

A newsletter of the Autonomous Region of Narcotics Anonymous.

someone in NA who believes in me

and wants to help me in my recovery

The Autonomous Region of Narcotics Anonymous is comprised of groups & individual members who have come together to support each other in carrying the message in their local communities. Regardless of literature preferences, location or meeting formats.

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Our members speak

Escaping or Finding Freedom?

From the very first time, I fell in love with the euphoria of running away. That chains are off, feet are moving, heart is pounding breaking out into the cool night air was like a hit of some new drug. What's not to love about that? The problem was, I was bringing just as much trouble with me than I was leaving behind. It took years for me to get tired enough to do something different.

In 2002, I picked up the phone and said to the woman on the other end "I'm DONE!!" and then I waited. They showed up and explained to him I was leaving and he needed to let me do what I need to do. They stood between myself and his violence and escorted me out the door with my ½ packed bag into an unknown future, but that was ok. Within a couple of hours I was picking up a newcomer chip from a woman that whispered in my ear, "The war is over"

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This is our eighth issue of this monthly newsletter. Our intention is for this newsletter to serve as a vehicle to communicate experience, strength and hope in recovery among the members and groups of ARNA. We welcome your input into this newsletter. Please contact us at newsletter@arna.world.

Please send anything you would like to share with other members and groups of ARNA, including - personal experience, strength and hope in recovery; what becoming a part of ARNA has meant for you and your group; challenges and successes you have experienced in becoming a member of ARNA; anything else you would like to communicate with other members and groups of ARNA.

This is your newsletter. We will do our best to serve you by delivering an updated issue regularly, editing your input into an easily readable format, to facilitate effective communication between the groups and members of ARNA. We will also welcome any ideas you may have to improve the quality and effectiveness of this newsletter.

Our members speak

The Evil of Sponsorship Trees in Narcotics Anonymous


So, I'm slow – I should have spoken out long before now, at least fifteen years ago when I had only 17 years Clean in Narcotics Anonymous, I should have said “wait, what?”. I noticed this trend of Sponsorship Trees about that time. I would hear mention of “Sponsor’s Sponsor” in meetings and the phrase “I have an NA sponsor , who has an NA sponsor, who has...” when people would introduce themselves when they shared, or when they qualified themselves for service positions. I really had not heard these terms before then, used in that manner.

At first, my thoughts were, “good for them! They found sponsorship and it works for them!” It made me smile. It was not my personal experience in NA, but we all have different paths in Recovery, right? Sponsorship had played an important part of my first five years in Narcotics Anonymous, finding a home, fitting in, incorporating the Steps and Traditions into my daily walking around life. Sponsoring other addicts was important and still is in my program of NA recovery. We don't have enough successful sponsor/ sponsee relationships in our fellowship today and it was nice to see functioning sponsor/sponsee relationships, rather than the norm of S.I.N.O. (sponsor in name only) or no sponsorship at all, back then.

...but as I watched these chained links of sponsor/sponsee dance their recovery dance my smile faded and I've found some big problems with them over the years. “Well, Nate, isn't the use of the word “evil” in your title a little strong, even if you don't agree with the concept of Sponsorship Trees?” Maybe, I'll let you decide...

So, my first problem with Sponsorship Trees came with their club-like behavior. As members, they seemed to be part of a secret society within our Fellowship and they seemed to be a Clique -Obviously, getting into a particular “tree” can be difficult, and requires that you become sponsee to a member of the “tree”. I have often heard of sponsor tree gatherings for

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and I nearly crumpled in tears. I had finally run TO something not just away from something. That something was NA.

I have since realized why it did no good to outrun the last “him” or “them” that had become part of my prison because I always brought the source of my problems with me; myself and my addict mind that could only make decisions driven by compulsion and obsession. A mind that cared more about changing feelings than changing the problem. As long as that was who was driving the getaway car, my destination would remain the same, unmanageability and degradation.

This program, created by addicts for addicts, showed me why I can leave in the middle of a million nights, hitchhike hundreds of miles and take a million drugs but I cannot outrun myself or addiction. My impulses, defects, selfishness, obsessions, compulsions, short-comings and deficiencies are hard-wired into who I am and there is no escape. NA gave me a better offer than mere escape, it offered me freedom. Escape was about what's “out there, freedom is about what's in here ☐☐. I needed more than a change of address, a differ-

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ent boyfriend or a different chemical. I needed a new me. Luckily NA is in the business of creating new people.

I'm a messy human. I used to be messier. I'd go from the frying pan into the fire, jump back into the same pan and back into the same fire. I'd look for rescue thinking it was the answer only to have to find the fire exit. I was unequipped to live a real life, handle real responsibilities or even sane enough to want them. I was easy pickings for the predator and the sick rescuer whose price tags were always eventually more than I wanted to pay. I kept trying to fix the problems with the same brain that made them and then cried about my poor misunderstood life. A vicious cycle of self-destruction and pain, driven by the madness inside that only cared about "one more". Escape cannot fix such a mess. What I needed was a personality change.

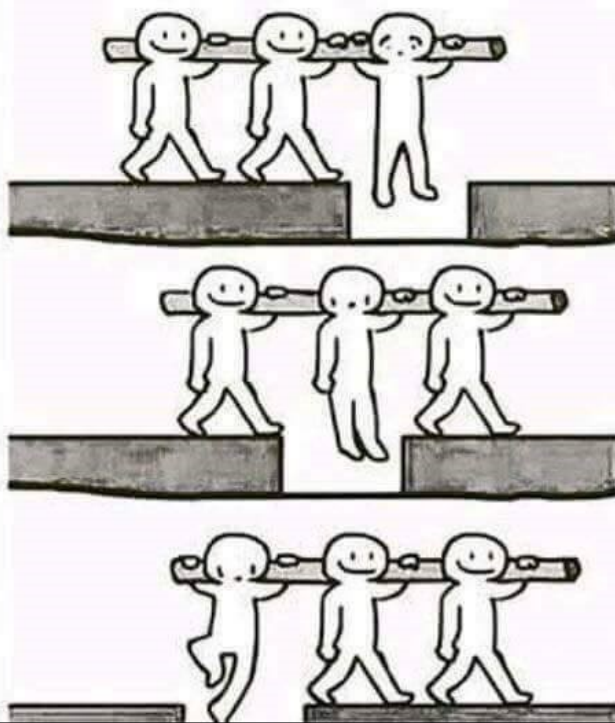
I now know escape is but an event but freedom is a process. Through the 12 steps I discovered I could finally admit I'm an addict and open the door to the fresh air of truth and

peace. I could lay down the burdens of denial, justification and rationalization. I could turn around and face the wreckage and defects I had tried to outrun and instead DO something about them. As I changed, so did my surroundings and the people in them. My life slowly became something I wanted to live and less something I wanted to avoid. And choices, beautiful choices bloomed like flowers

in a field waiting to be picked. GOOD choices, new choices each with endless possibilities. The monster has gone to sleep.

Maybe you are reading this and you are tired. Maybe you are tired of the "one more" and the "this time it will be different" hustle that is dragging your poor exhausted soul over the rocks. (Is that why they call them "drugs", because they drag our asses over every painful thing imaginable?) Or you might be someone with some clean time but addiction craziness has morphed into some other display of insanity and self-destruction that has left you just as exhausted as the day you came in. That's ok, we get clean, not perfect. Take off your running shoes and meet me at the meeting tonight. I'll save you a seat, give you a hug and whisper in your ear "the war is over" and we can get on with the business of recovery and the gift of true freedom.

If we unite nobody falls



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events like picnics, motorcycle rides , NA events etc..., I have seen them gather, sit together at events and act as a clique. While this alone is not necessarily bad, it does tend to exclude others and lends to an atmosphere in our events and meetings of “us” and “them”. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clique>

My second problem was that program rhetoric in and out of meetings increasingly came from invisible, usually absent authority, Grandsponsor, Great Grand Sponsor and their interpretation of literature or recovery topic.

False authority – I often hear in meetings “my Grandsponsor says” or “my sponsor tree has taught me” “My sponsor’s sponsor’s sponsor says” which in some ways seems to lend authority to subsequent statements. As if the statements are true prima fascia. “Trees” have become hostile and rival to each other when ideology differs or members have “beef” with other members. (similar to gang behavior) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/False_authority#Fallacious_appeals_to_authority

Thirdly, I had a problem watching these groups have their own “NA meetings” and “NA events” limited to their own membership attendance. Our Third Tradition tells me that we are all equal in membership, but...

Exclusionary groups within Narcotics Anonymous – by their nature are limited to “invitation and acceptance” and exclude all others. A group within the group. They differ from specialty meetings in that they do not welcome all members of that specialty, ie. Gender, sexual preference, etc... as specialty meetings in Narcotics Anonymous do. To be a member, you must be accepted as a “sponsee” by a tree member. It is not NA if we all cannot attend. Period.

Fourthly, we do not have levels or hierarchy of membership in Narcotics Anonymous, except these groups promote a

Cult of personality – The titular heads of these “trees” often are put on pedestals and treated as celebrity, hero worship or “Uber Addicts” by their members and hierarchy of membership is endorsed with Sponsor at the head and Sponsee at the rear . http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cult_of_personality

Fifth and finally, these groups limit experience, strength and hope rather than increasing it. I propose they are

Incestuous - I will suggest that sponsorship trees are closed to outside experience and opinion based on their closed membership and offer limited experience, strength and hope as a result.

So, why do I care what these Sponsorship Trees do in our fellowship? I can choose not to participate and leave them to their perceived successful mentoring, right? Except, I see harm, rather than the good. For every single addict “success” story with Sponsorship Trees there are many who are left out, don’t fit or are not acceptable to the clique. We (Narcotics Anonymous) are not a program of exclusivity, cult of personality, inbred or limited membership, false authority, pedigree or cliques. So, I will no longer be silent and from now on will let you know that” I don’t care” what your “Sponsor Tree” thinks or what your Sponsors’ Sponsors’ Sponsor said, or that you come from an NA sponsor who has an NA sponsor who has an NA sponsor who has an NA sponsor...

I don’t believe the concept of “Trees” is good for our fellowship.

Our members speak

Tradition One

Not many people have had the honor of starting a meeting in a city that had a very small presence of Narcotics Anonymous. I was born and brought up in a suburb of Washington DC. I am a first generation Indian American. My clean date is January 7th, 2018. Prior to staying clean I was exposed to many NA meetings and chose to attend our sister fellowship, because I did not identify as an addict. I unfortunately was not able to stay clean because I was not ready. And frankly coming from a conservative Hindu background I had a hard time adjusting to the language used in the program. Luckily for me I moved to Hyderabad, India in 2018 and found recovery there. I mainly attended AA meetings because the only NA meeting was on the other corner of the city and the recovery house I was living in advised against going there, they hinted that the recovery was not as strong there. It came to a point where we started getting younger members in the AA fellowship. And these guys were not alcoholics, they weren't able to relate to that program. A few of us got together and one individual in particular pushed for us to start an NA meeting on our side of town. In the beginning it was just a handful of us. I was central to the meeting, I started it and often chaired meetings. I felt this meeting was an extension of myself. It was my baby. Once at a business meeting – there was a horrible disagreement between me and another member. He wanted to change things at MY meeting. I was heated; I had a full blown temper tantrum, verbally abusing this member and anyone that wanted to go against my will. It took me some time to realize that this thing works when we work together. I frankly don't even remember what the argument was about- but I can't forget how it made me feel. It left a lasting impact on me. I need to get out of this self-obsessed mindset. I brought my disease with me to the service position that I held. I am sure I'm not the first nor will I be the last. The group as a whole has to come before what I want. We received a lot of support- literature, key tags, and pamphlets from the other NA group. We soon even formed an Area Service Committee. What I am still learning to do, because I am early in my recovery is focus on "us" instead of I. I am such a self-obsessive human being, I make everything about me. But what the program has taught me- it's not about any one addict. It is about us as a collective. I can't survive without you and you can't survive without me. I finally found a place where I found unconditional love. The members in the room wouldn't leave me no matter what. This is what attracted me to the fellowship- which has led me to start applying the program to my life. There's two parts to the program as I understand it- there is the fellowship portion (calling a member, going to a meeting, hanging out with members etc.) and there is the action portion (working the steps and following the traditions). I believe that both are required in order to thrive in recovery. We've heard the saying over and over in the rooms "NA doesn't need me, I need NA". I hope to keep coming back so that I can continue to experience unity with the fellowship.

