

Tradition Nine

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

Tradition Nine may sound confusing, especially to COSA newcomers. What does it mean that COSA is never organized? It may feel like a scary idea that the entirety of our fellowship would be “dis-organized.” Having been deeply affected by compulsive sexual behavior, we may believe we have had enough chaos in our lives. We may feel compelled to take charge or want the comfort of having someone else in charge.

In our personal lives, we may have received positive feedback and validation or felt a sense of power and control from organizing things at work, at home, or in our communities. Before recovery, many of us tried to rigidly organize and structure our lives, often in an attempt to feel safe and guard against triggers. We often did more than our share of creating and enforcing rules, snooping, and supervising. Although we may not have been consciously aware of it at the time, we came to realize in recovery that we may have been attempting to gain a sense of control, to eliminate chaos, and/or to prevent compulsive sexual behavior from harming us.

Yet, coming into COSA, many of us were exhausted or resentful from feeling obliged to manage everything. We wanted someone else, like an authority figure or institution, to take charge.

So how does COSA function without organization? As Tradition Nine states, COSA operates through a structure of service boards or committees that answer to the COSA fellowship as a whole. There is no chief officer or president in COSA. There are no supervisors, managers, or other authorities. COSA members fill positions or roles with titles like “chair” or “secretary,” but they are “trusted servants” who “do not govern,” as Tradition Two tells us.

COSA has no directives, rules, or enforcement measures. Instead, our fellowship has suggested Steps, Traditions, and Concepts based on spiritual principles. Some meetings, including those of the International Service Organization (ISO) and the Annual Delegate Meeting, have established suggested safe communication guidelines to help members feel confident that meetings will be safe, sober, and productive. COSA members adhere to this guidance because it works. Following this guidance has helped COSA members recover and continue to carry the message to others who still suffer from the effects of compulsive sexual behavior.

For those of us who had been accustomed to caretaking, controlling, running, managing, and being in charge, this Tradition sometimes seemed difficult to follow. Serving on a committee or board felt more challenging than just doing all the work ourselves. Having more than our share of power was comfortably familiar to us, while being responsible or accountable to others required more effort emotionally. When we committed to serve on a committee in COSA, we worked alongside other recovering

individuals who sought to put their will aside and give selfless, humble service. We began to learn how to right-size our relationship to power. Adhering to the guidance of COSA's Steps and Traditions helps us avoid falling into old behavior patterns when we act in service to COSA.

In recovery, when we serve our fellow COSAs, we do so with humility. Tradition Two also tells us COSA has "but one ultimate authority—a loving God as expressed in our group conscience." Individual members in service positions are encouraged to rotate regularly so that no single personality dominates; as we are guided to "put principles before personalities" in Tradition Twelve. When volunteering to serve, COSA members align our roles with our responsibilities to the other COSA members we serve. We listen to feedback and practice patience and humility when making decisions. We set aside our individual wills and egos and work together under the guidance of our Higher Power for the common welfare.

In COSA, we do not need to be organized into a hierarchy of rank. We are all equal members. Newcomers and old-timers are equals in COSA. As perfectly imperfect humans, we bring our assets and our liabilities to our COSA service work. If we are serving, it is important that we are working the Steps with our sponsors, taking our own inventory, and listening to our Higher Power's will for us. We demonstrate gratitude, respect, and grace to each other when we recognize that we are all doing the best we can.

Members of a committee or group may decide by group conscience that they would like to take a group inventory. For example, the board of COSA has taken a board inventory to determine its health and effectiveness as a board and to identify its strengths and weaknesses. Similarly, individual meeting groups may take time to assess if their meetings are healthy, functioning in line with the Traditions and Concepts, and welcoming to all that attend.

COSA as a whole works using the model of an upside-down triangle. The COSA fellowship directs the board and committees through the fellowship's group conscience. Information is passed from individuals and meeting groups through intergroups and delegates to the board chair, who is at the point representing the bottom of the inverted triangle. This differs from a top-down business model where a director or small group of directors at the top make decisions and dictate them to the rest of the group.

Local groups, intergroups, and delegates attending the Annual Delegate Meeting make decisions for which they are responsible to the COSA fellowship they serve, such as "Let's plan a retreat," or "Let's write a COSA book." Then COSA members volunteer for committees or service roles. Committees and individuals in service roles can manage planning an event, developing new literature, and distributing information to the public on behalf of the group. In each case, the service committees and roles are directly responsible to the group they serve. As trusted servants, they are responsible for carrying out the group's decisions.

Writing this basic text for our fellowship provides an example of trusted servants at the level of the ISO being responsive to the fellowship. During the composition process, the Literature Committee asked for and incorporated feedback from the entire fellowship. Through responsible service to the fellowship as a whole, the book was written by COSA members for COSA members and reflects the entire fellowship.

Tradition Nine ensures that the ISO of COSA, by means of the board and committees, is able to function effectively and with care and responsiveness to the fellowship itself. In COSA we learn to serve with care and respect for ourselves, each other, and the group and fellowship we serve. The lessons from Tradition Nine may also teach us how to cultivate equality and healthy responsiveness in our personal relationships as well.

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