

The Slippery Slope of Reinterpreting Our Traditions & The Cunning of Justification

*The following is **not** an exhaustive study of the professionally-written "Traditions" book that is copyrighted to the NAWS corporation and proposed for approval at the 2016 World Service Conference which serves those Groups of NA who recognize and use the NAWS structure and who have been allowed to be seated at the World Service Conference.*

Many issues have arisen in online discussions such as: 1) The fact that all NA Groups (many who recognize NAWS and wish to participate) are not seated; 2) The fact that the book is only in English and cannot be approved by a world body that purports to serve many different languages and cultures; 3) During the approval and review period now under way by virtue of the CAR there is no posting at the official NAWS website (NA.org) of the complete book as proposed, nor have there been mailings of copies (email or hard copies) to all known Groups who use the WSC (or at least areas and regions). These issues are being discussed among Groups around the NA Fellowship and addicts online.

This essay seeks to highlight some of the glaring differences and renegotiation of our Traditions over the years that make administrative structures part of NA as such, paint them as part of the Fellowship, and completely change the idea that service bodies are 100% subservient to the will of the Groups.

In the Ninth Tradition section of the proposed book we are told:

When one addict helps another, NA is there. NA isn't one addict or the other; it's the helping, the sharing, the spirit of unity, the feeling of hope shared between us. When we read NA literature or listen to an addict share, we experience Narcotics Anonymous. When we write, when we pray, when we answer the phone even though we're tired or busy, or when we feel like using but we talk to another addict instead—that's NA. It's not just a thing; it's action. Chapter Ten in our Basic Text describes love as the "flow of life energy from one person to another." We offer it in meetings, at the "meeting after the meeting," on the phone, online, at our H&I panels, and in our literature. We share experience, strength, and hope to help one another stay clean one more day.

What this text fails to point out is that, while many of us would agree that the NA **program** is taking place whenever NA is shared that does not make the tools we may or may not create or choose to use a part of the NA **Fellowship**.

Let us look at an example: I can use a blueprint and employ the use of a hammer to help build a house. House building is taking place by me, the person holding the hammer according to the blueprint. The hammer is a tool in my hand, only for my purpose. It is not outside of my control nor is it outside my intention. That does not make the hammer part of me, the hammer is not the blueprint, and it most certainly is not the house. If I ever give the hammer to someone else it is no longer for my purpose. I can also cast the hammer aside anytime I wish.

Now let's look at the exact same example with the blueprint as the Steps and Traditions that define our program and Fellowship, the hammer as the services we create, and the house as the Fellowship: We as addicts can use the Twelve Steps of NA and employ the use of services directly accountable to the Groups to carry the NA message and help build a Fellowship. Fellow-shiping is taking place by us, the member-addicts who direct and participate in those services according to the Twelve Traditions. The services we create are tools for our direction and use, only for our purpose. They should not be

autonomous or outside our control or used for any other purpose or intention. That does not make services boards and committees synonymous with or equal to NA members in their Groups. Services are not mandated by our Traditions they are allowed by our Traditions, and they most certainly are not part of "NA, as such" but created and directed by NA. If we ever lend our services to someone else or enmesh them with outside interests they are no longer services for NA (some would use the phrase they are no longer NA services). We can also jettison any service board or committee any time we wish.

That last line is important. That is one of the major differences between services and "NA, as such". No member can be kicked out of NA. (Attempts of certain service bodies in the past notwithstanding). No Home Group can be kicked out of NA or dissolved by any other Group or any service body. (Again, recent removal of Groups from schedules notwithstanding. Most of those Groups still exist as NA Groups, carrying a message of freedom from active addiction through the Steps and Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous despite any efforts to rule them, censor them, decide for them, or dictate to them.) It is a major difference. The members of a Group can dissolve it. A single member can leave NA. No one can do this for them. In truth, even the individual member of NA enjoys total autonomy as guaranteed them in the Third Tradition. The member does have an obligation to consult with others in matters that affect them and experience has shown that to do it alone would be unwise, but the member has the choice just as the Group does and cannot be kicked out even if he or she disregards all the other Traditions. Service boards and committees do not enjoy such autonomy, even if they have developed and managed to get implemented policies that would make it seem they are indispensable. Services can be jettisoned at any time. This is the difference between "NA, as such" and a tool for NA.

Still not convinced? Imagine every service board and committee in existence ceased to exist. Would your Home Group still meet? Would you still be a member of NA? Would NA still exist? Would the Groups either do more for themselves, create new services, or (more likely) a combination of both?

Take it a Step further: If committees were never to exist again would Groups still write literature and find other ways to share information? Would your Group fulfill its obligation to carry the message and still find ways to consult with other Groups in matters that might affect them? The primary purpose of the Groups is an obligation which goes far beyond simply holding meetings. We are responsible as Groups for carrying the message to the still-suffering addict in all its forms; not just holding meetings. It is obvious NA could exist without committees if it had to. According to our Ninth Tradition committees are, in fact, something we CAN do, not something we MUST do.

Now flip the script. If NA Home Groups were wiped from the planet, who would rebuild them? Would it be service bodies or member-addicts? If Groups for some reason in some mythical universe ceased to exist and could never exist again would there be NA? If the member-addict ceased to exist would there ever be NA? "NA, as such" has two components: 1) Member-addicts 2) in their Home Groups. They are the only entities that enjoy autonomy and that cannot be removed from the equation.

What do our early writings on the Traditions tell us? What if we could pick the brain of the addict who authored the first NA service structure and what he believed about service at the time our structure was created? After all, despite many changes (whether they be good or bad) along the way, the basic model he laid out is the same: Addicts in their Groups ---> Areas ---> Regions ---> WSC. What if we could know what he thought of the Traditions, especially Tradition Nine? Actually, we can. Because he also wrote much about the nature of services and Tradition Nine including most of what became the Traditions section of the NA Basic Text. In fact services being analogous to a tool in the hand comes directly from his writings. A man called Greg P authored the NA Tree. He also wrote about our services. He later proposed certain "precepts of service" which were discarded by those who should have sent them out to the Fellowship for input and review. When the "Concepts" were being formulated by a single, closed committee he again submitted the Precepts as an alternative to delegating away the rights and responsibilities of the Groups. Here is what he said about service in just one of those Twelve Precepts...

5. Our Service Structure is only a tool.

Our ninth Tradition tells us that we create service boards or committees; we call these boards and committees, and the way that relate to each other, our "service structure". Its purpose is to do those things for our members and Groups which might compromise their spiritual integrity or distract them from their primary purpose. We try to keep the "recovery" aspects of N.A. separate from the "business" aspects of N.A. The "business" of N.A. begins in the Group and is carried through the rest of our service structure, which is neither separate from nor strictly a part of the Narcotics Anonymous program. Because our service structure is only a tool, it is only as effective as the members who use it and take care of it. A tool does not work by itself, and only has meaning in relationship to the job it is designed to do.

What else did the author of our service structure believe our Traditions made very clear? Much of it can be found in the Basic Text with very little change from what he originally wrote. Quite a bit of what he wrote did not make it into the text. Most of that was simply through the review and approval process by the Groups. But a very important piece was removed by the office AFTER the Fellowship approved it. Subsequent removal after its reinstatement (in the Second Edition) and the validity of such an act has been discussed other places and in other essays. ([You can view one of them here](#)). Regardless of what one believes about those removals, it does not change what the addict who authored our original service structure wrote. The following is from Tradition Four and is at it appeared in the Approval Draft of the Basic Text, which also means it contains the input & review (not just an up or down yes vote) of the entire Fellowship by virtue of a process now lost to most Groups known as "Open Participation"...

One might ask, "Are we truly autonomous? What about our service committees, our offices, activities, hot-lines, and all the other things that go on in N.A.?" The answer is that these things are not N.A. They are services we 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 in groups and using a given set of spiritual principles to find freedom from addiction and a new way to live. All else is not N.A. Those things we mentioned are the result of members caring enough to reach out and offer their help and experience so that our road might be easier. Whether we choose to utilize these services is up to the group.

The majority of this paragraph was removed by a few people after it was approved by the Fellowship. Shortly afterward, the Fellowship demanded it be put back but it was again removed by an "emergency vote" of the WSC. That aside, it is a very good illustration of how the author of the service structure and the Fellowship as a whole felt about services and understood (as opposed to interpreted) the Traditions. If this sounds kind of foreign to you remember that this was before there were concepts to delegate authority to the service structure and create votes of confidence, confuse us about where GROUP conscience takes place and a Loving God's authority is expressed, or redefine trusted service to mean "effective leadership".

Greg wrote much on Tradition Nine. Many people believe he wrote the words, "none of them (services) has the power to rule, censor, decide or dictate." In fact, these words were not in the writings he submitted which appear in the Grey Book (Pre-approval Draft for those new to the term "Grey Book"). That phrase seems to encapsulate much of what he wrote, but it is unclear for certain who wrote it, although there is much speculation. What Greg wrote about Tradition Nine was condensed down to the following that appeared in the Approval Draft...

TRADITION NINE

"N.A. as such ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve."

This Tradition defines the way our Fellowship functions. We must first understand what N.A. 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, not random and unstructured. They are organized, but this is not the type of organization referred to in the Ninth Tradition. For the purpose of 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 N.A. It says that we may create service boards or committees to serve the needs of the Fellowship. None of them has the power to rule, censor, decide, or dictate. They exist solely to serve the Fellowship, but they are not a part of Narcotics Anonymous. This is the nature of our service structure as it has evolved and been defined in the N.A. service manual.

One of the most important things the author of the NA service structure wrote, appears in the Grey Book exactly as he worded it..

Another point of confusion is the term organized, which 8
has several meanings. Our Steps and Traditions are uniform 9
and set in a specific order. They are numbered; they are 10
not random and unstructured. Certainly they are organized, 11
but this is not the organization of our Ninth Tradition. 12
For the purpose of this Tradition, organized means having 13
an administrative structure, and this implies management 14
and control. On this basis, the meaning of Tradition Nine 15
is clear. N.A. should never be run by bureaucracy or 16
management nor controlled by individuals within an admini- 17
strative structure. If we were to allow this, N.A. would 18
surely lose the best it has to offer and choke to death on 19
our insanities. 20

Even without this Tradition, organization such as this 21
would be in opposition to our spiritual principles. A 22
loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience 23
would find no place within an administrative structure. 24
How could a trusted servant manage and control? Service 25
and management are contradictory. Government implies control, 26
but our leaders do not govern. How could autonomy exist in 27
an administrative structure? Specialization and profession- 28
alism are the basis of any management scheme. Any admini- 29
strative structure, by its very nature, eliminated the 30
possibility of autonomy. An organized N.A. is a contra- 31
diction in terms and any attempt to force organization on 32
us would destroy us. 33

Compare this to what the NAWs Traditions book says - a book which is the result of a writer who is paid by an administrative structure. It almost seems to borrow the style Greg used. It is a ***glaring*** example of the **slippery slope of renegotiation and cunning of justification...**

We understand that "ought never be organized" doesn't mean that we do what we do without any planning or predictability. Our meetings are at regular times and places; we create and maintain meeting schedules, websites, and phone lines. In order for us to grow and recover, we need some structure. Administration is not the same as governance, and the structures we create in service are not the kind of organization this Tradition addresses. We absolutely organize our service efforts, our meeting schedules, and our event calendars. What is never organized is the part that matters most: one addict helping another, reaching out and sharing from heart to heart. The wordless language of empathy is what makes NA work. Without that, the rest of what we do would be meaningless.

One addresses administration and why services cannot be a part of NA, as such; why they cannot control us, decide for us, or have our decision making authority as member-addicts in Home Groups delegated to an administrative structure. One says NA is not organized, the other says only part (albeit "the part that matters most") is unorganized. Would our predecessors really have bothered to write the Ninth Tradition if the only thing that was unorganized was the simple act of one addict helping another? Or is it possible they were referring to what a fellowship is, how it operates and that they really meant that administrative structures and authority are not a part of but rather tools for that fellowship? Does Tradition Nine say, the act of one addict helping another ought never be part of our organized efforts or that "NA, as such, ought never be organized"? Quite literally NA ought never be organized "as such" or "as NA". Any organization is merely directly responsible to the NA Fellowship it serves.

Further, the Ninth Tradition does not address governance, as the author states. These are addressed by Traditions Two and Four. Tradition Nine addresses organization. Yes, our meetings are planned. No, the Area Service Committee is not NA- it is a tool. The Groups in the area are NA. The members of those Groups are NA. Those who serve on committees are -- hopefully -- members of NA. But the committees themselves are the tools we use. Although our meetings are scheduled it is the GROUP that schedules the meeting, not the ASC (Area Service Committee). The ASC (which is an administrative structure or organization) is no more NA than the paper the meeting schedule is printed on.

Even if this Tradition did address governance, try this experiment: go to work tomorrow and tell your boss that the administrative structure of your company does not govern - that is has no authority. See how well that goes over. For our services to truly not govern, they cannot be a part of, but must be subservient to "NA, as such". They can literally have no authority. If services have no authority, closed committees should not be commissioning, writing, or finalizing the literature that defines our Fellowship and program; let alone professional writers.

Confusion in "modern NA" as well as in the proposed "Traditions" book aside, the Traditions are simple:

Tradition One addresses NA unity.

One: Without unity there is no NA. Without the we, there is no me!

Many have wondered why literature by our predecessors who formulated these Traditions as well as that written by early members of our own Fellowship addresses the Group unity first and seems to stop there. The answer lies in the way the Traditions are laid out.

Traditions Two through Seven address what makes up NA and how it functions:

Two: NA is Groups who are governed only by a Higher Power which is expressed in their conscience.

Three: NA is addicts who have a desire to stop using.

Four: These addicts in their Groups are completely autonomous - independent of one another. They should never force anything on each other, and no Group or member of those Groups speaks for NA as a whole. They can and should consult with one another in such matters. This does not equate to submission or majority rule. Otherwise autonomy would not be mentioned at all.

Five: These addicts in their Groups have only one purpose and that is carrying the message to those still enslaved to addiction. If this Tradition meant the purpose was to hold meetings that is what it would say.

Six: These addicts in their Groups should not lend the NA name to anything or anybody else.

Seven: These addicts in their Groups should be completely self-supporting. NA Groups and members can and should pay their own way.

Traditions Eight and Nine further define things NA should not do but also go on to define tools NA can create for itself beyond the Groups:

Eight: NA is not a professional organization. Twelfth Step and Fifth Tradition work are not paid, and do not carry special titles. Because we perform service to the suffering addict it is reasonable to assume Groups might develop Service Centers specifically for NA. We can pay addicts to perform specific duties that are not possible to accomplish through our volunteer efforts alone. Notice we used the term "special workers" and not effective leaders, shining stars, or career professionals. There is likely a reason for that. When it seems necessary to employ a career professional perhaps we should ask ourselves if what we are really doing is paying others to do our service work for us. (An example might be professional writers writing our literature.) If it still seems necessary (an office director *might* be an example of this), we as well as those we employ should remember who the employer is and who those "special workers" answer to. Does the employer have a right to set the wage or even know what the wage is? Who is the employer? Who is in charge - who is the boss? If it is hard to define who employs special workers and who is in charge or where that authority is expressed, refer back to Traditions Two, Three, Four and Seven. The autonomous (Four), self-supporting (Seven) Groups of NA (Two and Four) which are made up of individual members (Three) are the employers and a Loving God is in charge, or "the boss" (Two). The will of the boss is made known through the conscience of the Groups (Two).

Nine: NA is not an organized administrative-structure, but we *can* (as opposed to must) create service boards and committees to help us keep our business dealings separate from our spiritual (Fellowship) activities. The purpose of any board or committee (administrative body) we create is to follow the direction of and be accountable the Groups whose purpose is to carry the message to the addict who still suffers. The Groups direct and hold "*directly accountable*" the services. Services do not rule, censor, decide for, dictate to, or police the Groups in any fashion.

Traditions Ten and Eleven further define how NA and the tools it creates function.

Ten: We have no opinion on outside issues. Individual members opinions on issues outside NA have nothing to do with the NA Fellowship. Groups have no opinion at all

on anything not NA related. Service bodies follow the direction of Groups and also cannot express opinion on outside issues. It is very simple and should not be confusing. Prohibition or legalization of any drug is an outside social issue. What constitutes clean time in NA is ***not*** an outside issue. Legalization of marijuana and if DRT is effective are not our concerns. Whether using marijuana or replacing one drug with another is clean in NA, however, are ***not*** outside issues. So who speaks for NA? No one. We do not need to justify our program to the outside. What if another Group disagrees with our Group on an "inside issue"? Thank God Tradition Four protects our autonomy by telling us we cannot act for other NA Groups or force anything on NA as a whole. But What if that other Group is just plain ***WRONG?*** They can take that up with the boss directly. (Again, see Tradition Two.)

Eleven: We don't need to ***make*** NA attractive to those on the outside. We simply need to be who we are and make our presence known so that those who are attracted to what we are and want what we have can find us. We don't need to go on TV and promote NA, and just as we don't hire actors to promote NA, we don't hide behind being an "employee" as an excuse to go on TV. We don't need to replace Public Information with aggressive Public Relations. We don't need to change our philosophy on replacing one drug with another because Hazelden or any other organization has, even if they threaten to sick a popular news show on us. If world board members follow our Traditions they won't have to worry about speaking for NA in the first place.

Tradition Twelve ties it all together and brings us full-circle.

Twelve: The unity that permeates all our Traditions relies on anonymity. "...anonymity is 'a state of bearing no name'. In keeping with this, the 'I' becomes 'we'. The spiritual foundation becomes more important than any one group or individual". Every widely known version of the NA Basic Text contains this line whether they be Fellowship approved (as only the Approval Draft truly is), conference approved (as is the case with Editions 1,2,3,3R,4,5,6) or simply Home Group Approved (as is the case with the Baby Blue, Alive & Free Edition, etc). They all contain that line. Just like they all contain the Steps and Traditions. It doesn't matter which "school of thought" you subscribe to, "the I becomes we". The same unity the Groups depend on, so do we as individuals, so do our services, and so do our special workers. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions. Anonymity is expected of the Groups, the members, the special workers, and the trusted servants. Anonymity underlies every Tradition and creates unity at every juncture. It simply demands that we act in accordance with our non-negotiable, simple Traditions and place principles before personalities. (This includes our own personalities, egos, and selfish desires.)

One-Hundred, One-Thousand, or even infinite truths cannot justify a single lie or renegotiation of our non-negotiable Traditions.