Social Media and Our Guiding Principles

The rise of social media and social networking in recent years has had significant and widespread effects on how members of our fellowship interact with one another. NA members have had many questions about how our principles apply with these social networking tools, and this topic generated an extended discussion at the 2010 World Service Conference. This service pamphlet provides a synthesis of some of the points that arose from that discussion, along with members' input and best practices related to the topic of social networking. Our goal is not to endorse or encourage the use of any particular social networking resource; we are simply responding to the reality that members do utilize these resources and to the many requests for guidance and insight on how to use social networking responsibly in light of our tradition of anonymity.

While our Eleventh Tradition specifically addresses our presence "at the level of press, radio, and films," the principles of that tradition can be applied to many other levels of engagement with the public. For a coworker or family member who knows nothing about NA, our behavior in these forums may be the only example of NA they encounter. Our own personal activity on social networking sites, and especially our interactions with other members on these sites, can say a great deal about who we are as a fellowship. This service pamphlet is meant to be a resource to help members gain some clarity and make informed decisions that keep our guiding principles in mind when making use of social media and social networking sites.

"...at the level of press, radio, and films..."

One of the first questions to be asked with regard to social networking is whether this form of media falls under the scope of our Eleventh Tradition, which states: "Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films." It's worth pointing out that the Eleventh Tradition was written before the widespread use of television, and yet the language of the tradition is flexible enough to cover that new form of media. Similarly, it can be applied to other new types of media, such as social networking.

However, the internet in general and social networking sites in particular can be slightly more complicated in terms of our Eleventh Tradition. The level of accessibility of information on the internet can vary widely from completely open, publicly viewable websites to highly restricted, password-protected sites. In some cases, information posted online is just as accessible to the general public as, say, a television program or a local newspaper article, while in other cases sharing information is more like sending a letter to an exclusive group of friends or family members.

With that in mind, honoring the guidance offered by our Eleventh Tradition calls on each of us as individual members to be mindful of the public visibility of our online interactions. Some members are not very concerned about sharing personal information in a very open and accessible manner, but our Eleventh Tradition reminds us that when it comes to membership in NA, the credibility of our program of recovery can be greatly affected by the actions of individual NA members. The Eleventh Tradition

essay from *It Works: How and Why* cautions that "In the public eye—including press, radio, films, and all other media—we need always maintain personal anonymity."

If we are not careful about maintaining our personal anonymity, our activities and interactions on social networking sites can be a reflection on Narcotics Anonymous, affecting the way our fellowship is viewed both by potential members and by those who might refer addicts to NA. While some of us may have the perception that this type of anonymity is only important for celebrities or "high-profile" members, this is not the case. The Eleventh Tradition essay in *It Works: How and* Why reminds us: "wherever we go, we always represent NA to some degree. . . . we want that reflection to be a source of attraction rather than a source of embarrassment." By revealing our NA membership online, we can become accidental representatives of the fellowship and any of our individual behavior or opinions can be wrongly understood as reflective of NA as a whole.

"Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion," and another unintended consequence of our online activity is that addicts who have not yet found recovery may find NA unattractive if they think that joining NA could mean having NA information posted on their social networking profiles for friends and family to see. Similarly, our behavior on social networking sites could give professionals and others who might refer addicts to NA meetings the impression that NA does not take members' privacy or confidentiality seriously. In both cases, disregarding our Eleventh Tradition could result in a loss of credibility for NA, which could in turn unnecessarily hinder our ability to reach addicts seeking recovery.

Questions we can ask ourselves when interacting online include: "What is the level of my visibility in this medium? Am I in the public eye, or is this a private forum?" The answers to these questions can vary depending on a number of factors, including the type of site we are using and the privacy settings that may or may not be available on that particular site.

Privacy and Anonymity—Our Own and Others'

Many social networking sites offer various levels of privacy and security that can be adjusted to some degree by the user. NA members who use these types of sites to network with one another and/or with friends and family outside of NA may want to familiarize themselves with the available privacy settings on these sites. Some sites offer the ability to organize contacts into groups or categories, so that posts and other content shared on the site may be seen only by specified individuals. By adjusting privacy settings accordingly, members may be able to ensure that NA-related content such as pictures, events, and status updates are only visible to other NA members. In this way, it may be possible to interact with our NA friends separately from coworkers, family, or other people outside of NA.

While adjusting our own personal security settings may be a great start for protecting our own privacy and anonymity, we also need to be concerned with the ways that we interact with other members. It is important to be careful about the types of posts, comments, or pictures we put on other NA member's personal pages, because those members may not have the same privacy or security settings, or because they may have more non-member connections or share their information differently. Tagging a member

in a photo of an NA event, for example, could undermine that member's anonymity with family members or people from work or school because a notice of that tag may be distributed to that person's network, drawing people to the photo or album who otherwise may not have known about it. What's more, if the individual's privacy settings are such that information from their profile is publicly visible, posting a photograph from an NA event could effectively break their anonymity to the general public.

Regardless of our own privacy settings, being cautious about mentioning addiction and recovery in posts and comments on other members' pages can help to avoid the possibility of inadvertently breaking other members' anonymity. While we may be aware of the privacy settings of our close friends or those with whom we regularly interact on a site, when we don't know, it is safest to assume that photos and information posted on other members' profiles may very well be visible to the general public. Regardless of our personal feelings about whether family, friends, and coworkers are aware that we are NA members, our Eleventh Tradition reminds us that "we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, or film." Committees responsible for organizing NA events may consider adding a statement to be read at the event reminding members to be mindful of anonymity concerns as it relates to information and photos from the event.

Using Online Communication Tools for NA Services

Many NA service bodies around the world have found it helpful to begin utilizing various online resources to facilitate greater communication and collaboration among members. Very often these tools and resources can function as private invitation-only forums, allowing for fast and reliable internal communication streams between trusted servants and concerned members. When using any online tool for this type of communication, it is still very important to be cautious when establishing and configuring the services. Trusted servants responsible for finding and setting up these tools can take steps to make sure that communications, documents, and other information will only be visible or accessible to NA trusted servants and other members who have the appropriate permissions or passwords. If and when groups are created through a social networking interface, it is also important to ensure that the full names and photographs of members associated with the group are not visible to the general public. Being very cautious and deliberate in setting up these resources can go a long way in avoiding scenarios in which members' anonymity or other private service-related information is made public.

With regard to event invitations, there are some other thoughts to take into consideration. Social networking sites may appear to be a great option to spread the word among NA members about various events, but as with other uses of these sites, care should be taken when creating event pages and inviting members. In most cases, simply sending an invitation to members for an event created on the site may not pose a threat to that member's privacy or anonymity. Typically information about the event will only be displayed on their profile or their activity feed if they RSVP to the event, and members may even be able to adjust their sharing settings to not include these posts in their feed.

Still, not all members will be aware of these settings or how to adjust them, and so by being careful when creating an event, trusted servants may be able to reduce the chances that an individual

member's anonymity will be inadvertently broken to their non-NA friends, family, or co-workers. Not referring to NA in the name of the event is one step that can be taken. For example, creating an event called "Picnic in the Park" may be a better way to label an event on a social networking site than "NA Picnic in the Park." It can be helpful to explore other options on the site's event creation tools, which might allow for the event to be listed as private or invitation-only. The organizers may also be able to adjust privacy settings so that only those who RSVP to the event are able to see the list of others who have RSVPed or who have been invited.

NA Logos and Copyright Issues

Another concern that comes up from time to time with regard to social networking sites is the use of NA logos and copyrighted materials. The guidelines for using NA's trademarked logos and copyrighted material are set forth in the *Fellowship Intellectual Property Trust* (*FIPT*). That document and the bulletins that help explain it are available online at http://www.na.org/?ID=legal-bulletins-fipt. NA groups and registered NA service committees must follow certain rules when making use of NA's trademarked logos, and those rules can be found in *NA Intellectual Property Bulletin #1*, "Internal Use of NA's Intellectual Property." Individual members—and people outside of NA—are not permitted to use NA's trademarks, including NA logos and even the full name Narcotics Anonymous. (For example, it would not be appropriate for an individual member to create an online group named Narcotics Anonymous.) While the motivations for using the NA name or trademark are usually positive, unfortunately it can often end up reflecting poorly on NA when individuals create pages, groups, or profiles using NA logos or trademarks, including sites that reprint NA literature in a manner that is not consistent with the rules spelled out in the FIPT. Any questions about these issues can be directed to NA World Services.

Some Tips for Maintaining Privacy and Anonymity Online

Familiarize yourself with the security features of the social networking site you're using and set up your account in a way that respects the principle of anonymity. For example, if the site allows you to segment your friends into lists and to restrict the visibility of your posts by such lists, make use of that feature. Thus, if you had a work list, an NA list and a family list, you might restrict certain NA-related posts or photos to only your NA list.

Be thoughtful about the names of photo albums and event pages and try using more generic names for photo albums and captions, so that photos are not specifically identified as having been taken in an NA context. This is especially important if an album will be more widely visible. "Last weekend in Anytown," for example, might be a better reference than "Anytown Regional NA Convention." The same is true for event pages, to which members can RSVP electronically and may therefore be visible to nonmembers. Carefully selecting names, or using private events when possible, can help members to preserve their anonymity.

Be thoughtful about comments you make on an NA member's non-NA-related posts. Perhaps they structured a post to have no identifiable reference to NA and posted it widely to their friends, family, and co-workers. You should not then post an NA-related or addiction-related comment under that post.

Be mindful of what and who is in the background when you take photos. Is someone in the picture who has not given permission to be included in an online photo album? If you are posting this more broadly than to only NA members, are there NA logos or banners in the background that might identify the event as an NA setting?   If you are taking photos that you intend to post to a social networking site, ask anyone you photograph, "Do you mind if I post this on [name the site]?" Always respect the wishes of anyone who prefers not to be posted, regardless of whether you are confident that their anonymity would be protected by your other security practices.

In general, do not tag people in photos that may be seen as NA-related, especially when you are not the one who set up the security level of the photo album, and especially when you are not certain about the person's own anonymity concerns regarding social media. It is safest to let people tag themselves.

Some people restrict their friend list to only NA members, and use the social networking site strictly as a way of networking and communicating within NA. Assuming your privacy settings do not allow your photos to be reposted by others, then the anonymity issues are significantly reduced provided you protect others' anonymity in your online interactions. In this way, we can strive to honor the guidance offered by our Eleventh Tradition, which reminds us that "The credibility of NA's message can be greatly affected by NA's messengers. In the public eye—including press, radio, films, and all other media—we need always maintain personal anonymity." (Eleventh Tradition, *It Works: How and Why*)

Conclusion

The widespread use of social networking and social media by our fellowship indicate that these forums are resources that can serve to facilitate greater communication and interactions among NA members. The ability to network with other recovering addicts and share in mutual support of one another's recovery offers many members a way to enhance their relationship with the NA Fellowship. With NA's public image and the anonymity and privacy of our members at stake, it is crucial that we take great care in how we utilize these resources. We hope this resource can be helpful for that purpose.