

HANDBOOK FOR NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS NEWSLETTERS

World Service Conference
Literature Committee
Approval Literature
for
WSC-86

THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on N.A. unity.
2. 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.
3. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or N.A. as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose — to carry its message to the addict who still suffers.
6. 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.
7. Every N.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Narcotics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. N.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Narcotics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the N.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. 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.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

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World Service Office, Inc.
P.O. Box 9999
Van Nuys, CA 91409
(818) 780-3951

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INTRODUCTION

The Newsletter Handbook is designed to provide guidelines for all phases of producing newsletters in the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous. Many experienced members and committees contributed input for this handbook. Their collective experience is recorded here to help new newsletters get started and existing newsletters avoid repeating mistakes others have made. Before any N.A. newsletter is produced, these guidelines should be read carefully.

WHAT IS A NEWSLETTER?

Newsletters serve several purposes in Narcotics Anonymous. Most importantly, they build N.A. unity through communication. The information they contain usually falls into one of two categories: N.A. news, or personal experience in recovery from addiction. N.A. news is provided to help unify an area or region, so that in keeping with our First Tradition, personal recovery is made more available. Sharing personal experience lends the flavor of an N.A. meeting to the newsletter. In both cases, our Fifth Tradition must always be the guiding principle: our primary purpose is to carry the message to the addict who still suffers.

"N.A. news" is a phrase which covers a number of possible subject areas. Most newsletters include a section providing information about upcoming events on the area, regional and world levels. Another section may be used for reports about recent service committee meetings. When informational reports are distributed from the world or regional levels, these may be printed or summarized. New meetings and meetings which need support can be listed. See the section of this handbook entitled "Suggested Topics to be Covered" (p.3) for more information.

A section which includes the experience, strength and hope of N.A. members is usually an important part of the newsletter. The sharing in this section is much like the sharing at meetings. It should focus on

recovery, and it should be based in the Narcotics Anonymous Program. See the section entitled "Editing" (p.4) for a more detailed discussion.

HOW TO FORM A NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE

When an area or region has decided to produce a newsletter, a newsletter committee should be formed. To allow for appropriate accountability, this should be a subcommittee of the area or regional service committee. It is usually helpful to schedule a planning session for the newsletter committee to elect officers and decide upon the name and basic design of the newsletter. The vice-chairperson of the area or regional service committee can call the meeting to order and preside over the election of the editor. The editor of the newsletter is also chairperson of the newsletter subcommittee. The person elected then chairs the rest of the meeting and subsequent meetings, and reports regularly to the area or regional service committee.

The remainder of the planning session (or sessions) is spent holding the other elections, naming the newsletter and deciding on its format and content. Other officers elected are the secretary/typist and distribution manager. It should be stressed, though, that many more people than just the three officers should participate in this committee. There's a lot of work to be done.

The name of the newsletter should be chosen with care, and with respect for group conscience. Remember that the name you choose will become a public representation of our Fellowship. It should reflect an attitude of recovery. We urge you to avoid the temptation to compromise a positive public image in favor of a name that may be catchy but is in poor taste. Bringing ideas for the name to the area or regional service committee for a group conscience vote may be a good safeguard.

Perhaps the best way to design the format for the newsletter is to look at several other N.A. newsletters from around the country. Addresses for these may be obtained from the World Service Office at the address on the inside cover of this handbook. To be included on this list, you will want to get a permanent mailing address and send it to the WSO.

Once the committee is formed, and the format and name of the newsletter are chosen, you are ready to hold regular production meetings. These are chaired by the editor and attended by as many members as are willing to help. Experience would suggest that only a few will be reliable over any period of time, so each member will have to be committed to working hard.

SUGGESTED TOPICS TO BE COVERED

The following list of suggested topics was compiled by looking at existing newsletters. It may lend some direction to committees looking for guidance. You will no doubt develop your own style as you gain experience.

| | |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| Anniversaries | Meetings needing support |
| Announcements | New meetings |
| Area N.A. news | Personal recovery stories |
| Regional N.A. news | Conventions |
| World N.A. news | N.A. trivia |
| Letters | Cartoons |
| Slogans | Committee reports |
| N.A. literature | Poems |
| Material from | Workshops |
| other newsletters | N.A. Way articles |

Do not use articles or quotes from non-N.A. sources. Besides creating potential copyright problems, this practice often compromises or violates our Sixth Tradition by implying endorsement or affiliation. Using quotes also opens you up to the possibility of misquoting or plagiarising. The best way to be sure to stay out of these pitfalls entirely is to print only original N.A. material. When you do borrow or quote

from any N.A. source, note that source at the end of the quote.

If the format you have chosen includes a section on experience, strength and hope, each issue should include an open invitation to your readers to submit written essays or poems about personal experiences in recovery. Each item of this nature should be accompanied by a signed copyright release form. See other newsletters and the N.A. Way magazine for examples of these. Once you have settled on wording for your release form, it should be printed in every issue for your readers to tear out and send in with their written material.

EDITING

The Twelve Traditions of N.A. should serve as the basic guidelines for editing your newsletter. We have no opinions on outside issues, we are not affiliated with any other organizations, we remain anonymous in print, we are non-professional—all the principles contained in the traditions must be studied carefully and followed to the letter. You will most likely receive a good deal of input that is not usable or needs to be changed before it is used. The job of the editor is to make those decisions and changes before anything is printed. Group discussions and proofreading sessions help, because this responsibility is then shared by a number of people, and a better group conscience is obtained.

Always edit out any profanity. Whether or not you distribute outside of N.A., your newsletter represents the public image of our Fellowship. This basic courtesy is essential if we are to be viewed as a respectable recovery program.

The language of N.A. recovery should be used. Our steps and traditions are worded to keep the focus of our program on addiction and recovery, not on specific drugs. We are addicts, and our disease is addiction. Alcohol is often arbitrarily separated from other drugs in the speaking and writing of some N.A. members. This practice should not be reinforced in our

printed word. For us, such a distinction is artificial, and contributes to a lack of understanding of our First Step. For those reasons, we make the following edits in the essays we print:

If the writer said:

We print:

Alcohol and drugs

Drugs

Clean and sober

Clean

Alcoholic and addict

Addict

Sober

Clean

Sobriety

Clean time or
recovery

These changes are in keeping with the accepted language in all of our Conference-approved literature, and are intended to help us keep the N.A. principles of recovery clearly in focus.

Of course, all grammatical and structural errors, misspellings and faulty information should be corrected. Some newsletter editors are well versed in technical matters, and some are not. The rule of thumb is to do the best with the resources at your disposal. The clearer the newsletter, the better, but perfection is not always possible. The most important concern is that a clear message of N.A. recovery come through that is consistent with the Twelve Traditions and N.A. philosophy.

Some input you receive will be controversial. If the controversy is over an outside issue, of course the article should not be printed. If the controversy is over some issue within N.A., the committee should discuss among itself whether the article should be printed. If solutions are offered, and the tone of the article is positive and helpful, controversy may be healthy. If, however, the writer seems to be using the newsletter to simply vent hostility or as a forum for promoting self-will, such articles may do more harm

than good. A rule of thumb: the newsletter should carry the message, not the disease.

PRODUCTION

General Format

In an earlier section we discussed the content format of the newsletter—i.e. what sections will be included, which content areas to cover, etc. This section focuses on the physical format of the newsletter—i.e. what size paper will be used, number of pages, etc.

One common format for N.A. newsletters is to type two columns of copy on a regular 8-1/2 X 11 (letter size) or 8-1/2 X 14 (legal size) sheet of paper. One sheet can then be used for a newsletter one or two pages long. Two sheets can be stapled together to form a three- or four-page newsletter, three sheets for five or six pages, etc. This format lends itself quite nicely to the kinds of copy machines that most committees have access to.

A second type of format uses 11 X 17 sheets of paper folded in half to form four 8-1/2 X 11 pages per sheet. This format accommodates larger newsletters very well. Cover graphics may be used, and the back page may either be used or left blank, depending upon the amount of input per issue. Many copy machines are set up to copy this size of paper, or to reduce it to smaller sizes.

A third type of format is a magazine style such as the one used for the N.A. Way. This format is recommended only when sufficient funds are available and you expect your newsletter to be 12 pages or longer. Any size paper can be used, folded the same way as the previous example and stapled along the fold. It is wise to start simple and expand as you see how successful your newsletter turns out to be. Some newsletters have failed for lack of interest on the part of the local N.A. community, or lack of ongoing support by trusted servants. Other newsletters started out

simple, and were so well received that they expanded their format as they grew.

Layout

If the pages of the newsletter are 8-1/2 inches wide as in the first and second examples above, all copy should be typed out in two equal columns rather than simply across the page like a letter. This looks better and is easier to read. Pages that are 5-1/2 inches across may be typed either way. A typewriter with a good clear ribbon is necessary for quality reproduction of your copy. A typewriter with a carbon rather than cloth ribbon should be used if possible. Figure out your margins (they can be small when two columns are used) and type out all your copy within that margin setting. Rather than trying to line up two columns on the same page as you type, just type one column per page (this will not hold true if you are using a mimeograph machine—then you will have to type your pages exactly as they will appear in the final form). If you are using typesetting or photocopying, you can cut and paste these columns in their final positions after all the typing is done.

Most newsletters print some kind of graphics along with the copy. Sheets of cut-outs can be bought from most art supply stores to be used as borders and filler. If there is an artist in the local Fellowship, home-made art may add a nice touch.

When all the typing is done and any graphics you wish to use are chosen, you are ready to cut and paste. For this you will need a good pair of scissors or an exacto knife. Exacto knives work best; they can be purchased at any drafting supply store. Take a sheet of paper of the size you have chosen for your format, measure the area on the page that is to be covered with print, and cut your columns to that length. Next, place the columns in the desired locations on the page. A transparent ruler with a grid covering it, also available at a drafting supply store, is a great help in getting your columns to line up straight. One coat of rubber cement will hold the

columns firmly in place without wrinkling. When you are through positioning your copy and graphics in this way, you are ready to print.

Printing

The three most common methods of reproducing a newsletter are mimeograph, photocopy and offset. We'll consider them one at a time.

1. Mimeograph: This method requires special equipment both for typing and running off copies. Advantages are that it's cheap (if you have access to the equipment) and requires no cutting and pasting. Disadvantages are that it requires a mimeograph machine, it does not lend itself to graphics or attractive lettering, and mistakes are difficult to correct.

2. Photocopy: Most newsletter committees have easy access to a photocopy machine. If you use this type of machine, make sure you find a good, clear one. Also, remember the Seventh Tradition. Any copies you make must be recorded and paid for. Advantages of this system are that it's cheap and readily available, and it can be used to copy originals which have been cut and pasted, including attractive lettering and graphics. A machine with an adjustment for light and dark copies is best, because you may need to adjust it to copy your words and graphics, but not the edges of your cut-outs.

3. Offset: This must be done by a print shop. You may take your cut and pasted originals into the shop where they reproduce them on the desired paper, or you may have them typeset your copy in a type style of your choice. That last option is almost always too expensive for our purposes. The advantages of offset are that it's fast, high quality reproduction, and the print shop makes all the copies. The main disadvantage is that it's quite expensive.

Colored paper may be used for the final product, regardless of the print method you have chosen. That may add to the appearance of your newsletter, but one important factor should be considered before that decision is made. If you use darker colored paper, it will be impossible for your readers to make copies of the newsletter later. This may be an advantage if you want to prevent distribution except by subscription, or a disadvantage if you want the newsletter to be copied freely.

DISTRIBUTION

Once your newsletter has been printed and reproduced, it is ready to be distributed. The most important concern about distribution is that it be completed on time. A newsletter loses credibility fast if it is not dependable. The success and support of the newsletter depend on its reputation for prompt, regular distribution.

Distribution by Subscription

For a newsletter to be fully self-supporting, not draining the service committee treasury, a subscription system is most practical. All costs of production and distribution for one year are computed, a realistic number of subscribers is estimated, and the subscription price is computed from there. A subscription list should include name, address, amount paid and date enrolled.

Perhaps when a newsletter is first starting up, the first few issues should be distributed free by the area or regional service committee. This will give the newsletter some initial exposure. A discussion of the subscription price along with subscription blanks can be included in those first few issues to attract initial subscribers.

Distribution by Service Committee

Some newsletters are distributed at no cost to members within the area or region. Some advantages of this system are that there are no large mailing lists to maintain, there is little mailing expense—copies are brought to the regular committee meetings—and distribution is not limited to the number of subscribers. The disadvantage is that the hosting service committee bears the production expense, rather than passing the cost along to the reader. If this system is used, a separate list of addresses outside the area or region should be kept up so that others who want to receive the newsletter may do so.

Whenever you mail your newsletter, be sure that the anonymity of your subscribers is protected. The N.A. name or logo should not be visible on the outside of the package. A plain envelope or a fold and a staple are the common ways to avoid this potential problem.

Good luck! Producing a newsletter is demanding, but rewarding. If you follow the Twelve Traditions, these guidelines, and the example of other successful newsletters, you should be pleased with the outcome. The ever growing number of newsletters within Narcotics Anonymous suggests that they are fulfilling a need. Thank you for your interest in this area of service to N.A.

THE TWELVE STEPS OF NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS

1. We admitted that we were powerless over our addiction — that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. We made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. We continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. 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.
12. 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.

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