

Gratitude, Entry #1 of 5

One of the ways we express our gratitude for the gifts of recovery is to help others find what we've found (*Just for Today*, January 30).

During our first days of being clean, who of us is contemplating the intangible gifts of recovery? Nobody, that's who. We are thinking about making it through the day without using. We're focused on ourselves and how we are going to get through the pain, uncertainty, and shame.

As the weeks and months pass, the physical, emotional, and spiritual gifts of recovery become more evident, and we find ourselves feeling grateful for the journey we have begun and for the people who have helped us. We're told that "a grateful addict will not use." So far, that's turning out to be true.

We also hear that gratitude is an action. A member put it like this: "Gratitude isn't just a feeling we bask in or a state of being we pay lip service to. Walking around feeling grateful we're clean and for the gifts of recovery is fantastic, but gratitude is less meaningful without evidence of its expression." It's an action, as well as an awareness and an attitude, which means that it's something that we do—and practice.

There is perhaps no truer or more practical expression of gratitude in NA than helping another addict find or rediscover their path in recovery. If one of the most common manifestations of the disease of addiction is self-centeredness, naturally one of the ways we counteract that is by being there for new members or any member in need. There is a symbiotic relationship between gratitude and service, between expressing our gratitude through supporting others and staying clean ourselves. As we say in NA, "we can only keep what we have by giving it away." And on a day when we're feeling ungrateful, which happens to all of us, we can do something about it. We can remove our attention from ourselves and focus it on someone else.

Expressing our gratitude is a skill, too. We develop it over time and rely on it to keep our disease in check. Truly, this is one of the greatest gifts of recovery.

Today I will express my gratitude in the most fundamental NA way: I will seek out opportunities to help another member. I want to keep what I have, so I can continue to give it away.

Gratitude, Entry #2 of 5

When we feel the deepest gratitude, we can look back and see that our path to that moment was neither short nor straight (*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, “Keys to Freedom”).

“I’m so grateful for the life I have, thanks to NA.” The speaker was then quiet for a moment, wiping away tears, before continuing: “Grateful for my sponsor and the Steps...and even for the bad stuff that’s happened along the way...”

For someone who’s new, witnessing gratitude from a member for “bad stuff” can sound illogical, overly virtuous, impossible, even undesirable. Why on earth should we be grateful for our addiction, our mistakes, and our poor decision-making? Do we really have to feel grateful for pain and loss to recover in NA?

Reframing our past hardships or current challenges with a deep awareness of gratitude is not an easy path, nor is it a quick one. For one thing, we rarely, if ever, start our journey in recovery with a clear and broad perspective on our lives. This doesn’t happen just from being abstinent and going to a few meetings—and talking about being grateful. It requires effort, a lot of it. We do our step work thoroughly. We develop and learn to rely on a power greater than ourselves. We try to apply spiritual principles in all our relationships. We work on forgiving others and ourselves. We make amends for our mistakes and find compassion for ourselves when we mess up again. We consistently surrender in the face of new adversity and strive to find the lesson in it.

“My flaws and mistakes are part of what makes me who I am today,” the speaker continued. “They are what inspire me to work to be a better person. My ability to get through some of the worst times in my life—bruised and battered but still clean—is a huge gift. I am grateful for this life.”

Gratitude is not a destination we arrive and stay at. It’s an awareness and a process. Though we recovering addicts don’t feel grateful all the time, there are times when we do feel it deeply. When we’re feeling ungrateful, we’ve learned what to do: help another person on their journey in recovery.

Today I will do some work to learn from my mistakes and from hardships. I will strive for gratitude for the “bad stuff” as well as the good.

Gratitude, Entry #3 of 5

Gratitude in action is an engine for change: As we carry the message, our own lives transform (*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Five, opening meditation).

We tell the newcomer, “Welcome home,” as we give them our number, an IP, and a meeting directory. “Call me anytime. Hang in there—it gets better.” This simple act of gratitude carries a powerful message, just as Tradition Five and Step Twelve intend. Simple words and actions like these take place in meetings every day. Though our intention may be to help the new or potential member, we end up helping ourselves, too. We’re reminded of where we came from, and our gratitude engine gets recharged.

In NA, all of our service efforts focus—directly or indirectly—on our primary purpose. Groups are the main vehicle for carrying the message, and it takes trusted servants to make them run smoothly. Likewise, events carry a message and require a lot of work behind the scenes. We serve to ensure that the addict who reaches out for help by phone or online finds the information they need to get to their first meeting. All of this and more happens within a larger context for NA service that goes largely unnoticed. Our fellows are hard at work translating literature, telling the world that we’re here to help, and demonstrating that NA is a reliable program of recovery.

We tell the newcomer that change is possible and barely notice how *our lives* transform as we carry that message. It’s a happy byproduct, a pleasant surprise, an unintended consequence. Call it what you will, there is no doubt that our lives change, just as we do. Each Step has an impact on who we are and how we see ourselves. We connect with a Higher Power, with ourselves, and with other people.

By the time we get to Step Twelve, we’re not the same people, and all of that change has made us increasingly able to serve. Our new found approach to life reflects this transformation. We are there for each other in moments of crisis and celebration. It’s who we are and what we do. We take this “how can I help?” mindset into the community, and it changes the way we interact with the world.

I will look for opportunities to give of myself today and take time to appreciate my transformation.

Gratitude, Entry #4 of 5

Every act of service, no matter how small, is a contribution demonstrating our commitment and our gratitude (*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Seven, “Word by Word”).

The Seventh Tradition is confusing at first to most of us. The basket is passed, and our reaction ranges from surprise (because we thought this was free), to guilt (because we have nothing to put in), to shame (because people see we don’t), to resistance (because do we *have* to?), to indignation (because *hell no*).

In time, we absorb the meaning of Tradition Seven, appreciating the importance of group autonomy and self-support. We give what we can, when we can, and sometimes more than we thought we ever could or would—not just with our money, but with our skills, our passion, our empathy, and our time. And we also come to understand how contributing to NA demonstrates our commitment to the program and gratitude for its impact on our lives.

Beyond the basket, it’s tempting to assume that service which requires an election, gives us a title, or takes a lot of time has the most meaning. A member aptly shared this: “We are often asked if a glass of water is half-empty or half-full, but I’m not concerned with how much water is in the glass. I just want to know how good the water tastes. The quality of NA work we do is more important than the quantity. Every bit of love and gratitude we contribute has value.”

Sometimes momentary acts have lifelong meaning to another addict: remembering a newcomer’s name or saying “welcome home” to a member returning after a relapse.

And then there are those acts of service we use to occupy us so that we can endure the terrible awkwardness we sometimes feel. They can help us stall long enough to get up the guts to ask someone to sponsor us. They keep us busy until we are ready to receive hugs. At times, just having something physical to do before or after the meeting can help us keep it together when our insides feel like they are ready to spill out. These contributions are self-supporting in a different way. We’re grateful that they get us through challenging moments.

What time, talent, or treasure can I contribute to NA today? What can I do to make an addict feel more comfortable, even if that addict is me?

Gratitude, Entry #5

Gratitude and a sense of wonder change our perception (*Guiding Principles, Tradition One, "For Members"*).

"You're still alive!" she said, sounding, well, surprised. It can be a bit shocking to find one of our old running mates in the rooms of NA. "I mean, I've seen this thing work for lots of addicts, but YOU—you were hardcore." We puff up as our selective memory kicks into gear. "I mean—*bloody hell*—you were a mess, love. But look at you now! Your mum must be so happy to have you back." We feel another surge of pride, this time for our recovery.

The jolt of seeing someone who-knew-us-when reminds us that we've come a long way. It's also a good reminder of just how incredible this program is and how it really can work for *any* addict. No matter what drugs we took or where using them took us, there's help available in NA.

Embracing this perspective makes it easier to set aside our differences and consider our common welfare first. Humility helps us see ourselves simply as members in a community of equals. Our gratitude speaks when we welcome the new member who made it to the rooms by way of a different route than the one we took. Regardless of how obvious or how well-hidden our active addiction had been, we've found the same solution in Narcotics Anonymous.

"If NA can work for me, it can work for anybody," our hardcore addict responds. "I didn't want it to, but I'm so grateful that I proved myself wrong." As we listen to each other's stories, we're reminded that NA is for any addict. When we tell our own, we remember where we came from and get glimpses of where we were headed. Letting go of our reservations about membership—our own and others—makes it easier to surrender to the unity called for in our First Tradition.

With gratitude for the solution that can work for any addict who has the desire to stop using, we put unity first. We focus on what matters: this simple program that changes lives. Our gratitude for what the program has done for us as individuals is amplified when we think of NA's transformative power in the lives of recovering addicts around the world.

I will reflect on my journey with gratitude today and take time to revel in the awe-inspiring diversity and expanding reach of this Fellowship.