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# NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS

## The GROUP

an excerpt from The N.A. Tree

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Approved Literature

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## STRUCTURE

### The Member

The front-line, so to speak, of N.A. Service is the individual N.A. *member*. Anyone can be a member, the only requirement is the desire to stop using. For the group's purpose, a member in good standing is a self-proclaimed addict who is living a drug-free life by practicing the principles of Narcotics Anonymous. One qualifies by taking the First Step and remains a member as long as he or she is clean and desires membership. The services that each of us provide are the most important in N.A. It is the member who carries the message of recovery and works with others. Without an active membership there would be no need for the rest of the service structure, there would be no N.A.

The benefits of membership are clear to us all; a drug-free life, the chance to grow, friendship, and freedom. However, membership is not without its responsibilities. It is the responsibility of each member to maintain his or her personal sobriety; to share freely his experience, strength, and hope with the addict who still suffers; and to work to ensure that that which was given freely to him remains available to the newcomer.

Before coming to N.A. most of us realized that we could not stay clean alone. The gathering together of two or more member addicts for the purpose of learning how to live a drug-free life by practicing the principles of N.A. constitutes an *N.A. Meeting*. When these meetings are held regularly, they can become a Group.

### The Group

An *N.A. Group* is any meeting which meets regularly at a specified place and time, provided that it follows the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions (having no outside affiliations and receiving no outside financial support) and is duly registered with the World Service Office of Narcotics Anonymous. The Group is the second level of the service structure of N.A.

The primary purpose of an N.A. Group is, of course, to carry the message to the addict who still suffers. However, it also provides to each member the chance to express himself and to hear the experiences of other members who are learning how to live a better life. There are two basic types of groups; those which are open to the general public, and those closed to the public and for addicts only. Meetings vary widely in format from group to group. Some are participation meetings, some speaker, some question and answer, some special problem discussion, some topic discussion, and some have a combination of these formats. Despite the type of format a group uses for its meetings the function of a group is always the same, to provide a suitable and reliable environment for personal recovery, and to promote such recovery. The Group has proven to be the most successful vehicle for 12 Step Work. After sharing one's personal experience, strength and hope, the most valuable thing a member can do is usually to bring the suffering addict to a group meeting. In this way the group meeting becomes a place where the newcomer knows he can come for help. Often the first thing that can open the doors of recovery for the addict is the recognition of himself in others. The Group provides a setting in which the newcomer can find this identification by hearing a number of recovering addicts rather than just one or two.

The Group is the level at which we first find some of the mundane business of N.A. being taken care of. There is rent to pay, literature to buy and distribute, refreshments to be provided, a meeting hall to be kept clean, a time schedule to follow, announcements to be made, and many other things to be done for the maintenance of the Group. The Group must stay in contact with other Groups in their local area and with the rest of N.A. so they can find out about activities, learn of new groups opening up, get new literature, and find out what's happening in N.A. This is also the first level at which fellowship funds are handled, and the correct use of this money is essential for the preservation of the Group. In general, there are many uninteresting things that a Group must do, in addition to its meeting, which are necessary for survival.

We have found that most members who attend group meetings just aren't interested in the "business" of N.A. As a result, a few dedicated members who are willing to do something for the group, usually have to do most of the work. It is at this point that the principle of the trusted servant comes into being. Although most addicts don't want to help out with the work, they are at least willing to delegate this responsibility to someone else. This seems to be part of the nature of the addict. These members who have been drafted to do the work make up an informal *Steering Committee* out of which come the group officers. For the purpose of most groups these officers usually consist of a Secretary, a Treasurer, and a General Service Representative (GSR). Some groups, however, have additional officers, such as a Program Chairman to arrange for speakers or decide topics to be discussed, depending on their specific needs. Group officers other than the GSR normally serve for a period of one year and are elected by the group as a whole. One of the pitfalls which has caused many N.A. groups to suffer or even fold has been the election of officers who were unqualified to serve or did not have a history of sobriety. Often N.A. elections have seemed to be popularity contests rather than the selection of trusted servants. The officers of a group must be chosen with great care because of the responsibilities that their offices carry and the potential effect bad officers can have on their group.

The *Group Secretary* is responsible for the day-to-day functions of the group. It is his primary responsibility to assure that the group meeting takes place when and where it is supposed to. He selects a leader for each meeting, makes sure the coffee gets made, keeps the meeting records, arranges for group business meetings, arranges for the celebration of "birthdays," makes sure that the meeting hall is left in proper order, and answers correspondence. This job is important because without a good Secretary a group has little chance of attracting new members.

The *Treasurer* of an N.A. group is responsible for the funds which come into the group from the collection and for the distribution of these funds. The money collected in our meetings must be carefully budgeted. There are numerous expenses necessary for running a group.

The Treasurer keeps an accurate record of all the group's financial transactions, he or she maintains the group bank account, and distributes monies to pay the rent, purchase literature, provide refreshments, buy supplies, and cover the costs of any miscellaneous expenses the group incurs. In order to maintain our fellowship and freedom, the monies which come from group collections and member contributions must always be used to further our primary purpose. A group must first support itself. After paying its bills, any remaining funds should be placed in a group bank account and a reserve adequate to run the group for 2 or 3 months built up. After this "prudent reserve" has been established, excess funds should be diverted to help N.A. as a whole. A group can do this by contributing to the area or regional committees which serve the group or through contributions directly to the World Service Office of Narcotics Anonymous. One of the biggest problems we have faced has been the misuse of group money. Thousands of dollars in needed funds has just sort of disappeared. This abuse limits what N.A. can do and for the individual the dues have usually been very heavy; obviously, the Treasurer has a grave responsibility and much thought should be taken in selecting a member to perform this function.

The *General Service Representative* is the vital link between his group and the rest of N.A. He is the formal line of communication whose purpose it is to represent his group's conscience in matters affecting other groups or N.A. as a whole. Because the role of the GSR is so important to the success of N.A., this servant will be discussed in some detail in the next section of this pamphlet.

As a general guide, we have found that the group Secretary and Treasurer are most successful if they have certain assets necessary for the performance of their responsibilities. These qualifications include:

1. The willingness or desire to serve.
2. A history of sobriety (we suggest a minimum of 6 months continuous freedom from drugs — including alcohol).
3. A good working knowledge of 12 Steps of recovery.
4. An understanding of the 12 Traditions.
5. Active participation in the groups they are to serve; preferably some experience with the group's Steering Committee.

These assets do not guarantee a good servant, however they do help to ensure that those we choose will be capable of doing the job. Normally, group Secretaries and Treasurers serve for a period of one year at which time they are succeeded by other members who have been elected by the group. Of course, the use of drugs while serving as a group servant constitutes an automatic resignation for that officer. One of the responsibilities of group officers not often talked about, is to train group members to replace them. A group can be strengthened by new officers who are prepared to take over the responsibilities of those they replace. Another valuable lesson we have learned is that the continuity of service can be aided by staggering the election of servants, and overlapping terms of service. (Example: A Group Secretary might be elected in November to begin serving in January and the Treasurer elected in March to begin in May.) Remember, choose your trusted officers well, it is you whom they will be serving.