

# CHAIRPERSON'S WORKSHOP FORMAT

## WHAT IS A CHAIRPERSON?

A chairperson of a Narcotics Anonymous recovery meeting is an addict who is primarily responsible for maintaining an "atmosphere of recovery" during the meeting.

There is a marked difference between being primarily responsible and being solely responsible. As members of NA, each of us is responsible. Not only for our own conduct at a meeting, but to help educate the less experienced members on how our meetings operate and what each member should do to help further our primary purpose. To make one person solely responsible for that task would set him/her apart from the group by making him/her an ultimate authority figure (see Traditions 2 & 12.).

## WHY DO WE NEED CHAIRPEOPLE?

We give the chairperson the primary responsibility to maintain order in a meeting so the NA message of recovery can be heard without obstruction. If any of us could talk whenever, as often, and as long as we wanted, only those members with the strongest personalities would ever get a chance to share.

It is also important that we follow an established format (usually decided upon at the group's business meeting). Before chairing a meeting you should know where the format may be found. By using a meeting format, our experience shows that we can achieve much more sharing in much less time.

## WHO CAN BE A CHAIRPERSON?

Any member of NA with a desire to serve and that meets any requirements established by their group.

Although not requirements, there are other attributes that help someone be a good chairperson. Some of them are:

- A working knowledge of the 12 Traditions of NA.
- An active NA step program (you're working the steps.)
- The ability to be assertive.
- The willingness to be patient and tolerant.
- The ability to express yourself in a loving manner.
- The willingness to keep and fulfill the commitments you made to open, chair and close the meeting.

The responsibilities of the chairperson are a serious matter. Suffering and recovering addicts are depending on you. When you volunteer to chair a

meeting, please read these guidelines and try to follow them to the best of your ability.

### **BEFORE THE MEETING**

- Arrive at least 30 minutes before the meeting.
- Clean up the meeting room if needed.
- Make coffee, set out cream and sugar dispensers, cups, stir sticks, candles, etc. if they are used at this meeting.
- Set out literature.
- Have announcements, readings, Basic Text, and anything else you may need ready before the meeting starts.
- Have a topic prepared in case no one suggests one.

### **DURING THE MEETING**

- Start and end the meeting on time.
- Follow the suggested meeting format
- Maintain order and observance of the 12 Traditions
- Remember to observe the 7<sup>th</sup> Tradition (pass the basket).

### **AFTER THE MEETING**

The chairperson is responsible for cleaning up. Ask for help, but please make sure the following things are done:

- Clean up the coffee pot and supplies
- Make sure any smoking materials are safely disposed of in butt cans
- Take out the garbage if it is full
- Record the attendance and the 7<sup>th</sup> Tradition, and store the funds according to the practices of this group.
- Make sure everything is picked up and clean. Wipe down the tables, turn off the coffee pot and lights. Leave the meeting place as clean or cleaner than you found it.
- **LOCK THE DOORS.**

### **WHAT SHOULD A CHAIRPERSON DO?**

A chairperson should open the doors to the meeting and begin setting up 30 minutes BEFORE the meeting is scheduled to begin. This will give you ample time to greet early arrivals, make coffee, clean up the meeting room, and take care of any other necessary details. Be sure to start the meeting at the scheduled time, even if there is only one other member present. Follow the MEETING FORMAT guidelines in the order they appear on the printed sheet.

After the closing, be sure that everything is left in good order for the next meeting. You may want to ask others to help with the cleaning up. Be sure to count, record, and store the money as directed by this group.

After the meeting, sharing is important and should be encouraged, however an NA meeting is not a “hangout” or a clubhouse. 30 minutes after a meeting should be plenty of time for people to leave. This is flexible of course, but certainly one hour past a meeting should be the most anyone needs to stay there and share. If the meeting is over and people are still hanging around, you can tell them that you need to lock up and ask them to leave.

### **HOW SHOULD A DISRUPTION DURING THE MEETING BE HANDLED?**

There are different types of disruptions, but we will address a few here and perhaps you can find some direction that you can use. One good rule of thumb is, if the disturbance is brief and not very noticeable by the entire group, ignore it. If the problem is severe or persists, then you may have to address it.

**THE SIDE TALKER** This is a member or members that carry on a conversation while someone else is trying to share. Not only are they missing out on the benefits of the meeting, but they may be preventing someone else from hearing as well. It also displays a callous disregard for the feelings of the person sharing. If our members feel they are being ignored, even by just a few, it can inhibit their willingness to openly share about things that are important to them.

If you need to restore order to the meeting, one way would be to say, “Excuse me. We are trying to conduct a recovery meeting here. It would be appreciated by all of us if the other conversations wait until after the meeting is over. Thank you.”

**THE COMPULSIVE TALKER** This is the member that has already shared at the meeting, but if left unchecked will talk 2, 3, or 4 more times before everyone else has had a chance to speak. Often times this person isn’t trying to be rude, but just doesn’t understand good meeting etiquette. Usually it is someone fairly new in NA and they may just want to share their newfound enthusiasm. One good way to prevent this from happening is to begin with one member and ask that everyone take their turn in a clockwise or counter clockwise rotation.

If someone jumps in to talk for the second time, stop them immediately and say, “Excuse me \_\_\_\_\_, but everyone hasn’t had a chance to share yet. I’d like to ask you to wait until after everybody has finished, and if there is still time left, we will open the meeting up for additional comments.”

**THE ORATOR** The orator is the member that goes on and on when it is his/her turn to share at the meeting, using up much of the remaining meeting time at the expense of those who haven’t spoken yet and/or boring everyone to tears.

Usually this person (and the rest of the group) would benefit if s/he listened more and talked less.

How long a person should share depends on the situation. How many people are at the meeting? Is time running short while some people still haven't shared yet? Is everyone still listening and interested? Does this member have an important need to talk or does s/he just like listening to him/herself? Unless things get really bad, it is best to avoid cutting somebody off. This doesn't mean that you should never interrupt, but you do run the risk of hurting someone's feelings when you tell them to "cut it short" in the middle of their sharing. It's best to take preventative measures, if possible, by saying, "We have a large meeting tonight, so if everyone could keep their comments a little shorter in length, everybody will get a chance to share. Thank you." If it is getting late in the meeting you could say, "We're running a little short on time, so I'd like to ask those who have not talked yet to keep the sharing brief. Thank you." If you do find it necessary to cut someone off, try to be as polite and gentle as you can, while still being firm. You might try saying, "Excuse me \_\_\_\_\_, could you please try to finish up so everyone gets a chance to share? Thanks." Then, after the meeting, explain to him/her why you interrupted and try to smooth any hurt feelings if there are any (make amends) by helping them to feel wanted.

**THE ENDORSER AND THE CRITIC** These two seem to be opposites, but they really are more alike than they are different. The endorser is someone that comes to a Narcotics Anonymous meeting and endorses entities outside of NA. Most often it is the treatment center s/he went through, another 12 step fellowship, or a particular religious or spiritual belief. It can be any number of other things as well. S/he may make statements like this:

- I went to XYZ treatment center and they're wonderful. My counselor says...
- I'm grateful to NA and \_A.
- Like it says in \_\_\_\_\_ (they begin to quote from a religious book or other non-NA recovery literature.)

The critic, on the other hand, uses the NA meeting to vent their resentment at a particular place, thing, philosophy, or idea. Often it is the same subject that the endorser supports. The critic may make statements like:

- All treatment centers are after is money.
- I went to \_A before and they didn't do a thing for me!
- I don't want a thing to do with organized religion. I think they're a bunch of hypocrites!

Both of these members hurt NA unity by bringing up strong opinions about outside issues that others may disagree with. This disagreement could cause

controversy in the meeting and divert us from carrying the Narcotics Anonymous message of recovery.

As chairperson, you should try to keep the focus on NA's message. One effective way to do this is by explaining why we don't have opinions on outside issues or endorse outside enterprises as stated in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Traditions in the Basic Text. Whether you interrupt the person sharing, address it in front of everyone when they're done, or simply talk to the individual one on one after the meeting, should depend on how widespread and severely our spiritual guidelines (12 Traditions) are being departed from.

**THE ANYTHING-UNDER-THE-SUN TALKER** This is someone who begins rambling on any number of subjects, none of which are the chosen topic. Unless his/her commentary is extremely short, or they seem incapable of doing any better (e.g. mental illness, newcomer, etc...) it is a good idea to interrupt them and say, "Excuse me \_\_\_\_\_, the topic for this meeting is on \_\_\_\_\_. Would you mind keeping your sharing to the topic for the benefit of the group?"

**THE GOSSIP AND THE WORLD-SAVER** These two are closely related. Both use the forum at the meeting to talk about other people's problems rather than themselves. The gossip, although more rare, probably does more damage than the world-saver because his/her intent has more malice attached.

The world-saver may bring up the "problem" at the beginning of the meeting or focus their discussion on someone else when it is their turn to share. As chairperson, you can either form a topic focusing on our OWN recovery (live and let live, acceptance of God's will, powerlessness, etc.) or you can ask that members stick to topics that focus on THEIR experience, strength and hope, not someone else's.

NEVER get into a topic of "solving someone's problem" that isn't at the meeting. Example: "My sister's husband gets loaded and takes all her money. What should I tell her to do?" ... "She should throw him out!"

This may be an extreme example, but any time we begin focusing on someone else's recovery, or lack of, we cease to focus on our own. In Narcotics Anonymous, we don't claim to be able to solve the world's problems or even all of our own. We don't give advice or "solve problems." We share our experience, strength, and hope.

Our message is: Just for today, you don't have to use. You can find recovery from active addiction through Narcotics Anonymous.

**SOMEONE THAT IS STILL USING AT THE MEETING** If you suspect someone is high, you may ask, "Have you used any mood or mind altering drugs in the past 24 hours?" If they say no, accept that as true. If they say yes, you can say,

“It may be in your best interest to just listen today.” If the person is disruptive, upon being asked to be quiet, it is possible (but not likely) that s/he could become argumentative. DO NOT GET INTO AN ARGUMENT OR LONG DEBATE WITH SOMEONE WHO IS STILL USING! If all they want is the last word, then let them have it. You are there to chair a meeting and find recovery, not win arguments. If it seems the meeting will be continually disrupted, then you may have to ask them to leave. When doing so be sure to make them aware that they are welcome back whenever they want help.

You also have the right (as does any member) to ask for a moment of silence to reflect on our primary purpose.) This usually solves a lot of the problems in a meeting.

THESE ARE JUST A FEW EXAMPLES OF WHAT COULD COME UP DURING A MEETING AND ONE WAY TO HANDLE IT. IF SOMETHING ELSE WORKS BETTER FOR YOU, USE IT. WHEN FACED WITH ANY PROBLEM SITUATION AT A MEETING, OUR EXPERIENCE HAS SHOWN THAT CONFRONTING WITH LOVE AND CONCERN IS ALWAYS THE BETTER APPROACH.