



Review and Input (R&I) Batch #1

Deadline for input: 1 September 2019

Thanks for your interest in reading the first batch of draft entries developed for the Spiritual Principle a Day (SPAD) Book Project.

Please consider giving us some feedback on any or all of it. You can access an online form at http://tiny.cc/spad_RandI—our preferred means of receiving input—or you'll find a printable form on the SPAD page [www.na.org/spad] or you can email us at worldboard@na.org.

Review and input (R&I) ensures that the book will reflect our Fellowship-wide experience, strength, and hope. Your input will shape the revision of these 48 entries and provide more direction for us as we put 318 more together.

The deadline for input on this first batch of R&I is 1 September 2019.

Visit www.na.org/spad for background on the project and other ways to contribute.

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Unity, Entry #1

When we walk into our first meeting and see addicts coming together in unity, the spirit touches us even before the words get through (*Guiding Principles*, Tradition One, “Spiritual Principles”).

That first meeting. Some of us arrive beaten down, asking for help. Others of us show up because we need that paper signed. Still others come to prove a point to someone else or to ourselves—like maybe we don’t need a program and showing up at a meeting will somehow prove that point. We enter, not knowing what to expect, and try to stay on the sidelines, unnoticed. People are chatting, putting out literature, setting up the room, *being together*. Someone gives us a hug—to be welcoming, not for any other reason. *Culture shock!*

Our First Tradition tells us that “personal recovery depends on NA unity.” At first, we don’t grasp this concept. Instead, unity takes hold of us. Somehow, we accept that we just might belong here, and we surrender to the suggestion we hear: *keep coming back*. Some of us return to hear more of what members shared or read. For others, the togetherness we witnessed gets us to that next meeting. It’s the hug from a member that causes us to let go a little, because we sense that we are part of something greater than ourselves and our addiction. The spirit of unity encourages us to stay, despite the initial discomfort we may experience in meetings.

Later, at our first convention, we experience this spirit on a much larger scale: a celebration of our collective lives and the unity that springs from the simple fact that we’re all addicts who want to help each other stay clean. This abundant spirit of recovery shows the newcomer that we do recover, together.

Today, I intend to continue surrendering to the spirit of unity that keeps me coming back by helping newer members feel supported as they learn to let go.

Unity, Entry #2

Groups flourish with the loving support of addicts helping addicts. We strengthen our unity by participating in each other's recovery (*It Works: How and Why, Tradition One*).

After living in turmoil and fear for so long, the warm and welcoming atmosphere we found in NA meetings may have been puzzling at first. Some of us wondered if we were in the wrong place. We watched as members jumped in to help set up chairs and greeted each other with hugs. This behavior was unfamiliar and yet strangely compelling. Despite our suspicions, we wanted to find out more.

Some of us looked for excuses to leave or for reasons that we didn't belong, but found ourselves relating in spite of ourselves. One member recalled, "I heard the speaker share about the despair that brought her to her bottom. She gave voice to my own fears and regrets. It was a moment of clarity for me: I was not alone in my struggles."

We began to recognize that NA members understood the desperation and isolation of active addiction because they had been there. They found a way out and a new way to live. Initially, we connected when they shared about the insanity of using. As we kept coming back, we began to hope that the solution they found would work for us too.

Over time, we begin to appreciate what once confused us. We grow to value what we see and hear in meetings. We take part in applying the principle of unity by following the lead of experienced home group members; we welcome new members, empathize with each other's struggles, and celebrate the milestones of recovery. We notice what unity does for individual members as well as for the group—the way we treat each other contributes to a vibrant atmosphere of recovery in which members and groups thrive.

Group unity starts with one addict helping another. I will be a part of group unity by offering loving support to a fellow member today.

Unity, Entry #3

And just as all of us have our own individual personalities, so will your group develop its own identity, its own way of doing things, and its own special knack for carrying the NA message. . . . In NA we encourage unity, not uniformity (*The Group Booklet*).

Our worlds get bigger as we recover. When the fear and isolation of active addiction lifts, we can enjoy the company of fellow members. We may be inspired to visit other NA groups across town or in another part of the world, and we notice the different choices that contribute to a meeting's culture.

Members gather for meetings in bomb shelters, church basements, and next to hiking trails. Some groups join in with the readers, saying certain sentences aloud in unison. Other meetings save the chanting for the end of the meeting when they shout: "Go help someone!" or "Keep coming back—it works!" We have different ways of welcoming newcomers; we offer meeting lists, phone numbers, hugs, and sometimes even invitations to the meeting after the meeting.

When we attend a meeting that's run differently than at home, we might be annoyed by the format or the behavior. "They're doing it wrong," we think. But then we realize that it's still Narcotics Anonymous. We hear those familiar readings, recognizable even in another language. The atmosphere is one of love and acceptance. And that's what really counts.

Each group makes many choices about how to nurture an atmosphere of recovery. What that looks like varies from place to place, even within the same city. Tradition Four talks about group autonomy; now we see how that idea makes room for our creativity and diversity, helping us to embrace our differences and remain united.

Today, I will embrace different group personalities and the unity that allows our diversity to flourish in a single, worldwide Fellowship.

Unity, Entry #4

Unity depends on our willingness to keep coming from love, even when that seems like the hardest thing to do (*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Two).

Why is coming from love so hard?

Practicing the principle of unity in all of our affairs—and coming from a place of love while doing it—so often seems to require impossibly superhuman powers.

Sometimes coming from love is hard because a person has truly wronged us personally, hurt someone we loved. Or maybe it's the member who stole money from the group, or the one who gossips constantly. Or a newcomer from a treatment program uses language from another fellowship. Or, at dinner after the meeting, that guy is chewing with his mouth open. Again.

At other times, coming from love is a challenge because we *know* we are *right*! Yet our group's conscience runs counter to this indisputable fact. "There's no way in hell that our collective Higher Power is being expressed through *that* god-awful decision!"

Sometimes, instead of defaulting to empathy, trusting our group, or letting go of needing everyone to behave the way we want, we are driven to distraction. We want to throw chairs across the room or break down in tears of frustration.

Tradition Two reminds us that the group's conscience is expressed through a loving Higher Power. At times to support this idea, we've heard members say, "We are either acting out of love or fear." Maybe it's not always quite that simple, but as we grow, we come to understand how critical unity is to our own recovery, and we become willing to examine whether a chosen action jibes with spiritual principles.

Even at an emotional breaking point, it is possible to ask myself, *Am I coming from a place of love?* Today, I will take a moment to breathe before opening my mouth, clicking *send*, or throwing a chair.

Unity, Entry #5

We contribute to unity in our meetings by exercising loving care in the way we speak and the way we treat one another (*It Works: How and Why*, Tradition One).

Speaking to and treating other members with love, care, and respect is effortless. . . . Except when it isn't.

It could be fear that we'll say the wrong thing to the member who is grieving the loss of 20 years of clean time that makes us look past her. Instead of reassuring her, we say nothing. This action, driven by our discomfort, she takes as a harsh judgment of her relapse. . . . It could be a sudden serious bout of depression that causes us to snap at a newer member who set up the chairs incorrectly. . . . And that oldtimer's story that he's shared *three* times already this week! *Again?!* We can't help but roll our eyes as far as they will go. Maybe we just forgot to eat?

We don't intend to be hurtful or dismissive. We won't always know the right thing to say. And we don't all express—or prefer to receive—love, care, and respect in the same ways. In times of need, one member might approach us with warmth and a nonjudgmental ear. Another might demand, "Take the cotton out of your ears . . . !" in the style of old-school tough love. An action of physical contact—a friendly hand on the shoulder or that big NA hug—most often will be welcomed, but sometimes it will be rebuffed.

Our experience tells us that we must be doing something right, because so many addicts come to meetings and stay clean. We show up, and we listen. We may not always exercise "loving care" flawlessly, but as long we're trying to be supportive, we are exercising the principle of unity.

To promote unity, I will make an effort today to be careful in my words and actions keeping in mind "the therapeutic value of one addict helping another."

Unity, Entry #6

The unity that supports our common welfare is created not only by working together but by playing together (*It Works: How and Why*, Tradition One).

Many of us come into NA with tough exteriors after a lifetime of using. It takes time, honesty, and humility to drop that front. The safe, non-judgmental space we find in meetings makes it possible. Our sense of humor returns and our laughter contributes to the atmosphere of recovery. A member said: "I didn't get clean to be miserable. So when I saw people laughing and joking around, I started to think this just might work. My first convention sealed the deal!"

We do our best to take recovery—and not ourselves—seriously. Many of us embrace the deadly disease with a bit of gallows humor, poking a little fun at ourselves and laughing at the risks we took to stay high.

Recovery gives us the chance to make new friends, to try new things, and to remember them the following day.

As we practice unity, we begin to realize that we have more in common than not. Having fun in recovery is attractive to new members and therapeutic for us all. When we laugh and play together, we find the freedom to cry and heal together as well.

I need to remember to lighten up and not take myself so seriously all the time. Today, I'll take time to laugh at myself and share a smile in the spirit of unity.

Unity, Entry #7

What we learn about unity in NA helps us to figure out how to be members of our families, members of our communities, members of a team at work or at play (*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, "Desperation to Passion").

Before coming to NA, many of us had little experience with fitting in. We felt like extraterrestrial visitors and rarely believed that we belonged. We had a creeping feeling that we were imposters and lived in fear of others finding out that we were hiding behind a front.

This sense of loneliness and distrust made early recovery difficult. We wanted what NA members had, but couldn't open up long enough to let anyone in. We had to start somewhere, so we tested the wisdom of the advice we'd heard by joining homegroups. Soon, we found ourselves with service positions and sponsors. We began to feel a part of the Fellowship more often than not. Even when our sense of belonging shifts, we find that we're often *doing* better than we are *feeling*. We remain works in progress.

By participating in our recovery, we learn to participate in life. We start talking to our families, and stick with a job long enough to get to know people, and even let them get to know us. Thanks to NA and our experiences in the rooms, many of us have been able to reconcile with our families, serve our communities, and enjoy life. Our lives are transformed; we find fulfillment and purpose as we contribute to unity in all areas of our lives. On most days, we feel whole.

I will continue to walk through my fears and join in when it seems right. I will continue to open up and give back so that I can be a part of something bigger than myself.

Unity, Entry #8

Unity changes us. When we rise above our differences we start to understand who we are, how we fit, and how much we have to offer the world (*Guiding Principles*, Tradition One, opening meditation).

When we first come to NA, it's suggested that we "look at the similarities, not the differences" among our fellow members. As newcomers, this may have seemed like a ploy to diminish our uniqueness. We wondered, "Do they want me to think I'm just like every other addict? Impossible!"

That recommendation has been key to saving our lives. As Narcotics Anonymous members, we all have the opportunity to rise above, even embrace, our differences. Many of us find an unanticipated gift in recovering with people who don't look or sound as we do.

But even more unexpected is how we learn to draw from the assortment of perspectives that we encounter for how to work an NA program. Meeting attendance. Service positions. Working Steps. How many months (if any!) we should have clean before entering into a romantic relationship. And on and on. We encounter a wealth of experience, strength, and hope from our fellow members to draw upon. From there, we learn what works for us as individuals, and we make choices to benefit our personal recovery. We also benefit from witnessing and participating in lively, even heated, debates about NA issues at business and area meetings. A diversity of perspectives informs our own dynamic contributions to our home group, the region, the Fellowship as a whole, and outside NA in our personal and professional lives, even in our families.

Unity *does* change us. It helps us to look for and appreciate our similarities *and* our differences.

I know who I am and what I believe today, even as I strive to be open-minded enough to consider perspectives different from my own.

Unity, Entry #9

We learn when it's important to stand for principles, and when it's best to step aside in the name of unity, knowing that a loving God is ultimately in charge (*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, "Why We Stay").

We encounter different points of view in recovery and NA service. We may all be on the same path, working toward a common goal, but we're ultimately in different places along that road. For example, some of us take years to get through the Steps, while others work one Step per month. Some groups vote and others make decisions by consensus. It can be way too easy to slip into self-righteousness and believe that ours is the only right way to do things.

Accepting that members hold various perspectives and apply the tools of the program differently helps us understand the difference between unity and uniformity. There is, after all, more than one way to bake a cake. We learn to choose our battles and not have to be right all the time. A wise sponsor once said: "Would you rather be right, or would you rather be happy?"

Knowing when to stand firm and when to bend is a sign of maturity in recovery. We come to rely on the good or the god we find in NA. We learn to trust the process, and this takes away the burden of having to be right all the time. Allowing others—and ourselves—to be wrong, letting go of the need to be right, and holding firm to our beliefs are steps we take along the way to unifying our groups and our relationships.

When I feel contrary and stubborn, I can take a deep breath, let go of self-righteousness, and step aside. In quiet surrender, I will find the strength to extend empathy and understanding in the name of unity.

UNITY, Entry #10

Time and time again, in crises we have set aside our differences and worked for the common good (Basic Text, Tradition One).

People in recovery come from a wide variety of backgrounds. The demographic and cultural differences among us are innumerable, which often leads to being pushed out of our comfort zones and confronted with our own biases and prejudices. Often, we hear one member say about another, "Outside of NA, we never would have crossed paths. Who would have ever thought we'd become each other's closest friend and deepest source of support?" There are also instances when we develop intimate relationships in NA that end badly, causing rifts within meetings. And in service work, we've all witnessed how egos and opinions can clash.

But we all have two things in common: the disease of addiction and the solution through practicing the Steps. We must always keep in mind our common goals of staying clean, carrying the message, and living by spiritual principles. Whether it's hunting for a new meeting space, planning a holiday meeting marathon, or serving on an H&I panel, we will successfully collaborate with people we might not like or with whom we don't feel comfortable. We will face crises that call on us to unify in support of a member while she undergoes cancer treatment or grieves the loss of a child. We can be there for others and for the Fellowship, because we learn to prioritize unity over differences, to place principles before personalities.

Today, I will strive to place the welfare of NA and its members ahead of my own personal biases, ideas, and desires. As hard as that can sometimes be, I appreciate how we can see things differently yet be equally committed to a single purpose.

UNITY, Entry #11

With unity as our practical foundation, we find that our relationship with one another is more important than any issue that may arise to divide us (*It Works: How and Why*, Tradition One).

Recovery Fun Facts, #76 to 82: Addicts tend to be creative and bright, with brains chock full of . . . endless opinions. We are passionate and often have a strong sense of justice . . . the flipside of which can be profound self-righteousness. Lots of us are charismatic individuals blessed with considerable leadership qualities . . . who can be manipulative, giving others the smack-down with our encyclopedic knowledge of the Traditions. We are curious sorts who ask a million questions . . . about issues addressed in the subcommittee chair's report that we didn't read. We can be wonderfully flexible in weighing all the options about an issue . . . and change our minds and alliances many times in a single discussion. We can be calm, deep listeners who reserve offering opinions until all the facts are in . . . and then passive-aggressively subvert the group's conscience.

All of these personalities (and many more) are charged with ensuring that NA remains steadfast in its purpose to support the newcomer by carrying a message of recovery. Conflicts arise at group business meetings, during learning days, when planning a regional convention, and in NA World Services. Putting the principle of unity before personalities can be a challenge in practice. But it's our commitment to each other and our shared purpose—the very essence of unity—that helps us grow as individuals and strengthens the Fellowship of NA.

At the end of the day, it's our relationships with each other that get us through personal upheaval, financial peril, professional concerns—through every aspect of our lives. We strive to safeguard those relationships, especially when we can't agree on whether or not it's cool to buy cakes with the Seventh Tradition cash.

Instead of obsessing about our differences of opinion, I will focus on strengthening relationships with other members. I will seek opportunities to give or receive support from another addict.

Unity, Entry #12

Our ability to survive as a fellowship and to reach others depends on our unity (*It Works: How and Why*, Tradition One).

We bring all our old beliefs with us when we come to NA. Being intolerant and even hostile to people from different backgrounds may have been part of our identity when we were using. Some of us held prejudices based on race, ethnicity, or culture. Others held negative views about certain religious or non-religious beliefs, or sexual and gender identities. Our judgments about age, disability, income, and even what neighborhoods people lived in influenced how we felt about them.

It takes time to realize that our old ways of thinking may not serve us in this new life. And it takes even more time to change our thinking and behavior. We often encounter opportunities for growth as we do service in NA. One member shared about bumping heads with a homegroup member. "He was so rigid and seemed to be *against* anything I was *for*," the addict grumbled. Many of us have found ourselves similarly frustrated. Especially in early recovery, it's almost a reflex to assume that our way is best and they— whoever "they" may be—must be wrong.

Fortunately, our sponsors can talk us down from that tree. They help us see that we've taken it for granted that others should think, feel, and communicate as we do. As we get to know people from a variety of backgrounds, we start to see the strength in our inclusivity. Life is more interesting when viewed from multiple perspectives. We adopt a mindset of goodwill, and unity shows us how to put "we" before "me" as we focus on our common welfare. United by the ties that bind us together, we let go of our prejudices and embrace diversity as an asset.

I need NA to thrive, so today I will choose to practice the principle of unity by letting go of my old ideas and accepting all my fellow members.

Acceptance, Entry #1

Regardless of who we are, where we've been, or what we've done, we find in Narcotics Anonymous a place of empathy, acceptance, welcome, and belonging (*Guiding Principles, Tradition Two*).

When we get to NA, so many of us are thinking: *Oh, man, what happens when they find out I did THAT?*

Or maybe it's: *What if they find out I wasn't THAT bad.*

Either way, and everywhere in between, most of us come to Narcotics Anonymous in fear. We are afraid of being judged for who we are and what we've done. We're concerned we'll be asked, "Why are you here?" There'd be no point to answering that question, since we're already convinced that we'll be misunderstood. We fear that we won't belong in NA, and in many cases, we hope that we don't, so we can carry on using and not have to face our problems.

Instead of being denied entry, we hear that the only requirement for us to belong is a desire to stop using. All the group wants to know is what we want to do about our problem and how they can help. No one asks us for our addiction resume.

If we said that we leave all judgments at the door, we'd be kidding ourselves. We are human beings, after all. Instead, in spite of our judgments, our differences, our histories, we are welcomed and accepted. People have compassion for us, and it seems genuine.

Later, we begin to see ourselves in newcomers. We empathize with them, and welcome them just as we were welcomed. They are enveloped in the love members show one another, as they learn to love and accept themselves.

NA accepted me. Today I will ask myself, "What can I do to be more welcoming to my fellow addict?"

Acceptance, Entry #2

This acceptance of my condition—my powerlessness over addiction and the unmanageability of my life—was the key to my recovery (IP #14, *One Addict's Experience with Acceptance, Faith, and Commitment*).^{*1}

The powerlessness we discovered in Step One left many of us feeling empty and vulnerable. We didn't know who we were without drugs. The urge to control and manage our lives was overwhelming. We clung to our facades and a false sense of power.

The path to acceptance begins with an admission. It happens in meetings every time we speak. We start with our first names, and simply add "I *am* an addict." It's an ongoing process, but over time, the idea moves from our heads to our hearts. We come to accept it, to internalize it. And our lives begin to change.

When we accept our powerlessness and unmanageability in that vital First Step, it provides a foundation for every Step that follows. When we give up trying to control the disease, acceptance brings freedom. With time and practice, we sort through our internal struggles and find acceptance on a deeper level. The Steps help us discover who we are and who we're not. Acceptance gives us the opportunity to be ourselves and to allow others to see us as we are.

I've been given the keys to freedom. Today, I will stay clean and accept my disease, making new choices and opportunities possible.

^{1*} Please note that we have corrected the punctuation in this quotation by adding a second em dash. Regional Delegates will be notified of the corresponding change to the original as required by Motion 2 passed by WSC 2014.

Acceptance, Entry #3

We make peace with ourselves—with all we have gained, and lost, and learned, and become (*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, “A Vision of Hope”).

WHO AM I?

As clichéd and psycho-babbling as that question may seem, many of us will identify with having asked it—and not knowing the answer. Or more to the point, we didn’t want to know.

In active addiction, many of us could have answered the question like this: “Anyone you want me to be, baby.”

And right after getting clean, “Nobody!” might have seemed like the most accurate response, considering the shame we were feeling and how invisible we wanted to be in meetings.

Denial had kept us from accepting the truth of our actions and their impact on ourselves and the people who love us. Many of us paid the price of this lack of self-awareness with the loss of relationships, careers, assets, even our freedom.

The recovery process allows us to start contemplating our true identities, and it takes all the honesty we can conjure up, along with a healthy dose of courage and humility. We learn to accept that we’ve caused pain and injury, done damage to ourselves and others in our destructive paths. We also learn to accept that we aren’t the sum total of those actions.

Recovery affords us the opportunity to use the hardships we’ve endured to help others. We divulge our deep personal struggles—those from our pasts and those that will inevitably arise while clean—in order to deepen our relationships with other addicts. In doing so, we are able to show our fellow addicts that we have the ability to stay clean—no matter what.

Today, I strive to accept who I am, what it took to get here, and where I am now. I am not owned by my past. Instead, I will use it as a tool to help others.

Acceptance, Entry #4

The fantasy world that we lived in during active addiction fades as we begin to see and accept life as it is (*Working Step Four in NA, "Assets"*).

It took a lot of effort to create the alternate reality we lived in for so long. We invested in false perceptions and delusions about our lives and went to great lengths to maintain them. We became isolated from everyone and everything outside our self-made prisons.

As one addict put it: "My world had become so small. To live with that fact, I convinced myself that nothing outside my little sphere was relevant." In truth, we were only kidding ourselves. Denial and dishonesty protected us from seeing the harm we were causing. Once we raised the curtain of self-deception, we recognized the lies we'd been telling ourselves.

In Step One, we discovered many truths, but seeing the truth doesn't always lead to instant acceptance. It takes time to accept our addiction and life the way it really is. As one member said: "I was a legend in my own mind, and I didn't want to let that go."

By working Steps Four and Five, we identify the exact nature of our wrongs—as well as what's exactly right with us. And as we stay clean, the fantasy world fades, and we see ourselves and our lives more clearly. As we let go of the make-believe world we created, our real world expands. We don't have to cover up the shame and guilt created in active addiction with more "plausible but untrue reasons for our behavior."² Reality becomes a relief.

I will be honest with myself and practice living in the moment. I'll let go of my unrealistic fantasies and delusions so I can gratefully accept all that this life has to offer today.

² *The Narcotics Anonymous Step Working Guides*, Step One, "Denial."

Acceptance, Entry #5

When we practice acceptance, we distance ourselves from our reactions and reflexes (*Living Clean*, Chapter 2, "Connection to the World Around Us").

Everything is a trigger for many of us when we're newly clean. We are 100% impulse. Reactive. Protective. Feral. Territorial. The person next to us is sitting too close, even though there's an empty chair between us. The lights are too bright . . . in a candlelight meeting. Someone hugged us, and now we smell like his cologne! We complain about these things to anyone who will listen. Or we never go back to that meeting.

As difficult as it is for many addicts to accept, the world doesn't revolve around us. Often our need to fix, manage, and control knows no bounds. Fortunately, recovery teaches us this: While we are powerless over our addiction, other people, and our feelings, we aren't powerless over our actions. We have a choice. More often than not, people don't behave as we'd wished, situations don't work out the way we imagined, and life . . . well, life can get in the way of our plans. A car accident, an HIV diagnosis, a break-up.

Even with time in recovery, our first instinct may be to react negatively and impulsively. Our sponsor may be giving us the most insightful and loving feedback ever offered to an addict since the dawn of time, and before he's even finished, we're snapping, "I know, I know, I know!" Or, a sponsee tells us she's dating a woman with 72 days clean, and we flip out on her, pointing out 17 of her character defects without a second's delay.

Over time, we learn to pause. We put distance between our impulses and inappropriate reactions. We do, say, transmit nothing until we've vented to a trusted friend. We breathe, in and out, with our feet on the ground. We pray for guidance. Some of us even practice a radical acceptance: Everything is as it's supposed to be.

As I strive to acknowledge the role acceptance plays in my healing and serenity, I will take a deep breath before deciding what to do or say.

Acceptance, Entry #6

Listening to other addicts share without judging them is the beginning of listening to our own heart without judgment or punishment (*Living Clean*, Chapter One, "Growing Pains").

We do our best to silence our inner critics as we listen to other members share in meetings. We focus on their words and the feelings behind them. We practice acceptance by listening with care and attention. We set aside our own ideas about their lives and their recovery, even if it's just for the moment.

One member shared, "I can connect to anyone's story as long as I filter it through the message." When we listen for the message, it helps us relate on an emotional level. We can recall our attempts to stop using and the process of losing the desire to use. We find it easier to stop judging and start accepting our fellow members when we recognize all of our struggles as part of finding a new way to live.

We realize that being judgmental sours our ability to empathize, even when we don't give voice to such thoughts. After recognizing the obstacle this creates in our own recovery, we stop silently condemning other people's behavior. When we listen without judgment, we get a glimpse of freedom from the punishing thoughts we've lived with for so long. One of the gifts of NA recovery is that we learn to quiet our minds so we can listen with our hearts.

Today, thanks to NA, I will quiet my inner monologue and practice applying the principle of acceptance to myself and others.

Acceptance, Entry #7

Our attitude ought to be one of loving acceptance toward all addicts, regardless of any other problems they may experience (*It Works*, Tradition Three).

Many of us crawl into our first meetings totally paranoid and not having bathed for weeks, or fresh from getting high in the hallway bathroom. Or we're surrounded by a fifty-foot concrete wall with *DON'T EVEN EFFING THINK ABOUT TALKING TO ME* graffitied across it. Others slink in with a court card, counting days until they can get back to the business of dope. Still others waltz in, heads held high with enough entitlement, defensiveness, and been-there-done-that to fill all the dried-up wells in hell.

Tradition Three tells us that the only requirement for NA membership is a desire to stop using. It calls on members to welcome anyone who enters the room. But how do we know that someone else *really* has the desire to get clean? How do we measure it? We can't.

No addict is a sure bet for staying clean, and none of us can predict the future. We all know that perpetual newcomer who everyone thought would never "get it"—until they did. And what about the other situation we never saw coming? That revered old-timer, who helped countless newcomers to dismantle their fifty-foot walls, did every service commitment, and was the most beloved circuit speaker—until they relapsed.

It's human nature to judge each other and compare ourselves to determine where we fit. But it's only our personal recovery that we can truly assess and take responsibility for. And one of the most important measures of that recovery is our willingness to accept others for who they are—not for who we think they should be—just as we were accepted.

Despite my judgments, I will practice our Third Tradition by accepting and welcoming others, regardless of their appearance, circumstances, or reputation.

Acceptance, Entry #8

I have learned to love and to accept the people I sponsor as the people they are—not little mirror-images of me or any other model of recovery (*Sponsorship, "To the Sponsor"*).

Each of us looks for a sponsor who does the deal: trusts a Higher Power, cleans house, and helps other addicts. We seek out experienced members who have what we want and will accept us without judgment. Most importantly, we look for sponsors who will offer loving guidance through the Twelve Steps of NA.

Such love takes many forms. Some of us rely on our sponsors for an unbiased perspective on our thoughts and behaviors. Others appreciate being offered gentle guidance, tempered with loads of support and empathy. Whether our sponsors apply a firm hand or a soft touch, we learn to confide in them. Their acceptance of us—warts and all—helps us to accept that everything is as it should be.

Working Steps is a process of self-discovery. With a sponsor to hold the flashlight, our hands are free to dig deep. They help us figure out who we are and who we're not. As one member described it, "This process taught me not to fear the truth about myself. It turns out that I'm not as good or as bad as I thought I was."

We can learn a lot about recovery by talking to more experienced members. To find what's true for ourselves, however, it's helpful to have someone to question our ideas. As one member put it, "Instead of telling me what to do, my sponsor helped me figure out my own answers about who I am." We may aspire to be like our sponsors at first, but few sponsors are looking to mold a mini-me. Instead, they help us to be ourselves.

My sponsor's love and acceptance helped me discover who I am, who I'm not, and who I want to be. Today, I'll try to practice those same principles and help someone else on their recovery journey.

Acceptance, Entry #9

Our sponsor's acceptance and our Higher Power's unconditional love made it possible for us to judge ourselves less harshly (*It Works*, Step Twelve).

No one comes to NA on a winning streak. Denial had helped us ignore the wreckage, but those days are long gone. Our minds no longer reassure us: "You're living the dream, especially considering the lousy hand you've been dealt!"

In early recovery, we may experience rare glimpses of self-acceptance, but the mental whippings we give ourselves keep that optimism in check. We are undoubtedly our harshest critics. That's especially true when we make mistakes: not showing up for a friend in need, unintentionally making another member uncomfortable, blowing off a commitment, a relapse. Even for members in long-term recovery, our disease continues to urge us to judge ourselves. Not being real about our mistakes and overindulging in self-pity and self-flagellation runs counter to accepting ourselves as works in progress.

One member recalled, "Through his steady encouragement in the face of my self-made disasters, my sponsor showed me unconditional love and helped me be open to how a Higher Power was expressing it in my life. As my recovery continued, the chaos lessened but the whip I used to torture myself with never left my hands. Sharing the exact nature of my wrongs in Step Five—and still being accepted unconditionally—helped me put the whip down quicker."

Sponsors tell us the truth about ourselves. Inevitably, that truth is more loving, forgiving, and accepting than our version. Working the Steps with our sponsor teaches us to find that truth for ourselves. Through the practice of prayer and meditation, we can check in with a Higher Power to guide us toward what is real—about ourselves, our decisions, our mistakes—rather than relying on what our minds tell us.

I'll leave the "whip" where it is today. Instead, I'll pick up the phone and call my sponsor. I'll take a moment with my Higher Power and *get real*.

Acceptance, Entry #10

Recovery is not always a tidy process; we are building intimate relationships with other people and with a power greater than ourselves, and neither of these comes naturally to all of us (*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, "Relationships").

Before getting clean, a meaningful relationship was one that got us what we wanted. Now, we find ourselves getting to know and love other people and a Higher Power. And we don't always know what to do with that, even though our lives seem to be getting better.

We have a lot to learn about these new relationships. We make progress, but sometimes it's two steps forward, one step back. We get a sponsor and learn to apply spiritual principles. These are definitely helpful in our relationships with others. We start by being honest, empathetic, and sometimes even emotionally intimate with those zany addicts in recovery. We accept the fact that we need other people.

We also need a Higher Power. Some of us return to a spiritual practice we grew up with, others discover, define, and create beliefs that work for them. We pray, we listen, and—if our heads are in the right place—sometimes we even get answers. Other times, not so much. One member said, "Even when I feel disconnected from my Higher Power, I can still believe that you believe." And some days, that's good enough.

Relationships—with a Higher Power and with other people—have rough patches even when we're working a program. Our ability to accept ourselves and others helps us learn from challenging relationships instead of running from them. We can stay clean and continue to grow even as our spiritual connections and relationships ebb and flow. By working the Steps, our relationships get better over time, just like we do.

Even though it may seem messy at times, I'll give myself credit for learning to build relationships with others and with my Higher Power.

Acceptance, Entry #11

If we notice that we are the lone voice on every issue, we may want to consider the utility of acceptance and surrender as spiritual principles (*Guiding Principles, Tradition Two, opening essay*).

It's hard being right all the time. What makes it more difficult is that people don't seem to notice how right I am!

Before recovery, we were completely resistant to others' perspectives, especially about what we were doing with our lives. *My life, my choices*. Sometimes we'd pretend to hear someone out. *Yes, great idea. I will apply for that job tomorrow*. But we'd hit up the dealer instead.

Then we get clean, and there's an expectation that we take suggestions from more experienced members. *Yes, great idea. I will get a commitment tomorrow*. And we actually do! We even join a home group and are excited to participate in the monthly business meetings. . . because we have some great ideas that will improve this meeting! First off, the IPs should be racked in numerical order. Secondly, the refreshments cost too much; we know where we can get cheaper stuff. *And about that meeting format: Our area has too many literature studies!*

There are exactly zero supporters of our proposed overhaul. Actually, there are other proposals on the table the group favors. *Those won't work*, we say. The group feels differently and votes accordingly. The meeting continues to thrive.

The concept of a group conscience is foreign to many of us, especially one expressed through a loving Higher Power. As NA members, we all get to have our perspectives heard. With practice, we even start to see the wisdom in others' ideas. *They're almost as good as mine!*

Today, I can let go of some of my attachment to being right and accept the group's conscience. I will say, "Yes, great idea" to someone else and do my best to mean it.

Acceptance, Entry #12

Acceptance is not an all-or-nothing event, and it doesn't necessarily happen all at once (*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, "Growing Pains").

We talk about "practicing spiritual principles" because they take *practice*. That's certainly true of acceptance. At times, the only thing we fully accept is the fact that we're addicts. On those days, that's good enough. We practice acceptance by not picking up. And if we don't pick up, we won't use.

As we grow in recovery, we start to recognize where our acceptance falls short. Sometimes we might acknowledge a problem, but not fully accept its implications, especially when a solution requires us to take responsibility and make an effort. For example, we might sense relationship trouble, but may or may not adjust how much time we spend with a partner. Some of us can't accept, or even recognize, that we've been dishonest until we do a Tenth Step; the disease calls us to stop writing.

Our ability to practice acceptance sometimes wavers depending on who else is involved. We may be able to accept relapse from others, but not when it's a family member. Maybe we can accept the blunders of newcomers, but not those mistakes made by oldtimers.

We celebrate the progress we make, no matter how small: "Today, I told my boss why I was really late; that was a first!" Or big: "The loss of my beloved dog opened the floodgates, allowing me to revisit the grief of other losses and come to new levels of acceptance."

As we recover just a little more each day, practicing acceptance pays off. We experience rare and remarkable epiphanies with acceptance, and recognize the path it took to get there. We can hear other members' struggles with acceptance and think, "Yep, they're right where they're supposed to be."

Today, I'll look at the conditions I place on acceptance and try to practice this principle more fully.

Surrender, Entry #1

Surrender to the First Tradition brings us to understand that we are part of something much greater than ourselves (*Guiding Principles*, Tradition One, "Spiritual Principles").

When we hear the Twelve Traditions read the first several times (maybe even the first 1,000 times), the First Tradition sounds like some sort of recovery jargon. "Common welfare" is a new concept. As newcomers, we think we get the gist of it: Our days as the most important person in the room are numbered. To many of us, that notion brings relief, because we'd rather just be a part of the whole, instead of being singled out for our importance!

That "whole" is something we can't imagine caring about in our first days clean. Sure, we can understand surrendering to being powerless over our addiction. But then, we begin to surrender to the truth that we need each other to stay clean, *and* that there's a reciprocal relationship between personal recovery and NA unity, *and* that we are part of a worldwide fellowship comprised of tens of thousands of meetings with literature available in scores of languages. *Wow, all I wanted to do is to quit using drugs!*

"I can't, but we can" underpins the First Tradition. Our capacity to surrender to the principle of unity evolves, and it becomes more fluid as our recovery deepens. Surrendering to the needs of the group takes precedence over our desire to get our needs met at whatever cost. Many of us who struggle with the idea of a "god" working in our lives can surrender to the idea that we are supported by the power of the group. We begin to understand how our investment in something greater than ourselves through service improves our own lives and increases our feelings of self-worth. And something as basic as seeing a keytag with its "clean and serene" message etched in an unfamiliar language becomes awe-inspiring to us.

Today, I will take a moment to try to embrace the uncomplicated idea that I am a part of NA, just as NA is a part of me. I'll say a prayer for an addict who lives thousands of miles from me.

Surrender, Entry #2

Finding the patience and tolerance to accept those members we can't seem to stop judging is an exercise in surrender, acceptance, and humility (*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Three, "For Members").

Addicts tend to feel judged. Maybe that's because we can be pretty harsh in our judgment of others. Judging others and gossiping about people may have been currency in our old lives. These defects may emerge for us in recovery if we're not vigilant. They can poison our outlook on life, spoil our relationships with others, and drive members from the rooms. Tradition Three clarifies the one and only requirement for membership: A *desire* to stop using is all that's necessary.

We seem to get that when it comes to the brand-spanking-newcomer. Empathy for the newcomer comes easy since each of us has been in that position. It gets a little harder to set aside judgments of the chronic relapser. Then we remember that guy. He was in and out repeatedly over the years when suddenly something clicked. He stopped using and stayed stopped. Or we recall that other long-time member whose cleantime never amounted to much. When her mom spoke at her memorial service, she thanked NA for giving her daughter the best days of her life. We may wish that everyone would be able to stick and stay, but that's not a requirement for membership.

Judgments and expectations of people with significant cleantime can leave them feeling isolated, too. This is a program for living. We all need a place where we can share our life's struggles, our losses, and failings in order to survive them clean. Thankfully, we become less concerned about what others think of us with time. "Other members put me on a pedestal, but it's my responsibility to get the f--- down," one oldtimer shared.

When we are truly walking in surrender, we can muster a bit more patience for and tolerance of our fellow members. We surrender to Tradition Three and let go of any additional requirements for membership our disease may have invented.

I will suspend judgment and surrender to the Third Tradition by greeting that chronic relapser or thanking that oldtimer for continuing to show up and be real.

Surrender, Entry #3

Surrender means having the open-mindedness to see things in a new way, as well as the willingness to live differently (*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, "Awakening to Our Spirituality").

Change has a terrible reputation. It's scary. It makes our lives unpredictable. Many of us arrive in NA knowing for sure that we want to change the outside aspects of ourselves: our health and our finances, further our education, get a career. We hear the NA maxim, "It's an inside job," and that makes sense too. We want to change our state of mind and get rid of our insane feelings or our complete numbness. We'd love to turn the volume way down on the negative chatter in our heads.

Then we learn the inside job is more than mental: *NA is a spiritual program*. For many addicts, that realization makes us feel like we've finally come home. For others of us, that's the moment many of us want to bolt out the door and never come back.

But, we stay. We are told that living by spiritual principles means, at its core, being honest, open-minded, and willing. Even though we haven't been living that way, we see the value of those principles, and most of us *want* to be like that. In the program, we default to telling the truth, rather than being avoidant or keeping secrets. We become open-minded to others' perspectives rather than relying on the outlook and behaviors that got us here. Being willing to get a sponsor, attend meetings, write some Step work, and take a commitment *is* surrendering to the spiritual aspects of the program. Gradually, we gain some freedom.

For those of us with more cleantime, it's no different. Being open-minded and surrendering to change continues to be a necessity if we want any level of serenity. We can become rigid or completely lax in our program. Staying connected to NA helps us remember that we still have more to learn—and remember to apply what we have learned.

Change is inevitable. I can choose to resist it or surrender to it. Might as well try surrendering, since it's going to happen anyway.

Surrender, Entry #4

In ridding ourselves of all reservations, we surrender. Then, and only then, can we be helped to recover from the disease of addiction (Basic Text, Chapter 4, "Step One").

We reserve a place for relapse when we keep a mental list of reasons that might justify using. We can tell they're a problem because we defend and protect them. Our reservations reveal our doubts. Can we really stay clean through a death, a breakup, a job loss, or any big life change? As we watch other members walk through significant hardships and stay clean, we think maybe we could do the same. Seeing others choose to use when faced with unfortunate circumstances makes us wonder if they had held onto their reservations. We want to recover, so we continue to root out and surrender our reservations.

As we stay clean, we may find we still have lingering reservations. The truth is that we can't predict what challenges will arise. We never know what's going to happen, or how we'll feel about it. This is a program for living, and challenges are bound to arise. Surrender is just as important with some cleantime as when we were new. Eventually, we understand the value of surrendering our reservations to the best of our ability, and then surrendering some more when new issues come to the surface. Ongoing surrender gives us the best shot at recovering from this disease. We come to a place where we understand that no matter what experiences life may bring, they are not a reason to use again.

I will keep surrendering reservations as they crop up and use the tools of recovery to stay clean despite life's challenges.

Surrender, Entry #5

Surrender . . . is what happens after we've accepted the First Step as something that is true for us and have accepted that recovery is the solution (*The Narcotics Anonymous Step Working Guides*, Step One, "Surrender").

Our first introduction to the steps often stirs up a powerful rebelliousness. "All my life I've felt disempowered. Now you're telling me that I'm powerless and that I have to surrender? Every day?" many of us ask.

While NA is truly a program of action, we also strive to understand the ideas, concepts, and spiritual principles that underpin this new way of life. Before we got clean, surrender to most of us meant the inconceivable: showing weakness. In many of the neighborhoods we came up in, surrendering would threaten our very survival. For others, the thought of losing, or being wrong—and, worst of all, admitting it!—defied the very core of our being. We'd rather go down fighting than admit defeat.

Once we better understand the First Step and the concept of surrender, we realize that we've already admitted defeat when we came through the door of an NA meeting. "No one gets here by accident," our sponsor says.

Okay, we now understand that we've surrendered our grip on denial. We get that our addiction has worn us down, and we are powerless over it. No matter how we fought, we couldn't make using work. And, yes, we've even surrendered to the idea that surrender is a "process" that we must sustain by working Steps, going to meetings, service, all that.

"But what am I surrendering to?" we ask, thinking we are pretty smart.

"You're already doing it," our sponsor says. "You're surrendering to recovery as the solution. If you wanna fight for something, fight for that."

Point, sponsor.

I'm going to take a moment to find where in my life I am still resisting recovery as the solution to my problems. I'm still a fighter, but today my fight is for recovery.

Surrender, Entry #6

We are powerless over our addiction, but in our surrender we become powerful tools for transformation (*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, "Walking the Walk").

Before coming to NA, we understood surrender to mean giving up the fight. In our experience, nothing good followed surrender. We associate the idea with some of the lowest points of our active addiction: isolated by an abusive partner, demoralized by what we had to do to stay high, or ending up in handcuffs again. It's no wonder that some of us resist the idea of surrender when we first find recovery. It seems counter-intuitive that surrender would give us a chance to become free.

Although it might be hard, at first, to get our heads around surrender as a spiritual principle, a little practice allows us to loosen our grip on our ideas about what we need to recover. We start to recognize that our way hasn't worked, and we embrace a new way of moving through life made possible by Narcotics Anonymous. In this context, the principle of surrender starts to make sense for us.

We get a glimpse of how freeing surrender can be when we begin to identify as addicts in NA meetings. As one member said, "I could see that I had no power over my addiction and that life was unmanageable. Surrender meant I was willing to do something about it." Being powerless over our addiction means we have a disease that affects our decision-making process, often without our knowledge or consent. Surrender to Step One lays the foundation for right thinking.

Even though surrender helps to transform us, it's not a cakewalk. Conceding that "I can't, but we can" makes us feel vulnerable. Contrary to what our heads tell us, surrender positions us to accept help and to access the tools we need to walk through anything—and stay clean.

I will surrender to the recovery process, no matter how difficult. Today, I choose to be transformed through the Twelve Steps of NA.

Surrender, Entry #7

Only in working the First Step do we truly come to realize that we are addicts, that we have hit bottom, and that we must surrender (*The Narcotics Anonymous Step Working Guides*, Step One, opening essay).

We don't all enter the rooms of NA certain that we are addicts like *those* people. Some of us are dubious. Now that we have a couple of weeks clean, we remember our using a bit differently. A "disease"? *Really?* Sure, we have a problem with drugs, but it's not like we were ever arrested for it. We have a roof over our heads and teeth in our mouths. Never have we exchanged sex for drugs, and all our student loan payments have been on time. Was our bottom so terrible? Was it terrible enough to warrant a daily surrender? An oldtimer offers some unhelpful advice: "Maybe you aren't done yet." That sounds ominous, and we definitely have some sort of problem, so . . .

We stay clean and get a sponsor. We pick up the *NA Step Working Guides* and, at our sponsor's direction, begin to answer the questions as honestly and thoroughly as possible. By the time we get to the section on surrender, we've already written about our "disease" at length: our deep dishonesty and denial, our manipulation of the people who loved and trusted us, all the laws we broke (even if we didn't get caught), the powerlessness over our addiction, our obsessiveness, our compulsiveness, our obsessive-compulsiveness, the unmanageability we've created in our lives, and the reservations we may be holding onto.

Seeing it all there on the page, all that proof in black and white . . . It's undeniable. *I am an addict.* In an ideal world, that's the moment of surrender we never look back from. Sure, that happens for many of us. That's the beginning of our process of surrendering, opening the door to recovery. Others of us end up getting loaded, doing more "research," hitting a lower bottom, and surrendering later. Still others never make it back.

I've already done enough research. What is unmanageable in my life right now? What am I obsessing about? What can I do to surrender today?

Surrender, Entry #8

In the Seventh Step, we take our surrender to a deeper level. What began in Step One with an acknowledgment of our addiction now includes an acknowledgment of the shortcomings that go along with our addiction (*The Narcotics Anonymous Step Working Guides, Step Seven, "Spiritual Principles"*).

The steps are in order for a reason; each one prepares us for the next. Surrender to the First Step opened the door to a power greater than ourselves. In exchange for our surrender, we gained hope and freedom.

On a deeper level, surrender means we can't change on our own. We know that our way didn't work. We admitted defeat and looked to a Higher Power to restore us to sanity and care for our lives. When we got to Step Seven, we may have believed that our relationship with a Higher Power was really going to pay off—the only thing required in the Seventh Step is to ask that Power to take away the shortcomings we don't like, right? Oh, but there's so much more.

Step Seven surrender asks us now to let go of things that may have defined us and kept us safe. Some defects amounted to survival skills when we were using. Where would we be if not for dishonesty and manipulation? We ask ourselves, "Are they still serving us in our new way of life? What would life be like without them?" The answer is always, "a little freer."

Seventh Step surrender opens us to guidance and requires us to do some work. With humility, we surrender our shortcomings to a Higher Power and then follow the suggestions of our sponsors, trusted friends, and our own insights. Just like we can't get a job without filling out an application, we can't change without effort. As we surrender, we practice the daily application of spiritual principles and find that they can often counter our worst instincts. We sought a solution, and we got one in the Steps.

I will remember the gifts that surrender offers, do the footwork, and reap the rewards.

Surrender, Entry #9

Striving to maintain and build on our surrender, we are better able to live and enjoy life in the moment (*It Works: How and Why*, Step Three).

Before recovery, we had one primary strategy to help us deal with life's stressors: feeding our addiction. Drugs helped us escape from an abusive household or the feelings of loneliness from the death of our partner. They soothed the anxiety caused by our job, our rent, or having neither. We fled from the anguish of raising teenagers or the loss of a pregnancy. However well this strategy worked at first, ultimately it was not sustainable. The drugs stopped working, the money ran out, incarceration, overdose. We know the drill.

In recovery, we are shown new approaches to handle life's challenges—and even our successes. We learn to surrender our uncomfortable feelings, to accept the outcome of the day's events, to cope with the grimmest of tragedies just to be in the current moment. Practicing the Third Step daily, from the moment we open our eyes, helps many of us to deal with life on life's terms. We "turn it over" by whatever method or ritual we find works for us. Praying, meditating, sending a gratitude list to our network, calling a fellow addict who's struggling, or just taking a moment to acknowledge to Whatever's Out There (or Within Here, Up Above, or In the Two-Hundred-and-Twenty-First Dimension) that we surrender to its will and the power to carry it out.

We find that the practice of a daily surrender is sustainable. This process of surrender is a muscle that we build so that we can rely on it during our toughest moments. Just as critically, surrendering makes space for us to thrive. Turning over our will is metaphorically taking out the trash, clearing the cobwebs, airing out the sheets. It's washing the windows not merely to see out but to get out there and—*KAPOW!*—make our mark on the world.

Today, I will use the Third Step as a strategy to engage with life right here, right now. I can deal with the hardships of this moment—and the good stuff, too.

Surrender, Entry #10

Surrender begins as we become willing to consider new ideas. We can ask for help and accept it when it's offered (IP #17, *For Those in Treatment*).

In NA, we have access to a wealth of new ideas, information, and hard-won experience from people who know what we're going through. What a gift! Other members had strong feelings and survived. We ask for help and learn from their experience. As we hear their stories, it's not lost on us that asking for and accepting help share a common thread.

Asking for help is just the first part of surrender; accepting that help is just as, or even more important. Self-sufficiency seldom worked for us anyway. When we surrender, we give up fighting a losing battle all by ourselves. We become free to try new approaches to life's struggles, and we have each other to lean on as we do.

Not having to go it alone means that we can benefit from others' guidance. Our grip on self-sufficiency loosens a bit, and we become increasingly willing to share the burden of our secrets. Surrender happens when we consult our sponsors before we tackle life's problems. When we have trouble staying clean or moving past a destructive behavior, a lack of surrender may be our primary obstacle.

Many members have expressed the idea that "my best thinking got me here." When we accept that our own ideas haven't always worked out for us, it becomes easier to surrender control and let others help us. Knowing that other NA members have experienced similar situations and emotions helps us feel a little less awkward. We emerge from our vortex of self-centeredness as we start to see the wisdom of not going it alone.

If part of surrender means asking for help and accepting what my predecessors offer, I will be more willing to do just that.

Surrender, Entry #11

How do you know when it's time to speak up against a decision of the majority? When it's time to accept a decision and surrender to group conscience? (*Twelve Concepts for NA Service, "Ninth Concept Study and Discussion Questions"*).

Once a group or service body makes a decision, we are all *supposed* to roll with it, right? But what if the decision goes against our gut, isn't in harmony with the Traditions, lacks compassion by excluding some members, or puts a band-aid on a larger issue? Maybe the decision wasn't made with all pertinent information available. Was it truly an informed group conscience, or was it more like a popularity contest? What if we know for sure that the content of the decision has been tried before and it failed miserably? What if the group is wrong and we are right?

We have a process, and once that process is complete, to thwart group conscience creates disunity and confusion. Members then have to take sides, or not. Some leave the group or resign from their position instead, telling us "personal recovery depends on NA unity" on the way out.

The Ninth Concept of NA Service is clear that hearing all points of view is essential to developing a group conscience. But it's up to us as members to determine which perspectives have the most validity. The time to accept and surrender to a decision occurs immediately after our point of view has been heard, and the group elects to stay the course—despite what our gut is telling us.

If we are right and things fall apart later, we can be part of the solution—with humility. Even as we are reminded time and time again that we're not always right, we must also accept that others are sometimes wrong and there isn't anything we can do about it.

Today, I will participate in NA service with as much surrender and acceptance as possible. If need be, I will say to my group: "Well, I hope I'm wrong!" And mean it.

Surrender, Entry #12

Admitting our powerlessness is a surrender, an admission that we don't know the solution to our problems (IP #17, *For Those in Treatment*).

Admitting powerlessness over our addiction is often the first time we surrender to anything. Never mind the fact that we used to surrender to the drugs every day! We couldn't control our using, so what makes us think we can control our recovery? Many of us tried to stay clean on our own, with no success. We experience one of the greatest paradoxes in NA when we let go of our attempts to control the recovery process and find peace and freedom as a result. One member likened surrender to learning to float in water instead of thrashing about. It's a process of letting go.

We can surrender quietly to this new way of life and allow the experience of other addicts to guide our next steps. There is a sense of relief that accompanies surrender, a peace in powerlessness. Giving up our illusions of self-control frees us to become better versions of ourselves.

And in NA, we don't have to walk this journey alone. We ask for help when we need it. Sometimes that's the hardest thing we do, but it gets easier with practice. We learn to surrender our old ideas, listen to suggestions, consult a Higher Power, and make up our own minds about what course of action we need to take. We do the footwork, let go of the outcome, and move on—confident that surrender will help us accept whatever unfolds.

I will practice admitting my powerlessness in any situation and free myself to see new solutions. I will surrender the things I can't control.

Love, Entry #1

We learn that a simple, loving hug can make all the difference in the world when we feel alone (Basic Text, Chapter 8, "We Do Recover").

That awkward moment . . . We shuffle up to the door of our first meeting. Some guy is standing there with a big smile and asks our name. We reach out our hand to shake his, but instead of taking it, he puts his arms around us. "We hug in NA!"

For some of us, that hug is the first show of affection that we've received in a very long time. That simple, welcoming action can be reassuring (*you're going to be okay*), affirming (*you are in the right place*), even restorative (*you are loved and accepted*). We hear time and time again, throughout our literature and in meetings, how our self-love tank was on empty when we got to NA. Later on, when we inevitably make a mess of things in one way or another, our fellow members tell us with a hug: "You are not alone." That NA hug is an expression of unconditional support, and it's a distinctive part of our NA culture. It's meant to ignite that slow process of building (or rebuilding) our capacity for compassion, acceptance, forgiveness, and love for ourselves.

For many of us, receiving that love from others is a challenge, in the beginning and even with time clean. The idea of being loved by strangers who expect nothing in return can feel unsettling or outright bizarre, despite our loneliness.

And for others, it's not the love we balk at—it's the hug. We didn't grow up that way, in our families or cultures. Or, we aren't ready to be touched, period, and we have our reasons for it. Let's be straight-up: some women don't want to be hugged by the strange guy at the door, no matter his intentions. Sometimes letting the person decide if, when, and how they want to be hugged is the best way to show that NA love.

No matter who I am or where I come from, I will try to the best of my ability to let down my walls so that I can begin to accept love and share it with others.

Love, Entry #2

We learn to accept and love who we are whether or not we feel like we “match” the people around us (*Living Clean*, Chapter 2, “The Ties that Bind”).

For so long, we wanted to be anyone else because we were uncomfortable in our own skin. Many of us felt like we didn’t fit in anywhere. And it’s no different when we first get to NA. We compared our insides to the outward appearances of others and drew the usual conclusions. All we could see were the differences—and no one looked like we felt.

“Before we got clean, our identity was built on fantasy: who we could be, would be, should be, or even who we used to be.”¹ With precious little self-knowledge, it was difficult to build the bonds of human connections. Our ability to share with or relate to others was limited at best. We justified keeping other members at arms’ length with assumptions based on old thinking and outward appearances. One member shared, “I shielded the scared little girl inside with spikes and leather. I looked for others with similar armor, thinking maybe we could be alone together.”

In recovery, we learn to act our way into better thinking. We begin by emulating people we admire and picking up new behaviors that seem to fit. We do the next right thing, knowing that we don’t have to feel okay to be okay. We learn to practice love as a spiritual principle by simply listening to our fellow members.

Sometimes, we learn to love and accept others as they confront their greatest challenges—the new member, the recent widow, the cancer survivor, the parents fighting for custody of their children. We relate to their grief, their struggle, their vulnerability as they share their pain. Moments like these bring us back to the human race. The conditions of our own brokenness may have been vastly different, but we connect based on feelings.

We connect, accept, and love others and ourselves. The basis of “matching” those around us shifts to higher ground, and we learn to practice love and acceptance of ourselves and others a little more fully.

I will examine my ideas about fitting in and discard some old thinking. Today, I will practice the principle of love by looking for opportunities to connect with other members, even when they don’t look like me.

¹ *Living Clean*, Chapter 2, “The Ties that Bind.”

Love, Entry #3

When we are practicing Step Twelve to the best of our ability, love becomes central to all that we do—there is no more powerful antidote to the despair and self-destruction of addiction (*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, "Love").

Love in Narcotics Anonymous is the Twelfth Step in action. We felt the power of love when we entered our first meeting and were welcomed, no matter what we looked like, where we came from, how we smelled, or who we came with. We found open arms and true acceptance—perhaps for the first time in our lives. The hugs, genuine care and concern, and offers of support extended to us provide a powerful model of love in action.

In the beginning, allowing ourselves to receive this love takes some effort. Eventually, we get to give it away. That sounds simple, but it's not always easy. Through service, we learn to love even those members we don't really like. Sometimes we're surprised by what can happen when we focus on the primary purpose and choose principled actions.

One H&I subcommittee member recalled serving on a panel with his least favorite person in the rooms. "We set our difference aside and focused on our primary purpose," the member shared. "We're never going to be best friends, but I could see his heart was in the right place. We both loved NA and wanted help the addict who still suffers."

As NA members, we understand that sharing the message is an act of love. We share and we care to sustain our own recovery and to help the sick and suffering addict. It's what saves us all from the desperate and self-destructive lives we've known. After being in NA for some time, we also appreciate the love extended to those who've been here for a while, who need love just as surely as they did on their first day clean. While love alone may not help us overcome all our problems, it sure does provide a great springboard toward the solution.

I will put love into action by carrying the NA message today.

Love, Entry #4

It is a loving act to let others love us (*Living Clean*, Chapter 4, "Death, Dying, and Living with Grief").

NA recovery allows us to accept love even when our lives have been shattered by loss. Emotional pain makes this feel especially risky, but we take a chance, gather our courage, and lean on our fellow members. In times like these, we grow to appreciate all that recovery has to offer.

Too often, pride, low self-esteem, and fear of rejection block us from reaching out or accepting help from others. Not wanting to be a burden or to appear needy, we isolate and tell ourselves that we can handle this alone. We overestimate our nuisance value and deny others the opportunity to love, support, and serve us. We're embarrassed by our pain. It's inconvenient and uncomfortable to be so vulnerable. We hide behind a cloak of self-sufficiency and independence.

Of course, there's no right or wrong way to grieve. It's not unreasonable to want to spend some time alone with our thoughts and our HP. Intense feelings of loss can make it hard to find a balance between solitude and isolation. We do our best to be honest with ourselves. Letting others love us when we're grieving helps us avoid the trap of old ideas.

Accepting love, whether gracefully or begrudgingly, is in itself an act of love. And the consequences often prove astounding. "My best friend relapsed and died," one member shared. "I thought people didn't want to hear about how I felt, but after I shared, I got so much love and support that it truly renewed my faith in NA. It's why I'm clean today."

I will trust the process, feel the pain, and allow others to feel it with me today. I will let others love me, even when I'd rather they didn't.

Love, Entry #5

Unconditional love is not the same as unconditional acceptance. I don't have to like your behavior, but that doesn't mean we reject each other as human beings (*Guiding Principles*, Tradition 1, "For Groups").

Oh, boy. This.

So often, we come from families and relationships where love was conditional. If we didn't act right, when we made mistakes, love was withheld from us. For many addicts, rejection of any sort is unbearable. When an NA member takes issue with something we did or said, that's solid evidence that we are worthless. That person is now our mortal enemy, judging us every second. No matter how gently we are pulled aside and pulled up, we won't be able to feel the love in it—nor will we be able to forget it. Forever and ever, we will remember *her*, that oldtimer who took us aside after the meeting told us, "I love you, but could you please . . . "

That being said, there's no list of hard-and-fast rules to determine when a member's behavior in meetings warrants unsolicited feedback. Someone shared recently, "No matter how obnoxious I was, people always gave me a hug and told me to keep coming back." Ideally, our default is to treat each other with respect and kindness. But we also must consider our common welfare when, for instance, someone is being predatory or violent toward another member or is otherwise putting the meeting at risk. NA is here for all addicts, and our experience shows that we can support members through just about anything.

Our capacity to love and accept others as they are impacts our personal growth in recovery. When someone drives us mad, "Pray for them," a trusted oldtimer suggested. "We don't have to pray they win the lottery. But still pray for them."

I am reminding myself that we are all addicts trying to get and stay clean one day at a time. I don't like _____ [*fill in the blank*], but today, I'll try to love them anyway.

Love, Entry #6

The love we share in NA means we care enough to save each other's lives (*Guiding Principles*, Tradition 2, "Spiritual Principles").

Attending meetings lets us see the myriad ways in which members practice the spiritual principle of love. We observe the pre-meeting rituals, with warm welcomes all around. We recognize the love and trust it takes for us to share our pain, our breakthroughs, and our misadventures or to offer loving support by listening, nodding, and passing tissue.

After the meeting, we may catch a glimpse of a small group of two or three members who have stepped away from the crowd for a private conversation. If you've ever been pulled into such a discussion only to discover that your behavior is the topic, well, it may not have struck you as loving at the time.

As one member shared, "A couple of homegroup members 'suggested' that I get to the meeting on time if I wanted to hug all my friends before I took a seat. I was a bit embarrassed, but learned to enter a bit more discreetly when I'm late." With 20/20 hindsight, we can see the loving action members like these take to protect the atmosphere of recovery in our meetings and teach newer members how to behave. Love isn't always gentle. Sometimes we show love by saying, "We love you, but not your behavior."

As one addict shared, "Love is not simply an emotion; it's also an action." The action of love is the effort we choose to put into how we carry the message of NA. We share our recovery to save another addict's life, and it's one of the most loving actions we can take. It may not be convenient or easy, but the work is well worth it when we see another addict grow into a productive member of society and pass the NA message onto other suffering addicts. This is the work of love.

I will share the lessons I was taught when I first came around. Today, I will pass on the love that saved my life.

Love, Entry #7

Being of loving service is living spiritually. First we take, then we give, then we share (*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, "Creative Action of the Spirit").

In Narcotics Anonymous, we arrive to find ourselves the most important person in the room. For a lot of us, that notion is terrifying, but some of us enjoy the rock star treatment.

We grab a white keytag and do a victory lap for thirty days in a row—including weekends. We share in every meeting until the timer goes off (every time), wondering aloud what the hell we are doing here with "all you people . . . no offense." We dazzle our fellows with our theory of the difference between humility and humiliation. They must like what we have to say, 'cause they tell us: "Keep coming back." We find a sponsor and bend his ear with a detailed account. "Sponse" picks us up at the recovery house and buys us a meal after the meeting. He doesn't say much, but he's definitely listening!

As our status as the most important person melts away and our keytag color changes to orange, Sponse suggests we listen more instead of talking so much, take meeting commitments that don't court attention, and reach out to newcomers. We get a blue six months clean, and we ask Sponse about doing H&I. "Good idea," is his response. We think he's pleased about our initiative, even though he says nothing about it. Our bravado shifts. We get some high-fives and tighter hugs from members who acknowledge how well we're doing. That feels undeniably good, but showing up for other addicts feels even better.

Our story continues. We glow in the dark at one year and are black-and-gold at two. Our commitment to service deepens. We are invited to participate in our recovery, to share our experience, strength, and hope. We start to have this strange new feeling that we can't quite put our finger on. We try to articulate the feeling to Sponse: "It's something about being of value, maybe a little gratitude thrown in . . . ?" argh, we struggle to find the words.

"Hmm," says Sponse. "Sounds like you're finally awake."

Today, I will ask, "How can I be of loving service?" I will listen to the answer and take action, because this is how I want to live.

Love, Entry #8

We experience new sensations: to love, to be loved, to know that people care about us and to have concern and compassion for others (Basic Text, Chapter 10, "More Will Be Revealed").

"Low self-esteem would have been a step up," recalled one member of early recovery. Many of us started our journey in Narcotics Anonymous with little or no self-worth. After a lifetime of addiction, we believed down to our core that we weren't worthy of love.

We'd been so dishonest and manipulative in our own lives that it was hard to fathom the kindness and sincerity we found in NA. Did they really care whether we found recovery or not? Judging by their actions, it seemed that they did. We believed that if people really got to know us, all that love, concern, and compassion would disappear. They kept telling us to come back, and that gave us some comfort and hope.

This sort of love was new to us. Instead of relying on feelings, members showed love through their actions: by calling to see if we were all right, by inviting us out after meetings, and by listening to us even when we sounded bonkers.

Love is infectious. We became increasingly capable of loving others, just as we were loved. One member described how that contagion took hold: "I started acting as if I cared, and doing for others what had been done for me. To my surprise, I began to care about other people sincerely." As we become loving and compassionate people, we find new ways to participate in the world.

Today, I will practice love by expressing my care and concern for another member, by acting as an unofficial greeter at the next meeting I attend, or by appreciating my growth in recovery.

Love, Entry #9

My sponsor was one of the people in NA who loved me until I could love myself (*Sponsorship*, "What is Sponsorship?").

Many of us came to the rooms of NA battered and broken apart, full of secrets that we planned to take to the grave. Getting clean—yes, we are done with using! We can't keep a job. Our health is terrible. We can't bear to see that look in our parent's eyes one more time.

But what's this "secrets keep you sick" thing we keep hearing? We just want to put the past behind us, and instead, we're encouraged to tell some sponsor about it? We can share some of it, but not *that*. Oh, hell, no! *No one can ever know that*. And "loving ourselves"? *Does that mean I have to look in the mirror and say affirmations? Is this a requirement?*

For many of us, our sponsor is the first—and perhaps only—person who hears about our darkest actions toward others, our insane thoughts and behaviors, and our deep pit of self-destructiveness. The shame and self-hatred we feel are met with empathy and patience. Our sponsor's loving response and their commitment to loving us helps us to understand, a bit at a time, that we are deserving of love. Working the steps with them helps us start to organize the mess we had made of our lives. We know we can tell our sponsor anything, and we know we have to in order to stay clean.

Gazing at ourselves in the mirror and blowing loving kisses at our reflection is not a requirement of NA membership. But, after sustained exposure to the love and acceptance freely given to us by our sponsor, maybe . . .

I will thank my sponsor for their unconditional love. Today, I truly can say that I am on the road to loving the person I've become in NA.

Love, Entry #10

I think that the most valuable lesson sponsorship gives me is the opportunity to practice unconditional love. It deepens my appreciation for what has been given to me (*Sponsorship*, "What is Sponsorship?").

It takes a lot of courage to ask someone to be your sponsor. It takes even more courage to *be* a sponsor, as well as patience with ourselves and our sponsees. Whether we admit it or not, some of us avoid newcomers because we see ourselves in them. We know we drive ourselves nuts, so how can we deal with more than one of us? Also, what happens if we mess them up worse? And years later, when we have time and a reasonable amount of experience, we are asked by someone we respect to guide them through the Steps. Those feelings of fear resurface. *What if I'm not good enough?*

Our sponsor's steadfast support plays a huge role in our recovery, especially when we are the knucklehead we can sometimes be. At times, we are also aware that our sponsor is just another human being, an addict with character defects like ours, who can offend us or come up short. The mutual love, respect, and acceptance that flows back and forth within that relationship are instructive in our decision to sponsor others.

"Yes, of course, I'm so honored you asked." And we won't do it perfectly. For some of us, even with experience, our patience might wear thin when a sponsee doesn't take our suggestions. We have to confront our powerlessness when someone we sponsor relapses or acts out. There are times when our own lives are unmanageable, and we have to dig deep to be able to show a sponsee the unconditional love she needs.

Sometimes we make mistakes. But just as in the relationship with our own sponsor, we make it work, because we need each other to stay clean. Or we can't make it work. Sometimes going our separate ways is itself an act of love.

Today, I will give back some of the unconditional love I received—to a sponsee, my sponsor, or any addict who needs it.

Love, Entry #11

How we go about getting love is where our defects come into play (*The Narcotics Anonymous Step Working Guides*, Step Six, "Our Defects of Character").

Before coming to the Fellowship of NA, we had a distorted sense both of giving and receiving love. Now that we're clean, we've got love all figured out . . . *if only that were true!* It doesn't matter how much time we have clean (or what type of love we are talking about); love is a serious business that requires vigilance.

Where and how do we addicts go looking for love? When we write our inventories and listen to those of our sponsees, that question is answered in abundance. We hear many stories of unmet expectations, abandonment by parents and partners, abuse, and neglect. Others are about relationships sought, gained, and sustained through manipulation and passive-aggressive behaviors—and sometimes coercive acts. We hear about love being confused with the exchange of sex, money, and, of course, drugs.

We did these things to others, and others did them to us. And many of these behaviors will appear in future inventories, because our character defects will rear their ugly heads again. The difference is that in NA we have the opportunity to seek and express love in ways that are manifestations of our assets, rather than our defects.

In NA, we get to experience the unconditional love of the Fellowship. We learn how to love and care for people in the rooms, as we learn how to accept that same love and care from others. Also, we will have abundant opportunities outside the rooms to apply the principles of love. Through working the Steps honestly and thoroughly, we are far less likely to try to manipulate and control others—or let ourselves be manipulated and controlled.

I am learning new ways to give and receive love. I don't have to act on my defects to experience love anymore. I will try to love those in my life with acceptance instead of expectations today.

Love, Entry #12

Practicing the principle of unconditional love in the Twelfth Step is essential. Nobody needs love without conditions more than a suffering addict (*The Narcotics Anonymous Step Working Guides*, Step Twelve, "Spiritual Principles").

Judging from our experience prior to NA, many of us believed that love only came with conditions. That was often true in our families and in our relationships while using. We were loved as long as we got good grades, landed decent jobs, looked good, or could talk our way out of an arrest. We internalized these messages and berated ourselves for not being good enough. We felt ashamed of our very existence. Many of us turned those feelings of guilt and shame outward. We judged others based on how we felt about ourselves.

Thankfully, working a program allows us to examine and discard much of this damaged thinking. Members' willingness to love and support us without conditions made that work possible. Their unconditional love helped us to climb out of that pit of despair and self-loathing.

When we began to work the Twelfth Step, we got to pay that favor forward by giving unconditional love to other suffering addicts. Our self-esteem grew as we did esteemable acts. As one member shared, "After taking a meeting into the local jail every month for a year, I began to believe that maybe I was a good person, worthy of love too."

Learning to practice unconditional love is a process. The love of other members sustains us along the way. "If I'd had to wait until I loved myself, I might not have made it." A firm hug outside a meeting, sharing our story at an H&I meeting, giving newcomers rides, even a friendly smile of recognition—we give and receive these acts of love without conditions. And it keeps us coming back.

Today, I will give away the unconditional love that was (and is) so freely given to me.