

In the Twelve Steps of NA, we learn to apply principles to better our lives. Moved by the miracle of personal recovery, we reach out to share that miracle with others. This is the essence of being of service in NA.

It Works: How and Why

On serving selflessly

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“Thank you for allowing me to be of service” punctuates many of the reports given by trusted servants at all levels throughout the NA Fellowship. Many of us find this phrase kind of strange when we first come to NA. We think, why are these people thanking us, the people for whom they take on heavy burdens of responsibility? Shouldn't it be the other way around? But after we've had the opportunity to be of service—in any capacity—and realize what it does for us in terms of personal growth, we no longer find it odd to thank the people we serve for trusting us to do something for them.

It is indeed a privilege to be of service. Not everyone can handle it at first. Some of us serve on committees and are unable to put our personal views aside in favor of what's best for NA as a whole. Some of us get angry that others are not more helpful or more grateful, and quit in the middle of a commitment.

However, if we keep working on our recovery, most of us do develop an ability to serve selflessly. When we do, there are many opportunities, ranging from the group to world, artistic to technical, fast-paced to low-key.

This issue of *The NA Way Magazine* is dedicated to NA's trusted servants. Just because they're serving selflessly, expecting no reward, it doesn't mean they wouldn't welcome our support and good will, even our thanks. So try it—the next time the opportunity arises, make a trusted servant's day—say thanks for being of service. ❖



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EXECUTIVE CODIRECTORS

Anthony Edmondson
George Hollahan

EDITOR

Cynthia Tooredman

COPY EDITORS

David Fulk
Nancy Schenck

TYPOGRAPHY AND DESIGN

David Mizrahi

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Anne Peters

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

Bella A, Craig R, Stephan L, Jane N

World Service Office

PO Box 9999
Van Nuys, CA 91409 USA
Telephone: (818) 773-9999
Fax: (818) 700-0700
Web Site: <http://www.na.org>

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Our readers write

Five years in Iran!

What we can do together with guidance from our Higher Power, the principles of Narcotics Anonymous, and the conscience of an informed group of members can never be done any other way, no matter how we try to will it or force it and no matter how much money we spend.

Nearly ten years ago, two wealthy brothers here in Iran tried very hard, with outstanding dedication, to start NA in this part of the world. But they weren't in contact with the WSO, they didn't understand the traditions, and they didn't know that alcohol is a drug. After one year, a group of twenty members all got drunk.

Five years ago, five members who were familiar with the traditions and had worked the steps, with the blessing and direction of their Higher Power and guidance from the WSO, formed a group and started taking a panel into a rehab center in Tehran.

It is wonderful to inform you that last week we celebrated the fifth anniversary of our first NA meeting in Iran. It was a moving experience when, at the end of the gathering, a recovering family of four (a father and his two sons in NA, the mother in Naranon) blew out the candles on our fifth anniversary cake. This was a clear message of recovery and hope.

We had high-ranking guests from interested government agencies, including someone from the Iranian House of Representatives. For the first time we were able to invite legislators and decision makers from the Iranian government to see how our program works, and we were able to do this without jeopardizing our members or compromising our traditions.

It is a miracle to achieve such acceptance and respect in a country that only six years ago was still whipping and sometimes executing addicts. Today, thank God, several hundred members, ranging from one month to five years clean, have proven one more time that the tired old lie "once an addict, always an addict" no longer applies.

Froohar T, Iran

The NA Way Magazine welcomes letters from all readers. Letters to the editor can respond to any article that has appeared in the *NA Way*, or can simply be a viewpoint about an issue of concern in the NA Fellowship. Letters should be no more than 250 words, and we reserve the right to edit. All letters must include a signature, valid address, and phone number. First name and last initial will be used as the signature line unless the writer requests anonymity.

The NA Way Magazine, published in English, French, German, Portuguese, and Spanish, belongs to the members of Narcotics Anonymous. Its mission, therefore, is to provide each member with recovery and service information, as well as recovery-related entertainment, which speaks to current issues and events relevant to each of our members worldwide. In keeping with this mission, the editorial staff is dedicated to providing a magazine which is open to articles and features written by members from around the world, as well as current service and convention information. Foremost, the journal is dedicated to the celebration of our message of recovery—"that an addict, any addict, can stop using drugs, lose the desire to use, and find a new way to live."



What I've learned about being of service

Ever since I decided to write this article, I have been thinking about the topic of selfless service and what it means to me. At first I thought I would be able to sit down and finish an article in five minutes, since I do so much service. However, my concept and my perception of selfless service have changed since I've been clean, especially in these past few weeks when I have given it much more thought than I usually do.

When I came to NA, I knew nothing of service. The only time I served in my addiction was when I was going to get something in return such as drugs, money, or friends. When I got my sponsor, the first direction he gave me was to help set up and clean up at meetings. I did that, and I still do that.

As I kept coming around, I began to learn more and more about service and giving back what was so freely given to me. I soon learned that most things that happened in NA happened because of addicts who were willing to give their time and energy. I thought this was really wonderful, so I began to get involved—first with my home group, then with my area and region. Service soon became very important to me and took up most of my free time. I didn't mind, though, because I enjoyed my service commitments and I knew my service helped addicts.

Service has been one of the most rewarding things I have done in my recovery. I have learned so much about myself, the steps, the traditions, and communicating with people. It's also been fun and exciting. I have met a lot of great and wonderful people—people I would never have gotten to know otherwise.

But there's another side to service. Today I am learning that many times I neglected my friends, my family, and even myself because of all my service commitments. I am learning that many of the service commitments I took served my ego more than the fellowship. I remember the first area commitment I took. I had no idea what I was doing. I wasn't even involved with the committee I was asked to chair. Even though I probably helped a lot of people by taking that commitment, I know today that my motives were more about selfishness than selflessness.

My sponsor once told me that the most important person on any committee is the general member. Today that has a whole new meaning. For some reason I find it hard to serve on a committee without taking a position, without having a title in front of my name. I have to remind myself that a committee with no chair runs much better than a chair with no committee members. I am learning that sometimes it is best to step aside to give another addict the opportunity to be of service. Today I am learning that it's okay to be just a member doing a job.

I know that I need Narcotics Anonymous far more than Narcotics Anonymous needs me. Narcotics Anonymous got along just fine before I got clean, and I am sure that it will continue to grow and thrive long after I am gone.

This doesn't mean that I should stop doing service just because my motives aren't always totally pure. None of us are perfect. It just means that I need to have more balance in my life and take a closer look at why exactly I am taking on this commitment.

I believe that the only way I can be totally sure that my ego is not involved in my service work is by giving or serving anonymously, by doing good things for people without letting them know, by not bragging about it to my friends or even to my sponsor, and by keeping it between myself and my Higher Power.

Jason P, Florida

In my active addiction, I only served myself. Even if I did something that seemed selfless, it only seemed that way. My motives were always, and only, to get something in return for whatever I did. My service to NA is just the opposite, always and only for the still-suffering addict.

Barbara G, California

Growing recovery, rooted in service

My name is Eduardo and I am an addict. I have some special experiences to share about service. When I got to NA there were only two recovery groups in our region, and their only contact with the WSO was through a few members with some clean time. We had only the Little White Booklet as literature, and the only service we were doing was PI and H&I group efforts. I remember with happiness how those small service experiences awakened my dejected spirits, which were just starting to be restored.

In 1990 I received an AA pamphlet from Colombia, which included the address and phone number of the NA service office there. I felt the need to write to establish contact with the fellowship. I had one year clean in the program and I was attending meetings every day. I felt, for the first time in my life, a commitment to something. What happened afterwards is the wonderful story about the personal and institutional relations that led to the growth of the NA Fellowship in Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Chile.

In 1992 the ASC in Lima was created, and in 1995 the RSC in Peru was formed. Since 1993 we have been present at all the World Service Conferences, and I have participated in all areas of service (secretary, treasurer, GSR, and chairperson of our PI and H&I committees). I have experienced both financial and personal growth, yet this did not make me feel happy. I became tough and closed-minded. I was not serene. I was combative, and I always tried to assert my point of view. I didn't realize that my distorted social instinct was turning my service efforts into an extension of my disease. Hard times came, and through some bad management I lost my job, money, home, and everything else that I had achieved. What was worse, I became distant from NA. But the Higher Power, which is always present in my life, gave me another opportunity, and in 1996 my wife got a job managing a restaurant in a club. That enabled us to deal with our

most pressing needs, and by God's grace the restaurant was right next to the meeting place of an NA group.

My return to the program made me take stock of my real situation; it also reduced my pride and it opened my mind to humility. I hit bottom once again, and I understood that I was but another member of this marvelous group of people that God had brought together to create service for our fellowship. Then I took on the work of regional PI chair. We worked long hours, and I began to see clearly that the hand of a Higher Power was reaching into my closed mind. Strange concepts began to take shape in my life, such as understanding, tolerance, a passive attitude toward group decisions, and, especially, love. By respecting the opinions and points of view of my fellow members, I perceived ideas that were much more coherent and mature. Once again I began to experience the wonderful sensation that allowed me to learn, and I surrendered.

I returned to my Fourth Step. I shared with my sponsor and sponsees (I learn more from them than what I give to them), I appraised my feelings and my motivations. I accepted my spiritual blockage and the fact that I had become a strong personality in the fellowship. As a result of this process, I made a difficult decision and faced my anxiety and fears.

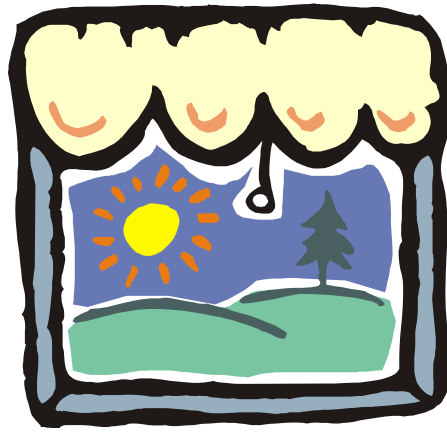
I returned to my profession, my training as an engineer in the tropics, and I asked myself, "What am I doing in the capital when my knowledge is more useful in another area?" I decided to let go of everything that was tying me down in order to find my hidden inner self that was crying for attention, and as a result of that decision I gave up my request to be alternate regional delegate in the RSC in 1997.

At this time I live in the tropics of Peru, and I work in areas of extreme poverty. I am a member of a small recovery group called "Abriendo Camino" ("Clearing the Way") which was recently formed. It is immensely gratifying to see that by being here, I've combined my inner self with service to society, I've found peace, I've returned to my program, and I'm allowing the members of my group to learn from their mistakes. That is the only way I can offer selfless and loving service.

All kinds of people, all kinds of service

Having recently moved to a new area, I wasn't too surprised when one of the addicts in my new home group asked me to speak at a meeting at a local treatment facility. She was simply following the time-honored tradition of ambushing the new person in the area whose story nobody has heard yet. Of course I agreed to help, but while thinking it over later on, I wondered how I was going to explain to a room full of newcomers the fact that I had been pretty much uninvolved in NA for the past four years. This is not really the message we want to give newcomers, but it is part of my story, so I started writing about it.

Four years ago I moved across the country in order to attend college. I did all the things that were suggested to me to prepare for my move away from the place where I had gotten clean 5½ years earlier. I contacted a friend in the new state who agreed to be my sponsor even though she lived several hours north of where I was going to be. I figured I would be able to find a sponsor locally once I got settled. I got a meeting schedule sent to me, and made sure that I was as ready as I could be to leave my home group, my sponsorship family, and my service commitments. I had huge expectations of NA being even better where I was going, since it had been es-



tablished there many years before it was in my home state. When I arrived in my new home, I was reminded that "expectations are premeditated resentments." Nothing seemed the same except the readings at the beginning of the meetings. I had a hard time getting women to give me their phone numbers. Everyone I asked to sponsor me turned me down. The service junkies acted like a closed community. I was completely frustrated and couldn't understand what I was doing wrong. Both my new sponsor and my old sponsor back home kept telling me that I was right where I was supposed to be; of course, I didn't want to hear that. I never want to hear that. So, for four years I went to live meetings sporadically, cyber-meetings pretty regularly, and threw myself into my studies and campus activities.

When I started school, I found it very difficult to deal with "earth people"—that is, nonaddicts. My friends were all in recovery, I had a job in a rehab, and I spent all my "spare time" on service commitments and sponsorship. To be completely honest, I didn't want anything to do with "earth people." I thought they had nothing to offer me. I was incredibly closed-minded on the topic. I could not imagine ever having close friends who were not addicts, yet that is exactly what happened in college.

Some of my new friends were in recovery, but most of them were about as normal as humans get. In my junior year, I even joined a sorority, although I was more than twenty-five years older than the rest of the women involved. Before going to school I didn't understand that it's possible to be of service outside the

fellowship, but I soon found myself immersed in service commitments at school. I was so involved that at graduation I was given an award for outstanding service to the community. Of course, I served because I am a service junkie, not to get an award. Service is simply what I do.

After graduation, I had to move to a totally new area again in order to attend graduate school. I had sorority sisters here, and friends who had attended college with me, so I knew I had people to connect with no matter what. This time, I had no expectations whatsoever of what I would find in Narcotics Anonymous. When we had been in our new home for a week, my husband suggested that we try to get to a meeting. I agreed, but not enthusiastically. He called the local helpline, and within the next hour we had three calls back to make sure we knew we would have a ride to the meeting that night. At the meeting, they passed around meeting schedules and people wrote down their phone numbers for us. We used the phone numbers right away. People began calling to offer us rides. I got a sponsor. Hooray! We had found the kind of NA we were used to.

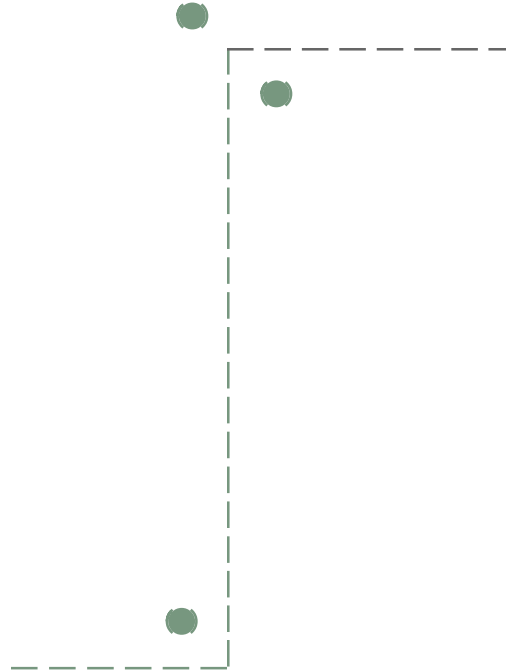
Which brings me back to being asked to speak at the treatment center. I realize that God makes no mistakes (duh!). Because I am going to need to work with all kinds of people in my chosen career, not just addicts, my Higher Power had given me the opportunity to learn how to do that. If I had become involved with NA during college the way I had been at home, this would never have happened. I learned through daily application how to practice the principles of recovery in all my affairs, with all kinds of people, in



all kinds of service to humanity. Although I was still uncomfortable with the fact that I had not been as involved in NA for the past four years as I would have liked, I had something to share about applying recovery to all parts of my life, and learning how to live life on life's terms outside the rooms.

Now—a couple of weeks, a lot of meetings, and many journal entries later—I find myself being grateful for the discomfort I experienced while I was in college. I had a wonderful time there. I learned much more than just what goes on in the classroom, and I grew spiritually and emotionally through my experiences. Still, it is really great to be back home in NA. Although I wouldn't trade the last four years for anything, I am very happy to be back home in a new state with my new NA family.

Maria T, Indiana



Getting God's gift

About a year ago I told my sponsor about a thirst I was feeling, an existential thirst that had tormented me for a long time and which made me feel empty. I had been clean for almost a year after about twenty years of using and surviving in solitude, fear, and despair.

"If only you knew about God's gift", said my sponsor. I had spent my whole life destroying myself and asking for the impossible. I had forgotten about or never knew that God's goodness and love followed me everywhere and at all times in my life. I had forgotten that God wants to live with me and that when I open the door to God, my life takes on new meaning, which is brighter and always more gratifying.

Strangely enough, when I tried to develop a relationship with God it was in order to reproach God when things weren't going well for me. I didn't want to acknowledge that I had made a mistake and had turned away from God's plans.

There were times when I thought I knew more than God. I was so arrogant that I thought I could find fault with God, so I just kept on making more mistakes.

Today, after praying for humility, I believe that it is a gift to know how to accept and carry out God's will. God's plans are wise even though they may at first seem incomprehensible. For me, God's will is shown in a personal and unique way.

I have started to lose my paralyzing fear, my despair, and my loneliness. My life has changed, and I now believe it's worth living. The greatest thing is that God's gift is given to me freely on a daily basis. I only need to ask for it regularly.

Gonzalo M, Mexico

Real service

When I came to NA, I felt that I had stumbled into the real world at last. Real people talking about real things in little beaten-up church halls and smoky rooms, drinking cups of tea, and caring about each other. It was wonderful and warm and reassuring.

When I had five weeks clean, I went to an ASC where two people I really admired started yelling at each other. This might have turned me off, but I was still so shut down and confused that I was willing to go to another one.

When I had six months clean, I went to an RSC as the newly elected ASR and was impressed by the length of clean time in the room and the knowledge of the participants.

By the time I went to my third RSC, I realized that I had stumbled upon another level of identification. I had found my home in this new world. I was a service junkie among service junkies. My new home was full of new words, new projects, and cooperation.

I was on fire about NA language, H&I meetings, literature development, and convention committee work.

I found a place for my energy and my willingness to help. I actually found a place for myself in the committee structure and was enjoying my new awareness of the worldwide nature of NA.

Where else could I learn to have a different opinion from people I loved and still like myself? Where else could I learn that a mistake is just a mistake and not the end of the world as we know it? Where else could I learn from and admire people who were different from me? Where else could I learn to let go and let go and let go and let go?

Where else could I be taught to be a teacher? Where else could I be shown that leadership is a great thing and not to be distrusted? And where else could I make deep and true friends from all over the world—one passion, one fellowship?

Thank god for NA and thank god for the opportunity to be a part of NA service.

In service I have explored and extended my deep love for this fellowship and have exercised my passion to be a part of something genuinely good.

Bella B, Australia



You're fired!

When and how should an ASC remove a trusted servant from office?

by Kit E, Minnesota

I don't know why so many discussions in NA seem to generate more heat than light, but at least they're entertaining most of the time. The question of when to remove a trusted servant from office is no exception.

Unfortunately, removing trusted servants from office seems to happen most often at what is usually the least-experienced service body in NA: the area service committee. ASCs are strange things. People who participate feel the weight of a burden that's essentially weightless because it's not something they need to carry (responsibility for the very survival of NA), yet the mountain of services that a typical ASC is expected to provide is somehow reduced to a molehill in the minds of most members.

I believe that area service committees serve a number of functions simultaneously, both explicit and implicit. At times one function or another will dominate the proceedings, but they are all in play at all times.

Explicitly, *A Guide to Local Services* describes an ASC as the "workhorse" of the service structure. Maybe that's the best way to describe the area service committee. Most of the hands-on work of delivering NA services to the groups and the community occurs at the area level.

Implicitly, you'll have to agree, there's another whole thing going on.

Being the delicate creature I am, I had to have ten years clean before I could attend two consecutive ASCs. I mean, the pathos, the bathos, the drama, the personalities, the breathtaking rudeness, the bottomless incompetence, the irrepressible arrogance, the showboating, the whining victimhood, the malicious interruptions, the constant battle for attention. A boatload of passion leavened with a pinch of humility.

Perhaps your ASCs are places where people arrive prepared to respectfully conduct the area's business in muted tones.

Mine wasn't.

Mine isn't.

No way. Nohow. Not by a long shot.

An example: One day an incensed young man showed up shortly after an ASC-sponsored dance and demanded that all future dances feature a "diversity" of music.

I asked if he was insisting that the DJ play a diversity of music or he was really looking to compel the DJ to play music with particular appeal to African-Americans.

He assured me he was reasonably requesting a diversity of music.

"Really? So you're proposing that the ASC direct all future DJs to play a yet-to-be-determined number of homosexual love songs?"

Believe me when I tell you the expression on his face was priceless as he envisioned a dance with so many classical cuts, so many bluegrass, so many rap, so many hard rock, so many country/western, and so forth.

Yes, my friends, it's possible at an ASC to discover that there's diversity and then there's "diversity."

Another example: At one time, the PI committee proposed placing four-by-six-foot backlit posters in bus shelters throughout Minneapolis and St. Paul. The proposal took a year to wend its way from the PI committee's brainstorming session to installation.

Each and every month, as faithfully as day follows night, we'd get a newcomer at the ASC who'd stop the proceedings to indignantly inform us that the posters constituted a hideously foul tradition violation of the highest order. Patiently, each month we stopped the meeting to help the newcomer gain a deeper appreciation of the tradition in question.

What does any of this have to do with electing the right people to the right service positions or giving a trusted servant the boot when he or she proves to be unworthy?

I'm getting to that.

While it's true that an ASC is the workhorse of the service structure, that's but a tiny part of the whole picture.

An ASC is a place where we learn what the traditions really mean.

We learn the difference between the Twelve Traditions (our own particular ones) and traditions (things that we do out of habit or to reinforce a meeting's atmosphere, identity, etc.).

We bring our ideas of who we are and give those ideas a reality check. We've all seen people who enjoy being the big frog in the group pond come to an ASC and realize they aren't temperamentally suited to hanging with other strong personalities.

The ASC was one of the places where I learned to cooperate with others and treat those who disagree with me with respect. Sort of.

I didn't have to be perfect. People were willing to very gently tell me to sit down and shut up. I like getting my own way. I like being in charge. I don't like people considering me just one more jerk in the room.

The ASC helped me learn that I have skills I didn't think I had by supporting me when I took on service commitments I wasn't sure I could do. They were there



with armfuls of advice and shovelfuls of criticism. They were there begging for someone to raise his hand to fill a position, then breathing down my neck when I didn't take the commitment as seriously as they did.

Some people who never considered themselves leaders come to ASCs and blossom. Some people who thought their leadership ranks up there with Hannibal come to an ASC only to discover to their chagrin that they're all sizzle and no steak. In public, no less.

I don't know about you, but many, many of the tasks I've taken on have helped me hone the skill of developing consensus from people predisposed to opposing such a thing. Today I learn my living as a project manager. My service activities, especially those at the ASC, have helped me learn to focus on the big picture while not letting the gnats of negativity buzzing around my head divert me from my ultimate goal.

What we as individuals gain through service at an ASC is incalculable. It's also not a pretty sight. People flounder and fail. People flounder and succeed. People lie to us. They steal from us. They surprise us by exceeding our expectations.

All this comes from people who are best known as drug addicts, losers, people who're guilty of every sort of mischief. We come together at an ASC and, if we hang around long enough, by rubbing one huge personality against another, we polish one another to incredible beauty.

What we come with to an ASC is a propensity to tear down rather than build up, a propensity to over-promise and under-deliver. The ASC is the crucible where we learn how to get along better in the larger community, where we mold the fellowship's future leaders.

ASCs are as messy as an infant's crib after he redecorates with the detritus from his diaper. Feelings get hurt and the message gets carried. It's a miracle in action.

Removing a trusted servant?

If done at all, it should proceed with sound judgment and caution, not the typical high drama of an ASC. If an ASC truly wants to pursue the removal, I suggest that the GSRs be required to go back to the groups for direction. Since

ASCs typically consider the failure of an RCM to return to them for direction an unpardonable sin, they should have to experience the cutting edge of the “directly accountable to those they serve” knife.

At their groups, I would ask that statements from both the ASC and the trusted servant it wants to remove be read.

I would ask that the GSRs tell the groups what their part in the situation was. For instance, if someone ran off with the money, what safeguards had the GSRs failed to put in place to prevent it?

If the GSRs are compelled to bring the issue of removing a trusted servant back to the groups, enough time will pass so that the passion of the moment will evaporate.

If the ASC acts on the passion of the moment, well, it’s just doing what ASCs do best. Hopefully, the removed trusted servant will continue to find recovery in NA. That, after all, is really what’s most important.

Finding the right person for the right position

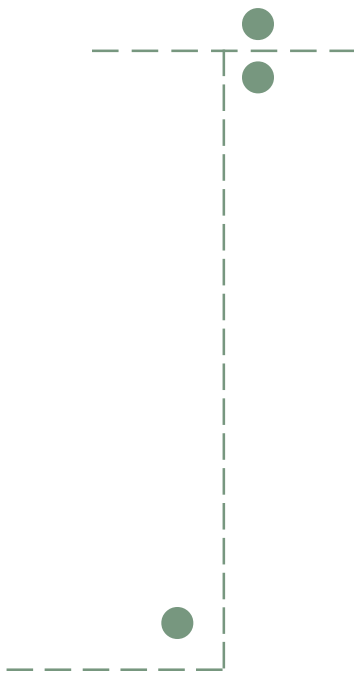
by Jeff S, World Services
Human Resource Panel

Just like a lot of people, I came to this fellowship because I didn’t have anywhere else to go. I didn’t “fit” in life, and NA was the last exit on the road to oblivion. When I got here I found a whole bunch of other people just like me, trying to build a life that was more beautiful than any of us had ever imagined. Now that I’m here, it’s only natural that I want to help. The question is, “What can I do?” If you’re anything like me, and I suspect you are, then you’re asking yourself the same question.

There have been several times in my recovery when I’ve been uncomfortable with my life situation. Sometimes my life experience has been downright painful. As I’ve shared these feelings with my sponsor and at NA meetings, I’ve often heard the same reply: “You’re right where you’re supposed to be.” Serving NA can often be just as uncomfortable. I’ve tried to serve in lots of ways. In some positions I didn’t have a clue about what I was supposed to be doing, but in service, just as in recovery, together we can do what we can’t do alone. My fellow NA members have always been there to answer my questions and guide me through my little part of fulfilling our Fifth Tradition—each group’s primary purpose is to carry the message to the addict who still suffers. Whether the guidance has been gentle or “less than amiable,” in the end I have always appreciated the help. In every situation I learned about the job and I learned about myself. I was right where I was supposed to be.

It’s interesting how we judge each other sometimes. With all the work that needs to get done and the overwhelming lack of trusted servants to do it, you’d think we would welcome anyone willing to help. But instead I often hear NA members talking about another’s motivations. “They just want the glory jobs,” or, “They have service-based recovery, not recovery-based service.” Such gossip is simply bunk. It’s not possible for anyone to get inside someone else’s head and determine their motivations. If people say they are willing, all I can do is take them at their word and help them along when they need some experience, strength, and hope.

We all serve for different reasons at different times in our recovery. It’s not important what motivates us to serve, only that we do. As we each travel our individual paths of recovery, our motivations will change anyway. I remember the first time that I set up a meeting. I got there early, opened the doors, and started the coffee. As I was filling the pot with water I started thinking. In third grade when my teacher asked me what I wanted to do when I grew up, making coffee at an NA meeting was not at the top of the list. But right then, it was the most important job in my world. I was part of something larger than myself. People were depending on me. I was making a difference.



So many times I have heard it said that this is a selfish program. I happen to feel and believe differently. Being in and of service renders that statement false. I came to NA selfish and self-centered, and I can still go there. However, the program teaches me, a selfish individual, about the joys of giving of myself, my experience, my hopes, and my love. I do this not because I expect an award, merit badge, or fame, but because of the sheer gratitude I have for what was so freely given to me. The principles of goodwill and anonymity are both reflected by my actions. Selfless service is the gift that keeps on giving as I grow emotionally and spiritually through working the steps. Selfless service leads me toward finding the true meaning of self-worth, self-love, and self-respect.

Craig R, North Carolina

As I grew in recovery, I wanted to be more “important.” Group treasurer, ASC treasurer, area service representative, and then regional policy work filled my plate. I was honored to play a part in organizing the first GSR assembly in the Upper Midwest Region. Since that time I’ve contributed in public information efforts and found a special talent in merchandising. In each and every situation, I was right where I was supposed to be. Now I really enjoy working in the background, helping to train others in how to be effective in service. I don’t need the limelight anymore.

We all have special abilities. None of them are bigger or more notable than any other. Each plays an important role in carrying the message, from opening the doors at the home group to translating literature into various languages. In a worldwide fellowship we can’t have one without the other. Some of us are good at keeping track of money. Others are good at speaking in front of large audiences. Some of us are interested in carrying the message through public information. Some have a passion for leading meetings in hospitals and institutions. Still others want nothing more than to work on conventions and activities. There is a place for everyone who wants to help. If you stick around and offer to help, you’ll naturally find your passion and your fellow NA members will recognize it easily.

My current commitment is on the World Services Human Resource Panel. This is the group of trusted servants who administer the world pool, facilitate WSC elections, and find people from all over the world to work on committees and project workgroups. The HRP continues to search out individuals who have specific talents and skills to meet the ongoing needs of world services. These needs are many and varied. The NA World Services Vision Statement says it best: “Our vision is that one day every addict in the world has the chance to experience our message in his or her own language and culture and find the opportunity for a new way of life...”

It’s a difficult job for a lot of reasons. Some of the world pool members don’t speak English at all, so their entire resume must be translated. We don’t get

the luxury of going to meetings with the candidates, so we have to do telephone interviews and reference checks. We have to provide lists of qualified candidates to the WSC for elections and to the World Board for project workgroups and committees. Obviously, particular skills and talents are required, but in every position that we seek to fill, we look for one common attribute in every candidate.

Whether serving at the group, the area, the region, or the world, the most important quality that we seek in any prospective trusted servant is commitment. Willingness is fleeting. Some days we’re a lot more willing than others, and when we’re less than enthusiastic for service, it’s commitment that carries us through. We depend on each other to do our parts in carrying the message to addicts who still suffer. This is a heavy burden because it is literally a matter of life and death. Sometimes we just have to do whatever comes next. It may be uncomfortable at times, but we just pick up one more foot, take that next step, and do it again. We just have to remember that we’re never alone.

I’ve met a lot of people in my recovery, many of them in service to NA. I can’t say that I like everyone I’ve met, and I’m sure that not everyone I’ve met has liked me. That’s not a requirement. Like them or not, I have the utmost respect for them, because, through thick and thin, good times and bad, they’ve always been there. We don’t always agree, but we get the work done, and the message gets carried. It takes all kinds. It is the commitment that impresses me. That sense of obligation to give back what was freely given overcomes almost any obstacle. Skills can be taught. Jobs can be learned. But when someone is committed to serving the fellowship of NA, they are always right where they’re supposed to be. ❖

Giving it away

by Richard C, New York

I once had the opportunity to start an NA meeting at a neighborhood community center and the privilege of attending the PI committee's presentation to the community center's advisory board. That was the first time I heard the expression "five percent of the people do one hundred percent of the work." From that point on, I decided to be one of the five percent.

In the past I've held such positions as area vice chairperson, area treasurer, GSR, newsletter committee vice chair, speaker exchange representative, outreach committee representative, and many group positions. I am still co-chairing a meeting and doing service work outside of NA.

They say you can't keep what you have unless you give it away. This is just one of the paradoxes of this program. To anyone outside of recovery, it wouldn't make any sense. For those of us in NA, we give away our knowledge about recovery. We give away our experience about how to get and stay clean. We empathize with newcomers by telling them how we got through our own painful situations when we were new. We give encouragement. We give our experience, strength, and hope. We give of ourselves and our time, when and where it is needed. We give unconditional love.

What do we keep? We keep our recovery intact. We keep our memories fresh of what our lives used to be like. We keep up our connection with and commitment to the NA program and the fellowship. We keep our confidence in ourselves and know that we're doing the right things for the right reasons. We keep in touch with our feelings and the things that challenge our recovery.

Part of doing selfless service is sharing unconditional love. When I was using, I never did anything helpful without some kind of ulterior motive. I had to get something back sooner or later. Today I can practice humility and put other people before my own wants and de-

sires. I've learned that in recovery, the more I help others, the more I will be blessed. The more I put into my recovery, the more I get out of it. I'm not talking about the physical things. I'm talking about spiritual rewards like happiness, satisfaction, and tranquility that this God-given program has to offer. ❖

On the interdependence of service and recovery

by Roger W,
area H&I committee member

When I attended my first H&I committee meeting in my area, I, like most of us, had no clue that this group of NA members would come to mean so much to my recovery and my life in general. This was a small committee, and its members had a lot of clean time and were very opinionated, even militant. There was a lot of controversy over NA members taking H&I commitments and not showing up at the monthly area subcommittee meetings. There were other issues flying around the table: speakers from other fellowships speaking on H&I panels and possibly carrying a mixed message; facility staff using our NA meetings for their own purposes; speakers on H&I panels giving their phone numbers to inmates.

This was very confusing to me, because most of these practices were done at the treatment center I had gone through. I felt that the NA members in H&I were so caught up in "regulations" that they had lost sight of what was most important: the therapeutic value of one addict helping another.

Some time has passed and I've had all kinds of H&I commitments, detoxes, rehabs, adolescent facilities, jails, and committee service positions. I've

learned so much from all of these commitments, and what I've learned has affected my understanding of the Twelve Steps, as well as the Twelve Traditions. I may have started doing service-based recovery, but that led me to work harder to apply the steps in all areas of my life. Doing H&I service and learning about the traditions have filled the void I felt in my early recovery.

While we keep working to carry a message of hope to the addict who suffers, we refine our ideas about what the phrase "the newcomer is the most important person at any meeting" means. We learn more about how we can best deliver the message of recovery and our responsibilities to NA as a whole. We welcome—with smiles and hugs, open ears and hearts—the addicts who will be here in the future, ensuring that NA has a future.

I'm still involved in the area H&I committee. At the last committee meeting there was a group of members who were very opinionated, even militant, but they didn't seem to be engaged in controversy. Instead, they were lovingly concerned with how best to share and care the NA way. ❖

I don't know if any of us can claim to serve in a truly selfless way all the time. I have to say, I'm sometimes surprised by how often my motives are selfless when I'm of service in NA. Recovery is truly a miracle. I don't believe that we should put off being of service until our motives are as pure as the driven snow. If a suffering addict calls me on the phoneline, what am I gonna do, check my spiritual condition before I agree to share my recovery? I don't think so. I'm going to take that call, and count on my HP to help me say what will best carry the message. And I might even feel pretty pleased with myself when I hang up.

Dan, Illinois

H&I Slim

For those of you who haven't had the pleasure of meeting him, H&I Slim is the ultimate "H&I kinda guy." He hangs out in hospitals and jails all over the world. You might say he's always in the know and always on the go. Got a question about H&I? Need some help? Write H&I Slim in care of the WSO.



Dear H&I Slim,

I'm the chairperson of an area H&I committee. I need help. One of the facilities we serve blurs the line between an H&I presentation and a regular NA meeting. During our presentation (1½ hours), they have a break, take up a collection, and have a raffle.

This was brought to my attention at our last committee meeting, and I'm not sure how I should address this matter. The facility is state-run and will treat addicts who have no ability to pay. They take up the collection so the residents can have coffee at the meeting. The raffle is an incentive to give at the collection.

Is this something we as the H&I committee should accept, or should we change the way our meeting is conducted?

*In loving service,
Frank B, Massachusetts*

Dear Frank,

First and foremost, an H&I meeting is different from a regularly scheduled NA meeting. An H&I meeting is conducted under the auspices and with the direction of the local H&I committee. The committee utilizes one of the suggested formats found in the *Hospitals and Institutions Handbook*. In these formats the Seventh Tradition is not observed. Whichever meeting format you choose, it is important for the H&I panel to maintain control of the meeting or presentation.

The clients are more than welcome to have a raffle or take up a collection, as long as they do it outside the H&I meeting. So, yes, you should change the manner in which your presentation is conducted.

H&I Slim

A tale of two fellowships

I owe an amends to Charles Dickens. You may think that my writing an article for *The NA Way Magazine* is an odd way to make amends to a long-dead novelist with whom I never had any personal interaction, but you'll have to trust me. Only this will do.

My seventh-grade English teacher had on her reading list *A Tale of Two Cities*. I read the famous first line, "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times," and slammed the book shut. I told my teacher that if we were going to read a book written by someone who was stoned, couldn't we at least read something by Ken Kesey or Timothy Leary? I ended up circulating a petition and getting the reading list changed. I never, until last year, read anything by Mr. Dickens.

So that's why I owe the amends. What does this have to do with NA? You must be shaking your head and wondering why the *NA Way* published this nonsense—talk about outside issues, or at least some very strange experience, strength, and hope about the Ninth Step!

So here goes. What this has to do with NA is that I finally understand how something can simultaneously be the best and the worst. Right now, at the beginning of the new millennium, in NA, it is indeed the best of times; it is also the worst of times.

On one hand, we're in an enviable position compared to many other programs and fellowships that help people with problems. We are well known, at least in my community. When I mention Narcotics Anonymous to people outside the program, I almost never have to add, "It's one of those twelve-step programs, you know, like Alcoholics Anonymous." Ten years ago, I not only had to add the reference to AA, I usually hesitated to mention NA because the stigma attached to drug addiction was much worse than now, and, if the person I was talking to knew anything at all about twelve-step fellowships, he or she believed that NA meant street people with bad attitudes, temporarily reformed junkies, and moldy bikers. At best, nonaddicts seemed to think of NA members as helpless, deserving of extreme pity, and doomed to a marginal existence no matter how long the term of abstinence from drugs. To me, it's nothing short of miraculous that in just ten years our fellowship has gained profound respect in the judicial and correctional communities and has taken root in dozens of new countries, even in places where democracy is considered some virulent Western disease.

In my community we can easily find affordable meeting space. Our meetings no longer look like gatherings of outlaws or the waiting room of the local parole office; the people in our meetings represent everybody you might find in the larger community. We also have one of the largest drug courts in the country, and the judges sentence addicts to combinations of incarceration, treatment, and Narcotics Anonymous—not some other program, even when there's a specific twelve-step program

for the particular drug that brought someone to drug court.

Though the full impact of the Internet has yet to be realized, and much that has been realized hasn't yet been acknowledged and articulated, one fact indisputable: People can find recovery on their personal computers. Think about that. Ten years ago, we considered it a major accomplishment to put up a billboard with a local helpline number that thousands might see. Getting information about NA into the hands of a small, local group of professionals took a lot of money and even more work-hours. Today, even if we only had one web site for all of NA (and we have many more), we would be accessible to the entire online world. Even if every suffering addict in the world sold his or her personal computer to pay for more drugs, chances are that he or she would still hear about NA from somebody—because we're global; we're on the web.

As for the program itself—our Twelve Steps, I believe with all my heart that if you wanted to create a plan for individual living that could solve all the world's problems, you couldn't do any better than what we've got in the Twelve Steps. (I say this with a background that should give me some credibility. I majored in religious studies and have studied most of the world's religions, both in principle and in practice.) Think about it. All the world's problems stem from selfishness and dishonesty. National selfishness leads to war, poverty, and xenophobia. Individual selfishness leads to crime, broken families, and spiritual bankruptcy. Dishonesty keeps us from ever seeing our problems for what they are and accepting responsibility for them. The steps, if practiced, address those very problems—they make us more honest and less selfish.

With so much going for us, how could anything be wrong? How could it be the worst of times for NA?

Even if we got through Y2K without the World Service Office or any of our area or regional offices melting down, we've got problems, huge ones that could destroy us. Ironically, our problems are based on the same things that have brought us to our current "golden age."

The stigma of being a drug addict has

lessened. Between celebrities and professional athletes, it seems like all our heroes go to rehab at some point in their careers. These "vacations" are widely publicized; unfortunately, so are the relapses that follow. The objectivity that's held as a sacred principle by the media treats these people with the utmost compassion, even when they've beaten their spouses, risked their children's lives, or gone on some binge of debauchery that included the sexual exploitation of minors. There are other factors that have contributed, of course, but the reality is that the media, and all who pay attention to them, are in many cases enabling us to death with their boundless compassion. The agonizing guilt (the most priceless gift ever given me) that compelled me to seek recovery seems to be absent in every newcomer I've worked with in the past few years. People still get clean and stay clean, but many of them get jobs in treatment and spend the next five (or more) years bragging about their active addiction. Society doesn't exert any serious pressure for them to change (get an education, stop swearing, model responsible behavior for their children), and working in treatment exacerbates this.

We're well known. In fact, most of the professionals working with addicts today know all about us. As far as they're concerned, we've been around forever. But addicts are still flooding their agencies, many who have "tried NA." Some professionals have concluded that since so many addicts "fail" in NA, maybe something else is needed. They are wide open to trying something else: new drugs that promise to control every inappropriate behavior from pedophilia to obsessive-compulsive disorder (this is *not* an opinion against using medication in recovery); every kind of pop psychology that some con artist consultant dreams up (this *is* an opinion); revived practices such as psychosurgery and electro-shock therapy; and you name it. God only knows what's in store for the next generation of addicts.

We're on the Internet. Addicts can log on, go to an online meeting or chat room, and relieve just enough of the pain of their addiction by getting attention

and encouragement from others online to go out and use some more. People can and do lie about their age, their gender, and everything else. We may even find ourselves reaching out to someone in an online meeting who isn't an addict at all, just another one of those perverse creeps who has nothing better to do than email hoaxes about computer viruses and terminally ill children to everybody. Our online discussion boards about service are open to anyone who subscribes, and I have never in my life read anything that disgusted me more than the paranoid, mean-spirited, and barely literate ravings that make up the bulk of the posts on our message boards. I pray that the people we're trying to reach don't have the time or patience to read our online message boards on a regular basis.

The final irony is that so many of our members use every beautiful and potentially uplifting principle of our program as justification for every sick behavior they want to act on. We are simultaneously the most insanely judgmental and the most morally retarded people I have ever spent time with.

The first of our sacred cows I'd like to slaughter is the so-called principle of unconditional love. Why do we place this "value" higher than our responsibility to protect children from abuse and neglect, higher than protecting emotionally vulnerable newcomers, and higher than making commonsense decisions when we elect people to handle our business and financial affairs? I don't know, but I suspect that it's because what we call unconditional love isn't that at all. It's actually moral confusion and cowardice. I know some people who would never in a million years sponsor someone who's taking antidepressants for diagnosed clinical depression, but who will drop everything to flock to support someone who's been clean a long time but somehow found himself unable to stop beating his wife and molesting his niece. "Unconditional love" seems to require posting bond, writing letters to the judge vouching for the character of this wife-beater/child-molester and the effectiveness of NA (as exemplified by the sterling character of the wife-beater/child-molester), providing a guest

room to live in after his bruised wife finally gets a restraining order, and so on.

We're so morally confused that we can't tell what's good from what's bad from what's evil. In fact, I am sure that most of us have gotten so politically correct that we squirm at hearing the word "moral" used in NA. Even though our Fourth Step tells us to take a *moral* inventory, most of us just think of it as an inventory of "bad choices" and "the consequences of our addiction," which waters down the unlimited potential of the Fourth Step to make changes in our lives.

We tolerate a great deal of truly destructive behavior in and around our fellowship. I have never, in fifteen years, heard anyone share about their responsibility to their family outweighing their desire to be at meetings or doing NA service more than, let's say, two nights a week. I have heard a few (not many) men talk about how the self-respect and recovery of newcomer women is way more important than their own desire for sexual gratification. Lest you think I'm male-bashing, let me add that I have never heard one young woman take responsibility for using men to avoid having to grow up and make decisions about a career, a relationship, or anything else.

Even with our penchant for "unconditional love" and "tolerance," we're still unbelievably cruel. Anybody want to know where all the oldtimers have gone? I'll tell you. Someplace, any place, where we're valued for our experience, where we can help people without having our motives judged and criticized. A place where we can have a discussion about ideas instead of other people. A place where we can go through a divorce without everyone we know feeling obligated to demonstrate their lack of bias by keeping their distance and leaving us alone with our grief. A place where we can have and express an original thought without somebody telling us we're "in the disease."

These times, at their best and at their worst, will be for us a crucible that will test what we're made of and what we're truly committed to. I pray that we, as individuals and as a fellowship, will rise to the challenge of living in God's will for us. I have high hopes for our two fellowships.

Anonymous

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CONVENTION OF NA**

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Cartagena, Colombia
31 August - 3 September 2000**

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To be considered as a speaker you must either submit a tape recorded within the last 3 years, or the individual must be recommended by their area or regional service committee and submitted in writing.

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MUST INCLUDE:**

The name, address, clean date, and phone number of the potential speaker, and the name and phone number of the person submitting the tape or recommendation.

DEADLINE:

Recommendations and tapes must be received no later than 1 March 2000.

Please mail to:

**WCNA-28 Program Committee
c/o NA World Services
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