

# Balance

NEWSLETTER OF THE NATIONAL SERVICE ORGANIZATION OF COSA



Volume 1 Issue 3

November-December 2004

## CELEBRATING 25 Years

As another New Year rolls around, many of us take the time to do an inventory, remember things for which we are grateful, and set our intentions for 2005. COSA started twenty-five years ago in Minneapolis because some suffering people were willing to step up and make the effort to start a group. The NSO was formed eleven years ago because some members were willing to step forward and make the effort to give of their talents.

Because members were willing to do service work and reach out to those still suffering, we have become a fellowship with groups in most states and in several foreign countries. Because members are willing to give back by doing service work, we are beginning to grow into full maturity as a fellowship. Our expansion can be only as rapid as we have sufficient members willing to volunteer some of their time and talent. We need more and more members with good recovery to help develop and expand our services.

As you contemplate what you have received from your COSA recovery, please consider what talents and resources you possess

that you would be willing to offer to your fellowship. Many of us have spent hundreds of dollars and much of our time and energy in our addictions and in therapy and counseling. Think about how much your recovery is worth to you, and what you are willing to give back to COSA.

Your fellowship needs you. It needs you to attend meetings. It needs you to work on your healing through the 12 Steps. It needs you to start new groups. It needs you to contribute to the on-line group. It needs you to attend the Convention and the Annual Meeting of the NSO each Memorial Day week end. It needs you to attend speaker meetings and retreats. It needs you to be long-distance sponsors for people with no meetings available. It needs you to become a CCC (COSA Connections Coordinator) for some of the states. It needs you to learn how to get the word out to your local community. It needs your financial support. It needs you to offer your talents, skills and abilities to help it grow into a mature fellowship among 12 Step Fellowships. It needs you to help with the continuing development of an efficient service structure which can

better provide the things that members are requesting. There are more suffering people seeking relief and asking for help than we have members in place to provide the support they need.

As for me, I know that I would not be alive had I not found COSA fifteen years ago. It is a gift to me to be able to serve this fellowship and give back in small measure. When I start to feel burdened with all that needs to be done in relation to the limits of one person's time and energy, I ask myself, "What is my life worth?" and I get renewed motivation to continue to do the best I can for the remainder of my service commitment.

It is my wish that we will find enough healing and enough self-care in our COSA recovery that we will be able to give back in some small way to help those who still suffer.

Thanks for the opportunity to serve,

JoAn D. NSO Chair

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## *COSA Step 1*

*Presented at the COSA Convention 5/2004*

***Step 1: We admitted that we were powerless over compulsive sexual behavior, that our lives had become unmanageable.***

When most of us came to COSA, we were in varying stages of collapse, from an inability to eat, sleep or do routine daily tasks, to a white-faced trembling stage of nausea and fear, to blazing anger at the betrayal we felt toward the addict. The realization of how deep our loved one's problem went left us stripped and in some cases unable to go on. We thought of suicide and murder at the same time, yet a part of us cried incessantly to hang on to the relationship, that maybe things would be OK if we could be enough.

We believed the addict when they said or implied it was all our fault, that the pressures we exerted on the relationship were overwhelming and if we would just do more, be more, everything would work the way we'd hoped. And besides, we were used to taking blame, so we eagerly took on the responsibility for yet another problem in our relationship. We started trying to be enough--to be sexy enough, capable enough, patient enough, attractive enough, responsible enough, silent or outspoken enough, to be a super hero in some or all respects, in order to hang on to this person we loved. In so doing we hoped to gain the respect, love, attention and fidelity we felt we deserved.

We learned controlling from our families of origin and applied those tactics to the relationship with our addict. We started

snooping, checking bank records, odometer readings, visiting the Spy Store. All the while looking to separate the truth from the lies we were being told, yet denying the reality of our lives. We ignored the outbursts of temper over nothing, blaming ourselves as the cause of the treatment we received. We let pass the silences that sometimes went on for days, hoping if we were quiet or cheerful or sullen, our loved one would notice and take interest again in us and the relationship. We were afraid to ask questions we had a right to ask. "Where were you?" "When will you be home?" "What happened to the money?" "Do you want to be here?" Fearing abandonment or worse, we often crippled ourselves so we couldn't leave, overeating, quitting our jobs, distancing from other people and things we loved, sucking the joy out of our own lives to focus more on the addict and the problems in our relationship. We covered up, lied to the kids, to our friends, to ourselves. We told everyone or no one, but in either case we pulled away into our own shell of hurt and distrust. As we grew more and more isolated, we hoped things would turn out alright given just a little more time, while we and our offspring lived in misery.

Some of us went as far as to become more sexual for the addict, participating in activities we abhorred and felt ashamed of, believing we could do more to satisfy the cravings our addict felt. Demeaning ourselves pulled us further into the cycle of despair, but we hung on to the idea we could do something to change our loved one.

It didn't work. Over and over again

we accepted lies as truth, wanting to believe we were at least partially at fault, that there was something we did to cause this. Because, if we caused our loved one's sexual behavior, then there was something we could do to change it.

As the truth came out, we learned we cannot be held responsible for someone else's sexual behavior. The discovery of the longevity of the addiction, that most of our loved ones were sex addicts before they were teenagers, led us to understand the condition pre-dated our arrival. Sex addiction is a disease as real as cancer or any other disease and we can no more control it by our thoughts, words and behavior than we could control cancer.

We came to realize we are powerless over sex addiction and we let go of the load of shame, guilt and responsibility we carried. A sudden lightness and freedom came to us that we never knew existed. It was a process of constant reminder at first. Whenever we were tempted to take responsibility, we remembered Step 1, that we are powerless, that our lives had become unmanageable. But this process was so much easier than our attempts to control, carry blame, and act as detectives. It wasn't our fault.

There was no hope of becoming sexy, capable, patient, attractive, responsible, silent or outspoken enough to stop our loved one's compulsive sexual behavior. Even a super hero couldn't do it. So we rested, as we let our powerlessness become our reality. And we let go. Then we went on to Step 2.

Linda R., Texas

**COSA Step 2**

*Presented at the COSA Convention 5/2004*

***Step 2: Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.***

It took most of us a long time to be able to accept there was someone, anyone out there stronger, more stable, and more powerful than ourselves. And more time to accept the same someone would be willing to restore sanity to our lives. As children, we were often caretakers in our families. Others of us were raised by those who modeled caretaking for us. Most of us were raised by addicts who couldn't take care of themselves, much less us. So at an early age, we took on the role of an adult with our parents and siblings. We solved problems, prepared meals, had jobs, took care of ourselves and others, way before our peers even thought of being responsible for someone else. We often took on a wife or husband role to a parent because we had to. And our parents, unable to help themselves, often told us we were selfish, dumping their problems on us, expecting us to make sacrifices beyond our years. We got use to being abandoned, betrayed and alone. There was no one we felt we could depend on. And after a while we stopped asking or even hoping for help, support, affection or even a thank-you. Our betrayal by our spouse cemented things for us. Most of us placed our spouse in the role of problem solver, the person who would complete us and care for us like we'd never been cared for before and like we were unable to care for ourselves. When they fell off the pedestal we'd placed them on, we thought we'd never recover.

We resented being the sole carrier of all the responsibility for the relation-

ships in our lives. While we felt strongly the insanity of our lives, the concept that someone more powerful than ourselves would care, much less be willing to help, was so completely foreign an idea that it took some time to comprehend.

"We came to believe. . ." means we went through the process of accepting the concept that someone actually was stronger than ourselves. Surrounded as children and now as adults by people who's weakness we were used to compensating for, the concept of both someone stronger and someone interested in helping seemed outlandish. Anyone in the past who appeared interested in us had often turned out to have a hidden agenda, only interested in using us. Suspicion breed from betrayal after betrayal by those who where in roles to care for us, left us gasping at the concept we could trust a power greater than ourselves. Our parents, our care givers, our spouse, the people we trusted, had more than betrayed us, they'd stripped us bare either literally or emotionally, or both, leaving us abandoned and trembling with terrors that still woke us up at night. Trust a higher power, someone greater than ourselves? Where had that power been when we were abandoned, shouldered with adult responsibilities way before our time? Our own childhoods stolen from us, we looked with jaundice-eyed suspicion at this offer of restoration to sanity. At the end of ourselves, we hoped it could be true, but. . . so many times our hopes had been raised to be shattered by yet another betrayal, another excruciatingly painful revelation, that we wondered if trusting again was simply

too expensive.

But we wanted to hope. A small belief refused to die. Still, sanity sounded too distant and frankly, too good to be true.

It was a process for us, one tiny step at a time, to come to believe. We asked ourselves over and over, could someone who has nothing to gain from me be interested in helping? Again, we asked, where had this higher power been before? But then we realized they'd been there hurting with us. We discovered we closed ourselves off in a shell of our own making that still didn't keep us safe, but kept life-giving help out. Slowly we peeled back the putrid, blood soaked layers of our pain, exposing what we could bear a little at a time. We learned to trust again, learned we could be secure and sane if we would choose to reach outside ourselves for help. And a little at a time, we let the light of the hope of sanity shine in as we came to trust, to believe, in that power we didn't have, that power greater than ourselves, who we discovered was eager to restore us to sane living.

Then we went on to Step 3.

Linda R., Texas

## *COSA Step 3*

*Presented at the COSA Convention 5/2004*

***Step 3: Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.***

After looking at ourselves in a situation we could hardly believe we were in, after viewing with clarity our anger and our pain, we had to get real. It was clear now to us that our best efforts to solve our own problems made things worse. What seemed perfectly logical behavior to us, often behavior advised by family and friends, not only made our lives miserable, those actions and words accelerated the problems. We could hardly believe things could get worse.

But as we uncovered more and more evidence, late at night, losing sleep, pouring over phone bills, bank statements, computer files, things did get worse. Our pain grew to unbearable proportions. It was tempting at times to simply end our own lives. What difference would it make?

The few minutes of relief we found from the pain that pursued us was when we admitted powerlessness in a group meeting or on the phone with another group member. It was at those times we were reminded there was someone, our higher power, who offered sanity. But how to accept that offer?

We didn't understand. We knew it was outside our comprehension to get it. How could we focus on ourselves and turn ourselves and everything else over to a God we'd just barely glimpsed? How would this work? It sounded so selfish.

And we didn't want to be selfish. We couldn't see it. How could it be that we could let go and the sun would still come up in the morning? It felt as though we were on a wildly spinning merry-go-round and should we let go, we'd be flung off never to be discovered again. And not only us, but our family members, the ones we'd been hanging on to and for, would also be lost forever.

But those with more recovery, the serene members of our fellowship, kept encouraging us. It was the peace we saw in them along with those moments of relief from our own pain that motivated us.

So we took the plunge. Not all at once, but a little more every day, we let go and let our higher power take over as much as we understood for that moment. We cringed doing it, expecting doom to befall our family members or ourselves, awaiting something worse. But as we accepted the concept that we simply could go with what little understanding we had of our higher power, we found peace growing within us. And we discovered we didn't have to know everything. We didn't even have to know a lot. We could admit how little we knew and the bit of understanding we had was enough. As we let go, turning ourselves over to however small a part of God we understood, we found a new freedom and a new hope.

Further, as we turned our lives over, we turned our wills over. We gave up our expectations, a little at a time, of who and what the people around us should be. In turning our lives over, we gave up what we wanted. It was no longer about how we wanted it to be or how we wanted to look to others. A little at a time, we stopped worrying about our reputation. We had wanted our family, our spouse to be certain things and we gave those things up. Released them to

our higher power. We learned an expectation is a planned resentment so we turned our expectations over to God.

We found we didn't have to carry all of it. We didn't have to carry any of it. Our family and friends would be OK without the pain we put ourselves through on what we thought was their behalf. If they were unhappy or upset or hurting, we could have compassion and be emotionally present but not take on those burdens. We learned to be gentle and forgiving with ourselves first as we went through this process and that translated into being gentle and forgiving with others. And if we were hurting or unhappy or upset, we learned we didn't have to carry those feelings alone. We could let go and focus on what was good for ourselves. It was no longer our job to make everyone happy, or to protect ourselves, or to protect others from themselves. We learned to nurture ourselves. Our higher power could do the carrying and all we had to do was turn our will and our lives over to Him.

And we learned as we did so that the more we let go, the better our lives got and the more we learned about God. We grew to understand God is a capable custodian of the universe, and we could trust Him to take care of it, even when it didn't look good to us. And our lives got better, happier, more joyful until we felt gratitude bubbling up within us. And that's an emotion we thought we'd never feel again. It wasn't our job or our responsibility anymore. It never had been. We could let go, let God and move on to Step 4.

Linda R., Texas

## Step 1

### WE ADMITTED WE WERE POWERLESS OVER OTHERS — THAT OUR LIVES HAD BECOME UNMANAGEABLE.

The keywords in this step are **POWERLESS OVER OTHERS**. It is the bases of the program and the sooner we admit to this powerlessness the sooner we can move into a more manageable life.

At first I only read **powerless**. This powerless concept was hard for me to understand because I interpreted it as helpless. If I was powerless or helpless over the addict it seemed to me that I was also vulnerable and dependent on him. Isn't the addict the one who made me the messed up victim that brought me to this program in the first place? Wasn't this supposed to be a program of strength and hope? At the time I thought "Oh, my God, once again I was to dumb or crazy to get it..."

But the step said "**powerless**" not helpless. And, vulnerability does not mean to become a victim to others. It means I cannot control the addict or a whole lot of other things and people in my life. It means I can voice my opinion and express my desires. It means I can and should have my needs met but not necessarily by the addict.

I bring value to all my relationships. And, I get value from who or what ever I have a relationship with, whether it is my husband, children, extended family, the corporation I work for, or the organizations I belong too.

As soon as I can't see the value that I bring to the relationship or the benefit I get out of the relationship it then becomes dysfunctional. Dysfunction breeds chaos or apathy. Both are unmanageable. Healthy people take action by making changes that bring value back into the relationship and if that doesn't work they dissolve the relationship. That sounds pretty powerful to me. I think I am getting it now. The step does not say I am powerless...it says I am "powerless over others".

Let me go back to relationships. If I don't and cannot foresee bringing value to a relationship, it is dysfunctional. If I don't receive or foresee a value from a relationship, then it is dysfunctional. Healthy people get out of dysfunctional relationships. It seems so simple and this is said to be a simple program. But, what about those relationships that I get a little benefit from but they seem to suck the life out of me? You know, those relationships that eventually make you resentful and angry. How many times have I said if only the addict would \_\_\_\_\_. This is the warning to me that my codependency is kicking in, that I am giving my power of well being to the addict or for that matter anything that can replace the word

addict in my sentence..."If only the addict would \_\_\_\_\_". I am thinking that if I say this sentence frequently I am in an out of balance or dysfunctional situation. I need to use my power to bring it into balance or get out.

This step talks about powerlessness but it is all about power. We all have power whether we believe it or not. Step One does not tell me where to put this power but it does tell me where **not** put it. It even warns what will happen if we choose to put our power there,... "our life will become unmanageable".

Where will you choose to put your power today?

This program has helped me make better decisions. The group members have supported me and understood my feelings and situations that others in my life could not, and I am thankful for them. I thank Almighty God, my Higher Power, for helping me write this step today and leading me to COSA many years ago. Catherine, MN

# Volume 1 Issue 3

## What is a COSA?

According to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tradition of COSA the only requirement for membership is that our lives have been affected by someone else's compulsive sexual behavior. This is actually a very broad and inclusive statement as it is written. It can mean that I am a COSA if anyone in my life is a sex addict and their sex addiction affects me. The sex addict in my life can be a parent, a partner, a child, a co-worker – anyone. Sex addicts are certainly a diverse lot. They are rich, poor, black, white, Hispanic, male, female, straight and gay. All of these sex addicts are affecting the lives of many, many other people. Aren't the COSAs they affect just as rich, poor, black, white, Hispanic, male, female, straight and gay? But is that diversity reflected in our meetings? Or are our meetings disproportionately white, middle class, heterosexual and female?

According to the 5<sup>th</sup> Tradition of COSA each group has but one primary purpose – to carry its message to those who still suffer. Are we effectively reaching out to *all* COSAs who are still suffering? Reaching out is hard and it takes courage. First we have to reach in – to see what is essential in ourselves as COSAs. Then we can see the essential COSA in others - even if these others look very different from us on the outsides. We have to see that in our COSA program gender, class, race and sexual orientation are irrelevant – they are not requirements for membership in COSA as stated in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tradition.

How can we reach out to others who are still suffering? We can carry the COSA message to others best, ironically, by keeping the focus on ourselves and working the Steps. We can attract others by growing spiritually, moving past our unhealthy fears, living out the Promises, and by leading healthy, effective lives. In

this way we can thoroughly practice Step 12 - having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps we will carry our message to other COSAs – *all* other COSAs. Carol Ann, Houston, TX

This process has brought me  
From despair to hope,  
From woundedness to healing,  
From obsession to serenity,  
From self-hatred to self love,  
From isolation to community,  
From family of origin to family of recovery  
From physical illness to physical health,  
From negative thoughts to positive thoughts,  
From mistaken beliefs to rational beliefs,  
From warped perceptions to realistic perceptions,  
From denial to awareness,  
From feeling responsible for everything  
To feeling responsible for myself,  
From caretaking to caring for,  
From self-negation to self-affirmation,  
From struggle to surrender,  
From unrealistic expectations to the serenity prayer,  
From "I love you because I need you"  
To "I need you because I love you"  
From having no choice  
To being aware of dozens of choices,  
From anxiety to calm,  
And from not wanting to be in my body  
and circumstances,  
To being comfortable in my skin wherever I am.

My pain brought me to my knees  
Where I made a  
**FEW GOOD CHOICES !**

JoAn D., WA

**MARK YOUR CALENDAR NOW FOR THE SPRING RERET**

**APRIL 22-24, 2005**

Email: [naturalwonder@fmuth.com](mailto:naturalwonder@fmuth.com) for more information

Retreat topic: Self Forgiveness & Self Love. This retreat is held in Michigan twice a year. It is impossible to share in words the experience, strength and hope that we have shared.

Retreats, workshops and conferences are not optional. They are necessary part of our growth.

Consider attending a retreat near you in 2005.

# Balance

## Dissatisfaction X Vision X First Step > Resistance

I'd like to share what I received by attending a retreat on the following topic. I'm hoping it will give each of us some insight on the experience, strength and hope we receive by attending retreats, conventions and conferences. My outcome may not be the same as what the presenter thought she presented. This is what I received from the workshop. The entire concept has been very helpful to me in every area of my life.

$D \times V \times F > R$  will give you a healthier body, improved relationships, plus a more positive attitude about yourself.

D signifies Dissatisfaction

V stands for Vision

F wants us to determine the First step

When I am dissatisfied and I have no vision, I will remain in my pool of dissatisfaction. I will continue to whine and complain but nothing will change because I have no vision. There is even the possibility that I like where I am. What are my rewards? Do I believe I get attention when I complain? Do I like the attention? Is there a payoff for staying dissatisfied?

When I decide I don't want to be dissatisfied any longer, I have to create a vision of what I'd prefer my life, my body, my relationships to look like.

Of course that is still just a vision. I'm probably still swimming in my pool of dissatisfaction. The next part of the formula  $F =$  First Step. What is the first step I need to take? I will soon move from dissatisfaction and toward my vision. It may take several steps to reach my vision, however the other steps won't happen if I don't take my first step.

The R stands for resistance. I see it as also standing for results.

Dissatisfaction times V my visions, times F my first step will be > greater than my resistance to change. Or D time V times F can = equal Results.

When I step out of the dissatisfaction, I can experience the positive results. I can do that with my relationships with my children, my siblings, other family members, my spouse or my friends and fellow workers. Even my fellow inmates if I'm reading this from my prison cell. I can use this formula with my health concerns. I can use this formula with my concerns about my outward or inward vision of myself.

A few months ago, I learned about this formula at a workshop. I appreciate this formula. It has reminded me once again

that I cannot look outward and blame others for my anger, my depressions, my sentence in this life. Everything about me is within. I am the only one who can change who I am, what I think, how I feel. I use this formula when I feel myself reaching for the desire to dive into dissatisfaction.

Today, I don't have a spouse. My spouse died. I do know what dissatisfaction feels like. My husband was arrested. I realize today, I made myself a prisoner of what I thought other people thought. I made myself a prisoner of my 'poor me' attitude. Why did this happen to me and my family?

I still don't have the answers to why negative events happen in our lives. I do know I am the only one who can change me. I can only do that by taking action to get out of dissatisfaction

Take the dissatisfaction. Use it to determine your vision. Figure out what your first step will be. It will produce results within you just as it has me. Vision with a First step toward change is greater than the Resistance to stay stuck in Dissatisfaction.

Ila D., MI

# Balance

## Plea for Input

My vision as editor of the Balance is to have a folder overflowing with articles submitted from the membership from which I can form topics for upcoming issues. For this to happen, I invite every group, intergroup and member to submit articles that share your ESH (experience, strength, and hope). Also, articles that share upcoming events in your area; such as retreats, workshops, speakers etc. Articles that give a voice to your story. As well as your ideas as to what you would like to see in future articles. The Balance is a newsletter for the membership, by the membership. Please send your articles to [NewsletterCOSA@aol.com](mailto:NewsletterCOSA@aol.com) or by snail mail to the NSO-COSA PO Box listed below.

Hope to hear from you soon...

## NSO-COSA Central Archive

The NSO of COSA is in the process of creating an archive in a central location.

If you have served the NSO-COSA board in any capacity in the past, and have anything that you think would be relevant in our attempt to bring all of the bits and pieces of our past together..

Please contact me at

[MyInnerPeace@aol.com](mailto:MyInnerPeace@aol.com) for instruction on where to ship it. Thanks for your assistance...

Judi K, NSO Coordinator

## WHAT'S HAPPENING

NSO COSA National Convention

Masks Off

Friday May 27- 30, 2005

New Orleans, Louisiana

See enclosed flyer for details

YOUR

EXPERIENCE

STRENGTH

AND HOPE

COULD HAVE BEEN  
SHARED IN THIS SPACE

*Balance, the newsletter of the NSO-COSA, is published bi-monthly. The NSO-COSA holds the copyright to the newsletter.*

*We apologize for the irregular schedule of the Balance over the past year. As an amends, we will extend the subscriptions by four months (two issues) for those subscribers of record since June 2003.*

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