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.