

A Sample Radio Interview

By Erik R, 7/5/00

The following is a sample interview that has been put together to help show how to provide a positive approach to answering questions about Narcotics Anonymous. Remember that this is only a sample. Please do not use it as an exact gauge of what an interview will be like.

INTERVIEWER

Today we have with us two members of Narcotics Anonymous, a worldwide Fellowship of men and women for who drugs have become a major problem.

Narcotics Anonymous costs the addict nothing and it costs you nothing because it charges no dues or fees. NA is a non-profit Fellowship that is entirely self-supporting and declines any outside contributions.

It is a program of complete abstinence from all mind or mood altering substances. We are a Fellowship composed of men and women from all walks of life. They hold regularly scheduled meetings to help each other live drug free lives.

We have with us, Dick and Jane, recovering addicts themselves. They're here to talk with us about Narcotics Anonymous.

INTERVIEWER

Is there more to it than that?

DICK

Yes. There are no strings attached to NA. We are not affiliated with any other organizations. We have no leaders, no initiation fees or dues. There are no pledges to sign, no promises made to anyone. We are not connected with any political, religious or law enforcement groups, and we are under no surveillance at any time.

Our program is based on twenty-four principles, the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions. The Twelve Steps are the tools that each member uses for personal growth and recovery. The Twelve Traditions are the guidelines that unify us as a Fellowship and assure that an atmosphere of recovery is available to every addict.

Narcotics Anonymous has only one requirement of the individual for membership, the desire to stop using.

INTERVIEWER

If your only requirement for membership is the desire to stop using, does that mean anyone can join? Can anyone go to meetings whether they are addicts or not?

JANE

Well yes and no. Narcotics Anonymous has many years of first hand experience with literally hundreds of thousands of addicts. Our experience has shown that the therapeutic value of one addict helping another is without parallel. We are here to share freely with any addict that wants recovery from active addiction.

Non-addicts are very important to NA but not as members. Many professionals who work with addicts attend our open meetings to find out for themselves how it works. Family and friends of addicts often attend our social functions and open meetings.

Membership, however, is restricted to addicts. We need this to preserve the atmosphere of trust and identification necessary to our recovery.

The highest priority at our meetings is the maintenance of an atmosphere where a suffering addict may find hope and recovery. We've learned from our own experience that those addicts who go to meetings regularly stay clean.

So, while anyone is welcome at open meetings, closed meetings are for addicts only. We usually ask that the sharing at our meetings be confined to addicts or those that think they might be addicts.

INTERVIEWER

You said addicts, or those who think they might be addicts. How would a person know if they were an addict?

DICK

Our literature states that "an addict is a man or woman whose life is controlled by drugs, the getting and using and finding ways and means to get more." Common to all addicts is the obsessive thoughts of using drugs and their compulsive use of drugs.

We believe that addiction is a disease that can happen to anyone, but each individual must make the decision as to whether or not they are an addict.

INTERVIEWER

What about someone who doesn't use drugs every day? Do addicts use drugs every day?

DICK

The frequency of use varies from one addict to another. In NA, we find that it is not what or how much you use that indicates whether you are an addict or not. What does matter is that the addict recognizes there is a problem and realizing that NA can help them find a way to live without using drugs.

INTERVIEWER

You're both addicts. What is it that made you decide you had had enough? Could you tell us a little of your story?

NOTE: We are not prohibited in relating our personal stories of addiction when doing an interview. However, our experiences has shown that using personal stories without regard to content can be harmful to the individuals involved or reflect unfavorably on the Fellowship. This is where we have the most problems or difficulties in interviews. It is suggested to minimize the personalization of the interview and focus on the program of NA. See the answer that Jane gives to this question.

JANE

Our personal stories are not that important to what Narcotics Anonymous is. Everybody's story will be a different. While our stories our different, we have much in common when we look at why we are in Narcotics Anonymous.

What makes our addiction common is the physical, mental and spiritual aspects of this disease. The physical aspect of our disease is the compulsive use of drugs. The mental aspect is the obsession or overpowering desire. The spiritual part is our total self-centeredness.

What is important is that Narcotics Anonymous is a "we" program of one addict helping another. People that are not interested in what or how much you used. People interested only in what you want to do about your problem and hoe they can help.

NOTE: If some personal disclosure is made, remember to speak more about your feelings and how your life has changed. Avoid speaking to what it was like to use and the harm done to others. Use terms that are generic rather than specific; use words such as "hospital" or "workplace" instead of using a proper name. Be sure not to disclose enough information so that your personal identity is revealed or implied.

INTERVIEWER

As the name implies, this is an anonymous program. Dick and Jane are not your real names. They are names that we are using to protect your identities. Why all the mystery? What is it that you have to hide? Are you some kind of secret society?

JANE

We remain an anonymous Fellowship so that the addicts who seek recovery here may be confident that their anonymity will be protected. Many of us eventually come to have nothing to fear from society if it becomes known that we are recovering addicts. We maintain anonymity as a reminder that it our personal identity is not important in NA.

It's the spiritual principle of anonymity that makes us all equal members. What is important is that we are all addicts who have learned to live without drug free.

Personal anonymity at the public level is another important spiritual principle that reinforces the humility necessary for ongoing recovery. Therefore, we maintain it at the level of press, radio, films and video. We thank you for respecting that today.

INTERVIEWER

Several times, you have both mentioned spiritual principles. Are you born-again Christians? Is NA a religion?

DICK

Narcotics Anonymous is a spiritual, not religious program. While we do refer to a Higher Power and God, the fact that this is a spiritual, and not religious program, gives us the right to a God of our own understanding that is total and without any catches. Our concept of God comes from what we believe ourselves as individuals, what works best for us.

As we said earlier, we are not connected with any political, religious or law enforcement groups of any kind. Anyone may join us regardless of age, race, sexual identity, creed, religion or lack of religion. This keeps us focused on only one thing, recovery from the disease of addiction.

What I personally believe is only important to my recovery and me. Religious beliefs are up to each individual. So, I'm not interested in debating or offending anyone whose beliefs differ from mine.

INTERVIEWER

You talked about law enforcement groups and you said that you were under no surveillance at any time. How do you know you are not under surveillance?

JANE

Our program is one of complete abstinence from all drugs. We ask that no drugs or drug paraphernalia of any kind be brought to our meetings for the protection of the facility where we meet and ourselves. Because of this, no one would have a need to keep us under surveillance.

INTERVIEWER

True enough! You say complete abstinence. Does that mean you don't take drugs at all? What about using alcohol?

DICK

We seem to forget that alcohol is one of the oldest known drugs. Our experience has shown that when we use drugs in any form or substitute one for another, we release our addiction all over again or create a new one.

We have a saying in NA that for an addict using drugs that "one is too many and a thousand never enough". The only way to keep from returning to active addiction is not to take that first drug.

INTERVIEWER

What about using caffeine and nicotine? Are you abstinent from those as well?

JANE

Our Fellowship has decided that it is up to the individual member on how he or she wants to deal with these substances. Our experience has shown that we can still be in recovery from active drug addiction and have a recovery program whether we drink coffee or smoke tobacco. Again, it's up to the individual members to answer this question for themselves.

INTERVIEWER

And what about drugs prescribed by a doctor?

DICK

Members who have had to use medication while in recovery find this a very difficult personal issue. We suggest to our members that since our bodies don't know the difference between a prescribed drug, or a drug taken for its mood or mind altering effects, that any prescription be handled very carefully. We strongly suggest that the member work closely their doctor and sponsor if medication should be necessary due to an existing physical condition.

INTERVIEWER

Let's say that a person recognizes that they have a problem and wants help. What would you tell them to do?

JANE

First, they should try to stop using. For a day or even just for a few hours at a time. Then they should attend a NA meeting as soon as possible. We suggest that they try to come to their first meeting not under the influence of drugs so that they can have a better opportunity to hear our message. Even if they are under the influence, they can still come to our meetings to listen and pick up some of our literature.

INTERVIEWER

People are familiar with Alcoholics Anonymous. They have been around for a while. Is this the same thing we're talking about? Is Narcotics Anonymous set up like its namesake Alcoholics Anonymous? Do you have alcoholics at your meetings?

JANE

The basis of our program is the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous as adapted from Alcoholics Anonymous. On the surface, they are very similar. However, Narcotics Anonymous broadened their perspective by referring to the disease of addiction rather than to a specific drug in Step One. In our meetings, we identify ourselves as addicts only and this term is all-inclusive with respect to any mind altering or mood changing substance. So, terms like "alcoholism and alcoholic" are too limited for us. Anyone is welcome, regardless of the degree or variety of their addiction.

INTERVIEWER

So, you don't have to use certain drugs to go to NA meetings?

DICK

Yes. It is not what a person uses, but what they want to do about their problem and how we can help. Again, addiction is a disease that can happen to anyone. The only requirement for membership is the desire to stay clean.

INTERVIEWER

Alcoholics Anonymous goes on the premise that alcoholism is a disease. You say the same thing about drug addiction. But I never thought of a disease as something that you bring on yourself. How do you get away with calling it a disease?

JANE

The Narcotics Anonymous program uses a very simple, experience-oriented disease concept of addiction. We don't qualify the use of the term "disease" in any medical or specialized therapeutic sense. We find that acceptance of addiction as a disease to be effective in helping us come to terms with our condition.

DICK

Our experience shows that addiction is a chronic, progressive and ultimately fatal disease if left untreated. Addiction has been found to have the same basic symptoms, same progression and same or similar results in all of our lives.

JANE

I would like to add that it really doesn't matter how we got here or why we have this problem of addiction. Narcotics Anonymous is more concerned with recovery from active drug addiction.

INTERVIEWER

What is a meeting like?

DICK

A Narcotics Anonymous meeting is any group of addicts that meets regularly, at a specified time and place, providing that it follows the Twelve Steps and Traditions.

Some of these meetings are topic discussions, some are speaker meetings, some are literature discussion meetings and some are a part or a combination of these. Whatever format they follow, they usually last an hour and there is one every night.

Regardless of the format, NA meetings usually start with readings from our literature then start into the meeting format. There is a time for announcements and perhaps more reading at the end. We usually close the meeting with a non-denominational prayer.

The primary purpose of the group is always the same, to carry the message of recovery to the still suffering addict and to offer a reliable and safe environment to promote recovery.

What you will find in our meetings is one addict helping another. We identify not at the level of apparent symptoms but at a deeper level of emotions and feelings. This empathy becomes a healing process for all addicts.

INTERVIEWER

How many people attend these meetings?

JANE

Like the format, the size of the meetings varies. On any given night, you will find anywhere from two to two hundred people at a meeting.

INTERVIEWER

Two hundred people at a meeting! How large an organization is Narcotics Anonymous?

JANE

We are a worldwide Fellowship, however we really don't know exactly how large we are. We don't keep any registration records on our members. However, we do have a registry of meetings for the purpose of communications. Currently we have over 20,000 meetings in 60 countries registered with our World Service Office.

NA locally has (*give local NA meeting information here*).

INTERVIEWER

You said your Fellowship is growing. Why has NA grown so much lately?

DICK

Recovering addicts living drug free lives sends a strong message to our neighbors and friends that the NA program works. They see our profound changes in living and in turn recommend our program to those who have a drug problem. So, with more NA members living productive lives within society, it translates to more lives being exposed to our way of life.

JANE

In the early 1980's, we experienced our greatest growth when we published our Basic Text. This book is the collective experience of our Fellowship concerning our program. Today, with the translation of this book and additional literature into languages other than English, we are exposing more and more addicts to our message of recovery worldwide. The growth has been phenomenal where our message is translated into the addict's own language.

INTERVIEWER

Is NA affiliated with any rehabilitation centers? What professionals are involved in NA?

JANE

Those are good questions, but the answer is the same for both of them. NA is not a professional organization, and we are not affiliated with any professional agencies or facilities. We employ no counselors or treatment staff. Our program works by one addict helping another.

DICK

Sometimes members of the public become confused about this point because there are aware of NA meetings within institutions that deal with recovery from drug addiction. They see us as being a part of that facility or program. We practice a tradition of non-endorsement or affiliation with these institutions as best we can. We do provide speakers or have panels conduct meetings at these institutions. We don't accept compensation or accept donations for these actions. Our purpose in these situations is to make sure that our message reaches these persons who may not have access to NA as do others do.

INTERVIEWER

So, who really runs NA? Is there one person that keeps it all going?

DICK

Our Second Tradition states, "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."

Our governing body is spiritual principles and not just one person, but a collection of trusted servants that volunteer their time to help carry the message.

These trusted servants serve on a rotating basis and perform such duties as getting meeting schedules printed, our phonenumber staffed, coordinate volunteers to lead meetings in the local prison, or public information activities such as this interview.

INTERVIEWER

Does Narcotics Anonymous do a lot of advertising?

JANE

Not as much as we would like to! Being self-supporting through our own voluntary contributions, our resources are limited. Our philosophy places emphasis on using attraction rather than promotion in carrying our message in view of the public. Our attraction is the fact that we are successes in our own right. We have found that the success of the program speaks for itself.

Of course, if an addict or those that work with addicts have never heard of NA, they cannot seek us out. So, the public information committee exists to help further our primary purpose by letting people know who, what and where our meetings can be found.

So, while our Fellowship does feel a need to reach as many addicts as possible, the word advertising really doesn't have any practical application for us. We try to do a lot of attracting!

INTERVIEWER

Does it work? It seems obvious that NA has worked for the two of you. Does the NA program work for everybody?

DICK

Remember that the only requirement for membership is the desire to stop using. Unfortunately, not everybody that finds his or her way to Narcotics Anonymous has that desire. But for those that do, IT WORKS!

JANE

We believe that an addict, any addict, can stop using, lose the desire to lose and find a meaningful way of life without the use of drugs. The key to all of this is the desire to stop using. Without that, it doubtful that any addict could remain abstinent and find a better way of life while still having the desire to use.

The truth is that it's not easy to stop using. Some members take many years to become drug free. Our program is simple, but not easy. When a member fails to stay drug free, we don't see it as a complete failure of the program or the individual. It something we have come to accept and offer ourselves to help

DICK

Many of us come to NA without hope, feeling that our only choices left in life were jails, institutions or death. It very difficult to overcome the problems we face when we are at the end of our rope.

In NA, we see for the first time that there is hope, that we don't have to die an addict's death. We've seen many addicts become responsible productive members of society who have applied themselves to this program.

JANE

It must be said that not everyone who uses drugs is a drug addict. We don't diagnose anyone as being an addict, we let those who come to us to listen, read our literature and decide for themselves if they are addicts. Drug abuse is a symptom of a problem and sometimes that problem is not addiction, as we in NA understand it for ourselves.

INTERVIEWER

We're out of time but before we close, tell us how to get in touch with Narcotics Anonymous....