

NEW ATTITUDES, The NORVANA Newsletter

December 2009

Editor: A nice submission on service from Jmu, a couple of step pieces by myself, and the usual quiz and haiku. Happy holidays everyone.

Monthly Quiz:

- 1. Many groups read “The Twelve Traditions” to start their meeting. Was it always its current length?**
- 2. When did work begin on revising our current policy?**
- 3. What is the date of the earliest meeting list in the NORVANA archives? (BONUS: where are the NORVANA archives located?)**

Working the steps: one time or many?

I’m going to throw out a topic for discussion: how often have you worked the steps?

Note to people in early recovery: if you have not finished the steps for the first time, you may want to skip this article.

I would venture to say that almost all of us in these rooms believe that working the steps is a good idea. Opinions range from “work the steps or they will work you”, “ you can stay miserable as long as you can stand it”, or the ever-popular “work the steps or die, MF”. But what do we do after we have worked all 12 steps?

I was thorough or lazy (or maybe both) in working my steps, but after about 4 or 4 ½ years I had finished the first 9 Steps, took a daily inventory, meditated and prayed daily, and tried to carry the message of recovery and practice spiritual principles throughout my life. Now I have over 21 years clean, and continue to do this. I have pursued personal growth outside of 12 Step recovery in many ways, but I have not found it necessary to work the steps again. As I learned them, it did not make sense. The first 9 steps were designed to put to rest all the demons in my past from my years of addiction and unspiritual existence, and the last 3 steps (the maintenance steps) allowed me to continue on a spiritual path. However, as time has gone by I have noticed that most people I know in NA with some time continue to loop through the steps again and again.

There are many paths to the same mountaintop, and I am quite OK with other people doing this, but I am curious: why? I made amends to everyone in my 8th and 9th step; am I supposed to go bring up the past again and again with my family and friends? I know my assets and defects, and I don’t think I have developed any new ones since my 4th step. The 10th step takes care of ongoing inventories. Anyway, I just don’t understand it. So I am asking people to share their experience and we’ll see what we can all learn from each other.

One thing I heard in preliminary discussions about this with others is that our parent fellowship (AA) does the steps only once, and NA does it again and again. I don’t know how accurate this is or the history behind it, although my source is honest and knowledgeable.

So I open up this topic to the local fellowship. How do you work the steps: once or again and again? What do you know about the history of either or both approaches? I look forward to hearing from you.

(Jim S.)

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Best Practices in NA Service

Establish an atmosphere of recovery

One of the first things I was taught in service committee work is always bring a paper and pen. You cannot depend on the secretary to get the minutes of a meeting to you in time. So if you attend an **Area Service Committee** (ASC), take notes, especially on matters affecting groups, so you will be prepared to report to the group what they need to know. I usually take copious notes, and afterwards, go back and put stars by the items I want to include in my report.

The next thing I learned was to have a full stomach for service committee work. Having HALTS conditions leads to dissatisfaction with the work, so don't be hungry, angry, lonely, tired or too serious, if you can help it, especially in an NA Service Committee.

The most serene service committee I have ever attended began with the Service Prayer as well as the Serenity Prayer. Whether this is the foundation of the general ambience of the meeting, I cannot say, but it seems to have been a factor. If you didn't know, this is a modified version of the prayer from the beginning of the basic text;

Service Prayer "God, grant us the knowledge that we may act according to your divine precepts. Instill in us a sense of your purpose, make us servants of your will and grant us a bond of selflessness that this may truly be your work, not ours, so that no addict, anywhere, need die from the horrors of addiction." As adapted from the Introduction section of our Basic Text.

When I chaired we would begin with the Serenity Prayer, which established the unity, read the ASC Purpose, which specified the unity, the 12 Traditions and Concepts, and then the Service Prayer to bring us all back to that unity of purpose. Here is the Purpose, which looks to be adaptable to any service body.

On March 17, 1991, a new area of Narcotics Anonymous was formed. We would like to continue our spiritual direction. We are asking that each member act with respect and love to every member of this area to insure the spirit of unity. We will strive to carry the message in a loving way to the addict who still suffers. We are dedicated to supporting our members, our groups, and our area in carrying the message of N.A. We are committed to linking together by helping each other deal with the basic needs and situations and by encouraging the groups of our fellowship. We must always remember that as individual members, groups, and area we are not in competition with each other and never should be. We work separately and together toward our common goals.

When the meeting becomes disunified, I call a Serenity Prayer during business or debate or whenever, and things calm down. I stress that it is the right of any member of a service body to call for the Serenity Prayer at any time. I even use the Serenity Prayer before introducing a topic I expect to cause disagreement.

I try to keep things positive, offering opportunities for service instead of whining about vacant positions. I do reserve the right to be discouraging, particularly when dealing with the G&I committee. That is Guilt and Intimidation for those who are fortunate enough not to know.

Keep it Simple

I try to keep things simple. The use of **Three Letter Acronyms** (TLAs) should always begin with stating them clearly and using them sparingly. If one has not been used in the last few minutes (or last few paragraphs of a written report), they should be introduced again as the first time, the words followed by the acronym. If I am creating material that includes TLA's, simplicity is the key. **[continued on p. 3]**

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For instance it is easy for a newcomer to understand **Group Service Representative** (GSR) represents the group, **Area Service Representative** (ASR) represents the area, and **Regional Service Representative** (RSR) represents the Region. By contrast, having GSR, Regional Committee Member (RCM), Regional Delegate (RD) has caused enough confusion to discourage some members from serving. I think this is the major drawback of the **Guide To Local Service** (GLS):

Policy should be written clearly and concisely. A list of policy motions is not the same as a policy. A chair should only accept policy motions which state where they fit into the existing policy and are worded to flow with that document. If there are many motions that have been added without this care, the policy committee should consider a full re-write to make policy easy to follow, readable, and not self contradictory. One of my favorite Best Practices is from the Washington DCASC, which states that policy motions may only be submitted during a single month of the year.

Voting: I understand the concept of having all members of a service body having full participation, but the WSC is the only service committee I have served on in 20 years, 5 areas and 3 regions of experience that practices this in the act of voting. All other service bodies allow only those representing groups to vote, and groups may not be represented twice, e.g. by the RD and by a Board Member. Nor may individuals have equal voice to those who represent multitudes.

I greatly prefer voice votes to hand counts, but they are only practical when the outcome is pre-ordained, as when approving minutes. Ideally, we could take the time to discuss everything to consensus, and even voice votes would be unnecessary. Until that paradise arrives, we may be forced to count hands. Even this apparently simple process can waste hours if you are constrained by strict bean counters. I have spent as much time in some committees with my hand up for voting member counts as I have actually voting. For instance if an **Area Service Committee** (ASC) has 50 voting members and the vote count is 40 yes/5 no/3 abstaining, some weenie says 'that doesn't add up to fifty, who wasn't counted? Gimme a break! Motion passed. If the yes/no count is close, a more careful count may be required, but exact numbers are not necessary in a landslide.

Which brings us to the matter of abstentions. An interesting practice I have found is, if abstentions are greater than either yes or no votes, the motion is returned to the next higher level of service, for instance, a vote at an ASC with a majority of abstentions would be sent to the groups. This can be effective in working towards consensus, as if the majority of **Group Service Representatives** (GSRs) are undecided, it encourages further discussion of the issue throughout the fellowship. It can be counterproductive if the motion in question does not affect the groups. I strongly feel that we should only send to groups motions which affect them. Should we have child care at the convention? Ask the groups! Should we change our fiscal year at the **Regional Service Committee** (RSC)? Who cares about that outside the RSC? We need to encourage all members of the fellowship to join a home group and attend group consciences. This is discouraged when they go to one and get a longwinded explanation about something that does not affect them, and they still don't understand. I have not seen a Regional Assembly as proposed by the **Guide To Local Service** (GLS) that was effective. In fact, I have not been to one that had as many GSRs as a small ASC. If someone has advice on making this an effective service tool, I would love to hear about it. In conclusion, it is among the best practices in service to be prepared, stay serene, and keep it simple. ILS, Jmu

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MY EXPERIENCE WITH STEP TWO

Step Two: We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

It was late on a weekend night, Friday or Saturday, I don't remember which, it really doesn't matter. What did matter was that my state of mind was in a black hole. I had spent 15 years as an agnostic, but I was so desperate I felt like I had nothing to lose. I was alone in the basement of my house, no one could hear me anyway. I screamed out "If there's anything out there, please help me!"

Nothing happened instantly, no burning bush or anything like that, but over the next few weeks strange nice things began happening in my life. I guess I could have been cynical and written them off as sheer coincidence but it seemed like they were not in the normal laws of average occurrence. I thought, maybe there is a Higher Power and it heard what I said! Maybe I should talk to it some more!

So I began talking to this invisible Force or Being or whatever, and paying attention to what was going on in my life, and more and more I became convinced that this Thing was responding to me, and over a period of time I "came to believe" in a Higher Power. I worked at developing a relationship with HP and it has strengthened into a deep friendship over the years that is a central part of my recovery and my life.

But this is only half of Step Two: belief in a Power greater than ourselves. The other half is belief that this Power can restore us to sanity.

You see, while I was having this wonderful experience of developing a relationship with my HP, I was still using. As it continued to develop, I decided I wanted to stop using to make the most of my life, now that it had some meaning. But I couldn't stop, even though I kept trying again and again. I couldn't do it on my own. Occasionally the thought "get help" would occur, but I didn't want to listen to it. I just kept praying to my HP to give me the strength to quit using. I couldn't understand why this wasn't enough. Eventually, however, my situation got so desperate that I had to ask for help, not just from my HP, but from other people. Via a treatment program, I ended up in NA, and slowly discovered that while I couldn't stay clean on my own no matter how strong my relationship with my HP, I could stay clean by going to meetings, doing service, having a sponsor and a network, working the steps, and the other aspects of an NA recovery program. For me, NA is another power greater than myself that can restore me to sanity if I just use the tools it provides. I do not have two HPs, I just have one. But my HP works through NA for the purposes of helping me recover from active addiction. And the beauty of this is that there are people who don't believe in "the God thing" who can still use NA as the power greater than themselves that will restore them to sanity. I have a good friend who has 15 years clean and is an atheist, but he uses NA to stay clean and work the steps. And he has every bit as much right to his beliefs and his place in NA as I do. And so do people whose concept of a Higher Power differs from my own. And I don't think NA would work as well as it did if we had it any other way. I CAN'T. WE CAN. (Jim S.).

Answers to Monthly Quiz:

- 1. No. When I came into recovery the reading stopped at the end of the 12th Tradition; the text on the back was added some time between 1988 and now, I believe in the 1990s. Can anyone confirm an exact time?**
- 2. In early 2007. Something to consider if your group wants to abstain or not allow the policy subcommittee to submit revisions.**
- 3. 1981. And Jim S., the Newsletter Chair, has the NORVANA archives, passed to him from LeeAnne B. several years back.**

Recovery Haiku:

Strong wind blowing leaves /Around lawns with now-bare trees /Clean again today.

REMINDER: SEND SUBMISSIONS TO
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