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Our primary purpose & how its done

NA's message, and purpose..... Look, this is going back a while.... When I was using, my main concern was getting loaded. To do that I had to be able to communicate that I wanted to get my "drugs." That included talking with the appropriate "street" vernacular for the local place or area I was in at the time. I knew it was necessary to call the same drug by differing names and "speak the language" somewhat (depending on where I was: Orange County, East L.A., South Central L.A., the Haight, the Tenderloin, Queens Bridge or any "neighborhood" in the Boroughs of N.Y.; or any "neighborhood" ANYWHERE --including the doctors office, to gain 'some trust' with the users there, get my drugs and not get burnt too often.

Then I started to go to NA meetings because I was tired of just surviving and not living and not dead yet. I didn't trust much (looking at it now, how could I? I didn't really trust myself much!). But there were a few that talked like I did, had done my drug, done what I did and known the same people (addicts, cops, judges) I did. Granted, my world was very small and shallow when I was just finding NA, and for my first year or two in recovery, in all honesty. Oh, I went to places, conventions....etc., but it was with only a small portion of those in recovery I could relate to. That small, sorta local, "the same as me," portion that I was able and willing to learn from.

"a quote"

It's said that "Power corrupts," but actually it's more true that power attracts the corruptible. The sane are usually attracted by other things than power. When they do act, they think of it as service, which has limits. The tyrant, though, seeks mastery, for which he is insatiable, implacable.

Benjamin Franklin

You know what made NA work for me? Knowing that the person talking at meetings was really an addict! Not some "social worker," goody-two-shoes, a cop, the parole agent or from a church group -- but a REAL ADDICT, who had (or was finding) a way of life without the use of drugs. And seemed happy about it.

There was dirt and grime in the message. Serial numbers, state correctional numbers, loaded addicts at the meetings, insanity was just being crazy fucks -- we had the truly clinical insane at meetings too.

The MESSAGE of "IF YOU WANT TO STOP USING AND FIND A BETTER WAY OF LIFE; WE *CAN* HELP.", dirt, grime, rough edges and all that still happens sometimes at meetings HAS BEEN TOTALLY SANITIZED IN ALL OF OUR RESENT LITERATURE - TO THE POINT WHERE IT JUST DOESN'T SOUND LIKE ADDICTS WROTE IT ! IT READS and SOUNDS like it was written by a social service organization or some psychologists/psychiatrists who've never lived our disease. But that same sanitization of "the message in our literature" may also be the reasons that: loaded, crazy, and socially incorrect addicts are often made to feel UNWELCOME at meetings; and that the "down and dirty" language and honesty don't happen so much at meetings any more. (I include the "share-back-at" statements of "you shouldn't feel/think/be that way", and their like, as a part of the *forced* cleaning up and sanitizing.) Having rules to operate under in the meetings or the *service structure* is a good thing, if they are about passing on our experience or learning, in a general sort of way. But the *service structure* is going too far now. It seems like the *service structure*(and I include the *WSO* in this) has become both the law makers, law enforcement, and the courts.

Beside and beyond "NA literature", and the *WSC-Lit Committee's determinations about what THEY are going to write: The *WSO* seems to be able to determine who can be a group (registered and all). The Southern Calif. P.I. Committee just finished NINETEEN pages of rules on PI BOOTH SITTING!!! that is called... a hand book. Come on. Give us a break from all the regulation.

An addict, any addict that has stopped using and found a new way of life.. How the fuck can they blow it in sharing that message????????

The only things that are FUBAR in NA are the over abundant regulations and regimentation of NA. Since when did WSwhatever, RSwhatever or ASwhatever become *governing bodies* of the groups????????? But today maybe *service structure's* primary purpose is money?

Now in closing I ask you to think about NA's primary purpose, what it IS and how it IS getting done. Then ask, What is not getting done and why?

Victory by Nomenclature



The passage of a new service structure into 'officially approved material' is almost unknown to the NA Fellowship. New terminologies, procedures, and duties of office will come as either a shock or surprise to most members in area and group service. Members in regional service are probably more aware that has happened but still unclear about exactly what it means, or will mean to them and to the Fellowship. I am shocked that I am not more upset or concerned, but then that is probably for the same reason that in my opinion it should not have been approved. I wonder how many who voted for its approval read the whole thing... So maybe I'll be upset when others become aware of it. I am glad for the people who supported it because it galvanizes them into a position that will eventually make people wake up. It is one thing to hear about lightning striking and another to have it knock the roof off your house.

So the nomenclature has been officially changed but I wonder if there is even one NA community that is saying something like, "Great, it passed. Now it's gonna really be cool. Thank God! It is the answer to our prayers." What I have heard is that it is a ploy to get the whole Guide to Service passed including sections involving world service units that the Fellowship found objectionable. Passage of the Local Guide is a step to the other.

Both are, I believe, smoke screens. World Service will just keep doing what it wants to with our money. The Gold Cards are still there for those who don't make waves. Jacuzzi Service, they call it. The fine hotels, the plane tickets, the token recognition. And the greatest thing is we're still here too. We still get to find recovery, grow spiritually and achieve things money can't buy. While it might be nice to think of a day of reckoning, it is probably a long way off and thank God I can find things to do today to help NA be a better place and my own recovery going full tilt boogie.

Surprise, surprise!

Within our NA unity, there is great diversity. There are even groups within our diversity that have enough in common to establish perceivable subdivisions within our ranks. These subdivisions within our unity are most often not discussed by a custom established to emphasize our commonality as addicts seeking recovery and our vision that addiction is but a single disease.

In view of the overwhelming vote for the Guide to Local Services, it is time to examine clearly and without undue emotion or haste, the facts. There is a type of member who loves NA and devotes themselves totally and without stinting to the growth and betterment of Narcotics Anonymous. They don't want the usual rewards of money, recognition or praise: they want to live clean and make a place for other addicts to come to in safety and comfort.

There is another type of addict who wants to believe in NA but sees an unresolved competition between things of the world and things of the spirit. They seem to think, God really can work miracles but I'm on my own side of the planet! Many of the things we share are attractive to them, but many things haven't come to them yet and in all honesty, they are rooted in a lack of surrender and faith that makes it impossible for them to proceed spiritually without experiencing some more pain and suffering of the type that comes from spiritual failure. They will get this because they are doing what is necessary to produce those results. They are also numerous and as far as our service structure goes, equal in status and potency to the most esteemed elder statesman. There is something wrong with the thinking here.

I was at a meeting seventeen years ago and I heard someone say, : the oldtimers run the meetings and control the groups. At the time I was just getting into thinking about group conscience and how our service system works. This statement seemed bald faced and arbitrary. I didn't like the way it sounded. I continued to question the statement within my own mind and even asked the person who shared what they meant after the meeting. They said it was no big deal, it was just that only people who knew about our way of life could exert an opinion on what our way of life was. While newcomers keep the program alive by picking up on the spirit of the thing, they remain capable of gross errors until they have fully surrendered, achieved some kind of faith, sought release from their personal defects and gained the ability to amend past wrongs. There can be no doubt of this. For NA to survive as a spiritual Fellowship, we must establish our spiritual core as a Fellowship. The growth and direction of the business office and service structure is not known for its loving and caring nature or for its ability to manage our affairs in sight of and with the support and permission of even a substantial minority of the general membership. Fantastic stresses have developed within the structure that pain me as a past Trustee yet they don't particularly affect what I do or say when I am working my Twelfth Step with a suffering addict. Nor do they affect much of what is shared in my home group, or my sponsorship. The structure is just good for certain things and if it falls short, we have to do without or make up the difference.

With all these things in heart, we have to define ourselves as loving, caring, grateful, loyal members of NA. We have to discuss openly - among ourselves - what concerns please or outrage us if we are to claim spiritual freedom. We have to build on our successes, shore up our shortcomings and innovate to meet the future that relentlessly rushes up to meet us each day.

We shall attempt to print all articles promoting a change in our intolerance and indifference towards spiritual principles.

We seek any and all ideas for this publication to become a venue for change. All materials shall be printed in a spirit of anonymity.

We encourage the use of humor and lampoon to stimulate thought and levity. Our hope is to find ways to transgress the perceived separation that exists amongst members of our society.

Spiritual Maintenance in Service

Service is about the joy of giving a new way of life, for free, to someone with a disease they may not know they have that left unchecked will destroy them. Doing this is part of what keeps us clean. When we have worked all twelve of the 12 Steps, we are just beginning to qualify for service. Our service positions have carefully worded phrases in the qualifications of office that are usually passed over lightly.

But surrender, a higher power source, a clearing away of defects and the making of amends allows us to move into a new universe. One that was closed to us before. If we have members in service who can't surrender, don't have access to a higher power source, habitually cling to defects and can't make amends, we're going to have trouble. As we grow in recovery, we are moving in the direction of Twelfth Step giving. It is enough that we are moving in this direction but we need to keep moving that way. That is probably what spiritual maintenance is all about. It keeps us humble as well as interested. We have enough members into their Twelfth to stabilize and refocus our attention away from finance and marketing and back on to the miracle of recovery.

Are surrendered members who play by the rules at a disadvantage when engaged with someone who bends or breaks the rules? It may often seem to feel so but there is a viewpoint that any apparent gain made by dishonest means will later fall away. This is particularly true when it comes to our services. Abraham Lincoln said you can fool all the people some of the time, some of the people all of the time but you can't fool all the people all the time. Well, I believe something like that plays out in our arena. We have just gotten so big in the last few years that a terrible strain has been placed on our service communication. It is like a card game where nobody has a full deck. Talk about the luck of the draw! Recovery hooks us up to a power greater than ourselves, clears away inner and outer wreckage and brings us to a place where acquiring and applying real spiritual principles in our daily lives. This is not lip service to a religion. This is not superficial mumbo-jumbo. This is the real McCoy. I used to think you had to be born in another time or another hemisphere to get real about God. Some Native Americans seem imbued with the kind of spirituality I can respect, admire and want for myself. Narcotics Anonymous recovery has led me into a sort of different world with different values from what I had before the 12 Steps.

If spiritual maintenance is important to me, I realize it is also the basis for the spirituality of our groups. My great hope for World Service is that this spirituality penetrates to the extent that the values and terminology begin to take precedence over the material and commercial. Perhaps because we live in America, it seems like worldly things take precedence as important, real and definitely there. Spiritual things are seen by many as insubstantial, iffy, and unreliable. In recovery I have found that the reverse of this is true. When I maintain my spirit, all else falls into place. When I lose my spiritual center, it is

as if I have become unplugged and an avalanche of details and bothersome trivia descend on my head. By stopping, praying and waiting for the spirit to come to me, I am able to resume the path I am walking and do what is needed, in reality. To me, God alone is real. There are people I have admired and thought a great deal of who are no longer alive. They were very together people but they died before their time due to this disease. The disease attacks us in our spirits and distracts us into a confused and uncertain state where we become susceptible to the twin conspirators of obsession and compulsion again.

If spiritual maintenance is so important to us individually and to our groups, maybe it's time we thought about how spirituality might be utilized to maintain something like a spiritual nature in our service efforts. *All else is not N.A.* is a line familiar to some of us from the approved form of our Basic Text. It was used to keep politics and personal contention out of our recovery meetings. Many members of our Fellowship have become aware that there is some need for improvement in this area.

One measure we can take is to contact those we know and let them know how we feel on issues. This used to be done in earlier days with excellent results. There is no way this would not work today, we just have to think to do it. It is far easier to view the Fellowship in adversarial terms and assume that objecting members are just trouble makers, if there is no direct written communication from those people to us addressing issues within our realm of responsibility. The disease flourishes in the dark and dies in the light of exposure.

Another aspect is that some members within our service structure allow disinformation, misdirection of emphasis and creation of false issues to distract the viewer or reader from the real issues from within the service structure itself. There are options for these members to take if only they think to pray, be brave and speak up for the truth. I have met with an attitude from some members in the structure that is like this: *"I don't agree with what's happening but I am going to hang on to my position and try to help things along until they get better."* Well, I'd just like to suggest that 'better' is going to be a long ways off if this attitude prevails. **Bad things happen when good people remain silent.**

What I firmly believe has happened is that we have another organization within our organization that has aims and objectives of its own. And since not many see this, it is free to operate in ways that assure its continuation without the knowledge or suspicion of most members at our expense.

Spiritual maintenance for me has been largely a matter of getting in touch with my real feelings, the God of my understanding and resolving conflicts within in my being that were pulling me in two or more directions. If there is a chance that something like this is happening, all we have to do is realize it, discuss it and begin to make some arrangements. Denial, justification and continuance won't change things for the better. Calm deliberation, consideration of facts and appeal to our higher nature will guide us as surely today as they ever did when we were just beginning. Expediency is expensive. If there is a chance we have a wheel in the ditch, we step on the brakes not the gas pedal.

RECOVERY FALLACIES

For 11-1/2 years I've enjoyed attending NA meetings, and hearing the lore and wisdom of recovery. While most of the pithy sayings and clever phrases sounded just right, some of them are somehow missing something. It always seemed to me that they were passing on an incomplete thought, or a slightly fractured truism. As I related the more complete thought to sponsees, some asked me to write them down. So:

1. *"An addict alone is in bad company."* That all depends. Am I alone with the Basic Text and a sense of God's presence? When I'm centered in the light, I can be very happy, joyous and free in my own company. In fact, lots of times I'm enjoying a peaceful morning of solitude and contemplation; and then later I find myself in the company of others who are angry or vexatious; and I can't help but think, "Gee, their company sure didn't contribute anything to my recovery, except to make me practice patience and tolerance!"

Undoubtedly, the REAL saying should go: *"AN ADDICT ALONE WITH HIS DISEASE IS IN BAD COMPANY."* If I get caught up in resentful isolation, with sick thoughts and obsessive worries, and can't call or reach out to anyone, then I am at my disease's mercy. That's when almost anyone's company is better than my own. But when I remember that God is always with me and can help me if He is sought, I know I don't have to go through it alone.

2. *"I'm powerless over people, places and things."* (some go on to say they're powerless over thoughts and feelings too.) This one always bugged me. After all, I'm not a complete jellyfish! In fact, I've been rather influential over all those things. I have influenced people to use in the old days; in clean time I have helped influence people to stay clean. As for places, I may or may not clean up my apartment; and if I really want to alter my space all I need is a day off and a full tank of gas. And things?!! Don't be silly; I was an epicurean user, and even now I pride myself on my ability to make a lovely meal out of food, a nice tune from a piano, or a nice message from a word processor.

Only once or twice, I have heard addicts express this one as a complete thought, i.e.: *"I'm powerless over those people, places and things that are DIRECT TRIGGERS TO MY ADDICTION."* Think about it: I have no business hanging out with those playmates, playgrounds and playthings that were intimately associated with getting high. (As the old-timers used to say, "If you stick around the barber shop long enough, you WILL get a haircut.") The classic example: Wombat the addict has 30 days clean, and decides to drop by his old pal Dealer Dan's place, to gloat about his newfound freedom. Dan and the boys are passing the bong around, and whenever it gets to Wombat, he self-righteously refuses it -- "None for me, thanks; I'm CLEAN today!" Which doesn't go down so great with the

boys, who now make a bigger point of passing it right under Wombat's nose and ridiculing his stoic attitude -- till he finally gets steamed, loses his "serenity," grabs the bong, and says "Give me that! I'LL show you who's chicken!"

As for being powerless over thoughts and feelings: Yeah, I'll give you that I don't always have the power to keep crazy thoughts or uncomfortable feelings from just popping into my head uninvited; but I DO have power over whether I make them welcome and let them stay. I can counter a sick thought with a well one, and I can ask my God to extinguish diseased thinking and grant me some serenity, courage and wisdom. And the more I do that, and practice principles in all my affairs, darned if I don't get fewer and fewer crazy thoughts and uncomfortable feelings that just pop in from nowhere!

3. *"It's a selfish program."* Oh yeah? Doesn't say that in MY Basic Text. Or in my Steps or Traditions. People who repeat this classic misrepresentation of recovery principles are (in my opinion) parroting trash, confusing newcomers, and denigrating the good name of Narcotics Anonymous. This is quite patently an UNSELFISH program for selfish people. We are taught to give and share, to stop being self-centered and learn to be God-centered. (I suspect that selfish people repeat this tired old lie in hopes that the fellowship will come to cosign their shortcomings.)

I'd like to rephrase the sorry saying: *"This is a program of SELF-PRESERVATION."* In ONLY ONE sense can I discern a so-called "selfish suggestion" -- and that is the refusal to be milked dry. At times, my needs must come first. Sometimes my friends, my sponsees, my group and my area all want a little piece of my time and energy. If I give it all away, then I have no time and energy left for me. And if I let myself get so drained that I lose the recovery I have, then I'm of no use to them anyway. So I try to always schedule some time for recreation, serene solitude, or just goofing off. I am entitled to some time and activities that are just to please me. My promise to serve and help is not the same as a vow of sacrifice and poverty. God wants me to prosper; but it can't be just for me.

The best way I've seen this phrased was in Hillel's Riddle: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am for myself alone, then what am I? And if not now, when?"

4. *"Clean time isn't important."* If that's so true, why do we never see addicts lining up to give theirs back? (One guy says, "If clean time don't mean nothin', then you won't mind if I take yours, right, sport?") Even though I will grant that the first thirty days is the most important, there is no doubt that seeing lots of members with lots of time, helps give the newcomers hope.

The completed thought ought to read, *"What you DO with your clean time is more important than how much you HAVE."* (Or perhaps, *"Continuous Clean Time isn't everything -- but it's a start."*) Without a doubt, a 2-year addict with Steps, love, service, God and recovery in his life is a far better example of the program than the 5-year addict with compulsion, anger, selfishness, nihilism,

and addiction-without-drugs. But even sheer time has a value all its own. They say, "Time heals all wounds." We can only recover over time; even the most eager among us don't get sane overnight. Chances are that an addict who is staying clean but not following suggestions, will still do less damage to himself and others than one who eagerly agrees with the program but just can't stop using.

There's a cool old saying that goes: *"There's no-one more miserable than an addict with no recovery and no drugs."* So even a member who stays clean but doesn't work on his recovery picks up some of the solution just by "keep coming back." And if he won't work the Steps, sooner or later they'll start working him.

5. *"I surrendered to my addiction today."* NO!!!! That's what I did every day I used! The whole idea is to STOP surrendering to our addiction, and to START surrendering to our program! (Or to our Higher Power.) This one goes back so far, it even got repeated in the Basic Text. If you really want to reflect a new level of surrender, you might say, *"Today I try to surrender my addiction to my Higher Power."* Sort of like turning a dangerous criminal in to the cops. That's also a better way of saying that I think God has a better way of capturing and rehabilitating my disease than I do, and I'm going to defer to a Higher Authority.

6. *"Fake it till you make it."* Sorry, wrong. Those who get good at faking it never make it; we are, after all, the world's best actors. So good at seeming to be cool that we can even fool ourselves. The real script went: *"Act as if you had faith, and faith will be given to you."* Sort of suggests, if you behave like a woman or man of God; if you move through life like one upheld by Spirit; if you take risks that would honor someone who was more certain of their spiritual sure-footedness -- then your deeds will awaken the spiritual sleeper within. All great lives started with practice; that has nothing to do with fakery and phoniness.

7. *"That means that you can say that you were here, but you can't say that you saw me here."* Or even worse, *"That means that what you heard here should stay here."* WHY do some people feel such a compulsion to interpret the 12th Tradition for us, and to do it so badly? (A- I don't care WHO says they saw me at a meeting; and personal anonymity is an 11th Step issue, not a 12th; and B- If what you heard here stayed here, then you'd leave the message of recovery here along with the identity of who shared it.) When I'm feeling whimsical, I say, *"And that means... exactly what it says."* When I'm feeling more helpful, I say, *"This suggests that the ideas you bring home are more important than the names of the people who introduced them to you, and that if you can use it, whoever said it doesn't make it any more true."* The simplest form: *"If you heard something good from me, don't hang it around my neck like a ribbon; instead, take it home and make it your own. And if you heard something terrible from me, don't crown me with it like a dunce cap; remember that I'm an addict too, and my years clean don't mean I'm immune to pain or that I couldn't use your love and support."*

8. *"A drug is a drug is a drug."* Sorry, no, you can't get high from aspirin or saccharin or insulin. We have NO RIGHT TO PLAY DOCTOR. Some addicts have died, and some



have gone into convulsions and were left with brain damage, because some meddling fool with too much self-righteous zeal and too little plain sense, convinced some poor naive fool to stop all their prescribed medications. I have even seen some sponsors with umpteen years who should know better who tried to get sponsees to adhere to the most extreme standard -- no vitamins, no Tylenol, no nothin'!

Really, "Anything you're using to get high is a relapse" is what we surely meant to say. Addiction's main trigger is INTOXICATING CHEMICALS, not NutraSweet. Many drugs are harmless; many are life-saving. The ones we are recovering from in NA are the ones we used to get LOADED from. Not all those other things. We have "no opinion on outside issues", and drugs (unlike addiction) are an outside issue.

9. *"Once an addict, always an addict is a lie."* No it's not. We admit we're still addicts every time we introduce ourselves, so why the contradiction? Because the original idea was, *"The tired old lie, 'once a JUNKIE, always a JUNKIE' will no longer be tolerated, either by society or by the addict himself. We do recover."* And THAT was true -- because recovering addicts can stop acting and thinking like self-centered sleazy junkies. We are not cured, but we can change -- often to an astounding extent. Maybe we could better say: *"The claim that 'Addicts can never change' is a lie."* We prove the truth of that every day.

10. *"Take what you want and leave the rest."* (I first heard this and thought, Oy, people here are quoting "the night they drove ol' Dixie down!") Partly pernicious, because it's partly true. At any meeting, somewhere from 5% to 90% of the sharing will be self-indulgent nonsense. We need to be a little discriminating, and toss out the whining and misconceptions, and glean the gems and the wisdom that will make recovery better. But we CAN'T take what we want and leave the rest of the PROGRAM. When addicts only work Steps 1, 3 and 12 (ignoring the rest), they tend to become BT thumping busybodies who tend to lack the humility, compassion and forgiveness that mark real recovery. Without the whole Step & Tradition matched set, the piecemeal hodgepodge program resembles more a box of memorized quotes and an invitation to fanaticism.

Better let's say, *"Whatever you can't use today, put it on the back burner; maybe you can use it tomorrow."* Matter of fact, this is even true of the whining and self-indulgent nonsense! If I remember how ridiculous someone looked when they monopolized a meeting with crap, I'm more likely to turn that crap over to God when it comes up in my life, rather than dwell on it, wallow in it, and bore my home group with it.

There are quite a few other "NA Misconceptions" that we successfully mislead ourselves with from time to time. I'll think about some more and get back to you.

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