

Co-Dependents Anonymous

Carrying the Message

Living the Twelfth Step

IS IT CODEPENDENCE, OR IS IT SERVICE?

One CoDA member described the difference between being of service and functioning codependently in this way:

Codependence: “If I don’t do it, it won’t get done right. The entire burden is on me again.”

Service: “I am doing my part within the group, as each person is doing her/his part. God is in charge, not me.”

In this pamphlet, we will reflect on some of the concerns we all share in our recovery from codependence; the dilemma of when to say “no” or when and how to accept a responsibility or to make a commitment. We will also offer some solutions and methods suggested by many of our fellow members from a variety of CoDA groups.

Perhaps the first solution is to ask the Higher Power of our own understanding for guidance so that the way we approach service is right for each of us as individuals. If we choose to view being of service in a new way, we might see it as an opportunity to transform our thinking about helping, about giving, and about doing.

A DELICATE BALANCE

So many of us came to the CoDA Fellowship in a state of perpetual burnout. We had been giving to others what we thought was our support, encouragement and even good advice. In the process, we usually neglected ourselves. We failed to see or to value our own needs and wants. Being with or avoiding others seemed to be our only concern. Our lives often felt cockeyed, out of alignment and unbalanced.

Now, as we progress in our Coda recovery, we begin to believe that a part of our growth lies in the ability to say “no” to any request that we fear may be intrusive. And it would be our choice, in many cases, to say “no” without feeling guilt. What better place to practice this new found freedom than in the very Fellowship which offers us this opportunity. We begin to turn down requests to be of assistance where we feel the safest-in Co-Dependents Anonymous.

If we have felt overloaded and overwhelmed at home, at work, at school and in our personal relationships, why should we volunteer for service at CoDA meetings, let alone at higher levels like the community, state, or national? The very idea of adding one more burden to our load seems unthinkable. In fact, it may appear to some of us that to say “yes” would mean we are practicing our disease. It may seem to us that the only healthy answer to most requests has to be “no.”

As we attend CoDA meetings, use CoDA literature and study the CoDA Steps and Traditions, we cannot fail to notice that someone, somewhere, is providing these and other tools for us to use in our recovery. The question for each of us becomes, “How can I continue to recover from codependence and, at the same time, share some of the gifts I have received from the CoDA Fellowship?” Just the fact that we are asking ourselves this question suggests we are willing to look at the idea of service in a new way, free from those old compulsions to control, to avoid, to direct, to comply, to advise or to do “everything ourselves because if we don’t, who will?”

Our next action may be to find an answer and then implement it. For this, we can look to our Steps and Traditions, the experience of others who are dealing with this question in CoDA, and our own inner guidance. We know we can apply the tools of our recovery program to any living problem we might encounter. The question of balancing service with our recovery from codependence is no different.

BEING FIRST, DOING SECOND

In a general sense, being of service can mean living our recovery by practicing its principles. It can be as simple as seeing to it that we are available as a vehicle for our Higher Power in the healing of ourselves and others.

As we work the Steps and our recovery deepens, many of us will want to try out what we have learned. We may feel moved to do some kind of CoDA service and yet feel resistant at the same time. The answer to this dilemma might be to discuss it with another member or at a meeting, to ask our Higher Power for guidance, or to write about it and share it with our sponsor. The following is a checklist of questions some CoDA members have found helpful.

How do I know if I should give service in CoDA?

- Am I doing more than I want to, perpetuating a pattern of over-commitment and burnout?
- Am I waiting to have more recovery before I give service?
- Am I avoiding service because I think I have to do it perfectly?
- Am I avoiding service in order to isolate from my group?
- Am I using fear of my control issues as an excuse not to give service?

- Am I volunteering for a particular task because no one can do it “right” but me?
- Do I think if I don’t do it, it won’t get done?
- Am I doing it because I want to or because I think I have to?
- Do I feel resentful about the service I am currently doing?
Am I being a martyr or a victim?
- Am I afraid to be a leader? Or am I unwilling to do a smaller task because I think I have to be in charge?
- As I do my service, will I remember to stay in contact with my Higher Power?
- Am I willing to do my part and let go of the results?

While some situations are bound to stimulate a defect we thought had been removed, many CoDA members have had positive experiences from being of service.

Some benefits of CoDA service:

- Being of service lets us be a part of the group.
- It teaches us that we can contribute.
- It helps to insure that the meetings we attend will continue to be available.
- It teaches us to take responsibility for our own needs.
- It gives us a chance to practice our recovery in our relationships with others in the program.