

Humility, Entry #1 of 7

It’s a tremendous struggle for most of us to stop relying on our own thinking and begin to ask for help, but when we do, we have begun to practice the principle of humility found in the Second Step (*The Narcotics Anonymous Step Working Guides*, Step Two, “Spiritual Principles”).

Before recovery, pride, ego, and denial were essential to our survival. They allowed us to feign a fierce sense of independence. In our new way of life, these powerful defects of character can often lead to addicts suffering from “Super Hero Syndrome”—the belief that we can and must do everything on our own. This can be a very lonely place, separated from the God of our understanding and other addicts in recovery. It can be so easy for us to encourage our friends and sponsees to reach out to others for help, only to find ourselves stuck in our own self-centered thinking.

In the Second Step, we begin to build a belief system and come to understand that two of us together represents a power greater than any of us on our own. In our active addiction, many of us perceive asking for help as a form of weakness. But we learn to be vulnerable enough to ask for support and find strength in this surrender. For many of us, the sponsorship relationship is where we learn to trust someone and reach out when we are in need.

Something clicks into place when we realize that we are not giving up our independence or problem-solving abilities by simply asking others to be there for us. Whether it is a shoulder to cry on, experience with a commitment, or learning how to do our own laundry—we all need a little help sometimes. One addict shared, “As I practice humility and become open to the support of others, my relationships become increasingly authentic.”

When we can let go of the idea that “our way is the only way,” then we can find some comfort in knowing that we are not alone in this process. People can and will help us; all we have to do is ask.

Even though it can feel like an attempt to climb Mount Everest, I will continue to reach out and let another member help me to consider a perspective besides my own.

Humility, Entry #2 of 7

Understanding that we are not unique is a good indication of humility (*It Works, Step Seven*).

The disease of addiction turns us into masters of self-deception. A distorted view of the world might convince us that we’re smarter than the average addict. When we are new to Narcotics Anonymous, this outlook can keep us separate from everyone in the room and lead us right back out the door.

The pain of stubbornly holding onto our perceived uniqueness can keep us stuck in isolation. As one member found, “Eventually the pain was great enough, and it didn't matter how different I thought I was from everyone else. I was an addict, and if I didn't want to die, I had to start doing some work.”

Step Seven shows us that in surrendering the defect of denial, we can let go of arrogance and pride, creating room for humility and identification within the Fellowship. We can see our humility grow when we can sit in a meeting and *naturally* hear the similarities rather than our differences.

When we trust a loving Higher Power to remove our shortcomings, we begin to make space for our true selves and develop a sense of our place within an NA community. Regardless of how long we have clean, how old we were when we got here, or our career status—we remain teachable. The gift of humility allows us to learn how to ask for help and take suggestions.

Sometimes, even with years clean, we can convince ourselves that “our case is different” or “we are the exception.” Calling our sponsors, regularly attending meetings, and continuing to practice spiritual principles remind us that we share the bond of addiction, as well as a common solution in NA. Whether we think we are “nowhere near that bad” or “the most flawed person in the room,” we eventually find a place where we can be right-sized by continuing to work the Steps.

Today, I will be grateful for freedom from the sharp edges of my uniqueness and find opportunities to identify with our fellow addicts.

Humility, Entry #3 of 7

A hard lesson in humility reminds us that we never graduate. When we stop practicing the basics, we are in trouble (*Living Clean*, Chapter 6, “Getting Out of Our Own Way”).

In active addiction, we were convinced that we had all the answers. This arrogance kept us in the dark and might have killed us if we hadn’t found NA. As newcomers, desperation forces us to unlock the door to humility. At that threshold, we learn to ask for help and take suggestions.

The basics—meetings, sponsor, Steps, service, Higher Power, not picking up no matter what—are the same for all of us. Our literature offers abundant and simple advice for what we must do to get humble and stay clean. In meetings, we frequently hear members recount their version of: “I relapsed because I stopped doing the basics.” Our fellows continually tell us there’s no finish line in NA, no graduation. We believe all this. The stories we hear in the rooms are the evidence. So, we soldier on with the basics.

...Until life gets in the way. The good stuff: We’re housed, out of prison, making bank, got our kids back, in love. We graduate (from school!). Staying connected to NA becomes harder. Those basics are time-consuming, and time is scarce these days. The arrogance we banished creeps back in. We got this! We did the work! We can have one _____ [*insert substance of choice*]! ... *We are in trouble.*

How much trouble we get in depends on how willing we are to get back to the basics. We don’t have to destroy our lives and lose everything. We can become teachable again and rediscover our spiritual center. We can call a fellow addict, show up at our home group, say “what’s up” to our HP.

We’ve heard: “If I never leave the basics, I never have to get back to them.” It means more now.

Which of “the basics” are lacking in my program? What am I willing to do today to change that?

Humility, Entry #4 of 7

The practice of humility helps us be honest about our circumstances. We learn to live and give within the limits of our lives (*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Seven, “For Members”).

In active addiction, we became masters of manipulation. We spun a web of lies so intricate that we began to believe our own nonsense. The admission that we were addicts may have been the first time we had been *truly* honest with ourselves in years. With this honesty comes an opportunity to take a look at our lives and where our antics led us.

For many of us, being at our lowest low, having lost everything but our lives, and feeling humiliated by our behavior inspires a modicum of honesty and humility. Others of us identify our spiritual and emotional desperation before we destroyed our relationships or lost our material possessions. In either case, an honest assessment leads us to practice humility as we accept that we’re no better and no worse than anyone else in the room.

As we stay clean, we get to know ourselves better through the process of working the Steps. Becoming familiar with our strengths and weaknesses in the Sixth Step gives us some perspective on what we have to offer the world and the Fellowship. And in Step Seven, we find new freedom in developing a humble and realistic view of ourselves and our resources.

Life has a way of nudging us back to a state of humility as new experiences challenge us over time. We learn to stay clean through life’s losses—divorce, bankruptcy, death. And we learn to stay humble even as we pursue an education, meet success in our careers, or establish healthy romantic relationships. We do our best to stay grounded in our program by remaining humble.

Practicing humility can help us learn how to monitor our emotional well-being and change course before we hit a breaking point. When we lose sight of our humility, we become more vulnerable to overextending ourselves, risking emotional or physical exhaustion. Over time, we learn our limits. Protecting pride and ego take a backseat to defending healthy boundaries. We begin to learn how to give within our means.

Today, I will maintain a realistic perspective of my circumstances and exercise discernment when offering to contribute or serve.

Humility, Entry #5 of 7

Being asked to lead, to serve, to accept responsibility, is a humbling experience for a recovering addict (*A Guide to Local Services in Narcotics Anonymous*, Fourth Concept).

While using, most of us were not asked to lead anything. When we did have such experiences, they were often opportunities for our ego-based character defects to feed like vampires on their victims’ blood. Our ravenous need for perfection and validation, our self-importance, competitiveness, and attention-seeking branded those situations. Others of us imploded with self-doubt. We couldn’t ask for help, didn’t feel we had anything to offer, or were too high to show up. Such experiences only made us more isolated and fearful, and even less willing to take on responsibilities, if anyone bothered to ask again.

When it comes to service, our one-two punch of low self-esteem and high self-importance follow us into the rooms. If we are asked to take out the rubbish, it requires asking someone, “Where to?” and even that can be hard for us. If we’re asked to lead a meeting, we need assurance that we don’t have to wow them with a *tour de force* or slay with our comic genius. All we have to do is show up and be honest. When we lack humility, everything is more complicated than it needs to be.

If we are willing, we’ll end up in service positions that suit our innate talents, some that we’ll grow into with support, and others that will expose our defects to the bone. Humility is the vehicle that allows us to accept responsibility without serving our ego. We can do something well without showing off, just as we can do something awkwardly, or even fail at it, with grace.

Next time I’m asked to serve, I’ll just do the task as well as possible. That’s what really matters.

Humility, Entry #6 of 7

We all go through times when we need help of one kind or another. Asking for help may be as principled and as difficult as anything we ever do (*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Seven, “For Members”).

Moving into our first apartment clean, learning how to pay bills on time, going to a funeral or a wedding for the first time in recovery, asking someone to sit with us while the craving to pick up passes—life on life's terms presents us with opportunities to ask for help on a daily basis. Our old way of thinking—shaped by self-centeredness and denial—guards a myth that equates asking for help with weakness.

It takes a great deal of courage to push past the impulse to do all of this on our own. We cultivate humility as we surrender our excessive pride. We ask for and receive support from other members and find the courage to face new emotions and experiences. One member shared, “Today, I see that asking for help is our greatest source of strength.”

At times, life shows up and hits us square in the face. No matter how good a program we work, life can be an emotional rollercoaster. We all suffer losses. Success, at first so unfamiliar, can be challenging as well. And often we feel ill-equipped to handle life on life's terms alone. The good news is that we don't have to.

The hardest part of getting help may be asking for it. We don't feel worthy and may think of ourselves as a burden. We swallow our pride and turn to more experienced NA members for help. As awkward as that might be, our requests are typically met with graciousness. Having navigated many of life's obstacles clean, they're usually delighted to share their wisdom and offer support. The joys of helping another addict don't end when we attain X number of years.

Learning how to be self-supporting does not mean that life's challenges become a solo endeavor. By practicing humility, we learn what our limitations are, establish some healthy boundaries, and set out in new directions that develop our strengths.

Today, I will challenge my old ways of thinking by asking someone about their experience and opening myself up to their support.

Humility, Entry #7 of 7

Humility is most easily identified as an acceptance of who we truly are—neither worse nor better than we believed we were when we were using, just human (*The Narcotics Anonymous Step Working Guides*, Step One, “Spiritual Principles”).

In early recovery, we often find ourselves going from unrealistic, grandiose self-perception to believing we are the worst person in history. It’s that familiar addict pendulum swing—from one extreme to the other (with an optional sound effect):

I’m a spiritual giant deserving of high praise—*WHOOSH!*—I’m a worthless piece of trash.

I’m the hottest person here—*WHOOSH!*—I’m repulsive and don’t deserve to live.

I’m the only parent who knows what she’s doing—*WHOOSH!*—I’m going to screw up my kid worse than my parents screwed me up.

Torchbearer of overblown self-importance—*WHOOSH!*—barren self-pity farm.

Hero—*WHOOSH!*—zero.

Getting clean and working the Twelve Steps of NA can slow our addict pendulum and greatly narrow the distance of its swing. The humility that ensues from working Steps will help us to find that serene sweet-spot somewhere in the middle. This place is where our true selves reside. Here lives reality.

Humility is like kryptonite to our self-indulgence, jealousy, and entitlement. It allows us to accept the beautiful muddle of our humanity, the truth of our perfectly imperfect selves, and our authentic place in the world. We can have reasonable expectations of ourselves and let others be who they are without our interference. We can find humor in our shortcomings and try to do better when criticized, instead of wanting to annihilate ourselves when we make a mistake.

Perhaps most crucially, we don’t boast about our spiritual growth, especially in comparison to other members, nor do we overindulge in denigrating who we “used to be” when we were using. We were human then, and we’re human now.

I will try to be mindful of where my pendulum is swinging today. Though I can accept where I am, I’ll still try to move toward the center, because that’s what’s real.