



NA WORLD SERVICES, INC.

PO Box 9999
Van Nuys, CA 91409 USA
Phone (818) 773-9999
Fax (818) 700-0700
www.na.org

Date: 21 September 2010
To: Conference Participants
From: World Board
RE: "Living Clean" Review & Input: Chapters Six and Seven and the Preface

We are happy to present you with review drafts of Chapters Six and Seven, and the Preface of the book, "Living Clean: The Journey Continues." This cover memo will provide you with some background about the project and a set of questions to guide your discussions as you review the draft material.

The deadline for input on these chapters is 31 December 2010.

Project Background and Purpose

This book is to aid members with the long-term process of living clean and walking through life on life's terms. The project plan for this book-length piece was adopted at WSC 2008, but has been an item on the "literature wish list" since 1983. This project remained on the back burner until other literature priorities were completed.

This book will allow us to include many of the ideas gathered from the fellowship over the years regarding new literature. While "Living Clean" will not be able to capture all of the ideas submitted, it will touch on relationships, spirituality, living with success, dealing with challenges, health/illness, practicing principles in our daily lives, etc.

We want this book to sound like us in much the same way that the Basic Text speaks to us—a lofty goal to be sure, but one that is attainable if we all work to contribute to the project. As with any literature development process, the beginning of this process is the best time to offer input which may affect the overall scope of the book. Although we have passed that point in the project, your review and input can still significantly impact the book.

Opportunities for Involvement by the Fellowship

Currently the fellowship has several avenues for participation in the project. In addition to commenting on these drafts in this process, members can support us in its creation by submitting ideas and concepts using one of the methods outlined below.

- There is a session profile for development of input for the project posted at: http://www.na.org/?ID=Living_Clean_Project so that members in local NA communities can have their own input sessions to assist in creating some of the material.
- There is also an online discussion board open to all members of the fellowship. The link is: <http://naws.org/lc/index.php>. Registration is required to keep spammers off the

board. Upon registering, you have the option to hide your email address and develop a screen name of your choosing. The discussion board is divided up by chapters, and the topic outline is posted there for easy reference.

- Members can also send input to: LivingClean@na.org or to our regular postal address: World Board; Attention: Living Clean; 19737 Nordhoff Place; Chatsworth, CA 91311.
- Provide specific input to the review draft of Chapter Six, Chapter Seven, and the Preface at <http://questionnaire.disc.na.org> or by mail or email to the addresses above.

The Drafts

In this packet are drafts of Chapter Six, “A New Way of Life,” Chapter Seven, “The Journey Continues,” and the Preface. The approval form of the book will be released in April 2011 according to conference policy.

The deadline for input on these chapters is 31 December 2010.

Review and Input Questions

It is our hope that this book will speak to all NA members. This will necessitate discussing all elements of our lives and may encroach on topics that, at first glance, may appear to be outside issues; yet as NA members, we navigate those issues on a daily basis.

Please keep in mind that these drafts have not been fully copyedited, so they may contain spelling errors or erroneous punctuation. The approval form will have been fully edited, so the focus of your review sessions can remain on the concepts being communicated rather than spelling or punctuation. These questions will help to focus your review sessions.

Chapters Six, Seven, and the Preface

Take each chapter separately. Many times it is helpful to read the material aloud as a part of the review process.

1. What are your overall impressions of the chapter? Please rate this chapter on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 representing “don’t like it at all” and 10 representing “loved it.” Try to be specific about what you particularly liked or disliked in the chapter.
2. Are any ideas or concepts missing from this chapter? If so, what specifically is missing?
3. Are there concepts or ideas that should be elaborated upon or expanded in some way, including ideas that are inadequately explained? Please be as specific as you can be.
4. Is there anything in the drafts that should be removed or modified, including anything that is not consistent with our NA principles? If so, what specifically should be removed or modified, and why?

The deadline for input on these chapters is 31 December 2010.

Thank you for participating in this process. Each member’s input and feedback helps us to develop a book that truly reflects our fellowshipwide experience, strength, and hope.

Living Clean – Chapter Six

A New Way of Life

Finding our Place in the World

Our Little White Book tells us that we become acceptable, responsible and productive members of society, but we are also cautioned that “social acceptability does not equal recovery.” We know that’s true, but they aren’t mutually exclusive, either. We each measure being productive members of society in our own way. We progress in the journey by applying what we learn in recovery to the rest of our lives.

Step Twelve calls this “practicing these principles in all our affairs.” The Basic Text goes on to suggest that, “the steps do not end here; they are a new beginning.” NA offers us both the set of principles that will transform us, and the laboratory in which we practice applying these things before we take them into the world. Not coincidentally, that is the very last thing asked of us in the steps themselves. We can’t wait until we’re all the way through the steps before we begin practicing the principles, so why is this at the end?

Our commitment to work the steps has consequences. It doesn’t matter how many times we’ve done the steps, there’s always something new in the work and in the reward when we do it to the best of our ability. But when we stop halfway through we don’t get half the goodies; instead we are left holding the bag. Often it’s just when we come face to face with our most painful character defects that we stop surrendering. When we stop in the middle, we leave ourselves with too much awareness and not enough hope. When we see the process through, we find that doing the work takes much less energy than avoiding it!

Finding a new way to live is not something we do just once. We don’t just “find it” and move on. Some of us experience great upheaval in our recovery as we try again and again to find a life that makes sense to us and for us. We practice living a principled life.

We try new things, exploring deeper layers inside and higher levels outside. As our values change we change our lives. The process is like a spiral staircase. We come again and again to the same view, only we’re seeing it each time from a different perspective. When we put love, effort and commitment into action, our lives miraculously change.

One of the benefits of our experience is that we know our participation in society is a choice. It’s our decision how we engage with the world around us, and whether or where we want to fit in. Integrating into the world in a way that is comfortable for us is part of our journey, not a destination. If we stop here we don’t just miss half the gifts of recovery: we miss the point. Finding our place in society isn’t the goal, it’s the means by which we achieve our goals. The idea of social acceptability can become the shiny thing that distracts us from the goal of feeling fulfilled.

Our ideas of success are as individual as we are. We start at different places and our destinations are just as varied. We know how to do some things very well, and others not at all. We may come in with a career still in place, or it may be that getting a steady place to live is a big step. When we’re open to each other’s understandings, it helps to clarify our own thinking. We do have this in common: we want to be free. We want to feel accepted and respected without having to pretend to be anything other than

39 who we are. The freedom we are seeking is not some abstract thing. It's how we live. No matter what
40 our accomplishments, the principles we live by will sustain or destroy us.

41 When we get here, we are told that "we are not interested who your connections were, how much or
42 how little you have, but only what you want to do about your problem and how we can help." Years
43 down the line this statement remains true. What kind of a life we want really doesn't matter any more
44 than where we came from. No matter where we are heading, we go about building our new lives in the
45 same ways. The work we do in the steps helps us to define our values and teaches us to work toward
46 our goals. We consider what we want, and start moving in that general direction. Our journey into the
47 world begins to shape itself from there.

48 In some ways, this chapter is a meditation on personal application of the Seventh Tradition: we find
49 freedom when we learn to be ourselves and support our own efforts. This is not just a financial issue.
50 We have some pretty twisted ideas about independence. On one hand, we may be fiercely aloof,
51 unwilling to trust others or to risk getting too attached to anyone or anything. On the other hand, we
52 may be accustomed to getting our needs met without having to take responsibility. Some of us feared
53 independence in our active addiction, clinging to our partners or families for support. Being
54 institutionalized led some of us to feel absolutely alone, but without any autonomy at all. Learning to
55 make decisions for ourselves also means accepting responsibility for our decisions.

56 We are no longer alone. But we cannot pretend we don't have to take responsibility for our lives.
57 Blaming others and harboring resentments can be a way to avoid responsibility for the work we must
58 do, inside ourselves and out in the world. Taking responsibility for ourselves is necessary for us to move
59 forward, and it opens the door to the amends process. It is an amends to those who care for us that we
60 are no longer a burden on them. It is an amends to society that we can give back. And it is an amends to
61 ourselves when we practice self-determination, making our own way and our own choices.

62 One of the benefits of taking a personal inventory is that we don't have to wait for someone else to tell
63 us who we are or how we are. When we are willing to stand for our own dreams and beliefs, we are
64 practicing a deeper kind of self support. We develop the ability to choose what's right for us and to
65 stand for it even when it's not what others believe. We don't have to be defensive to stand up for
66 ourselves. With new perspective, we start to trust our recovery and our instincts. Addicts have really
67 good instincts -- and really bad impulses. Learning to hear the difference inside takes practice. A sponsor
68 and trusted friends can help us to sort out the difference between our desires and our compulsions.

69 When we take a look at what compels us to put so much emphasis on things outside ourselves, we often
70 find that what is driving us is fear. We are afraid of ourselves, afraid of the world, and afraid someone
71 will find out how afraid we are. We hide behind all sorts of screens, from social conformity to outright
72 hostility. Often we assume that other people will do what we did in our worst moments. For people who
73 have been through so much, we can be extraordinarily sensitive. We hope that "social acceptability" can
74 give us immunity from the pain of caring about what other people think.

75 Figuring out our strengths and weaknesses can be tricky; sometimes they look a lot alike. All of us are
76 missing pieces and parts. Some of us have a long way to go just to learn the most basic principles of
77 appropriate behavior, while others have mastered the art of covering whatever might be wrong with a
78 coat of lipstick or leather. We can get caught up in looking good, or projecting an image of who we wish
79 we were. If we allow things outside ourselves to define who we are, we end up like a tree with no roots.

80 At the first storm we are liable to come crashing down. When social acceptability becomes more
81 important than recovery we are more vulnerable than we recognize.

82 Getting the outsides right isn't only about wanting approval. We are learning to respond appropriately
83 to life. Many of us masked low self-esteem with inappropriate behavior. We push people away for fear
84 they will see us as we see ourselves. "Spiritually and emotionally I was starving myself to death," a
85 member shared. "I was faking my way through everyday reality." Allowing ourselves to appear in the
86 world as we are is a big step. "I went to jail clean," said another member, "I kept feeding my disease
87 without drugs until I learned to apply the program to all areas of my life. Step Four began the demolition
88 process that prepared me for society. I had to learn how to participate without being destructive." We
89 are mindful of our behavior and our surroundings without giving up our individuality. But we also begin
90 to let our guard down, let people in and share who we are. What we find, of course, is that when we are
91 less afraid we tend to be less frightening to others. Ultimately, the issue isn't how society accepts us, but
92 whether we accept society and our role in it.

93 **Moving Beyond "Social Acceptability"**

94 "I always felt like an outsider when I was growing up. I found acceptance in drug culture," a member
95 shared. That feeling of belonging can be harder to give up than the drugs. We got our identity from being
96 outsiders, and joining anything can feel a little fishy. Coming back to society from underground is a difficult
97 step, and there may be substantial risk involved. No one can make the decision for us, and there is nothing
98 in our literature that might suggest this is necessary. "Getting out of prison was freedom," said one
99 member, "but it was also terrifying. I didn't know how to live, and I wasn't too sure I wanted to learn."

100 While some of us crave material success or social status, others want no part of that. Ultimately we
101 define social acceptability for ourselves. Even so, it's a moving target and it changes over time. What we
102 consider an acceptable life in early recovery may seem inadequate or even embarrassing later on. "Just
103 being able to bathe and get through the day without a felony was a big deal for me," said one member.
104 We start with a goal of not using, and our dreams and goals grow as we recover. However much or little
105 we have, our feelings of fear or comfort, scarcity or security, have more to do with our perspective than
106 anything else. We always remember that a day clean is a day won, no matter how far we've come or
107 how far we have to go.

108 Many of us ask ourselves what society we want to be acceptable to. Some of us understand "society" to
109 be NA itself. We find a way to make ourselves at home in NA, even if we've always been loners, skeptics
110 and outsiders. Getting comfortable in NA can be a real challenge. Staying comfortable takes work. As the
111 fellowship grows and changes, we may struggle to feel that we still have a place in it. When we move to
112 a new place where people don't know us, we may be surprised at how challenging it is to make NA feel
113 like home again. It sounds paradoxical, but in this anonymous fellowship all we have is our name. When
114 NA feels like an unsafe place for us, we're in serious trouble. We practice principles in the rooms even
115 when it's uncomfortable because we need to be able to keep coming back.

116 The idea of integration is closely linked to the spiritual principle of integrity. Integrity is unity within
117 ourselves: we are the same person wherever we are. Our commitment to our values as we understand
118 them is not based on convenience or circumstance. We live that commitment whether or not anyone is
119 watching. We don't have to pretend to be someone else, or hold one side of ourselves to the light and

Draft material for review and input. Deadline for input is 31 December 2010.

120 hide the rest, in order to function or be accepted. Our comfort with ourselves is attractive. When we're
121 practicing integrity we can walk with dignity whether or not we find approval outside ourselves: we
122 know who we are.

123 A life that we're comfortable with might not seem very exciting. Letting go of our attachment to drama
124 makes it possible to enjoy the simple things without feeling we must constantly make something
125 happen. Part of what shifts for us is our perception of what constitutes a crisis. Many of us spend our
126 early recovery on "high alert." We are so much more aware of the wreckage of our past than the miracle
127 of our recovery that we seem to be in a chronic state of emergency. Addicts are funny: we tend to get
128 very dramatic about little things, but we deal with catastrophe better than most people. As we
129 experience life on life's terms, we come to understand a little bit about the scale of our experiences.
130 Experience gives us the ability to put events into perspective.

131 When we don't have a lot of secrets, we tend to be much less concerned about what others are saying or
132 doing. It's our secrets we're afraid of. We hide because we are ashamed. When we tell the truth about our
133 lives without embellishment or opinion, we put ourselves ahead of our story. Telling the truth limits
134 drama. Our own willingness to meet the truth and deal with it takes a lot of the air out of the drama in our
135 own minds – and on the gossip circuit. Ongoing step work takes the denial and deception out of our
136 actions. And as we learn compassion, we get less pleasure from magnifying the struggles of others.

137 Some of us are naturally dynamic and thrive on a lot of color and excitement. We discover that can be
138 passionate about our lives as they really are. We learn that the kind of work required to live a good life is
139 not nearly as difficult as the kind of work that results from sabotaging our own efforts, creating
140 wreckage, damage and drama, then cleaning it up to make room for more. At such a moment, our
141 sponsor might ask us, "What are you running from?" When we stop this destructive cycle, we can see
142 how much it requires of us. We find that we can be radiant without being radioactive. When we're
143 finally able to settle down and breathe, our lives get much easier. That space gives us room to look
144 around and ask ourselves what we love about our lives, and what we might want to change.

145 We may change because we choose to, or change may happen as a result of circumstances we can't
146 control. "I had success in society, NA service and sponsorship. After some changes in my career and a
147 move to a new town, it was all gone – my success, my self esteem, my joy in participation at NA
148 meetings. I was an old timer and I didn't know what to do anymore. I couldn't even participate in
149 conversation. I began to understand that my recovery and my self-worth were made up of externals.
150 When success and approval left, I collapsed. A new perspective and a walk through the steps from a
151 different angle were necessary." Our lives require ongoing maintenance, and our definitions of success
152 change as life gives and takes. We sometimes belittle the struggles we face as "gold plated problems,"
153 but if we ignore them we may get a gold plated relapse. Ultimately, we find that success isn't measured
154 from the outside but from the inside. When we apply the principles in our lives we succeed in many
155 ways, but most of all we become whole.

156 Our self-made prisons no longer serve us. We are free to explore and learn what we're good at. We are
157 free to participate, create, to care and share, to surprise ourselves, take risks, be vulnerable, and stand
158 on our own two feet. We find our beliefs and begin to act on them. We make decisions based on our
159 values. We walk through fear and wake up to the miracles that surround us. We are free to be ourselves
160 and live as we choose.

161 Freedom comes from discovering who we are inside. Recovering addicts are brilliant, creative and compas-
162 sionate people, whether we know it about ourselves or not. The steps give us integrity, a realistic perspective
163 on ourselves, a means to achieve self-acceptance, and a process to become acceptable to society. Many of us
164 don't feel good enough for life in recovery, and we show it in the way we treat ourselves. When we practice
165 respect and compassion with ourselves, our thoughts and feelings start to change. Self acceptance frees us to
166 take responsibility for our lives and to accept the gifts that are available to us. When we take the Serenity
167 Prayer seriously and really consider what in our lives we do have the courage to change, we find that our
168 ability to shape our lives is limited more by our willingness than any outside entity.

169 **Stability**

170 Like so many things we strive for in recovery, stability is an inside job. The feeling of stability starts from
171 the knowledge that we are okay no matter what happens. It's a sense of security and safety in our own
172 lives. We may believe that this will be a result of achieving goals, getting a house or a partner or a job or
173 some imagined amount of money. But when fear grips us, it doesn't matter what we have or who we
174 share it with. The security that we seek comes from peace within ourselves, a relationship with a higher
175 power, and connection to others. Coming to believe that our life really belongs to us can take a long time.

176 For some of us, stability begins when we are willing to commit to a fixed address. We may begin with
177 regular attendance at a home group and work our way up from there. Others of us come in with all the
178 trappings of a normal life. We may find that "trappings" are exactly what they are, and we need to break
179 free from the ties that bind us to our old lives before we can be ourselves. Serenity may be the presence
180 of peace or the absence of chaos. Security, predictability and a feeling of belonging allow us to change
181 without feeling like we're losing ourselves.

182 Our sense of stability within ourselves allows us to take greater risks, whether that means being willing to
183 study for a new career or to put our hearts on the line with someone we love. When we learn to trust that
184 stability, we can let go a little more. We no longer spend our days or nights worrying that it will all go away
185 – or wishing it would. "I'm so afraid to show up and grow up that I dream of running away, starting over,
186 leaving it all behind." We fear security because we don't quite trust that we are capable of sustaining it.
187 Staying with the process of our lives without creating upheaval and drama can be an experiment for us.

188 Stability is important for us to thrive, but there is a difference between being stable and being stuck.
189 "When I got clean it was relatively easy for me to make the transition to a normal lifestyle," said one
190 member. "But fear of change kept me paralyzed there." Clean time doesn't exempt us from getting
191 stuck. We have a hard time distinguishing between a plateau and a ditch. We may feel very grounded
192 even though the outside circumstances of our life are in flux. There are also times when everything looks
193 fine but we feel like we're coming undone.

194 It may be that we stop moving forward because we have arrived at a destination. Of course we want to
195 enjoy the fruits of our labor, but we run the risk of enjoying that fruit until it rots. There are some signs
196 that help us to distinguish serenity from complacency: when we get judgmental of others, ungrateful
197 and agitated, we're probably on the wrong side of that line. When interacting with others starts to seem
198 exhausting or burdensome, or we forget that we're important to others, we might be slipping back into
199 self-obsession. When we revert to old behavior, we need guidance. Sometimes a new perspective on

200 our lives requires a new look at the steps. We may find that a better attitude really is all we need – or it
201 may be time to make some changes in our lives.

202 When we're feeling apathetic and ungrateful, we say we're "bored." Boredom usually means we can't see
203 past ourselves. We get lost in pettiness and illusion. The world is as boring or exciting as we make it. A
204 member shared, "when one day starts to run into another it's usually because I'm not living my beliefs."
205 We are able to recognize our responsibility for our actions and our motives more often, and sooner in the
206 process. Identifying what drives us helps us to find relief from all the ways our disease shows up in our
207 lives. It also gives us the ability to move toward we want, and not just away from what we fear.

208 Many of us have gone through life by default, as if events simply happened to us. Our sense of ourselves
209 was so distorted that we felt like we had no impact on the world. When we understand the First Step we
210 realize that "I'm powerless over everything" is a cop-out. We are powerless over our addiction, and we
211 cannot turn back time. Beyond that, we may be amazed at the ability we have to make choices in our
212 lives. Our relationship with the world is a reflection of our relationship with ourselves. We are open to
213 new ideas, but also open to new ways of thinking and new ways of seeing what we think we already
214 know. Trusting people who believe in us allows us to try new things even when they seem frightening,
215 and to have faith that the changes we see are real.

216 We talk a lot about moving forward, but sometimes we need to take a hard turn. It can be a struggle to
217 find a new way to live after we've been here a while. We know we have to make changes but sometimes
218 we identify ourselves by the corner we've backed ourselves into. When radical change is necessary we
219 are prone to getting destructive. We may not be sure whether to prune the roses or pave the yard.
220 Thinking about relapse allows us to avoid a lot of questions we don't want to ask or answer, and that
221 can make it seem like a reasonable option at a difficult time. Making change in a healthy way can be
222 challenging. It's easy to say "take a deep breath and do it," but each of us has our own process of getting
223 ready. It's nice when we can plan ahead for change, looking for a job before we quit in anger or setting
224 aside savings before we relocate. When we know change is in order, but we're not sure what or how
225 much, we tend to set things on fire rather than walking away.

226 It takes courage to make a big decision, and it's a dangerous time for us. We may feel judged or isolated
227 by people we once turned to for support. If we're not willing to step out when we know it's right, we
228 run the risk of settling, selling ourselves short, and setting ourselves up for a much longer process of
229 avoidance and unhappiness. By building and maintaining our support systems we are weaving our own
230 safety net. Anonymity in action means that we are willing to accept support even when it doesn't come
231 from where we'd expected.

232 We are free to create a life that we value. When we are collaborating with our Higher Power, action and
233 surrender go hand in hand. We can spend a lot of time trying to convince our Higher Power how things
234 should go. Each of us has the experience of trying to will something into being and finding the most
235 ridiculous obstacles arise. When it's right, the path opens before us. Sometimes a challenge or
236 commitment just keeps placing itself before us. No matter how hard we try not to do it, it seems
237 unavoidable. When we surrender and try, we are astounded at what we can accomplish. The more
238 completely we surrender, the more we are able to follow through on our commitments and shine.

239 Throughout our recovery we improve our behavior, our attitudes, our perspectives and our lives. The
240 spiritual awakenings we have working the first eleven steps give us the ability to act in a new way. We ask

241 for knowledge of our Higher Power's will for us *and the power* to carry that out. After all the surrendering
 242 and housecleaning in the previous steps, a constant conscious contact in the Eleventh Step changes us. The
 243 more we embrace our powerlessness, the more deeply empowered we are to take action in our lives. The
 244 Basic Text tells us that we find God's will for us in the things we value the most. We may describe this in
 245 very spiritual language, or just know the feeling of being at one with what we are doing. "I know I'm doing
 246 my higher power's will," said a member, "when all that noise in my head goes away."

247 **Getting Out of Our Own Way**

248 It may be that the sky isn't the limit for us. There may be limitations set by our lives or circumstances
 249 that make some of our choices for us. More often we are held back by barriers we put in our own way.
 250 We get so accustomed to thinking of ourselves in particular ways that it's hard to imagine otherwise. We
 251 can be brutal to ourselves. Giving ourselves a break is one of the most important skills we gain in
 252 recovery, and it's critical to our ability to change. It's hard to learn something new if we can't allow
 253 ourselves to be imperfect. Our shortcomings and defects keep us from being able to act in our own
 254 interest. Some of the hardest things to get free of are our own beliefs about ourselves and our limits.
 255 We may be free a long time before we recognize it.

256 So much of our experience is a result of our perception. We can come through letdowns and
 257 redirections and see that we're still succeeding and progressing in our lives. Or we can feel like a failure
 258 even when everything is actually going along just fine. Often what we perceive as good or bad is simply
 259 an event. We make it good or bad by our response to it. We can turn a simple setback into a drama that
 260 lasts forever and is everyone else's fault. We get through difficulty much more quickly if we simply
 261 accept it and keep moving. Letting go gets easier when we learn not to hold on so tightly.

262 How often we succeed or fail is not the measure of our program. Our setbacks don't have the power to
 263 define us. Failure is experience, strength and hope in disguise. It can be incredibly important to learn the
 264 difference between failing at something and being a failure. When we are honest, we begin to take
 265 responsibility for our part. Remorse can fuel a new willingness to change. Failure, just like success, has
 266 an important role to play in our lives. It takes us places we would never choose to go. It doesn't have to
 267 be defeat: it can be the agent that frees us to pursue new things, and to seek even broader horizons.

268 Sometimes what we experience as failure is actually a redirection. We can get so focused that it takes a
 269 serious push to change our course. After getting through a hard time clean, a member said, "I needed to
 270 fail. I was completely out of control because I thought I was completely in control. I had confused
 271 outside success with internal growth in recovery." A hard lesson in humility reminds us that we never
 272 graduate. When we let go of the basics, we are in trouble. We respond to our own fear by getting more
 273 controlling, and create more problems as a result. Often when we're deeply challenged in one area of
 274 our lives, others start to suffer. When things get difficult, it never seems like just one thing goes. We
 275 start using old tools again, even though we know – or we once knew – that they don't work.
 276 Unmanageability feeds on itself.

277 It takes courage to put ourselves on the line. If the risks we're taking are real then certainly sometimes
 278 we will lose. If we don't occasionally fall short, it probably means we're setting the bar too low. We can
 279 learn through our mistakes. This experience strengthens our resolve and our faith. Most importantly,
 280 we don't have to do it alone. As we accept that we will be okay even when we are disappointed, we

Draft material for review and input. Deadline for input is 31 December 2010.

281 start to feel a little more comfortable with the idea of taking risks. We learn to listen to our instincts and
282 start to move with the rhythm of our lives. We can respond to changes as they happen without being
283 distracted by our desire to judge or explain them.

284 Obstacles give us a chance to examine our willingness. Some of us fight our way to a goal despite physical
285 disabilities, criminal records or other hurdles. The obstacles in our path only make us more committed to
286 our goals. We find a way to do the impossible. At other times, barriers drive us to think creatively and to
287 look in other directions for where we can best use our energies. "After I graduated from school," a
288 member shared, "I kept applying for jobs and getting rejection letters. Every time I got another one, I
289 would stand over the trash can and say, 'This is not what God wants for me'. Then I would let it go."

290 Many of us have expectations that if we do our recovery right, there will be no difficulty or pain. These
291 expectations can be lethal. "I thought if I was working a good enough program I would be fail free," said
292 a member. "In fact, working a program helps me keep going no matter what." Some of us experience
293 only small losses, while others endure catastrophe – sometimes over and over. Once we go through a
294 hard time clean, we know we can get through difficulty and be all right. We start to believe in our own
295 resilience, and to trust our recovery. We find faith and strength inside ourselves that cannot be taken
296 away unless we give it away.

297 Some of us never get where we meant to go, and it doesn't mean there's anything wrong with our recovery.
298 We're not staying clean for the rewards, though staying clean can be very rewarding. Whatever gifts we do or
299 do not receive, we do well to remember that there is nothing wrong today that a case of withdrawal won't
300 make worse. We all experience loss and hardship at some point in our recovery, and if we are not willing to
301 accept that as part of the process, our desire for success can turn insidiously into a reservation. If we are
302 ashamed by the difficulty we're going through or feel that we can't be honest about our struggles, our
303 relationship to the fellowship will suffer no matter how much clean time we have.

304 We have a tendency to act as if our progress doesn't count until we've arrived at our goals. Learning to
305 keep going through setbacks or hard times allows us to see that we're still moving forward even when
306 things are not going our way. We set goals for ourselves and move toward them a day at a time, an inch
307 at a time, knowing that when we're doing the right things the right things tend to happen – even if
308 they're not what we anticipate.

309 We are careful not to hold each other back or discourage each other from trying to follow our dreams.
310 Our own fear of getting too far from recovery can actually push others away, rather than drawing them
311 close. We help each other to see clearly what we may be getting ourselves into, but we need to be able
312 to listen for our own guidance. "After many years of sponsorship," one member said, "I finally realized I
313 wasn't going to keep anyone from doing what they really wanted to do. The question was whether they
314 were going to be comfortable sharing honestly with me about it. When I set demands or limitations, I
315 became one more thing to work around."

316 The real issue may not be our ultimate failure or success, but our faith in the process. Another addict
317 shared, "I had years clean when everything fell apart: divorce, job, finances, and my relationship with
318 my kids. People reminded me that every clean day was a successful day. That didn't seem good enough
319 anymore. I thought they were putting me down. But I actually was successfully working an NA program.
320 I needed a priority adjustment. I'm still putting things back together, but today I am happier and more
321 fulfilled." We start to see that big changes in our lives are not the end of the world, just the end of a

322 phase or an experiment. A member observed, “I thought “no matter what” meant, don’t use even if
323 there’s an earthquake. But I am learning it also means, keep going even when you don’t feel like it.”

324 Continuing to do as we were taught even when the sky is falling doesn’t just get us through. We learn
325 from the experience, we grow, and we often find that the new place we’re in as a result is better than
326 what we had resisted letting go. When we experience hardship, we get angry and resistant. It can be
327 hard to sit through a meeting or hear what anyone else has to say. We think we can just put our heads
328 down and bull through it, but that tends to make things worse. It’s like saying, “I’m just going to run my
329 own will until I get through this hard time, then I’ll turn it back over.” When we keep coming to
330 meetings even with our attitude, we can hear the message in spite of ourselves. We show up, and the
331 message finds us whether we’re looking for it or not.

332 Moving forward isn’t easy, but it’s what we do. We can’t necessarily set limits or time frames around
333 our feelings. We don’t need to be told how to experience our feelings, but it’s nice to know we are loved
334 and supported through them. “I needed to be brutally honest about my feelings,” said another member,
335 “even when it made my stomach hurt. I was sad, angry, afraid and jealous of others who’d succeeded
336 already. I lost my fear of pain when I lost my resistance to it, because the resistance amplified it so
337 much.” When we accept our limitations in one direction, we are able to open to possibilities in other
338 directions. The open-mindedness we practice in our recovery gives us the ability to be flexible when
339 things change in ways we hadn’t expected. “I’ve learned to be open-minded about all kinds of things,”
340 said a member, “including what makes me happy.”

341 **Success**

342 NA gives us different versions of success and failure than the rest of the world. Our lives are successful
343 because we’re clean, we help people and we have a relationship with a power greater than ourselves.
344 That can be hard to remember when the outsides are in turmoil. “If life is a dream,” said a member,
345 “then we may occasionally have nightmares!” We experience ups and downs, but we have a disease
346 that tells us it was “always like this,” however well or poorly we’re doing. We can get looped into
347 thinking either that we’re immune to failure, or that we can only have a hard life. We each go through
348 hard times and great success, and we learn that they are not the whole story – or even the most
349 important part of the story.

350 We build a foundation, a fellowship, and a life – not necessarily in that order. Those of us who have
351 been fortunate enough to be involved in developing an NA community know how gratifying it is to grow
352 something from a seed. The experience is unlike anything we know. Many of us devote ourselves heart
353 and soul to NA, and the process of building our own lives comes later. We may find ourselves beginning
354 a career or to seeing to our financial security years after our peers seem very settled. There is no right or
355 wrong way or order in which our recovery happens.

356 The desire to survive and feel fulfilled is not unique to us as addicts. But in recovery we do it backwards:
357 we begin with connection to others and work our way to basic safety. And perhaps it has to be this way.
358 Those really deep needs are the ones we believe won’t be met. We all have experience starting over in
359 our lives with new people, places and things, stepping into a new way of life we don’t quite understand.
360 To believe that we can trust the love in our lives is a different matter. It begins with the amends process,

361 the understanding that we can forgive and be forgiven, that we can take responsibility for our actions
362 and make better choices.

363 Both success and failure can be challenging for us. Some of us create crisis because we don't know how
364 to deal with positive experiences. We may fear success because it will bring more responsibility and that
365 feels like a trap, or because we do not want to lose focus on our primary purpose of staying clean, or
366 because it's easier than risking failure. Perhaps we don't feel worthy, or failing feels normal

367 As our understanding of the First Step grows, we surrender more deeply. Our trust grows, and we're a
368 little more willing to let go. We can see more areas of our lives where we still felt it was our job to be in
369 control. Each time we surrender, our world opens up a little more. We can see past our obsession and
370 accept the possibility of a change in our perception. We can trust that the results of letting go will not be
371 calamity. Our faith grows through our experience. Our experience gives us the opportunity to see our
372 lives from a different perspective.

373 We want to become the best person we can, doing work we feel is important, feeling loved and valued.
374 There cannot be one way to do that, because we are all unique. We want to be given a roadmap to
375 success, but few of us find that kind of direction gets us very far. Over time, we gain a keener
376 understanding of what it means to live in harmony with our beliefs. We must find a way to hear our own
377 desires and learn what is right and wrong for us. We may not have dreams when we get here, or our
378 experience has taught us that it's not safe to share those dreams or to want them too much. Recovery is a
379 process of evolution. We learn from our own efforts what is right for us. Even when we share our lives with
380 others, it is our willingness to fulfill our responsibility to ourselves that determines our ability to feel love
381 and be satisfied with our lives. Eventually we see that how we get there matters much more than where
382 we are going. It's the integrity with which we live our lives that is important. If we don't like who we are or
383 how we act, if we find our own company uncomfortable, does it really matter what or how much we have?

384 Perhaps because we've been so far outside society, we tend to be very conscious of how it works.
385 Addicts seem to have a nose for bullshit. We have no time for people playing fast and loose with the
386 truth, even if we struggle to consistently practice honesty ourselves. It's our own struggle with honesty
387 that makes it so important to us. We know how easy it is to let go of our integrity in favor of short-term
388 gain, even when we know the consequences. Addicts are political animals. We are acutely insightful
389 about relationships between people and about the flow of money and power. So it's no surprise that so
390 many of us get caught up in chasing status, either inside the fellowship or outside.

391 When we work hard and earn a victory, we certainly can be proud of ourselves. However, there is a big
392 difference between that and believing our own hype. We are in trouble when we start mistaking success
393 for recovery. If we allow our humility and integrity to decay, we are a danger to ourselves and everyone
394 around us. When we confuse our priorities, we can lose more than we thought we had at stake. And
395 when we try to fill up the empty places inside us with material things or lofty positions, we find that we
396 are emptier than before. When our gratitude is gone, we no longer relate to the newcomer. We are so
397 lost in delusion that we don't even know there is a problem. Many members have died behind such
398 arrogance. "Net worth does not equal self worth," a member said. We have all seen members achieve
399 great success and still use or want to destroy themselves.

400 On some level, this is all about faith. Living our dreams requires that we believe they are possible. When
401 we act on faith, we move in a positive direction. It can be very frightening and sometimes a little weird.

402 A member suggested that “Taking a leap of faith requires us to trust either that there will be ground
403 beneath our feet or that we will be able to fly.” Small actions give us the courage for bigger ones.

404 Dreams really do come true, but that’s almost never the end of the story. We need to remember that
405 we have only a fleeting glimpse of our Higher Power’s will for us. We can see what we want our lives to
406 look like, or what we think they’re supposed to look like. Achievement takes us out past where our
407 planning (or projecting) ends. We can mistake a goal for an ultimatum: there’s only one way it’s
408 supposed to be, and anything else is failure. Our desires may set us in a direction, but the journey takes
409 us somewhere it never occurred to us to go.

410 Talent or interest may come naturally, but any skill takes practice. Developing the focus and energy to stay on
411 task is one challenge; allowing ourselves to take risks is another. It takes courage to face our own creativity
412 and to discipline that to produce the things we want. A member shared, “I don’t feel I have the freedom on
413 the inside to do what I have the ability to do on the outside. I see that as a future freedom.” Awareness isn’t
414 the same as control. We don’t automatically get freedom from our defects just because we see them.
415 Awareness gives us hope and direction. Sometimes that can be a motivator to get us working, and
416 sometimes the best we can do is wait. When we can’t see our way around a defect or an obstacle, it’s often
417 because there’s other work that must be done first. Self-acceptance frees our imagination. Work on the
418 amends steps allows us to feel worthy of success. The answers are in different places for each of us, and we
419 may not know them until we’ve found them. Doing the work of recovery frees us in ways we can’t predict.
420 Sometimes it’s only in experiencing such freedom that we learn we were bound before.

421 It’s one thing to have faith in a power greater than ourselves, and quite another to have faith in
422 ourselves. Some of us take a long time to come to believe that we really can contribute to the world in a
423 way that serves it, or that serves our values and sense of purpose. Doing the right thing when no one is
424 looking is an act of service to what we believe in. Some of us call this integrity; some of us call it
425 character. Whatever we call it, it’s the cornerstone of discipline.

426 As principles go, discipline might be one of the less popular. We talk about commitment almost from our
427 first day clean. We make a commitment to show up, to stay clean until our next meeting, to call
428 someone before we pick up. Acting on the commitments we make requires discipline, and that’s a skill
429 we develop as we practice. Discipline is commitment in action. It is a demonstration of our willingness. It
430 is different from “willpower” or “self-will” in that we’re not trying to force something outside ourselves
431 to change. What we’re changing is our relationship to our own behavior. It doesn’t come naturally to
432 most of us, but our long-term goals are often served by postponing short-term gratification. The more
433 we trust the process, the more we are willing to practice discipline. When a member shared, “I got
434 where I am by the grace of God and a stubborn refusal to go away,” she was showing us what could
435 happen when discipline and faith come together.

436 If we have a history of failure, it may be hard for us to believe that success is a possibility. Our past
437 experience may not always be a good guide. We learn that things really can change for us. Just as the
438 second step taught us that insanity is doing the same things and expecting different results, sometimes we
439 still expect to get what we always got. We do different things and expect the same results. If we want
440 something we never had, we will have to try some things we never tried, and have some faith. When we
441 change our actions, beliefs and motives, our lives change – but not always the way we think they will.

442 The tools we use to practice our recovery serve us in all our affairs. Imagination is a tool, and when we
443 give ourselves permission to dream we are using that tool to explore our own hearts. It can be
444 frightening to look at what we really believe, what we want, and who we are. By practicing prayer and
445 meditation, we learn to listen to our own inner voice and to know when something is right for us. The
446 people we trust help us to sort out the truth within us from the driving voice of compulsion. A member
447 explained, “we tell newcomers to suit up, show up, and give NA everything they’ve got. Why shouldn’t I
448 do this in other areas of my life?” We make decisions born of desire – just like staying clean. Learning to
449 dream is important, but it’s not a way of life. Willingness without action is fantasy. But we really can
450 move mountains if we are willing to pick up the shovel.

451 Goals are dreams we put into action. We can understand the work and measure our progress more
452 easily if we break our goals down into steps. After all, we know a thing or two about doing things in
453 steps! Setting achievable goals and celebrating milestones along the way allows us to see our progress,
454 and gives us moments when we can step back and evaluate where we are and where we are going.

455 Our priorities change over the course of our recovery. In the beginning, not using is a full time job. Many
456 of us transition out of this desperation and get preoccupied with material things. We mistake success for
457 security. “I thought I could buy my way out of addiction,” said one member. Another member shared,
458 “When I was using I always had a change of clothes in my purse, because I never knew where I would
459 wake up. After I got clean I started picking up more and more furniture until my house was overflowing.
460 Later I realized I was taking on all this stuff to make sure it was hard to move. I didn’t really want more
461 dishes, what I wanted was to know I was going to be somewhere for a while.” We must ensure recovery
462 stays a priority as our lives are coming together. When our priorities shift again it may be a result of a
463 different kind of life change: a gradual realization that a deeper satisfaction awaits us. “I believed I was
464 acceptable as long as I was paying bills, but I came to a deeper vision of what I wanted. I worked hard,
465 but I forgot to take care of myself physically, mentally and spiritually. After a deeper connection to my
466 higher power, I wanted to fulfill a much greater purpose. Doing the right things became almost natural. I
467 stopped thinking about social acceptability in terms of status. I wanted to be a person people were
468 comfortable being around. I was no longer willing to let labels hold me back or define me. I began to
469 deepen my understanding and finally stop isolating myself from society at large. After finding my way to
470 the surface and taking that breath of life, I wanted to share it freely, with no motives.”

471 **Education**

472 Many of us go back to school after we get clean, and we can be surprised at the challenges we confront.
473 We may go back to school because we need new skills, or just because we want to try something new. “I
474 had really distorted ideas about what society was,” said one member, “and what the playing field was.
475 Before I could fully participate, I had to learn how it worked. Education was a way out of the mess I had
476 made of my life. I learned how to function, and it gave me some time.” It’s not something all of us do,
477 and many of us go back for a little while and decide it’s not for us. “I was grateful for the opportunity but
478 also to find out I didn’t have to do that,” said another.

479 We learn more than just the subject we’re studying. Just as our bodies were damaged by our addiction,
480 our brains have taken a beating. Whatever we study, whether it’s playing the guitar, welding, knitting or
481 philosophy, learning gives our minds a workout. We can see and feel the healing happening as we
482 practice absorbing and retaining information. We learn to work under pressure and to accept feedback

483 on our work. We learn to persevere through a learning curve. We may imagine that all of our classmates
484 are using, or that “they” are a unit we don’t fit into. We can be insecure and judgmental at the same
485 time. Even a training at work can be intimidating when we’re not used to learning that way. “The
486 process was surprisingly emotional,” shared a member. “I wore my recovery like armor. I felt lonely and
487 unnoticed, but I didn’t have the self-acceptance to let anyone in.”

488 Some of us go back to school with a specific plan in mind, but we can surprise ourselves. We may not
489 know what we are good at, and chances are we’re smarter than we think. “I believed I was stupid
490 because it took me so many years of relapsing to get clean,” a member shared. “Getting a degree helped
491 me to believe in my own intelligence.” Being open-minded about our talents can allow us to follow a
492 path we had not imagined.

493 Many of us share the feeling that we must catch up or make up for the time lost to our addiction. We
494 struggle with the feeling that we’re somehow just not enough. If we tend toward perfectionism at all,
495 chances are that we’ll get to confront it when we go to school. A member shared, “I felt like a failure if I
496 got less than a perfect score on a test. I couldn’t sleep until I figured out where I had gone wrong. I
497 wasn’t competing against the other students: I was competing against my own fear.” Right behind
498 perfectionism is a wall of shame. Any misstep feels like it opens a window onto that secret. Suggestions
499 feel like criticism and criticism feels like condemnation.

500 Even if we are starting at the beginning, there are few limits to how far we can go. Addiction can be
501 pretty disruptive to education, and some of us stopped early in the process, or never felt engaged by it
502 at all. There are gaps in our knowledge, either as a result of our addiction or where we come from, and
503 these can be a source of shame as well. Missing information is not a character defect; it’s just
504 something we don’t know yet. There is a difference between not knowing and not doing. We learn how
505 to learn. Impatience is a stumbling block: we want to know something, not to learn it. It’s an exercise in
506 staying focused. But our practice at being teachable is a good start. Recovery is an education. The
507 abilities we develop as we work the steps are easily transferable. We’re learning principles and
508 practicing a new way of life. In the process, we learn to read, write, care, share, practice, show up, and
509 keep coming back. When we apply these skills to other kinds of learning, we tend to do surprisingly well.

510 Often we act as if our lives will really begin at some future time: when we get a certain amount of clean
511 time, when we finish school, get that job, or when our lives have magically become manageable. In a
512 “just for today” program, we learn that our lives are not what will happen at a future date. Our lives are
513 what we’re doing right now. The way we live on the way to our goals is the way we live. Tall trees
514 require deep roots. We need to ensure that we are taking the time to build and maintain our foundation
515 as we move forward.

516 **Money**

517 Whether we have a lot of it or very little, most of us have a challenging relationship to money. There is
518 no one right set of values, but we do have principles that we practice. Our Seventh Tradition talks about
519 being “self supporting through our own contributions,” and while the Tradition makes direct reference
520 to the groups many of us find that practicing this principle in our own lives is essential to experiencing
521 freedom. We learn to support ourselves financially, and we find that there are other ways in which we

522 can practice self-support. We learn to carry our own weight, to clean up our own mess, and to
523 contribute to the places that are important to us.

524 Having money and working may be totally unrelated when we get here. We found the financial resources
525 that we needed in all sorts of other ways. We stole, we manipulated, we persuaded others of our entitle-
526 ment. We were takers, and we squandered the resources that were made available to us. In our self
527 centeredness we were oblivious to the toll we took on the people around us. The awareness that we might
528 never be able to repay that can be part of the force that drives us to a new way of life. We owe a debt, and
529 every time we act in the service of a greater good we can feel something shifting inside us. We have a con-
530 tribution to make, and we find that making it is not a sacrifice: it serves us at least as much as those we serve.

531 The sense of entitlement that enabled us to live as we did in our addiction can follow us into recovery.
532 Often it shows up in more subtle forms. We don't steal people's purses anymore, but it may seem
533 perfectly reasonable to take supplies from work, to shoplift a little, to continue taking advantage of
534 people. We may know that this kind of dishonesty is wrong, but harbor the sense that we're not being
535 paid what we're worth, that we deserve a break we're not getting, or that the people we serve at work,
536 at home or in NA should be more grateful than they are. Sometimes it shows up in our expectations of
537 others: we constantly suspect that someone is trying to get over on us.

538 This simmering resentment can be incredibly harmful. We see not what we have but what we lack. We
539 feel our vulnerability rather than our security. It's hard to be happy when the world feels like such a
540 hostile place. Learning to practice faith and gratitude doesn't mean that we give up our "street smarts."
541 It means we start to develop a different kind of intelligence. We can stand up for ourselves without
542 feeling like we're fighting for our lives. We begin to trust that our needs will be met, and to see the
543 imperfections in our circumstances as opportunities for growth, not barriers to it.

544 Even in recovery, obsession and compulsion play out in our spending habits. We shop impulsively or
545 compulsively, and get obsessed with having the newest or the best. We use our money unwisely in an
546 attempt to buy love, approval, or the appearance of success. Money becomes one more way to play out
547 our control issues, and our rigidity creates more problems than it solves. Or we simply let it go by, feeling
548 like poverty is probably appropriate for us. Some of us find that it's not "stuff" that attracts us; we get
549 addicted to the pursuit. This drive can bring us to great success or it can be the compulsion that fuels yet
550 another symptom of our addiction. We're the only ones who really know the truth. If we're gambling,
551 working the system, opening and closing businesses, veering from financial success to failure and back
552 again – we might want to take a look at what we're up to. Financial unmanageability is often a symptom of
553 a larger issue. Like so many things we struggle with, it's a practical problem with a spiritual solution.

554 "Very small things," one member shared, "like paying the bills on time, gave me a feeling of self worth."
555 Another member shared that she began to overcome her resentment of paying her bills by writing, "Thank
556 you for your services" on her payments. Simply meeting our own obligations can be a victory. For some of
557 us this resolves quickly. Others spend a lifetime learning to manage. Financial turmoil is not unusual for NA
558 members, but it is not a requirement. Acting out on our disease has financial consequences. But many of
559 the ways we show our recovery have financial consequences, too. This doesn't mean that when we're
560 working our program we get rich. Some of us never make as much money in recovery as we did when we
561 were using, and being responsible can be expensive. But many of us find success in recovery, and do
562 achieve financial comfort. When we're practicing sanity and living within our means, we find that we can
563 be comfortable with ourselves and our circumstances, no matter what they are.

564 We also learn to ask for help when we need it. Many of us struggle in recovery when we become sick or
565 disabled because our beliefs about being self supporting make it hard to seek the assistance we may
566 desperately need. The humility we learn from working the steps allows us to ask for help when
567 necessary, and know that we are neither too good to have needs nor too bad to deserve a hand. We
568 may find that how much we want is very different from what we need, and learning to adapt to our
569 circumstances can give us a flexibility that we hadn't imagined before. Losing everything isn't a life
570 sentence, just as having it all doesn't mean we will not need again.

571 Prudence is a principle some of us practice more than others. It's a funny word, but it's what we're
572 talking about when we refer to our group's "prudent reserve." We do our best to ensure that we can be
573 responsible even if circumstances change. "I went through a hard time in my business and had to live off
574 my savings for a while. I was ashamed to talk about it in meetings, but I shared with a fellow addict.
575 Later he told me that this was a message of hope for him. Because I planned ahead I was able to make it
576 through a tough time. What I saw as a failure, he saw as a success. One more time, I gained a better
577 perspective on my life."

578 In service, we learn to take on obligations thoughtfully to ensure that we can follow through on what
579 we've promised. In other areas of our lives as well, we find that planning and following through makes
580 us feel good about ourselves. A member shared, "I learned to be responsible and prudent with NA
581 funds, so I don't misappropriate other people's funds either. I have learned the principles of integrity
582 and accountability. It's part of walking my talk and applying the principles." We also notice in NA that
583 those who do not give it away tend not to keep it; the idea that giving is a crucial part of having is
584 something many of us are surprised to discover. We may or may not have material wealth, but our
585 emotional, spiritual and mental resources are enormous. We have a wealth of experience. When we
586 give our energy, time, talent and creativity we are rewarded many times over.

587 **Work**

588 While the steps help us to become better people, service is one way we learn how to function in the
589 world again. Many of the skills we learn in service translate into our working lives. We may sometimes
590 feel like outsiders or imposters in our jobs, but in NA service we are full participants. We don't second-
591 guess our primary purpose or our right to participate. In a fellowship where the ultimate authority is a
592 Power greater than ourselves, we learn to be a peer with something to offer and something to learn,
593 rather than an authority or a victim. We learn to channel our energy in a constructive direction, and we
594 can practice staying focused. Service counteracts selfishness and increases our feelings of self worth. We
595 learn to step back and think before we respond. Not everything that affects us is personal, and we don't
596 have to return fire every time. NA gives us a safe place to make mistakes, find out who we are and learn
597 how to relate to people. The things that make us defensive or self-righteous tend to be pretty much the
598 same wherever we go. We see our character defects manifesting and find humility, make amends or just
599 change course and start over. Everyone makes mistakes. Amends are appreciated in many contexts.
600 Promptly admitting we're wrong shows integrity and responsibility for our actions.

601 The experience of service helps us take on responsibilities and learn to meet them as we go. We stretch
602 beyond our current abilities and find that we can survive and succeed even if we're not perfect. We learn
603 to sit still and listen, and to make our voice heard when we have something to say. We start to feel we can

604 take our rightful place in the world, without feeling fear or shame. As we practice these principles in all our
605 affairs, the distinction between our work lives and our recovery lives begins to fall away.

606 The transition from NA to work isn't always seamless. We may be really shocked to find that outside NA
607 the Third Tradition does not apply. We are not members of other groups just because we want to be. We
608 may have to earn our seat at another table, and there are some places we may never be accepted as we
609 would wish. Additionally, what would seem perfectly natural with our NA friends may be inappropriate or
610 even shocking elsewhere. We are conscious of how we share our feelings and our histories. We learn the
611 difference between friendships, recovery relationships and professional relationships, and we begin to feel
612 like we can alter our behavior without having to compromise our integrity.

613 One way we practice these principles is to be of service to our employer. Some members have asked
614 themselves, "How do I practice unity at work? How do I let my HP be in charge during my workday? What
615 is the primary purpose of this workplace, and how can I help achieve that? What is my primary purpose
616 here?" Whatever our job is, when we can see it as an opportunity to practice our principles it becomes a
617 worthy use of our time. A member shared, "responsibility used to feel like a burden to me. Learning to see
618 it as a way to do my higher power's will made it feel like a privilege." With spiritual principles as our guide,
619 we can be an asset wherever we are. Often the people around us see our value before we do.

620 Some of us are naturally industrious, and others are really good at sitting still and being present in the
621 moment. Either one can be an asset or a defect, depending on how we use it. The guilt of being unproductive
622 and stealing time at work feeds itself. On the other hand, the drive to stay in constant motion can be a
623 consequence of fear. When we don't take time to reflect on what we're doing and how we're doing it, small
624 mistakes can add up quickly. As with everything else we do, we seek a healthy balance.

625 Our issues may differ, but the principles we practice are the same. Some of us never worked before we
626 got clean, and for others of us work was all we did. By the same token, some of us don't need to work
627 for financial reasons, and some are too disabled to be able to work steadily anymore. Still, we can
628 benefit from keeping a schedule and being accountable. We may resist structure in our lives but it can
629 help us enormously. We are, after all, creatures of habit. When we feel we have a purpose that gives
630 shape to our days, we are more comfortable with ourselves and our place in the world. Our work can be
631 something we do to fill time, or to pay the bills, or it may be one of the primary ways we define
632 ourselves. Those of us who have work that is meaningful or valuable to us are fortunate. It's a goal many
633 of us work toward, and when we feel that we're doing a good job at something that matters, it brings a
634 deep satisfaction. Whoever we are, wherever we come from, we have something to offer.

635 Our work ethic is the collection of habits we have about how we use our time. When we set our minds to
636 something, we can be exceptionally determined. Few people are ever as driven in their lives as an addict in
637 search of a fix. When we learn to turn that determination toward healthy goals, we can achieve amazing
638 things. We know if we do something regularly it will become a habit for us. What begins as discipline
639 develops into habit, and eventually it becomes a pleasure. There is danger in this method, however.
640 Substitution can be deadly, especially when it seems to be working for us. The hallmark of our disease is
641 progression. When we notice that our relationship to an activity has allowed us to justify unmanageability
642 elsewhere in our lives, it's probably time for a good hard look at how we're doing what we're doing.

643 We can be haunted by feelings of inadequacy well into our recovery, and spend our time and energy trying
644 to prove ourselves or live up to an unreasonable and imaginary standard. We may swing between being

645 very insecure and eager to please, and resisting the most basic rules and requirements of a job. Our lack of
646 self acceptance shows when we can't take compliments. When we feel bad about ourselves or unworthy,
647 we tend to over-compensate. We may find ourselves covering for others or taking undesirable shifts for
648 fear that we're somehow more expendable than others. "I excelled at work," said a member, "but I still
649 didn't feel responsible or productive. Inadequacy haunted me." It can be hard to tell the difference
650 between a genuine desire to do better and performance that's driven by fear. When fear is driving us, we
651 may notice that procrastination becomes an issue. We are afraid to finish what we start and begin making
652 excuses. "When I get close to the end of a project, it feels like I'm in a wind tunnel. I don't know where the
653 resistance comes from but it's so strong I can barely get my feet under me."

654 Working can become an alibi for not practicing our program. We have heard many times that what we
655 put in front of our recovery we will lose, and many of us have experienced this with jobs or material
656 things that seemed to make recovery obsolete or inconvenient. When we're using the tools available to
657 us we can see the challenges we encounter in our work as opportunities to practice our program.
658 Applying the principles regularly has never made life worse for anyone. When we're not practicing our
659 program, "our problems become magnified unreasonably." We feel overly responsible, obsessed and
660 compelled to keep going, even when a break might be the thing that would give us needed perspective.

661 A member shared, "As I advance in my step work, I am more capable of acknowledging my progress in
662 other areas, as well." We start to feel that we're no better or worse than anyone else, even at work, and
663 that our gifts are useful. One member talked about finding a job that suited his "skills and ills;" when we
664 find the right environment, we see that we can be distinguished by some of the things that used to make
665 us most uncomfortable about ourselves. Perhaps most of all, when we are spiritually connected creativity
666 flows through us. This doesn't necessarily mean that we paint or make music (though it can) but that we
667 can see solutions to problems and find satisfaction in doing whatever we do in the best way we can.

668 Efficiency is the result of clearing out that defective stuff that drains us of our time and energy.
669 Sometimes we can even use our defects to our advantage. For example, we may beat ourselves up
670 because we procrastinate what we fear. We can also use that energy to get a lot of other things done. "I
671 am rarely more efficient than when I'm procrastinating," said one member. "I might get the whole
672 house clean because I'm putting off studying, or I'll get the bills done because I don't want to have a
673 hard conversation." When we look back on how much we did to avoid one task, we may be pleasantly
674 surprised. Getting honest about what we are doing allows us to use our ways of being to our advantage.

675 We strive for balance, and we find it in different ways. When we get more comfortable with ourselves,
676 we are more comfortable with others as well. Our willingness and humility shows as a genuine desire to
677 do better, no matter how well we're doing – not because we have something to prove but because we
678 care. We can practice principles in the workplace without appearing naïve or overly eager to please. As
679 we stay clean, we develop a new history. Our colleagues haven't seen us in desperation and might have
680 no reason to guess that we're addicts in recovery. We don't have to let go of our anonymity to integrate
681 who we are into our careers. That's a choice we can make for ourselves. We're human beings, doing our
682 best to be responsible and productive.

683 We are successful members of society, in the workforce and out. We have as much integrity toward our
684 jobs and the people we serve outside the rooms as we do inside the rooms – and that's the point. When

685 we practice these principles in all our affairs, we bring so much to the world. It's not just a theory or
686 another awful lecture about our "potential." It's our experience; it's what we do.

687 **Anonymity**

688 Our addiction no longer sets us apart, but making the decision to tell people about our membership in NA
689 should be done with care. We can be recklessly casual about our anonymity. "Anonymous" is half our
690 name for a reason. There is still stigma attached to being an addict, and there may also be consequences
691 to admitting we're in recovery. Caution isn't the only reason for anonymity. The Twelfth Tradition tells us
692 that it is our spiritual foundation. The fact that we are anonymous means that the work we do in NA really
693 can be selfless service. We don't want or need credit for helping others; it's what we do to save our own
694 lives. We don't benefit from sympathy for our condition; the price for that is ultimately too high. In the
695 rooms we are equals with one another and out of the rooms we are equals with our peers.

696 We check our motives before we share with someone that we're addicts, and we learn that this is good
697 policy any time we're thinking about disclosing something significant about ourselves. Taking a moment
698 to pray and consider our intentions frees us to use our experience as a tool rather than a weapon. We
699 consider whether we are seeking attention, or trying to justify our behavior, or whether we are able to
700 offer help or guidance as a result of our experience. We may be letting someone get to know us better,
701 creating a bridge for empathy. We also want to consider our own boundaries: Is this someone we feel
702 safe to share with? Would someone else's anonymity be compromised by our disclosure? Are we
703 limiting or protecting the relationship by not sharing about ourselves? We have something to share that
704 has value in and out of the rooms. It is ours, and we have choices about it.

705 That said, there are times when it is appropriate to let go of our anonymity – and of course there are times
706 when people find out through no action of our own. We have choices about how we want to respond. A
707 member shared his experience: "I had been keeping my NA membership a secret, but someone I had seen
708 in meetings was friends with a rival at work. She told the rival and he told everyone. I was terrified. But the
709 result was – nothing. Now I'm free to be myself; I don't have to hide anymore." Not hiding means that we
710 can be ourselves, but also that we are free to carry the message when we see an opportunity.

711 When we run into people in NA meetings that we know from work or other contexts, we want to
712 consider each other's anonymity. We might be comfortable sharing our membership with others, but
713 that doesn't mean the other person is. Allowing each of us to experience our membership in our own
714 way is part of the freedom we give each other. Just as we don't judge one another's desire to stop using,
715 we cannot judge each other's commitment or quality of membership based on their willingness to be
716 known as a member. Likewise, each of us makes decisions for ourselves about what kind of
717 environments we feel comfortable in. Some of us are never in the presence of drugs after we get clean;
718 for others of us, our obligations to work or our families may regularly expose us to alcohol or other
719 drugs. What one member sees as an unnecessary risk, another may find an essential part of integrating
720 back into society. A member shared, "When I am obliged to attend events where alcohol is present, I
721 remember Step One and stay grateful that I don't have to use. I rely on my higher power for strength
722 and keep my NA medallion in my pocket as a reminder. Most importantly I remember the only words I
723 need when I'm offered drugs of any kind: No, thank you."

724 Learning to choose wisely and appropriately is important. We may be the only Basic Text someone ever
725 reads, and our behavior is a reflection of our message. We want to consider this when we wear or carry

726 NA paraphernalia. We're letting people know something about ourselves, and letting them know about
727 the fellowship as well. Our message is carried not just by what we say but what we do.

728 When we share honestly about our lives, who we are and what we do can become vital parts of our
729 message of recovery. Our fellow members often take pride in our success just as our family might. But
730 we don't want to lose the foundation of equality that keeps us all alive and free. Knowing that each of us
731 is no better or worse than any other member makes it easier to live with our past, and to begin to hope
732 for our future. It also means that we can see our success as part of our lives, but not as our whole
733 identity: a change in our status for better or worse doesn't have to destroy us. Our practice of
734 anonymity means that we can continue to grow in good times and bad, and that we can continue to see
735 the benefit of practicing a program of recovery even when our lives are extraordinary.

736 Honest self assessment is essential to recovery, but it's only possible if we are vulnerable enough to let
737 someone in. We choose those mirrors carefully, seeking those we can trust to be honest, helpful, and kind.
738 This difficult process is made harder when we are admired for our accomplishments, profession or social
739 status; we may find that people are reluctant to tell us about our flaws. They may not even see them.
740 When we treat a member as a persona rather than as another addict seeking recovery, we deprive them of
741 the opportunity to experience the recovery they may desperately need. None of our members is more or
742 less valuable than any other; when we forget this, we harm each other and the fellowship as a whole.

743 We have so much to offer. We are good listeners, and we've experienced a lot. We know how to find
744 the strength and hope in our experience. We are on a path and we're conscious of our journey. We are
745 each in our own way loving, caring and generous. NA is boot camp for caring: we can learn more about
746 empathy in our first year in NA than most people do in a lifetime. What we learn about living in NA is
747 applicable outside, as well, and we can be good friends to others whether they're in recovery or not.
748 "My higher power can use me to help a recovering addict, but that's not all: I can help others as well."
749 The tools and principles we learn here can serve others in and out of the fellowship. When we venture
750 out we get to discover how useful we can be.

751 **The Gift of Hope**

752 "I learned responsibility by watching others be responsible," a member shared. We learn from each
753 others' examples. We have sponsors but also predecessors, mentors, footprints we walk in. Telling the
754 truth about ourselves doesn't just set us free; our example frees others. Even in our most painful
755 moments we can still be a vision of what is possible. If we're willing to include the people we sponsor
756 and draw them closer as we go through an ordeal, they can offer support and reassurance we dearly
757 need. We also give them the chance to learn from our mistakes. We can be an example of strength and
758 perseverance for others, and we can look to others for hope, as well.

759 The NA program gives us tools for living. No matter where we are in our recovery or our lives, we
760 believe it can get better, and that we can get better. The work is never-ending, and the rewards of living
761 the program are ongoing, as well. We work to improve our circumstances, creating or recreating a life
762 that matches our vision for ourselves. Often the change we seek is in our ideas and attitudes. We learn
763 to see the world more clearly.

764 As we practice the principles, our understanding grows and deepens. We learn that there is no limit on
765 the process. There are no limits to where our recovery can take us, no limits to how much we can grow.
766 When we harbor a reservation in our Second Step and think there are some parts of who we are that
767 cannot be restored, we sell ourselves short. When we accept the possibility that there is no end to what
768 recovery has to offer, we begin to understand that spirituality is not just a way out. It's a way of life that
769 will continue to bring us new challenges, new possibilities, and new awareness as long as we practice it.
770 We find that if we allow ourselves to be motivated not by fear of what has been but by hope for what is
771 possible, we are as excited to move forward when life is good as we are when we are struggling.

772 When we feel the deepest gratitude, we can look back and see that our path to that moment was
773 neither short nor straight, and that some of what seemed like our worst decisions opened the door for
774 some of our greatest gifts later on. We may find that we have simply outgrown some of our decisions.
775 God's will for us can be a twisty path. It may not follow the route we thought. The dream we were
776 chasing may bring us somewhere we hadn't seen before. What is right for us at one point in our
777 recovery may not be right for the rest of our lives, but it can be very difficult to let go. Blessings can
778 come wrapped in such strange packages that we don't always recognize them when they arrive. We
779 don't pretend that there are no mistakes in recovery, but sometimes those mistakes can take us in a
780 new direction we hadn't thought of before. Sometimes life does for us what we cannot do for ourselves.
781 When we find our place, we fit like a piece in a puzzle. It feels right.

782 "Recovering in complete creative freedom" means that we can do what we want with our lives. The first
783 time we believe we can stay clean, we begin to understand that we have a choice about our lives. But
784 living out our choices takes courage, patience and perseverance. We have to be willing to hang in there
785 when it gets hard, and keep going when we're not sure we're getting anywhere. We keep doing what's
786 necessary to care for ourselves as we move forward. If we don't stop doing the basics, we never have to
787 get back to them. The same tools that brought us freedom in the beginning can keep working, if we
788 continue to use them with the same willingness.

789 We start in different places and move in different directions. Together we rise to the point of freedom.
790 We need each other to get there, and one of the most beautiful things we do in fellowship is support
791 each other in pursuit of our dreams. Sharing our hopes and our successes is as much a part of carrying
792 our message as sharing our fears and difficulties. We have a message of hope to carry. It's a gift and an
793 obligation. We may not relate exactly to one another's dreams but we can relate to the hope, energy,
794 and excitement of trying to realize them. We are inspired by one another's journeys. Being present to
795 one another's growth gives us the tools and inspiration to move forward ourselves. New beginnings are
796 possible any time we are ready. But we also find we are able to hang in, follow through and live the lives
797 we create. Our recovery is something we can trust and believe in.

798 We are loved and our lives have meaning today. We do remarkable things with our lives – sometimes by
799 accomplishing great things, and sometimes simply by being ourselves. A member complained to her
800 sponsor that as a homemaker she felt she wasn't really doing enough with her life or her time, that
801 maybe she should have done something more important. Her sponsor smiled, "Are you kidding? By
802 breaking the cycle of addiction in your family, you're changing history!" Our greatest achievements may
803 not be the things anyone else ever knows about: the simple fact that we survive our own stories is
804 monumental. That we go on to help others and live lives we can be proud of is beyond our wildest
805 dreams. Whatever we do, we make a difference in the world because we're clean.

Living Clean – Chapter Seven

The Journey Continues

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40

Awakenings

A spiritual awakening is just that – an awakening. We still have to get out of bed. Some people awaken for just a moment and then doze off again. If we want to stay awake and alive, if we want the miracle of recovery to continue to unfold in our lives, we find ways to put this awakening into action. The foundation of our recovery is that we have to get out of ourselves in order to live. If we're not carrying the message, we go to sleep again.

The spiritual awakening we have when we walk in the doors of NA is only the beginning. We seem to awaken in stages, not all at once. Each of us experiences new awakenings as we examine our beliefs and practice living by them. Honesty, Open-mindedness and Willingness are often the first spiritual principles we experiment with. Spirituality is progressive, dynamic and creative. We learn more principles as we go, and some become more important to us than others. Over time, we gain more experience with using them to guide our actions. There is no substitute for time in recovery. It gives us a chance to heal, grow up, start over, and build lives that matter to us and to the people around us. But time itself doesn't heal, grow us up, or start us over. What matters most is the action we take in our recovery. We start at different places and recover in different ways. Some of us may find it easy to rejoin society, but take a long time to learn how to build meaningful relationships. Others of us never seem to get the "outsides" together, but we love with a power that is breathtaking. It would be nice if we could say that certain things reliably happen at five years, or ten or twenty, but it's really not the case. When we get clean at a young age, the passages we go through may be different than those a member might go through who gets here later in life. But we do share a lot on the journey.

In early recovery, many of us move back and forth between genuine excitement at our new possibilities and sorrow for what we have lost. Some of us describe early recovery as a "pink cloud" and others tell about a long season of grief. We move between many new feelings, sometimes very quickly. We grow and change, we build and lose relationships, we go to meetings, and we learn. Throughout our recovery we experience new awakenings, new surrenders and new freedoms. The simple principles we learn when we are new take on deeper meaning as we practice them in our lives. Just when we thought we knew all that recovery had to offer, it opens up again – if we are willing to accept the gift.

Consistent application of the tools of recovery changes us. The process is ongoing, and the work we do on the steps is only part of the process. We come to live them. They shape how we think, how we feel, and how we respond to the world. The steps teach us to grow up and help others. Humility is honesty about who and what we are. We learn to love ourselves by speaking the truth. Accepting our assets is part of our amends to ourselves, but more importantly it makes it possible for us to make our amends to society. We start to develop a vision of who we are and who we can become, with all our assets operating. We may still wrestle with our defects, but we are able to see better who we are becoming. We come to see how much we have and how much we have to offer. There's a difference between being in the program and living the program. We can feel the connection even if we have been away for a while. When we come to an understanding of this program for ourselves, it becomes our own, and it becomes a part of us.

Draft material for review and input. Deadline for input is 31 December 2010.

41 We can measure our lives not in years or by the things we gain or lose, but by the degree to which we
42 make peace with our own lives and the world around us. Spiritual growth is the real success. As our
43 recovery unfolds we find ourselves resolving feelings we never admitted we had. A member shared, “I
44 kept thinking I was supposed to be better or get better, but instead I get to know myself better.” Open-
45 mindedness gives us the ability to see more and more clearly within ourselves as we go through the
46 never-ending process of surrendering, taking inventory, and inviting change.

47 We surrender, accept ourselves in the moment, and graciously allow our lives to unfold. Finally, we can
48 stop looking for the piece of the puzzle that will make it all okay. We let go of our fear of change and
49 come to realize that it’s constant. We are all changing, all the time. We can embrace that and know that
50 we can stay clean no matter what. The process is simpler, and doing the right thing comes more
51 naturally.

52 We discover that the things we care about and value the most are the will of our Higher Power for us.
53 Building a spiritual life that we can grow with is a creative action. It requires that we practice, develop
54 our beliefs, and apply them to our lives. Step Eleven does not say “we maintain a conscious contact;” it
55 says that “we sought to improve our conscious contact.” When we practice our program, this
56 relationship doesn’t just get more important -- it gets better. Our spiritual experience doesn’t have to
57 make sense to anyone but ourselves. Embracing the part of ourselves that is creative – that changes the
58 things around us in a meaningful and positive way – is an act of self acceptance that becomes visible in
59 our lives.

60 Self-acceptance frees us to do the next right thing, or to wait peacefully for the next words or actions to
61 emerge. When we’re no longer in the middle of the storm we begin to understand ourselves, our
62 disease and our recovery in different ways. We can be ourselves in the present moment – without fear
63 or apology, without the need for approval or justification. Life gets easier.

64 Wisdom is building on past experience to cope with new events. When we think about our lives now in
65 contrast to our active addiction, it is important to remember that “it is not where we have been that
66 counts, but where we are going.” But where we have been in recovery is important. We learn from our
67 experience, and we use it to help others. Where we have been is the foundation of our wisdom. It grows
68 as we learn to learn from it without judging or jumping to conclusions. As we gain experience we don’t
69 feel as much like we have to go out on a limb to act on our beliefs. When our spirituality leads us, we
70 can move through our lives with ease.

71 When a dancer moves through space with intention and beauty, we know they are graceful. In the same
72 way, when we move through our lives with intention and gratitude, we demonstrate grace; when we
73 crash from one self-willed experience to another, creating damage and confusion, we are dis-graceful. If
74 we are willing to return to humility and gratitude, our lives “magically” get easier. Living spiritually can
75 become as simple as doing the next right thing. A member shared, “even when I can’t identify the next
76 right thing, I can generally see the next wrong thing and stay away from it.”

77 Our lives in recovery are so unlike what brought us here that we may not know what to do. Sometimes
78 even achieving our goals can seem to make our lives unmanageable. A member shared, “as I started to
79 get everything back, it dawned on me that what I wanted back was really dysfunctional. I had to
80 implement what I had learned. I had a new way to live, but putting it into action was something else.”
81 Experience is a mighty teacher, if we are willing to look for the lesson. Awareness creates a foundation

82 for new ideas; life provides opportunities to put that new information into action. Adapting to new
 83 information can take some time. Awareness that we are in possession of a precious gift changes how we
 84 see ourselves and our world: we are able to recognize grace in our lives. When we are freed from
 85 obsession and self will, we can be in the moment. We experience grace.

86 Joy and gratitude walk hand in hand. Being spiritually awake, we can see the miracles that surround us,
 87 even when things are hard. That deep sense of joy does not require that we be happy all the time. It's
 88 bigger than that. For some of us, that joy is the sense that we are part of something much larger than
 89 ourselves, and more important than our immediate feelings and experiences. Humility is understanding
 90 our place in the world, joy is being able to see our purpose in its proper scale. We matter, but we matter
 91 most when we're connecting with others. Loving and giving are the most natural things we do, but we
 92 never stop learning how to do them better. Generosity of spirit is the antidote for loneliness and
 93 alienation.

94 **Living Our Principles**

95 Finding a balance between the program that gives us our lives and the lives the program has given us
 96 can be challenging. We are continually finding a balance between NA and the rest of our lives. This is
 97 where we learn the skills that lead us to be able to live our dreams, but our dreams may take us far from
 98 where we thought we would be. For some of us, recovery is a full-time job; for others, NA forms the
 99 bridge that connects us to our world. A member shared, "NA has been the springboard for my life, but it
 100 hasn't necessarily been the pool." Some of us find that the challenge of going back and forth between
 101 worlds diminishes, as does the sense that we're living a double life. Others of us find that as our lives
 102 develop, it gets harder to find a balance that works for us. It would be self-defeating never to venture
 103 outside of NA. But we put ourselves at risk when we mistake our new freedom for "graduation." Just as
 104 tightrope walkers maintain balance by making small adjustments all along the way, we stay balanced by
 105 being flexible in our recovery. As we go through different seasons of life, the balance fluctuates. Many of
 106 us find that we go through periods of being very structured and scheduled, and times when we are more
 107 relaxed.

108 Maintaining recovery as a priority may come to mean different things for us over time. Commitment to
 109 recovery is essential for us. We need to maintain our connection to NA, but taking responsibility for our
 110 lives also matters. Finding the balance is an ongoing negotiation. So many things compete for our
 111 attention, and as addicts we have a tendency to think in extremes: all or nothing, right or wrong.
 112 Attending meetings regularly doesn't have to mean every night of the week – but it continues to matter
 113 for our own well-being and for our ability to carry the message. But keeping that lifeline strong and
 114 available is a matter of continuing maintenance. It gets easier when we let go of the idea that it ought to
 115 be hard. After many years of recovery, a member shared that he was finally able to answer the question,
 116 "is it possible that life is really this simple?" with a simple, "yes."

117 We can see the changes in our lives and in our thinking, and we know that recovery works for us. The
 118 more we know that, the more we can see what is still to be done. The realization that we can always get
 119 better brings its own freedom. We don't have to get caught up in ideas of where we "should be" at this
 120 point in our recovery. We have ideas about what our lives are supposed to look like "by now," and we
 121 shame ourselves for not being there. This is an issue in early recovery, but it comes back as we get some

122 clean time. A member who was homeless on his 20th anniversary was ashamed to celebrate. “What have
123 I got to show the newcomer?” he asked. “That you can stay clean no matter what,” came the reply.
124 Acceptance frees us to share about our lives as they are without feeling that we have to fit into a model
125 or be anyone other than who we are. Serenity doesn’t mean that we don’t experience dramatic events.
126 It gives us the clarity of mind to go through them. No matter what happens, we can remain whole and
127 happy at our core.

128 Our understanding of the steps deepens, and we start to see the possibilities that they offer in new
129 ways. The more we trust, the more our eyes are opened. We are no longer so focused on what is wrong
130 with us; we start to shift our attention to the assets we have and the hope we can see for ourselves.
131 When we can separate hope from wishing or expectation, it stops feeling like such a “set-up.” More and
132 more we are driven by hope rather than fear. The gratitude we feel grows from relief at not having to
133 use today to real appreciation for our lives as they are, and as they can be. When we put gratitude into
134 action we see the world differently. A member shared, “my touch has come back, my smell and taste are
135 alive. My children and grandchildren run into my arms and are safe there. People who come into my life
136 go away with something good.” The sense of wonder we experience at our own lives – as if we were
137 seeing them for the first time – brings an array of feelings. Our hearts break for the harm we have
138 caused while at the same time we are filled with joy and gratitude for the gift of recovery.

139 Our ability to feel joy and gratitude can be a direct result of the suffering we have endured. Staying
140 clean is not a guarantee that nothing bad will happen. But the principles in the steps teach us how to
141 live on life’s terms and give us the courage, strength and wisdom to stay clean no matter what. We are
142 able to live lives of joy and purpose no matter what we have been through. Faith is what keeps us doing
143 the footwork even when we can’t see what for.

144 Knowing our spirituality cannot be taken from us gives us permission to hope in a new way. Many of us
145 are uncomfortable with hope. We have been so deeply disappointed in our lives that hope just feels like
146 a set-up. Some of us can’t tell the difference between hope and wishing. But the hope we get in
147 recovery is not that we’ll win the lottery or that our true love will return to us. Hope begins when we
148 think that it may just be possible for us to stop acting against our own will and stay clean. It happens
149 again and again as our journey continues: in the dark moments when we realize we can go on anyway,
150 and in our triumphs -- it is possible. It’s possible we can break the cycle, it’s possible we can exceed our
151 dreams, it’s possible that we are much more than we ever gave ourselves credit for. Each time we
152 realize it’s possible, our faith grows stronger. Hope doesn’t end. No matter how much better or worse it
153 gets, we know that there is still reason to look forward. We begin to experience unconditional hope.

154 We learn what’s true for us by going through difficulty, staying clean, and looking back on the
155 experience. We may think we’re the ones being tested, but the reality is that we are continually testing
156 our faith and understanding against our experience. When we go through difficulty in recovery it can
157 feel like we’re in the same place we were before we got clean. And while sometimes we recreate old
158 experiences in our new lives, more often we mistake a temporary difficulty for a permanent condition.
159 Making peace with loss is one way we learn acceptance. Like so many lessons in recovery, there are less
160 painful ways to learn but they’re not always the ones that stay with us. When we experience loss and
161 find that we can still feel complete within ourselves, something changes. The feeling that we must
162 constantly fight for our survival starts to ease. We find that we can let someone else be right, or let
163 something go, without losing ourselves or our dignity. We can see our part in situations without falling

164 into the belief that everything has to be somebody's fault. Acceptance is not an all-or-nothing event,
165 and it doesn't necessarily happen all at once. Often, a loss we're struggling to accept in the present
166 helps us to deal with earlier losses that haunt us.

167 It's wonderful to be able to feel good again. Even pain is okay sometimes – it helps us feel human. But
168 sometimes it seems like we don't have our hand on the emotional volume knob. "When I started to feel,
169 I had no control over my emotions," a member shared. "I learned different ways to deal with them over
170 time. My sponsor taught me to name my feelings and had me create a written list of healthy things I
171 could do when I was emotional." Our feelings won't swallow us, and at some level it really doesn't
172 matter what we feel. What matters is what we do. We no longer have to act on our impulses and
173 emotions. We can make choices in our lives today about what we do and how we respond.

174 The practice we get in having compassion for others teaches us to have compassion for ourselves. Some
175 of us ask ourselves how we would respond to a spouse going through what we're struggling with.
176 When we realize we've survived every emotion we've had, we start to believe that we're going to be
177 alright even when we don't feel alright. Our best lessons often come in looking back at our own bad
178 behavior. Our regret helps us to find compassion for others and a sense of possibility for our new way of
179 life. Getting some perspective means that we can put a little distance between our thoughts, our
180 feelings and our actions. Our feelings won't kill us, but denying them might. It's usually when we're
181 trying to avoid a feeling that we act out, creating damage and confusion to divert attention. Admitting
182 our feelings, even when we're judging ourselves for having them, is one way we practice honesty.

183 We may still get depressed or frightened or angry, but it doesn't have to take possession of us anymore.
184 We come to see our addiction in different ways, and to recognize it in different feelings and behaviors.
185 Sometimes it's as simple as obsession and compulsion, but we may also recognize it in a need to be in
186 control, fear of being wrong, self-pity and self-righteousness. We can see it in other behaviors as well,
187 including conformity, mistrust, inability to feel love or sadness, and fear of change. We learn to
188 recognize our own dis-ease as we get better at being aware of what's happening inside us. When we are
189 better able to look at ourselves honestly, and understand how we work, it's easier for us to accept
190 ourselves. Honest self assessment requires a little detachment, so we can stop judging and become
191 willing to change.

192 We rely on a strong foundation, and we never stop working on it. We know what we can expect when
193 we walk into an NA meeting, and that makes us feel safe and secure. We may resist changes to the
194 format or style of our meetings even when they're a good idea, because we hold so tightly to that
195 sameness. In other areas of our lives as well, making changes can be a challenge. When we're
196 experiencing change, we want to hurry back to a place of comfort and familiarity. Allowing ourselves to
197 have an emotional life without being driven by our feelings is a new freedom. Understanding is
198 important, but it doesn't help much without application. We apply the principles, and we apply effort.
199 We apply ourselves to changing our perspective and our lives. We forget, when things get difficult, that
200 we already have a life we love and enjoy. We don't have to deny reality to have hope or gratitude. We
201 feel what we feel, but we do the footwork anyway. We learn not to take our feelings quite so seriously.
202 "My feelings aren't facts," said a member, "but I still feel them." When we're not looking through the
203 lens of resentment and entitlement, we can see the world as it is, and find beauty in it even when it's
204 hard. Each day is filled with opportunities either to escape reality or to show up and live.

Draft material for review and input. Deadline for input is 31 December 2010.

205 The Lifelong Practice of Surrender

206 Our understanding of surrender may change over time, but our need for it does not. In the beginning, it
207 may just be about not using drugs. As time goes by, we start to see other ways our addiction plays out in
208 our lives. We become willing to surrender other behaviors, sometimes one by one. We come to
209 understand that using – whatever we’re using – is just a symptom of our problem, which is spiritual in
210 nature. Gradually we start to let go of the things that drive us to that behavior: denial, anger,
211 resentment, the need to be right, the feeling of superiority or inferiority, shame and remorse and fear.
212 Surrender rarely looks appealing in the beginning, but it takes us progressively less time to notice when
213 what we’re doing isn’t working. Our tolerance for pain diminishes as we recover, and we are less willing
214 to go along with things that wound our spirit. It may be that we continue to surrender only when we’re
215 beaten, but it takes a lot less time to admit defeat. As we have more experience with the hope and
216 healing that follows surrender, we can recognize it as a way to put our feet back on the ground. The shift
217 from thinking that we are surrendering to our disease to realizing that we can surrender to our recovery
218 is a spiritual awakening in itself.

219 Changing our perception is like seeing the world through a different pair of glasses. Surrender is a shift
220 in perception: we’re no longer looking for an angle at which we can take control. Honesty can shift our
221 perception: it opens us to the truth inside ourselves. A member shared that when she started an extra-
222 marital affair, “A friend asked, ‘never mind what other people say – what are your morals and values
223 today? What is important to you?’ It was so simple, it was like a light going on.” We begin to see more
224 clearly what it might mean to live according to the will of our Higher Power. A series of spiritual
225 awakenings add up to a steady faith.

226 Fear is a natural feeling. The question is what we do with it. Steps Three and Eleven allow us to invite a
227 loving higher power into our decisions, and Step Ten helps us to check ourselves as we go. “I can tell my
228 priority setting skills have improved since I’ve been clean,” a member shared, “because I have different
229 priorities now.” We are often the last ones to see or acknowledge our own growth. When we see other
230 members recovering and their lives improving, we are reminded that the same is happening for us. As
231 our awareness deepens, we continue to find areas of our lives that need work. As we change, we adjust.
232 And as we adjust, our balance shifts and we change some more. Feeling like we know it all is often
233 followed by the feeling that we know nothing. It’s a nice feeling, for the moment that it lasts – and then
234 we get to learn more about surrender.

235 Each time we let go, there’s a little mourning and then an opening of possibility. Each time we get
236 through that process we find a new freedom in ourselves. But it can take years to let go enough to feel
237 that freedom. We hang on fiercely, mistaking the attempt to control all the variables in our lives for
238 vigilance in our recovery. Letting go looks different at different times in our recovery.

239 We learn not to take ourselves too seriously. At the end of the road, nothing was funny anymore, but as
240 we let go of worry, shame, anger and confusion we start to relax. One of the gifts of recovery is
241 regaining our sense of humor. It comes and goes, of course, but when we lose our sense of humor it’s a
242 pretty good sign that we could benefit from a change in perspective. A member shared about a woman
243 in her home group whose laugh would fill the room: “her laughter gave me hope. It had so much love
244 and self-acceptance in it. You could hear the joy.” We can laugh because things are meaningful, or
245 because we know they’re going to be okay. We can see the magic and the irony in our lives, and enjoy it.

246 Lightening up is a necessary step on the way to enlightenment! The humor we find in each other's
247 stories is one way we know we're in the right place. Some of us find that the problem isn't our sense of
248 humor, but that we don't have good filters. What's funny to us tends to change as we grow. We are less
249 amused by the suffering of others, and more able to see the lighter side of heavy situations.

250 There are reservations we can see and name when we work our steps, but sometimes we don't know
251 we have a reservation until we bump up against it. They can be surprising things – not what we
252 predicted at all. One member shared that he struggled with pride and complacency when he finished
253 the steps. Another went through a hard time and lost hope. "I didn't know how much faith I had until I
254 lost it," she shared. "Recovery started to seem meaningless. Dry and cynical, I couldn't check this
255 negativity by myself. I had to seek out opportunities to witness the miracle happening." Others have
256 shared that it got hard when things got good: our lives get better, and we think 'okay, I'm done.' Not
257 only do we risk losing what we have, we miss out on the opportunity to get even better than we are. We
258 can lose everything to a failure of imagination. Complacency lies in the gulf between desperation and
259 passion. Not seeing the hope that lies before us, we stop seeing the fear that lingers behind us. Rather
260 than moving from desperation to passion, we move from desperation to complacency. It's better than
261 what we had, but we're still selling ourselves short.

262 The stories are so much the same, but we don't see it when we're in it: we get lost in work or church or
263 some other activity, thinking that NA is stifling or limiting our growth in some way, or that we've "grown
264 past" this recovery stuff; we lose a sponsor, or move, and just never reconnect. We can't see how
265 addiction is affecting us, especially when the destruction is different than before. It is possible to fall
266 asleep in this program and think we're still awake. The living skills we gain in recovery can become part
267 of our denial structure. The issue isn't that everyone who does this relapses; it's that everyone who
268 relapses shares this part of the story. The risk of relapse doesn't end when we get some clean time.

269 Complacency is a watchword for all of us, but it shows up in different ways at different times. Most of all
270 what we know about complacency is that we rarely recognize it when we're in it. In some ways, there's
271 not much sense trying to talk about it before we experience it. We always believe our own experience
272 will be different. Most of us don't recognize it until it hurts. Sometimes it's a gradual process: we drift
273 away from friends, stop going to meetings, get busy at work or start developing resentments. A little at a
274 time, we stop working on our recovery and our disease starts gaining a foothold. "I was on the road a lot
275 for work," one member shared, "and it stopped being a big deal to not show up." Thinking that we no
276 longer have to be vigilant about meeting attendance, step work, or sponsorship can lead us to
277 predictable places. A member with many years clean admitted, "to this day, I still try to talk myself out
278 of qualifying for this program. The majority of my problems are related to my self-centeredness and
279 immaturity, and I want to separate that from my addiction. I start thinking, 'You're older now, wiser and
280 more mature. Real addicts don't stay clean this long...' My own cleantime becomes a reservation." Some
281 of us fear contentment or serenity because it might look like, or lead to, complacency. Finding the
282 balance is a challenge. We learn to be content without being complacent – we can be very happy with
283 our lives as they are, and still not stop doing the basics. We can slow down without stopping. If we don't
284 stop doing the basics, we never have to get back to them.

285 Just as a battery can't recharge itself, chances are we can't put the spark back into our own recovery
286 without some outside power. Thinking about recovery never helps as much as getting out and taking

287 action, especially when we don't want to. Connecting with those who have enthusiasm and hope is a
288 beginning. Participation in the life of our fellowship keeps NA alive – but it also keeps the spirit of
289 recovery alive within ourselves. Celebration can propel us out of complacency, and many members find
290 that a good convention or retreat can get the gratitude flowing again. Sometimes celebrating the
291 anniversary of an addict who's important to us reminds us what a miracle it is that we're still here.
292 When the steps are an ongoing part of our lives, we are called pretty regularly to examine our lives and
293 see what about them is working and what can be improved. It's natural that we will take a hard look
294 sometimes at NA, too. We consider our fellowship, how we see ourselves in it, and our beliefs about it.
295 It can be very uncomfortable and frightening. But when we give ourselves the space to examine our
296 commitment, we can be honest about it – just like any other relationship. NA changes. People come and
297 go. But we change, too. The time we have available, our relationships with others, the way we're
298 comfortable serving or participating – all change naturally over the course of our lives.

299 When our beliefs and perceptions are changing, we can experience pain and confusion that leave us
300 feeling very isolated. We can be cut off from others, but also from ourselves and our Higher Power.
301 Sharing with others is critical at these moments. It can be surprising how welcome that sharing is. When
302 we are honest and real, we connect with people. When we have a lot of clean time, we can get caught
303 up in what we think we're supposed to share in meetings. But the message we think we should be
304 carrying can sometimes be pretty far removed from what we're experiencing in the present.

305 Acceptance of our changing spirituality is part of our personal evolution. If our relationship with a Higher
306 Power is real and meaningful, of course it's going to change over time. But sometimes this feels like a
307 crisis. If we surrender, it drives us back to the steps, and in revisiting Steps Two and Three we can find a
308 relationship to faith that makes more sense to us. After all, if we're not truthful with our Higher Power,
309 how do any of our other relationships stand a chance? As our values change, our beliefs are likely to
310 develop as well. Letting go of the perception that we have to understand why things happen or how it
311 all works frees us to have a spiritual experience without wondering if it's right or proper.

312 When what we're doing isn't working, we stop. But when what we're doing is halfway working, we tend
313 to keep going even if it's uncomfortable, because we're used to it. A member confessed, "the longer I'm
314 clean, the less I'm willing." Just like in the beginning, we may have to fight our impulses and make
315 ourselves do what we know is right. A service commitment at a group gets us there when desire doesn't.
316 Sometimes it's sharing with a newcomer that brings us out of our funk; in the middle of carrying the
317 message we remember that we have one. Sometimes we just have to get honest about where we're at,
318 and let go of the belief that we're not supposed to share about feeling bad or wanting to use if we have
319 the most clean time in the room. Even when we don't want to, we know what to do: if you're feeling
320 complacent, come place your rear end in a seat. The message is waiting.

321 Principles, Practice and Perspective

322 Whether they had three years or thirty, we recall the members who had the most time when we got
323 clean. We may or may not have liked them, but still they were important to us. We depend on those
324 with more clean-time to teach us and energize our recovery, but eventually we find that we are standing
325 where they once did. We look around for the old-timers and notice – we're them. We are grateful for
326 those who are still with us, but we must also be open to learning from those who come after us, or we
327 will get very lonely. Anonymity means that we are all equals in NA, no matter how much clean time we

328 have. Remembering that can be hard sometimes, and it can also be a task to remind each other that it's
329 true. We can get caught up in other people's expectations, or our own expectations of where we should
330 be or what we should know with our clean time. A member shared that being an elder was
331 uncomfortable: "I'm the one people come to with questions, and I don't feel equal. It's not about feeling
332 'better than' but separate from." Honesty, humility and a healthy sense of humor can help us navigate
333 through these challenges. We learn to help members answer their own questions, and not to feed the
334 image of ourselves as an authority figure. Just because people ask for our advice doesn't mean we're
335 qualified to give it. We share our experience, strength and hope; but we are careful with our opinions,
336 especially when we know they're taken seriously. It's nice to feel important or respected, but we indulge
337 it at our peril. When we allow our fellow members to believe that we no longer have needs, the result is
338 that we have nowhere to go when we're in pain.

339 No amount of cleantime can make us immune to our disease or exempt us from the challenges of life.
340 Recovery is an every day, just for today process. A relationship with our higher power requires ongoing
341 conscious contact, and ongoing growth requires that we stay teachable. "Keeping it green" means that
342 we are still in process, that we're still willing to change and grow and work on ourselves. We keep the
343 magic of our recovery alive by feeding it. If we're not getting ongoing support and nourishment, we get
344 depleted. It's our responsibility to find that, even if it means reaching out across long distances.

345 Working a program can mean different things from person to person, and at different times in our
346 recovery. It might mean that we're writing, we're serving, we're attending meetings – or just that we are
347 practicing a conscious contact with our higher power. A member shared, "I have worked the steps, and I
348 have not worked the steps. And I've experienced the consequences of both." Our willingness to pay the
349 price for acting out on our defects starts to fade. Whatever it means for us, we have a responsibility to
350 walk our talk. The idea that 'if you want what we have, do what we do' has no expiration date.

351 The simple fact is, if we stay clean, one day we'll be the one with the most time in the room. It's a gift, a
352 responsibility and a pitfall, all at once. Many members share that it's easy to feel separate when there's
353 a gap in cleantime. We may feel like the newer people don't understand us, or that there's no one we
354 can reach out to for help. When we're more aware of our responsibility than of our ability to get what
355 we need, we get lonely. "Sometimes being the member in the room with the most time feels as
356 daunting as walking into those first ninety meetings," a member admitted. We don't always know when
357 or how we will find ourselves in trouble, and we certainly don't know who is going to get us out. It's one
358 of the most beautiful things about NA – someone always steps up to the plate. It's almost never who we
359 expect. We don't get to make choices about who is allowed to save our lives.

360 Newer members expect oldtimers to be stable, grounded and principled – and often we are. But there
361 will always be times when we fall short. Sometimes we can feel like we're on a pedestal or under a
362 microscope. Once we lose the feeling that we are an ordinary "garden variety addict" like everyone else,
363 it can be hard to regain. We seek out others who have had that experience, and ask them how they
364 handled it. We are addicts in recovery, doing our best to learn how to live. When we remember that, the
365 rest falls into place.

366 It's sometimes said our emotional development stops when we start using, and that when we get clean,
367 we pick up where we left off. It may or may not be that simple, but the fact is that most of us have some

368 serious maturing to do in recovery, and we can spend many years in the process. Really basic questions
369 suddenly become important. Am I visible? Am I heard? Do I matter? We are desperate for recognition
370 and approval. Most of us go through this at some time in our recovery, and it's neither selfless nor
371 anonymous. It may be destructive, but it's part of our process.

372 It can be appealing to get up on a pedestal. Actually, many people on pedestals don't volunteer for it –
373 and once we're up there we may not know how to get down. The less we believe we deserve that
374 attention, the more insecure we get – and the more approval we seek. When we're past that point in
375 our lives, we can look back and see the humor in wanting to be a celebrity in an anonymous fellowship.
376 But when we're in that place, it can feel like the most important thing in the world. When people treat
377 us differently because of our clean time or our service, it can get very lonely and very strange. A
378 member with a lot of time said, "When I was new, you loved me but you didn't baby me. Don't do it
379 now. It's condescending and it separates me from any other recovering addict." It's the separation that
380 makes that position so dangerous.

381 As willing as some of us are to put people up on pedestals, others of us are even more eager to knock
382 them down. We can be mean and spiteful, judgmental and harsh. Kicking the pedestal doesn't help us to
383 change. A member shared, "any time I've been crazy, when it all came crashing down the people I came
384 to weren't the mean judgmental ones, but the ones who had been honest and loving." If we want to
385 help someone down, waiting may be the best we can do. Time is more powerful than we are. We may or
386 may not be the people to carry the message to a friend who forgets we're all equal here. The truth is,
387 yanking someone's covers is an incredibly intimate experience. It may or may not be our job. If we don't
388 pay attention to circumstances, what we do may simply be violent. Being humble and honest is a better
389 approach than trying to be someone else's conscience.

390 Consciousness can change through its surroundings, with no action needed. "At some point," shared a
391 member, "I had all the attention I could stand, and I started pushing the next guy up front." This is our
392 learning ground, and sometimes we make a mess in the process. It can be a wonderful aid in helping us
393 get free of our need for approval. "I really, finally, don't care what people think of me," said an older
394 member. There's a real freedom in knowing that. When we are secure in ourselves, we carry a message
395 of freedom without saying a word. The fact is that we don't have to live perfectly to carry a message.
396 More importantly, we don't get to choose who deserves to be a vehicle for something greater. We can
397 carry a message even if we're not quite living it, and some people are helped by it. But inside, it is slowly
398 destructive. When our expectations start to make our choices for us, we can become disillusioned,
399 disconnected and fearful of the very thing that saves our lives.

400 "Time is time, and in the end what it gets me is a seat in a meeting like everyone else," a member
401 shared. We come to enjoy our own anonymity, even if people still call us out as special. When we share
402 from the heart, we generally don't remember much about what we share. We disconnect from ego and
403 something else happens: the truth comes through us, and it takes on a life of its own. We hear the
404 gratitude after we speak, and know it's not for us. It's the love that came through us that taught us all
405 something in the moment. The love that we feel in the room is more powerful than any words that are
406 shared. When we glimpse what it is we are allowed to be a channel for, we are truly humbled.

407 The best way to model recovery is to walk the walk, and show up honest and real. When we're sort of
408 showing up and we're sort of honest, we're "sort of" in danger. We need to remember that our first job,

409 always, is to save our own lives. Sharing what is real for us is part of carrying the message, even when it
410 doesn't make us look good. A member shared, "I remember the people who were here when I got here
411 and how they bared their souls in meetings, and I follow suit. It's a benefit to my recovery and a
412 responsibility to those who follow." We learn from each other's experience. We find people who have
413 what we want, regardless of cleantime. Sharing our journey with others is how we teach and learn at
414 the same time. Honest sharing is always attractive, even when we're sharing some really unattractive
415 things. When we are honest and open, it resonates with people. When we are humble, they feel it – and
416 so do we.

417 We all need to re-energize ourselves sometimes – physically, emotionally and spiritually. We separate
418 these parts of ourselves so we can talk about them more easily, but really they're all connected. Just as
419 we may be much more emotionally sensitive when we're physically tired, we find that when we're
420 emotionally exhausted we're prone to get physically sick. When we're spiritually exhausted we can feel
421 deeply insecure. Some of us are at our best when we're moving and busy; others of us recharge when
422 we're alone and quiet. It may be as simple as sitting down for a brief meditation or showing up at a
423 meeting after some time away. However it works best for us, we have a choice every day to treat
424 ourselves well or badly.

425 There are no bitter ends in recovery, but sometimes it feels like that's where we are. We start
426 wondering if recovery will last, or if we've just gotten a brief reprieve and we're about to go crazy again.
427 "At ten years clean I hit a wall," said a member. "For me the turnaround was a group of newcomers
428 whose passion and intensity woke me up. It was the same passion that kept me clean in the beginning."
429 Once we've been through this feeling and survived it clean, we know it won't last forever. But that
430 doesn't mean we can see our way out. We come through these experiences with a deepened
431 understanding and faith in our recovery. Whether it's through hard work or grace, if we keep coming
432 back we do get free.

433 Reaching out might be the best thing we can do for ourselves – and for those around us. Seeing the
434 program work in another person's life affirms our commitment and gives us hope. We can recognize the
435 change in others before we see it in ourselves. Some of us thrive on working with newcomers. We only
436 keep what we have by giving it away, but we don't know what we have until we start to give. In the
437 moment, dealing with someone who is struggling or in pain, we find resources within us that we never
438 knew about. It's hard sometimes to watch the spark land, flash and go out – over and over again. When
439 we see someone really get it and take off, it gives us a gratitude we never thought possible. We don't
440 get to choose who gets recovery. It's not up to us to choose who to help. When we show up and do our
441 part, the message gets carried. It might be carried where we wish it would, or it might be that we're the
442 ones getting it today. "When I'm helping someone through the steps, I feel like an instrument of my
443 Higher Power's will," a member said. "I'm not in charge. My responsibility is just to stay close."

444 It may sound odd, but we are also responsible to let ourselves be outgrown. It can be a challenge when
445 we've been sponsoring someone for a while to allow them to move on. We take comfort in the thought
446 that, if they are taking responsibility for their recovery, we can see that we did our job. As a fellowship,
447 too, we can see our growth. Those of us who have been here since the very early days can see it in a
448 particular way that is bitter and sweet. The fact that NA changes and the patterns and habits at the
449 meeting are different can be an excuse to leave. It's another reservation we couldn't predict. When we

450 stay involved with a living, growing and changing fellowship, we don't notice so much. But if we move or
451 take a break, the changes can be startling.

452 The work we've done to build our fellowship means that a lot more experience, strength and hope is
453 available to newer people than "back in the day." But the skills we develop helping a fellowship get
454 started may be different from those we need to maintain unity and stability once that community is
455 established. We are liable to feel left out or left behind. The trouble with being called a "dinosaur" is
456 that we know they are extinct. Staying involved helps us to grow and requires us to change.

457 When we do the work of helping people get clean, something changes inside us. We discover the magic,
458 the gift, when we see the light come on in someone's eyes. We learn to get out of our self-obsession. So
459 many of our solutions are in service. There's an old saying that "faith is planting a tree you know you will
460 not live to sit beneath," but in recovery we reap the rewards of our efforts as long as we keep coming
461 back. The addict we reach out to in a moment of need may well be the person who saves our lives later.
462 There's a connection that gets made between the suffering addict and the fellowship when our first
463 surrender happens in the arms of NA. We know from the beginning that NA is our lifeline. When
464 something else brings us ashore, we may not know that as clearly. It can be frustrating when we need to
465 teach someone that NA is not an extended aftercare program or a treatment feeder. People get clean
466 here and we stay clean here.

467 We teach each other how to reach out. Just because someone did it for us doesn't mean that we
468 automatically know how to reach out to someone new. Bringing a sponsee along on a Twelfth Step call
469 gives them an opportunity to learn, and keeps us from trying to do that alone. We learn to be in the
470 presence of great pain without taking it in or taking it on.

471 There's a lot to be said for old fashioned Twelfth Step work. We can get confused, and limit our
472 outreach to members we know who have relapsed. We can be fearful of new people we don't know.
473 Perhaps there is reason to be cautious: We're dangerous when we're using. We alibi out of caring by
474 saying that we're making amends to ourselves: "I don't need all that drama in my life." But when we
475 "protect ourselves" from the newcomer we don't defend our lives from drama; we deprive ourselves of
476 the opportunity to witness the miracle. Sometimes what a new person needs most is just not to be
477 alone. Simply allowing someone to sit with us as we go about our lives can be priceless.

478 We learn about recovery in the process of serving, but also in the margins of the service we do: on the
479 long ride to an H&I commitment, the talks while we're setting up or cleaning up for an event, we make
480 connections with others who are serious about recovery. But the most important work we do is at our
481 home group. Participation at our home group makes it feel like it's really home. "I wish I could say my
482 actions are selfless," one member confessed, "but deep down I know that my goal is to keep my home
483 group alive so that I can keep coming back." We feel good about meetings where we feel loved and
484 accepted, and where we can be useful. Meetings are much more rewarding when we make more of
485 them. When we're coming to a meeting on a regular basis we are likelier to feel interested and involved.
486 We feel like we're a part of, and it's easier to hear something new. When we're just dropping in
487 occasionally, it can be hard just to stay in our chair.

488 Some people say that addiction is a disease of nostalgia. We glamorize the past and terrorize the
489 present. We may not recognize it in ourselves, but when we hear people we think of as newcomers
490 complaining that "it's not like it used to be" about what seems to us to have been the recent past, we

491 can start to find the humor in it. Something special happens when we first get clean. Our desperation
492 and the total commitment we make in the beginning combine to create a very precious and important
493 time in our lives. It's never the same as our first home group, our first real connection to a sponsor, or
494 that initial group of friends we ran with in early recovery. But the fact that it's not the same doesn't
495 mean it's not as good. A member shared, "When I let myself approach my recovery like a newcomer, I
496 don't struggle so much with the differences between how it is and how I think I remember it was. I can
497 be present today without getting lost in nostalgia or comparison." Allowing our recovery to change as
498 we change can be difficult, but it's what makes staying in NA possible – and productive.

499 The things we do when we're a small fellowship are the basics. Just like in our personal recovery, if we
500 get away from the basics we may have a hard time getting back to them. Fellowships get complacent,
501 too. When we get lazy, the message gets watered down. When we see that happening in our meetings
502 we have a responsibility – not to complain or chastise, but to get busy. Sometimes starting step studies
503 or literature discussions can help bring the focus of meetings back to recovery. Little things like calling
504 members when they don't show up can really re-invigorate a home group. Not giving up on each other
505 matters – whether or not we're just getting clean. We teach by example. When we share honestly and
506 openly from the heart about recovery, we carry a more powerful message than we ever do when we're
507 preaching or lecturing.

508 NA is different from place to place, and at different stages of growth. There is no model of the
509 recovering fellowship. In some places, families are very involved. In some places, we take members into
510 our homes to detox. In some places, tough love is the norm, and we tell people to sit down and shut up;
511 in other places, we encourage each other to talk it out. The principles are consistent, but how we
512 practice them can vary widely. The key is that they are practiced, that our unity comes first and that we
513 keep our focus on our primary purpose: to carry the message to the addict who still suffers. Politics and
514 popularity distract us from our purpose. When NA members forget that our personal recovery depends
515 on NA unity, both are in jeopardy. NA communities do sometimes wither and die. It's a tragedy, but we
516 can learn from it. We have a tendency to believe that things which are free have no value, when in fact
517 they may be precious beyond any measure. When we recognize that our fellowship is in trouble, we
518 must take loving action. Our lives depend on it.

519 Being of Service

520 The desire to be of service changes our relationship to the world. It's not just in NA that we are loving
521 and giving. We connect to the love that surrounds us by practicing loving actions, and being open to
522 receive the same. Being willing to accept help is a form of giving. It can be uncomfortable to admit a
523 need, or to ask for help. When we allow another person to step up and help us, we give them a chance
524 to express their own love and generosity. When we reach out to help, we get much more than we give.
525 In some places, after the closing prayer at the meetings, NA members say, "keep coming back!" In other
526 places, they say, "Go help someone!" Both come from the understanding that when we give, and when
527 we allow others to give, we find a connection to a power greater than ourselves.

528 Service is not a position in a committee; it is a posture in the heart. It's a way of life we can practice in all
529 our affairs. It can be as simple as holding a door open, or as complicated as helping a loved one in the
530 last stages of their lives. Our relationship to service and the way we express it changes as our humility

531 deepens. The desire to serve is a manifestation of freedom from self. Anonymity is a key principle in
532 selfless service. When we learn to give selflessly, in service to those who suffer and to a power greater
533 than ourselves, we find happiness, purpose and dignity.

534 Whether we find that we give back best in structured service, one on one or somewhere in between,
535 being of service is a matter of principle for us. Practicing and teaching principle-based service is both a
536 way we carry the message and a way we receive the gifts that recovery has to offer us. Service connects
537 us to the fellowship, and helps keep us connected and involved even when we're not at the top of our
538 game. Having a commitment to open the door at a meeting once a week can be the difference between
539 staying involved and slipping away. Early on, service is a way we start to feel like we're useful and
540 wanted. This is true later, as well: being of service gives us a reason to keep coming back when we don't
541 feel like it.

542 The therapeutic value of one addict helping another is a two way street. It doesn't matter who is doing
543 the giving or who the taking. We are all equally entitled to ask and to provide, and wherever we are in
544 the exchange, we benefit. We no longer have to weigh and balance who is getting more or less, whether
545 we're doing enough or being taken for a ride. The truth is, we're all looking for motivation, inspiration, a
546 spark that will catch fire in us. A good meeting, a powerful Twelfth Step call, a convention or campout
547 can leave us feeling filled up, knowing that for just a moment we were right where we needed to be.
548 That feeling is addictive. Once we know we can feel that good, we want more. We are willing to slog
549 through the hard times because we know, if we keep doing it, we're going to feel that complete again.
550 It's not an illusion, like it was when we were using. It's the very real understanding that, just for today,
551 what I did mattered to someone.

552 If we embrace the principles of recovery, we naturally embrace the fellowship and help it to grow. Each
553 of us does this in our own way. We may love and nourish our homegroup. We may start a meeting.
554 Some of us are exceptional at working with new members. Others of us aren't very good with people,
555 but make beautiful websites. When service is in our heart, we find ways to be useful just as we are. The
556 service that we do may never involve being "voted in" to anything.

557 We find a balance between service inside and outside NA, as well. We care for one another in little ways
558 – taking someone to a meeting, or bringing a meal to a sick friend. That's service, too. The program
559 allows each of us to find the ways we're most comfortable giving, and the ways we're most comfortable
560 asking for help. We confront our limitations, including the limits of our compassion, and learn to be
561 realistic about what we can do.

562 NA service should always be done in the spirit of carrying the message to the addict who still suffers.
563 This is our fellowship's primary purpose, and when we deviate from that we open the door to distracting
564 influences. But there is rarely a time when our motives are entirely pure. Selfless service is our goal, but
565 one of the things that makes service so rewarding is the sense of approval we get when we're doing it.
566 It's not necessarily about getting an ego-fix, but knowing that we are valuable and useful can keep us
567 together while we're waiting to feel good about ourselves. Our acceptance of that allows us to improve
568 rather than to pretend we have it all together. If we are acting in good will – doing the right thing for the
569 right reasons – we are sure to benefit. It's not selfish to know that having a purpose makes us feel
570 better. Each of us has something to give, and allowing us to do that is part of helping each other to
571 recover. A member shared, "I've had to close my mouth when I wanted to open it and open my mouth

572 when I wanted to close it. I've had to try doing new things and stop doing old things that are no longer
573 working. I've had to learn to ask for help, to delegate responsibilities, take risks and share. I've had to
574 clean up some disgusting messes - both literal and figurative. Why do I serve? It's not selfless. It
575 reinforces all the work I do in the steps."

576 Sometimes just being accountable to something is rewarding. For those of us who don't have a lot of
577 experience being responsible, this can be a really good lesson. Others of us have far too much
578 experience being responsible, and service work teaches us to let go. Flexibility, tolerance and balance
579 are principles we learn to practice as we serve. We learn to practice unity, even when it's
580 uncomfortable, and we get to exercise our courage. "All my life I felt less than," a member shared. "A
581 stranger would frown at me and I would have a bad day. Service helped me feel worthy."

582 Responsibility is one of the most important principles we practice in NA, and service is one of the best
583 ways we learn to practice it. It keeps us involved with and surrounded by recovery, and it gives us
584 opportunities to practice acceptance, as well. By sharing our experience with other addicts, we gain a
585 deeper understanding of ourselves. Seldom do addicts stay clean for long without practicing selfless
586 service in one form or another. NA gives freely, but there's only so much we can simply take from the
587 program. After a while, the rewards are not just from what we are given but from what we give. The real
588 work begins here, and not all of us are up to it. Some of us go elsewhere and look for other rewards to
589 take. Reaping rewards means we must sow the seeds through action. There is responsibility in recovery,
590 and responsibility for our recovery is part of that.

591 Service changes our relationship to our own lives. We learn to put love and gratitude into action, and
592 when we mobilize our good feelings they have a way of spreading through all our affairs. We are
593 confronted with our defects – and with each others' – and we find a way to work through them. "The
594 first time I chaired a committee, I discovered the true meaning of principles before personalities," a
595 member chuckled. "Boy did I grow!" In service we meet others who are passionate about their recovery,
596 and that excitement keeps us energized. For those of us who've always had difficulty fitting in, service
597 can give us something to do – and a reason to stay to the end of the meeting, the workshop, or the
598 dance. In the meantime, we make the connections that change our lives.

599 It's essential in whatever way we give back that we're able to share with others and to cooperate, and
600 these are not skills most of us bring to the rooms with us. Service teaches us to communicate, and it can
601 be one of the most frustrating lessons we ever go through. Over and over we find ourselves in the
602 position that we think we are offering information, and others seem not to get it – or not to remember
603 having gotten it. Communication is always about more than the information being relayed. How we
604 communicate cannot be separated from what we communicate. Taking a look at the difference between
605 what we are saying, what is heard, and how people are responding to us can be the beginning of real
606 change in all our relationships. In service and in our lives, we offer information to people in different
607 ways. When we throw it at them, they always get upset. Too often, we offer information and expect
608 people to know why they should be interested in it. There's life beyond the information, and it's up to us
609 to bring that forward. When we offer information without inspiration, people stop listening. The result is
610 that we cut each other out of a conversation that really needs all of us. The Second Tradition teaches us
611 that a loving God speaks through our group conscience. It's up to each of us to ensure that all of us have
612 the information we need and the ability to share freely, so that the genius that works through us has a

613 chance to be heard. When we regard one another with respect, we open the door to a different kind of
614 communication. When we practice attraction in our service, we work to make sure that it is as open,
615 inclusive and welcoming as it can possibly be. When our common welfare comes first, it shows.

616 We may each have our own ideas about issues and how to manage them, but our principles remind us
617 that our ideas are not the only ones that matter. Bringing alternatives to the table, even if we don't
618 agree with them, can help broaden the possibilities before a group. Often the best possible solution
619 emerges in the process of coming to consensus, so it's up to us to give the group as much information as
620 we can. Yielding to group conscience when we feel strongly provides an opportunity to experience trust.
621 When we can believe that everyone in a disagreement is acting from a position of good will, we can be a
622 little more willing to let go. When we can see past our own desires and accept where the group is at, our
623 relationship to our fellowship, our group or committee is not conditional on our getting our way.

624 Finding a loving way to address differences of opinion or experience in NA gives us tools to reach out
625 differently in the rest of our lives. We learn in the process that communication is at the heart of
626 forgiveness. We can hang onto a resentment for years that could have been resolved with a simple
627 conversation. Facing it and taking loving action is a demonstration of maturity and grace. Emotional
628 maturity is our reward for letting go of anger and resentment.

629 There are some words we use differently in NA than in the rest of the world. When we talk about
630 addiction, for example, we know that we are addressing a spiritual disease that affects all areas of our
631 lives. When we share about sanity, we're not interested in clinical definitions: we look to our own
632 experience for a practical understanding that works for us. And when we talk about leadership in NA,
633 we're not implying that some members have more power or authority than others. Leadership here is
634 about sharing our experience in a spirit of humility and unity. We practice leadership in NA by serving
635 selflessly. Whatever our service, we remember the suffering addict in all that we do, and we practice
636 acceptance, courage and action.

637 When we have experience in service, we can be a resource and a mentor for others. We do that in a
638 spirit of humility when we're committed to bringing more members into the process without retaining
639 control. Patience, kindness and trust are key to the process. Trust is a two-way street. If we treat others
640 with trust and respect we are likely to receive it in turn. We can lead by example, helping to guide
641 discussion and focus energy without being an undue influence. Participating without seeking the illusion
642 of control sets the model for the rest of our lives. In whatever capacity we find ourselves, we serve NA
643 with dedication and love when we serve with humility. Although we sometimes associate leadership
644 with a lack of humility, for us it's refusing to serve at all that fosters our egoism and impatience. Service
645 is always humbling. We learn to be servants. We walk through all of our ego stuff on the way. When we
646 forget that we are just a small part of a greater whole, we're in trouble.

647 Service can be an escape, or it can give us access to new parts of ourselves by allowing skills and
648 interests to surface. When we think we're climbing a ladder, using our position as proof of some kind of
649 success, we're not practicing "service-based recovery" -- that's just ego-based service. But when we are
650 giving back out of gratitude, selflessly and with the best interests of the whole at heart, we find that the
651 experience can be as rewarding as it is productive. When we are spiritually awake, we need to be of
652 service – and we have to do the step work to handle it.

653 It's an ongoing process. We find a niche for ourselves, learn to be comfortable there, outgrow it and find
654 a new one. Each time we learn something about ourselves and often we learn to do something new. A
655 member shared, "It seems like the more experience I get, the more inexperienced I realize I am."

656 Some of us jump into service with both feet. We involve ourselves in just about every facet of what is
657 going on, only to be rebuffed by members who have different ideas about how things need to be done.
658 Or we make so many commitments that we cannot possibly keep them all, and gradually get
659 overwhelmed and resentful. We get discouraged and withdraw. We go from caring too much to not
660 caring at all, and back again. We find ourselves outside of the fellowship we love, looking in. We get lost
661 in self pity - after all, didn't we give it our best effort? Times like these try the spirits of even our most
662 seasoned members. We may need to step aside for a moment.

663 The fact is, with each lesson we learn in recovery, we're not ready until we're ready. It may be that it's
664 not until we let go of all that commitment that our recovery begins in earnest. In the meantime, we stay
665 clean, and a lot of good gets done. The solution starts in the Tenth Step. We start by reflecting on our
666 motives in service. Are we trying to force our view of how NA does things on others? Or do we truly
667 want to be helpful? Can we step out of ourselves long enough to allow someone else to have a "win"
668 sometimes? Our experience gives us knowledge of what has and has not worked. We can share that
669 without trying to control the outcome. When we start taking it all very personally, we might want to
670 consider whether it's time to step back. Knowing when to let go – of a point, a decision or a position –
671 takes prayer and practice. Rotation is an important principle in service.

672 A member looked back on their introduction to service: "there was arguing, politics, agendas, and
673 overall chaos. From the moment the meeting started I felt the love. Being new, it was exactly what I was
674 used to and I felt like I fit in." Sometimes the very disorder that can be so difficult for an experienced
675 member is what makes the service meeting feel appealing or accessible to the newer person. Letting
676 new people serve allows more people to learn from the experience of serving. It also opens us to new
677 ideas and new ways of doing things. There can be value in reinventing the wheel, even if it is a pretty
678 inefficient way to do business. We learn from the process, and sometimes we also get a better wheel.

679 Everything changes. That's good news and bad news. Growing through the changes doesn't necessarily
680 mean agreeing with them. But good natured flexibility is a key to happy recovery. We try to have faith in
681 the long view. An uncomfortable outcome is a phase in our development, not the end of our story. It's
682 true in our personal recovery, and it's true in our fellowship as well. We grow and change, and our
683 needs grow and change too. If we are involved in starting the fellowship in a particular area, it can be
684 very uncomfortable when that area settles into being a community. If we're involved in a particular kind
685 of service for a long time, it can be difficult to allow others to step in and to accept that there is more
686 than one way to do the job. When our identity gets wrapped up in how it used to be, we can't reach out
687 in the same way. It's harder to ask for help because "they do it wrong," and it's hard to carry a message
688 because our disappointment is so wrapped up in it.

689 The fact that NA is different is a consequence of our success. And chances are it's not really *that*
690 different. The basics don't change. The message we carry doesn't change. The things we need to do to
691 stop using, lose the desire and find a new way to live really don't change. Learning to work with new
692 people, to try new ways of doing things, can be painful and awkward. When the things we know best

693 aren't wanted or needed in the same way it's hard not to take it personally. Because we feel safe in the
694 rooms, we feel like we know our place and we don't want anything to change. We can have a fit when
695 the chairs are rearranged at our home group. It might be evolution or growing pains, but it's not
696 necessarily ours to figure out. We can take a long view but we don't have a crystal ball.

697 When we trust the Second Tradition we can allow ourselves and others to make mistakes. Sometimes
698 the mistakes we make in service – as in our lives – bring us to the next place we need to go. Trusting the
699 Second Tradition gives us hope. We know that a loving God is in charge, and that the process is alive not
700 only because of our efforts, but sometimes in spite of them. Our judgments can interfere with the
701 message getting through. We don't have to be the best person in the room to be the best person for the
702 job. Part of making service attractive is finding a place for the people who are attracted to it.

703 It can be surprising who gets this program and who doesn't. We've had the experience of burying
704 someone who looked like the "most likely to succeed," and of celebrating the anniversary of the craziest
705 long-shot in the room. We don't get to choose our next generation. As we stay around NA, we have a
706 tendency to think that the members who follow us don't have the kind of foundation or experience we
707 do. An experienced member suggested that, "they are going to bring their experience to this program
708 that saves my life, so I better be sure they have what they need to save me." It's our responsibility to
709 share what we were given, and to ensure that NA continues to grow. The fact that the fellowship is alive
710 is evidence that this program works, and that it's still working. Our task is to trust that evidence more
711 than our fear or our rigid beliefs of how it should be done. If we are doing it right, we will grow beyond
712 what we know now – individually and as a group.

713 When we have faith that our services really are guided by a loving higher power, we can let go and allow
714 the process to unfold as it will. Success comes when we work together toward a solution. There are
715 times when mistakes are simply going to be made: we speak our piece and get out of the way. We find
716 ways to stay involved that allow us to be useful and appreciate service. It may be constructive for us
717 sometimes to take a break from the kind of service that involves committees and decisions, and come
718 back to the front lines. Reaching a hand to the addict in need is the most important thing we do. When
719 we shift our focus to the front door, our squabbles and resentments fade away. When we carry the
720 message, we get the message. The message is freedom, and the ties that bind are pure love.

721 **Love**

722 The spirit of love that we express in NA is the most powerful thing we have. The basic text describes it as
723 "the flow of life energy from one person to another," and we see this in action when we watch an addict
724 come back to life in the rooms. The hugs we give are an instrumental part of our method and our
725 experience. NA is all about love.

726 When we are practicing Step Twelve to the best of our ability, love becomes central to all that we do.
727 There is no more powerful antidote to the despair and self-destruction of addiction. The compassion
728 that we feel for the newcomer is something we learn to extend to our families, those around us and
729 eventually to ourselves. Some say that ultimately Step Twelve becomes about reaching out to anyone
730 who is suffering. Certainly we cannot look away as we once did. Still, we can sometimes have an easier
731 time offering compassion to newcomers than to oldtimers who are struggling.

732 Staying in recovery for a long time means not just that recovery happens, but that life happens. We
733 grow up and grow old, we raise families, change jobs, and navigate the world just because we are alive.
734 We come to understand that happiness is an inside job, a spiritual experience that can get stronger with
735 recovery. We find that no matter what happens on the outside, happiness can still live within us. A
736 member shared, “I embraced my feelings and found comfort in them because I knew they were part of
737 my remaking. I was alive. As much as it felt like I might come undone, I had faith that it wasn't the end. I
738 knew that absolutely nothing in the world mattered except love. I have wasted too much time not
739 loving.”

740 Some of us struggle to give ourselves permission to be happy. We may not think we deserve it, or we
741 fear that we will stop working on ourselves. Some of us have been unhappy for so long that it feels
742 uncomfortable to let go and enjoy our lives.

743 When we treat happiness as a spiritual principle, we can see its relationship to humility. Our ability to be
744 happy is directly related to our willingness to let go of our self obsession. If we think of happiness as a
745 spiritual asset, we can see it both as a gift and a goal. We work toward it by letting go of those things
746 that we can see standing in its way, and leave the rest to a power greater than ourselves. Humility and
747 empathy are essential to a rewarding spiritual life. As we find the deep joy that comes to us through our
748 practice of compassion, we find that happiness is much more available to us. “I had to make a decision
749 to be happy,” said one member, “but making that decision in a way that could really work meant having
750 a foundation on which that happiness could rest.”

751 Walking through our own challenges helps us to find compassion for ourselves and others. As we
752 develop our ability to feel and express empathy we come to realize that the same spirit dwells in all of
753 us, and that none of us is more or less important than another. We are all sick and suffering sometimes,
754 no matter how long we have been clean. We all bring hope and answers sometimes, even when we
755 don't feel it ourselves. One day clean is a miracle, whether or not it's ever followed by another. When
756 we see a member experience a real breakthrough with twenty or thirty years clean, we can see that,
757 truly, recovery never stops.

758 Love is an action word. Loving action takes many forms. Sometimes it's a warm hug; sometimes it's
759 telling someone the ugly truth. But when we act from love, with the intention of loving, it shows. It
760 matters. We can feel it, and the people who surround us feel it. We can enjoy it – literally, it brings us
761 into joy. When we finally trust that we can love and be loved without being hurt, we are able to tap into
762 our connection to others and to the world around us.

763 Unity is a practice of love. We rise above our judgments and come together in spite of ourselves. In the
764 process, we learn forgiveness and reconciliation. We don't always forgive before we start to work
765 together again, but we are obliged to make peace because we cannot easily avoid one another.
766 Forgiveness is an action and a decision. We need a lot of forgiveness, and we also get to provide it.
767 Forgiving is its own reward. We start to find peace within ourselves. When we are free of guilt, shame
768 and resentment, our minds can be still.

769 Love is a form of intelligence. It's the intuition that brings us to the right words when there are no
770 words, that tells us when to step forward and when to back away. We feel love when we speak truth.

771 When we are in our Higher Power's will, we naturally carry a message, and the message we need finds
772 us. When we clear away the defects that block the passage, we find that we can be a clearer channel for
773 the love that surrounds us. We tap into a love that is greater than ourselves, and find that we are able to
774 do things we never thought possible. A brilliance comes through us.

775 There's a saying in recovery that as we keep going the road narrows. That's partly true. Our willingness
776 to make the same old mistakes diminishes, and we know better than our impulses much of the time. But
777 that's not the end of the story. It's as if we pass through a funnel: the way gets tighter and more
778 uncomfortable as we begin to adapt to our new way of life – and then, without warning, it opens up and
779 we are free. The road is no longer narrow; sometimes it seems like there's no road at all. We move to
780 our own rhythm, finding a pace and a direction that is right for us. The trip is inward and it never stops.
781 We keep learning and growing, finding ways to live and to use our experience to help others. No matter
782 how long we have been clean, there is still more for us to learn and more for us to share. Our First Step
783 placed us on a path to awareness, connection and serenity. We received much more than simple
784 abstinence. We have been given an endless supply of principles to guide us as we travel through our
785 lives.

786 In Step Three, we turn our will over to a Power greater than ourselves, and in Step Eleven it is returned
787 to us, transformed. The desperation we once felt at our predicament was the opening to a passion for
788 caring, sharing, giving and growing. Where once we lacked the power even to keep ourselves alive, now
789 we take action in our own lives and in service to others and are amazed at the results. We live in dignity,
790 integrity and grace – and we know we can always get better. The more progress we recognize in
791 ourselves and our fellows, the more we know is possible. What first appeared to us as a way out now
792 offers us a way in – into a life we hadn't imagined, into joy, into hope, into growth that never stops. We
793 continue to get better. We continue to discover new ways to live, new freedom, and new paths to
794 explore. We travel together, and we pave the road as we walk it. No matter how far we have come, or
795 how far we know we have to go, the journey continues.

Preface

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36

Our Basic Text assures us that more will be revealed, and our experience bears that out. More has been revealed in the years since those words were written, and more continues to be revealed every day that we live clean and practice the principles of recovery. We grow as individuals but we also grow and mature as a fellowship. As we learn from our experience, we pass that knowledge on. This means that each generation of newcomers has more resources available in NA than the one before. Whether this strengthens or weakens us depends entirely on how well we practice the principles of sharing, caring, and service.

This book, written by addicts for addicts, is a snapshot of our experience. It is intended both as an offering to new members and to rekindle the passion of our oldtimers. It could not possibly contain all that our members know or believe, but it does reflect what we have been discovering and sharing in the years since our Basic Text was first published. Our greatest treasure and resource is the depth of our personal knowledge of the recovery process. We share that treasure at meetings, at our celebrations, over coffee and in our literature. Once more we hope to share as much as we can of our collective experience, strength and hope.

The first draft of a book titled *Living Clean* was created in 1983, but the history of this project goes back even further. As the Basic Text was being written, some of our members knew that it would not be our last word on the subject of living the NA way. The versions that were created in 1983 and 1990 contained a lot of concrete advice, suggestions and rules for how to get clean and stay clean. But most of us don't follow rules very well. Our experience is sometimes very different from what we wish was true about the process. What we found we share in common are not the particular actions we take, but the principles we try to practice as we live. In the years that have followed, generations of addicts have gotten clean and stayed clean using the Basic Text as our guide, and that experience has given us a perspective on the principles of recovery unlike any other.

We knew then that we were describing a problem not related to any single substance but a disease that, left untreated, would manifest in one symptom or another until it killed us. A focus on one symptom or substance seemed too narrow for us. Just as we understand that addiction affects all aspects of our lives, we can also see that recovery affects everything that we do. Our relationships with our families, our work, our spirituality – even our own bodies – are profoundly shaped by where we come from and the ways in which we address our disease. Just as the rewards of our recovery are often beyond our wildest dreams, we know that the impact of our recovery on our own lives and on those around us is beyond measure. We may never know the good we do just by staying clean and living a principled life to the best of our ability. The benefits of our new way of life motivate us to keep giving more, living more and loving more.

We are called to tell our story in NA, not just once but over and over. We cannot see the entirety of ourselves in one Fifth Step or one share, and we can't see the entirety of our recovery all at once, either.

37 We see it in layers, and our vision of ourselves changes each time we have a shift in perspective or a
38 change in perception. Telling the truth about our lives is one of the most powerful things we can ever do.
39 We start to see the threads that run through our experience, even though we may feel like we have been
40 many different people over the course of our lives. We can see the patterns that help us or hold us back,
41 and we can find hope even at times when our lives are very difficult.

42 This book is not a catalog of advice but rather a collection of experience, strength and hope about living
43 clean as we experience it in our daily lives, in our relationships, and in service to others. Chances are
44 good that not everything in the pages that follow will be equally important to everyone. Each of us has
45 different challenges on our journey. But we hope that there is something here for every member.

46 There is no simple formula for living clean. Recovery is a full contact, lifelong process. The more serious
47 we are about it the more clearly we can see how much growth is still available to us, no matter where we
48 are on the journey. We are never done learning. Continued practice of the program of Narcotics
49 Anonymous doesn't just make our lives easier. It makes them richer, better and more interesting. We
50 begin by staying clean, and from there the program gives us the tools we need to find the answers that
51 are right for us. Different moments teach us, reach us, or help us break through. We hope that the
52 experience we share here will serve to propel our members forward, beyond what we know now.

53 What follows is the experience of many addicts from all over the world. Hundreds of members shared
54 their insight on living clean in workshops and on electronic bulletin boards, in letters, conversations, and
55 on tape. The book took shape as it developed. The content and structure changed according to the
56 input. The process swung the doors open and we were amazed at what developed. We learned from
57 each other, and the sum was greater than its parts. As our journey continued, the focus of Living Clean
58 shifted, as well. The common thread through our varied experience is that we draw strength from NA no
59 matter how much clean time we have, no matter how many steps we've worked, and no matter where
60 life takes us. Sharing our experience gives it meaning and value. And the deep relationships we form in
61 NA – with each other, with ourselves and with our higher power – become more valuable than we can
62 imagine. We stay connected with the program and the fellowship over many years because we find what
63 we need here. Where once we may have wondered how we could ever make NA a part of our lives, now
64 many of us cannot imagine our lives without it. When we use the tools available to us, our recovery
65 remains viable no matter what we face or how long we stay clean.

66 The most important thing about living clean is that we are alive to do it, and for people with the disease
67 of addiction this is nothing less than a miracle. We do recover to live full and rewarding lives. Those lives
68 present us with challenges, some of which we never expected. Living beyond our wildest dreams means
69 that we are in uncharted territory. We have learned that we really can survive anything and stay clean.
70 The countless addicts who have contributed to this book have made clear that the miracle of getting
71 clean is not the last one we experience, or the last one we need. It's never too late to start over, to work
72 steps, to have a spiritual awakening and to find a new way to live. As long as we are willing to stay clean
73 and keep coming back, our recovery continues to unfold in ways we couldn't imagine. We are living
74 clean, and every day the journey continues.

"LIVING CLEAN: THE JOURNEY CONTINUES"

90 MINUTES

GOALS OF SESSION

- Raise members' awareness of the project and opportunities for involvement.
- Gather input on the drafts.
- Work through the session profile with others who will do this in their home communities.

On tables are pens, Brainstorming Guidelines, Ground Rules, Facilitator's Guides, and draft material for review and input. Ideally, there should be enough copies of the draft material so that each participant has one for the read-through portion of the session. The times indicated are estimates and may vary depending upon the size of the group.

LEADER WILL PROVIDE A SESSION SETUP

10 MINUTES

Background and Introduction to the Project

- The project plan for this book-length piece was adopted at WSC 2008, but has been an item on the "literature wish list" since 1983. This project remained on the back burner until other literature priorities were completed.
- This book will allow us to touch on many of the ideas gathered from the fellowship over the years regarding new literature. While this book will not be able to capture all of the ideas submitted, it will include material on practicing principles in our daily lives as we deal with relationships, living with success and failure, our health, and our spirituality as we move forward in our recovery.
- We want this book to sound like us in much the same way that the Basic Text speaks to us—a lofty goal to be sure, but one that is attainable if we all work to contribute to the project.

Review and Input

- The project plan calls for staggered periods of review and input. The first set of review and input contained the first two chapters and the detailed outline for the book. That review was conducted between 1 June and 15 September 2009. The second R&I period covered Chapters Three, Four and Five and was conducted between 1 April and 30 June 2010. This final period of review and input will cover the final two chapters and the Preface.
- **The deadline for input on Chapters Six, Seven and the Preface is 31 December 2010.**
- The APPROVAL FORM of the book will be released in April 2011 for one full year. Approval requires a two-thirds vote of the regional delegates at the World Service Conference in 2012.

Icebreaker

5 minutes

Have members of the small groups introduce themselves to one another and offer an interesting detail about themselves that others don't know. Groups of not more than ten people are best.

SMALL GROUP

55 MINUTES

Post the questions where participants can see them, use a PowerPoint presentation to display them, or have the questions printed and placed on each of the tables. If there are enough people present, divide the work between groups by assigning chapters to separate groups.

Review and Input Questions

It is our hope that this book will speak to all NA members. This will necessitate discussing all elements of our lives and may encroach on topics that at first glance appear to be outside issues; yet, as NA members, we navigate those issues on a daily basis.

Please keep in mind that these drafts have not been fully copyedited and, so may contain spelling errors and/or erroneous punctuation. The APPROVAL form of the material will have been fully edited to eliminate such occurrences, so the focus of this review session can remain on the concepts being communicated rather than spelling or punctuation.

These chapters are part of a larger whole and, as such, will not reflect a complete picture of recovery as practiced in NA. The entire book will strive to reflect the common experience of the fellowship with living clean and applying principles in our lives.

These questions will help to focus your review sessions.

CHAPTER REVIEW

Allot 55 minutes for the chapter review. Take each chapter separately. (note: The Preface is two pages in length and, accordingly, will not require as much time for the read through.)

Reading the entire chapter aloud is recommended before responding to the questions. Use the same questions for each chapter. Members may find it helpful to note areas they want to return to after the read-through is completed. Do not stop to discuss specific points during the read-through; make a note and come back to the item later.

1. What are your overall impressions of the chapter? Please rate this chapter on a scale of 1 to 10; with 1 representing "don't like it at all" and 10 representing "loved it." Try to be specific about what you particularly liked or disliked in the chapter.
2. Are any ideas or concepts missing from this chapter? If so, what specifically is missing?

3. Are there concepts or ideas that should be elaborated upon or expanded in some way, including ideas that are inadequately explained? Please be as specific as you can.
4. Is there anything in the drafts that should be removed or modified, including anything that is not consistent with our NA principles? If so, what specifically should be removed or modified, and why?

REPORTS BACK FROM THE SMALL GROUPS

15 MINUTES

Once time has expired, facilitate a brief discussion about the groups' work, addressing one set of questions at a time. Be sure to record feedback from the small groups.

- Allow the small groups to share their overall impressions and views regarding the material they reviewed. This is not a time to get into specific input. Specific input should be recorded and forwarded to the workgroup.

CONCLUSION AND WRAP UP

5 MINUTES

Here are some other avenues to offer personal input for this project:

- The Living Clean Project Discussion Area is an online discussion board for members of the fellowship to offer their thoughts regarding the material to be included in the book. The discussion board is set up by chapter, and members are encouraged to share their experience, strength, and hope regarding the long-term aspects of living the NA program. The link to the discussion board site is:
<http://naws.org/lc/index.php>.
- Input from this session can be sent to: LivingClean@na.org
Or entered on the website at: <http://questionnaire.disc.na.org>
- As always we welcome the submission of material from our members via regular postal mail as well; send that material to:

NA World Services
ATTN: Living Clean Project
PO Box 9999
Van Nuys, CA 91409 USA

The deadline for input on Chapters Six, Seven, and the Preface is 31 December 2010.