

Tom's Perspective on What is Wrong with NA

Hi everyone, I know many of you have seen this on my Facebook page so I am sorry for the redundancy, but I have been asked by several friends if I could post this on an email as well. It seems to have hit a nerve for many of us and got us all thinking things we have been feeling for quite sometime. Feel free to pass it on and who knows it might make more of us aware of what we can be. Love tom

I just had the privilege of speaking at the Northern California convention. I said a lot in a sort period of time, I was a bit freaked out but excited over the chance to share what I have found here. I made a statement that I needed to say, and maybe some other member might agree with it. One of my close friends in recovery who passed away this year used to say "Sometimes someone has to say something to somebody about something". So I said something.

I started off by using an analogy I have used before about my disease. Finding myself on a train and realizing the train was out of control and at some point it was going to crash and there was nothing I could do to stop it. Then the train would stop, it would be at the jail station, I would do some time and then get out, having no idea what to do with my self I would see the train sitting there waiting for me, I would get back on and head back down the tracks, I'd get off at other stations, more jail stations, mental institution, DRT or treatment program stations even the falling in love stations but always the train was waiting for me and I would get back on, each time the train would be going faster. One day it stopped at the NA station and I got off, this was different, there people just like me there, they were having meetings and talking about hope and freedom and having a lot of fun, they were wearing cool t-shirts and key tags. They were having conventions and camp outs and dances. I felt safe and I thought as long as I hung out here I would be ok.

One day some wise older recovered members came up to me and said Tom, we want you see something? Look back at the train, people are getting back on, notice everyone who has gotten off the train has brought all their baggage with them, notice there is personal baggage every where and people are tripping over them. They said come with us brings your bags with you we are going to take you to the road of recovery where you

can get rid of that baggage you are carrying around and we are going to show you how you can be free for the rest of your life. We are going to show what Narcotics Anonymous is really all about.

So this is how I began to talk about something that I have been thinking about for years.

A couple of years ago I watched a TV series called Newsroom, the first episode showed a panel of News Anchors who were being asked questions at an university, one of the questions was "why is America great?" each anchor expressed their views except for one anchor, he tried to avoid the question. But when pressed he said "what's great about America?" He said America is not great. Of course this shocked the audience and then he went on to explain why America is not great listing statistics of how America ranks in education, infant mortality, incarceration etc. It was a devastating reality check but then he went on to say "no America is not great, but it could be" he then listed all the qualities that America has beginning with its constitution and its bill of rights, then he gave a brief history of when America was great.

This got me thinking about NA, What if the question was posed to me? What is great about NA?

I guess I would say it a little different, I would say NA has the potential to be great but right now there are many things about NA that makes it not so great. So I am going to express some of my opinions based on my perceptions over the past 45 years. Some members might not like what I have to say so I will qualify with something we like to say. " I am not judging I am just saying".

There is an un-scientific study that estimates that less then 6% of the addicts who come to NA will be around in five years.

Based on group registrations and literature sales there is an indication that the growth of NA in the USA has gone flat or might even be declining,

We know we have serious issues with members not being willing to step up to be of service, and when they do get into service we fight and scare away newer people. We know that many frontline professionals who are charged with the responsibility of directing treatment to addicts are reluctant to send young men and woman to NA because of a reputation we have with sexual predators. We know we have basically turned over the "12 step call to

treatment programs" to the point where most members today do not even know what a 12 step call is? We are terrible at communications; we don't trust our trusted servants as soon as we elect them, we use them as scapegoats or punching bags for our own inadequacies. We have tremendous internal strife going within the fellowship and more and more our membership around the world is feeling it and becoming disenchanted with NA. Where we once were so excited about our fellowships growth we have become apathetic about the future or just don't want to change anything. We don't financially support our fellowship beyond our meetings. We will put out money for t-shirts, dances and conventions and tall cups of iced mocha Carmel frappe lattés but when we pass around the basket we find it painful to give. We never ask our self's how much value we place on our recovery. Many I mean many of our old timers have quit giving back they got theirs and have no desire to help the newer members find what they found. We in some ways foster an atmosphere of spiritual selfishness, We are called a twelve step fellowship and yet we soft pedal the twelve steps as if they are optional. We don't really tell the truth, we pretend we are allowing people to recover at their own pace when actually we are killing them.

Remember that less than 6% are still around after fives years. Have we ever asked our selves why?

So in these regards no NA is not great,

But it could be.

Here is why it could be. We know we have been given a gift when were freed from our addiction. That in its self should keep us fired up for the rest of our lives. We were given a set of spiritual, ethical or moral principles that when applied could also free us in many other areas of our lives. We knew from the beginning we could not do this alone that we need one another, we adapted the 12 traditions as part of our way of life to safe guard us and protect us from ourselves. We have one single primary purpose and we can not keep what we have unless we give it away. We are close to a million members worldwide. Attend any convention and you feel the joy the gratitude and the promise. You see and feel the unity, its power.

Our vision means aside from my personal recovery I am part of a global effort or mission to help to carry the message to every addict in the world. A vision Jimmy K had. And so far we have reached out to our brother and

sister addicts in every continent. But we still have a long way to go. We have a degree of universal respect in the public's eye, though that could be much more. With these attributes NA is great

I would of thought that the dysfunction we have has to do with our nature, we are sick people in the process of trying to get better, but I have sense revised that perception. I don't think we are so sick, I think what happens once we move out of that state of desperation is we can become apathetic, we are no longer motivated to save our own asses because it appears to have been saved. Its one of the reasons the "the living clean" book was written it was n some ways an attempt at helping us realize this, to move us beyond the state of desperation and motivate us with a pure passion for life and our recovery.

Sometimes while sitting at a meeting and looking around, not seeing anyone who was there 5 ,10 15, 20 or 30 years ago I wonder what would NA look like today if they were all still involved and were attending meetings regularly? What would the atmosphere of hope be like for the new comers, I don't think the fellowship in the USA would be declining, I think it would be still be exploding in growth.

Take NA in Iran, a fellowship that is less than 18 year old and is growing at such a pace that is mind-boggling, last estimate I heard there was over 500,000 addicts in recovery, they are now reaching out to Afghanistan where it too is beginning to grow. In Iran everyone is working the 12 steps with a sponsor, they have 12 step celebrations where instead of celebrating a milestone of clean time the will have a celebration party of someone completing the 12 steps for the first time. In turn they are sponsoring someone and everyone gets into service. This is way beyond quantity this is quality. I think maybe one of the reasons they have been so successful is because they were handed the whole NA package, all our literature was their for them to translate, our service structure was handed over to them although ironically they tweaked much of it to suit their needs and it resembles some of the ideas that are being proposed in the service system project. But what is most significant is they did not have to fight over every idea or change that was introduced to them, they are not burdened with the history or stuck in resentment. They are doing what we should be doing; carrying the message with all the humble gratitude and passion they can muster.

There are other countries that are growing in quality as well. Nepal does the sweetest thing when they pass around the 7th tradition. They reach in their pockets and take out a coin and place it on their foreheads and then to their lips and then to their hearts before putting it into the basket as an offering to the addict who is still suffering.

The members in western Russia (Siberia) where they travel for 6 days by train to attend an ASC meeting and support groups out on the tundra with out complaint.

And now in East Africa where they have hosted the first meeting of zonal forum called AFRI-CAN, 12 African nations attended and joined together to support one another.

In Thailand where a few years ago the government was rounding up addicts and shooting them in the streets to now having all our NA literature translated in their language and they can recover in their own culture.

So do I think NA can be great? I know it can be great, we got unlimited potential if we get out of the train station get rid of the baggage we brought with us and then come back to the station with out the baggage and with a real message of recovery to pass on.
