

NEW YORK CRYSTAL METH ANONYMOUS

ANONYMITY

IN THE MEETING, ON THE STREET, AND ONLINE

*"Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions,
ever reminding us to place principles before personalities."*

Tradition Twelve

Getting sober has turned our lives around, remaking us from the inside out into productive, generous, dependable human beings. Why aren't we running through the streets singing about it? In an age when reinvention and rebirth are commonplace marketing strategies for movie stars and politicians, why do we cling to this quaint notion of anonymity?

Humility

There are many practical purposes for anonymity, but the most important reason is spiritual. Our whole method of getting and staying sober involves a profound shift in the way we see ourselves and the world. In active addiction, we relied on our willpower in making any decision; predictably, our egos drove us over and over into the ditch of relapse and rationalization. Getting clean, we learn a day at a time to trust other recovering people, the whole Twelve Step way of life, and the love of our Higher Power. We go from feeling humiliated to being gratefully humble. **Humility—the awareness that our way no longer works, and that the better guidance we are receiving from CMA will lead us to a saner relationship with the world at large—is a cornerstone of recovery.**

That's why individuals keep their names—and egos—out of things. And our personal humility benefits the fellowship as a whole. CMA uses “attraction rather than promotion.” Anonymity is very attractive to most addicts. Many of us come into the rooms trailing a wake of damaged relationships. Openly sharing our past as drug abusers or our present as vulnerable newcomers in recovery might create problems with our employers, our friends, even our families. Imagine you see a new sober friend out on the street with a group of her friends. Innocently and cheerfully saying “You sounded great at the meeting last night. Isn't sobriety awesome?” could have some unforeseen fallout. What if her friends turn out to be coworkers? What if your new friend is still on probation and barely hanging on to her job?

Experience has taught us that we don't stay sober when we do recovery our way. We remain anonymous, no matter how thrilled we are about being sober, no matter how honest we believe we must be in our daily dealings, because we are not recovering by ourselves. And we've learned that our fellowship can't function unless we always remember to put principles before personalities. CMA must remain a safe place for us. This is exponentially more important for an addict just starting out in recovery. The person who has the biggest problem with his identity being known is the person we try to protect the most. Maybe that person is you?

So how do we maintain this spiritual and practical necessity, this vital anonymity?

Anonymity in the fellowship

It is up to each individual whether to give her whole name at a meeting; the vast majority do not. But we never give our fellows' names. Not saying last

names is much, much more than a cute ritual. **We promise anonymity to everyone who attends a Crystal Meth Anonymous meeting. And it's a promise we do not take lightly.** Newcomers especially find admitting their addiction is very painful, and only possible in an atmosphere of trust.

At many meetings, when the secretary reads the Twelfth Tradition—“Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities”—you will hear most of the room respond, “Hear, hear!” Who we see here, and what we hear here, we leave here. Every member from the manicurist to the movie star should trust that his coming to a CMA meeting is not going to become public knowledge. Similarly, the difficulties we share about tonight do not become the next day's gossip. Is it OK to pass on something you hear at a meeting to a fellow who wasn't there? Of course—just respect the confidentiality of the speaker. We have a great saying on this subject: “You can say what I said, but not that I said it.”

Without the safeguard of anonymity, CMA could not function at all. Let's consider how anonymity is at work in some of the fellowship's other Traditions:

Tradition Five: “Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the addict who still suffers.” Experience has taught us that the only way we can continue to focus on our primary job, to keep the rooms safe for newcomers to recovery, is to honor the anonymity of every member.

Tradition Ten: “Crystal Meth Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the CMA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.” You may have noticed that most members are reluctant to share specifics about their politics or religious beliefs in the course of their shares. That's another subtle way in which anonymity and humility are at work. CMA is not affiliated with any outside organization or sect; we come to the fellowship to get sober, not to proselytize or promote. In here we are all humble addicts, living in the simple solution of the Twelve Steps to maintain our sobriety a day at a time. It's not that we never share details of our lives—far from it!—but we try to keep personal views on controversial subjects to ourselves so others will always feel welcome.

Tradition Eleven: “Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films, and all other media.” Occasionally, the public information officer in your area will field questions from the press or direct inquiries to an experienced member. Much has been written about how best to talk to the media as a “representative” of a Twelve Step group. This Tradition was adopted because, in fact, **CMA has no representatives! We are all anonymous. No one personality, with a full name and likeness attached, can ever stand in for all of us.** When we trust our prestige to an individual, we are signing on to all of his baggage as well. This Tradition puts a brake on any member who would use his affiliation with CMA to achieve recognition, and whose relapse or self-destruction could potentially discredit

our fellowship. When we do speak to the outside world, we do so only as unnamed members, relating our individual experience.

That's how we try to conduct ourselves within the fellowship. What about when we are out among "civilians"?

Anonymity outside the fellowship

Most of us are eager to share the good news of our recovery with our friends and families. When and if we do so is always our own choice. CMA believes each member should stay as private or as open as she wishes about being in the fellowship. But when we are not in the calm confines of our meetings, the practical necessity of anonymity becomes more evident. The longer we come to CMA and other fellowships, the more sober people we are likely to get to know. The more sober people we know, the more likely our social circles will collide and overlap. This is a true blessing of recovery—embracing connections to others and shunning the isolation of using—but it can create logistical complications. A few things we do, out and about:

We are careful when discussing recovery or the fellowship in public. For example, on our way to fellowship at a restaurant or café, we are circumspect when talking about the great qualification we just heard. We wait until we're seated at a quiet table inside. You never know who might be passing.

We don't "out" each other, even to mutual friends. If a third party asks us, "How do you know Such-and-so?" We calmly reply, "We have mutual friends." It's very tempting, when the third party knows we are sober, to say that we met at a meeting. But believe us, Such-and-so would rather out herself at a time of her own choosing.

When in doubt, we sometimes speak in codes. It used to be commonplace if we were unsure of a person's membership in our fellowship to ask, "Are you a friend of Bill's?" slyly referring to one of AA's founders. But thanks to how widespread recovery is today, and how popular our stories have become in films and on TV, the connotations of seemingly innocuous terms like *meeting*, *program*, and *sponsor* are now widely known. We choose our words very carefully.

When we do break our anonymity, we are careful to check our motives. Consider our work lives: Talking about recovery on the job is a gray area. Many of us have great relationships with our employers; sometimes they helped us get into rehab and are keenly aware of our struggles. But we never want to use our recovery as an excuse to get special treatment—that's contrary to the idea of becoming a humble "worker among workers." Similarly, we don't advertise our membership in CMA as a boon to building our business, even if it's recovery-related. As discussed before, anonymity is the chief safeguard against any member using CMA for his own ends. Our friends and employers, like the media, should get the fellowship's message, not ours.

If the circumstances warrant and our motive is "clean"—meaning we find ourselves in a position to be helpful and are not operating out of

selfishness—we can and do break our anonymity. That’s part of working Step Twelve and “carrying the message.” But in our day-to-day encounters, we take great pains to preserve our anonymity and respect that of others.

Relying on these principles helps us conduct ourselves with integrity in the wider world. But do the same guidelines work online?

Anonymity online

The Internet, though it can be tailored to every individual’s private needs, is the most public forum in history. According to our Eleventh Tradition, “we should always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films, and all other media.” How on earth can we remain anonymous in our “personalized public”? It’s not easy. A good rule of thumb: **Just as we wouldn’t out someone on the street or in a public gathering, we wouldn’t out them online.** Unfortunately, many of us are unaware that we might be doing just that. Remember, once information leaves our hands we lose control over who sees it, reads it, or hears it. So how do we respect our fellows’ anonymity in the virtual world? Because technology is ever-evolving, we cannot be exhaustive, but we do have a few commonsense suggestions:

Social networking sites. With the rising popularity of sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and others, we have to be increasingly vigilant about protecting our anonymity. In effect, these sites are a public medium where CMA members and those outside the fellowship mingle. We carefully review the sites’ privacy policies and adapt our settings accordingly. (Many of us don’t include our phone numbers in our profiles.) We are very careful when posting on each other’s profiles. For example, congratulating each other on our anniversaries can break their anonymity or ours. “Bravo on 90 days!” may feel like the most wonderful thing on earth to post on a person’s profile—indeed, the sentiment couldn’t be nicer. But the message of recovery should never undercut itself by undermining our anonymity. If John D. posts that he “made it to one year sober!” that is his choice. Likewise, commenting on another’s post in a way that may or may not compromise our own anonymity is our choice.

Photos. When we post photos with our friends, we are especially careful about how we label them and whom we “tag.” John D. might be comfortable being shown at a harmless-sounding “weekend retreat.” Jane C. might consider it a tremendous breach of her anonymity. But tagging a photo of a fellow at a recovery-related function, even when we do have explicit permission, is contrary to the spirit of the Eleventh Tradition, which states in its Long Form, “... our [last] names and pictures as CMA members ought not be broadcast, filmed, or publicly printed.”

Forums. Members increasingly are joining “secret” sober groups within public sites. This is a laudable solution, but only if such groups are not searchable to the general public and invitations are distributed individually. And remember, although these gatherings can be quite valuable, they are not

meetings. Actual CMA events and forums should be restricted to websites maintained at the intergroup, area, or district level rather than social networking sites.

Emails, texts, and chats. Messaging is an extremely efficient way to communicate with other addicts, but just as with social networking sites, we are cautious about what we share and how. We have no way of knowing who has access to the account at the other end, or if our correspondent might share our messages with someone else. Many fellows create daily email or message lists to send recovery-related inspirational notes. That's fine, as long as we make sure we have explicit permission from each recipient and are scrupulous about removing anyone the moment he asks. In general, though, we are wary of broadcast messages—they take the anonymity of the recipients for granted, especially if the correspondence is unsolicited. Blind CCing is advisable, so that your recipients' anonymity is not broken to each other. But even then, understand that though they may remain anonymous to each other, they individually could forward your message on to anyone of their choosing. It's common for members serving on CMA committees to come up with non-identifying emails (KeepItSimpleSam@gmail.com) or, if they have a specific service commitment, to use an address provided by the CMA service structure (Literature@NYCMA.org).

Streaming media and blogs. Some of us choose to talk about our spiritual journey in a personal blog or document it using streaming video or audio. Sharing our experience, strength, and hope is commendable, but as with other forms of digital communication, we must protect the identities of our fellows and never refer to our personal association with CMA. None of us is qualified to be a spokesperson for the fellowship. We can obliquely but honestly credit our sobriety to “working a recovery program.”

We, not me

Broader social acceptance and new technology are making it easier and easier to carry the message of recovery. But each of us is still accountable for our actions, which reflect upon CMA as a whole. We are all responsible for upholding CMA's Twelve Traditions. If you encounter any situation in a meeting, in the world, or online that gives you pause, if you are ever unsure whether your words or actions might break your own anonymity or someone else's, we urge you to always choose discretion.

“Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon CMA unity.”

Regardless of our personal attitudes about disclosure, we honor anonymity to preserve the unity of our fellowship. No principle is more central to the successful running of CMA: It's in our name! Together, holding on gratefully to our newfound humility, we can keep it Crystal Meth Anonymous forever.

The Twelve Traditions of Crystal Meth Anonymous

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon CMA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as expressed in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for CMA membership is a desire to stop using.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or CMA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the Addict who still suffers.
6. A CMA group ought never endorse, finance or lend the CMA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every CMA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Crystal Meth Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. CMA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Crystal Meth Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the CMA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films and all other media.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

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