

Social Media and Our Guiding Principles

The rise of social media and social networking in recent years has had significant and widespread effects on how members of our fellowship interact with one another. NA members have had many questions about how our principles apply with these social networking tools, and this topic generated an extended discussion at the 2010 World Service Conference. This service pamphlet provides a synthesis of some of the points that arose from that discussion, along with members' input and best practices related to the topic of social networking. Our goal is not to endorse or encourage the use of any particular social networking resource; we are simply responding to the reality that members do utilize these resources and to the many requests for guidance and insight on how to use social networking responsibly in light of our tradition of anonymity.

While our Eleventh Tradition specifically addresses our presence "at the level of press, radio, and films," the principles of that tradition can be applied to many other levels of engagement with the public. For a coworker or family member who knows nothing about NA, our behavior in these forums may be the only example of NA they encounter. Our own personal activity on social networking sites, and especially our interactions with other members on these sites, can say a great deal about who we are as a fellowship. This service pamphlet is meant to be a resource to help members gain some clarity and make informed decisions that keep our guiding principles in mind when making use of social media and social networking sites.

"...at the level of press, radio, and films..."

One of the first questions to be asked with regard to social networking is whether this form of media falls under the scope of our Eleventh Tradition, which states: "Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films." It's worth pointing out that the Eleventh Tradition was written before the widespread use of television, and yet the language of the tradition is flexible enough to cover that new form of media. Similarly, it can be applied to other new types of media, such as social networking.

However, the internet in general and social networking sites in particular can be slightly more complicated in terms of our Eleventh Tradition. The level of accessibility of information on the internet can vary widely from completely open, publicly viewable websites to highly restricted, password-protected sites. In some cases, information posted online is just as accessible to the general public as, say, a television program or a local newspaper article, while in other cases sharing information is more like sending a letter to an exclusive group of friends or family members.

With that in mind, honoring the guidance offered by our Eleventh Tradition calls on each of us as individual members to be mindful of the public visibility of our online interactions. Some members are not very concerned about sharing personal information in a very open and accessible manner, but our Eleventh Tradition reminds us that when it comes to membership in NA, the credibility of our program of recovery can be greatly affected by the actions of individual NA members. The Eleventh Tradition

Be thoughtful about comments you make on an NA member's non-NA-related posts. Perhaps they structured a post to have no identifiable reference to NA and posted it widely to their friends, family, and co-workers. You should not then post an NA-related or addiction-related comment under that post.

Be mindful of what and who is in the background when you take photos. Is someone in the picture who has not given permission to be included in an online photo album? If you are posting this more broadly than to only NA members, are there NA logos or banners in the background that might identify the event as an NA setting? If you are taking photos that you intend to post to a social networking site, ask anyone you photograph, "Do you mind if I post this on [name the site]?" Always respect the wishes of anyone who prefers not to be posted, regardless of whether you are confident that their anonymity would be protected by your other security practices.

In general, do not tag people in photos that may be seen as NA-related, especially when you are not the one who set up the security level of the photo album, and especially when you are not certain about the person's own anonymity concerns regarding social media. It is safest to let people tag themselves.

Some people restrict their friend list to only NA members, and use the social networking site strictly as a way of networking and communicating within NA. Assuming your privacy settings do not allow your photos to be reposted by others, then the anonymity issues are significantly reduced provided you protect others' anonymity in your online interactions. In this way, we can strive to honor the guidance offered by our Eleventh Tradition, which reminds us that "The credibility of NA's message can be greatly affected by NA's messengers. In the public eye—including press, radio, films, and all other media—we need always maintain personal anonymity." (Eleventh Tradition, *It Works: How and Why*)

Conclusion

The widespread use of social networking and social media by our fellowship indicate that these forums are resources that can serve to facilitate greater communication and interactions among NA members. The ability to network with other recovering addicts and share in mutual support of one another's recovery offers many members a way to enhance their relationship with the NA Fellowship. With NA's public image and the anonymity and privacy of our members at stake, it is crucial that we take great care in how we utilize these resources. We hope this resource can be helpful for that purpose.