

SUPPORTING GROUPS AND
SERVICE BODIES

The Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous

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come first; personal recovery
depends upon OA unity*



The Twelve Traditions

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon OA 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 OA membership is a desire to stop eating compulsively.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or OA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the compulsive over-eater who still suffers.
6. An OA group ought never endorse, finance or lend the OA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every OA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Overeaters Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. OA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Overeaters Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the OA 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, films, television and other public media of communication.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all these Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

When we first come to Overeaters Anonymous, we are preoccupied with our own recovery and weight loss. It is not long, however, before we realize this is not a diet club, as we may have expected or perhaps experienced before. We hear the Twelve Steps read many times, and we begin to understand that OA presents a new way of living, rather than just a way to lose weight.

Another thing we often hear read at meetings is a set of Twelve Traditions. We may wonder at this repetition until we realize the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions have become familiar to us—have become part of our understanding.

Why are the Twelve Traditions so important to us? In general, the Twelve Steps guide the individual to recovery, and the Twelve Traditions ensure the well-being of the groups. Although the Traditions were developed to prevent group problems, individual members can also practice the principles of the Twelve Traditions in personal relationships. The Steps and Traditions have been hammered out by hard experience.* We find them vital to the growth and life of OA.

Tradition One

Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon OA unity.

This is the First Tradition: unity.

The reason for this Tradition is clear enough when you consider the consequences of OA fragmentation. If we split up into little argumentative groups, where is the strength we need? Growth depends on strength—both personal growth and group effectiveness.

Our recovery is not usually something we can do by ourselves. We need the loving support of our peers. We cannot afford to let disagreements deprive us of our unity.

**The OA Handbook for Members, Groups, and Service Bodies and The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous, Second Edition provide specific guidelines for applying the Twelve Traditions.*

But does this mean we must always be in sheep-like agreement? That is not possible, even if it were desirable. What it does mean is that discussion and differences of opinion must be resolved, in the end, by consideration of the welfare of the group as a whole. Not all groups follow the same eating plan or use the same meeting format. Some of our members must follow special diets for medical reasons. These differences are not important.

Our common ground and our one source of unity is that we are all working the Twelve Steps of recovery.

Tradition Two

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.

The newcomer may ask, “Who is the head of OA?” and be puzzled by the answer in Tradition Two: a loving God. No organization in the world, except other Twelve-Step groups, is run in quite this way. It may seem thoroughly impractical—but it works! We ask God’s guidance and then vote on concerns, and the group decision is our authority.

Not all our group decisions will be wise and practical. We do make mistakes. Then we must look for better answers to the problem. In time, we are likely to see we have learned and grown from our mistakes.

No one person has all the answers in OA. It is only natural for the founders of a group to feel they must always guide and direct the group. But this is not so. The counsel of elder members can continue to be invaluable, but it is not good for the group or the individual for one person to hold authority long. A vital part of personal growth is learning humility by yielding our self-will. As a group, we may think it is easier to follow a strong leader than to join in making our own decisions at a steering committee meeting. But group conscience must be our guide in making all decisions for the group.

There is more strength in working out solutions together.

Tradition Three

The only requirement for OA membership is a desire to stop eating compulsively.

Most organizations have rules for membership. We have only one: a desire to stop eating compulsively.

A person cannot be barred from OA because he or she differs from others in race, political views, religion, economic status, interpretation of the program, or food plan. Weight is not a criterion for membership. A person is a member if he or she has a desire to overcome his or her compulsion. There is a place in OA for each of us. Here we are free to be ourselves and be accepted.

Some groups have been troubled by members who were emotionally disturbed and tended to disrupt the harmony of the meetings. Yet they were not ousted from the group and were not denied the chance of recovery. They had the one requirement for membership: a desire to stop eating compulsively. Troublesome personal problems can be dealt with on a one-on-one basis through sponsorship. In time, these groups were seen to survive, stronger than ever.

Note, too, that desire is required—not success. Many people keep coming back even though they feel they have failed. The door never closes. As long as they keep coming back, they have a chance.

Tradition Four

Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or OA as a whole.

Tradition Four defines our freedom. Our groups are free to find what works best for them. They can make their own mistakes and learn from them.

There are only two limits to this freedom: we may not do anything that will injure OA as a

whole, and we must remain free from outside influence. Our decisions must be by group conscience. Let us see how this works. Suppose a group decides to have no format and to eliminate the Twelve Steps. Of course it is free to do so, but it is no longer an OA group and should not identify itself as such. It is simply a diet club. If members make a habit of going out after meetings and overeating together, they should not speak of themselves as OA members, lest they harm the reputation of OA as a whole. On the other hand, if a group votes to regulate smoking areas or to institute abstinence requirements for officers, it is exercising group autonomy.

If a meeting is held in a church or school, it must, of course, conform to rules about smoking, noise, tidiness, etc. But its membership is not to be confined to members of the church or residents of the area. It must be open to all who wish to abstain from compulsive overeating. Nor is its freedom of expression to be limited by nonmembers.

Group conscience is always our guide.

Tradition Five

Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the compulsive overeater who still suffers.

The practicing compulsive overeater is more likely to listen to a recovered overeater than to doctors, family or friends. If their advice were sufficient, very few would be compulsive eaters.

But we can and do listen to one another. We share our feelings and experiences with others. When we are traveling the road to recovery, we are uniquely equipped to help others, because they will let us.

This is our prime purpose. An OA group is not a social club, though we make wonderful friends. If a group has stopped getting newcomers, it is time to examine its actions. Are efforts being made to let OA be known by public notice and personal witness? Is the newcomer neglected, while friends are absorbed in conversation? Or is the newcomer warmly welcomed and made to feel at home? Our

group purpose is to carry the OA message. Specific causes, religions, unrelated philosophies, no matter how worthwhile, are not promoted at OA meetings.

Tradition Six

An OA group ought never endorse, finance or lend the OA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

It may sometimes occur to some among us that we could carry the message most effectively through health camps, packaged meals, or restaurants.

Why not?

It seems very promising at first glance. But the experience of AA has shown us the pitfalls. If the OA name is used for one outside enterprise, no matter how well-meaning, it may then be applied to many others. Inevitably, some would not be to our credit.

Then, too, we might lose sight of our primary purpose, carrying the message, in building up our profits and power. Personal power drives and desire for prestige would appear, and our ego demands would cause dissension.

We find it necessary to keep the profit motive firmly separated from our Twelfth-Step work at all times. Freely it is given to us, and freely we give it away.

Tradition Seven

Every OA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

Our OA program is our lifeline, our escape from our compulsion. It is very precious to us.

Money is needed to keep it alive. Each group has expenses—the meeting room, the books and literature, the coffee and tea. When groups become numerous and strong enough, there is the need to support an intergroup office, as well as the World Service Office.

How are we to finance our needs? They must be met by our own contributions. We may not accept donations from nonmembers. An OA member may contribute to the World Service Office up to \$5,000 per year for the general fund and up to \$5,000 per year for any special fund. OA, Inc. will accept a bequest in any amount from the will of a deceased member.

The reasons for this are clear. If we accept “free” gifts from outsiders, or too much from one member, we become less than free ourselves. If someone is paying our way, he or she will naturally come to expect a voice in our decisions. The heavy contributor in a group might develop a desire to dominate the group. This we cannot allow, for our ultimate authority is “a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience.”

Our groups are urged not to hoard large sums of money, but to keep only a small reserve above running expenses. We are not profit-making, and money is not our goal.

As long as we pay our way from our own pockets, we will have public respect, and our own. We will be free.

Tradition Eight

Overeaters Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.

Our World Service Office and intergroup offices require workers to take care of the business of OA.

Phones must be answered, bills paid and accounts kept, supplies ordered, business correspondence attended to and records maintained. When the work becomes too heavy for volunteers to handle, we need to hire special workers who may or may not be OA members.

But sponsoring, leading, speaking, explaining OA to newcomers—“carrying the message”—is our Twelfth-Step work and it must always be free from the dollar motive. Compulsive overeaters will listen to those of us who give freely from our

own experience.

Special workers are paid for office services, which makes Twelfth-Step work by volunteers possible.

Tradition Nine

OA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

At first glance, Overeaters Anonymous may seem to be organized. There are many tasks and functions in our groups and their activities. These services are delegated to special committees and service boards. Intergroup offices are formed when enough groups in an area realize the need and provide the support to maintain them. Our World Service Business Conference is composed of delegates chosen by local intergroups. The members of the World Service Board of Trustees are elected by and are directly responsible to the Conference, which represents the collective conscience of OA as a whole.

Yet Overeaters Anonymous as a whole is not organized. We have no president or vice president, no one with governing power in OA. No groups or members can be expelled from OA. If Traditions are broken, we can call it to the attention of the persons or groups involved, but do not demand compliance. We can suggest, but not order. It is not necessary that we give orders, even if it were possible. The group that does not follow the Traditions is soon struggling with serious problems. Through trial and error, groups and service boards come to accept direction from those they serve.

Tradition Ten

Overeaters Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the OA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

Since our members come from many areas and many backgrounds, we naturally have many shades

of opinion represented. This could cause dissent and controversy.

But we find we can maintain unity without sacrificing personal freedom of thought. We are free to believe in and work for any cause we choose—outside OA. Within OA, we are concerned only with the message of recovery. Other issues, however worthy, have no place in an OA meeting.

Nor will OA as a whole endorse any party, religion, therapy, nutritional reform or other cause. Our sole business is to carry the Twelve-Step message to the compulsive eater who still suffers. We cannot afford to let anything interfere with this objective.

Tradition Eleven

Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films, television and other public media of communication.

In OA, we have found hope at last, a way out of our dilemma. It is only natural that we are filled with enthusiasm and feel we cannot wait to tell everyone who is eating compulsively the good news! But if we are too excited and eager to use restraint in our approach, we may very likely find the one we wanted to help turned away instead. How are we to handle this problem?

If prospective members give you an opening, you may, of course, be able to tell them about OA and invite them to visit a meeting. Sometimes it is better to wait until they see a change in you and ask, “What are you doing for yourself?” When they see you have found something they want, attraction draws them to OA.

On a broader scale, how are we to help OA become more widely known? It is well within the realm of our Traditions to use TV or radio spots, newspaper articles, “attraction cards” on bulletin boards and anonymous panel presentations before professional groups to publicize OA.

We must be careful of our methods. It is OA we wish to publicize, not individual members. When

we have an opportunity to give interviews or personal stories, we do not use our names or show our faces. We focus the spotlight on OA, never on our own persons. Within the Fellowship, many of us feel free to reveal our full names.

None of us can afford to glorify oneself or others. No one can afford to be a star. Personal pride makes the star fall and results in harm to the member and to OA as a whole. Whatever we may be in our lives elsewhere, in OA each of us is just one of the members.

Tradition Twelve

Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all these Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

Anonymity means a great deal more to us than just not using our last names.

It means being able to talk freely about feelings and experiences, without fear of gossip, so we need not repress feelings with food. In meetings, we share in a general way. More intimate problems are best discussed with a sponsor or another OA member.

This is a life or death program; there is no room for pettiness. We cannot afford to let our antagonism to some member's personality distract us from practicing the Twelve Steps of our program. We must strive to put program first, admitting when we are wrong and trying always to find peaceful ways of working together.

Anonymity also means each of our members is just that—a member of the group. We place spiritual principles before personalities. We cannot build our program about any one person. No one is safe on a pedestal. No one is infallible. We are only compulsive overeaters, working toward our recovery.

Anonymity has one more significance. It means we serve OA in whatever way we can, without expecting glory, prestige or power. It allows us to practice the spiritual principle of humility.



How to find OA

Visit the OA website at www.oa.org,
or contact the World Service Office at 1-505-891-2664.

Many directories also include local listings
for Overeaters Anonymous.

Overeaters Anonymous®

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