

Balance

Newsletter of the National Service Organization of COSA

March–May 2004

2004 Convention & Membership Meeting

Our 2004 Convention & Annual Membership Meeting, taking place in Dallas May 28-30, are almost here. Every convention is different, and all six that I've attended have been memorable and well worth the time and money it took to attend. Meeting COSA's from all over the world is exciting, interesting and affirming. The Dallas convention looks like it will be a good one; check out the schedule preview on page 6.

The convention opens Friday evening and closes Sunday afternoon. On Friday, May 28th, before the convention itself opens, we hold our annual membership meeting all day from 9 to 5. Throughout the year, national COSA business is handled by our national volunteers, our stipended National Coordinator and our NSO-COSA Board. Once a year we have an annual membership meeting to discuss where we are, what our plans and priorities are for the next fiscal year and to select a new board of directors. Any issues which any member may have of national interest may be brought before this meeting. Anyone who is interested in or curious about how things work on a national level should attend this meeting, as should those who do or plan to do national service work. All COSA's are welcome to come to our Annual Meeting. Each group should choose a delegate to represent them at this meeting; decisions for our organization are made by delegates and board members using consensus. ⇒

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NSO-COSA is not a bunch of paid professionals in an office building somewhere. NSO-COSA is US, all of us, who participate in COSA meetings and activities and who care about this program being there for those who still suffer wherever we are.

—Burnet O

Consensus Decision-Making

Our NSO-COSA Board first began using a consensus decision-making process at our 1998 Midwinter Retreat. We tried it because it seemed more congruent with our recovery process than Robert's Rules and majority vote. Consensus worked so well for us and felt so right that we have continued using it ever since. Mysteriously, we've actually found it to be more efficient than the old way.

A consensus decision is one which all members of a group are willing to accept and support as if it were their own. It resembles a unanimous decision but goes deeper. We have found that the consensus process works best for us when certain key factors are all present.

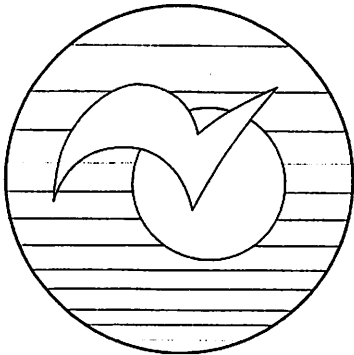
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Name the Newsletter Contest!

We are going to rename this newsletter. The name *Balance* has served us well, but we want a name which better fits with our NSO-COSA logo (shown below). We want a little more energy and freedom and vitality in our name, to match the energy which is coursing through COSA these days!

Put on your creative cap and send your entries in today! The winner will be announced and awarded a grand prize of a free one year subscription to this newsletter at the Dallas convention on May 29th.

Email your entries to
balance_editor@yahoo.com



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Balance, the newsletter of NSO COSA, is published every other month. The authors hold the copyright to their work; NSO-COSA holds the copyright to the newsletter.

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Distribution — Judi K

Welcome New Groups

Melbourne-Cocoa of East Central Florida
St. Cloud, MN
Lakeville, MN



Tradition Seven

"Every COSA group ought to be fully self-supporting declining outside contributions"

Minnetonka MN Sun PM Group \$30.00
Oakdale MN Mon PM Eastside Group \$10.00
Berlin OH \$1.75
Mart TX \$10.00
Seattle WA Wed PM Group \$75.83
Apple Valley MN Sat AM Vertigo Group \$15.00
Apple Valley MN Wed PM Group \$20.00
Essex Co NJ Group \$50.00
Richmond VA Group \$10.00
Laguna Beach CA \$25.00
Indianapolis IN Wed PM Group \$10.58
Linton IN \$6.75
Louisville KY Fri PM Group \$100.00
Portland ME Group \$5.00
Oxford MI \$50.00
Houston TX Fri PM SOS Group \$135.60
Flower Mound TX Faith Group \$200.00
Newport News VA Tues PM Work It Cause It's
Worth It Group \$25.00
Issaquah WA \$25.00
Granite Bay CA Fri PM Group \$50.00
Seattle WA Joint COSA/SAA Speakers \$25.00
Seattle WA Puget Sound Retreat \$100.00
Des Moines IA Thurs PM Group \$50.00
St Paul MN Thurs PM Gratitude Group \$65.00
Bancroft WI Group \$5.00
South Bend IN Group \$30.00
Kalamazoo MI Group \$20.00
Oxford MI \$50.00
Minnetonka MN Sun PM Group \$30.00
Tallahassee FL \$10.00
Waseca MN \$10.00
Houston TX Tues noon Group \$20.00
Houston TX Sun PM Group \$100.00

Bank Balance on 4/30/2004: \$13,695.09

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Key Factors for Consensus Decisions

- Openess to God's guidance
- Trust in and support for one another
- Informed and prepared participants
- Involvement by all of those affected by the decision
- Enough time to process the issues involved
- Open and honest communication:
- Encouragement for each person to share their views and feelings
- Positive acceptance of diverse views and experiences

These factors together create a positive and safe environment, much like a good meeting.

During this creative process, someone may ask for a "sense of the meeting" – which is an attempt to express what the group seems to be coming to agreement on. This is usually done two or three times before a consensus is called for.

Because of the importance of evaluating an issue thoroughly, an experienced member of the group may play "devil's advocate" – presenting arguments and ideas which one may not agree with in order to prevent "groupthink" and to make sure that the decision is well-examined.

What can one do if one is not aligned with the direction the group seems to be headed? It's important to notify others by "expressing concern" – announcing that an issue may be a personal decision-breaker and must be addressed. When the time to reach a decision arrives, what if one remains in disagreement? There are three choices, depending how strong the disagreement is: one can leave the group, one can block consensus, or one can "stand aside" – announcing that the forming consensus is unacceptable yet one also does not feel strongly enough to block it or drop out of the group completely.

We've found that this process is creative – when we have approached an issue with such openness and detachment we usually arrive at a decision which is different from and better than any of us expected.

— *Burnet O.*

Group Conscience

One of my favorite stories of our 12 step founding mothers and fathers talks about a dilemma regarding Bill W. wanting to be in a paid role within the community. It was a valid opportunity and something to look at in terms of being of service to others.

From this dilemma and others, Group Conscience was born. In the Group Conscience, whatever the dilemma, discussion or problem, there is the intention that our Higher Power will reign over personalities, individual triggers or personal agendas.

In the many years I've sat through Group Consciences, whether as a COSA or other 12 step member, its been my experience that personalities are almost always present. No process is perfect. However, when we are able to invite the presence of our Higher Power, turn over the outcome and trust, we can open the space for our Higher Power to show up. Sometimes it's prettier than others, sometimes it goes the way we think, sometimes not, but always, when we take decisions that affect our 12 step groups to a group conscience, we are honoring the intention for which it was created. To do our best as human beings to allow our Higher Power's wisdom and clarity to reign in decisions for our best interest.

Honoring these intentions, using our tools and letting go, all allow a Power Greater than ourselves to Guide and Inspire us in all areas of our lives.

— *Sally B*

Current 2003/04 Board Members

JoAn D, Tacoma WA, chair
 Gayle J, Houston TX, vice chair
 Mavis H, Reading PA, secretary
 Burnet O, Houston TX, treasurer
 Christi G, Apple Valley MN
 Bonnie C, Boulder CO
 Jenny E, Cincinnati OH
 Ila D, Birch Run MI
 Donna J, New Lothrop MI
 Shannon T, Issaquah WA

Steps Four and Five: Courage and Integrity

Step 4 Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

Living one day at a time, being truly present to each day, taking care of myself, loving myself — these experiences change dramatically after doing the 4th and 5th steps.

The Big Book of AA suggests an approach to the 4th step that is based on identifying one's resentments. I've come to believe that there is a lot of wisdom in this approach. I imagine all the complexity and weight I heap on each day when I harbor resentments, act out of resentments, squirm in the discomforts of those choices, which leads to further mess-making decisions ... Good Lord! That used to be my comfort zone!

Looking closely at my resentments is a call to responsibility and self-care. Why am I feeling resentful? At what, whom? What are my real feelings underneath the resentment? What were my reactions in a state of resentment? What character defects drove those reactions — which core issues were triggered — and what consequences did I suffer?

Part of my difficulty in doing this work was having to come face to face with so much shame. There was the collective shame of all the people and situations involved, my shame over my own inadequate responses to those shaming people and situations, and my core beliefs about being defective. Fortunately and miraculously, this work heals the shame it stirs up. I was able to see how truly powerless I am in my disease and how I hadn't the tools to behave any differently in the past. This clarity gave me compassion for myself. Beyond that, it gives me hope and confidence about choices I make today.

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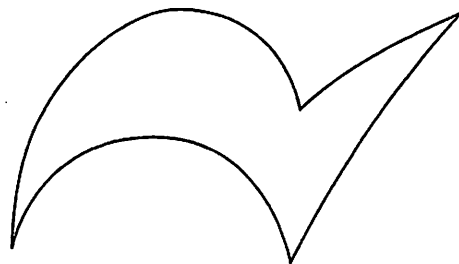
Step 5 Admitted to ourselves, to God and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

The full power of the 4th step is experienced only through the 5th step. A great beauty of this program is the experience of astounding personal transformation with the help of others. Not just me, on my own. Or me with my Higher Power. There's magic in the chemistry of human beings working together guided by our Higher Power.

Working the 5th step with my sponsor was such an experience. She was completely available to me. She listened to everything I had to share with patience, compassion and love. Along the way she gave me great encouragement. She had great insight and wisdom. She was willing to share her own experience whenever it would help my process and healing. When I got stuck and confused, I was usually in denial. She gently led me through the rough feelings to reality.

In my addiction I have been reclusive, defensive, mistrustful, afraid, walled-off and in denial. I think this often came across as arrogance and superiority, especially towards other women. Being able to do the 5th step in a place of vulnerability and trust is truly a blessing of the program. It wasn't perfect! I cried, cringed, suffered and complained — and I had the grace of my Higher Power throughout. These steps give great freedom. Blessings to all in their stepwork!

— Maria L



COSA in Houston 20 Years Ago The Beginning

I left the treatment center with the message ringing in my ears — “If you don’t attend 12 Step Meetings when you go home, your COSA disease will kill you!” That was over twenty years ago. Looking back, it has been quite a journey.

As I felt my feelings and started breaking the family secrets, I began to change my life — one day at a time.

Immediately upon hitting bottom in my COSA disease, I went to a 28-day treatment program. This was my first “COSA miracle” as I had never before heard of a treatment center! The pain and terror of remembering and accepting my past started there. It was the beginning of my recovery from co-sex addiction. As I felt my feelings and started breaking the family secrets, I began to change my life — one day at a time. I needed COSA support to change all of my relationships — with my husband, my children, my parents, my friends. This need to change my family dynamics drove me to help start COSA in Houston in 1984.

In 1983 there were no COSA 12 Step meetings in Houston. I attended ACA, Alanon and open AA meetings. The need for a COSA woman-ship became ever more apparent as I started working the 12 Steps of COSA with my sponsor. I felt the need for sharing and receiving strength and hope from other women suffering in the COSA disease. Two women that I met in other 12 Step meetings joined with me to create COSA meetings here in Houston. We obtained a starter packet from the women in Minneapolis and began our COSA meetings in the basement of a local church.

There we were, three little victims, finding the bravery from our Higher Power to band⇒

together. Our meetings were immediately wonderful and frightening. Joy and fear presided. The joy came from banding together with other women who knew the disease of co-sex addiction and who were ready to change and to accept the support and love of each other. We came to believe that with the help of our Higher Power we could accept one another’s love and support. The fear came from feeling the hell of our own addiction and COSA secrets.

Our first meetings were in the kindergarten room of a Sunday school. Sitting in those little chairs at a little table with two other COSA’s felt so very appropriate and healing, especially for the ones of us who had suffered childhood sexual abuse. Our meetings broke down the shame we carried from our past. In our meetings we started to evolve from victims to survivors!

... women would come up to me and say “I want what you have found. What is COSA?” Then they would appear at the next COSA meeting.

As we blossomed in our womanhood of recovery, I started to share in other 12 Step meetings about my feelings and the reality of my addiction. I was heard, and women would come up to me and say “I want what you have found. What is COSA?” Then they would appear at the next COSA meeting. COSA began to grow. Local therapists began to guide women to our meetings. Survivors of our COSA disease, we joined together, healing our wounds by working the steps, sponsoring and sharing. We heard the message of recovery from strong recovering women, powered by our Higher Power. This was our beginning.

I rejoice for COSA’s twentieth anniversary in Houston in 2004!

— *Claudine F*

News from Online

Our online COSA group http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/COSA_12_STEP/ is thriving. In less than a year we have grown from an idea to a membership of over 450 COSAs and an archive of over 5000 messages.

We screen applicants for membership for appropriateness for the group and do our best to maintain a safe and healthy environment for recovery. Because of the volume of email generated by this group, we encourage our members to choose to receive only special notices via email and to come to the website to browse the archive and files and to post messages.

Every Monday evening at 9 CT we hold an online discussion meeting in our Chat area. If we could recruit more people willing to host⇒

them, we would hold more online meetings. We have a Files area where we are gathering useful COSA files which can be downloaded by any group member.

Recently we established a smaller invitation-only Step Study group http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/COSA_Step_Work/ in which we study and work the Steps together, each at our own pace. This groups needs more mentors who have experience working the 12 Steps of COSA.

If you are interested in joining the online group you can apply at the online website or at the NSO-COSA website. If you are interested in volunteering with our online service work, please email COSA_12_STEP-owner@yahoogroups.com.

— Burnet O

2004 COSA National Convention Schedule

Date	Time	Topic
28-May	7:30	Opening Ceremony
29-May	9 - 10:15	Sharing Recovery w/Children (Panel Format)
29-May	9 - 10:15	Boundaries
29-May	10:30-11:45	Working With Others: Sponsorship
29-May	10:30-11:45	What are Your Circles: COSA Bottom Lines
29-May	1:30-2:45	Reclaiming our Sacred Sexuality
29-May	1:30-2:45	I am Completely Powerless: Step One
29-May	3:00-4:30	COSA Panel Workshop
29-May	3:00-4:30	Centering Through Yoga
29-May	6:00-9:00	COSA/SAA Banquet (Included in Registration fee)
29-May	9:00 - 12:00	Entertainment (Drumming, movie, karaoke)
30-May	10-11:30	How to Have a Birthday Meeting: Dallas Style
30-May	10-11:30	Learning to Take Care of Me: In Spite of My Core Beliefs.
30-May	12 - 2:00	Optional Brunch with SAA (SAA Speaker)
30-May	2:30-4	Closing Ceremony
30-May	7:00- 10:00	Talent Show
30-May	10:00 - Until	Candlelight Memorial Service
31-May	noon	Optional Brunch with SAA
31-May		Open for sightseeing, entertainment, shopping, etc.

* COSA meeting at the start and close of every day