

The Twelve Traditions and Public Information

Public information work is done by service committees or groups created by, and directly responsible to, those they serve. We try to do the best we can with what we have while upholding our Twelve Traditions. Our experience has taught us that an understanding of the Twelve Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous as they apply to public information is helpful. With that in mind, it may be beneficial to spend time studying and discussing the traditions. The knowledge gained may help us to be more confident in our presentation of NA. This confidence can be apparent to our audience and may assist in developing a positive image of our fellowship. The following traditions can play an important role in PI work and may have direct applications to PI service we conduct.

Our Sixth Tradition states: 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. "This tradition is the basis for our policy of non-affiliation and is extremely important to the continuation and growth of Narcotics Anonymous." (Narcotics Anonymous Basic Text) While it may be important to reach as many people as possible with our message of recovery, it is imperative that we not risk our independence by becoming reliant on any outside source. If NA becomes strongly identified with any "related facility or outside enterprise" (club houses, drug treatment centers, or other twelve-step fellowships, for example), our primary purpose and independence can become confused with the priorities of others.

Cooperation with those who come in contact with addicts is important when carrying the message of NA. Without this cooperation, many addicts may never have found our fellowship. We want to work with other organizations, but we do not want to be merged with them in the mind of the public. To give the impression that we are one and the same might threaten our independence. Our aim is simply to make it known that NA is available. It may require additional effort to make clear the distinction between NA and other organizations. However, we will be rewarded as more addicts find us through other sources and our fellowship continues to grow.

Our Tenth Tradition states: Narcotics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the NA name ought never be drawn into public controversy. "Our recovery speaks for itself. Our Tenth Tradition specifically helps protect our reputation." (Narcotics Anonymous Basic Text) We have no recommendations for any outside organizations, nor do we participate in their politics. To do so might invite controversy, which may jeopardize our fellowship's standing in the community. If we voice an opinion on any public issue, we may block the path for a new member to join or feel welcome in our fellowship. It is critical that we remember this aspect of keeping our fellowship open to any addict who has the desire to stop using.

Our Eleventh Tradition states: 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. "Our attraction is that we are successes in our own right. As groups, we offer recovery. We have found that the success of our program speaks for itself." (Narcotics Anonymous Basic Text) This tradition tells us that we do not have to promote recovery; the changes in our lives will be apparent to those around us. The positive effect of our own personal recovery can be a powerful element of attraction to our program.

We may decide that we do need to inform the general public of our existence. Is this attraction or promotion? The difference between attraction and promotion is in the content of the message and its presentation. Providing basic information and informing the public who, what, and where we are is well within the definition of attraction. When we go beyond the act of simply informing the public that we exist, we can cross the borderline into promotion.

Participation by NA members in public information events typically is not a violation of anonymity. Those who serve may personally choose to give up some of their anonymity in this fashion. But to give our full names to the press, allow our faces to be photographed, or appear on television or film in association with or identified as a member of Narcotics Anonymous is plainly a violation of the Eleventh Tradition. This can threaten an individual member's personal recovery and give a false impression to newcomers that they will have to reveal their identities to others.

Our Twelfth Tradition states: Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities. "The spiritual foundation becomes more important than any one particular group or individual." (Narcotics Anonymous Basic Text) This tradition reminds us that NA is a "WE" program, and that the sacrifice of personal recognition may be inherent to the spiritual principle of anonymity.

When we act on our own in public information we can lose the spirit of humility inherent in a "we" program. The damage that can be done to NA's reputation by individuals acting on their own can take a long time to repair. Being of service in PI we get a glimpse of humility every time a newcomer walks through the door of an NA meeting. We can then recognize the spiritual aim of the fellowship and our own place within it. We are grateful to be able to carry the message of recovery and can acknowledge the actions of a power greater than ourselves.