



Volume 7, Issue 4 Fall Issue September/October 2011

Sponsorship

Finding One

When I got to this program, I found the COSA Sponsorship Booklet. This booklet and the collective wisdom of my group were available to teach me about sponsorship. I was not in a hurry to find a sponsor, though. I had come into COSA engaged to a man who had told me on our second date about his addiction, though he didn't call it that. I felt shame about staying in the relationship, and I wasn't sure I wanted to let someone really get to know me. I felt safer at first hiding in the group and doing a lot of listening. In my home group, there was a sign on the wall that said "Meetings = Relief, Steps = Recovery." I was enjoying the relief the meetings provided, and eventually I wanted more.

I began working the Steps; however, it took me several months to decide to try to find a sponsor. For me, the first three Steps helped me to become less self-reliant and more Higher Power reliant. When I was ready, I heard a Sponsorship Prayer:

[Continued on page 8](#)

Convention Confusion

Those of you who attended the 2011 COSA Convention may have seen how smoothly everything went. Workshops were where they were supposed to be, speakers showed up on time, and the silent auction went off without a hitch. It was as smooth as silk, and that's what we're used to.

Many people did not know that due to a difficulty with the hotel, it looked like we were not going to have enough rooms for the events we had planned. We had no luck getting what we needed until we went to SAA, and asked for help.

SAA came through for us. They did some shuffling, and gave us some of the rooms that were allocated to their convention. Because of SAA's generosity, we had the rooms we needed, and the COSA Convention worked for *you*.

Thank you SAA.

ISO of COSA Board

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**Every COSA
group ought
to be fully self
-supporting,
declining
outside
contributions.**

Seventh Tradition: Financial Report/June & July 2011

Group	
NV-01	50.00
IA-01	25.00
MN-04	20.00
CA-02	73.00
CA-13	178.17
CA-09	80.00
MN-02	216.00
CT-02	80.50
	722.67
Recurring	
	836.42
Total	1,559.09

By the Fellowship - For the Fellowship

Balance, the newsletter of the International Service Organization of **COSA** is published six times a year. The ISO holds the copyright to this newsletter

Editing, Design,
Production & Layout by
COSA Literature
Committee

Distribution by—

I SO Office Manager

We encourage every group, intergroup and member to submit articles that **share your ESH** (experience, strength, and hope). Also, articles and announcements that **share upcoming COSA events** in your area; such as retreats, workshops, speakers, etc. We also would love to hear your ideas for **what you would like to see** in future articles. The Balance is a newsletter for the membership, by the membership.

Guidelines for Submitting Literature:

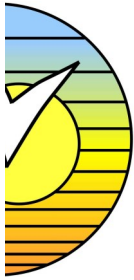
<http://www.cosa-recovery.org/literature.html> (scroll down, then click on pdf link)

Please send your articles to COSACopy@yahoo.com or by snail mail to the

COSA ISO
P.O. BOX 79908
Houston, TX 77279-9908

Phone: 866-899-2672
E-mail: info@cosa-recovery.org

What if there was only half an ISO?



Well, in a sense, a part is missing.

In COSA recovery, we learn that the only thing we can change is our part.

This year the ISO Board has changed many things—the size and location of the Central Office, the new toll free phone number, and the range of new free services provided to help local groups carry the COSA message. But....

We can't do it without you!

If you have not already done so, please consider including the ISO in your annual charitable giving by making a tax-deductible contribution through the ISO website.

To do your part, simply go to the ISO of COSA homepage at www.COSA-recovery.org and click the *Donate Now!* button.

If each member were to contribute in this way, just think how far we could carry the COSA message together!

In your service,
The ISO Board of Trustees

Goal Three Committee Report: COSA Book Development

The Goal 3 committee is working hard on finalizing a draft for our COSA book's table of contents. We have reviewed the texts from nine other fellowships for inspiration. Six of our members recently completed a "basic recovery workshop" designed to help them work the Twelve Steps. They are now better equipped for their Goal 3 committee work.

If you are interested in working on the COSA book contact jadntacoma@aol.com

JoAn D.
Chair, Goal 3 Committee



The COSA Literature Committee is responsible for producing booklets, pamphlets, and other literature for the fellowship, as well as publishing the *Balance*. Also, LitCom would like to develop an editing team and a layout and design team to work with the COSA Book Task Force toward completion of Goal 3: COSA Book Development. We have an ambitious plan for this year's literature and we need your help!

Would you be interested in serving the fellowship through involvement with LitCom? Some of our current projects include booklets on Steps Seven, Eight, and Nine, a booklet about Triggers, and a piece on Attraction Not Promotion. If you would like to write, edit or do layout and design with us, please email COSAcopy@yahoo.com for more information.

Thanks!
Claudia M
Literature Committee
Chair



**Made direct
amends
except
when
to do so
would
injure
other
people**

Step Nine

By the time I came to Step Nine, my life was manageable. In fact, I was well out of the storm. I had a strong self-care routine, new friends, and solid social and professional support groups. I had a new boyfriend. I could have chosen to stop there. But, why stop at “manageable” when I could be “happy, joyous and free.” Those are the Ninth Step Promises. My trust in the program motivated me to move forward and begin to actually make amends.

In many cases, the recipients did not even know that I was making amends to them. Some amends consisted simply of appreciation letters. My resentments had kept me from seeing their good sides and appreciating how they had enriched my life. I thanked them, and my own heart and gratitude grew with each word written.

Some were living amends, such as staying on my side of the street, yet speaking up and expressing my true feelings when someone challenged my boundaries. Visiting my family is a lot more enjoyable for me because I practice these principles. I get the impression that these feelings are reciprocal.

With each amend, I reminded myself to stay humble. Spiritual pride interfered constantly in the process. This was particularly true when I was writing my amend letter to the person who was my partner at the time I came to COSA. For example, I imagined myself in competition with him for recovery. “He might have done his amends to many first, but my amends are cleaner.” It took me weeks to clean up my intentions for doing this amend.

With Step Five, I had admitted to myself, to my Higher Power and to my sponsor the exact nature of my wrongs. However, my sponsor listened to me with compassion. She was on my side. She understood what lay beneath my actions. My ex-boyfriend had threatened me with a defamation lawsuit. The things I wanted to apologize for were different from the grievances he had expressed towards me. With that letter, I felt that every word could be used against me in a court of law, literally. I was phrasing each sentence carefully, aiming for accuracy and completeness.

Why was I doing this amend? I doubted that this would make him feel better. I had not spoken to him in two years, and frankly did not long for reconciliation. Many non-program friends were questioning my sanity at this point. They were still seeing me as the victim in the whole story. “What good is this gonna bring?” Frankly, I was not particularly optimistic about the outcome of this amends either. Finally, this simple answer came to me clearly: “This is the right thing to do. When I screw up, I need to apologize.”

For years, I had been expecting intimacy from an active sex addict. It was like expecting some sweet maple syrup from a rose bush. When I pricked myself on the thorns, I made

Step Nine—cont'd.

scenes at the nursery, checked in their cash register, and scared the other clients off. For years thereafter, the gardener became wary of what the “crazy woman” might do every time he saw me walk in front of his store. Well, one day, I had to stop and apologize.

I prayed before I met the ex-boyfriend I hadn't seen for two years. It was unpleasant but I was not afraid any longer. I did it on the leap of faith that the long term benefits of doing the right thing now would far outweigh the unpleasantness of the experience. I stayed silent when he compared his recovery to mine. I felt invisible and sad because, despite years of recovery, our realities still seemed very different. Yet, I did what I could to alleviate the fear he felt as a result of my actions.

The process also benefited my current romantic relationship as I know that I never want to have to do this again. Today, I talk about the tough issues as they come up, and with respect. Those are the amends to myself."

With all my amends, I invite the recipients to add to the list of harm done in case I have inadvertently omitted something, and I ask them to offer suggestions about how I might make reparations for harm done. I do not guarantee that I will do it, but I assure them that I will consider their feedback and suggestions with integrity. So far, no one has taken me up on my offer.

The last of the Action Steps, Step Nine feels like the end-of-semester performance, to which the rehearsal of the other Steps was leading. I needed the introspection of the Fourth and Fifth Steps and the humility of the Sixth and Seventh Steps.

Today, I am at the tail end of my Ninth Step, on the last climb of this steep recovery mountain before I reach the unblocked view of the horizon. But there have already been many wonderful views along the way.

Helen
SF Bay Area, CA

Step Nine Questions

1. Why is it important for me to stay in close contact with my sponsor during the amends process?
2. Why do I need to make amends to people who have harmed me?
3. Why do I need to make direct amends wherever possible?
4. Why do I have to make sure that I do not make amends at the expense of the person I have harmed or other people?
5. Why is forgiveness such an important part of Step Nine?

STEP SHARES



**Continued
to take
personal
inventory
and when
we were
wrong
promptly
admitted it**

Step Ten

I have always seen Step Ten as a housekeeping Step. Just as I take care of my home, I must also take care of myself. The longer I go without doing some cleaning, the harder and longer those jobs are. When I did my first Step Nine, it took me months. I had never done one before. I had made a lot of mistakes and harmed a lot of people. As I slowly went through my list I made amends to those who were easiest first, until the ones who weren't so easy became so. I had learned that some of the ones that were the hardest were from a long time ago. I had let them sit and build up for years. When I had made those amends my life changed. I felt lighter and freer. I was on to Step Ten. I realized that in order to keep these feelings, I had to be honest with myself about my actions. When I was wrong, I had to promptly admit it. Like the hard chores I would do in my house, if I did them often enough they didn't seem so hard anymore. When I avoided doing these chores for months, they would build up into something that seemed impossible.

While practicing Step Ten, I started to notice patterns in my life. While doing daily inventories, I started to make amends to my partner frequently for the same things. At first I thought, this is okay because I apologized. However, I had forgotten a key part of amends: changing the behaviour so my apology was genuine. Was I really sorry if I kept doing the behaviour or did I just want to excuse it away? Step Ten really helped me. Without it, I don't know if I would have seen the daily routine of how my actions could hurt others. Step Ten also helped me see the good in myself. I often would do inventories trying to find all of the wrongs and promptly admit them. I had forgotten about the other part of this step: finding the good I was doing. Where had I progressed? What defects had turned into assets? What were some positive things I had done? I had to look at myself honestly. If I were honest, I had things I needed to work on and make amends for and things I could be proud of.

Now just as I try to tidy up my house daily, I try to tidy up myself daily. I look at what I can improve on, and where I have progressed. When I am wrong, I promptly admit it. I don't have another long "to-do" list of amends to make in the future if I continue to trust in the process of Step Ten. I know that I will also have fewer "heavy-duty" jobs to do in the future.

Carolee D
Ontario, Canada

Step Ten Questions

1. Step Ten is the first of the "maintenance" or "growth" Steps. Why do I need to continue to take inventories to maintain or grow my recovery?
2. Why should I make my amends promptly? How soon should I make amends?
3. Have I ever made amends prematurely? If so, why? How did this affect me?
4. Do I include amends to myself while working my Tenth Step?
5. When I work my Tenth Step, do I remember to give myself credit for the things I do?

ISO of 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, sexual orientation or gender identification, physical or mental challenges, race, financial status, 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 on COSA unity.



Sponsorship

Sponsorship—cont'd.

“Higher Power, please tell me who you want me to choose as a sponsor, and please make it so obvious that I know for sure it’s your pick.”

There was a woman in my group who had recovery that I admired. She had Twelve-Stepped me when I came in, and I knew her story. She had a lot of what I wanted. But, perhaps more importantly, she had what she wanted. She was happy. I had a lot of resistance. She was different than I was. She didn’t fit several of the requirements on my list. In her sharing, she’d often say how busy she was, and I didn’t want to be rejected. However, my Higher Power seemed to urge me forward. Each time this woman shared, she had something that struck my heart. I was beginning my Step Four, and the message for me was courage. Was it obvious enough? In faith and desperation, I asked. She said she would be honored. And we began a relationship that has changed my life.

I know today how lucky I was to find a sponsor so easily. There aren’t a lot of people who sponsor in COSA, although there are a lot of people who want and need sponsors. I have often been amazed at the creativity and persistence of the people that I have known who have found sponsors, co-sponsors, or study groups. They found a way because they wanted recovery so much.

Having One

My sponsor is not always available, so she has taught me to reach out and to use boundaries. She does not always make me happy with her honesty. She has taught me to tell the truth. She often surprises me with her experience, strength and hope. She has taught me the value of another person's perspective. She has sometimes made me angry. Her acceptance of that my anger has taught me I am not responsible for other people's feelings, and that I don't have to make everybody happy. She has also taught me that I can be angry at someone and stay in the relationship.

It's important to understand what a sponsor is NOT. My sponsor is not my chauffeur, my banker, or my best friend. She leads me through the Twelve Steps and the Traditions and Concepts and helps me to apply all the tools of the program. Most important of all, she led me to a deeper understanding of my Higher Power.

Having a sponsor means that I tell all my secrets to one person. Before I had a sponsor, I spread out those secrets pretty well. My sponsor got to know all of me, through our conversations and through my Step Five. I found out for the first time that I was really lovable. I spent a lot of time hiding from people, and letting myself be really known for the first time was frightening but rewarding.

Continued on page 9

Sponsorship—cont'd.

My recovery took off once I began to work with a sponsor. Suddenly, there was a person in my life that I trusted enough to call and ask questions and spill out my deepest fears and dreams. She encouraged me to talk about myself, not my partner. She patiently taught me the tools of the program and taught me how to identify the problem so that I used the right tools. Always, she shared her experience, strength, and hope. She never gave me advice. In doing these things, she not only sponsored me but also taught me how to sponsor. Her love and acceptance of me early on helped me to treat sponsees in the same way. Her suggestion that I build myself a support network in COSA taught me not to depend on one person for my recovery.

Being One

The first time I was asked to sponsor, I was afraid. I was afraid that I wouldn't be good enough. I was afraid that I wouldn't know what to say, wouldn't be able to answer her questions, wouldn't be able to set boundaries, wouldn't have experience, strength, and hope for her. With my sponsor's help, I learned that a sponsor is not a Higher Power. I had all that I needed to sponsor because I had experience with the Steps and a relationship with a God of my understanding.

At first, I sponsored much as I had been sponsored. Over time, I learned that each sponsee is different and has different needs. But always, the Steps were first and foremost. Always, my Higher Power showed me the way. Always, love and intuition were the keys.

I made a lot of mistakes as I sponsored. I learned how to make amends to my sponsees, and learned that the sponsees and the relationships survived my humanness.

I found it was true that I got as much out of the relationship as my sponsee did, or more. When a sponsee worked Step One, I remembered Step One and learned as well. There were times when I was miserable, and a sponsee would call. I would find myself telling my sponsee exactly what I needed to hear. Most importantly, when I worked with my sponsees, I worked Step Twelve. What I got for fun and for free from my sponsor and the other COSAs in my face-to-face, online, and telephone meetings, I gave away for fun and for free.

Sponsorship

Sponsorship

Sponsorship—cont'd.

Changing One

I have learned that my sponsor invites me to do things differently today. There have been times I thought I needed to changed sponsors, when all I needed was an honest conversation about a difficulty that had arisen between us. I learned to face and express my feelings. But sometimes, it is time to end a sponsor/sponsee relationship. It is not easy. However, I have found that if I thank my sponsor for all she has given me, and make it about me, things usually go well.

Service Sponsorship

As I became more and more active in COSA service, questions came up. I didn't know how best to approach a project or a personality. If my personal sponsor didn't have the experience in this area to help me, I could choose a person whose service work that I admired and respected to become my service sponsor. She might work the Traditions with me, and teach me how to navigate the sometimes difficult and confusing waters of service, how to improve my self care and how to deal with the perfectionism that could cripple me when I was doing service.

Some things I have learned from my Sponsors

I've learned how to have an intimate relationship. I've learned how to work through a disagreement or a disappointment using the tools of the program. I've learned how to trust appropriately. I've learned how to love and respect another person. I've learned how to honor another person's boundaries and how to set my own. I've learned that I am worthy of love. Some of the things that I've learned are words of wisdom that I've used over and over. These include:

Be gentle with yourself

Feelings are like music; we can listen to them but we don't have to dance to them

Least said, most heard

Boundaries build bridges, not walls

There's much to be done about me

When I am not the problem, there is no solution

Sponsorship is one of the greatest gifts this program has given me. Thank you, Sponsor, for all you are to me.

Claudia

Tradition Nine

Tradition Nine: COSA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

When I'm in a playful mood, I might interpret this Tradition as recommending that we be disorganized. In reality, of course, we need a certain amount of structure in order to be effective. What the Tradition is cautioning us against is being organized in such a way that one person or a few people make autocratic decisions for the many. What it encourages us to do instead is to honor the principles of equality and shared responsibility.

Tradition Nine reminds us to be inclusive and democratic. No one person is in charge, and we practice rotation of leadership at all levels of the fellowship. Every COSA member has a right to voice his or her opinion as long as we are respectful when we do so, and no one is excluded from being a member of the fellowship as long as he or she identifies as someone whose life has been affected by compulsive sexual behavior. Our program is for all of us and by all of us.

For COSA to work at the International Service Organization level, we empower and trust the hard-working volunteer members of the ISO Board and committees to make well-considered, informed decisions. If we didn't delegate some of these tasks, we would have a difficult time keeping things running smoothly. Still, we aim to keep bureaucracy to a minimum and keep the well-being of the fellowship first and foremost. The Board will often ask all of the members for input, and each group may send a Delegate to the annual conference for important votes. Through this generosity of service, transparency of process and open dialogue, we all benefit. We are all part of the whole. Each of us is important.

Tradition Nine is not only healthy for the fellowship but is also valuable for me in my individual recovery and service work. If I am having a hard time accepting how someone in my home group works his or her program, Tradition Nine reminds me that all COSAs are welcomed as members, not just some. We are each free to work toward our own recovery in our own way, with the help of our own conception of a Higher Power. Through COSA's democratic approach, I have learned a lot about honoring and expressing myself in group situations. I have walked through my fears of rejection, tempered my perfectionism and my need to feel in control. Now I practice taking care of myself emotionally when tension arises or disagreement arises. I practice good listening skills and try to cultivate open-mindedness in considering other people's opinions. Tradition Nine helps me maintain a right-sized conception of my place within the program (and in the world). Instead of feeling unimportant or invisible, or – at the opposite extreme – feeling overly important and indispensable, I can find a place of peaceful moderation somewhere in between. I can remember that I am special... and so is everyone else!

Tradition Ten: COSA has no opinion on outside issues, hence the COSA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

Tradition Ten helps us serve the greatest number of COSAs. Our members are a diverse group of people. We come from all over the world, from various cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds, and with a broad range of religious beliefs, political opinions, and approaches to life. If we were to link COSA with certain causes and not others, we might alienate many COSAs who could benefit from our life-saving program. Tradition Ten helps COSA be as inclusive as possible.

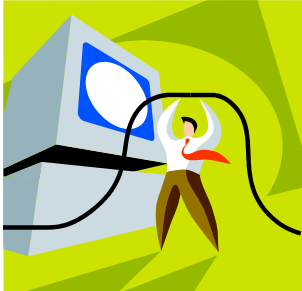
Tradition Ten also ensures that we won't get distracted from our primary aim. To link our fellowship to any outside issue – no matter how worthy – may cause us to dilute our message, divert money, time, and energy away from COSA concerns, or may even drag us into a power struggle or public scandal. This could have disastrous results for the fellowship, and ultimately for the lives of those who may be helped by what we have to offer.

We are each free to celebrate our unique perspectives and to take a stand if we feel called to do so; we do this on our own time, though, separate from anything COSA-related. Outside issues have no place in our fellowship. COSA is a sanctuary where we work through very specific issues. When we enter our COSA meetings, we leave our differences behind. We aim for unity and commonality rather than divisiveness.

On a personal level, Tradition Ten helps me stay “on task” and maintain my serenity wherever I am. For instance, I may find myself in a situation of potential conflict or distraction. If I am at work and I realize that a co-worker has a political point of view that I disagree with vehemently, I can choose to steer clear of political conversations. I can choose to stay focused on my work responsibilities and not pull politics into the mix. It's that simple.

Tradition Ten keeps our program straightforward and effective. It helps ensure that COSA will be there for us – for all of us – when we need it. For that, I am deeply grateful.

Tradition Ten



Online Meetings/Online Message Boards

<http://www.cosa-recovery.org/online.html>

Join [COSA 12 STEP](#), a Yahoo Groups forum for COSA members. COSA 12 STEP is an announcement board owned and operated by the ISO whose main purpose is to help isolated COSAs connect and to support our online chat meetings.

[COSA Parents of Teen Sex Addicts](#) is an Online Group for COSA Parents

Sober & Sustainable Teleconferences

Is your COSA meeting struggling to attract service volunteers?

Are you thinking of starting a new COSA Meeting?

Concerned about how to attract and retain COSA newcomers or old timers?

Bring your questions and/or your Experience, Strength and Hope about starting and sustaining Sober COSA Meetings.

The Teleconference # is 218-862-1000 and the Access Code is 1051791#.

Cost is only whatever your personal long distance carrier charges.

Saturday, September 24, 2011

2:00pm (PDT), 3:00pm (MDT), 4:00pm (CDT), 5:00pm (EDT)

Saturday, November 19, 2011

4:00pm (PST), 5:00pm (MST), 6:00pm (CST), 7:00pm (EST)

Thursday, January 12, 2012

5:00pm (PST), 6:00pm (MST), 7:00pm (CST), 8:00pm (EST)

Saturday, March 3, 2012

1:00pm (PST), 2:00pm (MST), 3:00pm (CST), 4:00pm (EST)

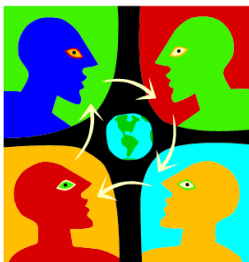
Saturday, May 5, 2012

1:00pm (PDT), 2:00pm (MDT), 3:00pm (CDT), 4:00pm (EDT)

Thursday, July 19, 2012

6:00pm (PDT), 7:00pm (MST), 8:00pm (CDT), 9:00pm (EDT)

Meetings



Telemeetings—www.cosacall.com

Phone Number: 1-218-862-6420 Passcode: 679461

MONDAY	Step/Tradition Study	9:00am (PT) (10MT, 11 CT, Noon ET)
	Recovery Tools...	5:00pm (PT)(6 MT, 7 CT, 8 ET)
TUESDAY		7:00pm (PT) (8 MT, 9 CT, 10 ET)
	<u>Europe</u>	9pm GMT, 10pm CET (US 1pm PT, 2pm MT, 3pm, CT, 4pm ET) - see website for phone #s
WEDNESDAY		4:00pm (PT) (5 MT, 6 CT, 7 ET)
	<u>COSA Parents of Teen Sex Addicts</u>	6:00pm (PT) (7 MT. 8CT, 9ET)
THURSDAY		6:00pm (PT) (7 MT, 8 CT, 9 ET)
SATURDAY		5:00pm (PT) (6 MT, 7 CT, 8 ET)
SUNDAY	<u>Men's Only COSA Mtg.</u>	10:00am (PT) (11am MT, 12pmCT, 1pm ET)

Announcement

The telemeetings are looking for a few good men and women to serve. Many of the telemeetings would like to increase the diversity of their trusted servants. We need COSA members who are interested in being of service as a guest speaker and/or reader for seven to ten minutes at the beginning of meetings. We are especially interested in COSA members involved in service, including Board and committee members.

If you are interested in helping please email us. You might also encourage others to consider serving the fellowship in this area. The email addresses for each telemeeting are listed at: www.cosacall.com



Telemeetings



Skunks and Character Defects

Every day presents opportunities for me to do some weeding on my drought-tolerant character defects. One day my partner and I discovered a portly skunk had moved in under our house through a gap in the foundation. What we didn't realize was that it was mating season. Night after night her male suitors showed up. The house took on the pungent smell of skunk. We called animal control and set traps. We were quite successful at trapping the males, but no such luck with the clever madam under our house. Very long story made short, she had babies. Between loud music and disco strobe lights rigged up under the house, she eventually relocated her family. We were told to seal up the hole in the foundation as soon as possible because skunks like to return to their favorite hotels.

Once we had been relieved of the terrible smell, the problem didn't seem as urgent or significant compared to the rest of life. Months passed before I called a contractor. Months after that, we finally got the contractor to give us a quote. Somehow nearly a year passed; and, the hole was still there. My partner had been brave enough to go under our deck to pile rocks in front of the hole in an attempt to keep the critters out while we waited for the contractor. Days before the contractor was scheduled to do the work, we noticed that the rocks were moved, and, we started smelling familiar Eau D' Skunk.

I considered calling the animal control guy and asking if we needed to set traps again. But, I didn't; my pride and embarrassment got in the way of positive, timely action. In my denial, I told myself there was no mischief happening under our house ... it was just a coincidence.

The morning that the contractor was supposed to arrive, I woke to the sound of a high-pitched squeal and aggressive scratching that came from under the living room floor. As I stood there trying to pretend it wasn't a skunk and it wasn't under the floorboards, the squealing stopped. My eyes started watering (not because I was crying). All I could think about was this: the contractor was going to come and he would seal in the vermin. Skunk spray may be nasty. But, I knew it was not as bad and didn't last as long as the smell of a decomposing animal under our house. In an instant, my panic turned to anger. I blamed my partner, all skunks, the neighborhood, the former owner of our house, my dog, you get the idea.

Then when I realized it was irrational to be angry, I began to beat myself up for being angry. Finally, I sucked up my embarrassment and shame and called the contractor and animal control to untangle the mess that I had contributed to. That day, I learned how similar my character defects are to the skunks

Meditations

Skunks and Character Defects—cont'd.

and that my Higher Power has a sense of humor. I can pretend that I don't have character defects like procrastination, that my character defect has somehow moved away from the comfortable environment I've previously offered. However, things will eventually start to stink enough that I have to take action and do something about it. I came to see that the skunks under the house were a not very subtle message from my Higher Power. My character defects aren't gone if I have simply pushed them under the house. In fact my character defects, left unattended, have a nasty habit of propagating. I made skunk program calls, shared about skunks at meetings and had a skunk huddle with my sponsor (who said she knew I was skunk-challenged but confessed she thought they were 'cute'). I had everyone in my recovery community praying and appealing to the Higher Power of all skunks to relieve me of this stinky reminder of my character defects. Today, I can say that I am grateful for those skunks because they were one of the more interesting tests of my belief in a Higher Power.

Anonymous

Asking for Help

I've heard many COSAs talk about their reluctance to making program calls (in other words to ask for help) and I can relate. One of my greatest challenges in working my recovery program has been and continues to be reaching out to make program calls when I'm really struggling. I guess one major root of this resistance is my lack of acceptance that I need help from someone other than myself. Another type of resistance is my fear that I will be perceived as weak and unable to care for even my smallest needs. I've also been guilty of deciding that other people don't want to hear me whine and hide behind phrases like: "I don't want to be a bother" or "He/She is probably too busy for me." All of these excuses combined to make a neat trap that keeps me at the bottom of the list of being worthy of receiving help and keeps me from hearing my Higher Power's will for me. I try to remember that not calling is a sign of "self-will run riot."

What I've learned when I reach out and ask for help is I often get something different than what I expect. I find that people are grateful I have called them. Really, this is NO surprise since I know codependents like to help others. Making program calls has forced me to get clear about my needs in the time I am on the call. Making calls is a visible example of my progress and challenges my codependent belief that I don't know what I want or need anyway. Program calls have become a microcosm for me to practice figuring out what I need in a short span of time. This actually requires me to either know what I need at the beginning of the call or I spend the first few minutes on the call talking out loud to help me figure out what I do need.

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Asking for Help—cont'd.

I once made a program call to someone when I was in a total panic and really hurting. The person listened for a few minutes and sensing the level of my distress tried to give me suggestions for what I might do to not feel so bad. A part of my mind shut down instantly. I couldn't hear anything of what she was saying. It was difficult for me to stay on the phone at all. At first, I thought that I would just do what I had done in similar situations; I would be patient and wait until they were done and then say thanks, hang up and then be alone feeling worse than before I picked up the phone. That day, I found the courage to decide to break my old pattern. I interrupted – politely, I think – and said that I was feeling worse as she talked. She stopped and apologized. I was immediately gripped with shame that I had made her feel bad about trying to help me when I had called her! However, I was just desperate enough that I pushed the shame aside and told her what I really needed was for her to just listen to me having the hysterical feelings that I was having. It took so much courage for me to risk letting my feelings be 'seen' by another that I didn't want to have to go through all the gyrations that I go through under those circumstances all over again with someone else. I just didn't have the energy. She said to me that she would just listen. And, she did just that until I didn't have anything left to describe about how I was feeling. I felt heard and complete. She had given me the greatest gift. I wasn't ready to move into action on the call. I just needed a witness. My need for a witness was important because I felt like I was going crazy. I spent so much of my childhood being afraid to be seen, afraid to risk speaking up about the bad things that were happening to me, and the bad ways that I was feeling. I had started to convince myself that none of the bad things had ever happened. This was a convenient way that I kept myself trapped seeing myself as a victim.

When I hung up from that program call I felt calmer, more serene, but perhaps more notably I also felt proud of myself. I discovered I actually knew more about what 'help' in that moment looked like than I thought I did. It was amazing to go from feeling like I was ready for the loony bin to feeling good about myself, all in the span of a phone call! I learned that day that there are usually layers to what I need and to not stop looking for greater clarity as I go. I learned I can change my mind about what I need as I reason out my needs with someone else. I learned when I make a program call it helps to ask up front, if and when I am able, if I just need someone to listen (knowing I can always ask for more than that if I feel ready and safe enough). I learned how good it felt to not have someone judge me when I interrupted their good intentions to help me and ask for something different. To this day that experience reminds me to treat others the way that friend in COSA treated me because it helped me to open up instead of shut down. Specifically I learned to give others what I needed that day: to listen with compassion and a boat load of patience when someone asks for help.

Anonymous

Meditations