

Module 2 - The Mafia Structure of Cosa Nostra

Let us now have a look at the structure of the Cosa Nostra in North America. This group originated in Sicily.

There are two groups that oversee the Cosa Nostra in North America; they are called Commissions. They are composed of the leaders of the Cosa Nostra families. There is one for the Eastern United States, and one for the Western United States.

On the Eastern Commission are the leaders of the following families: the five families of New York, and the leaders of Cleveland, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Buffalo, which includes the families of both Toronto and Hamilton. Also on this Commission is the Rizzuto family of Montreal.

The Commission settles disputes between families, and authorizes the killing of a family Godfather. The structure of a particular COSA NOSTRA family has six levels.

Level 1 is that of the BOSS of the family, called the Don or Godfather. He has absolute authority over his family and is very difficult to displace.

When this happens, it is done by killing him. However, in order to do that, the authorization of the Commission is needed, unless the killing is ordered by another Mafia group, outside the Cosa Nostra.

If the killing is ordered from a group outside the Cosa Nostra, then all the families that make up the Commission will take revenge for the killing of one of their own leaders. This is how, historically, they have protected themselves.

At level two is the SOTTO CAPO, the underboss or the Director of Operations. This is the person that all captains report to.

At level three is the CONSIGLIERE, who is the advisor to the Boss. A lawyer is generally the ideal candidate for this position.

At the level four, we have a CAPODECINA or a Captain. The Captain directs a crew of approximately 10 to 20 soldiers who will commit crimes and bring in money for him. The soldiers will often be paid a salary by the Captain, who will give a portion of his profits to the Director of Operations who, in turn, will pay the Godfather.

Level five consists of SOLDIERS, who are made or sworn in as Cosa Nostra members. A soldier will have a number of associates working for him, varying in number from five to twenty. The soldiers are the ones committing the crimes on the street with the profits going up the pyramid, up to the Godfather.

An outstanding soldier will likely, often after five years of work, be promoted to Captain. That promotion is always the goal of a Cosa Nostra soldier.

The last level is that of ASSOCIATES. These are not full members of the Cosa Nostra; they work for a soldier, and hope to become a soldier someday. As in any organization, the best ones are promoted.

Recently, two new positions were created by former Genovese leader Vincent Gigante.

The first is STREET BOSS. The main purpose of this position is to distance the official boss from federal surveillance, and to enforce his orders with the other members of the administration. The street boss helps divide up the responsibilities of the boss, ensuring the official boss can devote more time to upper management and planning. The street boss is considered the “go-to guy” for the boss, by passing on his orders to lower-ranking members.

The second is the FAMILY MESSENGER. This position functions as liaison between crime families. The messenger can reduce the need for meetings of the mob hierarchy, and thus limit the public exposure for the bosses.

We will now look at the INITIATION CEREMONY of the Cosa Nostra, as revealed by a number of former members who switched sides and became police informants.

There are normally 5 to 15 members present, and on a table in the room where the initiation takes place, there are a pistol, a dagger, and the image of a Saint.

There are two steps to the procedure. First, the Boss—which in the Cosa Nostra is called the Don or Godfather—questions the candidate as to his views concerning criminal acts that are done in the family he is joining, like extortion, drug trafficking, and murder. They will be questioned on acts they are expected to commit.

However, by the time they get to the initiation phase, they likely will have committed these crimes anyway.

Second, the Godfather takes a needle and pricks the candidate’s finger. The blood is then smeared on the image of the Saint, which the candidate holds in his hands. The image is then set on fire. The Godfather then says: “If you betray the Cosa Nostra, your flesh will burn like this Saint.” The candidate then becomes a Cosa Nostra soldier, reporting to a captain, in one of the largest criminal organizations in the world.

Members of the Cosa Nostra must abide by a list of 10 Commandments. In late 2007, the Sicilian police found this list of “*Ten Commandments*” in the hideout of a captured mafia boss. They are thought to be guidelines on how to be a good, respectful, and honourable mafioso.

1. No one can present himself directly to another member of the Mafia. There must be a third person to do it.
2. Never look at the wives of friends.
3. Never be seen with police officers.
4. Don’t go to pubs and clubs. (that’s a tough rule.)
5. Always being available for *Cosa Nostra* is a duty—even if your wife is about to give birth.
6. Appointments must absolutely be respected.
7. Wives must be treated with respect.
8. When asked for any information, the answer must be the truth.
9. Money cannot be appropriated if it belongs to others, or to other families in the same group.
10. People who can’t be part of *Cosa Nostra*: anyone who has a close relative in the police, anyone with a two-timing relative in the family, and anyone who behaves badly and doesn’t hold to moral values.