

THE OUTER CIRCLE

Rediscovering Joy

Creating a 'sufficient substitute for sex addiction' is key to recovery. Here's how.

PLUS

When to Share the Message

To Recover, Do This, Not That

Spring Retreats Abound





International Service Organization of SAA, Inc.

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The Outer Circle Mission

The mission of *The Outer Circle* is to provide information from the ISO and to share the experience, strength, and hope members have obtained from working the SAA program of recovery. As the first iteration put it in 1998, *The Outer Circle* newsletter “carries the message of hope to the sex addict who still suffers” — especially prisoners and others who don’t have the Internet.

Through *TOC*, SAA members contribute articles and poems that focus on working the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. It also communicates ISO news, regional activities, and other items of interest.

SAA meetings are encouraged to reproduce *TOC* at no charge and display it alongside other SAA literature. To keep costs down, please print out the online version.

If you have comments or suggestions, please see contact information on p. 30. To have an article considered for publication, see our Submission Guidelines on page 31.

To ensure that future issues can be offered without cost, please consider making a tax-deductible donation now to support publication of the newsletter.

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FROM THE EDITOR

Let's Talk About Sex

BY GARY T.

**We sex addicts
seem oddly
reluctant to
talk about sex
— unless it's
our acting out
behaviors.**

Tell me if this sounds familiar: you're in a meeting where "healthier sexuality" is the topic. Once the meeting is open, you're met with silence, people shifting in their chairs uncomfortably.

For a group who, on the whole, are no strangers to sex, we sex addicts seem oddly reluctant to talk about it — unless it's our acting out behaviors. Then we have no problem.

To be sure, sharing those secrets and releasing that toxic shame is a key part of the program. It's how we work the Steps and have a spiritual awakening. But the more distance I get from my acting out (I have eight-plus years of sobriety) the more I believe talking about healthier sexuality is also a vital way to work the program — and free myself from the shame that drove my addiction.

Yet the fellowship of SAA not only does not seem to welcome these discussions, it seems to encourage dwelling on our shameful behaviors.

Think about the tradition of sharing our inner circle behaviors. The idea is to let newcomers know they're not alone. But what if instead we shared about healthier sexual behaviors we're working on, and how it relates to the Steps? What a powerful message it could send to newcomers — and old timers — if instead of sharing about our addiction to pornography, we shared about our efforts to stay present as we explore healthier masturbation.

What's your experience with healthier sexuality in recovery? If this column strikes a chord, please write me about it. Better yet, write an article about your experience, strength, and hope around healthier sexuality. Because in the end, a spiritual awakening may go hand-in-hand with a sexual awakening.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Being Prepared for Unexpected People at Meetings

BY JOE H.

A simple suggestion is to have two or three sober members available to help the newcomer feel welcome and safe.

Recently, the ISO office received an email from a woman who mistakenly showed up at a men-only meeting. This particular meeting was not prepared for this to happen, and the result was extremely hurtful for both the woman seeking help and the men who were at the meeting. Unfortunately, they acted in ways that could be seen as being in conflict with our Twelve Traditions.

If this meeting had been prepared by documenting what to do in the meeting material, the result would have been much more beneficial for everyone involved. A simple suggestion is to always have two or three sober members available to take a newcomer aside to discuss any unique situations or just to help the newcomer feel welcome and safe.

How prepared is your recovery meeting for a newcomer? Is your meeting prepared for someone underage walking in the door? Is your meeting prepared for a woman who accidentally shows up in a men-only meeting? The answers to these questions and many more should be discussed and, if needed, documented in the meeting material before any of these circumstances happen. Please take the time to hold a group conscience on how you want to help newcomers at their first meeting. If you are a men- or women-only meeting, be prepared when someone walks in by mistake.

With over 1,700 weekly recovery meetings in over twenty countries, the ISO office receives very few complaints, but that does not mean our meetings cannot improve upon how to welcome newcomers. Please take my request to your group and help us make the SAA fellowship a safe place for our members, free of the discrimination and sexism that is present in today's world.

DEAR GRACE

What's the Best Way to Carry the Message?

BY WOMEN'S
OUTREACH
SUBCOMMITTEE

Until you have worked the Steps yourself, it is best to admit that you can't give away what you don't have.

Dear Grace:

I've just started going to meetings in my area. I've got a very close friend whom I suspect may also have a sex addiction, but may not be ready to admit it to herself. Do you have any advice on how best to approach the topic without upsetting her?

Helping a friend

Dear Helping:

It's natural to want to help your friend find the recovery you are beginning to find, and it's easy to see others who "should" be in the program. However, there's an old saying that this program is not for people who need it, it is for people who WANT it. Tradition Three states, "The only requirement for SAA membership is a desire to stop addictive sexual behavior." If she does not meet this requirement, then SAA is not for her (yet).

There are some things you can do. If you have an open meeting nearby you could invite her to attend with you. You can offer her literature or give her the address of our website. Some of us came into the program when a friend or relative shared a simple sentence such as: "I've been going to SAA, and you may want to try it as well." Importantly, they never pushed or pleaded with us.

Focus on your own recovery. It's not selfish; the result of the Twelve Steps is a spiritual awakening that will allow us to live a new way of life and carry that message to others. As you work your steps, ask your Higher Power and sponsor for guidance in what (if anything) to say to your friend. If you make amends to this friend in Step Nine, that will be a powerful message. Your new life will speak



louder than anything you might say. Until you have worked the Twelve Steps yourself, it is best to humbly admit that you can't give away what you don't have.

You can keep this friend in mind as an incentive to work your own program better. It's a worthy aspiration to become a person who has that "something" others want. We hope to carry the message of recovery. But (so important!) we must stay humble. While we strive, we never get to assume that we are there. Over time your friend may see the change in you and want it for herself; she may see it and not want it or feel threatened by it; or she may not see it.

If you are making these changes specifically to help her, you will almost certainly find yourself on shaky ground. If you are doing this for yourself, and if

you accept that your friend will do what she will do, you will experience the gift of Step Twelve: doing our best to help others and letting go of the results. Be patient. Work your program the best you can. You will help others (though you may never know exactly who).

Blessings in your recovery!

Grace

*Statement of Purpose for Dear Grace: to reach out to all women with a desire to stop addictive sexual behavior through this printed medium and share with the fellowship the types of questions the Grace e-mail (grace@saa-women.org) receives. *Names have been changed to protect anonymity.*

LIVING IN SOBRIETY

The Solution Never Changes

BY DON E.

**More than five
years later, I
continue to
work the same
program. I have
gone from living
an addiction-
centered life to a
God-centered life.**

My name is Don and I have been sexually sober since September 19, 2011. Compulsive sexual behavior is something I have dealt with my entire life. As far back as I can remember, I have participated in what I now call “acting out.”

There was no one single event that I believe made me a sex addict. It was my constant companion to soothe me, help me fall asleep, ease my anxiety and fears, and make me feel loved. As a preteen I discovered drugs and alcohol. That quickly escalated to daily use and finally an arrest that brought me to an early bottom. I got clean from substances and that is when my sex addiction began to consume me.

I had a family and owned a successful business, but my acting out had me isolated from all of it. I was having a full time affair, watching pornography, masturbating, visiting prostitutes, cruising, and constantly searching for more. I knew that disaster was imminent but there was no way to stop.

Finally my wife confronted me about the affair and I reluctantly confessed. I did not tell her everything at that point, but I did go to my first meeting of Sex Addicts Anonymous. I was amazed how much I related! I heard people talking about experiences and feelings that I had never heard outside of my own head. I was home. In that first meeting they spoke of making outreach phone calls. The practicality of this struck a nerve with me. I got a phone number from another addict and immediately started using the phone. I went to more meetings and got more numbers.

With some reluctance, I got a sponsor and started working the Twelve Steps. He told me I needed to call him every day, attend a minimum of three meetings a week, make one outreach phone call every day, and do written step work daily — just ten minutes every morning.

After a week, I reported back how great I felt and how well this was working. I couldn't believe how simple it was and that I was not acting out. He said if one phone call and ten minutes of step work worked so well, how about two calls and fifteen minutes of step work? I obliged and have been following that very basic program of recovery ever since.

This practical and manageable plan of action allowed the spiritual principles of the program to take hold in my life. Attending meetings and making phone calls helped me to become accountable for my everyday actions and to see my disease for what it really was.

My addiction was not just something I did occasionally or only in the dark recesses of my life. The planning, fantasizing, manipulating, and lying was constant. I lived a daily program of addiction. A daily program of recovery was required to replace it. As I continued to work my recovery daily, I gradually moved towards the spiritual transformation promised in the Steps.

Acting out became a thing of the past.

The solution never changes. More than five years later, I continue to work this same program. I have gone from living an addiction-centered life to a God-centered life. I enjoy a daily remission from my disease contingent on my daily work. On the days that I choose to follow my program as it was originally presented to me, I get to live a peaceful life of freedom in God's care. The days I do not are often wrought with returning character defects and the call of the disease. I don't need to reinvent my recovery program or come up with some new spin on living. I just need to continue to do what has worked for so long and carry this simple message of hope to others.

In the time of my recovery I have faced many challenges from life. Some of these were long-term effects of my addiction, and some were not. The strength of my program and reliance upon God carried me through each of these challenges not only sober but with integrity. I continue to maintain my abstinence, but my sobriety is so much more than that. I feel fulfilled in who I am and feel as if I am the person that God originally intended me to be.

If you have five or more years of sobriety and would like to celebrate by writing a Living in Sobriety column, please contact toc@saa-recovery.org.



My Big Fat Beautiful Outer Circle

Creating a ‘sufficient substitute for sex addiction’ is key to recovery

BY LAURA T.

In 2013, when I returned from Greece with a broken soul to an estranged family, I was badly in need of routine. I needed basic self-care, and I needed recovery I could count on even when I could barely get out of bed. My Higher Power helped me put together a strong program in spite of my pain, anxiety, and confusion, and when I look back today, I see the logic and beauty of what I’ve come to call “my big fat beautiful outer circle.” I’ve been able to use it — along with working the Twelve Steps of SAA — to stay sober for more than three years and to share it as a kind of methodology with my sponsees and other fellows who often have difficulty coming up with their own outer circles.

A friend in recovery once said in a meeting that we need a “sufficient substitute for sex addiction.” This is really what I’m going for with my outer circle: It’s got to be a powerful motivator, something that satisfies

my deep human needs in healthy ways. It's got to be personal — adapted to my unique problems and preferences as an individual. And, like all our circles, it's got to be specific enough to keep me accountable, yet flexible enough to allow me to grow.

Now, a little about the methodology. I like to design my outer circle in three parts: 1) self-care, which I call the foundation; 2) joy or passions, which I call the heart; and 3) service, which extends the joy to others and satisfies our primary purpose. Let me take each of these in kind.

Self-care simply has to be the foundation; it's the daily work in which we heal and learn to love ourselves. My sponsor told me in the beginning, "As long as you keep the focus on Laura, you'll be all right." This was the best mantra he could possibly have given me; a lifetime of co-dependence had kept me mainly focused on everyone's needs but my own until eventually I would become enraged and act out. So I underscore my outer circle with basic self-care.

I used to teach self-care to adolescents, and I realized that my old table metaphor worked very well for the outer circle. A table has four legs, and each of these legs must be intact to support

the table. The four legs are 1) the physical, 2) the emotional, 3) the intellectual, and 4) the spiritual. We can brainstorm by drawing a table and then jot down next to each leg some of the things we will do to take care of that leg. Here, specificity is a good thing.

Under the physical leg, I would personally make a list like this:

- » Eat twice a day and stick to my paleo diet.
- » Take my supplements.
- » Check my blood sugar.
- » Turn off the computer by 10 p.m. and go to bed by midnight.
- » Aerobic exercise (Balkan dance 2x/wk, exercise room 3x/wk).
- » Brush my teeth 2x day.

Under the emotional leg, I would make this list in part:

- » Connect with friends and fellows every day (meetings/phone).
- » Get out every day for a bit (be seen).
- » Feel whatever I'm feeling and just sit with it.
- » Read text every day about positive healing in my life.
- » Journal/write/sing/dance.

Under the intellectual leg, I might write something like this:

- » Practice my Greek and French.

- » Read my current book and articles.
- » Spend some time organizing my life.
- » Prepare an upcoming dance lesson.
- » Prepare a new poetry manuscript.

For the spiritual leg, my list would look like this:

- » Morning prayer and meditation practice (Higher Power).
- » Minute-by-minute mindfulness.
- » Practice rigorous honesty and compassion.
- » Connect with my community (people).
- » Observe the night sky (nature).

You can see that there would be some overlap: things that make me feel good physically affect my emotional, mental, and spiritual legs. For example, exercising reduces my anxiety (physical), helps me feel good about taking care of myself (emotional), learn new routines and research methods (intellectual), and connect with reality (spiritual).

Going to meetings keeps me safe (physical/emotional), I always learn something new (intellectual), and I connect with other sex addicts, many of whom have

become close friends (emotional/spiritual).

Now that the fundamental layer of my outer circle, self-care, has been sketched out, I can move on to the second layer by asking myself this very important question: what are the things that bring joy and passion into my life? They don't have to be current activities or items; they can come out of our past, recent or distant, or they can be something that we've always wanted to try or learn. The sky is the limit!

Both conditions applied to me when I began my recovery. I have been passionate all my life for writing poetry, so I found a senior writing group in my part of the city and joined. I stayed with these kind and creative elders for over two years during the early phases of my recovery and, within the safety of their support, I used my writing to help myself heal from some very hard emotional stuff.

I had also fallen in love with the Greek language, music, and culture when I was in Greece, so I found a group of people who practiced Greek and other Balkan line dancing and singing and I started studying with them twice a week. It remains today a big part of my outer circle — there is still so much joy in it for me — and I now teach dances as part of a

group that has been meeting for over 45 years! I started a French book club in my city that meets every two months. And I attend two SAA meetings every week, as I have from the beginning.

All these and more have been part of the consistent routine that I so need. When I was jumping out of my skin and afraid I wouldn't even be able to talk, I got myself out of the house simply because these things were on my calendar. I didn't give myself excuses; I showed up.

And over time, along with working the Steps one step at a time, my anxiety and fear became manageable and at times began to melt away in the very joy of the activity itself. As for meetings, I often say that I would rather be in a room full of sex addicts than anywhere else, and I mean it. My two meetings have been the borders of my recovery and eventually a great joy for me.

Finally, where would our outer circles be without service? I held myself back a bit in this area because I had always been the over-responsible volunteer, helper, worker. But little-by-little, as I got to know myself in this program, I took on service work. First, I was the literature-person for a meeting, then proofreader for this very publication, then women's outreach

coordinator for our intergroup. I started a women's only meeting in my region.

I also started tutoring adolescents again and cleaned rooms for the elderly; jobs can contain elements of self-care, passion, and service. I am helping my mother who is in hospice after a great healing in our relationship. I spend time every month with my grandson and am mending my relationship with my son and daughter-in-law. There are many opportunities, both personal and professional, to be of service to this program, our families, and our world.

Yet still, I keep the focus on Laura and what works for her, and I know that way, I will be all right. Life is such a balancing act! With the help of my Higher Power and my fellowship, I can keep shifting, growing, and loving myself and others without losing myself or devolving into selfishness.

The light of recovery shines into each of these three levels of the outer circle for me. I can now grieve a big loss but not lose my sobriety because I have joy. I can have a major expense but not lose my serenity because I know that in any given moment, I have everything I need. My big fat beautiful outer circle isn't just a sufficient substitute for sex addiction anymore: it is life itself. ●



Why do some get recovery and some don't? Here are some possibilities

T

BY KEITH G.

he program of recovery found in Sex Addicts Anonymous is for anyone and everyone who is a sex addict. Any sex addict can find recovery by working this program.

And yet, some sex addicts never seem to reach that point. Some of us seem to struggle, having difficulty putting together any significant period of sobriety.

We may even seem to be doing okay for a while, but then we slip or relapse and are picking up a white chip again. And this process seems to repeat itself, perhaps for years.

Yet there are other sex addicts who seem to continue to progress as they work the SAA program. Those people may have slips along the way, but they seem to be continually moving forward, being able to learn from their slips, and in time they are experiencing longer-term sobriety and picking up extended-time chips.

So both of these groups seem to genuinely desire to stop acting out, and yet

some people are successful at staying sober and some are not. To put it bluntly... some seem to get it and some don't.

Why is that? If this program is for anyone and everyone, why does it sometimes seem like that's not the case?

Let's look at a few potential reasons.

1. Misunderstanding. One of the primary reasons that I might struggle with finding sobriety through this program is that I have misunderstood the SAA program of recovery. This program is not a go-to-meetings program. It is not a Three Circles program, nor is it based on any of the other SAA tools of recovery. It is not based on therapy or accountability. The SAA program of recovery, as stated in chapter three of the SAA Green Book, is based on working the Twelve Steps of SAA, preferably with a sponsor. That is where our spiritual transformation occurs and where we find sustainable relief from sex addiction.

Those other actions – tools of recovery, therapy, etc. – can be extremely helpful aids in our recovery. But they are not the program. To recover from sex addiction through the SAA Program requires me to work the Twelve Steps. Anything else is not the SAA Program.

Even with a genuine desire to stop acting out, some people are successful at staying sober and some are not.

2. Unwillingness. It is one thing for me to understand our program of recovery, but another thing entirely for me to actually apply it. I have been selfish and self-centered for many years now, and I may find that I don't like someone else telling me what to do. I may find that I just don't keep in contact with my sponsor or just don't seem to get past one of the steps. To progress, I need to be willing. I don't need to wait for willingness; I just need to take the actions.

3. Hindrances. Many of us face numerous hindrances to our recovery. Though meetings are not our program of recovery, they are a vital part of our recovery process. And yet, I might have an occupation that seems to make it more difficult to attend meetings. Perhaps my occupation is public enough that I don't believe I can take the chance of being seen at a recovery meeting.

Perhaps my hindrance is the fact that I am married or in a long-term relationship with the person I have harmed the most severely. It can be difficult to stay focused on the

early steps if my spouse or partner is ready for me to progress more quickly into those later steps. Also, spouses or partners may want us to “graduate” from the SAA Program. They may want us to do whatever we need to do to get sober, but at some point they may want us to stop going to meetings and helping others so we can spend more time with them. Our recovery can be an embarrassment to them.

But whatever the hindrance, I need to continue to progress. I must work this program of recovery no matter what, because this may be my last chance at finding any sobriety from acting out.

The topic of hindrances leads to a certain, specific hindrance – one which I believe may be one of the main reasons why some get sober and others don’t.

4. Feelings. The SAA Program of Recovery is based on actions, not feelings. The Twelve Steps of SAA is not a list of feelings I need to develop or contemplate; instead, it is a list of actions I need to take.

If I am a person who is more feelings-based, that can be a hindrance to my recovery. I can get too wrapped up in contemplating my feelings and developing self-knowledge, sometimes to the exclusion of taking any actions. I might avoid certain actions until I understand those actions or the reasons behind

them. Of course, one of the problems with this approach is that my own thinking is what got me into this situation in the first place.

As an addict, I can be successful at recovery if I do nothing but take the recommended Twelve-Step actions – even to the exclusion of any understanding of my feelings or the reasons why I do what I do.

However, consider the opposite extreme: If I only work at understanding my feelings – to the exclusion of getting a sponsor and working the Steps – I may not recover.

The reason it is important to consider this particular hindrance is the same as the reason for considering any hindrance to my recovery: it is not that this tendency or situation will prevent me from recovering; it is that I will need to overcome this tendency if I want to recover. I will need to decrease my time spent in contemplation of my feelings or trying to understand the Steps... and just work the Steps.

That is the bottom line for the recovery found in the program of Sex Addicts Anonymous: as we say, it works if you work it.

But that’s actually a bit of a misnomer. The program itself works; the program is sound. Twelve-Step recovery has been working for decades. But the program will only work for me, if I work it. ●



The Penny

A powerful message about the Third Step comes from a surprising place

BY RICHARD I.

Iwrote this true story three years ago, after realizing that I had experienced my first “God-shot.” My sponsor suggested that I send it to The Outer Circle and I promised I would someday. Sadly, he died about a year later. I think it’s about time I kept my promise, so here it is:

On the morning of my “God-shot,” I witnessed a fellow receive his eighteen-month sobriety coin. I was proud of him because I had sat next to him a couple months earlier as he read his First Step. I made sure to be there because he was among the first fellows who reached out to me at my first SAA meeting. I was a wreck and could hardly speak without crying at that first meeting. But he put his hand on my shoulder and assured me that I did not need to say anything. He understood. He made me feel I was in the right place.

After hearing his First Step, I felt like he was my brother although our backgrounds were quite different and we were ages apart. So when his

eighteen-month sobriety coin was passed around the circle of fellows, it had special meaning when it came to me. I held it by the tips of my fingers and read each word of the Serenity Prayer inscribed on it. I turned it over a couple times then held it tight after reading those words, “From Shame to Grace.”

I closed my eyes and swallowed hard with a lump in my throat. I took a few deep breaths then traced the number that was stamped on the coin with my fingertips... “Eighteen Months.”

As I sat there holding his coin, my mind wandered. I was not listening to the reading at all. I only remember thinking that eighteen months seemed like a distant dream. Here I was struggling to make three months.

No one really knew what I was going through at that point. My life, as I knew it, had collapsed in a very public way. My wife left me. I did not want to be seen by friends and neighbors. I thought life was over for me — nearly sixty years gone up in flames. I was under a lot of pressure to just hold on. But I was determined to go to a meeting every day because it was helping me cope, and I was beginning to hear a few whispers of hope.

Ninety days of meetings was the goal I set with my sponsor and I was determined to do that if noth-

ing else. As I sat there, it dawned on me that I should have a three-month coin by the group’s next meeting. “Just a few days away, I thought... I’ll make it.”

But then what? What will my life be like when I reach eighteen months? I had no way of knowing what would lie ahead for me but I remember feeling a new sense of hope.

As I finally let go of the fellow’s eighteen-month coin and passed it on, I wondered what I had done with my two-month coin. I couldn’t remember when I last had it. I struggled to even remember the color.

My hands were tucked inside the pockets of my fleece as I sat, vaguely listening to the shares that followed the reading. I came out of my daydream and started to listen, wondering what the reading was about.

Then I felt a small coin that was tucked down in the corner of my jacket. It felt like a dime. I was curious so I pulled it out to have a closer look. It was only a penny, but it looked old. Then I recognized what looked like wheat sheaves on the back and I thought, “We don’t make them like that anymore.”

I turned it over to find the date. I couldn’t quite make it out, but it

looked like it could be 1963. I adjusted my bifocals and took a hard look. “Wait a minute,” I thought. “It can’t be... Yes, it’s from 1953 — that’s the year I was born!

I was amazed. Sixty years ago, that penny was minted in San Francisco the same year I was born in Iowa. Yet, here we were — together today after all these miles and years!

I tried to remember if I had saved the penny previously but forgot about it. It was a jacket that I usually wear golfing. Perhaps the penny was someone else’s lucky ball-marker that I accidentally picked up. Maybe it was just loose change in the pocket of a fleece.

But as I looked at the penny, I had a feeling we were meant to find each other. For sixty years, this penny had wandered in and out of the lives of perhaps thousands of people only to find me at this moment of my soul searching.

The sharing continued and everything that was said up to this moment had gone in one ear and out the other. Then the fellow who received the eighteen-month sobriety coin decided to share, so I perked up and listened to what he had to say.

He referred to what was read while I was in my trance. It was a reading of the Third Step. He said that the Third Step became a pivotal time

I held the coin by the tips of my fingers and read the Serenity Prayer inscribed on it. Then I held it tight after reading those words, ‘From Shame to Grace.’

in his sobriety because he made the decision to stop hanging onto one more day of sobriety and start living by turning his will over to the care of his Higher Power. I remember feeling a little skeptical. I had heard those words before but this time they took on new meaning because they were not from the Green Book, but from his heart.

As he spoke, I held onto the penny. It was mine now. I looked at the penny again. There was Abe Lincoln, the wheat laurels, the date. It was just a penny, but I still felt lucky to have found it. For all I knew, it could be rare and worth far more now.

Then I squinted as I read the faint words arcing across the edge of the coin. I had read those same words countless times on countless coins all my life but they never took on as much meaning for me as they did at that moment: “IN GOD WE TRUST.” ●

DEAR WILL

Do I Need a Sponsor for the First Step?

BY WILL

Writing out
a First Step
and getting a
response from a
sponsor is also
a major step for
many
sponsees.

Dear Will:

One thing I hear at the meeting I go to is, "It is recommended that those doing First Steps have a sponsor." This bothers me. I have been in the program for a few months and I want to start working on my First Step, but I do not have a sponsor. I don't really think I need one. I have the SAA First Step pamphlet, have done some writing, and have even been published. Do you think I need a sponsor to do my First Step?

Trying to Find the Right Path

Dear Trying,

Will senses that even though you are only asking one question, a second question is lurking beneath the first one. He will begin by answering your asked question, and then maybe take a look at the lurker, depending on how verbose he has been in answering the first one.

Will can answer your question best by relating his first experience with the First Step. He did have a sponsor when preparing the Step but never actually wrote it down. His sponsor did not insist he do so, so Will never had an opportunity for real feedback. He was more concerned with impressing the group by giving his First Step from memory. (This character defect of trying to impress others has, perhaps not surprisingly, landed Will in trouble more than once.) By the way, Will's first attempt at a First Step was something of a disaster. The group was not hesitant to point out elements in his First Step that his sponsor never had a chance to do.

A sponsor can look at a written First Step and note whether any of the things that the sponsee is plan-

ning to say are triggering. A sponsor can help determine if the First Step is just a dry recitation of facts or if the sponsee is giving the group a sense of who he is. The sponsor can help the sponsee determine if he or she is sharing things that could cause legal problems for the sponsee or for the group.

Writing out a First Step and getting a response from a sponsor is also a major, well, first step for many sponsees in learning that he or she is indeed not alone. Will had always thought that he was one of the worst people on earth, and it would have been a major benefit to him to see his sponsor not run screaming out of the room after reading his First Step.

Now, since he hasn't been too verbose, Will wants to get to your second question. It says on page 13 of *Sex Addicts Anonymous* that, "Often a sponsor is the person in the fellowship who knows us best." Will (now) knows that his best thinking is what got him into SAA (he heard this at a meeting somewhere). He couldn't see some of the consequences of his best thinking because he was too close to the situation. A sponsor could (and did) say to him, "Will, do you realize the similarity between what you are saying about this situation and what you said last week



about this other situation?" Will would never have seen some of his rationalization and justification unless an objective outsider had been there to point those things out to him and, consequently, would have made much slower progress in the SAA program. That paragraph on page 13 gives several other benefits of having a sponsor; there are many others as well.

So yes, Trying, Will does think you would benefit from having a sponsor. He encourages you to find somebody at a meeting who has what you want and ask him to sponsor you. Will thinks and hopes you will be pleasantly surprised by what you will get out of the experience.

Will

*If you have a question for Will,
please send an email to [men4saa@
saa-recovery.org](mailto:men4saa@saa-recovery.org).*

STORIES OF SERVICE

Service Work Builds Self-Esteem

BY TROY C.

I now do service work for three meetings and counting, because of what it's doing for my self-esteem, and character.

Seven months ago I hit rock bottom. I knew that I had a thinking problem, and finally became teachable. My sponsor told me that if you want to build self-esteem, then do esteem-able things. Also, the only way I could change my thinking was by taking different actions. He told me that a great way of doing this was by doing service work.

The Tuesday night SAA meeting needed a new chairperson so I grabbed it. I reliably got there early, set the meeting up, greeted new comers, and started the meeting on time every week. The regulars have all thanked me for carrying the torch. I feel so much more part of the fellowship, and it means a lot that people take me a little bit more seriously.

I am the one who is most grateful for the golden opportunity to rebuild my life. I now do service work for three meetings and counting, because of what it's doing for my self esteem, and character. The accountability is helping me get much distance from isolation, self-obsession, self-loathing, and self-pity.

Early on I certainly felt some fear about not being reliable or making some kind of mistake. Actually, in one particular commitment I have slipped a little, but no one has shamed me. I simply got myself back on track. Today, I feel the self-confidence and self-respect that service work helps me build.

Stories of Service are meant to be short articles between 100 words to 300 words that inspire others to be of service in the SAA fellowship. If you have a story of service to share, please send it to toc@saa-recovery.org

FROM THE BOARD

Convention Speakers: Please Only Share the SAA Message

BY MIKE L.

**Recorded
workshops can
be pulled from
sale because they
stray too far from
the SAA message.**

Well, it's March now, and the convention is getting closer. Seems we just had a convention; how time flies when one is having fun!

I was on the planning committee for the 1997 convention in Houston. One particular memory from that convention that stands out was a wonderful lengthy visualization that one of the founders of our fellowship presented on Saturday afternoon.

Because of some technical difficulties, we were not able to record that visualization by connecting to the device that the presenter was holding, and it did not occur to me until later that we could have simply held up a microphone and caught the sound from the ether, which is essentially what we do for all of our workshops anyway.

During our "wrap up" committee meeting, we expressed our dismay that this workshop was not recorded, and one of the committee members, putting the best possible face on the matter, said that particular workshop would just have to be a gift for the folks who were there in person.

This brings me to the crop of workshops and keynote speakers for the upcoming convention. The Literature Committee has had, for a number of years now, an Audio Review Subcommittee which listens to each recorded event, even including the talent show, and decides on its suitability for continued sale.

After each bimonthly meeting, the Audio Review Subcommittee passes on to the Literature Committee the names of any workshops that

FROM THE BOARD

it considers to have possibly strayed too far from the SAA message.

The Literature Committee then reviews those workshops and recommends to the office that it pull those workshops that may have done so.

The Audio Review Subcommittee also makes recommendations as to any workshops that should be given away rather than sold.

Workshops can be pulled from sale for a variety of reasons, sometimes for a reason as simple as that the sound quality is poor.

The majority of times, however, the workshop has strayed too far from the SAA message. Perhaps there are lengthy references to other Twelve-Step programs or to outside literature. Perhaps too much time is devoted to help that the presenter has received from therapy. And so forth.

Each year's Program Committee circulates a document from the Literature Committee as part of its vetting process that describes topics from which it encourages presenters and keynote speakers to shy away.

There is also a meeting before the official start of the convention to discuss these sorts of topics as well as technical aspects of recording the workshops.

I have noticed in workshops from the past year or two that more presenters are encouraging their attendees to stay on topic in this regard.

This is not to say that a single brief reference to another Twelve-Step program or to therapy is going to get a workshop disqualified.

A good example might be, "My therapist told me such-and-such" as opposed to "I really couldn't have gotten the real recovery that I have now if I hadn't spent years in therapy" or "I never had a real connection to my Higher Power until I started going to such-and-such a program."

Though statements may very well be true for the presenter or the keynote speaker, they are the kinds of statements that raise a red flag for the Audio Review Committee. The Literature Committee can answer questions about what strays too far from the SAA message.

I want to see as few workshops and keynotes from the convention as possible fall into the category of being only a gift for the ones who were there in person.

Accordingly, I encourage all keynotes and presenters to focus primarily on the SAA program in their presentations.

ISO NEWS

Conference Nominating Committee Invites Ongoing Participation

The need for trusted servants never ends! Any member of the fellowship who is interested in or might be interested in serving at the ISO level is invited to complete and submit a service resume.

The Conference Nominating Committee (NomCom) is hoping to build a large pool of potential trusted servants, which can be used as a resource of potential nominees from year-to-year.

The service resume form may be found on the service website at www.saa-iso.org. Select “International Service” in the left-hand menu, then click on the figure.

Your information can be entered directly into the PDF form, which can then be saved and emailed to the ISO office. Or you may print the form and send to the office by postal mail. Information submitted on the service resume will be treated as strictly confidential.

On the International Service page of the service website, there is also a link to the guidelines for service at the international level. In brief, the NomCom is seeking candidates with solid program experience, long-term sobriety, and an appreciation of the value of active service at all levels within our fellowship.

The NomCom is committed to nominating qualified candidates who reflect the broad geographical and personal diversity of our fellowship. This can be accomplished only if the pool of potential nominees reflects that diversity.

Consider serving at the international level today!

Completed service resumes should be emailed to info@saa-recovery.org or mailed to Nominating Committee, ISO, PO Box 70949, Houston, TX 77270.

Conference Committee Structure Seeks Input, Participation

The Conference Committee Structure Sub-Committee (CCS) of the Conference Steering Committee (CSC) would like to know what is currently working in your area. Do you have committees at your local or intergroup level? If so, what work are members of these committees doing (public information,

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contact with professionals, literature development, retreats, for example)? As we determine what is already working within the SAA fellowship locally, it can help chart a future course. We especially would like to hear diverse input on how you see future development of committee work within SAA.

As we transition to involvement of more members sharing the work of the fellowship, and having individual members do the work of our program, we invite you to participate.

We are looking at work currently being done by the ISO Board and Board Committees — keeping the hand of SAA out to the still suffering sex addict through literature development, area formation, online presence, and many other service projects — and developing ways that more of this work can be accomplished through the energy, input and participation of all members of the fellowship. Our particular area is, “How will Conference Committees be constituted and operate in the future?”

We welcome your participation. We offer you three options for contact:

- » You can attend our monthly phone meeting on the third Tuesday of each month at 5pm central time. You can obtain dial-in information by contacting the SAA office at info@saa-recovery.org, or by calling the office at (713)869-4902. We would love to have the input of all SAA members during this time of exciting transitions. All SAA members can participate in our discussions, and current delegates have voting power in any Conference Steering Committee work group.
- » If you, or any members of your groups, would like to send written communication, you can do so by sending an email to csc.committeestructure@saa-iso.org or writing to CSC/CCS c/o ISO, P.O. Box 70949, Houston, TX 77270.
- » A third option is to speak with a member of the Conference Committee Structure by phone. You can do this by sending an email to: csc.committeestructure@saa-iso.org. Include your phone number and a member will call you to answer questions or listen to your input.

Please pass this information along to all groups and members in your area. Thank you.

SAA Board Increases Alternates Travel Reimbursement

Here's a look at the complete actions the board took in December:

- » That the board approves funding for Board Alternates for Face-to-Face meetings that

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coincide with the 2017 Conference and Convention. Board Alternates be reimbursed up to a maximum of \$600 per person. There are currently six alternates (and six for Sunday if NC elects an Alternate). Alternates who take the place of a voting member would receive full funding, if the voting member were not able to attend.

- » Further it is moved that the Board having previously approved funding for Literature Committee alternates to attend at a \$500 limit per alternate (Nov2016 9.3) is increased to \$600 per alternate.

Group Donations Yield Budget Surplus for January

In the month of January our budget showed a surplus of \$19,972.69. We had budgeted for a surplus of \$13,705.00. The increase in our surplus was due to group donations exceeding their budget by \$5,031.60 and the Houston Giving Thanks event exceeded their budget by \$3,067.00.

Our gross sales revenue for the SAA Green Book exceeded our estimate by \$270.43 in January. For the year we are at 103.2 percent of our estimated SAA Green Book sales.

Our pamphlet and booklet sales exceeded our estimate by \$72.12 for January. For the year we are at 101 percent of our estimated pamphlet and booklet sales.

Our bronze medallion sales exceeded our estimate by \$665.00 in January. For the year we are at 128.9 percent of our estimated bronze medallion sales.

Our total sales for January exceeded our estimate by \$1,003.79. For the year we are at 105 percent of our estimated sales.

Individual donations were below our estimate by \$166.38 for January. For the year we are at 99.6 percent of our estimated individual donations.

Group donations exceeded our estimate by \$5,278.36 in January. For the year we are at 147.1 percent of our estimated group donations.

Our product inventory is valued at \$38,322.70. Our expenses were below our estimate by \$359.73 in January. For the year we are at 99.3 percent of our estimated expenses. Our operational reserve is fully funded.

ISO NEWS

Spring SAA Events Abound

Everything is coming up retreats this spring, as a bevy of options blossom across the country. Here's a look at all the options from coast to coast. For more information, including contacts and costs, go to <http://saa-recovery.org/NewsAndEvents/>

San Francisco Bay Area Annual Retreat - Petaluma, CA — March 17-19

The San Francisco Bay Area Intergroup's 17th annual SAA retreat will be held in Petaluma, CA, 40 miles north of San Francisco. All SAA members are welcome to attend. The retreat includes workshops, meetings, and great fellowship. Register by March 1 (or by Feb. 9 for the early-bird special) to help us with meal and bed counts. Partial weekend attendance is welcome. We will have a team of ASL interpreters onsite throughout the retreat to support hearing-impaired members.

Gulf Coast Region Intergroup Retreat - Chatawa, MS — March 24-26

The Gulf Coast Region Intergroup of SAA is planning their annual retreat for the weekend of March 24 - 26, at St. Mary of the Pines Retreat Center in Chatawa, Mississippi. The "Tools of Recovery - 2017 GCRIG Serenity Retreat" will feature workshops, meetings, and members' stories. The retreat center provides a serene place for quiet reflection and plenty of opportunities for recreation.

Fifth International SAA Women's Retreat — March 31-April 2

This year's retreat will be held in Minnesota. Time & location details are given on the registration form. The retreat offers: fun, fellowship, face-to-face meetings, workshops, indoor and outdoor activities, a heated pool, and arts and crafts. For a registration form and additional information, please email: saawomens.retreat@gmail.com. Cost is \$130. This fee includes meals and lodging. Scholarships are available. Number and amount TBD.

Triangle Area Spring Step Retreat - Chapel Hill, NC — April 7-9

The North Carolina Triangle Area Intergroup is sponsoring an opportunity to work on Steps One through Nine in a weekend. Four tracks will be offered, and on-site sponsors will be available for men and women. The

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beautiful camp ground setting in rural NC has climate-controlled accommodations for men and women.

DFW Men's Spring Retreat - Denton, TX — April 22-23

Come join us for our 4th annual men's retreat on April 22-23, 2017, in Denton, TX. Recovered sex addicts will share their experience with the Twelve Steps. Activities include speakers, a panel discussion and Q&A session with experienced sponsors, as well as plenty of time for fellowship with like-minded men. Overnight accommodations are available on Friday night for out-of-towners.

Calendar — Here are tentative ISO outreach and committee meeting times for the next several months. Meetings times change often. All times are Central Standard Time. To attend a committee meeting, you must be a member or be invited. If you're interested in joining a committee, email info@saa-recovery.org or call the ISO office.

First Sunday of the month

Nominating Committee: 11:00 a.m.

Audio Review (odd months): 2:30 p.m.

Intergroup Communications: 3:00 p.m.

LGBT Outreach: 5:00 p.m.

CSC: Policy & Procedure: 2:00 p.m.

Prisoner Outreach: 8:00 p.m.

First Saturday of the month

Author's Group: 4:00 p.m.

Second Saturday of the month

Intimacy and Sexual Avoidance: 8 a.m.

Women's Outreach: 5:00 p.m.

Second Sunday of the month

Literature Committee: 4:00 p.m.

General Outreach: 6:30 p.m.

Third Tuesday of the month

CSC: Conference Committee Structure: 5:00 p.m.

Third Wednesday of the month

Area Conference Committee: 7:00 p.m.

Third Saturday of the month

CSC: Twelve Concepts Work Group: 12:00 p.m.

Third Sunday of the month

CSC: Charter & Bylaws: 2:00 p.m.

Information Systems and Online Presence
Committee: 2:00 p.m.

SE Region: 6:00 p.m.

Fourth Sunday of the month

Conference Steering Committee: 2:00 p.m.

Meditation Writing Workshop: 5:00 p.m.

Fourth Tuesday of the month

Seventh Tradition: 6:00 p.m.

CONTACT THE ISO

Want to connect with the International Service Organization website, staff, Board of Trustees, trusted servants, or special workers? Here's the contact info you need:

Office

ISO Office Mailing Address:
PO Box 70949, Houston, TX 77270

Phone: 713-869-4902 -or- 800-477-8191
Fax: 713-692-0105

Office e-mail: info@saa-recovery.org
The Outer Circle e-mail: toc@saa-recovery.org
Website: www.saa-recovery.org

The Outer Circle

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Prisoner Outreach: Jonathan C.: outreach@saa-recovery.org
Administrative Assistant: Harvey A. harveya@saa-iso.org
Publications Manager: Cody S. codys@saa-iso.org

The ISO of SAA Board of Trustees also has an e-mail box, which may be used to register comments, positive or negative, from the fellowship about the ISO staff: oochair@saa-recovery.org.

Board of Trustees and Literature Committee

Great Lakes

Board: Stephen N. (Vice-Chair); Alternate: Vacant
BoardGL@saa-recovery.org
LitCom: Vacant; Alternate: Vacant
LitComGL@saa-litcom.org

Intermountain

Board: Bob H.; Alternate: Allan B.
BoardIM@saa-recovery.org
LitCom: Raymond W.; Alternate: Robbie
LitComIM@saa-litcom.org

North Central

Board: Dawn S.; Alternate: Vacant
BoardNC@saa-recovery.org
LitCom: John W.; Alternate: Alice P.
LitComNC@saa-litcom.org

Northeast

Board: Tim A. (Secretary); Alternate: Carl D.
BoardNE@saa-recovery.org
LitCom: Don R.; Alternate: Mike B.
LitComNE@saa-litcom.org

North Pacific

Board: Cliff G.; Alternate: Bob L.
BoardNP@saa-recovery.org

LitCom: Les J.; Alternate: Ben B.
LitComNP@saa-litcom.org

South Central

Board: Paul M. (Chair); Alternate: Mike L.
BoardSC@saa-recovery.org
LitCom: Tracy R.; Alternate: Doug S.
LitComSC@saa-litcom.org

Southeast

Board: John J. (Treasurer); Alternate: CW G.
BoardSE@saa-recovery.org
LitCom: Garret I.; Alternate: Byard B.
LitComSE@saa-litcom.org

Southern Pacific

Board: Antonio B.; Alternate: Wayne B.
BoardSP@saa-recovery.org
LitCom: Carole D.; Alternate: Mark W.
LitComSP@saa-litcom.org

At Large

Board: Lisa S.; Herman J.
BoardAL@saa-recovery.org
LitCom: David M.; Steven P.; Wayne K. Gary T.
(*The Outer Circle* editor)
LitComAL@saa-litcom.org

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Get Your Story Published in *The Outer Circle*

The Outer Circle newsletter relies on submissions from the Fellowship. It's a great way to carry the message to other sex addicts!

Articles may be submitted by email to toc@saa-recovery.org or by mail to the ISO office. If possible, please submit articles via email in Microsoft Word format. All articles must be accompanied by the **RELEASE FORM** at the bottom of this page.

Deadlines for Submission

Jan/Feb:	Nov 5
Mar/Apr:	Jan 5
May/June:	Mar 5
July/Aug:	May 5
Sept/Oct:	July 5
Nov/Dec:	Sept 5

Here are some general writing guidelines:

Personal stories can be anywhere from 500-1,000 words. The main guideline is to share your experience, strength, and hope in the principle of Step Twelve. It may be helpful to think of your submission as a written form of a share you'd give in a meeting — something that's working for you or that you're struggling with.

Also, please consider writing a 500- to 1,000-word article based on a workshop or talk you've given around the Steps and Traditions. Again, the key is sharing your experience, strength, and hope with other sex addicts. Please don't worry about grammar and spelling. We'll clean that up for you.

General Release Form

In consideration of being reviewed for possible publication, I hereby transfer and release to the ISO of SAA, Inc (assignee) all legal rights to the publication of my submission(s) or any edited version thereof in any official ISO publication, including Sex Addicts Anonymous, The Outer Circle, the SAA meditation book, the SAA websites, or any other SAA program material, such as pamphlets, booklets and audio recordings.

With this submission, I transfer to the assignee without limitation the legal title and all literary rights, including copyright and/or trademark and the full right and license to reproduce, copy, edit for content, modify, distribute, and create derivatives from the submitted work. I understand that every effort will be made to safeguard my personal anonymity in the publication and distribution of this material. I also understand that I may or may not receive further communication regarding my submission prior to its publication.

I hereby further attest that I possess full legal capacity to exercise this authorization, and I hereby Release the assignee from any claim whatsoever by me or my successors.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Printed name: _____

Witness: _____ Date: _____

Printed name: _____

SAA TWELVE STEPS

- 1.** We admitted we were powerless over addictive sexual behavior - that our lives had become unmanageable.
- 2.** Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
- 3.** Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.
- 4.** Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
- 5.** Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
- 6.** Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
- 7.** Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
- 8.** Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
- 9.** Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
- 10.** Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
- 11.** Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.
- 12.** Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to other sex addicts and to practice these principles in our lives.