

DRAFT EDA 12 Traditions (half of an EDA 12x12 book)

Please send comments/edits/suggestions to Literature@eatingdisordersanonymous.org.

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Introduction

EDA's original members had such deep respect and appreciation for AA experience that they adopted, with only slight modification, all twelve of AA's Traditions. Our distinct experiences in recovering from our eating disorders and carrying the message to others with eating disorders, however, led these same original members to interpret not only the Twelve Steps but also the Twelve Traditions to more specifically address EDA members and groups. Thus, much like the Steps of EDA, the Traditions of EDA are both consistent with and different from those of AA. Those who "grew up" with the original AA Traditions will find much in the ensuing pages that is familiar and comforting. It is in the spirit of unity that we in EDA seek to clarify and provide examples of how we understand and apply our Traditions.

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Tradition One¹

Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon EDA unity. Eating Disorders Anonymous is a “we” program. United we stand; divided we fall. EDA groups are effective in carrying the message of recovery to individual EDA members because we are united in our commitment to our common purpose, consistent in our use of the EDA Twelve-Step program of recovery, and allied in adherence to our common Traditions. Without the support of EDA, many would not have found recovery at all, and many more would have died. We want the hand of fellowship and support to be there whenever anyone needs it.

Unity in EDA is essential to ensuring the health and stability of our individual groups and organization. Unity means that, despite our individual differences, we work together to accomplish our common purpose: *to carry the message of recovery to others with eating disorders.*² EDA members can find understanding, support and fellowship in individual meetings, enhancing a sense of unity and connection. Tradition One reminds us that unity strengthens EDA as a whole, ensuring that it is available to all who need it.

When meetings are divisive and contentious, newcomers and seasoned members alike may not feel safe and, therefore, may not return. EDA Traditions give us tools to work our way through conflicts which may arise in any group over time. Uniting on our message of recovery and using our Traditions to resolve conflicts means groups remain aligned on

¹ EDA’s Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions are reprinted and adapted from the first 164 pages of the “Big Book,” *Alcoholics Anonymous*, with permission from Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. Permission to reprint and adapt this material does not mean that AA has reviewed or approved this or any other EDA material. AA is a program for recovery from alcoholism only. Use of AA material in the program of EDA, which is patterned after that of AA but which addresses other issues, does not constitute endorsement by, or affiliation with, AA.

² Eating Disorders Anonymous.(2016) Carlsbad, CA: Gürze Books, 487.

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our common values and goals while supporting each member in their individual recovery.

Tradition One tells us that one reason EDA groups are effective in carrying the message of recovery to individual EDA members is that we are consistent in the use of EDA's Twelve Step program of recovery which includes:

- Taking care of our own basic needs
- Celebrating small, incremental milestones of recovery every day—noticing what we are doing right
- Focusing on balance (not abstinence)
- Gaining perspective and calm through working the Twelve Steps of EDA
- Recognizing that recovery is about feelings, not food, weight, exercise, or body image
- Understanding that recovery is not rigid
- Learning that full recovery is possible
- Carrying the message of recovery to others

In EDA unity means:

- Individual members place the needs of the group ahead of their own needs. Although we each have needs, preferences and desires, we don't make divisive demands which harm group unity.
- Individual groups place the needs of EDA as a whole ahead of their own needs.
- Individual members do not monopolize time at meetings; we make a concerted effort to consider the needs of everyone in the group.

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- We practice love and tolerance rather than judging, bickering, and gossip.
- We don't discuss outside issues such as religion and politics at meetings.
- Groups set aside time to conduct group business meetings to discuss issues and vote on their resolutions.
- Groups send representatives to General Service Board meetings.
- Group Representatives take difficult or important issues that may affect other groups to the General Service Board for further guidance or clarification.
- Each EDA member has a responsibility to learn the Traditions and lovingly remind those who stray from them that the Traditions and meeting guidelines are for the purpose of group harmony.
- We, individually and collectively, are committed to practicing the Twelve Steps and being guided by the principals of EDA expressed in our Motto: HEALTH (*honesty, equality, accountability, love, trust, and humility*).
- We apply the principle of humility that is foundational to our Twelve Steps. Tradition One asks us to take the humble perspective that we are each a small part of a greater whole.

Here is an example of how EDA members used Tradition One to resolve a conflict. When the EDA Big Book was being written, some of our members were upset at the inclusion of detailed instructions that show atheists and agnostics how to make use of the EDA program without requiring them to embrace spiritual ideas they could not trust. Despite the EDA and AA historical context of inclusivity and openness, these members' groups considered separating from EDA but chose to remain. Their decision to stay within EDA illustrates their commitment to Tradition One. Members within these groups submitted material that became the Believers portion of the EDA Big Book's Chapter 4, "We

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Agnostics, Atheists, and Believers.” Thanks to this thoughtful and active response, our fellowship is now stronger than ever. Our strength rests in diversity *and* unity.

In summary, Tradition One tells us the individual is best served by caring for the organization’s common welfare. We support our common welfare by becoming familiar with our Traditions and how they guide us to best serve our primary purpose of carrying the message of recovery to others with eating disorders. We use the group conscience to make decisions and stick to them, despite things sometimes not going “our way.” When we each do our best to seek personal understanding of the principle of unity, and follow the ground rules established by group conscience, we are doing our part to sustain our fellowship and Tradition 1.

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EDA Members’ Reflections on Tradition One:

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- I used to be offended by the idea that EDA unity ought to come before my own recovery. Why would anyone invest in an idea before they got anything out of it? I also thought the idea of “giving it away to keep it” was organizationally self-serving at best. I changed my thinking about these ideas, and here is why. First, if there hadn’t been a place where I could see and hear people in full recovery talk about how they got free of their eating disorders, I don’t think I would have accepted the idea that I could be free. I was stuck on the idea that an eating disorder was a permanent state. But when I got to EDA, all that changed. If there hadn’t been an EDA, I honestly would not have

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found true peace and freedom. “Giving it away” has turned out to be a huge boon to me—I get joy and perspective by sharing my experience, strength, and hope.

- To me, a right-sized perspective includes considering what the experience of the meeting is for everyone, not just for me.
- While I needed to work EDA’s Twelve Steps with a sponsor for my own recovery, I believe EDA unity was the starting point. Without EDA unity, EDA would not have been around long enough for me to find it all the way across the nation decades after it started.
- It is a responsibility, opportunity, and honor for those of us who have achieved a measure of peace and freedom to support not just sponsees but EDA groups and EDA as a whole, so newcomers have a place to find hope.
- I serve on the General Service Board to support the fellowship and help EDA stay strong and healthy. As a benefit I meet wonderful people there and enjoy working with them.
- I need to remember that “I” is smack dab in the middle of “unity”. Despite being a “we” program, unity has to start with me.

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Tradition Two

For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God³ as God may be expressed in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern. When making decisions that affect an EDA group or EDA as a whole, EDA’s servant leaders use a democratic process called a group conscience. In a group conscience, each participant consults their own conscience and votes as they think will best serve EDA’s primary purpose: to carry the message of recovery to those who still suffer.

When an EDA group takes a “group conscience”, group members discuss proposals and decide what would best serve the group’s purpose—carrying the EDA message of recovery to those who still suffer. During a group conscience, group members are encouraged to share their thoughts and ideas. The group takes care to ensure minority opinions are given equal time and consideration before a vote is taken. Once a vote has been taken, group members individually and collectively agree to act in accord with the group decision. Rather than depending on the vision of a few group members, our reliance on a group conscience enables EDA groups to make decisions based on the collective vision.

It is typical for charismatic individuals to emerge as leaders in any group setting. Such folks are usually inspirational speakers with a great deal of experience, strength, and hope to share. EDA members appreciate everyone who shares with insight, humor, warmth, and wisdom—yet even the best and most selfless among us can divert the group’s focus if

³ “God” in EDA literature can mean the Deity, a deity, a spiritual entity of one’s own understanding (a Higher Power), or a non-spiritual conception (a higher purpose). Reliance on any of these conceptions confers a perspective that transcends our immediate physical, social, and emotional circumstances and allows us to “keep calm and carry on” with what really matters.

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given too much authority. Rotating positions of leadership affirms that group authority resides with roles, not with individuals.

Initially, each individual group's founder is the authority on everything. Soon, the founder and their close friends form the center of authority. Sometimes, the groups' original members attempt to impose quite a few rules to preserve stability. If so, there can be pushback against excess control. Conflicts can arise when newcomers initiate proposals to make things better. Original members may reject new ideas on the basis of "that isn't how we do it here." Without a doubt, some proposals will stun and horrify, yet even the most outrageous will spark important and necessary discussion. The best ideas surface when all perspectives are heard. For this reason, dissenting opinions should be welcomed and provided adequate time for expression during EDA business meetings. We can trust the group conscience to choose reasonable constraints over unnecessary rigidity.

Tradition Seven's declaration that "we are self-supporting through our own contributions" applies not only to monetary concerns but also to our contributions of time, talent, thought, and effort to support the best interests of the group and EDA as a whole. Leadership should naturally shift from founders to elected positions. Positions such as Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer provide important services that support the group. EDA members respect that every service role is that of a cheerful servant. Service positions do not entitle anyone, nor any few, to dispense spiritual advice, judge conduct, or issue orders. EDA members who help marshal the group through times of expansion, turmoil, contraction, and regrowth are likely to develop enough perspective to be what the AA *Twelve & Twelve* describes as "elder statesmen."⁴ *These*

⁴ Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. (1981) New York, NY: AA World Services, Inc., 135.

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leaders do not drive by mandate; they lead by example. Calm demeanor and a durable sense of humor can help the group find balance.

Each group should understand that there is a place for individuality as well as unity within EDA. As an example, in EDA, we encourage sponsors to use whatever materials have been most helpful to them in their own recovery so that their unique message—their experience, strength, and hope—is clear. A sponsor who has a strong faith may share their belief system—and may quote passages from spiritual or religious texts—to share what works for them with their sponsees. At the group level, this type of sharing is not appropriate; we stick to EDA’s core concepts.

An underlying key to a healthy group conscience is for participants to be fully informed. Being informed means getting information on all relevant matters, which might take a little time. A group conscience isn’t rushed. Some issues require multiple meetings before a vote is taken. Becoming fully informed might involve footwork by one or more members and requires a commitment to hear all perspectives. A quorum (minimum number of representatives as determined by each group) is required for decisions that materially affect the group.

Here are a few examples which illustrate the power of the group conscience process:

- Until the publication of the EDA Big Book, many EDA groups used other literature to support members in working the Steps. Outside literature may leave out critical aspects of eating disorders recovery, such as taking care of our own basic needs, focusing on what is going right, addressing emotional disturbances (recovery is about feelings, not food), and seeking a perspective that embraces and celebrates balance. Yet, there were many who found peace and freedom from their eating disorders through use of outside literature. These members were understandably hesitant about adopting new material.

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EDA meetings, using the group conscience process, almost universally adopted the new EDA Big Book. Recovery grew stronger as EDA's focus on balance and resilience began to receive more attention.

- An EDA group that had stipulated a length of abstinence as a prerequisite for being invited to speak at their meeting amended this to instead require having worked the Steps of EDA.
- Another group addressed an ongoing problem with members promoting specific treatment centers when they shared during the meeting by editing their meeting format to discourage such references.
- A group addressed a problem with someone who regularly mentioned abstaining from a particular food by explicitly empowering the meeting chair to respond after each such comment with a gentle reminder (to the group) that EDA focuses on balance, not abstinence.

As EDA's Tradition One clarifies, each EDA group must put unity ahead of individual concerns. The welfare of the group and EDA as a whole is paramount. Thus, in each case where a group is conflicted, we rely on the group conscience, rather than the decisions of a few, to keep our groups focused and our message clear. We are each responsible, uniquely qualified, and empowered to help our EDA groups forge a common understanding of God's will for us and/or the greater good. We are each responsible for adopting the attitudes and actions that help our EDA group(s) succeed.

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EDA Members' Reflections on Tradition Two:

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- EDA members who hold service positions have the same single vote as any other EDA member. Their opinions count no more or less than those of any other member. People who hold service positions in the group don't define the practices of the group—such decisions are reserved for the group conscience.
- During group business meetings and General Service Board meetings, everyone is encouraged to participate, particularly those with minority opinions and those who might be most directly affected by a decision under consideration. For significant issues, groups including the General Service Board of EDA may decide to use substantial unanimity rather than plurality to pass a motion. Substantial unanimity means that three quarters of the people voting must agree that the motion should pass. Some groups pause before a vote to allow members to consider impacts (and optionally pray) before voting.
- When I take good care of myself and work my EDA program, I can hear all sides of a discussion more calmly and am more useful to the group in and out of business meetings.
- As a group member, I attend business meetings and participate in group conscience discussions and decisions. I share my personal experience and points of view where relevant. When others share, I listen attentively. EDA has taught me that what each person shares is of equal importance.
- I have learned I can disagree with others in my group and remain friends even when things do not go my way. I can disagree without being disagreeable.
- I pray for guidance when I know what I am going to present to my group may be controversial. I am often surprised that when I listen respectfully to opposing views, my own position sometimes changes.

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- After a group conscience changes something about our meeting, we announce the change the next time we meet and write it into our format if that seems necessary.
- Changes can be controversial or uncomfortable. Nothing decided by a vote at the group or General Service Board level is set in stone. Anything decided by vote can be brought up again at another time.
- My group struggled to tolerate noisy infants and children. After trying several other approaches, we decided by group conscience to use our 7th Tradition funds to pay for a babysitter. This required a lot of discussion but worked out well for us.
- In my group, we voted to state in our format that we request members not mention specific foods, numbers, or plans of eating. Newcomers sometimes worry about “getting it wrong” but quickly learn how the group works. If a newcomer mentions a food or number we usually don't say anything but if it continues to happen a group representative speaks to them privately.
- Being a trusted servant is an honor and a responsibility. I have had tremendous growth by serving my group and EDA as a whole.
- In my group, rotation of leadership ensures no one gets burned out. Experienced members mentor those who are new to service positions until they become confident.
- Rotation of leadership is vital to my understanding of Tradition Two. It is beautiful to watch those who are shy or introverted blossom when taking service positions.

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Tradition Three

The only requirement for EDA membership is a desire to recover from an eating disorder. To deny EDA membership to anyone could be to pronounce their death sentence. Hence, the only prerequisite for EDA membership is the individual's desire for recovery. We never turn anyone away who is trying to recover from an eating disorder.

While we willingly contribute our time, talent, experience, strength, and hope to ensure the hand of EDA is there whenever anyone needs it, we are under no obligation to pass any kind of test or meet a certain standard for EDA membership. There are no dues or fees for EDA membership.

The early members of AA realized that having multiple requirements for group membership reflected a fear that recovery was fragile. Thankfully, it became apparent that this fear was unfounded. AA's Foundation (the predecessor to the AA General Service Board) threw out all but one of those membership rules: the only requirement for membership should be a desire to recover. Just as in AA, EDA's General Service Board determined only one membership requirement applies: the desire to recover from an eating disorder.

EDA's earliest groups considered whether to limit EDA membership to people with only a specific type of eating disorder. Early EDA members were not sure whether the program of EDA would be as effective for people with anorexia and binge eating disorder as it was for compulsive overeaters and bulimics. They questioned whether having all types of eating disorders together in the same meeting (or even the same fellowship) was wise and healthy. Some EDA members were distressed to discover that a person can have multiple forms of an eating disorder.

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For example, a person can have symptoms of anorexia, bulimia, and binge eating disorder all at once or over time. Some people hoped they were exempt from forms other than their own and were concerned about “catching” forms they had not experienced. The matter was solved when the initial EDA groups began to see people with every form of eating disorder, including those with no specific diagnosis at all, grasping and developing a new manner of living and walking free. The point became clear: all EDA members have a common solution. Our differences turned out to be assets, rather than impediments. We learn positive coping skills and gain insights from each other regardless of differences in specific expressions of eating disordered thinking and behavior. Most importantly, we discover that we need not be afraid of each other or of ourselves.

When a newcomer shows up at an EDA meeting, we hope the experience is warm and welcoming. We hope each newcomer and each EDA member leaves feeling safe, supported, and inspired. We know from experience, however, that this is not always the case. Newcomers and old-timers alike can have issues that manifest in ways we do not like. Are we to deny EDA membership to people who annoy, frighten, trigger, or bully us? The answer is an emphatic “no,” yet EDA meeting participants are responsible for keeping EDA meetings safe and upholding group-conscience decisions. It is ok to ask someone to leave a meeting if they are being disruptive, but this does not exclude them from EDA membership. They are welcome back as soon as they are willing to be considerate and respectful of others.

On the same note, while EDA membership is never in question, we do not tolerate speech or behavior that disrespects others. We address serious problems that come up in meetings directly and without delay. When someone’s safety is at risk, it may be appropriate to involve

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outside security resources or ask the disruptive person to leave. If someone's inappropriate action results in their expulsion from a meeting, we recommend—if it is safe to do so—that a meeting representative reach out to the offending person. Anyone is welcome to attend if they are willing to respect the rights of others and accept group conscience decisions about what is best for the group as a whole. We aim to offer everyone in EDA a consistent level of acceptance, dignity, and respect.

Some people can be challenging for a group to accept. There are those who are brash, eager to tell others how they've got it all wrong, happily pointing out what they believe to be fundamental errors in EDA's approach or correcting perceived deficiencies in how other EDA members work their programs. People responsible for chairing meetings graced by such enthusiastic irritants may be tempted to suggest that other eating-related programs would be a better fit. After all, isn't it paramount to keep EDA meetings safe and protect other meeting participants from attack? The answer, of course, is yes. There are, however, caveats. We are reminded that even though we may not have voiced our opinions, many of us had doubts about the efficacy of EDA's approach when we arrived. Didn't we also wonder why a program that deals with disordered eating avoids the topics of weight and food, and perhaps complain that EDA was too rigid?

Newcomers to EDA with recovery in other Twelve-Step programs sometimes question EDA's lack of insistence on abstinence before working the Steps. *In EDA, we know freedom is an outcome of working the Steps; our peace and resilience—and our freedom from fear of relapse—comes because we are addressing causes and conditions, not symptoms. Freedom is a byproduct of this work—a lagging indicator of our progress.* When someone new to our meetings questions our

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approach, we empathize. We talk with newcomers after meetings about our own misgivings and how we learned to think differently about recovery. We share how we struggled to grasp that our eating disorders were an ineffective coping mechanism for addressing our challenging feelings and life problems. We share how it helped us to realize that our eating disorders would persist until we no longer needed them.⁵ We share how the Steps and fellowship of EDA helped us turn things around, and we invite them back.

Sometimes, EDA members feel uncomfortable with topics raised during member shares. Unlike some Twelve-Step groups, EDA does not attempt to silence those who bring up outside issues such as alcohol, sex addiction, or mental illness—provided they pertain to the person’s efforts to recover. We can be glad of an opportunity to provide support and empathy when an EDA member brings up something that is holding them back from recovery. EDA members diagnosed with other serious mental illnesses can and do recover. That said, EDA makes no claim about efficacy in addressing other issues; we support one another in seeking outside help as needed.

We do not turn anyone away, no matter how overwhelming their problems might seem to them or to others. Usually, EDA meetings are warm and comfortable for all. Occasionally, EDA members can be a danger to themselves or others. At one time, an EDA member discussed her intention to attempt suicide while rocking an infant right there in front of us. The meeting chair stayed with the suicidal member until she called her psychiatrist and family members arrived. The person involved was angry at first but grateful in the ensuing years. In EDA’s second year,

⁵ Eating Disorders Anonymous. (2016) Carlsbad, CA: Gürze Books, xxix

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a meeting attendee began rambling incoherently about killing people, becoming physically very agitated. She was restrained, which only made her more upset, and the chair had to summon a facility security guard to remove her—a horrible situation for all concerned. The person who was removed eventually wrote a note thanking the chair for doing the right thing and offering amends to the group. Although we are under no strict obligation to help fellow EDA members with outside issues, sometimes EDA members are unsafe due to situations such as domestic violence. If so, we make an effort to connect them with authorities and shelters.

We never turn anyone away who has a desire to recover from an eating disorder. Those who are not yet willing to address root cause issues are welcome to participate in EDA meetings. We know from experience that it can feel like an eternity before developing enough trust in our new perspective that change becomes possible. Our job as EDA members is to be there consistently, so newcomers can form bonds of trust and envision new possibilities.

We are, in a very real way, all the same. We might remind ourselves that those who have not yet found recovery, and those whose behavior distresses us, may someday be able to convey the hope for recovery to others in ways that we ourselves cannot. Our strength is in our diversity of experience, strength, and hope.

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EDA Members' Reflections on Tradition Three:

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- This is the “membership tradition.” It means that we ask nothing from those seeking relief from their eating disorders – no dues or declarations. It’s about what we as EDA offer – and indeed must offer— in order to keep to our primary aim to carry the message of recovery as effectively as possible. We must be inclusive and never exclusive.
- Each EDA member decides on their own whether they belong. No one needs to make a formal pledge or even verbalize their desire to recover; we take a member’s presence in meetings as evidence of their desire to recover.
- When I came to EDA, I was just welcomed. People reached out to me and let me know they had been in the same place I was. It helped me have hope and be honest. Because no one wanted anything from me, I was quickly able to begin building trust with myself and others.
- I can break Tradition Three in very subtle ways. I can easily assume newcomers are too sick to recover, or are too “different” for me to approach. If I hadn’t been welcomed, I wouldn’t have gotten the help I needed to recover. Others’ acceptance of me allowed me to find relief and continues to be an important part of my recovery today. I have found that my reaching out to others helps strengthen my recovery and my group.
- It’s important for me to help new people who have no idea what a meeting is about. It can be so strange when we are new. Face-to-face meetings can be terrifying and disorienting, and phone and online meetings can feel really awkward at first. I didn’t know group etiquette at all. I was so glad that someone talked with me after the meeting to explain the nuances.
- My life is busy and I am careful about how I spend my time. A while ago, I was getting really frustrated in my group because new people from treatment were coming in and doing “group

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therapy” in our meeting. I was about to leave, then it dawned on me that not everyone was as lucky as I was to have 12-Step experience before I came to EDA. I made it a point to make it to my home group 15 minutes early so I could welcome new people and try to give them a sense of what a 12-Step meeting was. Soon I was staying a little late as well. Not only have I formed some amazing connections, but our group has grown stronger in its message and in how we work together.

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Tradition Four

Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or EDA as a whole. Each EDA group manages its own affairs, but every group is part of the EDA fellowship. Each group must be careful to not cause harm to EDA as a whole. Thus, special consideration must be taken in matters beyond the scope of the immediate group. We work together, while remaining separate.

An EDA group is defined as two or more EDA members who meet for the common purpose of supporting one another in finding and sustaining recovery from their eating disorders, provided that as a group they have no other affiliation.⁶ We in EDA, like those in AA before us, understand the importance of singleness of purpose. That said, we aim to have only the essential rules and guidelines needed to maintain consistency in our message. Each group should be permitted to discover through trial and error what works best for group members. Each group has “a right to be wrong.”⁷

The foundations of our 4th Tradition are clear. Individually, we build trust with ourselves and others through the active process of making deliberate choices that build our resilience and capacity. We must take small risks to progress. So, too, do our groups. When we are authentic, our bonds of community deepen as honesty is met with acceptance, respect, and trust. As with EDA members individually, EDA groups thrive in an atmosphere of tolerance and love. An excess of rules feels rigid—

⁶ Same as noted for AA groups as stated in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. (1981) New York, NY: AA World Services, Inc., 146-147.

⁷ *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. (1981) New York, NY: AA World Services, Inc., 147.

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the antithesis of trust and recovery. EDA experience has demonstrated that the group conscience process effectively helps to correct practices and processes that deviate from EDA's fundamental principles.

It is important to emphasize that although EDA groups are independent, they are connected to the rest of EDA. While individual EDA groups have the freedom to deviate from the General Service Board of EDA's approved "Suggested EDA Meeting Format" through group conscience decisions, it is important to exercise caution when considering practices that might have an impact on other groups or EDA as a whole. For example, use of outside literature risks distracting members from the fundamentals of EDA and gives newcomers the impression that EDA is affiliated with outside entities. Another practice that could affect EDA more broadly is awarding tokens for time in recovery; doing so draws attention to numbers and draws attention away from balance.

Impact determines whether representation is required in making a group decision. When in doubt about whether an issue impacts other groups (including EDA's service groups), or EDA as a whole, consultation with EDA's General Service Board (GSB) is recommended. For example, a group of men in EDA wanted to form a men's group. They were concerned that this might adversely affect those who do not identify as men. They checked with the GSB and got unanimous approval to proceed. In another example, some EDA members objected to the formation of a "People of Color" group on the basis that it excluded those who did not identify as a "person of color." The GSB considered the question and found that groups can benefit where there is dual identification, especially for groups that are historically marginalized in the predominant culture.

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Innovation in EDA meetings *is* encouraged. One example from early EDA history is the practice of claiming milestones of recovery in meetings. We knew early on that telling each other what was going right helped us focus on what worked. As we focused more on what worked than on what didn't work, our recovery grew stronger.

Modifications to the standard EDA format are common. Some groups open or close with special prayers. Some groups have none. Some EDA groups limit membership to one gender or one age cohort. In each case where group composition is limited or the format differs significantly from the norm, such as when the group focuses on quiet writing or silent meditation, EDA's GSB recommends the group include such distinctions in its listing and make an announcement at the start of each meeting. Some additional examples where group conscience decisions have had a positive impact include: implementing time restrictions during milestones or sharing time; agreements on cross-talk; and offering an after-meeting gathering.

In our individual recoveries we learn to rely on God, a Higher Power, or a higher purpose to gain perspective and find peace in our lives. Similarly, we learn to trust the group conscience process to bring perspective and peace to our groups. Individually and collectively, we can have confidence that as we focus on what really matters, the most useful ideas will win out.

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EDA Members' Reflections on Tradition Four:

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- My group takes a regular inventory on where we stand with the Traditions. We ask how well we are living up to and exhibiting the

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ideas expressed in the Traditions as a group. It is a bit like doing a personal inventory. We look at what we are doing well, and at what we might want to change.

- One EDA group I attended had a “fitness advocate” running it. There was a lot of enthusiasm, but it wasn’t an EDA meeting. A few of us decided to write to EDA’s GSB. Someone from the GSB contacted the group’s founder, recommended that the Traditions be read at meetings at least once a month, and requested that the group hold regular business meetings where a group conscience could be taken about the meeting format, to ensure the meeting stayed focused on what would most help carry the message of recovery to newcomers. She agreed, and the matter was sorted out pretty quickly: the “fitness advocate” soon folded her meeting. Not long after, we started another meeting. It was great to see the group conscience process working.
- My group decided to do something radical with the format and got rid of about half the standard verbiage. Most of us were quite happy with more time for sharing, but after a while we realized newcomers kept asking basic questions that the old format had answered. The pendulum swung the other way and now we’ve added back about half of what we’d eliminated. I love that we can modify things to make it work.
- Oh, brother—my first group was a little crazy; we liked to yell and curse! I loved that group but was taught by my sponsor that no matter what practices were ok there, when I went to other groups, I needed to respect that group’s conscience or respectfully not attend. Doing anything else would be like visiting someone’s house and rearranging the furniture.

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- If people don't like something about the way a group conducts itself, there is a process for change. Tradition Four means we need to consider who is affected and get their feedback. It's about establishing our common welfare and group unity. If we act on our interests alone and make unilateral decisions but disregard how those decisions might affect other groups, then we ignore our common welfare. We should instead work to safeguard EDA's future so it can be there to offer hope to those who struggle.
- This is going to sound weird, but my group voted to accept cross-talk. It can be jarring and quite a surprise to people familiar with Twelve-Step programs in general, so we state it in our format. Maybe when our group gets bigger we will change our group conscience decision about cross-talk but, for now, it works for us.⁸

⁸ The contributor probably did not know this, but the first EDA group in Phoenix permitted respectful (non-advice-bearing) cross-talk. Interjections such as, "Me too!" were common and helped foster bonds of friendship. As that first group grew, cross-talk indeed became more of a hindrance than a help.

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Tradition Five

Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message of recovery to others with eating disorders. We freely give away what others have given to us. People struggling with eating disorders need hope to be able to make any progress in recovery. EDA members strengthen and build recovery by sharing their experience, strength, and hope with others who still suffer. Each EDA group serves as a channel for the message of recovery, helping newcomers and “old-timers” alike.

Tradition Five introduces the idea that EDA groups ought to have just one primary purpose: to carry the EDA message of recovery to individuals with eating disorders. Our message is described in EDA literature and summarized below. In meetings, we focus on solutions and use of the processes and tools that are part of the EDA program. These address the root causes of our eating disorders.

For the message of recovery to be most effective, each EDA group needs to actively consider whether a newcomer could gather, from an initial meeting, the hope and strength that EDA can provide. Our singleness of purpose keeps the focus on what we know works for eating disorders recovery. It is important to avoid the distraction of other topics at EDA meetings. Individual EDA members’ unique experiences and demographics—including membership in other Twelve Step programs, politics, values, ages, identities, socioeconomic conditions, sexual orientations, and forms of eating disorder—are as many and varied as are EDA members. While these distinctions matter greatly to our individual identities and our recoveries, it is essential that EDA groups stay focused on our common message. Our goal is for people attending EDA meetings to be clear about EDA’s message. Discussion of outside

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issues at EDA meetings risks side-tracking members from hearing the EDA message. Thus, regardless of how helpful outside resources (such as recovery books, counseling, treatment centers, plans of eating, vitamins, religions) have been for us individually we do not discuss these at meetings because they are not part of the EDA program. Such topics may be discussed one-on-one, but should not be brought up in meetings, where the EDA message needs to be consistent.

The core components of the EDA program of recovery include:

- **Taking care of our basic needs**—we are the only ones who can!
- Celebrating **milestones, not numbers** (noticing what we are doing right)—changes our negative self-talk into acceptance and compassion through acknowledging the many positive efforts we make each day.
- Focusing on **balance (not abstinence)**.
- Recognizing that **recovery is about feelings, not food, weight, exercise, or body image**.
- Understanding that **recovery is not rigid**.
- Learning that **full recovery** is possible.
- Living by the EDA principles—reflected in the EDA Motto: **HEALTH** (*honesty, equality, accountability, love, trust, and humility*).
- Respecting that a **desire to recover is the only requirement** for EDA membership.
- Affirming that the heart of the Twelve Steps is a spiritual solution, yet anyone (including atheists and agnostics) can work the Steps through **reliance on something greater than themselves** (such as a higher purpose).
- **Sponsoring others** as part of EDA’s 12th Step.
- Supporting one another by **sharing experience, strength, and hope** (inside and outside of meetings): fellowship.

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- Using EDA literature.
- Expressing **gratitude** for whatever life presents to us, such as noticing not just what we, but also what others, are doing right; this practice helps us replace negative thinking with more appreciative and positive thoughts.
- **Maintaining anonymity (meaning safety) for ourselves and others.**

We would like to elaborate on some of the above-listed components because they deserve additional explanation:

- **Taking care of basic needs.**
 - After we begin to engage in listening to and addressing our basic needs (as listed below)—distinguishing these from wants and desires—many of us are astonished that we are no longer engulfed by deep, unmet needs as we might have feared. Our confidence in our minds and bodies grows stronger as we gradually realize that our bodies can be trusted to tell us what they need. We begin to trust that we will address our emotional needs as well. We build that trust slowly, by taking small risks and paying attention to the results. But what do we mean by “basic needs?” Basic needs have physical, emotional, social, intellectual, and purpose-related dimensions. Simply put:
 - If hungry, we eat.
 - If angry, we find a safe outlet.
 - If lonely, we reach out.
 - If tired, we rest or sleep.
 - If ashamed, we talk about it.

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- If feeling other strong emotions, we talk or write about them to get perspective.
 - When anxious or troubled, we focus our attention on our physical senses, get outside, pray, meditate, or do service – anything that helps remind us of the bigger picture. Once calmer, we deal with the problem as soon as appropriate, bringing as much courage, humility, and humor as possible.
 - Once we have taken care of our basic needs, we can turn our attention to what really matters in the greater context of our lives—whatever that may mean to us individually.
- Celebrating **milestones, not numbers**—reminds us that we do much good each day that supports our recovery and benefits others. We address our errors and shortcomings while continuing to celebrate what is going right.
 - Milestones can come in many forms, including but not limited to: making the decision to reach out; attending an EDA meeting; sharing personal experiences of hope; working with a sponsor; taking small risks with support to change behaviors; reconnecting with hobbies and passions; or beginning a character-building activity (as outlined in Step 7 of the EDA Big Book.) These milestones mark significant achievements and progress in our journeys, highlighting commitment to change, willingness to seek support, and taking steps to increase reliance on our Higher Power/higher purpose.
 - Focusing on what we are doing right—our positive actions and growth—fundamentally changes our perspective and builds self-esteem. It reduces the

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obsession with food, weight, and body image, and helps us remember that it is our efforts—not outcomes—that matter.

- Claiming our milestones helps us recognize the many incremental changes we make along the way and corrects the habit of ruminating on our negative experiences.
- Celebrating one another's milestones helps us see that it is the small things we think and do differently that make all the difference.
- We don't count calories, weight, amount of exercise (or anything else of that sort) because focusing on numbers is a distraction from addressing our underlying emotional issues. Instead, we call attention to the numerous ways we can be of cheerful service and doing the next right thing.
- In EDA, recovery is not associated with body size. Body size is an outside issue, not a topic for discussion.
- We don't officially recognize days, weeks, months, or years of recovery and we do not give chips or tokens for lengths of time in recovery. One reason is to avoid comparing ourselves to others in any manner as this can be a part of our eating disordered thinking. Another reason is to prevent shame. It takes time to become proficient in practices that support recovery. We do not want anyone to feel embarrassed about their missteps. Instead, we practice humility and accountability and admit our errors. We refrain from judging anyone, including ourselves. It is important that everyone feel safe being honest about their recovery journey.
- EDA members who no longer engage in eating disordered thoughts or behaviors even under duress sometimes choose to identify as fully recovered because

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it can generate hope. For this reason, EDA members sometimes mention the length of time since last use of an eating disorder behavior when sharing their individual stories at the group level, but length of “time” is never officially celebrated in EDA.

- Focusing on **balance—not abstinence**—helps us address underlying issues without shame.
 - Our continuous effort to find and retain balance (sanity) through life’s ups and downs leads incrementally to full recovery. The quest to find and retain balance is a lifelong, humble exercise that gives our lives meaning and humor.
 - An “abstinence is recovery” mindset can be rigid, perfectionistic, or uncompromising. It often increases shame and anxiety when what we need most is a calm perspective and deliberate action. We do better when we take a return to ED behaviors as a valuable opportunity for learning and growth. In EDA we do not fear “losing abstinence.” We know we will have our eating disorders until we no longer need them. Our job in EDA is to build trust and resilience through making incremental changes as we work the Steps to create and maintain a calm and balanced perspective.
 - Focusing on balance allows us to see that rigid, all-or-nothing thinking is a symptom of excessive fear. Rigidity in thought and behavior are typical signs of an eating disorder, not usually part of the solution to one. We need not fear our minds or our bodies if we focus on balance and do the next right thing. We aim to keep things simple: we do first things first, one thing at a time.

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- In EDA we do not focus on food, weight, or numbers of any kind. Any definition of recovery that depends on numbers means defining the solution in terms of the symptoms of the problem, and diverts attention away from our goal: sanity.
- A focus on balance frees us to strive for what we truly need and enables us to tolerate what used to “trigger” us. We learn to be unafraid of ourselves and our eating disorders.

- Recognizing that recovery is about **feelings, not food**.
 - The problem (an eating disorder) is not about food, weight, body image, or exercise; neither is the solution. **We cannot resolve an issue by focusing on symptoms.** Instead, we investigate root causes, which invariably have to do with how we think about ourselves in relation to others, God, our Higher Power, and/or higher purpose. We outline possible resolutions and do our best to work through these in daily living. Changing the way we think is a slow process, not an event.
 - Full recovery is not about exerting control, but about full acceptance of our feelings, and full recognition of our ability—and responsibility—to do something useful with them. We cannot simply “cage the tiger and let it out three times a day to eat.” We are the tiger. Caging ourselves does not allow us to live in peace and freedom. We use our feelings to motivate us to make changes in ourselves and/or our circumstances. We celebrate the joy and love that come from doing what is right for ourselves and others.

- Understanding that **recovery is not rigid**.

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- Rigidity in almost any area of our lives can be more detrimental than helpful. Seeing the humor in life's challenges and our response to them helps us maintain balance. A well-developed sense of humor reflects a healthy perspective.
- Recovery from an eating disorder means becoming more flexible and resilient in all areas of life. EDA provides direction and support that can enable us to reach beyond our rigidity and fears toward a fuller and happier life. Unless there is an underlying medical condition, we need not avoid any ingredient or food. Unless there is a threat to safety, we need not avoid any person, place, or thing. We can engage in the world with confidence that we can handle ourselves successfully, no matter the circumstances, and regardless of what anyone else does or says.
- A flexible response to life requires reliance on something greater than ourselves for perspective. Without this, we are likely to be sucked into the undertow of self-centered drama and fear.
- We need to become comfortable with being uncomfortable at times. We try different ways of thinking (leveraging Steps and other recovery tools) until we can move forward with dignity and integrity.
- In recovery, we can change plans, and change our mind, as we see fit. We need not apologize for changing our mind if doing so is consistent with our aim to make things better regardless of what others may think.
- We are not rigid about the pace of recovery. We may feel unsettled when old patterns resurface. Our next step is to consider what is giving rise to our discomfort and do what we must to restore perspective and find balance. We embrace progress, not perfection. We do not compare our

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progress to anyone else's recovery, and accept the pace with which we are addressing our issues and making healthy changes.

- We accept life as it comes and adapt ourselves as we think best serves God's will, our Higher Power, or higher purpose. We cease fighting anyone directly, even ourselves.⁹ Instead, we stand up— on the firing line of life—for what we think matters.¹⁰

- **Learning that full recovery is possible.**
 - Though most of us never thought it possible for ourselves, many of us are fully recovered, which means we are free of recurring preoccupations with food, weight, body image, or exercise.
 - We know that freedom from an eating disorder is a *byproduct* of doing the work to gain perspective, build trust, and maintain balance.
 - We acknowledge that it often takes time and effort to build enough resilience and trust (in ourselves and our God/Higher Power/higher purpose) to be completely free of our eating disorders. With this trust, we develop recoveries that are durable and resilient—not vulnerable to mental blank spots or “triggers.” We don't live in fear of ourselves or our eating disorders.

⁹ Eating Disorders Anonymous. (2016) Carlsbad, CA: Gürze Books, 191-192, and Alcoholics Anonymous. (2001) New York, NY: AA World Services, Inc., 84- 85.

¹⁰ Ibid. and Alcoholics Anonymous. (2001) New York, NY: AA World Services, Inc., 102.

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- *Full reliance* on God/Higher Power/higher purpose brings perspective and peace and makes *full recovery* possible.

To ensure the EDA message is clear, we safeguard EDA meetings from unnecessary distractions. Distractions can include excessive mention or focus on outside issues, including other Twelve Step programs, treatment centers, food plans, outside literature, politics, and religion. We discourage cross talk to create a safe atmosphere where everyone has an equal chance to share without anyone commenting or interrupting. Derogatory statements—no matter how subtle—including thin- or fat-shaming language, are not allowed in EDA meetings as these violate EDA’s core principles. Politely calling out disrespect is vital to group health and strengthens group unity (Tradition One). The Suggested EDA Meeting Format reflects these considerations.

EDA members are the most effective tool any EDA group has in carrying the message of recovery. Our humble sharing of difficulties, and joys in overcoming them, creates bonds of trust and builds our collective strength. EDA’s Motto—**HEALTH** (honesty, equality, accountability, love, trust, and humility)—reminds us of EDA’s core principles and unifies us around our common purpose.

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EDA Members’ Reflections on Tradition Five:

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- The “balance not abstinence” message clicked for me the first time I heard about it. Other fellowships are wonderful, but it is in EDA that I first found ideas that worked for my eating

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- disorder. Now I help carry the message of EDA recovery because I understand how important it is.
- EDA's ideas about recovery challenged a lot of beliefs I used to have. I am glad I heard a lot about balance and milestones in my EDA groups because these helped me understand where my thinking needed to change. Focusing on the positive is hard, but it works better than anything else I've tried.
 - Although true, saying I am fully recovered from my eating disorder feels a bit weird. I do it because it reminds me of who I am, and helps newcomers grasp an important concept: full recovery is possible in EDA.
 - I cannot believe how many years I spent obsessing on numbers. It was the whole deal: weighing, measuring, and counting absolutely everything. I suffered and my family did, too. In EDA I found a new freedom and a new happiness. It gives me chills when I think about what my kids learned from me before I found EDA.
 - Singleness of purpose does not mean that we never discuss problems other than eating disorders. EDA is about addressing root causes for our eating disordered behaviors. This can involve a lot of topics! Singleness of purpose means we focus on solutions that are part of the EDA program.
 - I was surprised how many of my problems were resolved when I worked the Twelve Steps of EDA. Some problems required outside help, and I was happy to discover another 12 Step program (with its own singleness of purpose) to address my sex addiction.
 - It is not only newcomers who need to hear the EDA message—all of us benefit from regular review of EDA's principles.
 - When EDA members promote their business, interests, or religious beliefs at EDA meetings, it is detrimental to the group's primary purpose. New members find EDA attractive because

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there is nothing selfish, profit-seeking, or proselytizing about our message of recovery.

- It is important for meetings to focus on solutions, not just problems. While it is wonderful to find people who understand our problems, the unique message of every EDA group is our common solution—the Steps of EDA and the support we find in working them.

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Tradition Six

An EDA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the EDA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, or prestige divert us from our primary purpose. To involve our fellowship in issues outside the direct scope of our primary purpose is to distract us from carrying the EDA message to those who still suffer. To best serve our primary purpose, we hold no affiliation to external organizations or activities.

Tradition Six makes it clear that EDA members and EDA groups should not promote outside enterprises such as treatment centers, medical professionals, or recovery materials, including websites and apps, at EDA meetings—no matter how helpful we think these may be. The tendency to think that our own arsenal of recovery tools is likely to be a great fit for everyone can at times be almost inescapable. Yet, whenever EDA members recommend outside institutions, applications, businesses, literature, or organizations—including other Twelve Step fellowships—at EDA meetings, they risk diverting attention from EDA’s core message. We want the EDA message to be as clear and consistent as possible. Each EDA member may share whatever they have found helpful outside of EDA meetings, however, at meetings we focus only on our common solution. When EDA members promote outside entities, giving the impression these are endorsed by EDA, meeting chairs should clarify EDA’s stance of non-affiliation and non-endorsement.

The principle of non-affiliation can feel burdensome and restrictive, but it is very important. In EDA’s early days, before internet search engines were as robust, EDA’s General Service Board (GSB) thought it would be helpful to connect EDA newcomers with outside resources. EDA had not yet developed much literature of its own, so we listed a few outside

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resources on our website. We included books and websites that GSB members had found helpful. Treatment centers started asking to be added to the “external resources” web page. If three or more EDA members verified that the treatment program was sound, we listed it. Members raised concerns about the Sixth Tradition, and a disclaimer was added, “Here are some recommendations from individual EDA members. EDA does not endorse outside entities. Take what you can use and leave the rest.” Before long, a treatment center where an EDA meeting was held protested when it did not get listed due to a bad review from an EDA member. You can see where conflicts of interest came into play. In the end, the GSB wisely chose to remove all references to outside entities from its website.

Some wanted the pendulum to swing as far back to the other side as possible, expressing concern that holding EDA meetings at treatment facilities could be a violation of Tradition Six, especially if any signs were put up showing people where to find the meetings. People might take EDA’s presence at the facility as an endorsement. The GSB considered the concern and confirmed the following:

- EDA meetings can be held anywhere, including hospitals and institutions. These facilities serve people with a desire to recover from an eating disorder, and it is EDA’s purpose to carry the message to them.¹¹
- It is essential for each EDA group to have signage that helps people find the meetings, ensuring the message of recovery reaches those in need.
- An EDA group can cooperate with any entity but should avoid too close an association. We think it better to call an EDA group something boring or zany, i.e. “Monday night EDA” or “Freedom

¹¹ EDA meetings have also been held in private homes, group homes, private business, prisons, retreat centers, religious facilities, hotels, public and private schools, colleges, public parks, community centers, and libraries.

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Funlovers”, than to adopt the name of the facility where the meeting is held.¹²

While we do not affiliate with outside entities, cooperation with them is encouraged to enable us to carry our message of recovery wherever it is needed.

All EDA members should take care to avoid promoting EDA or revealing their EDA membership in public settings.¹³ For example, EDA nametags should not be worn outside of EDA meetings and EDA members should not solicit EDA by approaching people with information (i.e., flyers, brochures, or books) that they did not request at non-EDA gatherings. However, EDA members and groups can attend and host tables at eating disorders awareness events, sharing information about EDA without endorsing or affiliating with other entities. We are carrying the message of EDA recovery to those who could benefit without promotion or affiliation.

Clubs, including online social media groups—even when set up exclusively to facilitate fellowship for EDA members—are outside entities. EDA members who create and or maintain such clubs should avoid using the acronym EDA and Eating Disorders Anonymous in their name and logo. Some EDA meetings have affiliated online communities (currently on WhatsApp and FaceBook) for communication among meeting members. Everyone in EDA should take care to maintain the anonymity of EDA members who use online platforms and applications.

¹² It is fine to put up flyers in places where EDA meetings are held, including hospitals and treatment centers, as well as other locations, provided we are not forcing information on people who have not asked for it. For more about this topic, please see Tradition Eleven.

¹³ See Traditions Eleven and Twelve for additional detail.

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EDA conferences and workshops should never aim to make a profit. We do not want finances to become a distraction. While we use 7th Tradition funds to support specific objectives such as supporting the General Service Board, hosting online meetings, purchasing EDA literature for a meeting, or renting a venue for an EDA event, it is never ok to associate the EDA name with a money-generating operation such as a counseling practice or even a non-profit treatment center.

The relationship between EDA and outside Twelve Step fellowships can be confusing due to shared core concepts. In the early days before there was an EDA Big Book, many EDA groups used outside literature, including AA texts. However, there are important distinctions between the programs. Any literature, including AA's, that focuses on abstinence as a goal directly conflicts with EDA's belief that recovery comes from persistently applying the Twelve Steps of EDA to develop the needed perspective and balance. The EDA General Service Board unanimously decided not to include AA literature as part of EDA's foundation: AA literature is not EDA literature.¹⁴ It is fine, however, to quote passages from outside literature that are explicitly referenced in EDA texts at EDA meetings.

Tradition Six means EDA does not endorse anything outside of EDA. One EDA group recommended that everyone attend non-EDA Twelve-Step meetings to get more support. The same group advised everyone to describe themselves as “an addict” to facilitate “fitting in” with these other fellowships. These practices were brought to the GSB’s attention as violations of Traditions Four and Six: the group was affecting EDA as a whole by endorsing outside entities and promoting the idea that an eating disorder is an addiction. EDA does not embrace this idea. People

¹⁴ AA World Services, in a letter to EDA’s GSB dated May 25, 2017 (seven months after the EDA Big Book was published), requested that if AA literature is read at all, that it be read as written—without word substitution.

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with eating disorders frequently report *feeling* that they are struggling with an addiction, and this is not wrong, but there is more to the story. While the EDA Big Book states that EDA has no opinion on this topic,¹⁵ many who started EDA with the idea that they were addicted to specific foods or behaviors later realized that eating disorders had little or nothing to do with addiction. Many, if not most, professionals in the field of eating disorders treatment and prevention think eating disorders should not be viewed as addictions. Drs. Dennis and Pryor, for instance, cite multiple sources in describing eating disorders as treatable, curable psychiatric conditions in which the goal of treatment is to *moderate over-control and normalize eating patterns*, whereas the goal of treatment in substance use disorders (often viewed as chronic medical conditions which can be arrested but not cured) is to increase self-restraint.¹⁶ These are opposite goals. In sum, while abstinence is regarded as “the path to sustain remission” for substance use disorders (i.e., addiction), a focus on abstinence is contraindicated for eating disorder recovery.¹⁷

Like the medical professionals cited above, EDA’s initial members recognized that rigidity, anxiety, and fear of having eating disordered thoughts and behaviors were all detrimental to recovery. Many other Twelve Step fellowships take the stance that engaging in behaviors is a “slip” or relapse requiring a return to Step One. This can be especially shameful for people with eating disorders since it often takes many months or years of diligent effort to develop the coping skills and practices necessary for full recovery. In EDA, we know we will have eating disordered thoughts and behaviors until we no longer need

¹⁵ Eating Disorders Anonymous. (2016) Carlsbad, CA: Gürze Books, xiii.

¹⁶ Dennis, Amy Baker, and Tamara Pryor. 2019. “The Complex Relationship Between Eating Disorders and Substance Use Disorders.” Gürze-Salucore Eating Disorders Catalogue. January 27, 2019. <https://www.edcatalogue.com/complex-relationship-eating-disorders-substance-use-disorders/>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

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them.¹⁸ Fear of ourselves, our thinking, our bodies, and our eating disorders does not help us establish the relationships of trust that we need as a basis for recovery. Our experience has been that the way out of an eating disorder is to fully embrace it—not with fear, but with gentleness, courage, curiosity, and a sense of humor. We know that trust—whether with ourselves, our bodies, other people, God, Higher Power, or higher purpose—emerges only with practice over time. As we strive to accept ourselves and our thoughts, we gradually discover attitudes and actions that bring lasting relief. Our goal is to establish a new foundation—one that provides enough perspective on our lives that we can walk free—unafraid of ourselves.

Many other Twelve Step groups count numbers as a measure of recovery. One hears of weighing and measuring in some fellowships and years of abstinence/sobriety/clean time in others. In EDA, we don't find it helpful to count numbers of any sort: we don't weigh or measure anything, including days or years of freedom, because as noted above, a return to old behaviors is very common in early recovery. Any focus on this fact tends to generate shame which is counterproductive to the attitude of acceptance and compassion needed for recovery. In EDA we look at a return to old behaviors as a learning opportunity. As we resolve our underlying thinking problems which cause anxiety and rigidity, and become more positive and proactive, our recovery grows stronger and more flexible. In our experience, numbers have nothing to do with this process.

Gisele B, EDA's founder, addressed the topics of "balance versus abstinence", focusing on numbers, and "fitting in" with other programs at the June 6, 2018 meeting of EDA's GSB.¹⁹

¹⁸ Eating Disorders Anonymous. (2016) Carlsbad, CA: Gürze Books, xxix

¹⁹ GSB Meeting Minutes, June 6, 2018, GSB of EDA Archives. Refer to the long form of the address for additional content indicated by ellipses.

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“I wanted to address this separately because this is such an important issue. An EDA member recently raised a concern about EDA's statement that ‘balance—not abstinence—is our goal.’

My recovery is inside, not based on external measurements. The work of recovery is work we do on ourselves. Letting go of eating disordered behaviors is a byproduct of that work. I don't see any way of getting full recovery in EDA without working on my *real* issues. Ask people who have full recovery, ‘When did you get full recovery?’ and the answer is almost always, ‘I am not exactly sure.’ ...

I realized getting balance in every area of my life was what worked. I still have a long way to go—lots of room for growth—but I know I am in full recovery because of where my focus is: on what is really important. The reason I identify in meetings as fully recovered is to give the newcomer hope, and for my own accountability.

This can be a hard gig, just living life, but anyone can gain their life back, and it is worth it. Because EDA does not focus on numbers and length of time, my focus goes to dealing with my issues so I can live at peace with myself.

Abstinence was never the model for EDA and I want to make that clear: EDA is not an abstinence-based program; it is a full recovery program. The process of recovery is messy. It's never just about stopping a behavior. It's about fundamental transformation.

EDA is different from other Twelve Step programs and I pray the foundation and principles do not ever get compromised or watered down, so we can "fit in" or feel more comfortable with other programs.

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The foundation of a program is very important to keep intact. ‘Balance—not abstinence—is our goal’ has such a deep meaning. I don't think we knew at first how important this was going to be, or how well it would work—but it is important because it *does* work.”

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EDA Members’ Reflections on Tradition Six:

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- I think we should be very careful about what we tell newcomers about attendance at other Twelve Step programs. It is disrespectful to the newcomer and other fellowships to think all issues and recovery from them are the same. The Steps and fundamental transformation may be the same, but the issues and the way we have to think about them in order to recover are very different.
- Our group hosted a table for EDA at a local health fair. We made a simple banner for our table so people would know who we were. It felt great to share information about EDA with those who were seeking it. We were careful not to approach anyone who was not looking for information, but I smiled a lot and got a lot of interest.
- Tradition Six reminds EDA groups not to get distracted by money, property, or prestige. I’ve worked closely with professionals and treatment centers to help others and it can be a wonderful experience. Collaboration helps everyone.
- Our group meetings take place in a large hospital. Before the meeting, we put up signs: “Eating Disorders Anonymous meets at 4PM in Boardroom 7.” Our signs are informational. They do not promote the hospital or EDA. We take the signs down when the meeting is over.

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- I post informational flyers about my EDA meeting anywhere that I can – including the library and the laundromat. I also drop off brochures with a couple of local therapists. I appreciate that we get new people at my meeting almost every week.
- I am a professional who sees clients with eating disorders at an inpatient treatment facility. I am also a member of EDA. When I attend EDA meetings, I am not acting in my professional capacity. I love where I work and am proud of the work we do, but in meetings I do not mention or recommend any facility.

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### Tradition Seven

**Every EDA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.** EDA subsists solely on voluntary donations from its members. Financial contributions from outside our fellowship would distract from our primary purpose and undermine group autonomy. Each EDA group is responsible for its own expenses, while carrying a prudent reserve.

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EDA's General Service Board (GSB) has happily avoided some of the struggles with money and power that early AA members had to address. Starting out with the policy of corporate poverty that AA ultimately adopted, EDA has continued to decline offers of money and support from outside entities. We know from reading AA history that it is important to pay our own way, lest we become beholden to outside influence. We remember the old adage, "whoever pays the piper is apt to call the tune."<sup>20</sup> We have not permitted anyone to bequeath large sums of money to our organization, and (in keeping with Traditions Six and Seven), have rejected both financial and other forms of support from outside organizations.

Small groups may find it hard to meet expenses. At these times, some group members may try to shoulder too much of the burden. It can be tempting to accept outside help in defraying expenses. New meeting founders can try to find locations that charge minimal or no rent until the group is large enough to safely cover costs at a larger venue. Some of EDA's earliest meetings were established in people's homes. Members contributed to cover childcare expenses for the hour, even if they did not bring children themselves.

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<sup>20</sup> Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. (1981) New York, NY: AA World Services, Inc., page 164.

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In addition to rent (and sometimes childcare) there are often other expenses such as keeping a few copies of the EDA Big Book on hand and printing brochures. Most EDA groups, as part of the standard meeting format, collect voluntary “7th Tradition” monetary contributions near the end of each meeting to cover such expenses. While newcomers are typically invited to attend without an expectation of donating anything, we encourage EDA members to contribute as they can. Collectively, we can do more to carry the message if we have sufficient resources to support the effort.

Each EDA group is encouraged to assess its ongoing operational costs. In addition to books and brochures, expenses typically include paying rent and printing meeting flyers to leave at locations where they might be useful, such as treatment professionals’ offices, treatment centers, and Twelve-Step clubhouses. Some groups keep cash on hand for reimbursing those who travel to treatment centers to carry the message of recovery. Some groups keep a reserve for hosting workshops or providing scholarships for group members to attend workshops held elsewhere. Some groups keep local libraries supplied with literature and hold money in reserve for that. Some groups keep a bank account which requires paying bank fees. Each group should carefully choose its treasurer and ensure proper and prudent management of all funds and payments. A group conscience can be taken to determine how to address special expenses, for instance to host a workshop.

Ideally, each group should keep enough funds on hand to cover at least three months’ expenses—a prudent reserve—before making contributions to an area or district EDA intergroup (where applicable), or to the General Service Board (GSB), to support centralized services that support all EDA groups.

Being “self-supporting” applies to more than financial concerns. Tradition Five states that the primary purpose of each EDA group is to



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carry its message of recovery to others with eating disorders; each EDA group must consider what it needs to be effective in fulfilling this purpose. Generally, most groups need members to fill specific service positions. These positions may include a *chairperson* to facilitate meetings, a *membership chair* to manage the meeting contact list, a *newcomer greeter* to welcome and follow-up with newcomers, a *treasurer* to collect and disseminate funds, a *General Service Board Representative (GSR)* to represent the group at GSB meetings and to carry information back to the group, and a *secretary* responsible for chairing the group's business meetings and keeping a record of decisions made. Some EDA groups have a *speaker coordinator* who lines up speakers. Since each group is autonomous, other positions may be required. Each of these group-level service positions are staffed through EDA group members' voluntary donations of time.

Many small EDA groups do not have formally assigned roles. *What is important is that each group determines how to carry a strong message of recovery without burning anyone out.* EDA groups are encouraged to rotate positions regularly to prevent leadership from being concentrated in just a few individuals and ensure as many as possible have the opportunity to serve. Filling a service role helps us recognize that our contributions of time and effort are valued. Once our basic needs are met, it is of utmost importance that we turn our time and attention to ways we can be of service to others. Helping others is the foundation of our recovery.<sup>21</sup>

The principle of rotation is important so that no one person is associated with any one job. As a new person rotates into a role, we find it helpful for the person rotating out of the role to support the new person by

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<sup>21</sup> Eating Disorders Anonymous. (2016) Carlsbad, CA: Gürze Books, 200, and Alcoholics Anonymous. (2001) New York, NY: AA World Services, Inc., 97.

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conveying their understanding of the role's responsibilities, and by sharing their experience, strength, and hope.

EDA has always encouraged balance and getting one's own basic needs met first so that there would be capacity for turning attention to serve others. While EDA discourages members from using excessive service to avoid the hard work of recovery, waiting to feel "confident" in recovery before performing any service at the group level is a mistake. We recover not by waiting for recovery to come to us but by taking small risks—committing to doing something and following through on commitments. Being reliable builds self-esteem.

Just as an EDA group cannot survive if it is not self-supporting, service structures outside the group level such as the GSB cannot survive without regular and committed support (time, talent, ideas, and contributions) from EDA groups and members. There have been a few times in EDA's history when no one stepped up to post information about EDA meetings on the EDA website. Each time, the GSB put up an automatic response letting people know meeting information could be out of date and that the GSB needed volunteers. Thankfully, the auto-responder only needed to stay up for a short time because EDA members understood the value of the service and quickly closed the gap.

It is important for service boards and committees to assess how well they are doing in delivering services, to regularly check in with EDA groups and members to see if services are needed and valued, and to elicit ideas for how things can be done more efficiently. The goal for each EDA service board and committee is to deliver the best possible service with the least amount of cost and overhead, and with the greatest transparency and accountability.

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## EDA Members' Reflections on Tradition Seven:

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- I am grateful EDA has a Tradition Seven. I like knowing we will not be subjected to outside influence from treatment centers, publishers, religious institutions, and commercial entities.
- I am grateful that EDA never accepted any remuneration from outside entities, and that the EDA message of recovery is dependent only on EDA members' experience, strength, and hope.
- I never thought much about the 7th Tradition applying to contributions of service. My group is small and we struggle to find people to accept responsibility at times. It can be very disheartening to shoulder the whole burden myself. I am happy to read that I can encourage people to overcome the perfectionism that tells them they have to have perfect recovery and do service "exactly right." We should not let perfection be a bar to progress.
- I am reminded of the saying, "*Anything worth doing is worth doing badly.*" Once we get started on service, we can always get feedback and improve incrementally — both individually and as a group.
- Two of my groups were offered a room to use for free — one in a library and one in a church. To be self-sufficient, we made a monthly rent "donation" to both. At first when our group was small, we donated what we could. As our group and member contributions grew, we increased the amount to a more reasonable level.
- In my meeting, we take care to use the money or send it to the GSB instead of sitting on it. We don't want to hold on to money that could be put to good use helping other groups or EDA as a whole.
- When I started a meeting, I bought books and made a bunch of copies. Once the meeting got going and our group attendance was consistent, other members started participating in making sure the group was functioning for others. To me, at that point it shifted from

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being *my meeting*, where people came on time and left once it was over, to being *our group*, where people came early and stayed late.

- It's pretty easy to think about self-support when money is involved—not just for my group, but for me. I know in my recovery it was really important to start taking care of myself, and that involved *not* expecting others to support me. When we are adults and not completely impaired, we need to be responsible for paying our own way. If we live with our parents, we need to pay full rent. If we go to coffee shops or restaurants where our friends work, we don't expect free coffee and meals. It is the same with EDA. Taking care of myself contributed to my self-esteem and self-trust. EDA members taking care of EDA groups gives us esteem and trust collectively.
- Like most of us, I have a little trouble recognizing self-support when money isn't obviously involved. My group was getting indirect financial support, beyond the obvious “free rent.” The treatment center where we held our meetings offered to print brochures for the group and to buy books we wanted to use. We realized that wasn't self-support.
- I used to use time (and copier supplies) at work to print out materials for my EDA group. After a while it got me thinking that this was subsidizing EDA by stealing my time and materials from my work. Now I am more honest. I use my own time and money to support my group. I am happier being more present in my work while at work, and more present when doing service for EDA. It feels a lot more peaceful.
- Another quirky self-support issue for my group was with participation. We voted (unanimously) to take an EDA meeting to a nearby treatment center, but no one would take the commitment consistently. The one who did take it seriously was frequently the only one who showed up. I realized that when I was voting I needed to consider whether I was going to honor my vote by showing up.

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### Tradition Eight

**EDA should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.** We do not give or receive payment for Twelve-Step work. While we support EDA members in their individual pursuit of professional help, we are not a professional organization. EDA employs workers when necessary to maintain the essential functions that support our fellowship.

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Tradition Eight clarifies that our work directly with one another—Twelfth Step work (such as sponsoring others) in which we share our personal experience, strength, and hope to help fellow EDA members work the Steps—must never be compensated. EDA also does not compensate members who volunteer at the group level (Twelve-Step work), such as chairing meetings, bringing literature, setting up chairs, and representing the group at the General Service Board (GSB).

All service positions in EDA rotate so all EDA members have the opportunity to serve. Rotation of service positions also keeps groups vibrant and healthy, preventing any one member from having special authority, and ensuring no one gets burned out by having to do too much. The reasons we do not pay anyone for Twelve-Step group work or Twelfth Step individual work are the same as those outlined in Tradition Six: we need to be mindful that problems of money, property, or prestige can impair our ability to carry the EDA message.

EDA does not offer professional services and never refers members to specific healthcare professionals, though EDA does recommend that EDA members leverage outside resources such as doctors, therapists,

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and registered dietitians when needed. Some EDA members work in the field of eating disorders recovery and prevention, and others hope to work in this field in the future. Great care is called for to ensure that such employment remains separate and distinct from an EDA member's Twelfth Step work, as conflicts of interest can arise. For example, an EDA member considered expanding her life-coaching business to address the needs of EDA members who were struggling to find a sponsor. This EDA member had volunteered to help potential sponsees find sponsors, but the list of unmatched sponsees was growing much faster than the list of available sponsors. In addition, some people who were struggling with their sponsors had reached out seeking other options. The situation was both frustrating and distressing for the EDA member. It initially seemed that everyone would benefit from the expansion of the EDA member's life-coaching business to cover the unmet needs, so she sent an email inviting those looking for a sponsor to take advantage of her life-coaching service. Tradition Eight cautions us not to mix sponsorship or other Twelfth-Step work with business interests. When this was pointed out, the EDA member immediately saw how she was mixing her private business with sponsorship and sent out a retraction of her offer with an apology.

Sponsoring others in working EDA's Twelve Steps is a wonderful opportunity to turn a life of pain and misery into one that inspires others through honesty, integrity, compassion, and hope.<sup>22</sup> Sponsors do not provide professional counseling or other paid services to sponsees as part of their sponsorship. Sponsors should never impress upon a sponsee any obligation for special consideration (financial or otherwise).

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<sup>22</sup> Eating Disorders Anonymous. (2016) Carlsbad, CA: Gürze Books, 200, and Alcoholics Anonymous. (2001) New York, NY: AA World Services, Inc., 236.

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Sponsors should make it clear to sponsees that sponsorship is a service they do for their own recovery, not just to help others.

Group-level service work and individual Twelfth-Step work are both unpaid. Tradition Eight makes it clear that the GSB, which provides central services that support EDA groups, can contract for services and employ people to do whatever is needed. EDA groups usually send a portion of their 7<sup>th</sup> Tradition monies to fund essential central services that cannot reasonably be covered by volunteers. The GSB pays for services including website hosting, virus protection, and online meeting resources. The GSB has hired publishers, printers, and graphic designers in the past and may do so again in the future.

As EDA grows, the GSB may need to expand its centralized services, and might need to hire an office manager, secretary, accountant, or other specialists. EDA members with expertise and skills in the areas needed are welcome to participate in the bidding process. It's important to note that the GSB ensures fairness by paying market rates for services that volunteers are unable to provide. EDA members are not paid less than non-members for work that would otherwise be outsourced.

Tradition Eight permits the GSB to hire individuals for such services, while making it clear that individual Twelfth-Step work and group-level services should remain distinct and never professionalized.

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EDA Members' Reflections on Tradition Eight:

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- When I first read this Tradition, I wasn't impressed. The wording is distressingly vague. What was meant by "service centers" and "special workers?" As I gained experience with our fellowship, the reason for the lack of specificity became clear. The GSB might eventually need to staff an office (a.k.a. a service center). It might need to hire electricians, attorneys, or office managers (a.k.a. special workers). Tradition Eight makes sure the GSB can hire professional services when needed.
- One of my groups had an issue with a therapist who was running an eating disorders recovery meeting in her office (using EDA materials) and calling it an EDA meeting. She was charging a nominal fee from each person attending. The meeting was listed on the EDA website. One of us in the group contacted the GSB about this. The GSB clarified that EDA groups are led only by EDA members. The therapist would have to be participating as a regular EDA member or the group could not be listed as an EDA meeting. Further, the GSB advised that leadership positions should be rotated and that no one should be charged a fee for meeting attendance. While facilities usually do charge rent, and EDA groups can provide rent details in their meeting formats, EDA members donate whatever they can. There are no dues or fees for group participation or EDA membership. The therapist agreed to stop charging a fee and the group agreed to rotate leadership and become a true EDA meeting. The meeting format was updated to state the rent obligation and recommended a contribution amount, but there is no mandatory fee. Meeting regulars are happy we have become a "real" EDA group.
- A person in my group raised questions about the inclusion of Letters of Support in the EDA Big Book. She said, "The people who wrote the Letters of Support used their full names. Doesn't this mean they broke their anonymity? Doesn't this mean we are paying EDA members for EDA work?" We wrote to the GSB and found out that two of the Letters of Support authors had



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attended open EDA meetings, and the other two had not attended any meetings. None of the writers considered themselves EDA members, and no one writing EDA literature has ever been compensated for their work.

- A sponsor in another program once shared that she tithed to her sponsor. It felt like she was suggesting I do the same. I found a new sponsor.
- I am a professional in the field of eating disorders prevention and treatment as well as a recovered member of EDA. I never accept sponsees as clients nor allow clients to become sponsees for ethical reasons. To do so would also conflict with Tradition Eight.
- My sponsee has a painting business and I like hiring people I know. I am careful to be clear when hiring EDA members that I am paying market rates for their professional services not because of any pre-existing relationship but because it is correct to compensate people fairly for their work.

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## Tradition Nine

**EDA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.** The EDA fellowship is grounded in guidance based on experience. We avoid giving directions or ultimatums lest we risk defiance and competition between members and groups. Since our experience proves that service work is essential for recovery, we extend opportunities for our members to be of service within the EDA fellowship.

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Without service boards or committees, EDA's message of hope and recovery would be severely curtailed. A simple example is the EDA website. The upkeep of the website requires organization and committee work as well as funding. The absence of the website would leave those searching for EDA information without access to crucial resources like meeting details, literature, contacts, and recovery tools. In the absence of an EDA website, EDA members interested in starting a meeting would not have ready access to a standard meeting format, free brochures, the EDA Meeting Guide or helpful suggestions for starting and sustaining an EDA group. Another example where organization beyond the level of the EDA group is required is the development, review, and publication of EDA literature, including the EDA Big Book, this text, and brochures that address our common concerns. EDA members from across the globe participate in this work, which is coordinated by a few trusted servants on EDA's General Service Board (GSB).

While EDA groups may create service boards and committees to support them in carrying the message of EDA, it is a matter of principle—and of this Tradition—that they remain as free of unnecessary complexity and overhead as possible: the aim is simplicity. Each board and committee remains responsible directly to those it serves.

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At the meeting level a committee might be needed to find a new location for the group. Across multiple meetings, a committee might be needed to host a regional retreat. At the General Service Board level, many committees are needed to respond to email, reach out to professionals, maintain the EDA website, as well as update EDA literature. All EDA committees have the authority and responsibility to discharge their tasks as efficiently and professionally as possible while remaining directly responsible to those they serve. Transparency and accountability are important in committee work. While EDA members serving on committees are not in charge of anyone, each committee chair is responsible for ensuring that everyone affected by a committee decision is represented before votes are taken.

We may marvel at the idea of large numbers of individuals and groups, not just in EDA but in all Twelve Step fellowships, somehow collaborating without any formal organization or governance. Our approach works because we are unified by a single, common purpose and committed to the idea of non-governance. We focus on principles and concepts upon which we can all agree. We aim to have as few rules as possible, with just enough centralized structure that groups can operate efficiently.

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EDA Members' Reflections on Tradition Nine:

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- When I got to EDA I was surprised there were no membership forms and no dues to pay. It blows my mind that any group could function so well with so little organization.
- I am glad Tradition Nine supports forming committees and service boards to help carry a unified and positive message to those who have

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never heard of us. Without any type of organization, it would just be individual heroes and chaos.

- My experience with groups is that unless people are empowered and charged with the responsibility to do things, nothing much gets done. I am glad that at my meeting we have a committee that helps put on Step Workshops. The chair of that committee does a lot! I am grateful that the GSB is empowered to maintain our website and literature so we are consistent in how we carry the message across groups. I have attended GSB meetings and have been impressed with how dedicated everyone is.
- I like to keep things simple and used to have no interest in anything "extra". My attitude was, "I will stick to my Steps and meetings, thank you very much!" Then my group started to struggle. We had some issues with some attendees, and core members were leaving. I realized that what I had considered "extra" things were basics, just as essential to my recovery and the health of my group as any other basic needs. We found information on how to deal with difficult situations on EDA's website. We followed some of the guidance offered. As our membership began to rebuild, we began to reach out to neighboring groups for speaker exchanges. All of this happened quickly and easily because information was accessible online.
- Rotation is such a key idea, and one that is very important to ensuring no one person has too much authority or seniority.
- Respect is at the heart of cheerful service. We are all equals in EDA, and we respect every EDA member.
- My experience as one of the "trusted servants" on EDA committees and boards is that such roles are the antithesis of "being the boss." Instead of command and control, I have learned patience and humility. I treasure how much I have grown through the examples of cheerful service offered by those around me. I hope my own humble example will help carry on this tradition.

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## Tradition Ten

**EDA has no opinion on outside issues; hence the EDA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.** EDA does not take sides in any debate. A foundation of neutrality and acceptance allows us to remain focused entirely on our primary purpose.

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Tradition Ten reminds us that EDA groups have but one primary purpose: to carry the message of how we recovered from our eating disorders to those with a desire to recover. In EDA, *any* other cause or issue, no matter how important or uncontroversial, needs to be kept out of meetings to ensure we focus on what unifies us rather than on what could divide us and cause confusion. As a group, EDA takes no position on outside issues.

The communities, states, and nations we live in are frequently engaged in conflict. While individuals in EDA may hold differing opinions on matters of public controversy and may actively support organizations outside of EDA, we take care to *leave outside activities out* of EDA gatherings. This applies to conversations before and after online meetings that are held on platforms sponsored by EDA's General Service Board (GSB).<sup>23</sup>

EDA has no position on the pros or cons of any outside recovery tools, programs, treatment centers, books, food plans, exercise programs, and other Twelve Step fellowships. Even brief mentions of external resources during meetings can be confusing, particularly to anyone not acquainted with EDA's Traditions. It can be challenging when one of us has found something they think will be helpful to everyone in EDA. For example, a member of the GSB went to a non-EDA workshop promoting spiritual healing and could not stop sharing about how great it was. When they

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<sup>23</sup> See Tradition 6 in this text for additional reasons why EDA does not endorse, finance, or lend the EDA name to any outside enterprise.

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sent an invitation to the next workshop to the entire GSB distribution list, the GSB quickly stopped the email and apologized to everyone who received it. The GSB does not permit its distribution list to be used for any purpose other than to support EDA groups in carrying EDA's message of recovery.

EDA does not have any position on political or religious matters. By keeping to what unifies us in EDA settings we remain welcoming to anyone attending meetings regardless of where they stand on any outside issue. Bringing up outside topics that incite anger, fear, and animosity can destroy our ability to carry a message of solidarity, hope, and encouragement. Although we may think we ought to share our positions on non-EDA topics with others in EDA settings, we must refrain from doing so to maintain solidarity and respect within our fellowship.

Let us consider a scenario where a newcomer who passionately supports an unpopular opinion attends their first EDA meeting. They observe EDA members wearing attire supporting the opposite position and even hear a share where the topic is mentioned. This could easily dissuade the newcomer from returning. We think we should take care to avoid discussion of topics and display of items that could be distracting or alienating.

Some topics that EDA considers "outside issues" may surprise newcomers. Food, food plans, exercise, and weight are not useful topics of conversation in EDA. EDA does not endorse any regimen of eating or exercise because our solutions rely on working the Steps to gain perspective and balance in all aspects of life. Everything else—no matter how beneficial or detrimental to us individually—is an outside concern. When it comes to food, EDA endorses sound nutrition, but takes no position on nutritional plans or approaches. Food is fuel for our lives. Enjoyment of meals and socialization with others is nourishing as well. We leave the details of what feels good and right up to the individual.

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Sometimes it is necessary for an EDA member to work with one or more professionals before they are medically stable and safe enough to address root causes—the reasons we developed our eating disorders. In EDA, we encourage everyone to take advantage of whatever outside support is available as needed. In meetings, however, mentions of specific food, food plans, weight, exercise, and numbers are distractions and outside issues; we do not discuss them in EDA. Instead, we talk about our life challenges and our feelings, and how we are using the tools of EDA to address them.

Although many EDA members also belong to other Twelve-Step fellowships, we do not discuss them in EDA meetings. Some members have had profound and wonderful experiences in other programs, including those addressing food and eating issues, and are more than willing to share their positive experiences. Others, however, have had the opposite experience and are bitter about it. It is important to respect that all other Twelve-Step fellowships are “outside issues.” If we stick to what we know works—EDA’s solutions—we can avoid unnecessary controversy and confusion.

We have learned we have to leave all our differences aside, or we may not be able to truly help each other recover from eating disorders. Our ability to listen to each other with calm perspective and respect regardless of anyone’s position on outside issues is what our service work and 12<sup>th</sup> Step work requires of each of us. We hope our example of civility, decency, and respect for one another – both in and outside of EDA meetings – will serve as a model for healthy and productive engagement in all aspects of life.

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Reflections on Tradition Ten:

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- My group became enthusiastic about supporting the rights of minorities. One member in our group said that not taking a stance meant supporting the status quo (oppression and marginalization of the minority). Most of us agreed: something needed to be done. We started talking about what we could do about this in our meetings. Soon, we became divided about what to do, and it wasn't long before the group fell apart, even though we could all see the value of taking a stand on this outside issue. Now I can see why Tradition Ten matters. I loved that group and now it is gone.
- I am having a hard time trusting a neighbor who I have come to love and respect over the years. Their social media posts are now so repugnant to me and my values that I can hardly look them in the eye. This situation helps me understand the importance of not permitting outside issues in EDA. I can see where doing so could destroy trust.
- I've seen EDA members wear hats and jewelry announcing political and religious affiliations at meetings and these serve to remind me that we are not all the same. Recovery starts when we see how we are the same as someone we respect and trust who has recovered; we start to believe we, too, can recover. If we are upset by another person's stance on political or religious issues, we might not be able to hear them properly.
- I like that we *are* different, and can *respect* that we are different, without making "differences" a subject of conversation in EDA. To recover, we need a spirit of openness and inquiry. I am so grateful EDA avoids engaging in controversy.
- When I first got to EDA, I was critical because the singleness of purpose just seemed naive. It annoyed me that I could not talk about what was really bothering me in meetings. Then I realized that other people in the same meetings were just as upset as I was, but their position was 180 degrees from mine. Now I see that focusing on what works in recovery —hearing one another,



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validating emotional challenges, identifying solutions, and putting them into practice—holds hope for us all. If I can tolerate those who are so very different from me and work for their success, others who believe differently from me ought to be able to do the same.

- I get support for my recovery anywhere I can get it. For example, I have some amazing books that I am very passionate about. I used to read various excerpts to my group, until someone asked me what the name of the book was. I realized that including outside literature, no matter how meaningful to me, endorses an outside entity and could easily bring controversy to my group.
- I am so glad we don't discuss food or numbers in EDA meetings. I've been to other groups where food was discussed. It was like a diet club, and I never got to the bottom of why I was binge-eating and restricting. In EDA, in the absence of distractions, I've made real progress. I rarely find myself back in old behaviors. After many years, I am at a stable weight. I'm no longer afraid of food. I no longer have insane cravings. The best part is that I am not afraid of myself. I thought it was so weird not to talk about food when I first got to EDA, but it made all the difference.
- People in my groups occasionally bring up other Twelve Step programs or literature. When this happens, if it is a brief mention, I usually let it go, but if they want to talk about these things at length, I speak up. It is not especially easy or comfortable reminding people that other Twelve Step programs and literature are outside issues, but it is important, so I do it.

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## Tradition Eleven

**Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need to maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, film, and web.** Our fellowship gains membership by demonstrating EDA principles in our daily lives and by sharing our message of recovery within our groups. We focus on the EDA program rather than on individual members. Each member serves as an active guardian of our fellowship.

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While the primary purpose of each EDA group is to carry the EDA message of full recovery to those struggling with eating disorders, the way we carry the message is essential. We are not marketing a product. We have no claims to make about our process, except that it works for us.

We can carry the message of recovery far more effectively by talking about EDA principles and the process of recovery itself, avoiding any semblance of self-promotion. By humbly sharing our personal experience, strength, and hope, we can establish a foundation of trust and possibly inspire hope in those seeking recovery from eating disorders. Conversely, adopting a boastful or prideful tone about our successes seldom leads to meaningful connections that foster lasting recovery. Those of us who have tried this approach can assure you it does not work!

The same principle that applies to working with individuals also works collectively. When EDA as a fellowship is modest, EDA is more likely to attract people with eating disorders who are looking for relief. In EDA, we know there are no guarantees in recovery, and our solution is not the only path to recovery. To act as if our approach is the best or the only way would be a disservice and disrespectful to others' experiences.

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We only know that what works for us is likely to work for others. Like other Twelve Step fellowships, we allow our success to speak for us. Nothing convinces people of an approach's efficacy more than seeing its positive impacts firsthand.

EDA's history includes well-meaning efforts to carry the message of recovery that exceeded the bounds of what most EDA members would likely consider to be "attraction rather than promotion." Although carrying the message is necessary for other people to learn about EDA and find recovery through the program, anything that goes beyond basic information-sharing could be seen as promotion. For example, organizers for one EDA Step Workshop put flyers on car windshields in a parking lot close to an eating disorders recovery event hosted by an outside organization. With hindsight, they realized that compelling individuals to remove EDA flyers they had not actively requested was an inconvenience that was more promotional than attractive.

Hosting an information and outreach table at an event where people can read or take EDA literature – provided no one is forcing brochures or literature on anyone—is an example of "attraction, not promotion." Sending out a few emails with information about where to find details about an EDA workshop or special EDA event is fine. Posting a single flyer in other fellowships' meeting halls, in treatment centers, and in therapists' offices can be an effective means of conveying information to those who need it. Taking out an advertisement in a newspaper—provided the advertisement is only about the time(s), location, and format of meeting(s)—is helpful and encouraged. Announcements about EDA in another fellowship's meeting, however, is disrespectful of that meeting's singleness of purpose—and is clearly promotional. This type of sharing about EDA is best done one-on-one.

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We are delighted for opportunities to share information about EDA with treatment professionals but draw the line at direct interviews with media. EDA's public relations policy has been to direct all media inquiries to our website and literature rather than to accept requests for direct personal interviews at the level of press, radio, film, and web.

The concept that EDA is about attraction and not promotion has important ramifications for each of us individually. We need to consider whether those who are aware of our EDA membership find our conduct attractive or offensive. We think that living by the EDA Motto, HEALTH (honesty, equality, accountability, love, trust, humility), is the best way to carry the message.

- We are **honest and kind**.
  - Maintaining or building dignity and integrity while being honest is being kind to ourselves and others.
- We treat everyone respectfully because we are all **equals**.
  - We focus on the positive aspects of our own actions and help others to do the same.
  - We celebrate milestones together. Milestones are thoughts and actions that promote our recovery, helping us notice what we did right.
- We are **accountable** and transparent.
  - We communicate our intentions and follow through on what we commit to do.
  - We take care of our own basic needs.
  - If we fall short, we own up to it and try to set matters right.
- We set an example of **love**: we aim to be empathetic.
  - We listen attentively.
  - We strive to empathize; we do not minimize anyone's difficulties.

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- We know that everyone endures pain. We don't try to fix anyone. Instead, we are supportive of one another.
- We do not dominate conversations.
- We build **trust** with ourselves and others.
  - We do what we say or do our best and are honest about our limitations.
  - We take small risks to develop trust with ourselves.
  - We share struggles as well as milestones with others, which helps build connection and trust with others.
  - We value our sense of humor and don't take ourselves too seriously.
  - We tell the truth even when it is uncomfortable.
- We are **humble**—we are open-minded, flexible, and open to feedback and new ideas.
  - We focus on personal growth and service to others rather than seeking admiration or praise for our actions.
  - We respect everyone's efforts.
  - We strive not to judge anyone.
  - We listen with love and attention rather than having to be heard.

Maintaining anonymity at the level of press, radio, film, and web helps remind us that we succeed through *humble service*, not through self-seeking activities. We find joy and validation through internal alignment with our God, Higher Power, or higher purpose, rather than seeking external validation. We take care to prevent unintended breaches of anonymity by using blind carbon copy (bcc) when sending emails to EDA groups. We create emails for our EDA groups that omit people's names. We maintain one another's anonymity when we meet EDA people in mixed contexts such as work and social groups.

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While it may seem appealing to utilize social media platforms for group activities and connecting with one another, it is essential to recognize that such practices are not suitable for Twelve Step groups, as anonymity and privacy are core principles. Even if a social media group is “private”, information about individuals using the platform is not truly anonymous. If an EDA group has already committed to a social media platform, we ask that every member take strong measures to safeguard their own information.

We acknowledge that de-identifying oneself on social media might violate end-user license agreements. We encourage everyone to have integrity and adhere to the agreements they have signed. Therefore, while protecting anonymity is essential, we must do so in a way that complies with legal agreements.

It is prudent for any EDA group using social media to conduct a regular inventory on whether it has taken appropriate measures to keep individual information private. It is critically important that no one “invite” anyone else to join an anonymous group via a social media platform because the invitation is not anonymous. By understanding the risks associated with social media, taking appropriate precautions, and maintaining our commitment to anonymity and integrity, we can foster an environment of trust, hope, and healing within our fellowship.

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EDA Members’ Reflections on Tradition Eleven:

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- When I think about how my actions affect others, I do a better job carrying the message. I try to think about whether my actions would attract anyone to EDA.
- Although I have declined to be interviewed by media outlets, I have shared my story at treatment centers, hospitals, professionals' offices, schools, and meetings. I am not important, but the message is.
- I have found that a low-key approach works better to carry an effective message than an over-zealous, impassioned testimonial. EDA members individually may be very enthusiastic about EDA but should take care not to "overdo it" when talking with others.
- I share my first and last name when I am in an EDA meeting. I always want someone to be able to find me if they need to. At the same time, I do not list my last name on my group's online phone list because I know I need to maintain anonymity, and nothing on the web is likely to stay private.
- Data mining companies are very proficient at connecting the dots; your aliases are not secret. With social media, your information is the product being sold to the data mining companies.
- I love my EDA group and think it's the best! I would never say anything like that in a flyer, however, because it could come across as sounding promotional.
- The principles of the program are deeply attractive when we stick to them. As I remind myself and my sponsees, actions speak louder than words.

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## Tradition Twelve

**Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.** Our fellowship is grounded on a foundation of tolerance and love. Personal distinction does not interest us. We gather with the single goal of carrying the EDA message of recovery, irrespective of our personal opinions. True humility is achieved through the principle of anonymous service. We place priority on principles, not personalities.

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Anonymity extends beyond mere confidentiality. In embracing anonymity, every EDA member acknowledges their place within a collective whole where each person's contribution is valued, but their differences and distinctions are not a focus. Anonymity serves as an expression of humility, which is necessary for our personal recovery. Humble service, performed without expectation of recognition or reward, stands as a critical cornerstone in maintaining the vitality of every EDA group. By upholding humility and offering humble service, EDA members not only support their own recovery but contribute to the well-being of the entire EDA community.

Just as early members of AA feared being associated with a stigmatized label long after becoming sober<sup>24</sup>, members of EDA may be concerned about being labeled or embarrassed due to their history with eating disorders. The name of our fellowship, Eating Disorders Anonymous, contains a commitment to maintaining strict confidentiality among group members and attendees. This commitment extends to both an individual's attendance at EDA meetings and the content they share within meetings. When we see each other outside of EDA meetings we take care to protect one another's anonymity. If we do not, we risk

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<sup>24</sup> Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. (1981) New York, NY: AA World Services, Inc., 184-185.



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making attendance at EDA meetings unsafe—the last thing we want to do. EDA members do not pretend they don't know each other when they run into one another outside of meetings—we all have at least one friend in common: Gisele B. By upholding our commitment to anonymity, we help ensure EDA meetings are a safe space for everyone seeking recovery.

EDA members are usually happy to share information about EDA and their own recovery with others such as family, friends, and medical professionals—especially those who want resources or need support. We think these one-on-one disclosures are valuable because they let people know about EDA's existence, message, and success. By sharing their stories, EDA members also help reduce the stigma associated with eating disorders. While EDA members strictly maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, film, and web, we also want to ensure that anyone who wants to know about us can easily find out about EDA and can locate EDA groups.

EDA doesn't appoint official spokespersons for a good reason: to avoid associating our program or any EDA group with specific individuals, regardless of their charisma. This approach serves to safeguard both the individual and the collective group. By refraining from singling out any one person, we reinforce our dedication to treating all members equally and recognizing the common process and principles that unite us. If a theoretical EDA spokesperson faltered, they could bring critical attention not only to themselves but also to the EDA program and might feel pressured into being dishonest. EDA members are careful not to disclose their identities when speaking on camera or to media outlets.

EDA members rotate responsibilities within our groups, so a meeting or a service position does not become associated with any one person. At work we might refer to “Mary's meeting” but in EDA we avoid doing

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this. Instead, roles are rotated to prevent any one person from having too much power which can be associated with authority. Rotating roles can be particularly difficult when a meeting is small or has an especially beloved member who is excited to be of service. We rotate roles because we put principles before personalities, no matter what the circumstances.

It can be distressing when someone in an EDA meeting is demonstrating judgmental, controlling, abrasive, or even overly supportive behavior—for instance when a meeting chair offers gracious, but highly specific comments after each person’s milestone(s). Even when such behavior is well-intended, we might feel inclined to suffer in silence or even consider leaving the group rather than addressing the issue. In these situations, it's important for EDA members to voice their concerns, even if the person involved is a friend. This practice aligns with the principle of prioritizing principles over individual personalities. By embracing Tradition Twelve, which underscores preserving anonymity and valuing principles over personalities, we overcome our fears and, with tact, address concerns directly with the individual or bring the matter to the group conscience.

Tradition Twelve’s collective commitment to preserving anonymity and placing principles before personalities helps make EDA meetings safe and a healthy experience for everyone.

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EDA Members’ Reflections on Tradition Twelve

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- Some members may excel at carrying the EDA message. Tradition 12 reminds us to listen to the message rather than idolizing the person. In EDA we are all important, but no one is more important than the rest.
- People sometimes break others' anonymity. I think people should share intimate issues in a general way at meetings and reserve specifics for conversations with sponsors or trusted friends.
- Public figures do attend EDA meetings. I have been tempted to discuss seeing such people, but I don't. Everyone deserves privacy.
- Closed EDA meetings offer an additional level of privacy to those who do not want their identity known to anyone who does not identify as having an eating disorder.
- In keeping with the practice of anonymity, we refrain from using our last names in association with our EDA membership outside of EDA meetings. We also do not allow our photos to be used in association with EDA membership in social media and other media.
- In EDA I have learned to overlook personality quirks and focus instead on the principals of love and tolerance.
- How cool is it that in EDA rooms we are with peers? Outside roles, finances and years of recovery are not given special importance.
- When I feel the need to discuss another member with my sponsor, I do my best to leave out their name and identifying information.
- Tradition Twelve stands out because it makes it clear that we ourselves are only the messenger—not the message.