

Excerpt from

OA Handbook for Members, Groups and Service Bodies: Recovery Opportunities

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The Twelve Traditions Are Our Guide

OA has no firm rules or regulations and no central authority. Instead, OA groups are guided by the Twelve Traditions listed on the inside back cover of this pamphlet. These Traditions embody spiritual principles that ensure the survival of OA, just as the Twelve Steps are based on spiritual principles that promote individual recovery.

In OA, the essential group work is done by volunteers. Members do their OA jobs in the way they think best within the spirit of the Traditions. We keep things as simple and uncomplicated as we can. As OA grows, we try to find ways of doing whatever has to be done without getting too organized.

Rarely does an OA group use written bylaws, although they are considered essential at the intergroup, region and world service level. Often the more written rules and laws a group passes, the more problems it creates. Group autonomy (Tradition Four) does allow for a wide variety of OA meeting formats and practices.

Few differences, criticisms and problems will arise if well-informed members are willing to participate in decisions for the group. Our Traditions are adapted from Alcoholics Anonymous, and group members become well-informed by reading the Twelve Traditions and studying The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous and the explanatory text published in the pamphlet *The Twelve Traditions of OA* and in AA's books.

Recovery from compulsive overeating isn't a gift that can be clutched selfishly for oneself. Sharing what we have found with others is essential to our own continued abstinence, day by day, year by year. Being willing to give helps us keep what we have received.

How Do New Groups Get Started?

Practically every OA group started when some hardworking members scheduled and announced a new meeting, often in somebody's home, and did the chores necessary to keep it going. As a group grows, it is helpful to move on to a meeting place other than a home.

This may sometimes involve breaking off from an older, larger group or filling some special needs at a certain place and time for a particular kind of sharing of experience, strength and hope.

Our own interests and those of other compulsive overeaters who haven't yet come to OA are best served if we do not let physical comfort, personality factors or other elements keep us from starting new groups when the time is right for such action.

Carrying the OA message to other overeaters who need and want help is the chief way we maintain our own abstinence. The more healthy groups there are to carry the message, the better we can help ourselves and others.

Reluctance to start a new group where it may prove helpful could deny the opportunity of a new life to a compulsive overeater who has lost hope.

Groups have flourished even when ideal meeting quarters were not available. If the group provides needed service for compulsive overeaters, uses the suggestions in our Traditions and has abstaining members, it attracts and receives the support it needs to grow and prosper.

How will you know if there is a need for a group? Ask yourself if there are compulsive overeaters in your area who need OA but who don't know help is available. Millions of people have never heard of OA, and many others misunderstand it. This includes many suffering compulsive overeaters and the professionals who work with them.

In each city, certain people seem to be more familiar with obesity problems than others. They know of individuals who need help and can perhaps point out some who are ready for it. These people are often OA's natural allies and are generally very helpful in getting a new OA group going. They include members of the clergy, doctors, teachers, hospital workers, employers, social workers, psychological counselors and staffs of crisis hotlines and information centers.

It is usually helpful to talk to some of these people to explain what OA is and especially what it is not, and to tell them why you want to start a group. Giving them OA literature and a copy of *Lifeline* or a subscription sometimes works wonders.

When you start a new group, make it a priority to inform neighboring OA groups, your intergroup, region and local OA office, if any, and the World Service Office. Much support and assistance can come from these sources.

Getting Started in a Small Community

Problems for those of you who are starting an OA group in a small town can be overcome if you are willing to make yourselves known to the community as OA members. As a new member wrote in a letter to WSO, "How can we keep our anonymity when our problem is so obvious?" In a small community, many people will already be aware of your problem and will probably be delighted to know of the possibility of recovery.

Letting key members of the community—such as doctors, teachers, clergy, lawyers, employers and counselors—know of the availability of OA and our willingness to help any compulsive overeater who is willing to accept help will aid you in getting started.

A single member in a state with no OA groups took the following steps, and now dozens of groups flourish in that region:

- (1) Order a Group Starter Kit from WSO.
- (2) Obtain a meeting place, and set a day and time for the meeting.
- (3) Run a small ad in the newspaper with the meeting time and place. Some newspapers provide free announcements for non-profit charitable organizations, or the cost may be reimbursed from the Seventh Tradition collection after the group is functioning.
- (4) Contact the local radio station for a spot announcement; see the *Public Information Manual* for suggestions.
- (5) Register your group information with WSO (this can be done on OA's Web site at www.oa.org). It is vital that your meeting and contact information be kept current with the WSO so that those who call or check the Web site for meetings in their areas receive accurate information.

To continue to attract new members you might: list Overeaters Anonymous in the phone book; put notices about OA in church bulletins and OA "attraction cards" on community bulletin boards (to order, see catalog and order form); and arrange to have some information or a story about OA placed in the local paper. To help you, WSO has prepared a *Public Information Manual*, which is available at a nominal charge.

It is particularly helpful to talk to the local newspaper editor and to the management of local radio and television stations to establish from the beginning the importance of the OA principle of public anonymity, thus helping to avoid embarrassing anonymity breaks later. (See *The Twelve Traditions of OA*, Tradition Eleven.)

Usually a group in a small town has only a few members. What often happens is that the OA members come to a group meeting once a week and share their past experiences with compulsive overeating. Overfamiliarity with these stories can take the life out of the group, so here are some ideas to help individualize a meeting:

- (a) Schedule two meetings a week: one Step study and one participation.
- (b) If the distance is not too great, plan exchange meetings with groups in nearby towns.

- (c) Invite a trustee or delegate from your region to speak at a meeting occasionally so the group may be informed of its part in the overall service structure.
- (d) If your group is too isolated to allow for visiting groups and speakers, try for a meeting or two devoted to listening to good recorded talks. (For information on how to obtain OA convention recordings, contact the WSO or check the World Service Events page on OA's Web site.)
- (e) Devote some meetings to study of OA books, pamphlets and *Lifeline* magazine, as well as Alcoholics Anonymous (the Big Book) and other AA literature. Ask different members of the group to rotate leadership for the evening.
- (f) Contact your local AA office and ask for speakers on the Twelve-Step program or visit open AA meetings as a non-participant for better understanding of the Twelve Steps of recovery and compulsive behavior.
- (g) As soon as a group is well established, plan an open meeting for the community and invite civic leaders (such as the mayor), as well as doctors, nurses, teachers, members of the clergy, health and social workers to attend. One or two OA members may then talk about the OA program and its availability locally and worldwide.
- (h) Ask a well-established OA group to "adopt" your group, exchanging recorded meetings and corresponding with your members.
- (i) Keep a supply of all available OA pamphlets and OA and AA books, and see that members avail themselves of the opportunity to subscribe to *Lifeline*.

Once a group has started, it is essential to provide continuity for the meeting time and to see to it that at least one person is at the meeting place every week on the day and time designated, even if it takes a long time for another compulsive overeater to show up. Enthusiasm and happiness about our own progress in OA can do a lot to make the group succeed and be understood and accepted in the community. We need to share with them what we are trying to do. Let's ask for their help and send out some OA love to the community; our love will return to us.

How to Keep Them Coming Back

Newcomers are more likely to return if someone in the group gives them personal attention and encouragement. Here are some ways to do this:

- (a) Appoint a recovering member as newcomer chairperson at each meeting. This person is responsible for taking the names of the newcomers and calling

them sometime during the next week to let them know they are not alone and asking if they have any questions.

- (b) If it is common in your area for members to go out for coffee after meetings, encourage the newcomers to join you.
- (c) Offer transportation help, if needed.
- (d) Be ready to befriend other OA members, even if they don't ask you to be their sponsor. You will still have the opportunity to share your program.
- (e) Help newcomers get involved as soon as possible. Let them know they can help.
- (f) If people ask you to sponsor them, remember that this may be the first attempt they have made to establish contact with someone in the program. If you are truly too busy, take the time to introduce these new members to other qualified sponsors. If a newcomer does not follow through, don't take it personally.

Be realistic about the times you want the person to call. If you are never home at night, don't tell someone, "Oh, you can call me anytime." If the person calling you stops calling, find out why. Don't ever give the impression, "You blew it." It's much better to focus on the positive: "Okay, let's go forward, one day at a time."

How Do You Become a Group Member?

You are a member of OA if you say so. Tradition Three says, "The only requirement for OA membership is a desire to stop eating compulsively," and none of us can judge the desire in another's heart.

To join a group one simply attends its meetings. Most groups do not have a formal procedure for "joining." Group officers have an obligation to keep confidential the lists of names of members who wish to be notified of steering committee meetings or other OA events and who are available for Twelfth-Step work.

Most members have a special feeling for one particular group, and consider it their home group where they accept responsibilities and try to sustain friendships. They do not meddle in the business or policy of groups which they visit only occasionally and in which they would accept no service assignments.

OA is not intended to promote individual or group competition to see which group is biggest, or who keeps abstinence the longest, or which group contributes the most service, or who is the most popular speaker. Therefore, all OA members are welcome at all OA meetings and will feel as much a part of the Fellowship in another group as in their own.

Topics Covered in the *OA Handbook*

The Twelve Traditions Are Our Guide

How Do New Groups Get Started?

Getting Started in a Small Community

How to Keep Them Coming Back

How Do You Become a Group Member?

Getting Things Done in Your OA Group

1. Do Groups Have "Officers"?
2. What about Insurance Requirements for a Group?
3. What Service Positions Do We Need?
4. What Is a Steering Committee?
5. What Does the Secretary Do?
6. What Does the Treasurer Do?
7. What Does the Program Chairperson Do?
8. What Does the Literature Chairperson Do?
9. What Does the Intergroup Representative Do?
10. What Is a Greeter or Welcoming Committee?
11. What Does a *Lifeline* Representative Do?
12. What Does a Designated Downloader Do?
13. How Are Service Volunteers Elected?
14. What Are Some Good Qualifications for Service Volunteers?
15. Why Are Some OA Jobs More Popular than Others?
16. Is Rotation Important?
17. What Kinds of Meetings Can an OA Group Have?
18. What Is the Usual Meeting Procedure?
19. What about "Coffee Therapy"?
20. How Do Group Problems Get Solved?
21. How Do We Apply the Twelve Traditions Through the Group Conscience?
22. How Do Good Groups Get Better?
23. Can We Get Help from Other Groups?

How Things Get Done in Your Intergroup or Service Board

1. How Do Intergroups Start?
2. What Functions Do Intergroups Have?
3. What are Service Boards?
4. How Do Intergroups Work?
5. What Can We Do for the Intergroup?
6. What Is Public Information For?
7. How Do Newcomers Get Help?

Things To Know about Public Information

1. When Is "Breaking My Anonymity" Not an Anonymity Break?

How About OA in Institutions?

How Conference Delegates and Region Representatives Serve

1. What Does the World Service Conference Delegate Do?
2. What Is a Region?
3. How Important Is the Region?

4. What Is the Makeup of the Regional Assembly?
5. What Are the Requirements for a Region Representative?

How Things Get Done in Your World Service Office (WSO)

1. How Did WSO Start?
2. How Does WSO Work?
3. What Does WSO Do for You?
4. How Is the World Service Office Supported?
5. How Can You Help WSO?
6. What Is *Lifeline*, and How Can You Help?
7. How Can You Benefit from Service to Your Group, Intergroup, Region and WSO?

Questions and Answers About OA

1. How Did OA Start and When?
2. Is OA a Religious Organization?
3. Why Do I Need the Twelve Steps? I Only Want to Lose Weight.
4. Who Runs OA Clubhouses?
5. What Is an OA Service Center?
6. Should Get-togethers of OA Members Outside of Group Meetings Be Called OA Events?
7. What Is IDEA Day? Unity Day?
8. What is the difference between an OA "Conference" and "Convention"?
9. Is OA Affiliated with AA or Any Other Anonymous Fellowship or Medical Group Interested in Obesity?

Pathways of Service: Roads to Recovery (The Overeaters Anonymous Service Structure)