

President's Letter

A. Thomas Horvath, Ph.D., President

SMART Recovery is an Organization of Volunteers

The primary purpose of this column is to honor SMART Recovery[®] meeting Coordinators and the leaders of SMART Recovery[®] Online. These individuals are the backbone of the SMART Recovery[®] organization. They donate their time, often a considerable number of hours each week, for various altruistic reasons to be elaborated in a moment. Without their thousands of hours of volunteer time each month, SMART Recovery[®] might still be a concept, not a thriving organization.

As you may know, SMART Recovery[®] has only two part-time employees, Shari Allwood, our Executive Director, and Jodi Dayton, her administrative assistant. Together they manage the operations of the Central Office in Mentor, Ohio (a suburb of Cleveland). They do such a good job that most in SMART Recovery[®] just take the operation of the Central Office for granted. If an organization were to have only two employees, these are the two to have! We also hire a few contract services intermittently. Otherwise, the entire SMART Recovery[®] operation is a volunteer one.

What motivates someone to volunteer his or her time for SMART Recovery[®]? Consider one reason that is *not* applicable for the typical Coordinator. Professional Advisors, Board members, and members of the International Advisory Council, although also volunteers, do receive some indirect benefits professionally for their volunteer efforts. As active supporters of SMART Recovery[®], they may be able to enhance their professional reputations, get indirect publicity for their books, get an occasional referral of a client, or promote the dissemination of their research. None of these reasons are a problem, of course, and they are typical of why professionals of all types volunteer to serve non-profits. For instance, the physician who serves on the Board of the hospital where she also practices may experience an enhanced reputation in her community for her service. This is a win-win scenario of which almost all non-profits make use.

Let's not overlook the professional volunteers who are not in a position to experience any significant indirect benefit from their volunteerism, but who volunteer nevertheless. Among them are Robert Taylor, the editor of this newsletter, and Joe Gerstein, our founding President, whose professional reputation before SMART Recovery[®] even existed already exceeded anything we might do anytime soon to enhance it.

Unlike a professional volunteer, a SMART Recovery[®] non-professional volunteer is engaged in a “labor of love,” defined in the Random House Dictionary (2nd ed.) as “work done for the sake of one’s own enjoyment or of benefit to others rather than for material rewards.” To be sure, in SMART Recovery[®] there can be pure enjoyment at times: watching someone “get” a critical concept (such as unconditional self acceptance) or having the opportunity to observe someone who has attended meetings over many months report an unexpected and significant step of progress.

Unfortunately, such moments of pure enjoyment may not occur in every meeting, or even once a month. If these are the primary reasons you volunteer, you have achieved a significant mastery of delay of gratification! I believe there are deeper reasons keeping most of our Coordinators and SMART Recovery[®] Online leaders going. There may be as many reasons as we have volunteers, of course, but a few stand out from my conversations over the years.

To be a SMART Recovery[®] volunteer is to be available to help those who are caught up in the pain and turmoil of addictive behavior. Addicted individuals often feel trapped and disheartened. A SMART Recovery[®] volunteer is a tangible sign that there is reason to hope, that addicted individuals do change. The volunteer may also help someone consider making changes even beyond overcoming addictive behavior. SMART Recovery[®] opens up for many members the opportunity to re-think their entire lives. Our members regularly establish self-acceptance, gain effective problem solving skills, and identify and live in accord with what is most important to them. The SMART Recovery[®] volunteer may introduce these possibilities to members, or create the climate in which discussion about these and related issues can flourish.

There is an additional reason our volunteers experience satisfaction in their work, although I hope this reason will phase out over time. Many newcomers to SMART Recovery[®] have felt traumatized to varying degrees by their experiences in treatment or at other types of support group meetings. Unfortunately, some treatment professionals and members of other support groups fail to appreciate that there are many approaches to overcoming addictive behavior and instead insist that their approach is the only effective approach. To be supporting the concept of choice in addiction recovery in communities across the US (where this problem is the greatest) has been a profound satisfaction to many of our volunteers. As several have indicated to me, “I hope to be able to save others from the pain and self-doubt of knowing that some approach wouldn’t work for me, but being told that if I didn’t follow that approach, I could not succeed, and not knowing where to turn.”

Because we are an organization with a very limited budget, we are limited in how much we can recognize and thank our volunteers. This newsletter, however, provides an excellent vehicle for acknowledging and appreciating their work.

It is with great pleasure that I remind us that SMART Recovery[®] has over 300 active Coordinators. Many lead a meeting (even more than one!) each week, and others support the existence and growth of meetings and our organization in various ways, including writing for the newsletter, doing publicity, finding meeting space, covering when a Coordinator is away, keeping outgoing phone messages updated, doing mailings, or returning phone calls. The list of active Coordinators is part of the meeting list, viewable on the website.

In addition to Coordinators who lead face-to-face meetings, our other volunteers support SMART Recovery[®] Online, which has evolved over several years to become a significant component of our organization. Our new Webmaster is Patrick Whorton, who follows founding Webmaster Mike Ozar.

By the time this newsletter reaches you, Patrick (and a committee including Charlie, Joe Berenbaum, and several board members) will have overseen a complete revision of the website (check it out!). Joe Berenbaum, in Great Britain, manages the SMARTCAL and SMARTREC listserves, where conversation thrives. He follows Jeff Schaler, Tom Parmenter, and Kent Hooker. We now have nearly one dozen online meetings and a flourishing message board on the website.

We now have nearly one dozen online meetings and a flourishing message board on the website. The Professional Advisors for SMART Recovery[®] Online are Jonathan von Breton and Kate Chadwick, and the Online Steering Committee includes Patrick Whorton, Randy Ballinger, and B. Martin Wlodyka. On-line Coordinators include: Fred, Charlie, Randy, Garth, Jason, Mark "Marky", and B. Martin.

When you think of SMART Recovery[®], think of the volunteer energy that keeps this organization going!