

Alive & Free

The Non-Negotiable Twelve Traditions
of
Narcotics Anonymous

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INPUT & REVIEW MATERIAL - NOT FOR SALE - ANY MEMBER OF N.A. MAY DISTRIBUTE FREE OF CHARGE TO OTHER N.A. MEMBERS

This work is based on the Grey Book. It is not intended as a revision of the Grey Book, but does use that work as its foundation for input & review, with the vast majority of material coming directly from that volume.

Much of the material will seem familiar and some will match, or be similar to the Basic Text. This is because the Basic Text also sprang directly from the Grey Book. This volume includes more material on the Traditions from the Grey Book than was included in the Basic Text and delves a little deeper into each Tradition.

This book differs from other books written on the NA Traditions after the Second Edition of our Basic Text, in that it does not try to reinterpret or “renegotiate” Traditions to justify service practices that are well outside our non-negotiable Traditions as originally understood and practiced. No consideration is given to “Concepts Of Service” or the idea of a “vote of confidence” for servants to act in lieu of getting a true conscience from the Home Groups that comprise the whole of “NA, as such”. There is no attempt bend the Traditions to match “modern NA practices”. If the Twelve Traditions Of NA are truly “not negotiable”, it is incumbent on us to inventory our actions as individuals, Home Groups, and services for NA and bring them in line with our Traditions, rather than relying on new Concept-ual interpretations of our Traditions in an attempt to justify practices which are out of line with our original principles as a Fellowship.

Any NA Group can input and review this material on their own or make revisions. We ask only that you note in your work that it represents work done by your Group in addition to what was done by the Alive & Free Home Group. Alive & Free is only a working title. We are also considering other options. If your Group does something different with this material, you can call it anything you want. We are not worried about what comes of autonomous NA Groups working in true Group conscience. If you wish to submit your work to this Group or participate with us simply go to OldSchoolNA.com and click the “contact” link to get in touch with us.

We are also submitting all of our work to the Anonymi Foundation (A publishing entity created by and directly responsible to the NA Groups who direct the Fellowship Service Conference *for* NA) to use in Traditions books other Traditionalist NA Groups are working on.

True NA literature is written as a labor of love, free of professionalism, and serves no other purpose than to carry the NA message to addicts seeking a way to live clean. We, as NA members and Groups, have complete creative freedom and do not need permission from committees who govern through “effective leadership” masquerading as “trusted service” to put our experience, strength, and hope into writing.

In truth, that is exactly how all of our original NA literature came to be; NA members and Groups simply started writing it! In fact, our greatest literature came as a result of addicts writing in their Groups and through Open Participation and our Basic Text is the result of addicts writing despite the fact that the majority of those in World Services were opposed to the idea in the beginning. They did not wait for permission to write a book, they simply started writing and eventually most addicts got on board with the idea. Our oldest NA literature started as addicts writing for addicts, usually in Home Groups and later through Open Participatory committees directed by those Groups. That has not changed, just because, “NAWS said so”, nor can any collection of Groups attempt to vote away the autonomy of others. This is, in fact, what the second half of our Fourth Tradition deals with: Not forcing the will of one Group or even the vast majority on one, single Group or NA as a whole.

If you want to write, please do! If you want to join with us in writing this piece, please do! What is written here, in this preamble is not currently under consideration as being part of this work. It simply explains it what we are doing. When we get done, and if we decide to publish this as an actual piece, we will write a preface or introduction of sorts. Some of what is written here may or may not be used. We will write about the finished piece if, and when it is finished.

As this is NA literature, only NA members and Groups are given permission to make changes, edits, or add to it. As long as it is never sold for profit, what you do beyond that is up to you. No one speaks for NA as a whole and only the NA members, through their Home Groups, own NA literature. (Service bodies for NA may not claim any type of ownership, “modern practices” to the contrary notwithstanding.)

If you do not wish to participate in this process, that is fine by us. Please respect our autonomous right to complete creative freedom and our obligation to share the NA message in written form, just as we respect your autonomous right not to do so.

Our gratitude speaks *when we care enough to share* with others the NA way!

A note on capitalization in this work: The word "Group" is capitalized whenever it is in reference to an actual NA Group. This is to emphasize and clarify when the word is in reference to an NA Home Group, as opposed to any generic group of addicts or a group of addicts in a service body. This capitalization practice is based on the capitalization of the word in the numbered Traditions present in all versions of our Basic Text prior to the Third, Revised. The word "Fellowship" is also capitalized when it is in reference to the Fellowship of NA, as opposed to fellowships in general.

THIS VERSION REFLECTS THE EFFORTS OF THE ALIVE & FREE NOMADS HOME GROUP
OF NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS IN SPRINGVILLE, UTAH AS OF APRIL 12, 2017.

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THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS

We keep what we have only with vigilance and just as freedom for the individual comes from the Twelve Steps so freedom for the Groups springs from our Traditions.

As long as the ties that bind us together are stronger than those that would tear us apart, all will be well.

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on N.A. unity.
2. 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.
3. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using.
4. Each Group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting other Groups, N.A. as a whole.
5. Each Group has but one primary purpose--to carry the message to the addict who still suffers.
6. An N.A. Group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the N.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money property or prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every N.A. Group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

8. Narcotics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our Service Centers may employ special workers.
9. N.A., as such, ought never be organized, but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Narcotics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the N.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. 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.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

We come to this program from homes and apartments, offices and schools, treatment centers and jails, parks and gutters. We come from many different places, but they all share loneliness, pain, and fear. Somehow addiction draws us together in Narcotics Anonymous.

We came to this program for many different reasons. Those of us who stay do so to stay clean and realize a freedom and a life worth living. After we've actually stopped, and the fog has cleared a bit, most of us take a look around to see what this program is all about. We start trying to do the things we see those around us doing. Eventually we come to the Twelve Steps and try to work them the best we can. The result is a degree of freedom that we never have known before. We find freedom from drugs and the obsession to use them; and in time start to enjoy a new freedom from our disruptive patterns and the wreckage of our past.

We're taught that we can only keep what we have by giving it away. So we seek out and give our hand to other addicts who have problems like ours and want help. Usually one of the

first things we try to do when we're working with a newcomer is to get them to a meeting. After all, that's what worked for us.

Why is this so? What is it about our meetings that's so special? Usually, about all we can say is that there is a feeling of strength, hope, understanding, and love in an atmosphere of recovery. Our meetings are very special to most of us. They're a place where we can feel safe and fit in. But what keeps it that way? One would think that any time people like us get together the results would be chaos. Groups of self-centered, self-willed, isolative individuals just can't meet together peacefully; but we do. The reason that we can is that we have the Twelve Traditions.

For most of us, understanding these Traditions comes slowly over a period of time. We pick up a little information here and there as we talk to members and visit various Groups. It usually isn't until we get involved that we realize personal recovery depends on N.A. unity, and that unity depends on how well we follow our Traditions. The Twelve Traditions of N.A. are not suggested, and they are not negotiable. They are the undeniable spiritual principles that keep our Fellowship alive and free.

By following these principles in our dealings with others in N.A. and society at large, we avoid many problems. That isn't to say that our Traditions eliminate all problems. We still have to face difficulties as they arise: communication problems, differences of opinion, internal controversies, and problems with individuals and groups outside the Fellowship. However, when we apply these principles we avoid some of the pitfalls.

Many of our problems are much like those our predecessors had to face. Their hard won experience gave birth to the Traditions, and our own experience has shown that these principles are just as valid today as they were when they were conceived. Our Traditions are what protect us from the internal and external forces which could destroy us. They are truly the ties that bind us together, but they don't work automatically. It is only through understanding and application that they have the power to work.

TRADITION ONE

Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on N.A. unity.

It makes sense that our First Tradition concerns unity and our common welfare. One of the most important parts of 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 our Home Groups and Fellowship as a whole.

Before coming to N.A., most of us tried to get clean or stay clean on our own. Many of us sought professional help. These efforts were usually unsuccessful for us until we came to Narcotics Anonymous. Then recovery became possible. N.A. can do for us what we could not do for ourselves. We came and saw this program work in the lives of other addicts. Their recovery gave us hope for ourselves. We became part of a Group and found that we could make it too. We also learned that those who did not continue being an active part of the Fellowship faced a rough road and often relapsed. Most of us agree that without N.A. we would be in real trouble. We know we can't do it alone, and nothing else ever worked for us. For our own good we try to do what is best for the Group.

This isn't to say that the Group is shoved down the individual's throat. Most of us had never experienced the kind of attention and personal care that we found in the program. We are accepted and loved for what we are; instead of "in spite" of what we are. The individual is precious to the Group, and the Group precious to the individual. No one can revoke our membership or punish us, or make us do anything that we don't choose to do. We are taught this way of life by example rather than direction. We share our experiences and learn from each other. In our addiction we consistently placed our personal desires before anything else. Here we found that in the long run what's best for the Group was usually good for us. We choose to put the good of the Group ahead of personal ambitions.

Our personal experiences while using differed from member to member. However, as a group we found many common themes in our addiction. One of these shared symptoms was

our need to prove self-sufficiency. We 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 our self-sufficiency was a lie. We found that we could no longer control our using, nor could we manage our own lives. This surrender was the starting point of our recovery, and is a primary point of unity for the Fellowship.

Not only are these common themes in our addiction, but we find that in recovery we also have much in common. We share a common desire to stay clean. Each of us has learned to depend on a Power greater than ourselves, which is our source of strength. Our sole purpose is to carry the message to the addict who still suffers. We have our Traditions, the time-tested principles that protect us from ourselves. We share many things, and each is a point of unity for us.

Unity is a reality in Narcotics Anonymous. This isn't to say that we don't have our disagreements and conflicts; we do. Whenever people get together there are differences of opinion. However, when the chips are down we pull together. Time and time again we've seen this; in times of crises or trouble we have set aside our differences and worked for the common good. How often have we seen two members who usually don't get along very well working together with newcomers? How often have we seen a Group doing menial tasks to pay the rent for their meeting space? How often have we seen members drive hundreds of miles to help support a new Group? These activities and many others are commonplace in our Fellowship. It is self-evident, because without these things N.A. could not have survived.

Some of the darkest times our Fellowship has seen have come as a result of a misapplication of this Tradition. Tradition One is never a mandate for conformity or a license to ostracize individuals and Groups who do not do things "our way". Quite the contrary; Tradition One calls on us to honor our diverse experience and respect our differences of opinion.

Too often our First Tradition has been used to give service bodies license to rule, censor, decide, dictate, or even silence a minority voice. When this happens the results are always

disastrous. "Collateral damage" is never acceptable. True unity never results in members or Groups being outcast or marginalized.

N.A. is not a majority rule society. While we may vote on some common service decisions, no Group or individual member is ever bound by the decisions of others. We must never dictate to one another, even in areas as seemingly important as the literature each Group chooses to use or how we understand and apply our Traditions.

Non-negotiable does not mean we can enforce the Traditions and police other Groups. It means we hold ourselves and our own Group accountable and that we don't try to bend the Traditions to fit our agendas; we don't look for "loopholes".

While it may seem "dangerous" to allow Groups to make their own mistakes, we have learned that the minority view is not necessarily the "wrong" view and that mandating, dictating and ostracizing are far more detrimental to our survival. We can lovingly disagree and still maintain our unity. We can allow Groups to make their own decisions even when we don't support those decisions. Just as an individual cannot be kicked out of N.A., neither can any Group be declared "outside N.A." by any other Group or service body.

Without N.A. few of us would have survived, and fewer still would have found recovery. As long as we can love each other through our mistakes and differences we will always come out whole on the other side.

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 N.A. We have a great need to safeguard our Fellowship against our character defects. Our Second Tradition is another example of this. By nature we seem to be strong-willed, self-centered people who seek gratification in the realms of money, property, power, and prestige. An important part of our recovery is learning how to deal with these desires. We try to realign our misguided instincts, and stop acting out our insanities. We are by nature self-destructive people so we need to re-channel our thoughts and actions toward constructive ends. In other words, we have to replace our "dying program" with a "living program". Early in our recovery we learned that we did a pretty poor job with our lives. One of our sayings is "Our best ideas got us here". This seems apt as we look back and see how many times our schemes and plans got us into trouble despite our original intent. We were powerless over our addiction and could not manage our own lives. Now we find ourselves thrust together in N.A., mismanagers all, not one of us capable of making consistently good decisions. Because of this, we may find it hard to trust the Group at first.

At this point an old-timer might come forward to reassure us. "Don't worry. God takes care of fools and addicts. This is a spiritual program and he won't let us screw it up, as long as we can stay out of the way." They go on to explain that in N.A we rely on a loving God as he expresses Himself in our Group conscience rather than on personal opinion or ego. In working the Steps we need to come to depend on a Power greater than ourselves. We continue this relationship and utilize it for our Group purpose. If we each turn our will and our lives over to God's care and seek to do His will, He will express Himself on a Group level. When a decision needs to be made for the Group, each of the members should take the time to meditate on what is most beneficial to our common welfare. If we do this, then the results will truly be an expression of the spiritual nature of our Group. We know this is true, but sometimes we are confused when it seems our decisions don't work out very well. We forget that we are not perfect, and that we are only experiencing spiritual progress. When personalities and self-will

creep into our efforts then the results suffer. We must be constantly on guard that our decisions are truly an expression of God's will. There is a vast difference between Group conscience and Group opinion. True Group conscience is never based on powerful personalities or popularity. Some of our most painful experiences as a Fellowship have come as a result of decisions made in the name of "Group conscience". Our experience has shown that some of our decisions have been none too spiritual.

"We took a Group conscience and decided that..." Wait a minute! Coming to a Group conscience involves far more than simply taking votes. One Group decided that members must be graduates of a specific treatment program. Another felt that only heroin addicts should attend. Another accepted only Christians. Another decided that residents of a halfway house could attend if they promised not to talk. Another let non-members sit in on their Group only if they would contribute to the collection. Another decided to pay its officers wages. Still another Group promised that anyone who attended their meetings would be able to get a job at a local counseling center and so on and so forth. We've made a lot of bad decisions and pawned them off as Group conscience. This worries many of us. How can we tell if our decisions are truly Group conscience and how do we prevent painful mistakes?

There is one truth which helps guide us. True spiritual principles are never in conflict; they always complement each other. The true spiritual conscience of a Group will never contradict any of our other spiritual principles. This does not mean we will never disagree or that what is right for one Group will be right for another. Whenever we find ourselves using this to silence other opinions, mandate conformity, justify ostracizing other addicts and Groups, or to give committees and administrative structures authority over the Groups they serve we must consider that it may be we who are in conflict with true spiritual principles. Whenever we are faced with a Group decision, we first try to eliminate personalities, prejudices, and self-centeredness. Once we reach a decision we review it to make sure it is not in violation of any of our Twelve Traditions. We take another look at our decision. If there is a conflict we must resolve it. This approach isn't foolproof, but it has helped to prevent problems many times.

The Second Tradition also concerns the nature of leadership in N.A. We rest all authority in the spiritual conscience of the Group. In keeping with this, we make a special point of trying to prevent authoritarian leadership. We have learned that for our Fellowship, leadership by example and by selfless service works, and that direction and manipulation fails. The way we designate our trusted servants insures this. We choose not to have presidents, masters, chairmen or directors. Instead we have secretaries, treasurers, and representatives. We choose to use titles that imply service rather than control. Our experience shows that if a Group becomes an extension of the personality of a leader or a certain member, then it loses its spiritual autonomy. Newcomers don't stay, and members stop coming. The Group must then change or it will eventually die. This is sometimes a difficult and agonizing process, but we grow as a Group and as individuals through the experience. An atmosphere of recovery in our Groups is one of our most precious assets; and we must guard it carefully, lest we lose it to politics and personalities.

Those of us who have been involved in service for a long time, or in getting a Group started and keeping the doors open through the hard early days sometimes have a difficult time letting go of the reins. Sometimes our egos get in the way, sometimes ungrounded fears get in the way, and sometimes even the Group can get in the way when we rely solely on opinion rather than seeking the will of a loving God. Most of us come in with a poor self-image and low self-worth. With time and some successes, we begin to recover somewhat and develop healthier egos. We enjoy these feelings. They are healthy for us. We like recognition and attention and we often deserve them. However, this sometimes gets out of hand. We begin to pursue these things as ends in themselves and find ourselves in trouble. With more time and maturity we grow in humility and learn to deal with these new feelings in a more realistic and spiritual way. Another situation which often causes us problems is fear. We sometimes fear that there is no one else who can serve the Group as well as we do. We are afraid that if we turn over the responsibility to new members, something terrible is going to happen. We may may even have tried to get others involved before without success. It doesn't matter. Whenever we are unwilling to take a chance and let the Group grow on its own, or when we become afraid of change, we are playing God. Our friends may tell us to let go and work the Third Step, but sometimes we are deaf to their love. In these cases it is ourselves who

must go and grow.

Still another situation which causes problems is when senior members are thrust into positions of power, rather than allowing them to be trusted servants. Sometimes a Group or part of a Group will be afraid to let their servants step down gracefully. Time and time again the members draft the same leaders; demanding that they perform, demanding that they rule the roost. In these cases change is especially hard because it seems that only a crises will do the job. Usually, the perceived leader must refuse to serve. This goes against the grain because we've been told never to refuse an N.A. Request, and this has been a valuable part of our program. To refuse to lead because it's not what's best for the Group requires a lot of maturity and humility.

Most of those involved with service sooner or later have to deal with these problems. At fist they are unaware. They run on good feelings, the notoriety, and the attention. After a while, they may begin to have mixed feelings. Part of them revels in the spotlight, while another part is very uncomfortable because they know they are just another member. This period is often followed by a period in which they deny their leadership and value to the Group. Eventually and gratefully they find a degree of humility which allows them to accept themselves and their places in the Fellowship. They accept that they truly are part of a greater whole. Along with this they also accept that they do have special and valuable experiences which can benefit the Group. They become a resource for the Group; seeking neither to control the Group, nor to set themselves apart. It is at this time that their long service truly contributes the most. They encourage us, inspire us, and teach us by example. Even though their services are less dramatic than when their Group was struggling to survive, they provide a foundation of stability, strength, and experience upon which our Fellowship can grow.

Now what of services? How does this Tradition apply to the services we create, and why do our older writings and those of our predecessors never seem to address this Tradition beyond the Group level? Simply put, this Tradition is not for service bodies, it is for the Groups who comprise N.A., as such. Service bodies are organized and have administrative structures. If we are in line with our Traditions our service bodies answer directly to the Groups. Because

we can never be governed, God's will is made known at the Group level. In truth, "N.A., as such" exists prior to and apart from any service boards or committees we may or may not create. Of course it is wise for services to endeavor to employ the same diligence in seeking God's will in the limited decision-making entrusted to them, but we must always be mindful that any decision which is important enough that it would seem to merit "Group conscience" is probably best made by the N.A. "Groups". It is not that God is limited in scope or power, or that God lacks the ability to express Himself at any level. The reason a loving God would find no place in administrative structures is because of our own tendency as addicts and humans to be easily distracted by money, power, and prestige. Administrative structures place power in human hands. Our Fellowship is directed only by God. The only way the tools for N.A. We create can function without infringing on our spiritual nature is to take direction only from the Groups whose total and complete autonomy and lack of organizational structure serves as a safeguard against the pitfalls of authority, prestige and the tendency to fancy ourselves "effective leaders" rather than remembering we are but trusted servants of the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous.

TRADITION THREE

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

This Tradition is very important for both the individual and the Group. It relates to many of the basic ideas of our program. Desire is the key word in this Tradition and desire is the basis of our recovery. In our stories and in our experience trying to carry the message 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, locked up, or whatever; but they won't stop using until they want to. The only thing we ask of our members is that they have this desire. Without it they are doomed, but with it miracles have happened.

This desire is our only requirement, and rightfully so. Addiction does not discriminate. Why should recovery? Our disease does not recognize race, religion, sex, age, occupation, economics, or any of the other lines people draw to separate themselves. "An addict is a man or woman whose life is controlled by drugs". The newcomer is the lifeblood of NA and when one comes to us seeking help we welcome them with open arms. We don't care who or what they are or even what they used. As long as they want to stop using there's a place for them in NA, and this Tradition guarantees them that place. Every clean member of NA could have been rejected by some kind of membership requirement or another. Many of us would not be alive today if we hadn't found a program which accepted us when we wanted help. We originally came to this program for many reasons, but those of us who have stayed have done so for the same reason – the desire to stop using. Many of us didn't even know that addiction was a problem. Many of us could not visualize a life without drugs, let alone want it. Many of us had reached the point in our addiction where we felt there was no hope for us. We only wanted a little relief. It wasn't until after we came to NA that we found out that we had a disease and that recovery was possible for us. Membership in NA isn't automatic when someone walks in the door; it isn't even automatic when the newcomer has a desire 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 Narcotics Anonymous and our problem is addiction. Other fellowships deal with other problems. Most newcomers are led to the fellowship which best suits their needs. Individuals come with problems that express themselves in various ways. They don't clearly fit into our Fellowship. Many of these people become valuable and active members of several fellowships while others single out the fellowship with which they are the most comfortable. Our primary purpose is to carry the message to the addict who still suffers; where they find recovery is not our basic concern. We know of addicts with a history of drug abuse who have found recovery in other fellowships. We respect their choice and rejoice in their recovery. Any addict who has found freedom and recovery anywhere is a miracle to us. Although we would welcome them in our Groups, we do not seek them out or force them to join NA. This would not be in keeping with our spiritual aims.

The Twelve Step fellowships do not compete. For us, recovery is more important than membership. However, some newcomers seem to have trouble finding a fellowship or fellowships in which they fit. We encourage them to shop around, to attend various meetings and find out where they most fully identify. They might ask themselves a few questions:

1. "Where do I hear about problems most like my own problems?"
2. "Where are there members who are living the kind of life I would like to live?"
3. "Where am I most comfortable?"

We have also met members with time who are still uncertain about where they really belong. Similarly, it might be advisable for people in this situation to pose a few questions to themselves:

1. What message do I carry? (What is the nature of my recovery and what am I recovering from?)
2. To whom am I trying to carry this message?
3. Where am I trying to carry this message?

We suggest that the answers to these questions should not be in conflict; we cannot give away anything we haven't got. We cannot carry a message that is not our own.

The choice of membership rests with the individual. We feel the ideal state for our

Fellowship exists when an addict can openly and freely come to an NA meeting, wherever and whenever they choose, and leave just as freely if they want to.

No one can be kicked out of NA. There is no central authority. The Groups answer only to the God of their understanding, but even the Home Group has no power to deny membership to any addict seeking recovery. All that is required is the desire to stop using or stay clean. No one can judge this desire. Every addict has the right to grow and watch others grow in an atmosphere of complete creative freedom.

We realize there is nothing we can do to make an addict stop using. However we have learned that recovery is a gift and that life without drugs is better than we ever imagined. We open our doors to addicts hoping that they can find what we have found; but knowing that only those who have a desire to stop using and want what we have to offer will join us in our new way of life.

TRADITION FOUR

Each Group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting other Groups, or NA as a whole.

The autonomy of our Groups is one of our most precious possessions. This sounds great but what does it mean? Some dictionary definitions of autonomous include, "having the right or power of self government", "undertaken or carried on without outside control", "existing or capable of existing independently", "responding, reacting or developing independently of the whole". Autonomy is all these things to us and more. Our Groups truly are self-governing and are not subject to control outside the Group. Each Group can exist on its own if it must. Each Group has had to grow on its own and stand on its own two feet. One might ask: Is this really true? Are we truly autonomous? What about our service committees, our offices, our activities, our hot lines, and all the other things that go on with regard to NA? The answer of course, is that these things are not NA. They are services that we can utilize 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 together in Groups, and using a given set of spiritual principles to find freedom from active addiction and a new way to live. All else is not NA. Those other things we mentioned are the result of members caring enough to reach out and offer their help and experience so that our road may be easier. Whether or not we choose to utilize these services for the benefit of the Group is up to us. They are tools to use as the Group sees fit; they are never forced upon us. Some have taken offense to this. They say that when they started out they were told they had to register their Group. This may be true, but some Groups exist that have never registered with any world body. Some service bodies ask Groups to register because we can't be of service to them unless we know they exist. Whether or not they register with a service body is up to the Group. In the end, they must choose for themselves; they are autonomous.

But we said that for NA autonomy was more than this, and it is. For us in Narcotics Anonymous, autonomy is also creative freedom. It gives our Groups the freedom to act on their own to establish their atmosphere of recovery, to serve their members, and to fulfill their

primary purpose. The only requirement of any Group is that we abide by the Twelve Traditions in order to call ourselves Narcotics Anonymous. These Traditions are the principles that define the Fellowship of NA and without them NA does not exist. But it is up to each Group to inventory itself to ensure we are following the Traditions. It is this aspect of autonomy that makes it one of our most precious principles. It is for this reason that we guard our autonomy so carefully.

We are autonomous, and from what we have said it would seem that we, in our Groups, can do whatever we decide to do, regardless of what anybody says. Well, yes and no. Each Group does have complete freedom, but also has an obligation to avoid taking actions that can become a threat to other Groups and the rest of NA. This is the other half of Tradition Four and the way we use our autonomy is just as important as the autonomy itself. There is no greater authority in NA than a loving God as may be expressed in the informed conscience of a Home Group, and no one can dictate the actions of any autonomous Group. However, each Group must be accountable to its own conscience, and avoid acting on behalf of other Groups or NA as a whole. Like Group conscience, autonomy can be a two-edged sword. In the past Group autonomy has been used to justify violation of other Traditions. Each Group should continually inventory itself to guard against this. As we have said, spiritual principles are never in conflict with other spiritual principles. If a conflict or contradiction does exist that means that somewhere along the line we have somehow slipped away from the true principles.

When we use our autonomy for the good of our Group we must be careful that our actions do not hurt other Groups or NA as a whole. Again, we are given a simple rule of thumb: If we check to make sure that our actions are clearly within the bounds of the Traditions, if we don't represent anyone but ourselves, if we don't dictate to other Groups or force anything upon them, and if we take the time to consider the consequences of our actions 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 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 to live. However, our Groups exist solely to plant the seed of recovery and bring addicts together. In this way the magic of empathy, honesty, caring, sharing, and service can become a reality in our lives. The purpose of this Tradition is to insure that this atmosphere of recovery is maintained. This can only happen by keeping our Groups focused on carrying the message to the addict who still suffers. The fact that each and every Group's purpose is to carry the message provides consistency. An addict can count on us if they want help. Unity of action and unity of purpose make possible what seemed impossible for us.

The Twelfth Step of our personal program also says that we should carry the message to the addict who still suffers. This is no coincidence. Working with others is one of our most powerful tools. “The therapeutic value of one addict helping another is without parallel.” For the newcomer this is often how they find out about NA and how they are given the gift of recovery. When we are fortunate enough to carry the message to a newcomer it rejuvenates our own recovery. The Group is the most perfect voice we have for carrying the message to the addict who still suffers. In the Group setting we have the benefit of a diversity of thought and experience. Literature, by itself, can be limited by lack of body language and tone of voice; the feelings, the intensity, and the strengths are sometimes lost. In our Groups, with all our personalities, the message is a recurring theme; an underlying reality.

What would happen if our Groups had any other purposes? We feel our message would be diluted and then lost. If our Group purpose was anything other than carrying the message, many would die and few would find recovery.

What is our message? We hear this question answered many ways. In our Groups we share our experience, strength and hope and this is our message – 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 it's all said and done, our primary Group purpose can only be to carry this message to the addict who still suffers, because this 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 Fifth Tradition defines our primary purpose. Tradition Six makes clear some of the things we should be vigilant about and unwavering in avoiding in order to protect our spiritual aim from our human shortcomings, so that we might preserve its pure simplicity for future generations who will need this Fellowship and program. This Tradition explicitly warns us against endorsing, financing or lending the NA name to any outside enterprise, including related facilities, where it is sometimes hard to distinguish or might seem, on the surface, to be okay. We are reminded in no uncertain terms what can, and almost always will happen if we ignore this advice. This Tradition is the basis for our policy of non-affiliation and is extremely important to the continuation and growth of NA.

Sadly, we have learned firsthand the consequences of ignoring our Sixth Tradition far too often throughout our history, and this Tradition has unfortunately become a point of controversy within our Fellowship on more than one occasion. The consequences of ignoring this Tradition, or failing to heed the warnings of our predecessors about keeping the material separate from the spiritual have lead to varying degrees of our primary purpose being lost or taking a back seat to “market share” and “the bottom line”. Some of the damage that has been done can be very hard to undo and may even seem irreparable to us at times.

One of the most painful examples of this is the idea that making free or at-cost literature available to the still-suffering addict is “fundamentally an issue of economics” and therefore impossible. This ideology was promulgated as we financed an office and a corporation to the tune of millions of dollars each year, including paying out hundreds of thousands of dollars for a few, select “trusted servants” to travel the Fellowship in the name of “Fellowship Support”.

Situations vary from Group to Group, area to area, and region to region but some of the ways in which we have been diverted from our primary purpose include enmeshment with drug courts and rehab centers to the degree that drug court graduations are celebrated in some NA meetings as if they were NA birthdays; judges requiring sponsors to sign off the Step work of sponsees who are monitored by the court; court systems and governmental entities expecting and even requiring NA to provide the lion's share of their curricula; therapists, social workers, drug counselors and others dictating to NA Groups just what clean time means and overruling an idea so fundamental to NA that it is the very reason for our existence: "...when we use drugs in any form, or substitute one for another, we release our addiction all over again." We have even seen a situation that has become more common than any of us would like to admit: The practice of replacing the will of a loving God expressed at the Group level with the opinions of a corporate board of directors. It is not uncommon for certain service bodies to refer to the primary purpose of the Groups as "holding recovery meetings" with the idea that permanently entrenched service bodies will handle everything else, rather than NA members in their Groups being responsible for carrying the message in all its forms and driving the NA services that should be directly responsible to them.

We could fill pages with all of the different examples and the many ways in which we seem to have lost our way over the years. Suffice it to say the Fellowship of NA once had a corporation that was formed as tool for NA, did not carry our name, and only responded to the immediate needs of the Fellowship. As the old joke goes, "We used to be a fellowship with an office. We have since become a corporation with a fellowship."

The end result is the material is no longer separate from the spiritual, "effective leadership" has replaced humble service, and NA Groups and members who dare print and distribute free NA literature are deemed "dangerous malcontents" - many such members who once served at the world level, helped start countless meetings, and were instrumental in the founding of various areas and regions in our formative years. NA Groups have been encouraged to stand against one another and remove from the schedules Groups who choose versions of our literature not classified as "works for hire". The minutes of many services for NA seem to be laden with money issues, bottom lines, intellectual property debates, and self-

importance with little or no talk of following the directives and will of the Groups or how to best carry the message to the still-suffering addict at the direction of those they serve.

Many reading this may be horrified that NA members would “criticize the program that saved their lives” because they are unaware that a corporation is not “NA, as such” and originally did not carry the NA name to avoid such confusion. It pains many of us to put these things in writing, but not being known does not stop the truth from being true and if we do not acknowledge where we have been and where we are at, we are doomed to continue down a road of money, property, power, and prestige that ultimately leads to the degradation of our program or it becoming something unrecognizable altogether. Already, in many places “freedom from active addiction” is being replaced with “drug replacement therapy” or the more gentle euphemism of the same meaning: “medication assisted recovery”. How can we carry the message of Narcotics Anonymous to the still-suffering addict if we no longer know what that message is or if we allow it to be shaped and influenced by outside entities in the name of compatibility and relevance? When we are in line with our Traditions we are able to stand on the fact that NA is a proven program that may not be for everyone but is available to and will work for anyone who needs it and wants what we have to offer.

Let's take a close look at what this Tradition really says. It is important that we first recognize that this Tradition addresses the NA Group. This is because NA is addicts in their Groups. Services and special workers are not mentioned until later in our Traditions when we start dealing with what NA may or may not create. Only the Groups are addressed because only the Groups are NA. However, It should not be presumed that service bodies or other NA related entities and tools are free to do any of the things this Tradition warns against. The reason other entities are not mentioned is because no other entity wields the power of an NA Group. Services, Service Centers, special workers, trusted servants, and even the individual NA member do not hold the power that the Group does: The power to act on God's will for the Fellowship. The NA Group is the only entity that can speak for NA, and even then, that Group can only speak on its own behalf; it cannot act in matters affecting other Groups or NA as a whole.

That said, these are the “ought nevers” of the Sixth Tradition:

The first thing a Group ought never do is endorse. To endorse is to sanction, approve, or recommend. Endorsements can either be direct or implied. We see direct endorsements every day in television commercials. Direct endorsements can also be in writing and often appear in proposals and promotional sales material. A direct endorsement is often used to try and persuade someone to do something. An implied endorsement is one that is not stated. Although we often don't recognize it, implied endorsements can occur when we share our stories. Naming the treatment center where we got clean or praising the drug court system are examples of this.

The next thing we ought never do is finance. To finance means to supply funds or to help support financially. This should not be confused with paying our own way as a Group, or paying a fair market price for our meeting space or the printing of literature. Some of the ways we can end up financing outside entities would be the well-intentioned, but misguided efforts of some Groups or service bodies to take up collections on behalf of some charity, particularly when it benefits addicts. Not only do we end up financing something outside NA, but we lose our focus and singleness of purpose. The purpose of NA is not to financially support or even find jobs for addicts seeking recovery. We offer only a proven set of principles that allow us to become productive members of society. Even when our motives are pure, or the cause altruistic, such endeavors set a precedent that slowly but most assuredly distracts us from our primary purpose. It is easy to forget that we as addicts are free to engage in any charitable endeavor we see fit, even as part of our personal programs and amends processes. But we do not need to do these things in the name of NA, even if we engage in such efforts with friends we have found in recovery, nor should such efforts ever be announced in our meetings. We should also avoid creating relationships with those we do business with that result in us becoming dependent on them, or they on us. In recent years much has been made of the fact that literature is often marked up in order to raise funds. Aside from the other Traditions this practice may violate, when literature is marked up it is often sold to outside vendors at a discounted rate so they can profit from our program. When this happens we are indirectly financing outside entities. This situation can and actually has led to such enmeshment that on at least one occasion one of our Service Centers allowed an outside entity to finance our

literature based on a future discount. In that instance some of our most basic and treasured literature was published with changes the Fellowship did not approve but which the vendor demanded. This resulted in Groups having to choose whether to take the easier, softer path or adhere to our principles and print literature themselves. The aftermath has lasted over three decades, and is still distracting us from our primary purpose as a Fellowship as these words are being written. What may make good business sense in an organization without a singleness of purpose and lives at stake is often something we, as a Fellowship of recovering addicts simply cannot afford. Too many lives depend on us not being distracted by issues of money, property, or prestige.

The third thing this Tradition warns against is lending the NA name. This means letting someone use the name "Narcotics Anonymous" for something that is not Narcotics Anonymous. It also means letting an outsider utilize our name for their own purposes. Quite often other programs have tried to utilize the name "Narcotics Anonymous" as part of their "services offered", or even to justify a funding proposal. Other times those who have served on what the outside world might view as "high ranking" committees for NA have also served on the boards of treatment programs and allowed their names to be published with their NA service listed among their credentials. When we willingly allow any of these things to happen, we are lending the NA name to an outside enterprise.

The Sixth Tradition also tells us "who". A related facility is any other facility or place that involves NA members. It might be a halfway house, a detox center, a counseling center, a clubhouse, or any one of a number of such places. Oftentimes people are easily confused by what is NA and what are the related facilities. Recovery houses which have been started or staffed by NA members have to take special care that the differentiation is clear. Some of our members do not believe it appropriate to take part in such ventures at all, based on their understanding of the Traditions and the practices and decisions of one of our founders as well as some of the predecessors who formulated these Traditions. Perhaps the most confusion exists when it involves a clubhouse situation. Newcomers and even older members often identify the clubhouse with NA, and NA with the clubhouse. We should make a special effort to let these people know that there is a difference.

The second "who" is outside enterprises. An outside enterprise is any agency, any business venture, any religion, any society, any organization, any unrelated activity, or any fellowship. Most of these are pretty straightforward, except for other fellowships. Most of us would not confuse NA with something like a specific religious fellowship, but when it comes to other Twelve Step fellowships, we sometimes have problems. Let's face it: Narcotics Anonymous is not Alcoholics Anonymous, or any other "anonymous". Narcotics Anonymous is a separate and distinct fellowship in its own right. We deal with drug addiction, and the use of the literature of any other fellowship in our meetings constitutes an endorsement of an outside enterprise.

But we have said before that NA is our members in their Groups, that "All else is not NA." What about our services? Our service boards and committees, though not "NA, as such", are tools in the hands of the Groups and are exclusively for our purpose as a Fellowship. We must fund our services in order to be self-supporting and to keep them accountable only to the Groups they serve. Our services are directed only by the Groups and are exclusive to Narcotics Anonymous. Even so, many Groups choose to use the term "for NA", rather than "of NA", when referring to service bodies. It is important that the public know where to find us and just who our service bodies serve, but it is equally important that we remember services are tools for, not strictly "part of" the NA Fellowship.

At times, we have created corporations to assist our service bodies and to help them conduct the business of NA while keeping the material separate from the spiritual. But the corporations we create are not service boards or committees. Just as our services are tools in the hands of the Groups, corporations are tools of the services which are directed by the NA Groups. We need to remember that people on service boards and committees and that it is the NA members who deal with the public, not the corporations we might create to separate the material and spiritual. Even when a corporation is solely for the purposes of the NA Groups, we should avoid attaching the NA name. Corporations are entities with legal standing, and the danger of them becoming rogue entities or usurping power is far greater than with a service board or committee, and we have witnessed it firsthand. There is no reason a corporation

should ever carry our name. Corporations we might create are tools for certain legalities, often involving the handling of money. If we are doing our jobs as NA members through our Groups in directing the services we create for NA, there is no reason the still-suffering addict or the public need ever access NA through a corporation. In fact, when you think about it, if the public's contact with NA is through a corporation that is only there to help us keep the material from distracting us from our spiritual aim, it is a sure sign that we indeed have been distracted.

The Sixth Tradition goes on to warn us what may may happen if we do the "ought nevers": "...lest problems of money, property, or prestige divert us from our primary purpose." These often become obsessions and shut us off from our spiritual aim. They are the sort of things we get involved with and run until we are consumed. For the individual this type of abuse can be devastating, but for the Group even the slightest touch can be disastrous. We can see the danger of endorsement, financial support, and letting others use our name. We can see how easily things can lead to the abuse of money, property, and prestige. We can see the results of this abuse, and the heartache it can bring. When NA Groups waver from our primary purpose addicts die who might have found recovery.

The Sixth Tradition is often overlooked. It can be hard to understand. But when we really take a look, when we really try to understand, when we stop trying to make the this Tradition fit our actions and instead ask if our practices have been in line with our Traditions, its simplicity is amazing.

POSSIBLE TRADITION ELEVEN ENTRY:

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In many service bodies Public Information has been replaced with aggressive PR efforts that ignore our Eleventh Tradition completely.