Trust, Entry 1 of 6

*We do not have to understand this program for it to work. All we have to do is to follow direction.*

—Basic Text, Chapter 8: We Do Recover

“Oh, that’s ‘ALL we have to do,’ is it?!” we snark to ourselves. “I’m supposed to trust these folks and do something I don’t understand? Yeah, right.” We learn to recognize this voice of our internal cynic. Sometimes we hear from an entire committee of smartasses living between our ears! Call it what you will—the disease, the committee, or an inner demon—it tries to sabotage our recovery from the start. We learn to talk back to that voice, thank it for sharing, and then seek better counsel from other members instead of our heads.

The members we consult may tell us, “If you want what we have, do what we do.” When we balk at the idea of relying on others, as many of us do, we’re reminded that it wasn’t so long ago that we’d hand our money to a stranger trusting that they’d return with drugs. Despite our resistance, we find ourselves desperate enough to follow the lead of those who came before us. Some of us start by nibbling at the edges of their advice; others swallow it whole. Either way, we can see the value of taking action. We learn to *act as if* we trust the process hoping that will help us to do that for real. Perhaps we can rely a bit more on blind faith and worry less about grasping *why* and *how*. “Understanding is overrated,” a wise new friend suggests. “‘Figure it out’ is not an NA slogan.”

It takes a measure of trust for us to come back for a second meeting, and then a third—whether we were inspired by seeing stone-cold addicts who’d turned their lives around or we’d simply run out of options. It takes courage to take direction. We put one foot in front of the other, taking suggestions from a growing circle of support, and trusting that we’re moving in the right direction.

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*I will take a leap of faith today, trusting that fate or instinct or an addict in recovery or some other power greater than me will steer me in the direction of my hopes.*
Trust, Entry 2 of 6

Over and over, we see members from rival nations or neighborhoods, from different faiths or families, come to love and trust each other in the rooms of NA.

—Guiding Principles, Tradition Ten, Closing Meditation

Our Traditions enable NA to bring addicts from all walks of life together in a single Fellowship. We often remark how addiction does not discriminate, so neither should we. Tradition Three ensures an open policy of membership, and Tradition Ten helps us learn to leave our outside baggage at the door when we join together in recovery. Unity, anonymity, common welfare—our Traditions are rich with principles guiding us to better embrace one another “regardless of.”

It all sounds great in principle, but it’s the practice that really matters. Many other groups and organizations speak highly of principles like unity and acceptance—some live up to their own standards and others don’t. Does NA really embody its ideals? As we stay clean, recover, and carry the message, the connection between our primary purpose and NA unity becomes very clear.

An H&I trusted servant wrote, “I served on a jail panel with a couple other members, and we joked that we were like characters in a bad TV show—a former gang member, a retired cop, and me, a defense attorney. We shared together twice a month for a few years, and now we are bonded for life.”

No matter what our differences are, carrying the message joins us together in a special way. We addicts are uniquely qualified to help other addicts. We have been there! This helps newcomers trust our message—and grow to trust us, too, in spite of our surface level differences. Sharing and serving together with other members helps us deepen that trust. Our message is truly a tie binding us together that is stronger than anything that might tear us apart.

Carrying the message is a bond of sharing, serving, and recovering together. I will trust in that bond with my fellow addicts today.
Trust, Entry 3 of 6

_Through our developing relationship with our sponsor, we learn about the principle of trust._

— _It Works, Step One_

More often than not, a last-ditch effort to stay out of jail, keep a job, or hang onto a relationship drives us through the doors of NA. We’d stopped using plenty of times before but staying stopped seemed beyond us. We knew that something had to change, and, honestly, we had nothing to lose.

When we look around at that first meeting, we see people who understand our plight because they’ve been there. They understood the high price of low living. The NA program worked for them; maybe it will work for us, too. Desperation may have brought us to NA, but inspiration keeps us coming back.

Trust hadn’t been on our radar, but we are somehow willing to accept a few suggestions. Just a few days in, and we’re committed to attending a meeting a day for 90 days. We even reach out to other members between meetings. With each passing day, we feel a little better and trust in this NA way a little more. And our actions show it.

We’ve begun to trust the process, but we’ll need a guide—a sponsor—if we want to give this a fair shot. “You don’t have to trust everyone,” we’re told, “but you’ve got to learn to trust someone.” This seems like solid advice. The source, a more experienced member, seems trustworthy. We’ve found a sponsor!

It takes time for most of us to shed our armor, but sponsors have a way of gaining our trust little by little. “One of us shares some truth about our life and experience, and the other returns the favor,” in one member’s experience. In the process, we develop trust and, eventually, intimacy. It’s a pattern of behavior we can replicate in other relationships, as sponsees, sponsors, partners, and friends.

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_Following my sponsor’s example, I will build trust from small moments by being true to my word, supportive of others, and open to intimacy. We can learn to trust and be trustworthy together._
Trust, Entry 4 of 6

This may be the first time we’ve ever trusted another person enough to tell her or him about ourselves and allow that person to get to know us.

—It Works, Step Five

We addicts have lots of stories. What some consider to be deep, dark secrets others easily share, sometimes even as badges of honor. Many of us are fine to divulge the goriest details of our using days, the mayhem of our childhoods, and our experiences of victimization. Regarding the Fourth and Fifth Steps, we think, no problem, I am an open book! But, as we do the work that is suggested, perhaps using the Step Working Guides, there’s a depth inherent in those questions that goes way beyond our comfort. Exposing our own part in situations turns out to be messy, agonizing, and illuminating all at once. For many of us, our pettiness, our unforgiving nature or unkind acts, our ego on blast, our shame: these carefully guarded parts of ourselves turn out to be far more significant than the dramatic tales we thought we’d tell.

Thankfully, we’ve had the benefit and experience of the previous Steps to build trust in the program, each other, a Higher Power, and our sponsor. The Fifth Step is an opportunity for us to open our whole book and have another human being bear witness to the stories about ourselves that are the hardest to tell. As much as we’d been nervous about sharing our inventory with another person, it’s the first time we’ve admitted much of this business to ourselves.

Building a bond of trust takes courage as well as vulnerability to build. In exercising that bond, a weight is lifted off our shoulders: We reveal the truth about ourselves and we’re not rejected. Many of us don’t even realize how distant we’ve been in our relationships as a result of the secrets we’d guarded. And often being seen as truly ourselves by one person allows us to feel much lighter and more open in other relationships. One bond of trust inspires us to form others.

I’m willing to practice trust by sharing my whole story with another person. I aim to build upon my ability to trust and be trustworthy by applying what I’ve learned to other relationships.
Trust, Entry 5 of 6

Even though we do not know how our lives will change as we work this step, we can learn to trust that our Higher Power will care for us better than we could.

—It Works, Step Three

As newcomers, many of us struggle with the aspects of Twelve-Step recovery that we don’t easily understand. Sure, spirituality is practical around here, but that doesn’t mean it’s straightforward. We describe our spiritual awakenings to newer members, but the explanations often make for more head-scratching. With most things in life—and count Step Three among these—we can’t know the outcome before having the experience. The meaning of our decision to turn our will over to a caring Higher Power is lost on many of us. Instead of applying our brainpower, we need to nurture hope, faith, and trust.

Hearing about the changes in the lives of other addicts gives us something to go on as we begin to develop some trust in NA. We listen to other members talk about trusting in a Higher Power that they don’t completely understand. We hear from people of faith, people who eschew religion, and everyone in between. To a member, “Working Step Three is a decision to open a door. I may not know what’s on the other side, but I’ve gained a measure of trust in that decision, because I know my life hasn’t fallen apart whenever I’ve cracked open that door.”

Trust is a conscious decision that we put into action daily in some way or another by sidelining fear and taking a risk. We do our best, but some days acting as if we trust in a Higher Power is all we have to go on. Lots of us abide by a “fake it ‘til ya make it” attitude. Along with faith, we take a leap of trust. Sometimes we fly, sometimes we flop. Growth can be a bruising process. We experience rejection, or not getting what we’d planned so carefully for. “Sometimes the gifts we receive in recovery come wrapped in dirt,” a member teased. But we’re okay, because we’re learning to trust the process. We’ll turn it over again tomorrow.

I am learning to trust, rather than completely relying on what I think I know. Whatever happens today, I’ll practice loosening my grip on results and muster some faith that I’ll be okay.
Trust, Entry 6 of 6

*Simply allowing someone to be with us as we go about our lives can be priceless.*
—Living Clean, Chapter 2: “Connection to Others”

Being a member of NA allows us to experience something many of us were looking for all along, whether we knew it or not: a sense of community. We found our people! But then, we may look around at our fellow addicts and think, “I’m supposed to trust these people?” The answer is, not all of them, and not all at once. An H&I speaker often joked, “The good news is, there’s hope. The bad news is, it’s us!” Like love and courage, trust usually begins with action, and the feeling comes later. We start with a sponsor and grow our circle from there.

We don’t have to like everyone in NA, but we do need to recover with some of them. After being clean a while, we often feel a special connection to the members we got clean with, the people who were around in early recovery. We may grow to appreciate the traits or qualities we don’t like about some fellow members—we know them well enough to trust that they are who they are, and there’s something reliable about that. We show up for each other, warts and all.

“My mom was a difficult person with few friends at the end of her life,” a member wrote. “We didn’t expect anyone but our immediate family to attend her memorial service. I looked up to see members of ‘my crew’—the folks I cleaned up with—walking in. They didn’t know my mom, but they knew me.”

Being part of the NA community helps us develop a practical form of trust, which we then find useful in so many other areas. We show up for others—and let them show up for us—in our family, work, and romantic relationships. We allow others to be who they are, and we have the courage and willingness to be who we are alongside them. We share the road together.

*Trust can sometimes spring up in unlikely places. I will be myself, allow others to be themselves, and let trust to take root where it will.*