

CHAPTER TWO

WHAT IS THE NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS PROGRAM?

N.A. is a non-profit fellowship or society of men and women for whom drugs had become a major problem. We are recovered addicts who meet regularly to help each other stay clean. This is a program of complete abstinence from all drugs. There is only "One" requirement for membership, the honest desire to stop using. There are no musts in N.A. but we suggest that you keep an open mind and give yourself a break. Our program is a set of principles, written so simply that we can follow them in our daily lives. The most important thing about them is that "They Work."

There are no strings attached to N.A. We are not affiliated with any other organizations, we have no leaders, no initiation fees or dues, no pledges to sign, no promises to make to anyone. We are not connected with any political, religious, or law enforcement groups, and are under no surveillance at any time. Anyone may join us regardless of age, race, color, creed, religion or lack of religion.

We are not interested in what or how much you used or who your connections were, what you have done in the past, how much or how little you have, but only in what you want to do about your problem and how we can help. The newcomer is the most important person at any meeting, because we can only keep what we have by giving it away. We have learned from our group experience that those who keep coming to our meetings regularly stay clean.

The structure of Narcotics Anonymous is quite unlike any health or welfare agency known to us. Although N.A. practices may vary from place to place, all N.A. services are performed voluntarily by the addicts themselves and without

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1 cost. N.A. does not accept money for its service, is not
2 funded by any public or private sources or agencies and
3 accepts no outside contributions.

4 Addicts respond instinctively to honest sharing. The
5 fact that the addict can feel the unconditional love and judge
6 for themselves the "qualifications" revealed in the stories
7 of recovering addicts, awakens the notion that at last there
8 might be hope. The newcomer loses his fear when he discovers
9 that N.A. members give away the message of cleanliness in
10 order to stay clean. We of Narcotics Anonymous are currently
11 trying to bring about more communication, understanding, re-
12 spect, and cooperation between N.A. and any professional per-
13 son who works with addicts--so that more and more addicts may
14 be able to recover. With local groups in many communities,
15 we are part of an international fellowship.

16 In the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous we make use of
17 things that have worked for those who have gone before us:
18 the Twelve Steps, the principles and the many positive tools
19 that enable us to make recovery possible. We have one primary
20 purpose--to stay clean and to help others who may turn to us
21 for help. We are united by our common problem, addiction.
22 Meeting, talking with, and helping other addicts, we are some-
23 how able to stay clean and to lose the compulsion to use, once
24 a dominant force in our lives.

25 We are grateful also to see new people coming to meetings
26 from the streets. There is nothing that compares to a new
27 person freely talking about the pain and the endless hustle that
28 goes on out there. As a result, Narcotics Anonymous had had
29 more than twenty-five years of trial-and-error experience,
30 face-to-face, with literally hundreds of thousands of addicts.
31 This mass of intensive firsthand experience with all kinds of
32 problem drug users, in all phases of illness and recovery, is
33 unparalleled in therapeutic value. Narcotics Anonymous is here
34 to share freely with any addict who wants it.

35 Narcotics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women for
36 whom drugs in one form or another had become a major problem.

We had become so physically, mentally and spiritually ill 1
that we became crazed, depressed and terrified people. We 2
were sick people. The growing fellowship of N.A. supports 3
us in our efforts of recovery. It gives us new friends who 4
understand where we have been. 5

Our message of recovery is based on our own experience. 6
Before coming to the Fellowship, we exhausted ourselves 7
trying to use successfully, or trying to find out what was 8
wrong with us. After coming to the Narcotics Anonymous 9
Fellowship, we find ourselves among a very special group of 10
people. Many were a great deal worse off than we were. 11
Here we found hope. If the Narcotics Anonymous program 12
worked for them, it might work for us. We began to ask 13
questions and listened a little more closely to the sugges- 14
tions. After all there's a chance we could get a little 15
relief. 16

We do not think we are the only people who have alterna- 17
tives to the problem of addiction, but we know that the N.A. 18
program works for us. We have seen it work for every one 19
who honestly and sincerely wanted to stop using. The main 20
point is that we meet people, addicts like ourselves, yet 21
they are clean for months or years. We watched and listened 22
to them openly and realized that these people had found a 23
way to live and be happy without drugs.

In all honesty the most we can do for the newcomer is 24
to share our experience, strength and hope and be ready to 25
help when asked. If we go beyond this we risk becoming 26
enablers. Most of us can remember doing nothing as long as 27
we could get someone else to take care of us. We don't want 28
the help we can offer to rob the new person of that essen- 29
tial ingredient of living which setting their own house in 30
order can bring. We addicts have no choice but to help one 31
another. In helping others our own recovery is aided. We 32
don't criticize them better we love them better. As several 33
great men have pointed out, there is more to it than a 34
simple love. We are really talking about survival in a 35
world where we have ceased to be functioning members of 36

1 society. This program has given us a belief in a loving God
2 that works through people. Never should we claim to have all
3 the answers, but we can share our experience and the things that
4 work for us. N.A. offers alternatives and suggestions that
5 have worked for others.

6 We don't want to settle for the limitations of the past.
7 We want to examine and re-examine all our old ideas, and con-
8 stantly improve on them or replace them with new ones.

9 We, in N.A., are men and women who have discovered and
10 admitted that we are powerless over our addictions. We have
11 learned that we must live without drugs if we are to avoid the
12 disaster we created for ourselves and those close to us.

13 The consequences of our addictive using (and thinking) have
14 also varied. Some of our members had literally become dere-
15 licts before turning to N.A. for help. We had lost families,
16 possessions and self respect. We had committed many offenses--
17 against society, families, and employers. Others among us had
18 never been jailed or hospitalized, nor had we lost jobs because
19 of our using. Even those men and women finally came to the
20 point where they realized that using was interfering with nor-
21 mal living. When they discovered that they could not live with-
22 out drugs, the, too, sought to help themselves through N.A.,
23 rather than prolonging their pain. The program works a miracle
24 in our hearts. We become new people. The Steps and abstinence
25 give us daily reprieves from our self-imposed life sentences.
26 We become free to move about without compulsion or guilt.

27 Communication is a very important part of our program.
28 Without it we would not have the chance to share ideas and new
29 aspects of the program with each other. What one group or area
30 learns can and should be shared with other areas. This is how
31 the Fellowship of N.A. has grown and spread over the past
32 twenty-five years. We need each other.

33 Our meetings contain a certain atmosphere of empathetic and
34 universal feelings which all addicts have in common. In this
35 atmosphere of recovery, we found we were very much at home and
36 were able to start a new way of life with these people who

called themselves addicts. The unconditional love we find 1
at meetings makes it possible to relax and review our assum- 2
ptions about ourselves and reality. Working the Steps will 3
give us a relationship with a Power greater than ourselves, 4
correct old defects, right old wrongs, and lead us to help 5
others. As we begin the process of change by honestly lis- 6
tening to the stories of people we meet in an N.A. meeting 7
or in private fellowship, we will want to try out some of 8
the solutions that have worked for others. Maybe their 9
solution is part of our solution. Trying to be all things 10
to all people, we have often forgotten what we really think 11
and feel. As we begin to come out of our fog, the layers of 12
phoniness will peel off like the skin of an onion. When the 13
layers are gone, our real selves will remain. 14

As we attend meetings and hear the experience, strength, 15
and hope of others, we will come to notice that we are not 16
the only ones with problems. We will eventually hear some- 17
one who flat out makes us feel lucky by comparison. We will 18
grow to know gratitude, to see where we came from and how 19
far we have progressed. We have all tried many ways to over- 20
come our addictions, and sometimes temporary recovery was 21
possible but always it was followed by an even deeper in- 22
volvement with addiction than before. 23

Let new ideas flow into you. Ask questions. The prin- 24
ciples of living incorporated in the Twelve Steps may seem 25
strange to you, but they work. This program works for those 26
willing to work it.

We have found that trying to help another addict is good 27
for us whether the addict we try to help uses what we have to 28
offer or not. For this reason, N.A. groups attempt to con- 29
centrate primarily on this person-to-person service, without 30
getting involved in any outside enterprise no matter how 31
worthwhile. 32

We feel loved. More and more we feel we would rather 33
be with each other when we are thinking negatively than by 34
ourselves. Good comes from being with others; loneliness 35
and negativity fall by the wayside. Something memorable, 36

1 precious, and beneficial stems from clean togetherness. There
2 is a security of being real; of having brothers and sisters on
3 the road to recovery is a comforting feeling. We recover to-
4 gether.

5 The only requirement to be a member of Narcotics Anonymous is
6 a desire to stop using. We don't have to be clean when we get
7 here, but after the first meeting, we suggest that you keep
8 coming back to the meetings and coming clean. We don't have
9 to wait for an overdose, or jail sentence, to get help from
10 N.A.; nor is addiction a hopeless condition from which there is
11 no recovery. It is possible to arrest the need to use with the
12 help of the Twelve Step program of N.A. and the Fellowship of
13 recovering addicts in N.A. We want to reach out to whoever
14 reads this and to lay our lives and our hearts on the line to
15 show what this program and the spirit of N.A. has done for us.
16 In other words, if you think you have a drug problem, it is
17 likely that you do; and our program might have something special
18 to offer.

19 We want desperately for the place where addicts recover to
20 be a safe place, free from outside influences. We feel safe
21 at our closed meetings. Everyone is an addict. We feel totally
22 free to express ourselves because no law enforcement agencies
23 are involved. No one judges, stereotypes, or moralizes us. We
24 are not recruited and it doesn't cost anything. N.A. does not
25 provide counseling or social services. The rooms are filled
26 with men and women from all walks of life and persuasions. We
27 do have one must in N.A.: NO DRUGS OR PARAPHENALIA BE ON YOUR
28 PERSON AT MEETINGS.

29 In a sense, the Program is a way for addicts to find the
30 Higher Power that traditional religions have pointed to. The
31 difficulty here is that we can quickly fall prey to the notion
32 that we were not sick, but merely misinformed, if we stop doing
33 the things that began our recovery. In the days before N.A.
34 began to serve the needs of the growing numbers of addicts in
35 our population, spontaneous recovery through religion was rare
36 and quick to fade. Claim of a spiritual awakening is worthless

if the life of the individual is not changed for the better. 1

Upon entering the Fellowship, some notices a strong spirit- 2
ual glow among members. Then we could see and feel that a 3
Higher Power was at work in N.A. After having a few months 4
in the Fellowship, we see how the spiritual need for a Higher 5
Power keeps us clean.

Our program is in fact a way of life. We learn the value 6
of principles such as humility, surrender, and service. The 7
idea that we have to do it alone is obsolete. It helps things 8
go more smoothly when we find sponsors to confide in and let 9
them help us. We learn the art of helping others appropria- 10
tely, without creating resentments. 11

We, of Narcotics Anonymous, do not promise to have all 12
the answers, but we've found that our lives steadily improved 13
if we didn't use and learned to maintain our spiritual con- 14
dition. In time we met an addict seeking recovery and dis- 15
covered ourselves really able to respond to their needs. 16
We gave others what we found. The truth is that the more 17
we give in this way, the more we have to offer. Our own 18
needs are met when we learn to live for others. Through 19
practicing our honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness to 20
try, we develop humility, tolerance, and patience. We are 21
able to love the unlovable and discover self-acceptance. 22
We are not likely to create problems in our daily living. 23
We finally realize we have a choice in the matter of our 24
lives. 25

The Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous, our new friends 26
and our sponsors help us to deal with our feelings. In N.A. 27
our joys are multiplied by sharing our good days with our 28
fellows, and our sorrows are lessened when we share our bad 29
days. For the first time in our lives, we don't have to 30
experience anything alone. Not only do we have the group 31
but hopefully, as time progresses, we will develop a rela- 32
tionship with a God of our own understanding that will 33
always be with us. 34

We learn to experience feelings and realize that the 35
feelings themselves can do us no harm, unless we act on 36

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1 them. We learn to call someone if we have a feeling we can-
2 not handle, and by sharing that feeling with a friend, we
3 learn to work through it. Chances are that our friend has
4 had a similar experience and can relate what worked for him.
5 By close work with a sponsor, we can utilize the Twelve Steps
6 of the program as a guide to dealing with situations we have
7 not dealt with in the past. Sponsorship is a give and take
8 partnership, with both gaining strength from the relation-
9 ship. It was suggested that we look for a sponsor as soon
10 as we became acquainted with members in our area. We look
11 for someone who has been down a path similar to ours, under-
12 stands where we are coming from, and has learned to cope with
13 the same types of situations. We, who are recovering, must
14 share with others. We have to in order to maintain our pro-
15 gress in the N.A. program and our ability to function without
16 drugs. Being asked to sponsor a new member is a privilege,
17 so don't hesitate to ask a person with whom you can identify.
18 Sponsorship is a rewarding experience for both, and we are
19 all here to help and to be helped. Get phone numbers and use
20 them. Ask questions about the program and get acquainted with
21 the people.

22 Many books have been written about the nature of addiction.
23 This book primarily concerns itself with the nature of re-
24 covery. If you are an addict and have found this book, please
25 give yourself a break and read it!