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.

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.”

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

_Recuperation 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.