

## **TRADITION FOUR**

**Each group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting other groups or Nicotine Anonymous as a whole.**

According to the history of our fellowship, Nicotine Anonymous groups (once known as Smokers Anonymous) existed autonomously without even knowing of each other's existence. They each were able to help addicts achieve freedom from nicotine. They practiced the Twelve Steps and/or provided each other with fellowship.

In essence, a group is any two or more nicotine addicts gathered together to achieve abstinence and the group claims no other official association. While our intergroups and World Services office perform valuable functions, they only exist to support the groups and their members. The groups are the heart of Nicotine Anonymous. It is here that recovery and abstinence are attained, sponsors and sponsees are united, and miracles occur. These groups can and have conducted their own matters since before our fellowship officially came into existence.

This is why we can confidently allow our groups today to continue to make all their own decisions without interfering in their affairs. Each group is free to do such things as arrange their own meeting format, select topics of discussion and speakers, provide anniversary tokens to recognize abstinence, and determine whether and when to donate group funds to an intergroup or World Services. As between individual members, the relationship between groups and World Services is strengthened by trust, both given and honored.

We do encourage all groups to confer with other groups, their intergroup, and World Services whenever they embark on something which may affect other groups or the fellowship. Seeking guidance to gauge an impulse or idea is one of the principles that support our recovery process. A case occurred many years ago when the chairman of an intergroup was contacted by the maker of a new alternative nicotine product. The company offered to finance and staff a toll-free number for them, if they would provide support for their customers and include their pamphlets on the groups' literature tables. After conferring with members of other groups, the offer was wisely

declined. Besides damaging the reputation of any groups involved, such an endeavor would surely harm the entire fellowship.

Even with so many temptations to go astray, we still understand that groups need to make their own decisions and their own mistakes. We have the right to learn from our mistakes. As we see later in Tradition Nine, the fellowship has little but advisory authority over the groups in most matters. We can only pass on the experience of other groups in similar situations. Ultimately, we need to have faith in our Higher Power who has guided our groups through many tough choices such as the following:

Many of the New York City area groups evolved from old "A.A. for Non-Smokers" meetings. These were A.A. members who came together to address their addiction to nicotine. Some of these groups changed their name to Nicotine Anonymous, while others kept their old "A.A. for Non-Smokers" name. The New York Metropolitan Area Intergroup had a very brief meeting list and many were eager to list as many meetings as possible. It was voted that these groups could not be listed because of their outside affiliation. Since then, many of these have decided by group conscience to become Nicotine Anonymous meetings. This decision had to be made by the individual groups themselves.

Perhaps the freedom that we offer our groups is part of the attraction of our fellowship. It allows each group to create meetings that best serve its membership. While it is comforting to go to meetings around the world and see the same Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, the varied formats, readings, stories and customs make for a wonderful variety. This serves to keep things interesting and to help us learn to approach our recovery with an open mind.

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