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 prejudgments, 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.

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.