



## Working with a Long-distance Sponsor

I found my current sponsor during a desperate and painful time in my recovery. Both my personal and professional life at that time were very stressful and I was in a lot of emotional turmoil and pain.

I started my recovery journey several years ago in a different program. When I moved to another state, there were no in-person meetings I could attend in that program. In fact, the town was quite small and rural and did not have a lot of variety for Twelve Step recovery groups. This got me searching for an alternative, and that's when I found the COSA telemeetings. I started attending several phone meetings and got used to the format of sharing and listening on the phones. The compassion and understanding the COSA members shared with me was such a salve for my hurting heart, and I realized that working my program through phone meetings was very possible. I dedicated myself to this end. Now, I needed to find a sponsor and work the Steps!

I've always known the importance of working with a sponsor through the Steps, but I had trouble finding someone in COSA that could commit to working with me on a regular basis. I went through a few COSA sponsors within that first year, but for one reason or another, my sponsors were not able to continue working with me. I then went through another year of being without a sponsor and trying to work my program in the meantime. I knew how important it was to have a sponsor and was beginning to feel desperate, but I just kept coming to meetings and working my program as best I could. If there are other COSAs who have had, or are having, difficulty finding a solid sponsoring relationship, I can relate! I really had to lean into my Higher Power's love and support while I kept looking and praying for a sponsor. Then, as I continued attending phone meetings, I remember a kind woman that spoke with me during after-meeting fellowship. She shared her experience, strength, and hope with me and I really admired her program work. I felt a special connection to her. I started calling her for outreach calls and remember talking with her after my husband's painful sharing of

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## Working with a Long-distance Sponsor

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disclosures and his Ninth Step amends to me. The more I talked with her, the more I learned about recovery and wanted what she had. I felt her compassion toward me and could sense she had a deep serenity and security that I wanted in my life. I could see she was working the program and it was working for her. I wanted the gifts of the program in my life, too.

Then it was that time of year for COSA's annual convention. I was excited to attend and knew I would be meeting in person some of the people I'd spent all this time getting to know on phone meetings, and listening to their voices and stories. I had also been praying to my Higher Power to help me find a sponsor and was hopeful that it might happen while at convention. I remember praying for my expectations to be lifted—that if I came back from the convention without a sponsor, I would acknowledge the convention to be a worthwhile experience; but I also hoped to find a sponsor! When I met this woman I'd been talking to and connecting with for months, I took the courage to ask her to sponsor me. To my delight, she said, "I think my Higher Power is saying 'Yes!' So I'm going to say yes!" I was amazed by her answer. I saw how much she brought her Higher Power into every decision she made and, although she was busy with many commitments, she still felt that saying 'yes' to sponsoring me was the right commitment; I was so grateful.

I have loved working with my sponsor over these past few years. I knew that working with her would take my recovery to a whole new level. I'd been hearing her shares on the phone meetings and I knew she took her recovery seriously—that she really worked to take responsibility for herself, her happiness, and her serenity. I saw that she lived on "her side of the street" with clean motives, and I didn't sense some of the negative energy of blaming and self-pity in her life that could be present in mine. As a partner of an addict, I am sometimes far too tempted to view my husband—the "addict"—as the problem in my life, without my taking responsibility for my own life. I saw how fearless she was in inventorying herself, while leaning on her Higher Power for her emotional needs. I saw the gifts of the program being realized in her life, and I wanted them, too.

Logistically, it has not been a burden to have a long-distance sponsor. We are both committed to keeping our appointments with each other. We meet weekly for phone appointments, and we typically have a set day and time of the week to meet and do Step work. Whenever we have changes to our schedule, we'll discuss it and find another suitable time to meet. We've had to work out logistics of length of time for our calls and what we'll discuss. We worked out a system where I "check in" at the beginning of our call and we set timers to keep our talking focused and to reserve time for Step work. As my sponsor reminds me, working the Steps is the essence of the program—and we receive the gifts of the program as we work the Steps. They are essential to recovery. I also keep in touch with her by texting or emailing her my Tenth and Eleventh Step check-ins. This helps me express my process to a safe person in between our phone appointments. Sometimes, I even write a prayer to my Higher Power in a text or email, and I've found that sharing this with my sponsor makes the experience very real and healing for me.

I have learned many things from working with my sponsor. I have learned that sharing my story with someone safe and nonjudgmental is incredibly affirming, healing, and freeing. I have learned that boundaries are essential to my safety and peace of mind. I've learned to set clean, non-controlling boundaries in all my relationships, whether with my husband, family members, friends, or at work. I've learned to speak my truth, to take an honest, fearless look at my life and my defects without getting swallowed in shame and self-hatred, while also learning to acknowledge my assets, progress, and healing. I've grown to love my sponsor and I know she loves me, too. Miraculously, I've also learned to love myself.

I've learned that the Steps are truly transformative. They have completely changed my life, and are still changing it.

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While there is no way to “pay back” my sponsor for all the time, love, and patience she’s given me over these past few years, there is a way to show my gratitude—by continuing to work the program and the Twelfth Step, paying it forward in service to others. About a year ago, I wondered if it was time to start offering myself as a sponsor. Though I was nervous, my sponsor encouraged me. She saw that I was ready and affirmed that I had lots of recovery to share with someone else. I now have a sponsee that I work with long-distance as well, through phone appointments, and I am experiencing the rewards of working with her and seeing her experience the miracles of the program. My gratitude for this program, my Higher Power, my sponsor, and all my fellow COSAs deepens every day that I am here.

Gratefully,  
Larissa

# Thank you



for your feedback on the COSA literature (Step Five of the basic text) that was submitted to the fellowship by Literature in Development for the 2016–2017 service year. Your input is valuable and we appreciate the time and care you invested. It helps make our COSA literature the best it can be.

Once we’ve compiled all of the suggestions, we will make adjustments to the literature as needed. Then, the final version will be available for review by the COSA delegates in April, 2017.

At the Annual Delegate Meeting, held at the COSA convention in Orlando, Florida, this May, the delegates will vote on whether or not to approve the items in their final forms.

Our hope is that the COSA basic text will be a precious resource on this amazing journey of recovery and your feedback is an extremely valuable part of this process.

With gratitude,  
The COSA Literature Committee

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

When sending donations to the ISO of COSA, please include your meeting number so we can record it properly and post it in the Balance. We thank you for all your donations!

To find your meeting number:

- Go to [www.cosa-recovery.org](http://www.cosa-recovery.org), click on the Meetings and Events tab, and then on Find a Local Meeting; or [click here](#).
- Search for your meeting and note the meeting number in parentheses next to your meeting name.

## **Seventh Tradition: Financial Report** November/December 2016 Donations

Hope in Healing, Mesa (AZ-03).....	\$100.00
Being in Balance, Mesa (AZ-15).....	\$59.00
Bay area Intergroup (CA-07) .....	\$1,498.00
SoCal Intergroup (CA-36).....	\$100.00
Santa Ana COSA (CA-40).....	\$100.00
Conn Hope and Love (CT-02).....	\$100.00
Orlando Step Study (FL-11).....	\$50.00
Mankato COSA (MN-01).....	\$60.00
Twin Ports COSA, Duluth (MN-19) .....	\$40.00
Cincinnati, OH (OH-01).....	\$50.00
Madison Area COSA (WI-07).....	\$200.00
Individual Recurring Donations.....	\$1,195.00
Individual Single Donations .....	\$1,586.50
PayPal .....	\$1,331.00
<b>Total.....</b>	<b>\$6,469.50</b>

# Letter from the ISO Board Chair



If you don't have a lot of people who have worked the Steps in your meetings, the COSA Store is an amazing resource for you.

We've got recordings of most of the speakers and workshops from conventions spanning more than a decade.

And the last five years are available to download via MP3. The International Service Organization of COSA board has just voted to lower the price if you buy an entire year of MP3 recordings all at once!

You'll get a 20% off by purchasing a full set of MP3s from any of the last five conventions.

<http://cosa-store.myshopify.com/collections/cosa-convention-mp3s/products/2016-mp3-collection>

<http://cosa-store.myshopify.com/collections/cosa-convention-mp3s/products/2015-mp3-collection>

<http://cosa-store.myshopify.com/collections/cosa-convention-mp3s/products/2014-mp3-collection>

<http://cosa-store.myshopify.com/collections/cosa-convention-mp3s/products/2013-mp3-collection>

<http://cosa-store.myshopify.com/collections/cosa-convention-mp3s/products/2012-mp3-collection>

There is so much there, I couldn't possibly cover it all. But here's a sample:

Every convention has several First Step shares which are shared at banquets and opening ceremonies.

To give you a sense of what else you'll find, let's take a look at the 2016 recordings. You'll hear workshops on:

- Step One – How to Get Started
- How to Use The Circles to Define Sobriety
- Demystifying Step Four
- Working The Twelve Steps in 15 minutes
- Moving through Triggers
- Dealing with Issues of Sexual Intimacy
- A Panel for Couples Dealing with Sex Addiction

That's just some of what's available.

I have been transformed listening to the shares of COSAs from all around the country. These are stories I would never hear in my local meeting. And I have learned tools I had not heard of elsewhere.

Most of all, these voices remind me that I am not alone in my recovery.

And I can always use more of that.

Thanks for all you do for COSA.

In Service,

Emily G.

International Service Organization of COSA Board Chair

# 2017 ISO of COSA Annual Convention

# May 26-29

Step  
INTO THE  
Sunshine  
ORLANDO • FLORIDA • 2017



**DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel  
Orlando at SeaWorld  
10100 International Drive  
Orlando, Florida 32821**

Step into the Sunshine! The Convention Committee has been busy planning this four-day event to be held in Orlando, Florida, during the Memorial Day weekend with hopes that you will join us! What a great opportunity to expand your recovery by gaining insight into working the Steps, the Traditions, and recovery tools while connecting with other COSAs!

What can I expect, how do I register, how do I book my hotel room? Read on!

### **Convention Registration**

Take advantage of early-bird registration! Pay by April 1 and receive the discounted price of \$175, which includes the Sunday Banquet. The fee goes up to \$190 after April 1 through May 10 but still includes the Sunday Banquet.

The weekend convention fee includes all of the events with the exception of Saturday's luncheon. Saturday's luncheon for registered COSAs is \$40. Sunday Banquet tickets for extra guests are \$90 each. Walk-in and day-only rates are also available.

Register online through the COSA website. Please note that it's a two-part process:

- First, complete the registration form here: <http://cosa-convention-registration.myshopify.com/pages/registration-form>
- Then pay for your registration by clicking on "Items for Shopping Cart" or click here: <http://cosa-convention-registration.myshopify.com/collections/frontpage>

If you have questions or problems registering, contact the Convention Committee at [convention@cosa-recovery.org](mailto:convention@cosa-recovery.org).

## Hotel registration

DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Orlando at SeaWorld  
10100 International Drive, Orlando, Florida 32821  
Special COSA Rate: Single/Double \$129 per night plus resort fees and taxes

Reserve your room under the COSA group block name, "Step into the Sunshine," to receive the discounted rate. Reserve your room online by clicking this [Step into the Sunshine Hotel Reservation Link](#)

Booking your hotel room as soon as you can will help ensure your spot at the convention hotel. To receive the special rate, your hotel reservation must be made prior to May 3, 2017.

NOTE: There is a daily Resort Charge of \$11.95 (plus tax) that will be added to your nightly room rate. The Resort Charge includes: Wireless internet access; Self-parking; scheduled theme park transportation (Disney, Universal Orlando, and Sea World); 1 appetizer w/purchase of entree in Laguna or Crazy Squirrel per stay; 2 bottled waters from The Market per stay; 10% discount in Spa; local and toll-free calls.

Parking for non-hotel guests is \$18 per day.

## What happens at the convention?

The convention kicks off with a speaker on Friday night followed by two days of workshops and panels on a variety of recovery topics. Special functions will feature speakers sharing their recovery stories. There will be a variety of COSA Twelve Step meetings, a meditation room, and many opportunities for fun and fellowship. Please join us!

## Support

You are not alone! We offer care and support! Part of the convention experience is receiving recovery support. Convention mentors are available to attendees to guide them through the convention process. Indicate your need for a mentor or willingness to serve as a mentor on your registration. COSA members also provide support to attendees throughout the convention.

## Volunteering

Our convention is run entirely by volunteers. Please consider helping with registration, Twelve Step meetings, the silent auction, sound recording of meetings, or in other ways. Indicate your willingness to help when registering and you will be contacted by the Volunteer Committee.

## Silent Auction

The Silent Auction is COSA's fundraiser at our annual convention and it raises seed money for the following year's convention, which will be in Oakland, California, in 2018.

In the past, we have had a HUGE variety of items donated for the Silent Auction such as note cards, scarves, jewelry, CDs, DVDs, luggage, themed gift baskets, pottery, paintings, posters, books, etc. Even services such as life coaching, photography, and time-share vacations. Items with a recovery theme or connection are great, but anything pretty or practical, of a reasonable size, is welcome. You can either bring your donation with you to the convention or mail it to us. You don't have to attend the convention to donate an item. Please e-mail [silentauction@cosa-recovery.org](mailto:silentauction@cosa-recovery.org) with information about items you'd like to donate or any questions you have.

## Serenity-on-the-Go Store

The Serenity-on-the-Go Store is a new initiative offering self-care items like scrubby gloves, bubble bath, and lotions for purchase. There will be travel size items available so you'll be able to pack them easily for the trip home, plus your purchase goes toward seed money for the next convention which is a win-win for all of us! We will also have some gift items like cards and bags for purchase as well. For additional information, consult the website at <http://www.cosa-recovery.org/2017> or contact the COSA Convention Committee at [convention@cosa-recovery.org](mailto:convention@cosa-recovery.org)

## Step Three

### *Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.*

To be in God's care should have sounded appealing and simple to me but, right off the bat, it required me to make a decision and a commitment. Even though working Steps One and Two had prepared me for this Step, I was shaky about making decisions. It was a daunting, fear-inducing task for me. In my life before recovery, I had come to believe the lie that I could not make good decisions on my own. So, to mitigate my fear of failure and commitment, I would carefully and exhaustively weigh and measure all the facts, the pros, the cons, and potential consequences of any decision facing me. I would put all the details down on paper because order and control made me feel better.

In making my decision in Step Three however, the normal metrics didn't apply. This Step required making a spiritual decision, and there were spiritual principles, not cold data, involved. Some of the spiritual principles involved for me were willingness, humility, faith and a conscious surrender. I couldn't hide behind a spreadsheet for this decision.

To further complicate my Step Three journey, I had to acknowledge and accept that I was not born with an abundance of willingness, nor was it something I could easily force myself to muster. Through recovery I've learned that it is a gift from my Higher Power and I have to ask for it, often repeatedly. Over time, as I worked through this Step, I felt willingness slowly beginning to soften me up and reduce my fears. Around the same time as I was working through some other issues in recovery, I was experiencing a lot of grace from my Higher Power. This was leading me to a greater understanding of true humility. As a result of these spiritual gifts coming together, my faith was also growing. My faith was now in a Higher Power that I had a healthy understanding of, not the vengeful God that I had feared when I was a child. All of these gifts were vital to my being able to fully understand and embrace the Third Step.

Prior to recovery, I had also resisted the concepts of surrender and commitment. So, given my fear of commitment, it came as a surprise to me that, as I contemplated what consciously surrendering would entail, I came to understand that for me, this kind of surrender is really a spiritual commitment. I had always thought of surrender as a hopeless defeat in which I just threw my hands in the air and "gave up" in futility. I thought of commitments as claustrophobic agreements in which I was doomed to get the short end of the deal. However, in the spiritual application of surrender, I embrace and commit myself to receiving the love, healing and guidance of a God who has my best interests at heart. I am grateful that God can do for me what I cannot do for myself. I learned that surrender is not futility; it is humility. What a powerful shift for me!

Living Step Three now brings me great comfort, security and peace knowing that I can turn over my problems, and seek comfort and guidance. I can ask God to let me know what His will for me is and not rely on, or force my will. For me Step Three also fulfills the promise of the program that I am not alone. I am in God's care.

~Anonymous

### **Additional Resources on COSA's Website**

NEWCOMER INFO:	<a href="http://cosa-recovery.org/newcomers.html">http://cosa-recovery.org/newcomers.html</a>
MEETING GUIDE:	<a href="http://www.cosa-recovery.org/PDF/The_COSA_Meeting_Guide.pdf">http://www.cosa-recovery.org/PDF/The_COSA_Meeting_Guide.pdf</a>
ONLINE STORE	<a href="http://cosa-store.myshopify.com/">http://cosa-store.myshopify.com/</a>
FREE DOWNLOADS:	<a href="http://www.cosa-recovery.org/freedownloads.html">http://www.cosa-recovery.org/freedownloads.html</a>
WRITING FOR COSA:	<a href="http://www.cosa-recovery.org/submissions.html">http://www.cosa-recovery.org/submissions.html</a>

## Step Four

### *Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.*

How do I even start this Step? Thinking about an inventory about me seemed daunting. This is what I thought before talking to my sponsor. Couldn't I just end at Step Three?

When we met to work on this Step I learned that this could be a difficult Step yet so rewarding, and I was told to hang in there and start slowly but keep moving forward. If I learned so much from Steps One through Step Three then I could just trust the process.

Some of my fear was taken away once I reworded this Step for some additional insight. Here is what I feel it means to me: "I can move forward with a desire to know more, being courageous and without worrying where it takes me, to take a look at, or have insight into everything that pertains to me at this time".

What could I be afraid of by looking at me? Wouldn't all the wonderful things about me -- assets, great character traits, great skills come to light? I should have a wealth of wonderful things to say. Yet all I thought about was the word "inventory" like it was going to be an "inquisition" about me! It made me realize that I sometimes approached things this way, worrying that I might look bad. So I trudged forward and let go of all the worry and shame.

I never learned how to do an assessment of myself and my traits, in a healthy way before. I took time to see that some of my assets might also be liabilities at times. Like being a friend, mother and protector was also a liability because I sometimes fought others' battles, or gave unwarranted advice, or did not have boundaries in relationships. I saw patterns in the way I stuck up for others when it wasn't my fight. I wanted to protect others so they wouldn't go through the pain of feeling hurt, unheard or unsupported...like when I was a child. I saw in this Step that when I focus on others, who are capable of taking care of themselves, I take away from my own growth and learning. I wanted others to be better in their life, and judged them. These were just a few 'ahas!' that resulted from my work.

There were lots of lists to do in this Step, such as a resentment inventory, assets and liabilities inventory, sexual inventory, financial inventory, fear inventory, patterns and observations, character defects...and a few more. My sponsor kept a positive tone and reinforced the great growth I was developing through this Step, yet I did not see it yet. I just wanted to write, to fill out as much as I could for now. At first I wanted to focus only on blaming others in my resentments yet I had to complete a column in the chart that asked "where was I to blame, or what could I have done differently". I started to focus more on my part the more I did this work.

I learned that my behavior at times was not aligned with who I wanted to be, regardless of what others did to me or around me. I acted at times in a controlling way, yelling to get others to listen, and to become passive, and I expected my partner to read my mind. I got indignant and disrespectful when I felt I was right...just to name a few of my character defects. What I realized through this work was that I wanted to be heard, understood, and respected...and this didn't occur in my life, especially as a child. So I fought back in unproductive ways versus learning to share my feelings.

My sponsor had to remind me that "what I've done" in my past does not define "who I am" or who I will become. Shame keeps me thinking and acting this way. I could look at all of me and not fall apart when I see terri-

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## Step Four

continued

ble traits. This is what an inventory does...provides insight. What I do with it occurs in future Steps. So I learned to pause and just slow down before making any decisions. Sometimes this was the hardest part for me. I always made quick decisions so the pain or commotion would go away. But now I needed to slow down and just reflect.

I received such wonderful help from my sponsor and Step study group and I remember how gentle everyone was when I shared some of my inventory. I kept hearing my Higher Power say, "Pause, Patience, Prayer". This was a wonderful Step and one of my favorites as it forever changed my life.....and I look forward to Step Five.

~Anonymous

## By the Fellowship - For the Fellowship



We encourage every group, intergroup and member to submit articles that share your ESH (experience, strength, and hope). Also, articles and announcements that share up-coming 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://cosa-recovery.org/PDF/lit\\_guidelines.pdf](http://cosa-recovery.org/PDF/lit_guidelines.pdf)

Please send your articles to [COSACopy@yahoo.com](mailto:COSACopy@yahoo.com)  
or by mail to:

ISO of COSA  
Central Office  
9219 Katy Freeway, Suite 212  
Houston, TX 77024 U.S.A.

ISO of COSA  
Phone: 866-899-2672  
E-mail: [info@cosa-recovery.org](mailto:info@cosa-recovery.org)

*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.

### 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.

## Tradition Three

*The only requirement for COSA membership is that our lives have been affected by compulsive sexual behavior. The members may call themselves a COSA group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation.*

When I first began attending COSA, I internally questioned if I truly belonged in the group. Years later, after doing service for the ISO of COSA and getting to know COSAs from many different areas and walks of life, I realized that this was not an unusual way to feel. I began to believe that feeling “not a part of” or “uniquely different” is quite common in our experience as COSAs. I have tremendous gratitude for the Third Tradition, as it means that it is clear to me (and others) that we DO qualify to be in these rooms, no matter if we feel similar or different from other COSA members. As long as my life has been affected by compulsive sexual behavior, I belong.

It was a relief to realize that no one but the individual member determines if their life has been affected by compulsive sexual behavior and is, therefore, eligible to be a COSA member. I don't need to worry that anyone is going to show me the door and tell me I don't belong. I truly DO belong!

As I worked the Steps and studied the Traditions, it began to be revealed to me the many ways my life had been affected by compulsive sexual behavior. Although I had originally come to these rooms due to my current husband's issues, I slowly became clear that my father had also been a sex addict. I realized I had qualified for COSA my entire life. This explained to me why I had had so many people in my life (ex-husband, former boyfriends, co-workers and others) whose compulsive sexual behavior had affected me. My journey was about healing the resulting deep wounding and my inability to have reality-based and truly healthy intimate relationships.

As I examined my own behavior, I grew in the understanding that I was (understandably) intimacy-disordered due to the way my life had been affected by compulsive sexual behavior. I learned to accept and love myself as I was. The fact that I felt a sense of belonging in COSA like I had never before experienced was indispensable to my learning and growth. In the process of doing my COSA Step work, my Higher Power revealed to me that I was also a recovering sex and love addict. The Third Tradition helped me to be clear that, regardless of this revelation, I still belonged in COSA.

The Third Tradition allows me to appreciate and be welcoming to diverse COSA members. I have experienced how my own recovery is deepened and strengthened by the participation of COSA members of any gender and any gender identification, any sexual orientation, and any social, ethnic, or religious backgrounds. It even (especially!) includes former and current sex workers. I have had to examine and turn over to my Higher Power my own subconscious resistance to welcoming those who I perceived as “different” from me. My Higher Power has used this Tradition to help me grow in my humility and appreciation for the gifts my fellow COSAs of all stripes bring.

I deeply believe that the path to sustaining and growing our Fellowship must include deepening our understanding and practice of this Tradition. Our Fellowship's inclusivity and openness – based on the Third Tradition - is a special strength and our pathway to deepening COSA recovery for all members.

Gratefully submitted,  
Linda P. (No Cal)

## Tradition Four

*Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or COSA as a whole.*

Tradition Four gives our fellowship both freedom and structure. Before joining COSA, I thought that these two qualities were mutually exclusive in organizations. I had structure at work, where I was expected to work certain hours, write in a specific format and meet strict deadlines. I had freedom outside of work to set my own schedule, write inane free verse (if I chose), and do it in my own time.

In COSA, we get to enjoy freedom in our groups within the structure of the whole COSA fellowship. The COSA Steps and Traditions provide the basic script for our meetings. We have the guidance of our ISO and Intergroup, as well as COSA history and COSA literature. We have guidelines that make meetings safe; such as, anonymity, confidentiality and respect for others. This makes me feel safe going to any COSA meeting. This helps newcomers know what to expect after their first meeting. It assures that meetings will be sober. As a person who loves routine (you can set your watch by my hot cocoa break), I took comfort when I joined COSA from hearing the same script and readings at my meetings every week. Every other part of my life felt chaotic, but my COSA meetings felt serene.

Tradition Four allows meetings to have freedom within the structure too. This allows meetings to adapt and change according to Higher Power's will, as expressed in the meeting's group conscience. Each meeting has a Higher Power, and the meeting belongs to that Higher Power, not to any single member or group.

I have seen this work beautifully in one of the meetings I attend. This meeting started about two years ago. Originally, the meeting script had the same weekly readings and a speaker/reader every week. In the last two years, this meeting has voted to change the script at least five times based on the meeting's group conscience. Among other changes, the meeting decided to omit the weekly readings, initiated a Monthly Speaker meeting, invited newcomers to be "guests," allowing others to donate on behalf of them for the Seventh Tradition collection, and adopted a "grab bag" of topics for members to speak on or read about on every second and fourth week. All of these changes were made in business meetings following the COSA business meeting guidelines. Each COSA had a voice, and the group looked to its Higher Power to vote on changes. I once attended this meeting when only one other person was there. The two of us prayed for guidance from the meeting's Higher Power, and our group conscience led us to share our Step Work, and begin the meeting script if another COSA arrived. This meeting was a wonderful opportunity to work on our Steps together.

All of the changes were individual; they applied to this meeting only, and do not affect other meetings, or COSA as a whole. I'm happy to see this meeting evolving in a sober way, keeping in mind the guidance from ISO and the entire fellowship. This meeting has the safety of structure, and the organic nature of freedom. I look forward to seeing where Higher Power leads it in the future.

~Anonymous -- Burlingame, CA

### International Diversity in Writing Statement

As the *Balance* receives more articles from our members from around the world, you may notice different spelling and word usage. We want to maintain the original voice of each author, so that we can benefit from COSA's beautiful diversity.