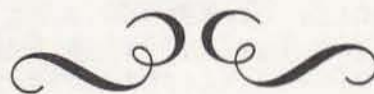


**It Works:**  
How and Why

World Service Conference  
Literature Committee  
Unapproved Literature  
For Review and Input

# **It Works: How and Why**

A Guide to the Twelve Steps and  
Twelve Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous



World Service Conference  
Literature Committee  
Unapproved Literature  
For Review and Input

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions  
reprinted for adaptation by  
permission of A.A. World Services, Inc.



---

Copyright © 1985 by World Service Office, Inc.  
All rights reserved

World Service Office, Inc.  
16155 Wyandotte Street  
Van Nuys, CA 91406  
(818) 780-3951



World Service Conference  
Literature Committee  
Unapproved Literature  
For Review and Input



PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

---

## Forward

Narcotics Anonymous is a Fellowship of men and women for whom drugs had become a major problem. We are recovering addicts who meet regularly to help each other stay clean. The Program of Narcotics Anonymous, often referred to as N.A., is based on 24 principles. These principles are specifically defined in the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions which were originally borrowed from Alcoholics Anonymous and adapted for use in N.A. Thousands of addicts have achieved total abstinence and ongoing recovery through the application of these principles.

In 1982, the book Narcotics Anonymous was first published. In its pages, the disease of addiction was described by recovering addicts who shared their personal experiences, strength and hope. This book outlined a better way of life, and became known as a Basic Text of recovery. It provided general information and discussion about the principles of recovery found in the Program of Narcotics Anonymous.

The present text is intended to provide a more in-depth explanation of the principles of the N.A. Program. The experience of countless recovering addicts has demonstrated that the N.A. Program works. These addicts have shared, through their collective wisdom, that the answer to how it works is the Twelve Steps. The answer to why it works, is the application of the Twelve Traditions. Appropriately, this text is entitled IT WORKS: How and Why.

IT WORKS was designed to be used as a supplement to the Basic Text. There are 24 chapters; each addresses one of the 24 principles of the program. Numerous quotes from the Basic Text appear, and are referenced with page numbers so that readers may refer to the original source. In conjunction with the Basic Text, it is hoped that this book will furnish addicts, with a desire to stop using, a practical means of achieving total abstinence and ongoing recovery.

Because addiction is a threefold illness, affecting us physically, mentally and spiritually, any discussion of the principles of recovery necessarily involves discussion of a Power greater than ourselves. Throughout these pages, you will find reference to **God, a Higher Power and God as we understand Him**. We use these phrases interchangeably, to mean only one thing: A Power greater than ourselves who does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. The Fellowship of N.A. encourages you to search out and discover for yourself, a God of your own understanding. In using the term "God, as we understand Him," we do not mean to imply male gender. We use these words only for the sake of simplicity, and acknowledge that each individual is entitled to develop and believe in his/her own personal concept of a Higher Power.

The information for this text was drawn from the experiences of recovering addicts throughout the United States. Particular

effort was made to solicit participation from N.A.'s earliest members, who shared valuable knowledge and perspective, especially with regard to the Twelve Traditions. The contributors for this book are too numerous to acknowledge, and in fact decline special mention in the spirit of anonymity. We therefore humbly dedicate this book to the entire Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous. We speak to its newest and yet-to-be members, without whom there would be no opportunity to share the miracle of recovery. We also speak to its older members, to whom we are eternally indebted for showing us the way to a better life. With these thoughts in mind, this book is offered, in a spirit of humility and gratitude, in the hope that all addicts may find recovery through the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous.

In loving service,

WSC Literature Committee

Contents

Foreward . . . . . iii  
Introduction . . . . . 1

THE TWELVE STEPS

Step One . . . . . 7

"We admitted that we were powerless over our addiction--that our lives had become unmanageable."

Addiction is a physical, spiritual and emotional illness with symptoms of alienation, denial, physical dependency and feelings of inadequacy. Powerlessness means the inability to control events--using. Recognition that we don't have power. Unmanageability in trying to control others, stealing, lying, cheating, using material possessions to "fix" us. Nothing worked--we tried to get the outside together, but the inside fell apart. Hitting bottom is crucial to spiritual growth.

Step Two . . . . . 14

"We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."

Step One left us with a void because we can't keep ourselves clean. We couldn't use anymore and had nowhere else to turn. We had only our insanity to lose. It is necessary to admit defeat before we can become open-minded. We had to get rid of old ideas about God. Coming to believe means being willing to believe. There is a variety of paths to faith. Usually, belief comes a little at a time. Restoration to sanity gives us a relationship with God so that we can proceed with faith.

Step Three . . . . . 24

"We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him."

Step Three calls for a decision--action. This is a major decision in the beginning of recovery. Surrender may be painful, but to surrender is to win. We were unsuccessful at running the show--self-will leads to using. Willingness is all that is required. Turning it over is letting go of old

## CONTENTS

ideas, sharing burdens with our Higher Power. God's will is doing our best, sharing recovery with other addicts, accepting life on life's terms. In practicing Steps One, Two and Three daily, we go to God with our everyday problems.

### Step Four . . . . . 32

"We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves."

The first three steps pave the way for the Fourth Step. We rely on our Higher Power and our sponsor. In being searching and fearless, we strive for self-honesty. There are many ways to write an inventory, but it is most important that it be written. We write about assets and liabilities - humility, kindness, forgiveness and tolerance as well as relationships, resentments, self-pity, dishonesty, pride and fear. We learn to identify the patterns of addiction which chained us to our past. This self-knowledge, accompanied by more action, brings freedom.

### Step Five . . . . . 44

"We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs."

Admission prevents self-justification and rationalization, Choose another human being - a sponsor is usually best, but anyone we trust will suffice. We admit our shortcomings to God, to ourselves and to another human being. The exact nature of our wrongs are the character defects and addictive behavior patterns we discovered through writing. The results include not regretting our past anymore, a sense of belonging in the N.A. Fellowship, improved self-esteem and self-acceptance.

### Step Six . . . . . 53

"We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character."

The knowledge we gained through Steps Four and Five can be painful - Step Six offers relief. Awareness necessitates action. Fear may be manifested in trying to dictate which defects are removed, or resisting letting them go. We combat fear with faith. Willingness is the foundation of recovery, and is necessary to spiritual growth. We realize it is an

## CONTENTS

ongoing job and that there are different levels of willingness. We couldn't remove these defects by ourselves, but God can. We ask ourselves some questions to see if we are ready before proceeding on to Step Seven.

### Step Seven . . . . . 61

"We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings."

The goal of Step Seven is an improved relationship with our Higher Power. Humility involves a realistic evaluation of ourselves and realizing that we are not perfect. A change in attitude - letting go of self-aggrandizement. Humbly asking for freedom from defects: "I can't, we can." Shortcomings are human failings. Applying Step Seven is an ongoing process. If we lose faith when our defects aren't immediately gone, we go back to the previous steps - slow, continuous progress; action and prayer.

### Step Eight . . . . . 67

"We made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all."

The purpose of Step Eight is to free ourselves from the guilt of the past, experience spiritual healing. Need to be thorough. In countering fear - trust our Higher Power, draw on strength gained through previous steps. We consider where, when and how we have harmed our friends, neighbors, family, employers, and people close to us. Making the list begins the process of becoming willing.

### Step Nine . . . . . 73

"We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others."

Being direct and thorough. In active addiction, we were not responsible for consequences. Now, by being responsible, we no longer have to fear the past. We exercise prudent judgment, realizing that some wrongs can never be fully corrected. As a result, we experience a clear conscience, are able to stop rationalizing. We sever our ties with the ugly past, and we begin to feel good about who we are.



## CONTENTS

### Step Ten . . . . . 82

"We continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it."

Through the previous steps, we cleaned house. Step Ten keeps it clean. Necessary because hidden fears lead to relapse. We recognize guilt, fear, self-centeredness and resentment. We don't want to use, so we must live by spiritual principles. Regular practice--daily basis. Reviewing day's events, assets and liabilities, seeing where we were wrong, making a gratitude list. Promptly admitting wrongs, asking God to remove our defects, forgiving ourselves and others.

### Step Eleven . . . . . 93

"We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us, and the power to carry that out."

Asking for God's plan for us and guidance; we experience peace and joy. Looking for God's will gives us inner strength to face problems. We develop conscious contact by practicing accepting conditions as they are, and by practicing praying and meditating several times a day. Prayer is asking God for help in good times as well as bad. We begin and end our days with prayer, as well as praying spontaneously throughout the day. The answers to prayers sometimes come mysteriously. Through meditation, we communicate and utilize a Higher Power in our lives. We become open and receptive to the voice within, and gain serenity and a renewed commitment to the Twelve Step way of life.

### Step Twelve . . . . . 100

"Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of those steps, we tried to carry this message to addicts, and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

The Twelve Steps hold answers to all our living problems. They provide a basis for enjoying a life and serving others. A spiritual awakening is the result of the preceding steps. May be a sudden jolt or gentle awareness. In carrying the message, we share our experience, strength and hope. We demonstrate recovery by living it. Practicing these

CONTENTS

principles in all of our affairs is being willing to change. We set aside old ideas and apply the steps to our daily affairs. We gain a new strength and find God as a source of nurturance. We strive for self-improvement and take responsibility for our actions. We become more open-minded to new ideas, experience respect and love, and become able to live clean and grow.

THE TWELVE TRADITIONS

Tradition One . . . . . 108

"Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on N.A. unity."

Common welfare--what is best for the group, not just one individual. We depend on each other for our lives. "I can't; we can." Recovery requires upheaval in spiritual, physical and mental makeup. The N.A. Fellowship provides an endless supply of answers to all our living problems. We cannot recover alone. We don't compete between ourselves, we help each other. Unity keeps fellowship strong. The Twelve Traditions are a matter of life and death for us.

Tradition Two. . . . . 114

"For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority - a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants, they do not govern."

Most of us have a history of rebelling against authority. Now, in N.A., we give up the struggle because it caused only pain. Group conscience means we set aside our personal differences and join together under God's will. How is God's will revealed? Listening is a very important part of the expression of God's will. We ask to be freed from the rampages of self-will and self-importance. In this way, we avoid group opinion.

Tradition Three. . . . . 121

"The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using."

There are no dues, fees or other requirements. There is only one: A desire to stop killing ourselves with drugs. Sex,

## CONTENTS

race, etc. are irrelevant in the disease and in recovery. We look for similarities, not differences. N.A. is a program of complete abstinence, although our doors remain open to addicts still using.

### Tradition Four . . . . . 127

"Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or N.A. as a whole."

We use autonomy to fulfill our group purpose which is to carry the message to the new member by providing a safe environment for recovery. We are governed by an Ultimate Authority, and don't infringe on the freedom of other groups. In order to improve the group's effectiveness, we support N.A. as a whole. This is accomplished through the other levels of service at the area, regional and world levels. By adhering to the Twelve Traditions, we help to strengthen N.A.

### Tradition Five . . . . . 135

"Each group has but one primary purpose - to carry its message to the addict who still suffers."

A group is two or more addicts sharing their experience, strength and hope. It provides an opportunity to discuss recovery and learn from each other. It provides a suitable and reliable environment for recovery and is the most effective means of carrying the message. It is easy to get diverted from our primary purpose by business or other matters. But we are responsible to addicts who seek recovery. We therefore choose our group's trusted servants carefully, keeping in mind that they fulfill the group's purpose: Carrying the message of recovery.

### Tradition Six . . . . . 141

"An N.A. group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the N.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose."

We need this tradition to protect N.A. from legal and financial problems and to avoid controversy. Endorsement means to sanction, approve or recommend and can be either implied or direct. This tradition becomes especially important in practicing the Twelfth Step where we may feel a

CONTENTS

need to refer a suffering addict to a treatment facility. N.A. doesn't finance outside enterprises because ownership creates influence and exacerbates our self-serving instincts, causing us to lose sight of our primary purpose. Tradition Six provides an end to controversy and confusion, offering a chance at recovery for addicts who seek it.

Tradition Seven. . . . . 149

"Every N.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions."

Each group has certain monetary obligations in order to provide a meeting site, refreshments and literature. All of these obligations are supplied by the members. Being self-supporting makes us feel a part of our N.A. group, allows us to maintain autonomy and helps us develop responsibility. We decline outside contributions because nothing else works for us. Accepting contributions would obligate us to our benefactors and open us to outside influence. We therefore cannot afford this practice because we must hold on to our freedom. This tradition has implications for the larger service structure of N.A. We see that all of the service committees and boards abide by the Twelve Traditions.

Tradition Eight. . . . . 158

"Narcotics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers."

N.A. is a program based on one addict helping another. There is only one requirement for membership. Each member who has applied the principles is equally qualified. N.A. contains members who work in professional fields. Their professional status is based on their education and skill, not their recovery. Members who work in fields which interrelate with N.A. use the Twelve Traditions as a guide. They must also be careful not to confuse their professional work with Twelfth Step work. Service centers are an important tool in effectively carrying the message of recovery: They provide referrals for Twelfth Step calls, public information, literature and telephone hotlines. They may be staffed by volunteers when available, however, increased growth often necessitates hiring workers to provide increased services. It is stressed that one addict helping another is strictly a volunteer commitment and not the same as a special worker.

## CONTENTS

We realize that all we have been given in N.A. has been free. We safeguard our traditions to ensure the same is true for all addicts.

### Tradition Nine . . . . . 163

"N.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve."

"N.A. as such" is recovering addicts meeting in groups and is not organized. We have no need of bosses or leaders in N.A.; we follow the spiritual principles because disregarding them brought us suffering. The service boards and committees make a unified fellowship possible. They don't dictate; they simply make suggestions and act to carry the message of N.A. As individual members, we need to take responsibility for our recovery and actively participate in N.A., rather than assuming "someone else will take care of it." The principles of the program are based on surrendering management and control to a God of our understanding. It is for these reasons that N.A. is not organized. We realize that individually we can't meet the needs of all addicts who reach out for help, and that with a minimum of organization in our service structure, we can be more effective in carrying the message of recovery.

### Tradition Ten . . . . . 171

"Narcotics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the N.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy."

Tradition Ten saves us from ourselves. We all have opinions on everything and there are many potential opportunities to draw N.A. into controversy. This would result in confusion and divert us from our purpose. Having no opinion on outside issues includes political, educational, medical, psychological, social, and religious matters. We sacrifice our personal opinions when speaking for N.A. Tradition Ten is vital to ensure the unity and growth of N.A. It allows us to concentrate our energy on recovery from addiction, eliminating controversy and dissension, strengthening N.A. as a whole.

CONTENTS

Tradition Eleven . . . . . 176

"Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films."

The attraction is that we live drug-free. Recovery and identification instill in addicts a desire for total abstinence. N.A. offers all addicts a clean life and ongoing recovery. Promotion contradicts the spiritual nature of the program. It is usually misleading and self-glorifying. Our recovery speaks for itself; N.A. needs no promotion. Our relationship with society must be maintained responsibly. The media links us with the general public, but this area can be sensitive. It is best to utilize guidance through a public information committee or handbook. The maintenance of anonymity protects the Fellowship from being judged by the actions of individual members. It protects members from our own grandiosity and keeps us focused on our purpose. In addition to all of this, it provides personal freedom and recovery for all.

Tradition Twelve . . . . . 181

"Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities."

Anonymity, the opportunity to give without recognition, is the basic guiding principle of all the traditions. It is based on honesty and humility. Anonymity further fosters an atmosphere of caring and trust, allowing us to give to others through dependence on a Power greater than ourselves. Anonymity applies to every member of N.A. We listen to the message, not the messenger. By practicing this principle, we cultivate unity and prevent conflicts. The principles of the Twelve Traditions protect our Fellowship and provide a shelter in which to recover from the disease of addiction.

References . . . . . 191

## Introduction

This book contains 24 chapters which discuss and explain the principles of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. These principles form the basis of the Narcotics Anonymous Program. The Twelve Steps are the basic framework by which our lives change from addiction to recovery. The Twelve Traditions provide for groups what the Twelve Steps do for individuals. The widespread growth of Narcotics Anonymous and the recovery of thousands of addicts point to the beneficial necessity of holding to these principles.

The Twelve Steps offer us a solution to the disease of addiction, and an alternative to the miserable existence we have known before. Through practicing and applying each of the Twelve Steps, we discover the gift of recovery. This miracle is a gift in every sense of the word: It is unconditional and perhaps undeserved. As we stay clean and take each of the Twelve Steps, we realize that it is truly a privilege to apply these principles.

Before beginning the steps, an addict must have a desire to stay clean. With the willingness to avoid the first fix, pill or drink, total abstinence and recovery become possible. Living the Twelve Steps enables us to stay clean. In this way, a miracle happens: The obsession for drugs is lifted, and we experience recovery.