

Flexibility, Entry #1 of 3

The open-mindedness we practice in our recovery gives us the ability to be flexible when things change in ways we hadn't expected (*Living Clean*, Chapter 6, "Getting Out of Our Own Way").

Trees are commonly associated with qualities like strength and resilience, the types of qualities that can help us to endure the difficulties of getting and staying clean. Living life on life's terms involves experiencing all sorts of weather patterns—plenty of sunshine and warmth, followed by patches of cold, rain, storms, and snow. Some of us work so hard to hold everything in our lives all together, only to find ourselves having a complete breakdown when someone takes *our* seat at the meeting. If we take a lesson from trees, we'll see that the more rigid and inflexible we are, the more easily we can be shattered.

Palm trees might not strike us as especially strong. They are often associated with beaches and easy breezes—and do they even look all that sturdy [compared to, say, an oak]? However, those skinny-seeming palms still lay down firm root structures, and when a powerful storm comes, they are able to lean with the wind. The part of the tree that is visible above the surface is flexible and resilient, as it is secured by strong, deep roots below.

Our lives will become tumultuous from time to time. We have disagreements with coworkers or partners. People in public annoy us. We have to sit in a different seat at our home group. We can become rigid and defiant, refusing to bend. Or we can move toward open-mindedness, willing to give a little here and there as needed, so we don't snap when the pressure is on. When our roots are firmly secured in recovery, we tend to find the flexibility we need.

I cannot control the weather, but I can practice flexibility. I will plant myself firmly in the NA program, knowing that I can bounce back from any feelings that may come to pass.

Flexibility, Entry #2 of 3

The flexibility that relationships require comes more easily to us when we are practicing principles in our lives (*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, "The Courage to Trust").

One of the many wonderful lessons we learn by working the NA program is that our relationships can be as healthy as the people in them. For many of us, this shows up first in our earliest NA relationships—with a home group and a sponsor. From our first meeting, we are often very pleasantly surprised by how open-minded and accepting the people in NA are, no matter how much of an edge we might have when we get here.

Our relationships with other members continually teach us how to live by spiritual principles. We don't do it perfectly—but by being real with each other, we help each other grow. Working with a sponsor helps us learn to trust and to ask for what we need. Serving in a home group and at other levels of service teaches us lessons like how to compromise, speak up for ourselves, respect boundaries.

Experiencing the principles firsthand like this in our NA relationships is a perfect complement to our work in the Steps. Steps One through Four help us get to know ourselves—and our disease—a little better. Steps Five through Seven give us more practice with relating to our sponsor and a Higher Power. In Steps Eight through Twelve, we strive to repair relationships with others and develop a practice for maintaining those relationships.

Working the Steps and practicing principles helps us see that letting go of the illusion of control improves our lives tremendously. Many of us once lived by a policy of "my way or the highway." By practicing the principles in our program, we gain the flexibility to be able to say, "Your way? Sure. Let's try it out."

Relating well with others involves some give and take. I will draw on my NA experience to practice flexibility in all of my relationships.

Flexibility, Entry #3 of 3

Just when we think we know all that recovery has to offer, more is revealed—if we are willing to accept the gift (*Living Clean*, Chapter Seven, “Awakenings”).

Recovery allows us to take life by the reins. With a clear head and a clean conscience, we’re able to deal with situations that would have mystified us in our previous lives. With time and effort spent on our recovery, we find the balance—often repeatedly—between confidence and humility, patience and action, faith and persistence. Flexibility sits at the intersection of all of these principles, allowing us to adapt and be resilient as recovery reveals its gifts.

When life takes an unexpected turn, sometimes there’s magic in what we discover; other times, disappointment. In either case, practicing flexibility helps us to go with the flow. We keep breathing, regardless of the circumstances. A difficult living situation, an unhappy marriage, or a dead-end job may call on us to make decisions and take action. Our problems don’t solve themselves just because we’re clean. The work we put into our recovery helps us to understand our part in every situation. With that, we figure out what we can accept, what we should change, and when it’s time to walk away. We take the reins of our lives, but we leave enough slack for the right pace and direction to reveal itself.

With faith and flexibility as our guideposts, new challenges seem more like serendipity and less like a curse. “As we say in my spiritual tradition: ‘We plan, God laughs,’” one member shared. “When something gets in the way of my plans, I take it as divine intervention prompting me to explore other options.” We often emerge from our most painful times with gifts we could not have imagined. Recovery helps us let go of some of our fixed ideas and look for the horse when all we see is manure.

I can learn new things and discover new gifts at any phase of life in recovery. I will loosen the reins today and be flexible enough to accept the gifts that come my way.