Service

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# Recovery

*Our primary purpose is to recover from underearning.*

Giving service to others and to the U.A. Fellowship is a tool vital to our recovery—we can only keep what has been so generously given to us by passing it on. It is through service that we work the Twelfth Step, sharing our experience, strength and hope with those who still suffer from compulsive underearning.

Underearning is a disease of the spirit, our self-will run riot: if we cannot be the biggest winners, then we make ourselves the biggest losers. If we cannot get everything we want, then we allow ourselves nothing. Through service, by truly listening to and responding to the needs of others, we learn how to set our own egos aside, and begin to see our true worth and the value we bring to the world.

There are as many paths to recovery in UA as there are members, and there is no rule or formula for Service that fits everyone. The guidelines below are suggestions only: please take what you need and leave the rest!

It is especially worth understanding that there is no pecking order or priority suggested here: one kind of service is not intrinsically better or more required for recovery than any other. We recommend that you talk things over with other recovering underearners, and find the approach that works best for you.

We do suggest that newcomers get involved in service as quickly as possible, by volunteering for roles that are appointed meeting by meeting. As recovering underearners become more familiar with the program, we suggest that they volunteer for a regular service position at one or two meetings: making this kind of commitment helps us keep coming back.

Whether we take on additional servicecommitments will largelydepend upon our individual circumstances, and we need to be ever mindful of the time commitments involved.

# Visibility

*It is through service that we become visible and find our voices.*

The direct connection to other members of the fellowship that comes with service frees us from the isolation and loneliness that tormented us before we came into the program. We learn that we have a voice—that when we speak, people not only listen but actually value our contribution.

So many of us have struggled for years to become visible, to become present in the world, to earn our living in our fields of choice. We have struggled to find our voices, to express our wants and needs, to reveal our talents. Coming to meetings has brought us out of our caves, but it is still easy enough for us to be invisible, sitting at the back of the room, not raising our hands, slipping out quickly when the meeting ends.

We start out in service with simple tasks—helping set up and put away chairs, greeting people, serving as time keeper, etc.—but what these activities are doing for us is making us *visible*.

Within the serenity of the rooms, where there is no one in a position of authority, no one in control, no one to judge, no one to criticize, we find our voice, becoming comfortable with ourselves and our presence.

Greeting newcomers, we become comfortable meeting people and talking even to complete strangers. Keeping time, we learn to speak up and make our gestures obvious so people can see and hear us. And as we become comfortable talking to others, these things in turn help us ask for the things we need: call buddies, action partners, action meetings, sponsors, and so on.

Stepping up to regular meeting roles, we find that we are becoming even more visible. As chair, it becomes routine to reach out to people we barely know, to ask them to speak at our meetings. As treasurers, we become comfortable asking for money, and asking again when the collection is short.

And our visibility carries over to the wider world. We find we are more comfortable talking to prospective customers and employers, able to find common ground and form the simple bonds we need for the business world. We have become comfortable asking for help, asking for money, expressing our wants and needs without shame or embarrassment.

# Responsibility

*The key to service is responsibility.*

So we start out in service with tasks that entail no responsibility at all—setting out chairs before meetings or putting them away afterwards, keeping time for speakers, greeting newcomers, etc. If we don’t show up, our absence hurts no one—another member of the group steps in.

As we grow in recovery, we start making and taking phone calls, book-ending, being action partners, giving action groups, speaking at meetings, providing sponsorship, and so on—*showing up* for other members of UA. And in these activities, we begin to see that the key to service is not leadership, not control, not power, but *responsibility*. We find that we are responsible for showing up consistently, for showing up on time, for showing up prepared: we are now answerable to other people, when before we tolerated no master.

When we are ready, we take positions—chair, treasurer, literature person, *etc.*—that entail showing up regularly and reliably for a whole roomful of people. We find that we have become responsible for important and complicated tasks, keeping track of meeting formats, collecting and safeguarding money, maintaining literature inventories, finding the answers to people’s questions, negotiating with outside parties over rooms and rent, printing and telephone services, and so on.

But again we find that our role is not to build personal empires, not to lecture people on what to do, not to punish misbehavior, not even to correct other people’s perceptions: our role is simply to keep doing the hard work of keeping the U.A. fellowship alive, so we can help ourselves and other people recover.

Some of us come to serve the Fellowship as a whole, as Intergroup or General Service representative, and we discover our responsibility is not just to U.A. at large, but to the underearners still suffering, who have yet to find the program. And we discover that we are *still* not chiefs, not professors, not police, not judges nor jury: we are merely taking responsibility for things that need to be done by someone willing to do them.

We are always just trusted servants fulfilling the needs and wishes of the Fellowship at the direction of our Higher Power as expressed through the Group Conscience. It is through service that we learn to be *truly* reliable, both inside and outside the program, holding ourselves responsible to other people for our actions.

# Accountability

*We are accountable for our words and actions, and for the outcomes of tasks that are assigned to us.*

Time is money and through Service, we come to see the value of time, both our own and other people’s, and we learn not to spend it frivolously. We find that showing up promptly for meetings, events and telephone calls respects everyone’s time.

We discover that being well-prepared helps us use our time well. We learn to double check when and where we are meeting action partners or action groups, sponsees or sponsor, so they are not inconvenienced by our mistaking locations or times. When we are chairing, we discover the benefits of being familiar with the meeting format, and showing up early so we are ready to start the meeting on time and run it smoothly.

When we are unable to attend a meeting we have committed to, we find that notifying others ahead of the meeting allows them to step in in our place, reschedule the meeting, or to adjust the agenda so it is still productive.

And we learn the power of our voices, the effects that the words we choose have on others. We discover that we need to be accountable for this, to moderate the language that we use, to be gentle with others in the program and respect their separate paths to recovery. When we must act to keep a meeting serene, we find that we can do so respectfully, by using the traditions and tools of the program, re-reading the cross-talk statement or the Serenity Prayer, and holding group conscience votes.

This new-found accountability helps us in our work lives, too, earning us respect from our colleagues, our vendors and clients, our employees and bosses.

# Clarity

*We strive for clarity in all we do.*

When we are asked questions, we come to realize that we only need to answer to the best of our ability, without feeling attacked or questioning the motivations of the questioner. If we do not know the answer, then we find the joy in being truthful about that: we can then either seek to find the answer out, or refer the questioner to someone else who is likely to know.

Above all when we are providing information, we come to be clear both to ourselves and to others whether this is something that we know for a fact, something we believe to be true, or something that is our best guess. And when we provide our opinions, then we own them as our opinions, and we become confortable with that, prepared for others to question or reject them, as is their right.

When we are concerned about something that another person has done in service to the program, we discover that we do not need to leap to judgment. We can ask for clarification, and then base our responses on the facts, not on fear, vagueness and guesswork.

As secretaries for meetings or committees, we learn the value of taking succinct and accurate notes, enabling everyone to be clear about what decisions have been made, what actions are to be taken by whom, and what questions remain. As treasurers, we come to understand the importance of keeping our accounts accurate and up-to-date, so we can answer others’ questions promptly during meetings, enabling the group to make good decisions based on the information we provide.

And we discover the value of clarity around the work efforts we undertake on behalf of U.A., and the importance of understanding the nature of a role or assignment before we commit to it. When we have questions during the course of our work, we find that raising them right away helps us and others do a better job. And we discover the lasting value of properly documenting our activities, so that our colleagues and successors can easily pick up where we leave off, and in order to provide transparency to U.A. members at large.

And this clarity helps us with our business communications: we find that being crystal clear with our employers, employees, vendors and clients gains us their respect and speeds our endeavors to successful conclusions.

# Willingness

*“If a job is worth doing, it’s worth doing it well.”*

Because the service we provide is entirely voluntary, we can undertake all our service tasks willingly and professionally, with courtesy and respect for all, applying ourselves to the best of our abilities.

Consistent with our vision and our time plan, we discover in our recovery a willingness to actively look for roles, areas, projects and tasks where we can be of service to others. Sometimes we can apply a special skill or expertise, sometimes all that is needed is our time and willing hands.

It is likely that giving service will challenge us to grow in ways we were not expecting, in order to meet the demands placed upon us. As we find we need to adopt new approaches, learn new techniques, or develop new skills, we welcome these opportunities to change the things we can, furthering our recovery through personal development.

And we find we need to make sure we are giving our full attention to the tasks we have volunteered for. When we take on a role with a heavy workload, then limiting our involvement with other service commitments allows us to put all our energy into the matters at hand.

This willingness carries over to the working world, where we can now delight in applying our skills and talents to the job at hand, confident we are giving value for money. We have moved from *anything but* to *no matter what*.

# Acceptance

*“If a job is worth doing, it’s worth doing it badly”*

We have already found in recovery that there are things we must do for ourselves, no matter well or badly we do them. The same is true in service: we accept that there are actions that we need to take, but that their outcomes are not guaranteed. Things happen in our Higher Power’s time, not ours, and all we can do is take the actions.

Sometimes we put our hearts and souls into something, but it founders and our efforts seem wasted. Proposals are poorly received. Motions are rejected. Projects fail. Events fall apart due to lack of interest. Or the results are not perfect, falling short of our expectations. There are mistakes on our freshly printed flyers. We have to turn people away due to lack of space. There are not enough volunteers or funds to achieve some vital initiative.

When these things happen, we come to face these failures honestly but without self-recrimination. We are consoled that our efforts, successful or not, flawed or perfect, are all part of our recovery. We have put our loving energy out into the universe, and it will come back to us in ways we may not understand.

When we cannot complete some task within the expected time, then we learn that promptly notifying everyone affected allows them to incorporate the delay in their plans, find other people to help, or even lift the burden from us entirely by reassigning the task to someone else. And then we discover that the simple act of asking for help has relieved us from the suffering of trying to soldier on, silent and alone—there are others willing to assist us!

And outside the program, we become unafraid to face our challenges honestly with our employers, customers or clients: we no longer have to be all-knowing, all-doing Superheroes. We can admit to our lack of knowledge, our failures, our shortcomings, rather than hiding from our mistakes or trying to paper over them as we did before.

# Consensus

*The cohesion of U.A. requires not just majority rule at the service level, but consensus—substantial agreement.*

Following the Second Tradition, we look to our Higher Power to decide contentious issues through the group conscience, but we need only look at the world around us to see how chaotic and destructive simple majority rule can be.

In serving the U.A. Fellowship, we need to be doubly sensitive to this, placing principles over personalities. We do not accept things that we know to be wrong, simply to achieve group consensus. And likewise, we pay special attention to the dissenting opinions of others, and do not ride roughshod over them just to achieve our own goals.

When others disagree with us, we take pains to understand the thinking behind their opinions—we become willing to modify our own thinking when we are presented with new information. And we are always happy to explain our own positions in more detail, if necessary doing more research and providing more information about things that already seem perfectly obvious to us.

When we encounter disagreements within a group or a board or a committee, we carefully work through the nature of the disagreement through discussion, rather than try to come to a quick decision with a vote. We design our processes to require not just majority agreement but substantial unanimity. If we cannot achieve this, then we are willing to take more time to consider and discuss the issue at hand.

In all our decisions on substantial issues, we seek to ensure that all sides feel they have had an adequate opportunity to express their views. If we do need to take things to a vote, then we make sure any dissenting voices are satisfied that the outcome represents the Group Conscience, that there are no important things that have been left unsaid.

And we find the tools we learn in coming to consensus and resolving disagreements within the program help us outside the program too. We can address business disagreements with openness, and a willingness to come to agreement, making sure that all parties have clarity about the issues involved and an understanding of each other’s goals.

# Feedback

*We rely on feedback as a measure that we are providing value in service.*

One of the most difficult lessons we face in Underearners Anonymous is learning to accept feedback. Whether it is from our sponsor, our action partners, our action groups, other members in feedback meetings, or our friends and colleagues outside the program, we come to see feedback for what it is: a suggestion based on another’s experience, strength and hope.

And we learn to accept feedback graciously and treasure it, however it is framed, acknowledging the desire of the other to help us in our recovery, whether or not we immediately see the relevance or value of their comments.

Most importantly, we become able to distinguish between the suggestions offered to us, contradictory or negative as they sometimes are: we learn to take what we need and leave the rest.

So as we fulfill our roles and undertake our service projects, we come to continually look for feedback. We look to the Fellowship to provide the guidance for our actions, through directions from the World Service Conference, through the Group Consciences of the committees and boards we serve and the meetings we attend, through direct feedback from other members. It is not our will that we are seeking to follow in Service, after all, but our Higher Power’s.

And we come to welcome feedback in our business lives as well, valuing this opportunity for employers, colleagues, customers or clients to tell us how we can better serve them. We even find that we can respond politely to criticism, with no need for an immediate answer, retaliation or deflection, no matter how inappropriate we deem their words in the moment.

# Guardrails

*We use the tools of the program to place vital guardrails for ourselves around our service commitments.*

One of our underearning symptoms is compulsive volunteering—we are all too ready to give away *too much* of our time, neglecting our own needs. What better excuse to shirk our duties at work and at home, or to neglect our own self-care, than because we are too busy serving the needs of others!

Every service position, every project, every sponsee, every action group, even every call we make, represents a commitment of time and energy.

Unable to just say “No,” it is easy for us to find ourselves trapped on a service treadmill, fearing that people will suffer if we turn down new commitments, afraid that vital work will not get done, dreading how things will turn out if we are not in control. The costs to our recovery come to far outweigh the rewards, plunging us further into underearning, not lifting us out from its shadow.

Both in the outside world and in service to UA, we must be careful not to give away more than we have in us to give! The tools of UA help us place guardrails around our underearning symptoms, and we discover that we must consciously use them to keep our service commitments from running amok.

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We recommend that people limit the total number of service positions, action groups and sponsees they take on, so that they can provide sufficient attention to each, and not over-burden themselves.

We can also use our vision and our goals to ground our service in our recovery, consciously examining, *how will taking on this role serve me, how will working on this project benefit me?* And we can check in with our sponsors, action partners and action groups on how we are balancing service with the other activities we are taking towards achieving our goals, to ensure we are not over-committing.

# Reflection

*We continue to take personal inventory.*

In serving as officers of meetings, committees or boards, we have taken on a responsibility to the U.A. Fellowship to make sure that we are making the best use of the time and money our fellow members so generously entrust to us. So we are always looking at ways to learn from our successes, so that we may repeat them, and from our failures, so that we may grow from them. We find we can explore these things with grace and humility, through the tools and guidelines that the Program provides to us.

In working the Steps, we have come to understand that it is only through failing that we can grow, and that it is only through understanding the nature of our successes that we can build on them.

What was it about the way we tackled a project that helped it succeed? What can we document about our processes, so that future projects can benefit from these insights?

In our meetings, the group inventory is invaluable in helping us explore how well the group is performing its primary purpose, and address the issues that have arisen over the course of the year, without shame or blame, accusation or guilt.

What ways have we done things that we can recommend to our colleagues and successors? What approaches have turned out to be better avoided? What areas seem to us to be working well? What things might the group want to focus on improving? What important tasks have we left undone or unfinished, that we commend for future attention?

In an organization where service positions are transient by tradition and by necessity, this self-reflection is how we ensure continuity, that our colleagues and successors have a firm foundation on which to continue to build, and that we ourselves get the most benefit from our service.

Reflection is important in the business world, too—we gain invaluable insights into ways to improve our worth to the world.