

The Twelve Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous

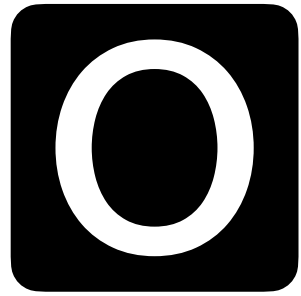
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Tradition One

*“Our common welfare should come first;
personal recovery depends on NA unity.”*





ur First Tradition concerns unity and our common welfare.

One of the most important things about our new way of life is being a part of a group of addicts seeking recovery. Our survival is directly related to the survival of the group and the Fellowship. To maintain unity within Narcotics Anonymous, it is imperative that the group remain stable, or the entire Fellowship perishes and the individual dies.



It wasn't until we came to Narcotics Anonymous that recovery became possible. This program can do for us what we could not do for ourselves. We became part of a group and found that we could recover. We learned that those who did not continue to be an active part of the Fellowship faced a rough road. The individual is precious to the group, and the group is precious to the individual. We never experienced the kind of attention and personal care that we found in the program. We are accepted and loved for who we are, not in spite of who we are. No one can revoke our membership or make us do anything that we do not choose to do. We follow this way of life by example rather than direction. We share our experience and learn from each other. In our addiction, we consistently placed our personal desires before anything else. In Narcotics Anonymous we find that what is best for the group is usually good for us.



Our personal experiences while using differed from one another. As a group, however, we have found many common themes in our addiction. One of these was the need to prove self-sufficiency. We had convinced ourselves that we could make it alone and proceeded to live life on that basis. The results were disastrous and, in the end, each of us had to admit that self-sufficiency was a lie. This admission was the starting point of our recovery and is a primary point of unity for the Fellowship. We had common themes in our addiction, and we find that in our recovery we have much in common. We share a common desire to stay clean. We have learned to depend on a Power greater than ourselves. Our purpose is to carry the message to the addict who still suffers. Our Traditions are the guidelines that protect us from ourselves. They are our unity.



Unity is a must in Narcotics Anonymous. This is not to say that we do not have our disagreements and conflicts; we do. Whenever people get together there are differences of opinions. However, we can disagree without being disagreeable. Time and time again, in crises we have set aside our differences and worked for the common good. We have seen two members, who usually do not get along, work together with a newcomer. We have seen a group doing menial tasks to pay rent for their meeting hall. We have seen members drive hundreds of miles to help support a new group. These activities and many others are commonplace in our Fellowship. Without these actions NA could not survive.

We must live and work together as a group to ensure that in a storm our ship does not sink and our members do not perish. With faith in a Power greater than ourselves, hard work, and unity we will survive and continue to carry the message to the addict who still suffers.



Tradition Two

*“For our group purpose
there is but one ultimate authority—
a loving God as He may express Himself
in our group conscience.
Our leaders are but trusted servants;
they do not govern.”*



In Narcotics Anonymous, we are concerned with protecting ourselves from ourselves. Our Second Tradition is an example of this. By nature, we are strong-willed, self-centered people, who are thrust together in NA. We are mismanagers and not one of us is capable of consistently making good decisions.

In Narcotics Anonymous, we rely on a loving God as He expresses Himself in our group conscience, rather than on personal opinion or ego. By working the steps, we learn to depend on a Power greater than ourselves, and to use this Power for our group purposes. We must be constantly on guard that our decisions are truly an expression of God's will. There is often a vast difference between group conscience and group opinion, as dictated by powerful personalities or popularity. Some of our most painful growing experiences have come as a result of decisions made in the name of group conscience. True spiritual principles are never in conflict; they complement each other. The spiritual conscience of a group will never contradict any of our Traditions.



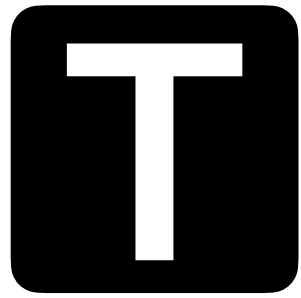
The Second Tradition concerns the nature of leadership in NA. We have learned that for our Fellowship, leadership by example and by selfless service works. Direction and manipulation fail. We choose not to have presidents, masters, or directors. Instead we have secretaries, treasurers and representatives. These titles imply service rather than control. Our experience shows that if a group becomes an extension of the personality of a leader or member, it loses its effectiveness. An atmosphere of recovery in our groups is one of our most valued assets, and we must guard it carefully, lest we lose it to politics and personalities.

Those of us who have been involved in service or in getting a group started sometimes have a hard time letting go. Egos, unfounded pride, and self-will destroy a group if given authority. We must remember that offices have been placed in trust, that we are trusted servants, and that at no time do any of us govern. Narcotics Anonymous is a God-given program, and we can maintain our group in dignity only with group conscience and God's love.

Some will resist. However, many will become the role models for the newcomers. The self-seekers soon find that they are on the outside, causing dissension and eventually disaster for themselves. Many of them change; they learn that we can only be governed by a loving God as expressed in our group conscience.

Tradition Three

*“The only requirement for membership
is a desire to stop using.”*



his tradition is important for both the individual and the group.

Desire is the key word; desire is the basis of our recovery.

In our stories and in our experience of trying to carry the message of recovery to the addict who still suffers, one painful fact of life has emerged again and again. An addict who does not want to stop using will not stop using. They can be analyzed, counseled, reasoned with, prayed over, threatened, beaten, or locked up, but they will not stop until they want to stop. The only thing we ask of our members is that they have this desire. Without it they are doomed, but with it miracles will happen.

Desire is our only requirement. Addiction does not discriminate.

This tradition is to ensure that any addict, regardless of drugs used, race, religious beliefs, sex, sexual preference, or financial condition is free to practice the NA way of life. With “... a desire to stop using” as the only requirement for membership, one addict is never superior to another.

All addicted persons are welcome and equal in obtaining the relief that they are seeking from their addiction; every addict can recover in this program on an equal basis. This tradition guarantees our freedom to recover.

Membership in Narcotics Anonymous is not automatic when someone walks in the door or when the newcomer decides to stop using.

The decision to become a part of our Fellowship rests with the individual. Any addict who has a desire to stop using can become a member of NA. We are addicts, and our problem is addiction.

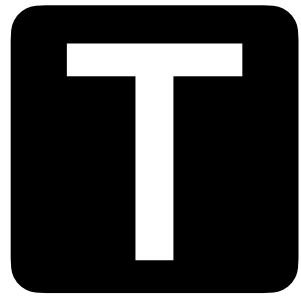
The choice of membership rests with the individual. We feel that the ideal state for our Fellowship exists when addicts can come freely and openly to an NA meeting, whenever and wherever they choose, and leave just as freely. We realize that recovery is a reality and that life without drugs is better than we ever imagined. We open our doors to other addicts, hoping that they can find what we have found. But we know that only those who have a desire to stop using and want what we have to offer will join us in our way of life.



Tradition Four

*“Each group should be autonomous
except in matters affecting other groups
or NA as a whole.”*





he autonomy of our groups is necessary for our survival. A dictionary defines autonomous as “having the right or power of self-government...undertaken or carried on without outside control.” This means our groups are self-governing, and not subject to outside control. Every group has had to stand and grow on its own.



One might ask, “Are we truly autonomous? Don’t we have service committees, offices, activities, hot lines, and other activities in NA?” They are services we use to help us in our recovery and to further the primary purpose of our groups. Narcotics Anonymous is a Fellowship of men and women, addicts meeting in groups and using a given set of spiritual principles to find freedom from addiction and a new way to live. The services that we mentioned are the result of members who care enough to reach out and offer help and experience so that our road might be easier.



A Narcotics Anonymous group is any group that meets regularly, at a specified place and time, for the purpose of recovery, provided that it follows the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous. There are two basic types of meetings: those open to the general public and those closed to the public (for addicts only). Meeting formats vary widely from group to group; some are participation meetings, some speakers, some are question and answer, and some focus on special problems discussion.

Whatever the type or format a group uses for its meetings, the function of a group is always the same; to provide a suitable and reliable environment for personal recovery and to promote such recovery. These Traditions are part of a set of spiritual principles of Narcotics Anonymous, and without them NA does not exist.

Autonomy gives our groups the freedom to act on their own to establish an atmosphere of recovery, serve their members and fulfill their primary purpose. It is for these reasons that we guard our autonomy so carefully.

It would seem that we, in our groups, can do whatever we decide, regardless of what anyone says. This is partly true. Each group does have complete freedom, except when their actions affect other groups or NA as a whole. Like group conscience, autonomy can be a two-edged sword. Group autonomy has been used to justify violation of the Traditions. If a contradiction exists, we have slipped away from our principles. If we check to make sure that our actions are clearly within the bounds of our traditions; if we do not dictate to other groups, or force anything upon them; and if we consider the consequences of our action ahead of time, then all will be well.

Tradition Five

*“Each group has but one primary purpose—
to carry the message to the addict
who still suffers.”*



You mean to say that our primary purpose is to carry the message? I thought we were here to get clean. I thought that our primary purpose was to recover from drug addiction.”

For the individual, this is certainly true; our members are here to find freedom from addiction and a new way of life. However, groups aren't addicted and don't recover. All our groups can do is plant the seed for recovery and bring addicts together so that the magic of empathy, honesty, caring, sharing, and service can do their work. The purpose of this tradition is to ensure that this atmosphere of recovery is maintained. This can only be achieved by keeping our groups recovery-oriented. The fact that we, each and every group, focus on carrying the message provides consistency; addicts can count on us. Unity of action and purpose makes possible what seemed impossible for us—recovery.



The Twelfth Step of our personal program also says that we carry the message to the addict who still suffers. Working with others is a powerful tool. “The therapeutic value of one addict helping another is without parallel.” For the newcomers, this is how they found Narcotics Anonymous and learned to stay clean. For the members, this reaffirms their commitment to recovery. The group is the most powerful vehicle we have for carrying the message. When a member carries the message, he is somewhat bound by interpretation and personality. The problem with literature is language. The feelings, the intensity, and the strengths are sometimes lost. In our group, with many different personalities, the message of recovery is a recurring theme.

What would happen if our groups had another primary purpose? We feel our message would be diluted and then lost. If we concentrated on making money, many might get rich. If we were a social club, we could find many friends and lovers. If we specialized in education, we'd end up with many smart addicts. If our specialty was medical help, many would get healthy. If our group purpose were anything other than to carry the message, many would die and few would find recovery.

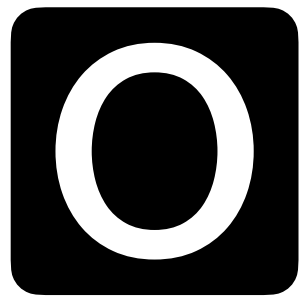
What is our message? The message is that an addict, any addict, can stop using drugs, lose the desire to use, and find a new way to live. Our message is hope and the promise of freedom. When all is said and done, our primary purpose can only be to carry the message to the addict who still suffers because that is all we have to give.



Tradition Six

“An NA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the NA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property or prestige divert us from our primary purpose.”





Our Sixth Tradition tells us some of the things that we must do to preserve and protect our primary purpose. This tradition is the basis for our policy of non-affiliation and is extremely important to the continuation and growth of Narcotics Anonymous.

Let's take a look at what this tradition says. The first thing a group ought never do is endorse. To endorse is to sanction, approve or recommend. Endorsements can be either direct or implied. We see direct endorsements every day in television commercials. An implied endorsement is one that is not specifically stated.



Many other organizations wish to ride on the NA name. To allow them to do so would be an implied endorsement and a violation of this tradition. Hospitals, drug recovery houses, probation and parole offices are some of the facilities we deal with in carrying the NA message. While these organizations are sincere and we hold NA meetings in their establishments, we cannot endorse, finance or allow them to use the NA name to further their growth. However, we are willing to carry the NA principles into these institutions, to the addicts who still suffer so that they can make the choice.

The next thing we ought never do is finance. This is more obvious. To finance means to supply funds or to help support financially.



The third thing warned against in this tradition is lending the NA name to fulfill the purposes of other programs. For example, several times other programs have tried to use Narcotics Anonymous as part of their services offered, to help justify funding.

Further the tradition tells us that a related facility is any place involving NA members. It might be a halfway house, a detox center, a counseling center, or a clubhouse. People are easily confused by what is NA and what are the related facilities. Recovery houses that have been started or staffed by NA members have to take care that the differentiation is clear. Perhaps the most confusion exists when it involves a clubhouse.

Newcomers and older members often identify the clubhouse with Narcotics Anonymous. We should make a special effort to let these people know that these facilities and NA are not the same. An outside enterprise is any agency, business venture, religion, society, organization, related activity, or any other fellowship. Most of these are easy to identify, except for the other fellowships. Narcotics Anonymous is a separate and distinct fellowship in its own right. Our problem is addiction. The other Twelve Step Fellowships specialize in other problems, and our relationship with them is one of cooperation, not affiliation. The use of literature, speakers, and announcements from other fellowships in our meetings constitutes an implied endorsement of an outside enterprise.

The Sixth Tradition goes on to warn us what may happen: “lest problems of money, property or prestige divert us from our primary purpose.” These problems often become obsessions and shut us off from our spiritual aim. For the individual, this type of abuse can be devastating; for the group, it can be disastrous. When we, as a group, waiver from our primary purpose, addicts who might have found recovery die.



Tradition Seven

“Every NA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.”



Being self-supporting is an important part of our new way of life. For the individual, this is usually quite a change. In our addiction, we were dependent on people, places, and things. We looked to them to support us and supply the things that we found lacking in ourselves. As recovering addicts, we find that we are still dependent, but our dependence has shifted from the things around us to a loving God and the inner strength we get in our relationship with Him. We, who were unable to function as human beings, now find that anything is possible of us. Dreams that we gave up long ago can now become realities. Addicts as a group have been a burden to society. In NA, our groups not only stand on their own, but demand the right to do so.



Money has always been a problem for us. We could never find enough to support ourselves and our habits. We worked, stole, conned, begged and sold ourselves; there was never enough money to fill the emptiness inside. In our recovery, money is often still a problem.



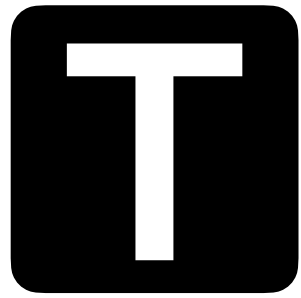
We need money to run our group; there is rent to pay, supplies and literature to buy. We take a collection in our meetings to cover these expenses and whatever is left goes to support our services and to further our primary purpose. Unfortunately, there is little left once a group pays its way. Sometimes members who can afford it give a little extra to help. Sometimes a committee is formed to put on an activity to raise funds. These efforts help and without them, we could not have come this far. NA services remain in need of money, and even though it is sometimes frustrating, we really would not have it any other way; we know the price would be too high. We all have to pull together, and in pulling together we learn that we really are part of something greater than ourselves.

Our policy concerning money is clearly stated: We decline any outside contributions; our Fellowship is completely self-supporting. We accept no funding, endowments, loans, and/or gifts. Everything has its price, regardless of intent. Whether the price is money, promises, concessions, special recognition, endorsements, or favors, it's too high for us. Even if those who would help us could guarantee no strings, we still would not accept their aid. We cannot afford to let our members contribute more than their fair share. We have found that the price paid by our groups is disunity and controversy. We will not put our freedom on the line.

Tradition Eight

*“Narcotics Anonymous
should remain forever nonprofessional,
but our service centers
may employ special workers.”*





The Eighth Tradition is vital to the stability of NA as a whole.

In order to understand this tradition we need to define “nonprofessional service centers” and “special workers.”

With an understanding of these terms, this important tradition is selfexplanatory.

In this tradition we say that we have no professionals. By this, we mean we have no staff psychiatrists, doctors, lawyers, or counselors.

Our program works by one addict helping another. If we employed professionals in NA groups, we would destroy our unity. We are simply addicts of equal status freely helping one another.



We recognize and admire the professionals. Many of our members are professionals in their own right, but there is no room for professionalism in NA.

A service center is defined as a place where NA service committees operate. The World Service Office or local, regional, and area offices are examples of service centers. A clubhouse or halfway house, or similar facility, is not an NA service center and is not affiliated with NA.

A service center is, very simply, a place where NA services are offered on a continuing basis.

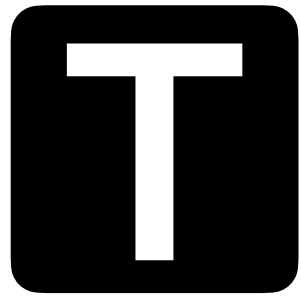
The tradition states, “Service centers may employ special workers.” This statement means that service centers may employ workers for special skills such as phone answering, clerical work, or printing. Such employees are directly responsible to a service committee. As NA grows, the demand for these workers will grow. Special workers are necessary to ensure efficiency in an ever-expanding fellowship.

The difference between professionals and special workers should be defined for clarity. Professionals work in specific professions that do not directly service NA, but are for personal gain. Professionals do not follow the NA Traditions. Our special workers, on the other hand, work within our Traditions and are always directly responsible to those they serve, to the Fellowship.

In our Eighth Tradition, we do not single out our members as professional. By not placing professional status on any member, we ensure that we remain “forever nonprofessional.”

Tradition Nine

*“NA, as such, ought never be organized,
but we may create service boards
or committees directly responsible
to those they serve.”*



his tradition defines the way that our Fellowship functions.

We must first understand what NA is. Narcotics Anonymous is addicts who have the desire to stop using, and have joined together to do so. Our meetings are a gathering of members for the purpose of staying clean and carrying the message of recovery. Our steps and traditions are set down in a specific order. They are numbered, they are not random and unstructured. They are organized, but this is not the type of organization referred to in the Ninth Tradition. In this tradition, “organized” means having management and control. On this basis, the meaning of Tradition Nine is clear. Without this tradition, our Fellowship would be in opposition to spiritual principles. A loving God, as He may express Himself in our group conscience, is our ultimate authority.

The Ninth Tradition goes on to define the nature of the things that we can do to help NA. It says that we may create service boards or committees to serve the needs of the Fellowship. They exist solely to serve the Fellowship. This is the nature of our service structure as it has evolved and been defined in the NA service manual.



Tradition Ten


*“Narcotics Anonymous
has no opinion on outside issues;
hence the NA name ought never
be drawn into public controversy.”*



On order to achieve our spiritual aim, Narcotics Anonymous must be known and respected. Nowhere is this more obvious than in our history. NA was founded in 1953. For twenty years, our Fellowship remained small and obscure. In the 1970's, society realized that addiction had become a worldwide epidemic and began to look for answers. Along with this came change in the way people thought of the addict. This change allowed addicts to seek help more openly. NA groups sprang up in many places where we were never tolerated before. Recovering addicts paved the way for more groups and more recovery. Today NA is a worldwide Fellowship. We are known and respected everywhere.

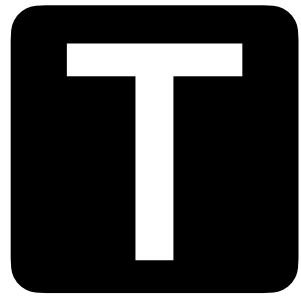
If an addict has never heard of us, he cannot seek us out. If those who work with addicts are unaware of our existence, they cannot refer them to us. One of the most important things we can do to further our primary purpose is to let people know who, what and where we are. If we do this and keep our good reputation, we will surely grow.

Our recovery speaks for itself. Our Tenth Tradition specifically helps protect our reputation. This tradition says that NA has no opinion on outside issues. We don't take sides. We don't have any recommendations. NA, as a Fellowship, does not participate in politics; to do so would invite controversy. It would jeopardize our Fellowship. Those who agree with our opinions might commend us for taking a stand, but some would always disagree. With a price this high, is it any wonder we choose not to take sides in society's problems? For our own survival, we have no opinion on outside issues.



Tradition Eleven

“Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.”



his tradition deals with our relationship to those outside the Fellowship. It tells us how to conduct our efforts at the public level. Our public image consists of what we have to offer, a successful proven way of maintaining a drug-free lifestyle. While it is important to reach as many people as possible, it is imperative for our protection that we are careful about advertisements, circulars and any literature that may reach the public's hands.

Our attraction is that we are successes in our own right. As groups, we offer recovery. We have found that the success of our program speaks for itself; this is our promotion.

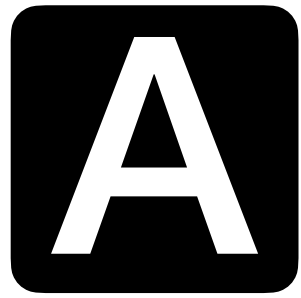
This tradition goes on to tell us that we need to maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films. This is to protect the membership and the reputation of Narcotics Anonymous. We do not give our last names nor appear in the media as a member of Narcotics Anonymous. No individual inside or outside the Fellowship represents Narcotics Anonymous.



Tradition Twelve

“Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.”





dictionary definition of anonymity is “a state of bearing no name.” In keeping with Tradition Twelve, the “I” becomes “we.” The spiritual foundation becomes more important than any one group or individual.

As we find ourselves growing closer together, the awakening of humility occurs. Humility is a by-product that allows us to grow and develop in an atmosphere of freedom, and removes the fear of becoming known by our employers, families or friends as addicts. Therefore, we attempt to rigorously adhere to the principle that “what is said in meetings stays in meetings.”

Throughout our Traditions, we speak in terms of “we” and “our” rather than “me” and “mine.” By working together for our common welfare, we achieve the true spirit of anonymity.

We have heard the phrase “principles before personalities” so often that it is like a cliché. While we may disagree as individuals, the spiritual principle of anonymity makes us all equal as members of the group. No member is greater or lesser than any other member. The drive for personal gain in the areas of sex, property and social position, which brought so much pain in the past, falls by the wayside if we adhere to the principle of anonymity. Anonymity is one of the basic elements of our recovery and it pervades our Traditions and our Fellowship. It protects us from our own defects of character and renders personalities and their differences powerless. Anonymity in action makes it impossible for personalities to come before principles.

