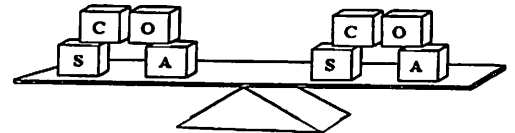


BALANCE

Search For Ourselves



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WINTER CONFERENCE

BALANCE

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STEP FOUR

STEP FOUR: "Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves."

The first time I took a searching inventory I wasn't fearless. The shadowy part of me brought out my fear. Because of fear I kept parts of me hidden and for years I hid my secrets so others would like me. I worked so hard to make others like me, I lost myself. That was codependent behavior.

My first Fourth Step included everything (correction "I thought" it included everything) and was an overall view of me. It took me months to complete. As I grew in recovery, I found myself needing another Fourth Step and another and another. Those Fourth Steps have involved specific topics. Although I can't recall all my Fourth Steps, I have processed on shame, fear and anger.

When I finished my Fourth Step on shame, I realized I was carrying far less shame than when I began. When I finished my Fourth Step on fear, I experienced a great relief from fear. I had just completed that work when my mother passed away. A great amount of my fear centered around my siblings. I was amazed at how differently I felt around them during those days after my mother's passing.

Step Four is an opportunity for me to look at myself, my feelings, my thoughts, my actions and reactions. My Fourth Steps include all of me and they keep me aware and focused on myself and my feelings. I'm not sure why the word moral appears in the Fourth Step. Maybe it is there to keep me focused on my truth. I can use this as a principle: Be morally truthful to my self.

It's amazing how the process works. As I reveal me, I don't lose friends (as I feared), I develop more real and closer friends.

I still feel fear when I look at myself. Today, I know my truth frees me. It isn't important if others like me. It is important for me to release my secret shadowy parts. My truth gives me the release to like myself. Liking myself is the important factor in my recovery today.

Ila D.

Editors note:

We invite you to notice the changes in our newsletter format. The February meeting of the Board of Trustees recommended removing the redundant information found on the back page. There is now more room for articles and we are eagerly checking the mail for submissions!

Also please note the March Insert contained in this April issue. March Madness (not the basketball kind) was too much for us. All of the articles for March are included in this combination March/April issue. As always we are open to comments, suggestions, letters to the editors, and more articles!
Robyn M. & Lisa M.

IT HAS BEEN MY EXPERIENCE ...

April is a month of beauty (flowers and trees bloom), playfulness (April Fools Day and beginning of Daylight Savings Time), spiritual renewal (Easter and Passover) and the *ever popular* April 15th deadline for filing personal taxes for the Internal Revenue Service. The IRS asks for personal honesty, personal searching (for receipts and other records), personal review (assets, liabilities, and charity donations) personal involvement (completing the paperwork process or finding someone else to do it for you) and the final payoff - writing a check to cover the short comings or receiving a refund check because I paid in more than my fair share.

For this column, I'd like to talk about a different IRS. For me, the initials IRS stand for Individual Renewal = Service work. Service work is a large part of my recovery and I'd like to share with you how it all started. I had attended only 8 or 10 meetings when I found myself volunteering to be the Treasurer of the group - and the group cheered! I had never spoken a word before, during or after a meeting, yet these strangers trusted me with their money and cheered. (Boy was I confused!) I volunteered not knowing what service work meant. It gave me an internal reason to return each week and an external reason to speak up to give the monthly Treasurer report. One thing led to another!

Because of this initial service work, I found myself being recruited to be chairperson for a meeting (all I had to do was show up and read the prepared materials). Then when a scheduled leader failed to show, I found myself *leading* a meeting. Not only was I heard (perhaps for the first time in my life), but I received positive feedback after that meeting for weeks. It was scary to no longer be invisible within the group. Before recovery I had been a Super Mom, a successful professional and a busy community volunteer yet I shunned recognition and praise or reward. My "job" was to make *other* people shine and in doing so they took credit for my work or deeds.

I innocently became involved with service

work at the national level by volunteering to lead a workshop at the 1992 National SAA convention in Tucson, Arizona. I had hoped for 10-12 attendees and found the room filled to standing room only (mostly SAA's). I was overwhelmed and terrified and I presented the workshop anyway, trusting my Higher Power was with me. I continue to get personal growth rewards from that one experience even today. It gave me the self confidence to try again. It gave me courage to risk telling others my beliefs, my ideas, and my experiences. It gave me the ability to trust I would not be ridiculed, shamed, or told I am wrong, stupid, or crazy.

Later, at that same convention, while talking with 5 other COSA's we all wondered why "they" (COSA) weren't better organized. Surprise! We discovered we were "they". Thus began the nucleus of the National Executive Steering Committee and the formation of the National Service Organization of COSA in Louisville, Kentucky in May 1993.

Individual Renewal = Service work rewards are unfathomable. I have discovered talents and skills I never knew I had. I've had the opportunity to polish them with the support, encouragement and assistance of some very neat people. Best of all I have made friendships at a depth I have never known before.

For me, Individual Renewal = Service work is not really work at all, I receive far more gifts from the program than I give. Service is an investment *in me* as well as the program in general. I do find it is an internal struggle sometimes to keep balanced. Time constraints and my physical and emotional energy levels all are weighed to see how much I have to give to others (COSA). Over-commitment leads to burn out. Part of my recovery is saying NO to requests for service work - I must step back and give others the chance to step forward so they too can experience the internal rewards of service to COSA. I also have to be careful that I don't develop a personal responsibility or a feeling of ownership for the needs of the organization. I am not the organization (or group). While I am important to the group, if it is truly a group, it will survive and thrive with or without me.

[continued on page 4]

Convention News

"I CAN'T GO TO THE CONVENTION ALONE"

When I start saying "I can't" I know I want to figure out a way to turn it into "I can". Though "I can't" is much easier and more straightforward (I just roll over, close my eyes and say pitifully, "I caaaaaaan't!!!!"), "I can" is what I want in my life. "I can" entails energy, planning, goal setting, looking at my feelings, processing, *risking*. More often than I like "I can" means I take a deep breath and I venture off into myself, with myself... alone.

Often I fool myself thinking that being alone means I am by myself. I can be alone in a lot of situations, any time. I don't have to go out of town to experience being alone. I can be in a group of people, at a meeting, by myself at my house or with my family - all situations where I can still feel and be alone. I think my problem isn't about being ALONE, it's about being afraid.

[continued on page 4]

Hear Ye! Hear Ye!

Convention Attendees: Plans for your Hospitality Room are underway! This is your spot to come relax, visit with old friends, and meet new people.

The Hospitality Room is your home for the weekend, a place to meet new recovery friends in a safe, warm social setting - an oasis of fun and food, so come by and introduce yourself.

We would love to have you be a host or hostess for a couple of hours on Friday, Saturday, Sunday (day and night) and Monday morning. What better way to become "part of"? We'd like to have COSA volunteers in the Hospitality Room every hour it is open.

We need the following items to make our social room a great place. You can bring them to the convention, or we can arrange pickup.

Cokes and all regular diet drinks (cans or bottles)	Cans/bottles juice
Instant tea and tea bags	Canned coffee, sugar, creamer
Potato chips, corn chips, pretzels	Cheese and crackers
Fresh apples, oranges, bananas, etc.	Bags of popped popcorn
Cookies, cakes, muffins, cupcakes, doughnuts	Ice
All paper supplies: hot and cold cups, coffee stirrers, spoons and forks, plates, napkins	

If you can bake cookies, muffins, etc., WE WANT YOU! Home made goodies will make our room pleasant and homey. If your talents lie in this direction, please let me know! I have some space in my freezer if you want to make treats early and send/give them to me for storage.

There are other ways to help out if none of the above are right for you. It might be more convenient for you to write a check, the money will be used to supply whatever is needed that is not donated. (Make checks out to 1997 Convention and note that it's for Hospitality Room)

I will be in the room Friday night (May 23), and at other times, so come by and introduce yourself. I hope you enjoy the Hospitality Room and I thank you in advance for helping to make this a great convention!

If you have Hospitality Room requests or suggestions, call me, Marlan, at 713-728-5100 or write 1997 Convention, P.O. Box 541162, Houston, Texas 77254-1162 Attn. Marlan - Hospitality

Thanks again! Marlan

Pen Pals + Service Work = Me ☺

Pen Pals are Needed

The communications committee is asking for volunteers who wish to do service work by writing to someone who is in an area without meetings. If you are interested in being a long distance pen pal, please write to:

P.O. Box 502
Mt. Morris, Michigan 48458

Please consider this service work. I remember how lonely I felt before I had group support. An occasional letter or card brings so much support and hope to those with no support network. Please announce this need for service work at your meetings.

Thank you,

Jo D. and Dana J.

Send contributions to support your NSO-COSA to:

NSO-COSA
9337-B KATY FREEWAY #142
HOUSTON TX 77024



National CoSA Phone Line
Phone 612/537-6904



SEND EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE AND SUBMISSIONS TO:

BALANCE EDITORIAL
9337-B KATY FRWY #142
HOUSTON, TX 77024

Many people on the mailing list are in an area where no meetings are available. This newsletter is their only contact with recovering people. Share your story. Share your recovery. Share the tools that work for you. Share your gifts.

THE "BALANCE" NEWSLETTER IS YOUR NEWSLETTER. SHARINGS FROM YOU CONTINUE THE PURPOSE OF THIS NEWSLETTER AS A COMMUNICATION LINK TO STRENGTHEN AND CONNECT COSA SUPPORT GROUPS AND ENCOURAGE THOSE WHO ARE STILL STRUGGLING ALONE.

Share with other readers about your new meetings, retreats, social activities, meeting experiences, life experiences.



The address for the E-mail Forum for Friends and Family Members of People Addicted to Sex is:

willing@netpath.net (this address is for those interested in inquiring or becoming a part of the support group.) This list is closed for the group's safety. It is for people in COSA, S-Anon, Co-SLAA or those with no meeting they can attend.

Ruth B.

IT HAS BEEN MY EXPERIENCE... [cont. from p. 2]

I continue to be of service to COSA at the local level (chairing meetings, leading meetings, telling my story, sponsoring, picking up mail, giving my phone number to newcomers, etc.). Following a two year hiatus, I have returned as a Board Member at the National Level and I'm on of the many organizers for the COSA National convention in May 1997.

Now that I've completed my service work for the BALANCE this month, I'm out of here to enjoy the wild flowers, dip my toes in the Gulf of Mexico and build a sand castle, commune with my Higher Power, complete my tax return forms (for that other IRS), and accept my "refund check" (personal development) due to my COSA Individual Renewal = Service work. Jan W.

Convention News [cont. from p. 3]

Being afraid for me is more than anxiety. In my family of origin, if fear was present it meant that death was close at hand. No wonder that today as a 41 year old, when I am afraid of something, I am paralyzed by the fear. Since fear means death it is natural for me to run from the fear. What I've started working on is recognizing that I'm afraid, and analyzing "what if the worst thing happened" would I really die? After I face/analyze the worst case I assure myself I am no longer in my family of origin.

Usually doing something on my own (which typically means ALONE) is scary because I am responsible for the outcome. It is scary to be responsible for myself, there were so many years when I tried so hard to shirk that responsibility. New situations are scary not only because I am venturing out but also because I may not know what to do or where to go.

I try to make healthy decisions for myself when I'm facing fear. A convention is a good choice for me because I believe that 12 step gatherings are the safest places I could go. I risk... knowing that there are no guarantees, knowing that I am choosing the fear instead of giving in to the "I can't's", knowing that I choose life.

NEXT MONTH: "I'M PACKING MY BAGS!"