

In and Out

By Jerry Guarino

“There are two ways to treat anxiety, through the mind and through behavior,” said the therapist. Sam had been taking sleeping pills after being fired in a tough economy. “Sounds simple,” said Sam. “Well, it will take some effort. Try this. Next time you’re feeling anxious, write down everything you can think of.” Sam nodded. “Like anything?” “Yes”-said Dr. Olsen. “Just writing it down will help. Then, do something positive to relax; stretch, take a walk, meditate.” Sam made a note on his pad. “Still sounds simple, but I’ll try it. Inside and outside the head, Doc?” Dr. Olsen smiled. “Yes, in and out.”

Sam woke up the next day, prepared the kids breakfast and dropped them off at school, his new duty since his wife had to leave early for work. Then he exercised and started a journal to keep notes on his thoughts, especially those that were stressing him. He put fruit and some whole-wheat pita bread into a bag and carried it with him on his job search. Most days he would show up in person to apply for jobs he saw in the classified ads; sometimes he would go to the library and look up jobs on the Internet.

WANTED: Boys and Girls Club needs a volleyball coach for junior high mixed gender team. Apply in person at downtown office. Sam headed for the club. He had been a good player in high school, good enough to get a college scholarship. Unfortunately, injury shortened his plans to play nationally. He walked into the office and met with a stout woman in her mid-fifties. “Yes, can I help you? Then she gestured for him to sit down. Sam did so and replied, “I’d like to apply for the volleyball coaching position. I was all state in high school and got a scholarship to state back in 1991. “Very impressive,” said the woman. “The job is two hours a day Monday through Friday, from 3:30 to 5:30pm and the pay is \$11.50/hour.” Sam didn’t expect it to be more. “That would be fine.” The woman continued. “Do you have a teaching or coaching credential?” Sam lowered his eyes. “No Ma’am, I never finished college.” The woman reassured him. “It’s not required; with your playing experience, I’m sure you’ll be fine.”

Sam started the next week. The assembly of diverse, urban youth seemed genuinely likeable, no problem kids here. But these were kids outside the system, not in the college lane. “Hi, my name is Samuel Toscano, you can call me Coach Sam. We’re going to learn how to play volleyball and play some games against other clubs around the city. We’ll have two weeks before our first game against Central.” Mixing up the eleven players, Sam split them into two sides and explained the basics and fine points of the game, positioning, setting up, driving and defending. The kids really took to him and went home happy each day. Sam felt better than he had in a year, doing something good with his time. He was helping kids get out of

their neighborhood and away from the drugs and the gangs. Sam was hoping to get some of them into good schools, maybe even college someday.

But it got better. His team won most of their games and really bonded. Parents came to watch and brought snacks for the kids. Their school even announced their wins at morning announcements. Soon kids were coming to join the team, even though they couldn't add any more.

At the final game of the season, which they won, Sam was high fiving and hugging the kids as they left. A man came up to him. "Congratulations coach!" It was his high school coach. "Coach Wilson, it's so good to see you. What are you doing here?" He put his arm around Sam. "I'm going to be retiring soon and need someone to take over. Would you consider being my assistant for a couple years? You'll have to get a coaching credential, but I can set that up for you." Sam gave his old coach an affirmative handshake. "You can count me in." The coach smiled and handed him a school team jacket with Coach Sam on the front. "That will be great. Meet me at the gym next Saturday and we'll go over the details."

The club manager caught Sam as he was leaving. "Sam, you've done a great job here and there are lots of kids who want to play. I'd like you to set up three teams for the summer league. We got a grant from one of those sponsors and it will pay \$5,000. What do you say, are you in or out?" Sam shook her hand and repeated. "Oh, I'm in, thanks very much."

On his way home, a teenaged driver hit Sam's car. The air bag protected Sam, except for some slight bruises. The other driver wasn't as lucky. He was one of his volleyball players, high on drugs. The kid never got out of his past. Sam opened his pad and began writing. Then he took a long walk.

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