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Fellowship Issue Discussions

Who's Missing: Long-Term Members

At workshops around the world, members with considerable clean time have been identified as one of the populations frequently missing from our rooms. In some NA communities, experienced members no longer attend NA meetings or participate in service. These members have much to offer our fellowship. We know that our groups, service committees, and members can reach out and encourage long-term members to return, but we also know that each individual member is responsible for his or her own recovery. So what might an individual consider in making the choice to return to the fellowship?



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www.na.org/IDT/IDT.htm

**for all the latest info
on Issue Discussion
Topics, and to participate
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Issue Discussion
Bulletin Boards!**

There will be resources available in this section to help you facilitate discussions and information about submitting your input. These resources are routinely updated, so be sure to check back regularly for new information.

How do I participate in NA when it is no longer my whole life? How do I reach out for help from people I don't know or who have less clean time than I do? Will I be allowed to have a "bad day" in spite of my considerable clean time and still be accepted? How do I go back to a fellowship that is different from the one I left?

Usually, our solutions in recovery lie in spiritual principles—some of them the same principles we learned about when we first got clean, and some that are new to us or that we may not have practiced as much. For example, living in recovery today may mean living in balance and including our recovery in that balance. Early in our recovery, we filled our nights with meetings and our weekends with service commitments, conventions, conferences, dances, and workshops. We replaced our old friends with recovering friends, and we developed a "habit of recovery." As we grew in our recovery, we welcomed relationships, jobs, nonrecovering friends, and new types of recreation into our lives. We may have found we couldn't maintain our recovery practices when they weren't our whole world, and our program suffered; but we can seek balance in our lives and recommit to our recovery. If there are others this will affect, we include them in our decision to return to NA, recognizing the need for balance in the time we devote to our recovery and to our other relationships.

When we first return to NA, we may feel like a newcomer again. The people may be different, the topics and formats may seem strange, the number of people in the meeting may have grown or dwindled, and even the demographics of members may be different—but it is still NA, the fellowship where we got clean and learned to recover. We can practice humility by introducing ourselves, by asking for hugs and phone numbers, or by sharing in the meeting that we have been clean awhile but have not been coming to meetings. If we have special needs, we can identify them and ask for help. Lasting friendships in NA have started with requests like this. When a group responsibility or service commitment becomes available, we can volunteer for it. This helps us get to that meeting every week, just as it did when we were new. We can still make time for recovery, and our program doesn't have to include meetings every day and service commitments every weekend.

If we are honest and open-minded, we will see that NA is not so different after all; that there are recovering addicts at meetings who have a lot to offer us, and many we can help. We may discover that our passion for NA has never really gone away. We can learn to love recovery in NA again, and learn to balance that love with our commitments outside of NA.

We may find that we still miss other long-term members with whom we got clean. We may find that the topics at some meetings are not relevant in our lives today. If that is the case, we can invite our long-term recovering friends to come and speak at or lead a meeting. We can suggest topics that will be attractive to those with extended periods of recovery. We can even start a new meeting and ask old and new recovering friends to help us support it. We can listen to the group service representative's report and offer assistance to the area or regional service committees on issues that are familiar to us or are similar to those we grappled with in our earlier service commitments. We may not be able to devote a Saturday or Sunday afternoon every month to our ASC, but we can still be of assistance on certain issues and projects.

Our "recovery muscles" are not very different from the muscles in our body. Since we haven't been actively flexing our recovery muscles, we'll need to get back into shape. If we have stayed clean for an extended period of time while not practicing those things that are important to our recovery, we must have had a very strong foundation in the first place. But we can't expect to stay clean on that foundation alone. We return to those practices that help us "keep what we have." We honor our gift of recovery by recommitting to our program and our fellowship, and working toward the balance we seek in our lives. When we do this, our recovery enhances every other gift in our lives.