method of self-support; offering our time, effort, attention, and perspectives can be just as important.

“I had less than two months clean when I went to my first group business meeting,” another addict shared. “The group was voting on motions for the World Service Conference, and they asked my opinion, saying the newcomer perspective was important. It occurred to me that there were home groups like this all around the world, talking about the same issues and sharing their perspectives—I felt connected to NA in a big way.”

Whether discussing global issues in the Fellowship or local ones, our voices as members and as groups are important. Each segment of our Fellowship does its part so that we, as members, have a place to share in the message of recovery. Our common welfare benefits from every contribution we make and every commitment we undertake. Embracing interdependence enhances our unity.

At any given moment, a newcomer somewhere is experiencing the same message that saved my life. In NA service, I am a part of that.
Interdependence, Entry 4 of 4

*When one addict helps another, NA is there. NA isn’t one addict or the other; it’s the helping, the sharing, the spirit of unity, the feeling of hope shared between us.*

—Guiding Principles, Tradition Nine, Opening Meditation

Tradition Nine, begins with “NA, as such, ought never be organized.” While it’s true that there are aspects of delivering the NA message that do require organization, what can never be organized is the spirit of our Fellowship. The active energy of that spirit, the flow between and among individual addicts and groups and service bodies—the “as such” part of NA—is our interdependence. We can’t organize the magic that happens when one addict supports another. We tell our stories of how we got here, despite the odds, despite our prejudices, despite fear. Doing so helps us and it helps others. Same with sharing our experience of how we got through illness or grief—and how we had dreams, set goals and then achieved them—or how we didn’t get what we’d worked for and hoped for and survived that pain, too. Flawed and human, we mutually depend on each other; we’re interdependent.

We can’t ever predict when an idea that one group has will reverberate to another corner of the world where it’s picked up and used by another. We don’t have NA bosses, handing down edicts from on high; instead, our service bodies are created in response to issues that emerge. And the solutions to our problems are gleaned from the hard-won experiences and brand-new ideas of recovering NA members. We can’t govern our way into unity or cooperation or participation. Or love. Instead, everyone pitches in however they’re willing. We’re a growing, evolving movement. When we band together, we are a power greater than the disease of addiction. Interdependence is our collective restoration to sanity.

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*I will practice interdependence by relying on others and allowing them to rely on me. NA, as such, only becomes stronger with our collective empathy, our creativity, our hope, our unity. Today, I will participate in all that.*
Joy, Entry 1 of 2

As addicts, we know the pain of addiction but we also know the joy of recovery we have found in Narcotics Anonymous.

—Basic Text, Preface to the First Edition

Many of us related very well the first time we heard the line, “We could not live and enjoy life as other people do.” Enjoyment and joy become rare when we’re caught up in the disease. “Addiction was like putting tons of salt on all my food,” an addict shared. “Quitting salt makes the food seem bland for a while… but then I can start to taste the actual flavors. Early on in recovery, I thought everything was boring and dull—but it turns out, it was just me!”

Being in recovery and working a program allows us to rediscover or redefine joy for ourselves. “My home group members go bowling together nearly every week,” a member shared. “I think bowling is just about the lamest possible activity… and yet I won’t miss it for the world. We bowl badly, make a big ruckus, and laugh nonstop.” We experience life in a new way, and different life experiences shape our perspectives on joy.

Developing a taste for the more subtle flavors life has to offer takes time. We learn a lot by listening to other members. Joy is contagious. A member shared, “A home group member who is a parent always shares so seriously about silly things like potty training, then laughs about it. I don’t even like kids, but those stories make me laugh, too. It’s helping me not take myself too seriously.”

The Steps offer a path out of self-centeredness toward contentment. It Works: How and Why describes it this way: “We’ve begun to see that God’s will for us is the ability to live with dignity, to love ourselves and others, to laugh, and to find great joy and beauty in our surroundings.” Getting to this place—living and enjoying life “as other people do”—takes a little bit of patience, and the willingness not to take ourselves seriously all the time.

Life is good when I let it be. I will find something to laugh at today—even if it’s just myself!
Joy, Entry 2 of 2

We come to understand that happiness is an inside job, a spiritual experience that can get stronger with recovery. We find that no matter what happens on the outside, joy can still live within us.

—Living Clean, Chapter 7, “Love”

As far as spiritual principles go, joy is uncomplicated. But it can be elusive. In active addiction, joy was an abstract concept often far removed from our reality. How can we position ourselves to experience it now? One addict wrote: “Recovery from addiction is our path toward joy. I invite it in by removing barriers to that path, like anxiety, fear, and self-obsession.” Another wrote: “Joy is the result of my commitment to gratitude, service, and simplicity. I never thought I could appreciate ordinary things.” A third wrote: “The greatest joy is bittersweet, because I have experienced moments of it during my darkest hours. I can’t have joy without hope, and no amount of pain can take it away from me.”

Experiencing pain is part of our human condition, even when we do everything right. We can get clean, own our part in our past mistakes, make amends, learn to live by spiritual principles, be of magnificent service in the rooms, at home, and out in the community—yet pain will visit us again. We’ll lose people and relationships. Material gains come and go. Our health may decline. But can joy be taken from us? Is joy—like pain—an inevitable part of our experience?

Most of us would say that joy, like recovery, is available to us all. Despite our struggles, when we infuse our situation with gratitude, we find hope for our future—and create a place for joy at the table. We can choose to look at our troubles with a sense of humor and maybe even benefit from some laughter through our tears of anger or sorrow. None of this is easy. But through the inside job that is recovery, acceptance of this very moment is within reach. Serenity is possible. We can endure loss and reclaim joy over and over.

Regardless of my current burdens, I will shine the light of gratitude on what’s right in my life today and experience joy. Recovery has taught me that I can embrace multiple experiences at once.
Listening, Entry 1 of 3

*In service, we listen well by listening for common ground rather than for ways to prove that our idea is better.*

—*Guiding Principles, Tradition Four, “In Service”*

NA offers plenty of opportunities for us to learn how to do a better job of living in the world. While very few of us show up to NA with the credentials of “great listener,” sitting through recovery meetings can teach us much about making an effort to truly understand what others are saying. The listening skills we hone in recovery meetings are quite useful in NA service, too. Self-centeredness might cause us to put the responsibility for good communication on others: If they would just be clearer, we wouldn’t have to listen so carefully. As we learn in meetings, with our sponsors, calling other addicts—communication is a two-way street, and we’re much better off when we work on our side, rather than insisting on improvements across the way.

“I noticed a fellow trusted servant frequently restating things other members had shared, but in different words,” a member wrote. “I got angry, thinking they wanted credit for everyone else’s ideas. After a while, I realized that they were basically interpreting for themselves as they tried to understand what other people were saying. The service meetings take longer, but I think hearing things in multiple ways actually ends up being helpful.”

There are many ways we can improve our ability to listen in service. For example, not talking while others are talking, can be practiced well in most recovery meetings. Other techniques, like asking others to clarify what they're saying, might be better reserved for service meetings. Sponsorship helps, too, of course. A member wrote, “My sponsor would say ‘what I hear you saying is…’ I started using that phrase in service, and soon my communication was improving dramatically!"

I typically have more in common with others than I may believe. I will listen for common ground with patience and gratitude.
Listening, Entry 2 of 3

*We learn to actively cultivate our listening skills, using our ears more than our mouths in conversation.*

—It Works, Tradition Two

Being open-minded is a key spiritual principle of Tradition Two in which we invite a Higher Power to develop and guide our group’s conscience in decision-making. One helpful step toward getting our minds open enough to participate in this process is to open our ears to each other. And, as the cliché goes, we’re not just *hearing* words (*blah, blah, blah, waiting for my turn to speak*) but *listening* to them. For that to happen in earnest, we need to take a break from talking, or thinking about what we’re going to say when it’s *finally* our turn.

A mistake we often make in relationships—and this easily applies to service in NA—is believing that being heard and getting our point across is the most important contribution we can make. There are times when we confuse listening with telling someone how much we understand and immediately sharing our own story of identification. And other times our evidence for listening is a hefty list of solutions to the challenges a member has just shared with us. Sometimes an addict just wants to be heard. Our sage advice can wait until it’s asked for.

When we actively listen in conversation or in a group discussion, we’re able to make more meaning of the topic, have more empathy, be more inclusive and curious. We tap into the conscience part of Tradition Two when we listen to—and absorb—the voices of our fellow members. Our perspective broadens, context deepens. At our most open, we can see things as others see them, maybe even clarifying our own viewpoints in the process. We can be influenced. An addict shared, “I feel much more at peace when I am listening and not trying so hard to be heard—and isn’t serenity what all this is about anyway?”

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*Today will be a day when I’m going to open my mind and my heart by opening my ears and not my mouth. Be quiet, brain, I’m listening!*
Listening, Entry 3 of 3

Active listening is a form of meditation. Some of the most important messages are delivered through some unlikely people.

—Living Clean, Chapter 3, “Conscious Contact”

In the simplest terms, we can think of prayer as talking to our Higher Power and meditation as listening. No matter the method, the goal is the same: We are developing a conscious contact. The wording is significant. Contact refers to the connection we foster through prayer and meditation. Consciousness implies that we are intentional in our efforts—awake and aware, purposeful and deliberate. In one member’s experience, “meditation sharpens my focus and calms my mind. I can let go of what I think I know. With that, I’m more open to stumbling on what I need, often from unexpected sources. I practice this mindset as I go about my day and my connections—with others and my Higher Power—benefit.”

It’s often easier to stay open to the message when we set aside our ideas about the person doing the talking. “If I listen with my heart—it keeps my thoughts from interrupting,” a member shared. “My recovery has been improved by people who couldn’t seem to take their own advice, bless their hearts. I never know who’s going to save my life.” Empathy and attentiveness help us listen with an open mind, consider different points of view, and be receptive to the message no matter the source.

Others remind us to listen with more than our ears. It’s an old trope in the deaf community that hearing people are emotionally inhibited because they hide behind words. “We communicate with our whole being,” a member explained. “Signing taught me to be present, receptive, and open—mentally, physically, spiritually—to that exchange of energy.” We might all aspire to communicate in such a connected, visceral way: doing our best to listen for resonance and not letting words tell the whole story. When we’re consciously listening for it, we can let a message nudge us in a direction, shape a decision, or make the next right action clear.

I will consciously listen with all I’ve got—mind, body, heart, and spirit—and be open to messages from unlikely messengers.
Participation, Entry 1 of 1

As a member of an NA group, we take part in developing a conscience about how the group will meet its responsibilities and participate in the life of the larger Fellowship.

—Guiding Principles, Tradition Seven, “For Members”

Who among us hasn’t felt like a victim of our circumstances at some point? In active addiction, we may have made an art form of blaming outside forces for our problems. It’s true that some situations beyond our control cause undue hardship or difficulties, but we have choices available to us now. Recovery teaches us to actively participate in a solution, beginning with taking personal responsibility for our disease and participating in the program of NA.

We also take responsibility for the Fellowship by participating in the discussions and decisions affecting our groups and service bodies. Each of us has to determine for ourselves—in consultation with our Higher Power and our sponsor, of course—what level of participation feels right for us. “I noticed that when I participate less and have less information,” a member recalled, “the more I think in terms of ‘us’ versus ‘them.’ When I step up my participation, I feel like it’s all ‘us.’” There’s a reason we often talk about service as part of Tradition Seven, not just the money we give. When we give our time through active participation, we are practicing a form of self-support. According to one addict, “recovery is not a spectator sport. We get out of it what we put into it.”

The practice of participation we learn in NA tends to show up in other areas, too. In our families, in our work—the more we participate, the more we feel that we are part of, our voices matter, and our needs are considered. We are not just victims of circumstance anymore, we actively participate in solutions.

When I passively observe life, service, and recovery, I’m short-changing myself.
Today, I will show up and participate.
Passion, Entry 1 of 2

Something different happens as we move into recovery motivated by passion, hope, and excitement. We are released into our own lives.
—Living Clean, Chapter 1, “Why We Stay”

Some of us spend our early days of recovery in NA more conscious of what we were trapped in and what we are escaping—compulsion, isolation, alienation, desperation—than aware of what we want in our lives. We see right away that people in NA have gained some freedom from the consequences of addiction, and hope keeps us coming back. It didn’t take long to realize that many recovering addicts get much more than freedom from the cage of addiction—they gain freedom to explore the world outside of that cage.

“When I was using, every other interest took a back seat to my disease,” one member wrote. “In one of my earliest meetings, I heard an addict share about going into the wilderness to get back into rock climbing after 15 years away from it. I had no interest in climbing rocks, but the idea of being released into the wild was so exciting to me. I decided to find a passion of my own.”

That’s how it goes in recovery: We regain the ability to pursue our interests. Rock climbing, songwriting, restoring old cars—our lives become our own to live. For many of us, the drive and excitement to follow our own interests grows out of our passion for recovery and carrying the message. Another member wrote, “I was so stoked about life without drugs in early recovery. As soon as I had enough cleantime, people invited me to share on H&I panels left and right, and I felt like I had a purpose. After years of thinking the world was full of threats, I started seeing opportunities everywhere.”

Where addiction limits us and makes our world smaller, recovery opens us up to the world. What opportunities are on my horizon today?
Passion, Entry 2 of 2

Passion is a lot like desperation: It is a motivating, energizing force that can propel us forward.

—Living Clean, Chapter 1, “Desperation to Passion”

The gift of desperation doesn’t look the same for all of us. One member quipped: “You can get off at any floor on the way down to hell.” All of us were propelled into NA by despair, pain, and fear. And—over time—we’re able to harness that energy to transform it into enough passion and excitement—even joy—to help us stay clean another day, grow spiritually, and live creatively and with purpose!

Living Clean reminds us: “Making the shift from desperation to passion is a First Step issue.” In desperation, we surrender to being powerless over our addiction, and ultimately surrender to the first steps on our path of a new life and to the purpose of carrying the NA message. The member continued, “After my initial surrender, the changes I saw in myself fueled my passion for recovery! I was energized by the potential of what could come next.” Like that initial surrender, this desperation-to-passion shift isn’t a one-time deal. Despair still happens in recovery. But we can allow it to motivate us, driving us to make needed changes to our program and reigniting our passion to persevere with purpose.

Passion, like desperation, doesn’t manifest in the same ways for all of us. Our personalities absolutely play a part in how our passion is revealed—and our mood also affects how we experience it. What is burning, purposeful, and creative passion on one day—excitement for sponsorship, motivation to serve, strongly held conviction—may look more like quiet fidelity to our program or begrudging perseverance on another. Although the fires may burn differently, they all propel us forward. Our passions don’t always remain fixed either. We may revisit ones long forgotten and discover new ones. We’re free to passionately pursue the things that bring us joy and nurture our spirits—both in the rooms of NA and out in the world.

Passion isn’t just a feeling. It’s an energy I’ll use today to move forward in my program, in my relationships, in my purpose.
Powerlessness, Entry 1 of 3

The First Step of Narcotics Anonymous is unique. Rather than addressing a single symptom or substance, we admit our powerlessness over the disease that drives us.

—Guiding Principles, Tradition Five, “For Members”

Depending on who’s telling the story, our First Step’s focus on the disease was either A) a stroke of genius, B) tremendous good luck, C) the work of a Higher Power, or D) all of the above. Our founding members knew that identifying a specific drug as the object of our powerlessness wouldn’t work for this motley crew. They were intent on creating a place for all drug addicts, where all of us could find identification. If refraining from naming a substance had been their only concern, our First Step might have just stated that we’re powerless over drugs. Instead, Step One points to the disease of addiction as our problem.

Powerlessness over the disease gives our First Step lasting relevance. Our focus on addiction—instead of an apparent symptom—makes Step One as relatable before we detox and as it is when we have decades clean. Sure, drug use was the most prominent and destructive manifestation of the disease, but unmanageability can bubble to the surface long after we’ve stopped using. When reaching outside ourselves to fix what’s within seems like a good idea, we may be in trouble. “When I admit my powerlessness, I interrupt that outward reach and turn to my Higher Power instead,” in one member’s experience. Surrendering to the First Step acts as a circuit breaker on our diseased thinking. This pause in the action is what’s needed for us to dodge some unmanageability.

Step One’s ongoing relevance influences how we think about the Fifth Tradition, too. Knowing that we’re all eligible to be the still-suffering addict reminds us to be more inclusive as we address our primary purpose. War stories may illustrate the unmanageability in our past, but our present-day, squeaky-clean powerlessness also deserves some attention. Talking about our struggles confirms that last element of our message: We keep coming back and keep finding a new way to live.

I will recognize my powerlessness in some present-day situation, flipping the circuit breaker on some distorted thinking and opening myself to spiritual solutions.
Powerlessness, Entry 2 of 3

By admitting our own powerlessness, we open our minds to an entirely new idea: the possibility that something greater than ourselves might be powerful enough to relieve our obsession to use drugs.

— It Works, Step Two

Our literature describes how the Second Step helps us to fill the gap created when we admit our powerlessness in Step One. If we are powerless over our disease, what can we do about it? For many of us, simply seeing that there are other addicts like us who have lost the desire to use is enough to open our minds to the possibility that something might be able to help us, too—even if we don’t know what that something might be.

The catch to accepting help from a power greater than ourselves is that we have to stop exerting our own power, first. Practicing powerlessness over our disease means that we stop trying to manage and control it. So many of us have shared about trying to limit our using, hiding our stash from ourselves, using only certain substances or on certain days of the week, and many other ways of trying to be clever or tricky enough to outsmart our addiction. If anyone had success with those types of tricks, they’re probably not NA members. (Yet?)

That’s the way it is with addiction. If we try to overpower or outmaneuver our disease, we’re bound to fail. It might not even happen right away, but eventually, we find ourselves surrounded by unmanageability, wondering what happened to our well-laid plans. Rather than exerting great control over ourselves to behave in a highly predictable and consistent manner, we let go of the illusion of control and open ourselves to power from elsewhere. Unlimited examples of experience, strength, and hope are available to us when we share with other addicts in recovery.

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Rather than trying to go it alone, I will rely on a power greater than myself.
Powerlessness, Entry 3 of 3

*When we admit our powerlessness and our inability to manage our own lives, we open the door to recovery.*

—Basic Text, Chapter 4: How It Works, Step One

Practicing powerlessness as a spiritual principle may seem far-fetched to many of us. Admitting defeat is a concept that we’re very uncomfortable with. But what’s ironic is that we’re already practicing powerlessness by darkening the doorstep of our first NA meeting. And, even before that, very likely we’ve had our moments of crying out to *something* to stop this madness, this pain, begging to get well, pleading to finally get to sleep, fearing the sun coming up or going down again, promising and bargaining another time, the *last* time, we swear it!

The surrender of Step One is often terrifying for us, because it’s a threshold that we can’t easily back away from once we make ourselves truly vulnerable to it. Try as some of us might, we can’t put the toothpaste back in the tube: we can’t return to using and just forget that people like us are staying clean in NA. We admit that we’re addicts, that we’re powerless over our addiction, and that we cannot manage our own lives. We need power to survive, and we gain it with the help of other recovering addicts, a program, and a Higher Power.

Practicing powerlessness is not a one-time occurrence; we are faced with embracing it over and over again. “No, we *get* to do it over and over,” a member corrected themself from the podium. “I used to feel so defeated by my powerlessness. But now that I have experienced some relief from active addiction and the benefits of getting this honest about my life, I see it as a source of strength and possibility: the possibility of recovery and a better life.”

Yes, we open the door to recovery. On some days, that door is flung wide open, because we are wide open. On other days we can only muster a crack to let a bit of willingness flow out and our Higher Power flow in.

*It’s a relief to admit I’m powerless over my addiction—in whatever form it takes. I’ll ask for help, because my real power comes when I surrender.*
Reliability, Entry #1 of 3

We make a commitment to our home group, and if we are absent for some reason, we will be missed.

—IP #2: The Group, “Home Group”

When we were using, reliability was as rare as hens’ teeth. We showed up when it was convenient, and only if we were getting something out of it. We might have made it home for the holidays but stayed just long enough to get gifts that we could return for cash. We might reliably show up to work, but mostly to swipe cash from the till or take our patients’ meds. The gratification of spending time with family or giving an honest day’s work for an honest day’s pay was lost on us.

It didn’t take much cleantime to figure out that this way of doing things wouldn’t serve us well in recovery. The idea that we could live clean and enjoy stable, happy lives inspired us. We understood that reliability would be an important part of becoming a responsible, productive member of society.

For many of us, becoming reliable starts with finding a home group, accepting our first commitment, and then doing our best—as one member put it—“to live up to the trust placed in me. My sponsor told me that reliability precedes trust. As suggested, I learned to show up and do what I said I’d do.” By keeping our word, we practiced the essence of reliability and built a foundation for integrity.

Our reliability makes us a real asset as home group members. Beyond any particular duties we perform, home group members steady the atmosphere of recovery. We think of some members as “fixtures” at particular meetings—the same people, often in the same seats, week after week—and, in time, we become them. “It’s okay to take us for granted—that’s what we’re here for,” one home group member explained. “We’re like candles you keep on hand just in case. We’re here to produce some light if needed or to set the mood.”

I will be true to my word today. I will show up and do what’s expected of me at home, at work, in the community, and in meetings.
Reliability, Entry 2 of 3

*We grow to be steady, reliable, loving people who can be a force for change in the lives of other addicts and beyond.*

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5: Relationships

For active addicts, unreliability is likely a near-universal character defect. When we did manage to be physically present for the family, for work, or for other commitments, we reliably brought chaos. With our lack of follow-through, our dishonesty, our untrustworthiness, and our instability, who really wanted us around when we did show up?

Recovery in NA is a reliability game-changer. We show up to meetings regularly—and participate. We take on service commitments—and fulfill them. We communicate with our sponsor and other addicts—and we pick up the phone or return a message when someone reaches out to us. Through our stepwork, we gain some reliability skills that help us go beyond being consistent and doing our part. Others can depend on us emotionally. We’re more reflective and self-aware, apt to practice gratitude, and quicker to forgive. We’re more available in terms of time and our spirit, bringing our whole selves to our relationships. We listen. “I have started to feel, even at my age—which is not young!—finally like one of the adults in the room,” a member commented. “People rely on me for the first time in my life. Members seek my help, and I’ll willingly give it.”

Put simply, when reliability shapes our actions, our relationships transform. When we’re present and available in our encounters with NA members and others in our lives, people begin to trust us. They take our expressions of love and kindness with more than a grain of salt, because we take actions now to back them up. We are works in progress, and we reliably allow others to be, too. Leading a spiritual life has ceased to be a theory we hear about in meetings; it is now becoming our own tangible reality—and we may even inspire others in the process.

*Learning to be reliable has helped me become a force for change. I will honor the person I’m becoming by showing up wholly and humbly. I’m here today for others.*
Reliability, Entry 3 of 3

We keep our commitments, and that matters to the people around us.
—Guiding Principles, Tradition One, “For Groups”

For some of us, being a member of an NA group gives us our first taste of what it feels like to be reliable. When we are new, members urge us to come to the next meeting and come back clean. Group members remember us, seem happy to see us, ask us to share or take a commitment. We keep coming back—and whether we like it or not, people begin to rely on us. “I was excited to be trusted by group members to carry on the work,” a member shared. “My end of the bargain was to do the work and serve the entire term.”

Even when we don’t complete our service as reliably as we would expect of ourselves, serving in NA helps us get better, especially because we start to see the value of our contributions. “Our group created some service positions for newer members to get them involved,” a group wrote. “When people miss the meeting, it’s not a big deal. All the tasks get done. But the meeting feels so much more complete when everyone is there, doing their part. It’s like music...you might not notice one or two voices missing from a choir, but when they’re all there, it just sounds so much better.”

Our families and friends might feel a little skeptical or surprised about our developing reliability. It’s discouraging when people don’t believe in us the way our fellow members do, but it’s our actions that matter. One member wrote, “I heard someone say that 90% of recovery is showing up—bring the body and the mind will follow. That helped me show up for my commitment, and I used it to help me be there for my family and my job, too. People started to count on me. I began to feel like I mattered.” Keeping our commitments changes the way people see us, but more importantly, it changes the way we see ourselves.

Reliability begins with showing up. I will show up for my life today, secure in the knowledge that I matter, to others and to myself.
Just staying in our seat without checking our phone or creating side conversation can be surprisingly difficult, especially when we are having feelings we’d rather avoid.

—Guiding Principles, Tradition Six, Opening Meditation

The idea of a bunch of addicts sitting in a room together showing restraint sounds like the start of a bad joke, but, hey, recovery in NA is full of miracles! It’s truly an achievement that we’re able to create and sustain an atmosphere of recovery considering our individual and collective capacity for being distracted. Many of us have to work especially hard to sit with any degree of stillness and patience—and just be present—because of how our brains work or, of course, how new we are. And yes, there are many tools and avenues that may divert our attention from our primary purpose in a meeting—our smartphones, our fellow addicts, a noise outside, a technological glitch, a moment of boredom or overstimulation. Out of respect for the speaker, the newcomer, our group, and ourselves, we try to stay focused. Showing restraint in this manner is the respectful thing to do.

There are other times where our diversion is a sign of something deeper, and our tendency to deny or avoid our feelings gets ignited. Identifying with a member’s share can be a lovely moment of connection, but it can also make us want to crawl out of our skin. We addicts seem to be allergic to discomfort, and yet pushing through it will often bring us to a place of more profound comfort—with ourselves and our surroundings. Glancing at our phone won’t give us that. It does help to have some guidance here, as not all discomfort has that potential to be productive. We need a sponsor and other trusted NA members to help us discern between a moment when we should rein in our desire to scoot and stay with our feelings—or when we should honor our need to remove ourselves from a potentially harmful situation.

Restraint is an expression of freedom. The freedom ‘to do' is also the freedom ‘not to do.’ I’ll practice that today by not being rude or running from my feelings.
Safety, Entry 1 of 1

_We do our best to safeguard those who are vulnerable without making others feel unwelcome._

—Guiding Principles, Tradition Three, “For Groups”

Many NA members have a complicated relationship with the concept of safety. It can conjure up the idea of “playing it safe,” of being uncool. More profoundly, some of us come to NA never having known a real feeling of safety or having known it only to have it torn away. In our using days, we were rarely safe—even when alone in a room with ourselves. Sometimes we witnessed or experienced terrible things, and that suffering left its mark. So, how do we practice safety as a principle in NA? And how do we strive to create a safe atmosphere of recovery while standing firm on the Tradition Three proposal that all are welcome?

One member shared: “Safety to me means feeling truly at home in the world. I never felt that until I sat in an NA meeting.” That sense of belonging, of having found our people, is precious. Anonymity means we are all equal in NA and that we respect each other’s privacy, integrity, and choices. We protect our equality by doing our best to provide every desperate and vulnerable member a safe place to recover. Without some sense of safety, it’s hard to listen, even harder to participate, and our effectiveness in carrying our message of hope is diminished. A focus on safety enhances our groups’ stability by creating healthy places that neither tolerate predatory behavior nor drive out offending members. _Everyone_ deserves a chance to recover.

At its best, NA provides an environment where we can _be_ safe and eventually _feel_ safe, too. This may be aspirational at times; creating a safe and welcoming atmosphere in our meetings often takes careful consideration and thoughtful action. When bullying, unwelcome sexual advances, or other disruptive behavior threaten to undermine our safety, we invite a loving Higher Power to direct our group conscience. Together, we find the courage to safeguard against harmful behavior, extending the promise of recovery to both the vulnerable and those of us who are still learning a new way to move through the world. We trust the process and do the next right thing.

_How am I participating in creating and maintaining a safe and welcoming environment for every addict seeking recovery?_
Selflessness, Entry 1 of 3

Make us servants of Your will and grant us a bond of selflessness, that this may truly be Your work, not ours—in order that no addict, anywhere, need die from the horrors of addiction.

—Basic Text, “Introduction”

The work we do in NA is all about carrying our message of hope to addicts seeking recovery. No matter what our beliefs about a Higher Power are, most of us can agree that anything capable of keeping addicts all over the world clean, just for today, is a power greater than any of us as individuals. “I couldn’t keep myself clean,” one member shared. “So there’s no way I have the power to keep anyone else clean either!”

The same holds true with our service efforts: Our job is not to keep anyone clean or make anyone recover. We carry the message. Our Service Prayer was adapted from the literature prayer in the Basic Text, acknowledging the crucial role selflessness plays in our services. Many of us understand a Higher Power to simply be whatever force keeps us clean, and when we serve selflessly, we can be a part of that force for the addicts who benefit from our work.

Selflessness isn’t always easy. Self-centeredness will try to make our work about us, rather than those we serve. Maybe we think a certain service position will make us popular or powerful. Maybe we think sponsoring a lot of addicts, or the “cool” addicts, will lend us some prestige in our anonymous fellowship. Maybe we think having the biggest home group or the best conventions means we are recovery rock stars. Some members say that ego can stand for “edging God out,” and there’s some truth in that: When we allow ourselves to move to the center, we have to push something else out of the center.

The Service Prayer reminds us to keep the needs of the still-suffering addict at the heart of our service efforts. We do our part and then try to stay out of the way. We won’t get it perfect, but practice helps!

I will practice selflessness by striving to keep the message—and a power greater than myself—at the center of my service efforts.
Selflessness, Entry 2 of 3

Practicing selflessness gives us relief from self-obsession.

—Living Clean, Chapter 5, “Fellowship”

Our Basic Text states “Self-obsession is the core of our disease.” When we look for evidence of this in our lives, most of us find plenty to go around. We see ample proof of self-centeredness and self-obsession in many of the thoughts, feelings, and actions that led us to the door of our first meeting. Coming to terms with the way our disease manifested itself in active addiction is a crucial component of the recovery process. We see much more as we stay clean and work a program: like how self-centered fear spirals into self-obsession and continues to manifest in recovery. And, thankfully, how selflessness can offer us some relief.

“Once I was able to stop using,” one member wrote, “the greatest freedom I’ve received in NA has been freedom from intoxication with my own thoughts and thinking, freedom from the self-centered me. I’ve been freed to care about others.” Simple abstinence does not eliminate self-obsession; we get a better perspective on our lives when we get out of ourselves. One member was known to tell newcomers, “If you feel lousy today, call another addict and ask how they’re doing.”

When we focus all our attention on ourselves, we end up feeling bad. By shifting our focus to others, we usually feel much better about everything. Especially when we are helping a newcomer, we find plenty of reason to be grateful for what we have. Instead of worrying (or obsessing) about our own desires, we try to practice care and concern for those around us. Selflessness doesn’t even have to mean we disappear from the picture altogether—we simply turn our thoughts to others for a bit, and we experience some relief from self-obsession.

When self-obsession strikes, I will help another addict. It’s that simple.
Selflessness, Entry 3 of 3

The principles we learn in the steps help us let go of our selfishness and lovingly serve the needs of others.

—It Works, Tradition One

In hindsight, many of us find that self-centeredness shaped our thinking and behavior. We realize how much energy we spent protecting our fragile egos, imagining what others thought about us, or carefully curating our image on social media. Privately, we were often negative, selfish, and entitled, as we neglected the work of doing our best with what we have. The Steps have a way of setting us on a more productive course in life. We see who we’ve been, come to understand who we are, and clear out what interferes with taking a more positive, selfless, and grateful approach to life.

Whether we’re new or have been around a while, some of us take up seemingly selfless activities like ducks to water. But, like anything that feels good, we can take selflessness to unhealthy extremes. We do love too much of a good thing, after all, and—bonus!—we can avoid examining ourselves by becoming immersed in helping others. Many of us learn the hard way that unrestrained generosity can harm both the giver and the recipient. As the old saying goes, you can’t draw water from an empty well. The Steps help us build a more realistic self-concept and a life that we don’t want to run from.

“To practice selflessness requires that I first have a sense of self,” in the words of one member. “I tell my sponsees, ‘You first, right after me!’” We take responsibility for our own well-being and strive for harmony as we contribute to our common welfare. The principles of the Steps help us to establish healthy boundaries and strive for balance. For many of us, the idea of loving and serving others selflessly adds a new dimension to our spiritual self-care routine. We find ways to recharge and gather fresh inspiration so we can selflessly contribute to NA unity.

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Self-care requires more than bubble baths and dark chocolate. I will turn to the Steps to care for my spiritual condition, preparing me to selflessly love and serve and contribute to NA unity.
Serenity, Entry 1 of 2

Serenity doesn’t mean that we don’t experience dramatic events. It gives us the clarity of mind to go through them.

—Living Clean, Chapter 7: “Living Our Principles”

“Ahhhhh, serenity. A permanent state of peacefulness, contentment, and awe. Those of us with time clean float around on a recovered spiritual plane that newcomers can aspire to and will achieve through doing exactly what’s suggested,” shared no member ever.

Unfortunately—and not surprisingly—life in recovery doesn’t work like that, because life will keep showing up. Thrilling moments, terrifying ones, joyful, and sorrowful. And plenty of unexciting times in between when things are just fine, yet the drama in our head continues. But there is good news on the horizon: we can deal with life because, no matter what arises, we have learned, collectively, that we can get through anything, and practicing serenity can help.

Practicing serenity is acting with intention to get to a place of equanimity where we can contain ourselves enough to keep perspective, show our gratitude, and act with care and thoughtfulness. Sometimes it’s about standing still when our mind is running, other times it’s about keeping our mind still when everything around us is spinning. It can be as simple as breathing. Serenity gives us time and space through extreme highs and lows. It can be the calm in the eye of the addict brain hurricane. But it’s not always about peacefulness; sometimes it’s about authenticity, about feeling how we feel and being okay with that.

Serenity is a tool for clarity. When faced with a difficult decision—which for many of us can be every single decision—we can pray for serenity. Sometimes the right path is revealed; other times we can adjust unrealistic expectations and realize we have enough information to move forward. We can jump into the unknown, because, today, we have tools to deal with that.

Where can I stop, breathe, and look for clarity during my day? Where I can take a moment to feel what I’m feeling and know I’m okay?
Serenity, Entry 2 of 2

The Serenity Prayer is a tool we use again and again in our recovery; considering what we can change and what we cannot becomes increasingly powerful.
—Living Clean, Chapter 2: “Connection to the World Around Us”

The simple binary offered in the Serenity Prayer—sorting between what we can and cannot change—provided quite a bit of relief to many of us as newcomers, especially when our minds were racing. Having this prayer as a new tool in our belt in early recovery enables many of us to muster a bit of courage to work on ourselves, and perhaps achieve just enough serenity to tolerate those around us. Over time, we realize that there is more depth in the Serenity Prayer than we might see at first glance.

Our wisdom to know the difference grows as we accumulate more experience with trying to change our lives. Shouting “ME!” during the Serenity Prayer might remind us to stay focused on ourselves, but many of us soon encounter aspects of ourselves that are not so easily changed. “They told me I only have to change one thing—and that’s everything,” a member wrote. “I had these visions as a newcomer of changing my diet, getting fit, folding my laundry as soon as it dries, achieving enlightenment, and all that. It didn’t take long before I wasn’t feeling very much serenity at all. I had to adjust my expectations.”

If our lives were all knotted up when we first got here, we aren’t likely to get it all untangled right away. Talking to other addicts helps us better see what knots we can loosen now, and what parts of the thread we’ll need to accept—at least for now—while we work on what’s right in front of us. Sometimes a knot gets tighter which can be a vexing part of the process. As our Basic Text mentions, “We learn that we are growing when we make new mistakes instead of repeating old ones.” As we draw on recovery experience—our own and what others share with us—our wisdom grows. Serenity and courage are sure to follow.

The wisdom to know the difference evolves as I do. When I say the Serenity Prayer, I will try to connect with the principles behind it.
Simplicity, Entry 1 of 1

Our message—that any addict can stop using drugs, lose the desire to use, and find a new way to live—is all we have to give, and it is sufficient to change the lives of addicts all over the world.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Eleven, Opening Essay

Simplicity is an essential principle of Tradition Eleven and of our entire program. Our approach to public relations is to inform the world about NA and let our simple message of freedom from active addiction lead the way. We trust that to be attractive enough. NA doesn’t run special promotions: *Stay clean for one year and all your dreams will come true!* We don’t promise financial stability or a happy marriage. Lifelong problem-free serenity is not guaranteed as a result of meeting attendance, stepwork, and service.

Our simple offer of hope and freedom is enough. According to one member, “We don’t need a complicated message to attract people. We are complex enough! Our message isn’t simple for the sake of simplicity. It simply works.” Both NA’s message and our primary purpose are identifiable, relatable, and digestible. They’re also adaptable, not bound by the specifics of a single language or culture. Since our message is applicable for addicts all over the world, dare we say it’s universal?

The simplicity of Tradition Eleven is a relief for most of us. When we do public relations, we let folks know who we are, what we do, and how we do it. With H&I, sponsorship, or speaking from the podium, we don’t have to do more than share what’s worked for us. We share the message just as it was shared with us. We lean forward and witness its impact—on our own lives, for those near to us, and those far away.

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*Our message works. So how will I share it today?*
Sincerity, Entry 1 of 1

We listen to one another with an open mind and an open heart, and we share our experience with the understanding that it won’t necessarily be shared by everyone else.

—Living Clean, Chapter 3, “A Spiritual Journey”

Among the first things many of us notice about NA is how recovering addicts get very real with each other when sharing in meetings. Especially among using addicts, sincerity is sometimes viewed as weakness. Showing up to recovery meetings for the first time and seeing people willingly exposing vulnerabilities the way we do can be both shocking and refreshing. Listening openly opens us up.

We changed our minds a lot before getting clean. Most of us adapted to whatever was happening around us, as a survival technique or just to get ourselves through any old situation. Yeah, yeah, yeah, we played along, not making any waves. In recovery, we may find ourselves listening to others and just trying to match how they share. We share like other addicts because we don’t want to call attention to ourselves. Or we use pretense and pretend to be something we’re not. One addict wrote, “I would tailor my shares to try to appeal to the listeners, and the harder I tried to make people relate, the phonier I felt (and sounded). When I just tell my own story my own way, people seem to connect so much more.”

Something shifts as we do the work of staying clean. Honesty is prioritized over ease. True connection over surface. Sincerity over fitting in. When we share, we allow ourselves and each other the dignity of our own understanding and experience. We each take on the responsibility of expressing what’s going on with us. It’s harder to talk the talk when we don’t walk the walk. We share what we’ve found, what we think, and where our uncertainties lie. The truer we are in what we share with others, the better the odds that they will be able to relate.

As a recovering addict, sincerity makes it possible for me to connect with others in a real way. I will keep it real today.
Solidarity, Entry 1 of 3

The safe environment of NA gave me the chance to face my own fear. ...The security and solidarity that I get from the program gave me room to breathe.

—Basic Text, “Coming Home”

We aren’t all strangers to experiences of solidarity before getting clean. Frequently, however, our safety was tied to keeping our mouths shut, a code of conduct that valued secrecy over good judgment. We’d have your back, alright, as long as that kept us safe and our behavior under wraps. We were constantly looking over our shoulders, barely breathing for fear of getting caught.

Coming to NA is, on some level, a rejection of our previous sense of security, an admission that we need help. Many of us are holding our breath when we enter the room of our first NA meeting. We fear we’ll see people we had used with, people we’d wronged, people that might out us as addicts outside the meeting. Immediately we see there’s the appearance of solidarity in meetings, but can we trust it? We are encouraged to share about our past, what’s going on with us today, and what we envision a new life to be. But when we are used to solidarity having so many variables, how do we know it’s stable and secure now?

In time, we breathe a sigh of relief, realizing we’ve made it home. A renewed consideration of solidarity may be to view NA as a group of survivors collectively fighting our disease, bonded by our recovery. We’re told that we don’t have to go through anything alone, and, as we witness that very thing happening among members, eventually we allow ourselves to become a part of it. We strive to overcome our fears of not fitting in, of being vulnerable and intimate with others, of being honest and open and still. Sometimes we’re successful in these attempts; other times not. But, make no mistake, we are in this together, striving to make NA a safer place for every addict seeking a place to belong.

As I continue to face my own fears, now in solidarity with my fellow NA members, I will make every effort to give others the same chance to breathe that I was given.
Solidarity, Entry 2 of 3

There is a special feeling for addicts when they discover that there are other people who share their difficulties, past and present.

—Basic Text, Chapter 5: What Can I Do?

Many of us experienced a sense of solidarity with our druggy buddies early in our using careers. We found camaraderie as we conspired on our next score, caper, or conquest. We entrusted at least some of our secrets with a select few, and they counted on us to hold our mud. There were limits to our loyalty, however. In time, we’d betray them, or they’d betray us.

The romanticized version of our stories often focus on those magic moments of solidarity with our running partners. If we follow the storyline of these relationships through to their collapse, we might mistakenly conclude that those kinds of bonds are a thing of the past or that we’re still incapable of sustaining solidarity with our mates. This adds to our sense of isolation and alienation, making us vulnerable to unhelpful self-talk that can create a wedge between us and our clean new friends. Once we recognize that recovery changes everything about our capacity for connection, we’re able to take a stand against that negative chatter. Our previous sense of solidarity centered around drug use. Now, solidarity springs from honest sharing and empathy, and the occasional caper, conquest, or war story.

In one member’s experience, “I came in feeling like I didn’t belong, that I was so uniquely troubled. Then I heard the stories and realized I’d found my people.” Solidarity is the spiritual opposite of isolation and self-centeredness. Although our circumstances, interests, and ambitions vary wildly, we connect emotionally and spiritually and stand by one another. We all have dreams and struggles, experience joy and sorrow, want to be happy and forgiven, to love and be loved. And we don’t have to experience any of it alone. Over the years, countless sponsors have offered this assurance: “I can’t fix your problems, but you won’t have to face them alone.” And, really, what more could we ask for?

To build solidarity with my fellow members, I will share my struggles with someone who can help or someone who might need help.
Solidarity, Entry 3 of 3

*An NA group reinforces the solidarity of its members and the foundation of their continued recovery by declining outside contributions.*

—*It Works*, Tradition Seven

One way to define *solidarity* is standing together with others. The Seventh Tradition explains that one of the ways we do this is by taking care of NA together, in our own way. Declining outside contributions is bold—it means that we rely on each other to step up and take responsibility for NA. The vitality of our groups and service bodies fully depends on the resources we contribute.

The bonds we share with other recovering addicts are unique; we have addiction and recovery in common, and yet sometimes we have very little else that connects us. Still, we are joined together in solidarity through the NA program. We don’t recover alone, and every one of us received the message of recovery as a result of what other addicts gave to NA before we showed up. Practicing solidarity in NA is not just a feeling of commitment to our own group or local services. We stand in solidarity with those who aren’t here yet—we stand for still-suffering addicts everywhere—when we take action to make sure they have a chance to experience our message in their own language and culture, just as we have.

In our groups, that means doing what we can to ensure the meetings remain open to anyone with a desire to stop using. Solidarity with our local service bodies means we support the efforts to ensure that local addicts can find NA. We practice solidarity with NA beyond our community by paying attention to the services that make our message more widely available, and by contributing what we can to help fulfill the needs of all our services.

*NA is here to ensure that the message is available to anyone seeking recovery, around the corner or around the world. I will practice solidarity with still-suffering addicts by sharing what I can.*
Steadfastness, Entry 1 or 1

We learn what is true for us, and that sets the direction for our lives.
—Living Clean, Chapter 2, "Connection to a Higher Power"

Early in recovery, each of us grapples with some troublesome truths about our addiction and our lives. Coming to terms with our powerlessness marks a vital shift in our perspective, and we strive to accept this reality on a daily basis. Many of us do this consciously in prayer or while meditating. We read today’s “JFT.” We write in our journal. We go to a meeting and say, “I am an addict.” Or all we do is not use that day and go to sleep clean again. Commitment to these practices, however it looks to any of us, on whatever day, is steadfastness.

Reckoning with this core truth about powerlessness leads to our unearthing many other truths. We develop new values and beliefs as we complete and share our Steps, participate in our recovery, and stay open-minded. We learn who we were, who we currently are, and who we want to be. We strive to live in accordance with spiritual principles we pick up along the way. Steadfastness is our anchor when we’re driven to act on a defect, harm ourselves, or lash out at others. We find that we’re better able to tame our worst tendencies or to bounce back more quickly and make amends when we do falter.

We learn some difficult lessons, too, especially when our firmly held beliefs and values are challenged. Other people can be equally steadfast in adhering to NA principles in their own ways and may have beliefs that we perceive as being in conflict with our own. Being steadfast doesn’t mean we’re inflexible. Rather, we attempt to find balance in those circumstances that call for a steadfast commitment to being reliable, practical, flexible, and compassionate—yes, all at the same time! While we stand up for our beliefs, we also must coexist with other people and contend with life on its own terms.

Whether it’s the truth of our powerlessness over our addiction, over other people, or over life’s difficulties, I can remain steadfast in the recovery practices that help me deal with it.
Thoughtfulness, Entry 1 of 3

When we share in a meeting and the room is quiet, attentive, and present to us—that’s a priceless gift.

—Guiding Principles, Tradition One, “For Groups”

Thoughtfulness is baked into the culture of NA meetings. We take turns sharing, and we share the time. The rest of us participate by listening, though that doesn’t necessarily mean we do so in silence. Many of us find healing in the laughter we share. That phrase—“participate by listening”—is sometimes used as a polite way to decline when called upon to share. But it’s more than that—it’s a real and valid option. Listening is an act of love.

When we’re new, our chameleon-like instincts set us up for thoughtful and empathetic listening. Even as we focus on blending in, we find ourselves responding instinctively with laughter, knowing nods, tearful eyes, or words of affirmation and encouragement. We bring the body, and the mind follows; we might start by faking empathy only to realize that we’re acting our way into better thinking. We find ourselves establishing new values. When we thoughtfully listen and engage, we show ourselves and each other that our stories matter.

Practicing thoughtfulness can really be as simple as “kind thoughts, kind words, kind deeds,” as one member put it. “Practicing thoughtfulness changes my outlook. I’m looking for that magic moment when some small act will make a difference for someone else. When I lift someone else up, we both feel better.” Our thoughtfulness is a gift that we both give and receive. It contributes to our sense of belonging and helps us to experience unity.

I will look to be more thoughtful today. I will offer my undivided attention, a kind word, or a compliment in hopes of making someone else’s day a little better.
Thoughtfulness, Entry 2 of 3

*It may be helpful to remember what made us feel welcome, and what made us feel uneasy or alienated, when we first came to meetings.*

—*Guiding Principles, Tradition One, “For Groups”*

We often reaffirm that “The newcomer is the most important person at any meeting, because we can only keep what we have by giving it away.” Reading the words is fairly simple; putting them into action can be a little trickier at times. One member wrote, “my compassion for others, especially newcomers, is a huge indicator of my progress in recovery.” In our groups, that compassion shows in the actions we take to consider the newcomers’ needs. By keeping our focus on the still-suffering addict, we also keep our common welfare first. The questions implied by the quotation above are a great place to start.

When we discuss what it means to feel welcomed, we are often pleasantly reminded that our group is doing many of those things well already. Much of it is hardwired into our NA culture. One member shared memories of being a newcomer: “Before the meeting, I was approached and welcomed by someone, and I was a little skeptical of the warmth. Soon someone else welcomed me, and they did the same with other addicts entering the room. I saw a pattern here of how they embraced people, and I felt like I was in the right place. I didn’t feel like an undesirable, the way I did most of my life.”

The question of what made us feel uneasy or alienated requires a little more sensitivity. Some of us arrive with so much despair that we stay no matter how unwelcoming a meeting might be. Others are looking for an excuse—any excuse—to bolt out the door and go pick up. We cannot rid our meetings of every possible excuse a newcomer might use to leave, but practicing thoughtfulness will help us eliminate as many reasonable excuses as possible.

*The simplest gesture can have the most power. I will practice thoughtfulness to make sure the newcomer is always welcomed.*
Thoughtfulness, Entry 3 of 3

_We become increasingly aware of our choices, our motives, and our behavior. ...[W]e recognize the difference between thinking through to a decision and reacting or acting on impulse._

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Conscious Contact”

Pre-NA, many of us flew by the seats of our pants when it came to making choices. Being self-aware and thoughtful of others was as low on the priority list as our impulses would allow. Now we have a chance to be more aware and thoughtful about our decision-making and its effect on relationships. To act thoughtfully, it’s a good idea to assess where our thoughts are coming from. And in recovery, we have many assessment tools at our disposal: Are we impulsively heeding our first thought or a more measured second (or third or fourth) thought that has been supported by taking a moment to breathe. Are we listening to our conscience or our disease? Are we acting out of love or out of fear, for the benefit of our ego or for the benefit of others? For many of us, the metaphorical cliché of “hitting the pause button” works wonders—and can certainly reduce the chances of pressing the other button: the one that blows things up.

Thoughtfulness goes beyond simple awareness. We consider the reality of a situation and who it’s affecting besides ourselves, and then we act on the awareness we’ve gained—especially when we’re feeling intolerant or indifferent. Luckily, we also have our sponsor, other NA members, and our Higher Power to consult so that we can determine our motives and discern between rational and irrational actions. We can help each other widen our perspectives and keep us more on a path of kindness, compassion, and goodwill. The more deliberate we can be in the moment, very likely the more thoughtful our actions will be. We can’t premeditate outcomes, nor can we completely avoid others being angered or disappointed by us. But at least we can live better with the decisions we make, because we know we did our best to be thoughtful.

_I will use all tools at my disposal to try to behave in a thoughtful manner. When that seems impossible, I can resist the urge to act and wait until the emotional storm passes._
Trust, Entry 1 of 6

*We do not have to understand this program for it to work. All we have to do is to follow direction.*

—Basic Text, Chapter 8: We Do Recover

“Oh, that’s ‘ALL we have to do,’ is it?!” we snark to ourselves. “I’m supposed to trust these folks and do something I don’t understand? Yeah, right.” We learn to recognize this voice of our internal cynic. Sometimes we hear from an entire committee of smartasses living between our ears! Call it what you will—the disease, the committee, or an inner demon—it tries to sabotage our recovery from the start. We learn to talk back to that voice, thank it for sharing, and then seek better counsel from other members instead of our heads.

The members we consult may tell us, “If you want what we have, do what we do.” When we balk at the idea of relying on others, as many of us do, we’re reminded that it wasn’t so long ago that we’d hand our money to a stranger trusting that they’d return with drugs. Despite our resistance, we find ourselves desperate enough to follow the lead of those who came before us. Some of us start by nibbling at the edges of their advice; others swallow it whole. Either way, we can see the value of taking action. We learn to *act as if* we trust the process hoping that will help us to do that for real. Perhaps we can rely a bit more on blind faith and worry less about grasping *why* and *how*. “Understanding is overrated,” a wise new friend suggests. “‘Figure it out’ is not an NA slogan.”

It takes a measure of trust for us to come back for a second meeting, and then a third—whether we were inspired by seeing stone-cold addicts who’d turned their lives around or we’d simply run out of options. It takes courage to take direction. We put one foot in front of the other, taking suggestions from a growing circle of support, and trusting that we’re moving in the right direction.

*I will take a leap of faith today, trusting that fate or instinct or an addict in recovery or some other power greater than me will steer me in the direction of my hopes.*
Trust, Entry 2 of 6

Over and over, we see members from rival nations or neighborhoods, from
different faiths or families, come to love and trust each other in the rooms of NA.
—Guiding Principles, Tradition Ten, Closing Meditation

Our Traditions enable NA to bring addicts from all walks of life together in a single Fellowship. We often remark how addiction does not discriminate, so neither should we. Tradition Three ensures an open policy of membership, and Tradition Ten helps us learn to leave our outside baggage at the door when we join together in recovery. Unity, anonymity, common welfare—our Traditions are rich with principles guiding us to better embrace one another “regardless of.”

It all sounds great in principle, but it’s the practice that really matters. Many other groups and organizations speak highly of principles like unity and acceptance—some live up to their own standards and others don’t. Does NA really embody its ideals? As we stay clean, recover, and carry the message, the connection between our primary purpose and NA unity becomes very clear.

An H&I trusted servant wrote, “I served on a jail panel with a couple other members, and we joked that we were like characters in a bad TV show—a former gang member, a retired cop, and me, a defense attorney. We shared together twice a month for a few years, and now we are bonded for life.”

No matter what our differences are, carrying the message joins us together in a special way. We addicts are uniquely qualified to help other addicts. We have been there! This helps newcomers trust our message—and grow to trust us, too, in spite of our surface level differences. Sharing and serving together with other members helps us deepen that trust. Our message is truly a tie binding us together that is stronger than anything that might tear us apart.

Carrying the message is a bond of sharing, serving, and recovering together. I will trust in that bond with my fellow addicts today.
Trust, Entry 3 of 6

*Through our developing relationship with our sponsor, we learn about the principle of trust.*

— *It Works, Step One*

More often than not, a last-ditch effort to stay out of jail, keep a job, or hang onto a relationship drives us through the doors of NA. We’d stopped using plenty of times before but staying stopped seemed beyond us. We knew that something had to change, and, honestly, we had nothing to lose.

When we look around at that first meeting, we see people who understand our plight because they’ve been there. They understood the high price of low living. The NA program worked for them; maybe it will work for us, too. Desperation may have brought us to NA, but inspiration keeps us coming back.

Trust hadn’t been on our radar, but we are somehow willing to accept a few suggestions. Just a few days in, and we’re committed to attending a meeting a day for 90 days. We even reach out to other members between meetings. With each passing day, we feel a little better and trust in this NA way a little more. And our actions show it.

We’ve begun to trust the process, but we’ll need a guide—a sponsor—if we want to give this a fair shot. “You don’t have to trust everyone,” we’re told, “but you’ve got to learn to trust someone.” This seems like solid advice. The source, a more experienced member, seems trustworthy. We’ve found a sponsor!

It takes time for most of us to shed our armor, but sponsors have a way of gaining our trust little by little. “One of us shares some truth about our life and experience, and the other returns the favor,” in one member’s experience. In the process, we develop trust and, eventually, intimacy. It’s a pattern of behavior we can replicate in other relationships, as sponsees, sponsors, partners, and friends.

*Following my sponsor’s example, I will build trust from small moments by being true to my word, supportive of others, and open to intimacy. We can learn to trust and be trustworthy together.*
Trust, Entry 4 of 6

_This may be the first time we’ve ever trusted another person enough to tell her or him about ourselves and allow that person to get to know us._

—It Works, Step Five

We addicts have lots of stories. What some consider to be deep, dark secrets others easily share, sometimes even as badges of honor. Many of us are fine to divulge the goriest details of our using days, the mayhem of our childhoods, and our experiences of victimization. Regarding the Fourth and Fifth Steps, we think, _no problem, I am an open book!_ But, as we do the work that is suggested, perhaps using the _Step Working Guides_, there’s a depth inherent in those questions that goes way beyond our comfort. Exposing our own part in situations turns out to be messy, agonizing, and illuminating all at once. For many of us, our pettiness, our unforgiving nature or unkind acts, our ego on blast, our shame: these carefully guarded parts of ourselves turn out to be far more significant than the dramatic tales we thought we’d tell.

Thankfully, we’ve had the benefit and experience of the previous Steps to build trust in the program, each other, a Higher Power, and our sponsor. The Fifth Step is an opportunity for us to open our whole book and have another human being bear witness to the stories about ourselves that are the hardest to tell. As much as we’d been nervous about sharing our inventory with another person, it’s the first time we’ve admitted much of this business to ourselves.

Building a bond of trust takes courage as well as vulnerability to build. In exercising that bond, a weight is lifted off our shoulders: We reveal the truth about ourselves and we’re not rejected. Many of us don’t even realize how distant we’ve been in our relationships as a result of the secrets we’d guarded. And often being seen as truly ourselves by one person allows us to feel much lighter and more open in other relationships. One bond of trust inspires us to form others.

_I’m willing to practice trust by sharing my whole story with another person. I aim to build upon my ability to trust and be trustworthy by applying what I’ve learned to other relationships._
Trust, Entry 5 of 6

*Even though we do not know how our lives will change as we work this step, we can learn to trust that our Higher Power will care for us better than we could.*

— *It Works, Step Three*

As newcomers, many of us struggle with the aspects of Twelve-Step recovery that we don’t easily understand. Sure, spirituality is practical around here, but that doesn’t mean it’s straightforward. We describe our spiritual awakenings to newer members, but the explanations often make for more head-scratching. With most things in life—and count Step Three among these—we can’t know the outcome before having the experience. The meaning of our decision to turn our will over to a caring Higher Power is lost on many of us. Instead of applying our brainpower, we need to nurture hope, faith, and trust.

Hearing about the changes in the lives of other addicts gives us something to go on as we begin to develop some trust in NA. We listen to other members talk about trusting in a Higher Power that they don’t completely understand. We hear from people of faith, people who eschew religion, and everyone in between. To a member, “Working Step Three is a decision to open a door. I may not know what’s on the other side, but I’ve gained a measure of trust in that decision, because I know my life hasn’t fallen apart whenever I’ve cracked open that door.”

Trust is a conscious decision that we put into action daily in some way or another by sidelining fear and taking a risk. We do our best, but some days acting as if we trust in a Higher Power is all we have to go on. Lots of us abide by a “fake it ‘til ya make it” attitude. Along with faith, we take a leap of trust. Sometimes we fly, sometimes we flop. Growth can be a bruising process. We experience rejection, or not getting what we’d planned so carefully for. “Sometimes the gifts we receive in recovery come wrapped in dirt,” a member teased. But we’re okay, because we’re learning to trust the process. We’ll turn it over again tomorrow.

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*I am learning to trust, rather than completely relying on what I think I know. Whatever happens today, I’ll practice loosening my grip on results and muster some faith that I’ll be okay.*
Trust, Entry 6 of 6

Simply allowing someone to be with us as we go about our lives can be priceless.
—Living Clean, Chapter 2: “Connection to Others”

Being a member of NA allows us to experience something many of us were looking for all along, whether we knew it or not: a sense of community. We found our people! But then, we may look around at our fellow addicts and think, “I’m supposed to trust these people?” The answer is, not all of them, and not all at once. An H&I speaker often joked, “The good news is, there’s hope. The bad news is, it’s us!” Like love and courage, trust usually begins with action, and the feeling comes later. We start with a sponsor and grow our circle from there.

We don’t have to like everyone in NA, but we do need to recover with some of them. After being clean a while, we often feel a special connection to the members we got clean with, the people who were around in early recovery. We may grow to appreciate the traits or qualities we don’t like about some fellow members—we know them well enough to trust that they are who they are, and there’s something reliable about that. We show up for each other, warts and all.

“My mom was a difficult person with few friends at the end of her life,” a member wrote. “We didn’t expect anyone but our immediate family to attend her memorial service. I looked up to see members of ‘my crew’—the folks I cleaned up with—walking in. They didn’t know my mom, but they knew me.”

Being part of the NA community helps us develop a practical form of trust, which we then find useful in so many other areas. We show up for others—and let them show up for us—in our family, work, and romantic relationships. We allow others to be who they are, and we have the courage and willingness to be who we are alongside them. We share the road together.

Trust can sometimes spring up in unlikely places. I will be myself, allow others to be themselves, and let trust to take root where it will.
Wonder, Entry 1 of 1

The sense of wonder we experience in our own lives—as if we were seeing them for the first time—brings an array of feelings.

—Living Clean, Chapter 7, “Living Our Principles”

Active addiction is a grind, leaving most of us jaded by the time we get to NA. We stay coolly distant from other humans and much of life in hopes of avoiding those pesky feelings. We think or say “Who cares?” a little too often, even for our own taste. Cynicism and apathy had worn away any optimism we once had. But then we get clean, and what we learn in recovery challenges this entire mindset.

Experiencing the world with a sense of wonder is one of the fringe benefits of working an NA program. Some of us stumble on a new positivity when we start stringing together days clean. Others warm up to a new way of responding to the world over time or encounter wonder in sporadic bursts. But, regardless of the timeline or intensity, we recognize that feeling of awed respect and the newfound appreciation it brings.

When we find ourselves thinking or saying “Wow!” it’s a good indication that we’re experiencing a sense of wonder. “Wow!” is a prayer unto itself in the minds of some NA members. It captures what it means to embrace wonder as a spiritual principle, complete with awe, connection, impact, and reverence in the space of three letters.

Nature is kind of a show-off when it comes to inspiring wonder. Of course, we don’t have to travel far to be wowed by a sunrise or sunset. But beyond nature—and perhaps more importantly for us in recovery—we find a sense of wonder in everyday life if we’re open to it and paying attention. Moments of clarity—the clean kind—allow us to see our lives anew. Each time we take a moment to appreciate our growth, admire what’s right with us and the world, delight in new insights, or feel all our feelings is an invitation to practice wonder.

I will challenge myself to look at life and recovery with curiosity and enjoy a sense of wonder wherever I may find it.
Purpose, Entry 1 of 7

Faith in the process means believing that we are moving in the right direction, even if it’s not where we thought we would be going.
—Living Clean, Chapter 1, “Desperation to Passion”

On the day of our first NA meeting, we may have predictions about what our lives will look like without drugs, but what if our dreams don’t come true? Desperation has forced us to strive for something new, but what will it be? We now have choices about how we live that we didn’t have before, but how do we know which is the “right” path and if we’re following our life’s “true” purpose? If we don’t have a whole lot of faith in the future, how can we get more?

Whatever questions we have about finding our true purpose, the same crystal ball that didn’t work when we were high doesn’t when we’re clean either. Thankfully, more is revealed as we stay clean. Through the steps, we discover our values and convictions. For many of us, that means our purpose radically shifts, or we find one at last. Recovery gives us a chance to revisit goals that addiction interfered with, or we start from scratch. Hope helps us to believe we’re headed down the right path, and faith keeps our feet moving in that direction.

We find purpose (or many purposes, as time elapses) in NA, in a career, in relationships, in our communities, on a mountaintop, in a foreign land, or in sitting still. We learn to serve others more than our egos. We practice self-acceptance and model it for newer members who think that being okay with themselves is unattainable. Many of us also have—or regain and revitalize—our faith in a God who has a plan for us that we can’t predict, ardently believing that this plan is better than one we could create on our own. Others find purpose in a life guided by spiritual principles or believe the universe conspires in our favor, cheering us on. Having faith in finding and living our purpose takes practice. Recovery in NA provides us with tools to manage our discomfort with trial and error, impossible without plenty of open-mindedness and willingness along the journey.

I can’t predict the future, but I believe I have one. I will move in a direction and see where the path leads. It’s worth staying alive to find out.
Purpose, Entry 2 of 7

What a joy it is to be part of something that not only saves people’s lives, but makes them worth living.

—Living Clean, Chapter 5, “Fellowship”

We’re brought together by desperation, so being alive and clean may seem like enough reason to be joyful at first. But wait, there’s more! Even in our earliest days clean, we may have some inkling that we are part of something special. We may wonder, am I being indoctrinated into a cult, but with no discernable leader and no dogma to adhere to, we can rule that out. We decide to keep coming back and just play along as we see what these dope fiends are up to.

So, we’re clean! Now what? We come across this passage in the Basic Text: “When the drugs go, and the addict works the program, wonderful things happen.” I like the sound of that! We start to piece together what it means to “work the program” and find some practical advice in “What Can I Do?” — chapter five of the addicts’ owners manual. We go to lots of meetings without using between them—even on holidays! We get a home group, a sponsor, and a service commitment, and we find ourselves surrounded by people who take great joy in our progress. They want nothing from us, just good things for us. They offer us words of encouragement, lessons from their own lives, and epic tales of shenanigans with other members. They point out our growth and say they’re happy, grateful, and even honored to be a part of our miracle. We smile and nod and our eyes start leaking. All we can think is, this NA thing . . . is a trip.

Our lives are transformed as we become both the helpers and the helped. Now we’re those people with stories and kindness for the newer folks and find great joy in being a part of their miracle. Our mentors continue to evolve, too, and they allow us to help them. We’ve found a purpose and a framework for living. We are free from active addiction, and although that’s NA’s only promise, that freedom opens up in unimaginably beautiful ways.

I will soak up the vitality around me and be grateful to have found a life with purpose.
Purpose, Entry 3 of 7

*Helping others is perhaps the highest aspiration of the human heart and something we have been entrusted with as a result of a higher power working in our lives.*

—*It Works*, Step Twelve

Many of us wanted to help others before getting clean, but once we started using, doing so became difficult. One member described it this way: “My heart aspired to help people, but my brain never got the memo!” At some point in early recovery, many of us have the experience of sharing and then seeing another member relate. Maybe they nod in agreement, or they shake their head in shared amusement or disgust at the insidiousness and insanity of our disease. Maybe they vocalize—“that’s right!”—or shed a tear. However they do it, they let us know that they know that we know—we share in the knowledge of the disease, and we share our experience with recovery, too.

This is how we get clean and stay clean—the therapeutic value of one addict helping another. We share experience, strength, and hope; we share tea and coffee; we share the joy of staying clean and the pain of losing fellow addicts. We do it together. At many points along the way, we are reminded of our purpose for being here and being together. Maybe it’s when a nonmember asks, “Why do you still go to those meetings?” We might even wonder, *yeah, why do I?* Then we remember—we are uniquely qualified to help other addicts, and helping addicts gives us purpose and keeps us clean.

When we go through something clean—the loss of a loved one, an unintended pregnancy, parents with dementia, learning to skateboard—we are rarely the first ones to do so. We share what we’re going through so others can help us. Then we share what we went through so we can help others. Yes, we’re each other’s eyes and ears; sometimes we are also each other’s trailblazers, coaches, older siblings. We have a reason for being here. And that reason is one another.

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*A sense of purpose can fill that void I tried to fill with drugs. I will find purpose by sharing with and helping another addict.*
Purpose, Entry 4 of 7

We begin to feel connected to the world around us and our lives have purpose.

—Living Clean, Chapter 3, “Creative Action of the Spirit”

Disconnection is one of the hallmark features of addiction. Whether being disconnected leads to drug use, or the use of drugs causes us to lose connection, most of us ended up feeling pretty isolated and alienated by the time we first came to NA. Some of us feel connected right away when we get clean. Others keep coming back for months or years to get there—but when we stop using and start living the program, that sense of connection begins to grow.

“The members who immediately directed me to service helped me feel like I had purpose,” one member wrote. “They carried a message to me, and then right away they involved me in carrying a message to others. I became part of something bigger. I felt connected in a way I hadn’t felt before.”

What we connect to and what our purpose is may not be the same for every addict, or for every phase of recovery. Feeling reconnected to humanity by virtue of being an NA member is a big part of early recovery for many of us—and we find an abundance of meaning and purpose in sharing our recovery with other addicts. Usually, as long as we’re still clean and still coming to meetings, this sense of purpose stays with us. But more is available, too.

Many of us develop a sense of connection and purpose in other areas of our lives, as well. We may get involved in a particular religious practice, begin volunteering in our community, or find meaning and beauty in art, fashion, fitness, or a career. The opportunities to find purpose in our lives are as varied as our membership, and they need not diminish the sense of purpose we gain by sharing with others in NA. In fact, they often enhance what we have to offer.

Where addiction is isolation and alienation, recovery is connection and purpose. I will seek out greater connection to the world around me to deepen my sense of purpose in it.
Purpose, Entry 5 of 7

Being able to focus on a primary purpose and work creatively toward it is so much part of our way of life that we may not realize how valued that is in the world at large.

—Living Clean, Chapter 5, “Bridging Two Worlds: Relationships Outside NA”

The idea that what we learn in recovery applies outside NA is not revolutionary or even surprising. There is plenty to be said about how we do things in NA—our tools, our principles, our primary orientation toward helping others—transfers easily to other contexts and is often appreciated. We have Steps that guide us, in essence, to clear the way so we can be of service to others. The principles within the Traditions challenge us to work with integrity, goodwill, and discernment in groups and within structures. Convening around a primary purpose helps us to stay oriented and in alignment with each other. The concept of “principles before personalities” guides us through conflict when it inevitably arises.

Each of us learns these transferable skills, embodying qualities that can support many different types of structures: a family, a business, a community or faith organization, even a one-on-one relationship, romantic or otherwise. Our value as members of NA extends to our value outside. Being oriented toward generosity, kindness, responsibility, perseverance, and of course gratitude in all our affairs enriches our lives and touches others’ lives. Some people outside of NA may know that we’re recovering from addiction, but others do not. Either way, what they often see is a person who is able to act with love rather than fear, can handle adversity, and is willing to help others when tragedy strikes.

As great as the above description sounds—and as true as it often is—none of this is possible without actually practicing the principles of NA and using the tools of our program. As we often declare in meetings, “it works if you work it.” But it doesn’t when we don’t. Working the Steps and Traditions helps to prepare us to serve beyond NA. And we know that when we make mistakes, in NA and outside of it, we always have each other’s experience, strength, and hope to rely on to help us get back on course.

How am I applying what I’ve been learning in NA to other parts of my life and what can I do today to further that purpose?
Purpose, Entry 6 of 7

As we seek our Higher Power’s will for us, we come to an understanding of our purpose. Spiritual awakening is a process. Maybe it is what the whole process is about.

—Living Clean, Chapter 3, “Creative Action of the Spirit”

Life before recovery was in steadfast pursuit of our addiction. We had purpose, that’s for sure! Now that we’re clean, we are still searching, still striving, but what we’re looking for and how we are pursuing it are quite different.

It may be worthwhile to ask ourselves right now, what is my purpose in life? and take a moment to listen for a response. Maybe we’ll write about it, share about it in our group, meditate on it, or ask our Higher Power directly. For some of us, the answer may come easily, as it’s something we’ve thought much about. We may have a specific practice of seeking the will of a power greater than us, or maybe we’re comfortable improvising in the moment. Many others will struggle with the question and with hearing, understanding, and articulating the answer. Still others of us may be seriously pondering this question for the first time clean.

Because we’re NA members, we may be of the mind that our purpose is already established: carrying the message of recovery to the addict who still suffers—and anything else is extraneous navel-gazing. Many of us believe that NA’s primary purpose aligns with ours but that seeking a life of fulfillment and living by spiritual principles extends further. But, to what exactly?

In NA, we talk (and read) a lot about “spiritual awakenings”—whether we call them that or not. Most of us would agree that living spiritually is both about what we do and about how we do it. Perhaps the “how” is even more consequential because our lives look so different from one another. Striving for integrity springs to mind here: being true to ourselves while acting by spiritual principles. Maybe we don’t have a specific answer, and maybe it will change and change again. Maybe the question is enough, and we’ll keep asking it.

I’m open to pursuing something different today. I want to be more awake and help others to wake up too. Beyond that, who knows?
Purpose, Entry 7 of 7

Groups have come together to form service bodies that help them achieve their primary purpose. Service bodies have formed workgroups, boards, and committees to accomplish the tasks that support the groups.

—Guiding Principles, Tradition Nine, Opening Meditation

In our service bodies, we embrace Tradition Nine when we regularly consider our responsibilities to those we serve. By carrying out public relations service, maintaining H&I panels, hosting recovery events, and furthering NA’s reach in other ways through public relations efforts, we make it possible for groups to focus on providing an atmosphere of recovery for members. The purpose of our service bodies is an extension of our groups’ primary purpose.

In our personal recovery, considering the relationship between purpose and responsibility can be helpful, too. When we are in a meeting, for example, we might have several reasons for attending. We show up for our own recovery, to carry a message, for coffee or tea, or to see whether that cute person who was there last time came back. Whatever our reasons, thinking about purpose can help us practice responsibility. The meeting exists to create an atmosphere of recovery, so our responsibility in that space is to contribute to that atmosphere. Even if the cute person does show up!

The same is true for other areas of our lives. Family, work, school—each has a purpose that may or may not align completely with our own. However, there is usually a fair amount of overlap, and so we can practice responsibility by attending to that portion of our purpose that aligns with where we are at. We practice responsibility by looking for the overlap in purpose and focus our energy there. The more we practice, the better we get.

Fulfilling my purpose involves being responsible. I will consider my responsibilities in each area of my life and try to act accordingly.