

Tradition Twelve

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

Before recovery, our understanding of anonymity may have been limited to the dictionary's definition of: "unnamed," "unknown" or "name not made public." In recovery, anonymity takes on a deeper, spiritual meaning. Practicing Tradition Twelve ensures that the COSA message, not the messenger, will always be our focus.

Tradition Eleven emphasizes the importance of remaining anonymous at all levels of press, radio, films, television, and other public media of communication as well as preserving anonymity in public relations. Here, in Tradition Twelve, anonymity is applied personally in meetings as well as all areas of our lives. Remaining anonymous, particularly in COSA, and safeguarding all members' identity, is of the utmost importance. Tradition Twelve's spiritual significance is central to keeping the COSA fellowship intact is a foundational component to individual recovery.

When we are newcomers to COSA, there is great relief in knowing that our privacy will be respected through anonymity. Discovering that our lives have been affected by compulsive sexual behavior, **we feel devastated, in pain, and likely full of shame.** Without the protection anonymity offers, many of us would have hesitated to share our experiences for fear that our information would be exposed and that we would suffer further harm. This practical aspect of anonymity creates a safe space to listen, share, feel heard and understood, and begin our healing journey.

In addition to the practical benefits of anonymity, Tradition Twelve offers a spiritual aspect in which we trust a Power greater than ourselves and leave our **social and professional labels and roles** outside the doors of our meetings. We enter as equals. From this place of equality, we can experience one another free from the influences of worldly identities. We come to see that we are all the same in the eyes of our respective God or Higher Power, and we can embrace one another in unity and equality.

The environment created by anonymity in our recovery meetings is not to *hide* us, but to help *free* us. Anonymity in our meetings actually fosters greater intimacy among members. We can share our true selves safely, freely, and without fear of judgement. **The trust generated, and the resulting ability to be vulnerable, bring us great relief and help to lift the burden of our isolation and pain.** Sharing honestly with our sponsors and fellow members promotes healing. We become open to receiving compassion and acceptance. This nourishes our healing in a way that we have never experienced before. **Because of Tradition Twelve, we are able to freely "carry the message to those who still suffer" as stated in Tradition Five, as well as receive the COSA message of hope and recovery that supports us in our healing journey.**

Tradition One (Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon COSA unity) offers an example of anonymity's spiritual influence on our Traditions. Without the equality offered through an avenue of spiritual anonymity, members with many years in recovery might be looked to as "COSA experts." Seen in that light, their singular input could sway or replace the group conscience.

Without practicing spiritual anonymity, we might look upon members known to have certain professional credentials or wealthy financial status with higher regard than others in the group.

Newcomers or other members might defer to them rather than develop their own voice.

Situations like these could lead to a hierarchy or cause personalities to overshadow vital recovery principles. The common welfare of the group, the group conscience, and COSA unity would be harmed. Personal recovery would suffer in such an environment. Without the bedrock of anonymity, Tradition One would collapse.

The COSA Diversity Statement¹ provides additional insight into the unifying power of anonymity. All who identify as having been affected by compulsive sexual behavior are welcomed equally in COSA. We embrace one another with understanding and compassion for the experiences that brought each of us to COSA. The Diversity Statement helps us to look beyond the ways in which we may be different from our fellows and to seek out and accept the commonalities that unite us. Diversity gives us the opportunity to learn from people of all kinds and it gives COSA a richer, more widely relatable message to share.

Tradition Twelve also helps us keep personal balance with others in recovery. We receive invaluable encouragement and inspiration from the experience, strength, and hope of others. By keeping principles before personalities we can have a healthy admiration for others without putting any individual on a pedestal or readily dismissing others.

We may share and learn personal information about each other. In the spirit of anonymity, we do not pass along personal details that other members shared with us at a meeting or privately. That would be a breach of anonymity, as well as confidentiality and trust. This is an opportunity to improve our humility. We ask our higher power to remove any shortcomings such as gossiping or sharing personal information about another person. Part of our recovery may be that we learn what our underlying character defects are that drove us to break another's anonymity. As we gain more understanding of the principle of anonymity, we are able to practice more humility and to recognize it as a foundational spiritual principle to our entire recovery process.

The principles in Tradition Twelve are applicable to all relationships. They help us keep our friendships balanced, healthy, and reciprocal through mutual respect. Placing principles before personalities also serves us well in our homes and families. Tradition Twelve reminds us that each member of the family is valuable and is an integral part of the whole. We recognize that each of us is a precious individual, entitled to our own decisions regarding personal privacy, boundaries, and the way we express our personalities. We build good relations when we treat

everyone fairly and respectfully. When difficulties arise, practicing Tradition Twelve helps us stay focused on the greater good of our family.

In places where there are established hierarchies, such as the workplace, putting principles before personalities is especially helpful. Putting principles first guides us away from aligning with cliques or gossip circles. Instead, we keep our focus on the work our employer has hired us to do. When working in a team environment, we become valuable contributors if we stay detached from dominant personalities or ego-driven issues and simply focus on the assignment. No matter where we are in the workplace hierarchy, practicing these principles can help us demonstrate our integrity and earn the respect and trust of others.

As we contemplate Tradition Twelve, we see why anonymity is *the* vital spiritual underpinning of all our Traditions. The safety and spiritual growth of each COSA member and of the whole COSA fellowship depend upon anonymity, and the respect and equality that come with it.

¹ COSA Diversity Statement

- COSA Diversity is consistent with the Third Tradition of COSA, which states that the only requirement for COSA membership is that our lives have been affected by compulsive sexual behavior.
- The COSA Fellowship welcomes all genders, all varieties of relationship to the addict, all religious and spiritual preferences, all employment statuses, all marital statuses, all ethnicities, cultures, and languages. COSA does not discriminate on the basis of class, financial status, sexual orientation or gender identification, physical or mental challenges, race, or national origins.
- In COSA, we find hope whether or not there is a sexually addicted person currently in our lives.
- COSA Diversity is consistent with the First Tradition of COSA, which states that our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon COSA unity.

The following statement approved at the 2018 Delegate Meeting will be included in the appendix:

Confidentiality Statement (appears in COSA Meeting Guide):

The anonymity and confidentiality of COSA meetings offer a sense of security rarely found in other environments. Many COSA members discover that COSA meetings are the first place they have ever felt safe to tell their stories. Anonymity is a “spiritual foundation” of COSA, established by our Traditions, and should be respected to the greatest extent possible, however, COSA membership does not guarantee immunity from any laws or legal jurisdictions.

Since membership in COSA does not bestow special legal rights or protections, we remind you that you are the steward of your own confidentiality and anonymity in COSA where local regulations are concerned. You may want to consider this when sharing specific details in meetings or with other members.

We remind you that our Traditions also state that COSA is “forever non-professional.” As such, COSA members enter meetings solely as a person in recovery. Matters of legality are beyond the scope of COSA and so the ISO of COSA does not offer legal guidance. Please contact a professional if you have legal concerns regarding confidentiality.