

## President's Letter

### Recruiting Non-recovering Coordinators

Although SMART Recovery<sup>â</sup> (Self-Management And Recovery Training) has had from its beginnings non-recovering coordinators (meeting leaders), we have recently taken active steps to recruit these individuals. In this column I'll describe why this move is desirable, and actions you can take at the local level to recruit non-recovering coordinators.

First a point of clarification. If, as SMART Recovery<sup>â</sup> suggests, everyone has had some level of addictive behavior, then isn't everyone either actively engaging in addictive behavior, or in recovery? Who then would be non-recovering? By non-recovering I am referring to individuals who have never needed to make "recovery" a major focus of their lives. Their addictive behaviors have been minor enough that they may not even have been labeled as addictive behaviors.

Why would we want non-recovering coordinators? Doesn't it take a recovering person to help an addicted one? Our experience has already shown us directly that being "in recovery" is not essential for leading a productive SMART Recovery<sup>â</sup> meeting. The scientific literature reports that being in recovery is not essential to the effectiveness of an addiction counselor or psychotherapist. Although the recovering coordinator may have better insights into some individuals, he or she may also have mental blocks about others.

The non-recovering coordinator won't be able to rely on identifying (or over-identifying) with someone, and hopefully will focus on the basics of leading a good meeting. By focusing on leading a good meeting there is also less chance that some form of "therapy" will be happening between the coordinator and meeting participants.

In fact almost any motivated adult can lead a meeting simply by following the meeting outline. We don't require that the coordinator have great expertise in any aspect of the SMART Recovery<sup>â</sup> program (although this expertise is certainly desirable). A "basic meeting" can be productive if the atmosphere of the meeting is relaxed enough that participants are willing to talk about themselves, and the coordinator is a good timekeeper and not afraid to exercise a little authority at times. The Coordinator's Manual provides basic instruction on leading a meeting, and help is always available from a variety of sources.

Although our seasoned coordinators lead meetings that have considerably more nuance than a basic meeting, one of my main points here is that if we make that level of expertise a requirement, we are hampering our own growth. It would appear that one of the major blocks to our expansion is that we don't have enough coordinators. Many individuals are scared of even attempting the job. Even though the exercise of authority and leadership inherent in being a coordinator would be a significant boost to the confidence of most members, and hence a boost to their recovery.

Whatever the reasons, we have approximately six years experience that shows us that only a small percentage of meeting participants become coordinators. We might be able to get a significant boost in meeting availability if we actively recruited non-recovering coordinators. More meeting availability leads to more participants (because the meetings are easier to get to), which leads back to establishing more meetings (because there are so many participants), and so forth in a positive spiral. We are already gaining, but wouldn't it be good to increase the speed of this spiral?

I recently did some internet searching on how to volunteer to fight substance abuse. It is noteworthy that you can easily find volunteer opportunities to fight AIDS, child abuse, pollution, etc., but the volunteer activities for fighting substance abuse appear to be non-existent. It would appear that everybody "knows" that only the recovering can help the addicted. There is no need to advertise that volunteer opportunity, just get involved in 12-step meetings! I am not objecting to all the volunteer work that 12-step meetings are founded on, but what about others who desire to volunteer in this area?

Ironically one of the main concerns raised by national addiction leaders is the need to overcome the stigma of addiction. However, by isolating addiction from the rest of the community (and placing it in 12-step meetings) stigma gets contributed to, not reduced. Of course what we really need as a nation is to abandon the disease model. Then we could adopt the cognitive-behavior perspective that all of have these issues, differing only in degree. We would probably then have much less stigma.

At the national level we are looking for opportunities to announce our volunteer opportunity. The recent passage of Proposition 36 in California (which requires treatment rather than prison for drug offenders) suggests that the public is ready for some new thinking about addiction. If you were someone in this affluent age who wanted to give back to the community, and you were interested specifically in reducing addiction problems, where would you turn? Now you can call SMART Recovery<sup>â</sup>!

I encourage each locality to identify local organizations that might be a source of volunteers. Possibly they will post a notice in their own newsletter. Possibly the organization or institution that provides you meeting space could do recruitment. If you have local organizations that list volunteer opportunities, list SMART Recovery<sup>â</sup> if possible (we are a 501(c)3 non-profit corporation). At the very least, if a non-recovering individual expresses interest in SMART Recovery<sup>â</sup>, be encouraging!