

'A book that could be a recovery companion for many people.'
Kuladharini, Chief Executive - Scottish Recovery Consortium

A man with short brown hair and a white button-down shirt is smiling. In front of him is a brown paper bag with '1 YEAR!' written on it. A red dynamite stick with black bands is stuck in the bag, with a lit fuse that has a small explosion at the end. The background is a plain grey color.

MY FIRST YEAR CLEAN AND SOBER

Tools for Change that anyone can use

Cal

MY FIRST YEAR CLEAN AND SOBER

Tools for Change that
anyone can use

BY CAL

Published by Cal Publishing
www.frog.net
First printing: Dec 2017
Copyright (c) 2016 by Cal Publishing. All rights reserved.

The right of Cal to be identified as the Author has been asserted by him
accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner
whatsoever with-out written permission, except in the case of brief
quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For more
information, e-mail all enquires – cal@frog.net

A CIP catalogue for this title is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978-1-908898-39-5

This book is also available in Kindle

CHAPTER 1 (p15): THE FOUNDATIONS to MY RECOVERY

**CHAPTER 2 (p30): WHY I HAD TO CHANGE MY THINKING AND
THE TOOLS THAT HELPED ME DO IT**

**CHAPTER 3 (p90): THE ANONYMOUS GROUPS AND MY
UNDERSTANDING OF THE TWELVE-STEP PROGRAMME**

CHAPTER 4 (p139): GENERAL

**CHAPTER 5 (p200): UNDERSTANDING THE NUMBER ONE
REASONS THAT CAN PREVENT SUCCESS AND LONG-TERM
SOBRIETY**

**CHAPTER 6 (p219): THE PLAN I USED FOR MY FIRST YEAR CLEAN
AND SOBER**

INTRODUCTION

During the last few months of my drug addiction things had escalated beyond belief; I was snorting ten grands worth of cocaine a month, necking 2 bottles of spirits a day along with three packs of cigarettes.

I only slept every five or six days and hardly ate.

Previously been rushed to A & E after suffering a heart attack and was heading for another; was also sectioned for my own safety in May 2005. Our large newly built beautiful home was lost, as too was my business, our finances, my wife – and I was just about to lose my life.

So, on 5th November 2006 when I celebrated my first year clean and sober I'm sure you can understand why I thought that would have been an impossible landmark to reach.

Today I am twelve plus years clean and sober and have written this book to share the tools of my recovery journey that saved my life from drug addiction including alcoholism.

Chapter 1 discusses the foundations to my recovery including the need to change my thinking.

Chapter 2 explains how I engineered that change plus the tools and tactics that helped me do it.

In parallel to the above I attended support groups at Cocaine Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous so **Chapter 3** explains the reasons I needed to do that, what I got from the groups and my understanding of the Twelve-Step programme.

Chapter 4 is simply general information I picked up and would like to pass on.

Chapter 5 focuses on the number one reasons to be aware of that can cause relapse and prevent long term sobriety.

Chapter 6 shares the plan I used to survive my first year clean and sober and I invite you to copy my blueprint if you want to get the same results.

IT'S NOT WHERE WE START OUT, IT'S WHERE WE END UP THAT COUNTS

ROCK BOTTOM

If you are a drug addict or alcoholic and you want a new life, then I am confident this book will help you to get started on your journey of recovery.

Dozens of people helped me; some were qualified professionals and others were simply people with no qualifications apart from their own personal experience of recovery from drug addiction or alcoholism.

That is who I am, a Recovery Champion with no qualifications apart from my own experience of recovery from drug addiction/alcoholism.

Nevertheless, if you are serious about changing, my recovery story should help you.

I can certainly tell you without any uncertainty whatsoever, living clean and sober is the smartest and greatest thing I have ever done and to my surprise a far better way of life.

This book is not about me; it is simply about how I got clean and sober and how you can do it too.

It is a miracle that I am alive today; life is great, and I have a purpose for waking up in the morning.

I meet many other recovered drug addicts/alcoholics and it is uncanny how similar our stories are; my clean and sober friends mostly had to hit rock bottom too before becoming desperate enough to want help.

Very often the pain needs to become excruciatingly sore before us humans are prepared to make change but sadly one in three drug addicts/alcoholics dies before getting desperate enough.

My rock bottom experience all unfolded on 13 May 2005 when I was dragged away kicking and screaming by the Balfron Police under the Mental Health Scotland Act. I was being sectioned for appearing insane and behaving as a danger to myself.

For a long time, I thought aliens were monitoring me and controlling my wife Elaine.

I believed she had been told by the aliens that if she confirmed to me they existed then they would kill us both.

Just imagine the outrageous debates I regularly conducted on that basis!

All drug induced, but nevertheless incredible that anyone can get into such a mental state.

I honestly believed a special government agency had me under constant surveillance and there was a conspiracy to have me killed; I believed the Balfron Police were privy to all this and supported my assassination.

I really thought I was important enough to get assassinated; that's right, Abraham Lincoln, JF Kennedy, Martin Luther King, John Lennon and Cal. While looking back can be quite humorous; the reality of psychosis is an incredibly frightening experience; into the bargain I experienced visual and audible hallucinations which were very unhelpful as these only served to confirm my crazy beliefs.

Yes, it's total insanity looking back, but at the time I believed I was constantly being watched from below the floorboards, through the curtains and through the ceiling; just imagine!

I thought there was a hidden basement chamber below our newly built house.

The neighbours no doubt thought it was slightly odd to see me outside digging an investigative tunnel under the house.

I was forever dismantling electrical goods looking for bugging devices and hidden cameras. When I remind myself of this destructive and insane behaviour I always feel so sad for what I put my wife through.

What must it have been like to arrive back home to our twelve-room house to be greeted by anything from lifted carpets and floorboards to dismantled phones and televisions scattered across the rooms they originally came from.

Incidentally, you would not believe how many pieces there are in a television!

I was very ill although at the time I did not know that or even accept that I had a problem. Hard to believe since I was well aware I drank a couple of bottles of scotch and snorted as much cocaine as I could every day.

In September 2000, I had been rushed to the Western Hospital A & E in Glasgow after suffering a heart attack due to cocaine, so this addiction had nearly killed me a long time before things got completely out of hand.

Apart from that, I overdosed several times, resulting in my wife having to call paramedics to our house.

With a ten thousand pound a month habit it's no wonder I eventually lost my thriving business, house, car, a pot of money and my wife and ended up homeless and absolutely penniless.

I had been suicidal for nearly a year and just wanted to die; I guess that's rock bottom.

And at rock bottom I did not believe there could be a solution apart from death so if you feel the same way then firstly let me tell you that you are not alone and secondly please try what I tried and see if you get the same results; I bet you will.

Be open-minded, honest and willing and just try; things surely can't get any worse by trying.

I want to help you onto the 'road of recovery' and take you on my recovery journey.

Let's raise our standards and tell ourselves we are no longer willing to accept the alcoholic or drug addict's quality of life; we will not settle for this anymore.

Let's take our life to a whole new level; I promise you there are solutions and most importantly you are not alone.

Go to the Champions Cinema (www.frog.net) where you can watch Recovery Champions sharing their recovery stories if you need further living proof that recovery is a reality.

SOMETIMES WE NEED TO LOSE SOMETHING BEFORE WE REALISE HOW LUCKY WE REALLY WERE BUT IT COULD HAVE BEEN TOO LATE

RECOVERY

What does recovery mean?

This question simply refers to the definition of the word 'recovery'; the Oxford dictionary defines recovery as 'a return to a normal state of health, mind, or strength'.

What does recovery mean to me?

This is an entirely different question from the previous and focuses on my personal experience including the benefits of my recovery.

For example;

Recovery means I am not destroying my mental or physical health today.

I now have the prospect of a long and happy life.

I understand mistakes I've made in the past and have choices today about which roads are safe for me to go down and which roads I must avoid.

I have developed self-trust and self-respect and have regained the trust and respect of others.

I no longer get into silly trouble.

I don't wake up with a list of people to avoid or to whom I owe an apology.

My family don't have sleepless nights wondering where I am or if I'm okay.

I can embark on a career again.

I can focus on sports and hobbies again.

Life has a purpose today thanks to recovery.

I have rebuilt self-esteem and I'm qualified to help others who are still struggling.

That's just some examples of what 'recovery' means to me.

If you would like to see what 'recovery' means to other real-life Recovery Champions, then go to the Champions Cinema at www.frog.net

At recovery meetings, I hear people saying we will always be in recovery.

I do not necessarily agree.

I agree if I were ever to have a drink or drug I may not be able to stop after my first but that's not being in recovery; that's having the addictive gene which I have always had and always will have.

The Oxford dictionary defines recovery as 'a return to a normal state of health, mind, or strength'; that can clearly be achieved, therefore to suggest we will always be in recovery would be suggesting we cannot ever return to a normal state of 'health, mind or strength'.

In broader terms, I also understand recovery to mean '**CHANGE**'.

A recovering drug addict/alcoholic is changing.

A recovered drug addict/alcoholic has changed.

For me, 'changed' means does not **WANT** to use unhealthy mind-altering substances again.

And 'changing' means the recovering drug addict/alcoholic has laid down unhealthy mind-altering substances (may still want to use them) but is determined to become clean and sober long term and reprogramme himself/herself to not **WANT** to use unhealthy mind-altering substances again. By the way I hear you say if there are unhealthy mind-altering substances are there healthy mind-altering substances? Well of course there are; we go into much more detail about that later.

Recovery has different levels of progression in my opinion and while I believe one can recover; I also accept recovery is a journey and not a destination.

Compare recovery to fishing;

You can either go to recovery meetings each day to collect a piece of fish or learn how to fish for yourself.

Today I do not have a desire to drink or drug and have chosen to live a life, clean and sober, so I have recovered.

I will always have an addictive personality and I will never be able to drink or drug in moderation but recovering from drug addiction should not be confused with recovering from an addictive personality, as the latter is not possible in my opinion. Anyway, I would not want to change that, as an addictive personality is a gift if used properly and not abused.

I have never been able to do things in moderation and never will but there are many things I choose not to do today; drinking and drugging was added to that list on 5 November 2005!

Life is a journey and not a destination, just like learning; we can forever continually improve our life skills, knowledge and emotional coping mechanisms.

There are different stages of 'recovery';

Recovering drug addict/alcoholic

A recovering alcoholic or a recovering addict is a person who does not drink or drug as opposed to a drug addict or alcoholic who does.

Recovered drug addict/alcoholic

A recovered drug addict/alcoholic is someone who does not drink or drug and does **NOT WANT** to drink or drug.

Generally, recovered drug addicts/alcoholics have no physical craving or mental obsession to drink/drug and have dealt successfully with the underlying issues that caused them to use in the first place.

Active drug addiction/alcoholism is terminal: however, if we arrest our drug addiction/alcoholism, it is basically harmless. Imagine the millions of people with other terminal illnesses that would give their right arm to

have the power and choice to stay well. Remember it takes work to be exceptional.

**WE ARE IN RECOVERY WHEN WE LAY DOWN OUR POISONS AND
WE ARE RECOVERED WHEN WE DON'T WANT TO PICK THEM BACK
UP**

THE ROAD of RECOVERY

I hear some people saying the 'road to recovery' but I like to see it as the 'Road of Recovery'.

It is the Road of Recovery and anyone is welcome to jump on it at any moment.

In fact, if you even have the desire to change then let me be the first to congratulate you because you are indeed, on the Road of Recovery.

Okay, you might be in the underground car park at the very beginning of the journey; however, you are on the right Road and that is what counts.

If you are in the underground car park, I have to admit you're a few kilometres behind me however I have some fantastic news for you;

The directions in this book will help you catch up with me and continue even further.

I'll help you get straight into the fast lane; might even let you speed for a while until I can see you in my rear mirror then you can simply follow me and other real life living examples, who have already recovered or may still be recovering like yourself.

It is so much easier to get somewhere by following someone in front so fasten your seatbelt and let me show you how to get to 'Recovery-ville'.

LIFE IS NOT AN OUTCOME, IT'S A PROCESS

HOUSE DEFINITIONS

Throughout this book I refer to a drug addict or sometimes an alcoholic; I make no distinction between a drug addict and an alcoholic as they are exactly the same. Okay alcohol is a legal mind-altering substance and some hard drugs are not but alcohol (ethanol) is still a drug, it's just in liquid form rather than powder form or resin form etc.

Incidentally, alcohol has just been launched in powder form so that must surely throw the cat amongst the pigeons with anyone who sees powders differently from alcohol.

Please do not be offended when I say, 'clean and sober' or refer to alcohol as a drug because in my little world, alcohol and other drugs are all under the same umbrella; mind-altering substances.

For some people, they become a problem and for others they do not.

If someone were to ask me; why then do I say, 'clean and sober' and not just say 'clean' if alcohol is also a drug? Well I guess that would be splitting hairs but a fair observation.

Addiction can never be cured for me; inasmuch as I will never learn to do things in moderation, whether that is drinking, drugging, working, gyming, golfing or striving for success in any particular field.

I was born with an addictive personality and I will die with an addictive personality.

However, alcoholism, drug addiction or any unhealthy habit can be arrested or cured as long as I don't have my first.

That's the way it is for me with anything; I can't place my first bet on blackjack otherwise I'll end up losing my house, I can't have my first drink otherwise I'll drink until I black out, I can't have my first line of cocaine otherwise I'll have my dealer deliver a wheel-barrow of the stuff within no time.

Similarly, I can't lift my first weight without pumping iron until I'm exhausted; I can't hit my first golf practice ball unless I've got time to hit another 200. Maybe you can't watch your first episode of CSI unless you have time to watch the complete box set and like myself you probably can't have your first Jaffa Cake unless you're prepared to eat the whole packet!

You think Tiger Woods isn't a golf addict, David Beckham isn't a football addict; of course they are but they have used their addictive personalities for greatness and you can too.

When others suggest addiction is a disease, illness or disorder; I can tell them with certainty it is not, it is an amazing gift, but we must choose our

paths very carefully as our addictive personality doesn't differentiate between healthy and unhealthy roads; that is our responsibility.

Of course, drug addiction and alcoholism will lead to symptomatic diseases but that is different from being a disease itself.

When understood and respected; there is no question addiction is a gift.

Sober;

Sober doesn't mean you've had a couple but you aren't falling about or feeling drunk. Sober doesn't mean you can legally drive a car either: no, sober means under no influence of any alcohol at all, at any time.

Clean;

Clean means FREE of all unhealthy mind-altering drugs including alcohol (ethanol). That is the definition meant in this book.

Some people feel they can't even use aspirins and maybe they can't.

My rule of thumb is simple, if I take or do anything unhealthy or potentially unhealthy that triggers an allergy which makes me powerless and makes me want more and more, then I must not take the first. Otherwise I'm free to take any drugs prescribed or recommended by my doctor and still remain clean.

There is an argument if someone smokes, that means they are not clean but that is another debate and it could be true: however, the meaning of clean for the purpose of this book is simply free of unhealthy mood and mind-altering substances and while cigarettes are extremely unhealthy they are not mind-altering substances in the context of this book.

Methadone can be prescribed but it is still an unhealthy mind-altering substance, so we do not recognise a user of methadone as being clean; however, it can be a gigantic step in the right direction if the intention to use methadone is in a harm reduction capacity to become drugs free.

Insane;

The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result.

If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got!

Every time we take our first line of cocaine, our first joint or drink, we honestly believed this time would be different.

It never was and it never will be.

After our first we are clearly on a collision course that we cannot stop.

THE GIFT OF ADDICTION•BORN WITH A GIFT•BORN WITH AN ADDICTIVE PERSONALITY•USE YOUR GIFT WISELY

CHAPTER 1

THE FOUNDATIONS to MY RECOVERY

There are several cornerstones to my recovery that create the principle foundations to my new life.

Some of these cornerstones are key philosophical beliefs that I have and other cornerstones are simply reminders of how I work and what makes me tick.

Lasting change is what recovery is all about therefore my cornerstones form the structure from which I continue to build around and remain resolute that being clean and sober permanently is without a shadow of doubt my best option.

Remember, stopping is easy compared with staying stopped.

IF YOU ARE JUST GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS IT WILL NOT WORK



THE CORNERSTONES to MY RECOVERY

UNDERSTANDING DRINK AND DRUGS WAS NOT MY BASE PROBLEM

This was a very important element for me to understand before I could reclaim my life.

I had to discover the reasons making me want to escape reality in the first place, so I could fix those issues and thus make obsolete the principle of needing to escape reality.

It was essential that I successfully completed this step, either quickly or over time, otherwise recovery would be impossible; I would either live with permanent mental torment (a 'dry drunk') or most likely relapse if I didn't address and resolve the primary reasons for using.

I understand the majority of people who drink alcohol or take other mind-altering substances do it for fun and I originally used alcohol and other recreational drugs for that purpose too. I did for many years but over time the dynamics changed; drugs and alcohol became my way of escaping life's problems and pressures.

So it was just the start of recovery when I laid down drink and drugs because I was left with 'me' and the underlying reasons I used in the first place.

I believe most drug addicts and alcoholics are similar and use mood and mind-altering substances because they have hidden fears, pains,

heartaches, losses, sorrows or past traumas of some sort that require escapism.

Incidentally I strongly believe drug addicts and alcoholics are very sensitive people.

Many will think the opposite and say they cannot be if they are prepared to put their loved ones through this, but I say the problem began way before things got so out of hand. You see, most people just nip problems in the bud and be done with them but there are people who just don't want to upset anyone and live with a problem instead. Their way of neutralising the problem isn't the straightforward way, but it is to carry it in their rucksack of life and eventually find ways to escape the pressure as the rucksack gets overbearing.

Living clean and sober means carrying an empty rucksack of problems or not carrying it at all. It's about hardening up and being straight with folk basically, I have found.

Of course, when a drug addict or an alcoholic begins recovery there will also be secondary reasons for continuing to use; for example, I experienced such harrowing withdrawal symptoms when I ran out of drugs or alcohol that I felt suicidal so I needed to get a fix to halt that feeling; I also thought if I cleaned up I would face an enormous guilt trip and feel extreme shame about what I had done to my family; these are examples of what I mean by secondary reasons for avoiding recovery.

Or put another way; excuses to continue to use.

Originally, I had 10 reasons for using but when it came time to lay down drink and drugs I had 20 reasons for using, 10 of which were new reasons (secondary) that had been created by using in the first place.

It's an ever-increasing spiral and that secondary list will keep growing, it certainly never reduces.

I'm not suggesting secondary reasons can be ignored so if you are serious about getting clean and sober then these reasons need addressed too.

For example, I underwent a medically supervised withdrawal process and for the record my family and friends had nothing but support for me when I began my recovery journey so there was no need to imagine shame and guilt trips as they became insignificant compared to the joy I was bringing my family and myself, for that matter, by recovering.

That said, I had to uncover and unlock the original problems that I had been avoiding all along for long term recovery to be sustainable.

Sure, it was quite understandable to think if I do not use drink or drugs I will be much better; however, that is not the entire case.

My behaviour immediately improved, and others saw me in a far better light since I was no longer demonstrating the insane behaviour that drink

and drugs very often helped create. I may not have got arrested any more or behaved insanely but that is not getting better — that is just behaving normally!

Don't misunderstand me; drink and drugs delivered an entirely new catalogue of problems into my life and the lives of others around me.

However, I needed to deal with the fundamental issues of why I used, primarily, otherwise it was just a matter of time until I relapsed.

People use substances including alcohol to alter their mood, to cover up their sadness, to ease their heartbreak, to lighten their stress load, to blur their painful memories, to escape their hurtful reality or to make their unbearable days and nights bearable. Drink and drugs are just the coping mechanism some people use to deal with their underlying difficulties.

These substances simply medicate the real problem.

At the bottom of every person's dependency, there is always pain.

Discovering the cause of the pain and healing the pain is an essential step in the process of ending dependency.

Addiction became the result of what started out simply as my effort to cope with challenges in my life; things simply got out of hand.

And thankfully it is never too late for anyone to change.

When people lay down drink and drugs and successfully address the underlying issues that were causing them to drink and drug in the first place it is relatively easy to stay clean and sober.

From 'impossible' to 'what's the big deal' in a relatively short space of time was my experience and that could be your experience too.

And by the way; relapse is certainly not part of my recovery journey despite hearing these nonsensical slogans at times.

It is not the addicted person who needs corrected; it is the causes or reasons for that person escaping reality which must be corrected; the person will naturally become better.

Most drug addicts and alcoholics are exceptional people when they are clean and sober; I believe most are actually very gifted if properly focused.

And there is more positive news because on top of that there have been academic studies that have shown people in recovery become more successful than they would have been had they not had a drink or drug issue in the first place.

So, if you have ever heard the saying 'you will come out the other end a stronger and better person' you will; it's official!

There may be separate issues you must address and deal with that I did not have to deal with and vice versa. The paths we travel may be slightly different; however, the direction we take is the same which is the case for most people in recovery.

Some of us may need to get professional help to come to terms with underlying issues, from childhood for example and others may sort things out for themselves.

Regardless, we must find out what we are feeling so bad about that caused us to use alcohol and drugs to escape.

Lastly do not think you need to spend a long time working with professionals to get to the bottom of what caused your dependence. Just be honest with yourself, get to the bottom of things, get them sorted and get on with your life; it should not be a long drawn out operation.

SOLVE PROBLEMS RATHER THAN IGNORE THEM



I HAD TO WANT TO STOP DRINKING AND DRUGGING

Often, we hear people saying, 'you must want to change'.

Well I say; until you believe you can change and on top of that think it will be worthwhile changing or recovering, you're not going to want to.

Sure, on thousands of occasions I wished I did not drink or drug but that was generally when I woke up in a police cell or opened a new citation or found out what I had done or said the night before or how much money I had spent. Quite simply a knee-jerk reaction to the torturing feeling I experienced as the carnage of my latest episode was unfolding.

Of course, it was natural for me to wish I did not drink and drug yesterday but that is completely different from not wanting to drink and drug tomorrow.

Self-destructing or not test (**SDON** test)

I am not saying I'm a saint today or perfect in any way just because I'm clean and sober. I still enjoy life, have my own vices and still enjoy partying like the next person; I just do it clean and sober.

It doesn't just have to be substances that wreck lives; it can be activities like gambling, shopping, game consoles, sex issues or even some other activities that most people would experience as healthy or at least normal activities like work, sleep, the gym, golf, sailing, acting, gardening, writing or whatever.

There is a test that I believe helps me monitor whether or not I am self-destructing in anyway.

The test is simple and when I talk about self-destructing I do not take into account long term destruction that will probably be caused by smoking or may be caused by controlled drinking or drugging; that is a different situation altogether although I personally chose to quit smoking for long term reasons.

I know I have a problem with a substance or an activity and must address it if it is adversely affecting any of the following departments in my life;

Physical health

Mental health

Relationships

Financial health

Legal implications

Social health

Employability

Happiness

So back to what I was originally saying; I had to want to stop drinking and drugging or in more general terms, I had to want to stop self-destructing. The solution I found to creating a new life for myself was to stop self-destructing in every way, shape and form.

It may be that a person is wrecking their life by gambling all their wages away every month at the bookies or casino as well as drinking and drugging to excess. The two in that particular case may be intrinsically linked; the gambling has probably created massive debts and could be one of the primary reasons for drinking and drugging. Or perhaps the individual only goes on reckless gambling sprees when they're out of their brains on drink or drugs.

If problem gambling exists then some of the negative outcomes on the above **SDON** test will exist too; for example the gambler's financial health is probably rock bottom as could be relationships and employability never mind happiness so it's not quite as simple as stopping drinking and drugging; because the **SDON** test may flag-up other key departments of life that are adversely suffering due to other unhealthy mind-altering substances or activities, like gambling in this case and therefore need to be addressed for recovery to be holistic. I hope you follow my logic.

Of course, I had to stop drinking and drugging to reclaim my life with immediate affect; however, what I am also saying is; removing negative outcomes from my life required additional change and wasn't just a case of stopping drinking and drugging.

Put it another way; I wanted to get my life in order and stopping drinking and drugging was going to go a long way towards that and needed to be done immediately. However, that wasn't the end of the changes that were needed in my life. That said, a lot of bad habits and poor choices disappeared just by the fact I no longer used drink and drugs; knock on effects, let's call them.

Imagine a criminal wants to turn their life around and so decides to stop robbing banks and post offices; would that do it for them?

The answer is yes if that is all they do criminally but if they continue to pick-pocket, shoplift and commit credit card fraud it is not going to do a thing to turn their life around.

And you know what, it's a fact that a person will always revert to their drug of choice if they continue to drink or drug. For example, I had a massive problem with cocaine and alcohol but if I laid them down and started smoking cannabis instead I would not have changed my overall behaviour because substituting doesn't work; I would still be using drugs to mind alter or escape reality and it would not be long until I reverted to my drugs of choice – cocaine and alcohol.

There are no half measures for me; it's all or nothing. I could not be partly changed or partly recovered.

It's like the criminal who is going to think if I'm leaving myself vulnerable to getting caught and jailed I may as well go for the jackpot and start robbing banks and post offices again, his crime of choice; it is natural, it is logical, and it is what indeed generally happens.

If I stopped drinking and drugging but continued to destroy my life with reckless and uncontrolled gambling for example why would I bother to get clean and sober if I was continuing to destroy my life anyway?

The answer is simple; I wouldn't stop drinking and drugging long term.

To stop would actually be making my life worse because now I couldn't even mentally escape from the destruction gambling was causing to my life.

That is why I am saying it is not quite as simple as 'I want to stop drinking and drugging'; it is more a case of 'I want to stop self-destructing' which may very well mean getting clean and sober to begin with but also mean addressing other issues too like gambling, or sex issues, or criminal issues or finding housing or employment.

It is for everyone to figure out for themselves; every person's journey of recovery will be different, and some may be more complex than others. The more complex the more likely it is that an individual will need help and support from professionals to create a plan of recovery so check out the Directories at www.frog.net to find local help and support within your area.

**STOPPING IS EASY, STAYING STOPPED IS THE TRICK
THE MONKEY IS OFF OUR BACK, BUT THE CIRCUS IS STILL IN TOWN**



BELIEVE THERE IS A MUCH BETTER WAY OF LIFE WITHOUT DRINK AND DRUGS AND I WOULD EXPERIENCE IT

We spoke about this a moment ago, but I would like to expand on it.

At first, I thought life without drink and drugs and life without getting out my brains would be impossible and if it was possible it would be hellish.

Of course, today I know that to be the opposite and my life with drugs and alcohol was what was making it hellish, of that there is no doubt today.

If you don't believe it's going to be worthwhile then you are not going to begin your journey of recovery and why would anyone expect you to.

Let me tell you what happened to me;

I attended support groups like Cocaine Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous and met real life living examples of recovery; people who had been trapped in a dark corner, like I currently was.

I met these Recovery Champions and saw a sparkle in their eyes that I had lost a long time ago; the darkness in their eyes had gone.

And I could not question their integrity; they did not know me nor do they get paid to turn up and share their recovery stories at peer support meetings so why would I doubt or question them.

In fact, today I would like to say thank you very much to all Recovery Champions who share their recovery stories as they have been very inspirational, motivational and without a doubt helped save my life.

I found out I was not alone and guarantee anyone if they hang about long enough they will hear someone sharing what will sound like their story too.

And it's not just about the one-person, entire families, friends and colleagues suffer too with that person so if you are a mum, dad, son, daughter, brother, sister, friend, neighbour, employer, employee and want to listen to other people who were once in your shoes then you'll either find these people at support groups for family members like Al-anon (check out Groups and Activities at www.frog.net) or watch their stories on the Champions Cinema.

I go into more detail about the Fellowship (Anonymous meetings) later in the book however the longer I mixed with Recovery Champions and other recovering drug addicts and recovering alcoholics and listened to them, the clearer my vision became for a bright future.

I looked, listened and talked with living examples of recovery whose lives seemed to shine. They actually smiled and laughed; something I had not done for a long long time.

I started to visualise a new life thanks to these Recovery Champions who had turned their lives around or were in the process of doing so. I gained belief and optimism for the very first time and actually started to feel quite excited about my chances of recovery; I was convinced I could do it too.

My recovery journey had begun; and life should be a journey; I pity the man who has arrived as he has nowhere to go.

How can we possibly get 'somewhere' if we do not believe 'somewhere' exists? That would be virtually impossible. We need to change our perception and our vision of the future and we need to visualise life without drink and drugs as not only being possible but being amazing.

And let me just tell you, life without using alcohol or drugs is beyond belief for me; I cannot describe how good I feel.

I visualised life without drink and drugs to mean life without police cells and court appearances, life without various hospital appointments, life without visiting psychiatrists, psychotherapists, alcohol counsellors, addiction specialists, treatment centres, rehabs, psychoanalysts and psychologists, life without the risk of an imminent heart attack, life without worrying the hell out of my family and friends, life without everything revolving around the next drug drop from my dealer, life without psychosis, life with self-esteem, life with self-trust, life with happiness, life with a purpose and life where drugs were not my god.

If you want to watch or meet Recovery Champions sharing their recovery stories; check out the Champions Cinema or the Groups and Activities to find local support groups in your area at www.frog.net.

**IT IS NOT A QUESTION OF WHETHER OR NOT YOU CAN CHANGE
IT IS A QUESTION OF WHETHER OR NOT YOU WANT TO CHANGE
IT'S THAT SIMPLE; RECOVERY IS YOUR CHOICE**



I HAVE AN ADDICTIVE PERSONALITY AND BECOME POWERLESS AFTER MY FIRST

One thing that I have never paid much attention to all my life until I entered recovery was who am I and what makes me tick.

What are my positives and what are my negatives?

What do I need to understand about myself and what do I need to be careful about?

What warning signs do I need to look out for and how should I react when these signals appear?

One particular character trait I have always been aware of all my life but never realised it was controllable is my predisposed addictive personality.

And let me just say from the outset I do not care if others don't believe a predisposed addictive personality could exist or would prefer to describe it as an irresponsible personality; it does not matter at all.

Call it obsessive, compulsive, dependent, habitual, an allergy, a vice, behaviour disorder, dedication, craving, weakness, disease, illness, hobby, fixation, enslavement, preoccupation, sin, crime, reliance, over-reliance, fanatical, screw loose or recreation gone wrong personality!

The terminology used is irrelevant to me because the reality of what happens is all that matters to me and that is not up for debate.

Words and definitions are only of relevance in my opinion for the academics who debate what to submit into a dictionary which is way above my pay grade, folks.

And talking about debates; I have seen civilised people sitting around tables nearly coming to blows over whether or not predisposed addictive personalities exist or whether addiction is a disease or illness or neither. I have witnessed carefully organised discussions quickly descending into shouting matches and the ironic thing is with these arguments people are very often saying the same thing anyway.

The debate over whether alcoholism and drug addiction are diseases or illnesses or simply a behavioural problem or some other explanation has continued for over 200 years and doesn't appear likely to end any time soon, folks and I'm not going to try to end the debate either.

So, let me repeat — I simply do not care what terminology people choose to use; I don't care about the forensic detail because from any side of the table there is no disputing people's lives are getting ruined because of alcohol and drugs not to mention other life issues like gambling, depression and smoking etc.

It's all splitting hairs to me; it doesn't matter if it is technically a disease, an illness or what because the solution remains the same; stop taking it or stop doing it; couldn't be any simpler regardless of what you think it is.

Here's a flavour of how my addictive personality works;

If I have an alcoholic drink, it triggers something inside me that demands I have another drink and another and another and another.

If I have my first line of cocaine, it triggers something inside me that demands I snort more and more and more.

If I place my first bet at a casino, it triggers something inside me that demands I gamble more and more and more.

If I hit my first practice ball at the golf range, it triggers something inside me that demands I hit another then another then another.

If I lift my first weight at the gym it triggers something inside me that demands I lift more and more until I can't lift any more.

When I start writing one of my books I get totally locked into it and continue to write for hours and hours.

But the interesting thing is I do have the power to say NO to my first. That's just me and as I've already said I do not care what you want to call that; label it determination, ambition, a disease, a disorder, an obsession, irresponsible, dedication, an allergy or whatever you like; it will not offend me because it is what it is.

That addictive trigger does not get activated with everything in life, but it can happen with anything if you understand what I'm saying. And it doesn't necessarily happen every single time either, but it will happen often enough that I must always be vigilant. And with certain substances and activities just being vigilant isn't enough; I must remain abstinent and that certainly applies to alcohol and other recreational drugs.

Incidentally at the peak of my drug addiction/alcoholism the dynamics took a slight turn for the worse and I couldn't even say no to my first.

Having said that, in my opinion an addictive personality is designed to be a gift.

Because I recognise my addictive personality, today it has become a wonderful gift.

I understand how it works and where it will probably take me so I have a choice before I say yea or nay to anything.

Generally speaking, there are no half measures for me; no middle ground, whether positive or negative; I can become very good at anything I'm passionate about, thanks to this gift but I must be careful too.

For example, I was asked by a friend recently if I wanted to go skiing.

Despite never been skiing before I suspected it would be an amazing experience but I just don't have the time or resources to get into skiing which is exactly what would happen if I liked it so I had to say no.

You see if I liked it, before I even got home from this maiden skiing trip I would have subscribed to the Ski Monthly magazine, subscribed to the Ski TV channel and could picture myself driving back down the road with a new Solomon roof rack crammed with all the new 'best of gear' on a monthly credit deal I struck back at the ski resort, so the answer was, many thanks but it's a definite NO.

I can't even have my first 'Jaffa cake' unless I'm prepared to eat the whole box!

I bet some of you relate to that.

Here's a slightly odd story about me when I was only 6 years old but looking back today, what happened makes much more sense.

I went to the local school fete. I had all my pocket money with me and I could not wait to see what I could do to entertain myself. The weather

incidentally in South Carolina, USA where I lived for a few years as a kid, was sunny and warm as usual I recall.

I entered the sports area where the fete was taking place. I was so excited to see all the stalls and rides; it looked like Disneyland to me at that age.

I arrived at the entrance gate where there was a full size wooden board painted like a clown and a hole for a head to peep through; I was immediately intrigued. Then I walked over and saw paper plates full of custard pie; I was hardly there before I found myself holding a plate (only 5cents) and I was staring at what looked like an extremely annoying face peeping through the hole in the board. He was the clown's face and a real person and yes, I was going to try to smack him right in the middle of his face with my plate of custard pie. I even remember today the rush of adrenalin I was experiencing just in anticipation of a bull's-eye or should I say a clown's face!

There were a few other people looking on and murmuring sounds of encouragement. Well I do not know how I did it but I threw this plate and hit this sucker 100% slap bang in the middle of his face. I felt like Spartacus! The crowd was screaming with laughter and I got such a buzz I needed to do it again.

Another 5 cents but this time I missed, damn!

Another 5 cents and missed again!

A couple more failed attempts and I had to take a couple of steps back to make a big decision; will I crack open my one-dollar bill or should I go and check the rest of the place out?

It only took a few micro-seconds and the answer in my head is as clear today as it was then; okay but just one more throw.

Just one more throw became just another and another and another and I missed with every single one until I had no more pocket money left.

I had been feeling the tears bubbling up before I had even spent my last 50 cents because I just knew what was happening. I was experiencing powerlessness for the first time in my life although I certainly did not use that terminology at the time. I was chasing that first rush when I hit the sucker, plum in the middle of the face.

Minutes later I was walking back home in floods of tears.

Saturday morning was such a special morning for me because I got my pocket money.

Then on Sunday my mother would take me to the store where I would buy a model airplane but here I was returning home within an hour of getting my pocket money and I was cleaned out. I was utterly depressed and when I went home I did not let on at all that my money had gone. I could not explain it so I just acted like everything was normal.

I had not got past the entrance of the school fete that day and I did not understand, at the time, what had happened to me.

However, I repeated this same behaviour in different arenas over and over again and I also kept my troubles secret from everyone until they came out in the wash, as they often did.

I lived with these troubles in one way or another until I entered recovery when I was 42 years old. I had got myself into awful debt at school because of pontoon cards (the original scratch cards). I would just take as many as I could get on credit; I could not help myself after opening the first.

Things evolved to fruit machines; then I got myself into massive financial trouble because of casinos.

I sometimes went crazy in casinos when I lost all my money at the blackjack table; I would swipe all the cards and everyone else's chips all over the floor in a John McEnroe-type outburst. I would see red mist and on one occasion when I was being escorted out I noticed the receptionist calling the boys in blue. Well you've just taken all my bloody wages and now you want me jailed; I don't think so! And seconds later the casino's large telephone system had been ripped out of the wall and flung across the tiled floor. Slightly messy situation I guess you would say; I was banned from most casinos in Glasgow and Edinburgh before I was even legally allowed to enter.

I faked my age and being 6' 3" helped.

I had overdrafts at all four banks in Milngavie town centre and none of the bank managers (the olden days) even knew I had another account across the road; I was robbing Peter to pay Paul.

And all the time I was drinking alcohol or using drugs to escape my woes. Well this went on for years until finally, I remember sitting in my car in floods of tears after blowing all my 21st birthday money by lunchtime. I was sitting there with debt up to my eyeballs, owing every loan shark in Glasgow money and with too little income to repay them; I had an insurmountable problem.

Nevertheless, I made one of the most remarkable decisions of my life that moment; I vowed I would never gamble ever again and despite being in 'shit creek up to my neck' it was only going to get worse and I couldn't handle any more.

Well I'm 54 years old as I write this, and I still have not gambled since that day.

I do buy a lottery ticket now and again or agree to play for a quid at golf, but it goes back to the 'self-destructing or not test' (SDON test); I believe

only each of us can decide what is or what isn't a problem and lottery tickets are not a problem for me.

A billionaire may lose a thousand pounds gambling every day but may not have a gambling problem or tick any of the adverse boxes on the SDON test but someone else who loses fifty quid a week may have a serious gambling problem and may tick three boxes on the test. It is all about individuality and it is our own responsibility to be honest with ourselves and figure out what is causing problems in our lives and address those problems if we want a better life.

The national lottery is not a gamble in my eyes, it is a donation; however, scratch cards, like those pontoon cards at school, do feel different and I would not be able to stop buying more and more if I bought my first. At least I understand that today and therefore do not go near them. Incidentally on a couple of special occasions people have bought me a scratch card as a gift; however, I was extremely careful to stay disconnected with the process.

Today I am free from all the self-destruction although it is only now at the ripe old age of 50 odds that I fully understand my recovery journey to get clean and sober was only part of my overall journey of change and my mission is and will always be to eliminate any type of self-destructing behaviour.

INSTANT GRATIFICATION EQUALS LONG TERM SUFFERING



I HAD TO CHANGE MY THINKING AND THE TOOLS THAT HELPED ME DO IT

This is by far the most important foundation to my recovery; Chapter 2 is entirely dedicated to this topic.

Can you believe we can change our thinking?

I didn't believe it at first. However, today I know we can take ourselves to a mental gymnasium and retrain or reprogramme our minds because I have done it.

Many mistakenly think we are stuck with what we have.

We all know we can take ourselves to a physical gymnasium or health club and after training physically for a few months combined with a healthy diet would expect to see some physical changes, but we may not believe we can change our thinking, which is understandable, but I guarantee you can change your thinking.

Imagine how much easier it is to stop drinking and drugging if you don't want to drink and drug.

Compare that with trying to stay away from drink and drugs through willpower if you still really want them. If we want to take drink/drugs but know we shouldn't or even worse we are only staying off drink/drugs because we are locked away from them, in rehab or prison for example, it is virtually guaranteed we will relapse.

Willpower only works for a short period of time, that's a fact and nobody can rely on willpower for very long. We all have relatively short mental resistance skills and if we want something, we will just about always give into it.

That said, to kick-start recovery, willpower and determination help us stay away from drink and drugs initially and can give us the much welcome window of opportunity to change our thinking.

We need to create new thinking that will create **LASTING CHANGE**. This is all about a new way of life, not a short-term gesture to our loved ones. This is all about changing our life for our benefit, first and foremost.

Recovery is not an event; it is a process.

Do not worry if you do not believe you can change your thinking since that is quite normal. If you think it will be impossible to change your thinking, do not fear since most people feel that way initially. Please experiment with the mental tools on offer and you will see change for yourself, and probably before you even believe it will happen; think about that.

The following tools in Chapter 2 helped me change my thinking and that in turn changed my behaviour which subsequently changed my outcomes; collectively, that's what saved my life.

It's a process and these tools and skills continue to work for me today.

There is surely nothing to lose by trying, since drink and drugs certainly do not work and will never work so that is why it is so important to stick with the formula for a new life until you see rewards. You will see change before you necessarily believe it and it will happen for you; so, have faith.

It may not make sense at first but keep working at it until it does.

I hope you enjoy Chapter 2.

CONSEQUENCES DO NOT STOP DRUG ADDICTS AND ALCOHOLICS

RECAP

THE CORNERSTONES to MY RECOVERY

- **UNDERSTANDING THAT DRINK AND DRUGS WAS NOT MY BASE PROBLEM**
- **I HAD TO WANT TO STOP DRINKING AND DRUGGING**
- **SELF-DESTRUCTING OR NOT TEST (SDON test)**
- **BELIEVE THERE IS A MUCH BETTER WAY OF LIFE WITHOUT DRINK AND DRUGS AND I WOULD EXPERIENCE IT**
- **I HAVE AN ADDICTIVE PERSONALITY AND BECAME POWERLESS AFTER MY FIRST**
- **I HAD TO CHANGE MY THINKING AND THE TOOLS THAT HELPED ME DO IT**

CHAPTER 2

WHY I HAD TO CHANGE MY THINKING AND THE TOOLS THAT HELPED ME TO DO THAT

CHANGE MY THINKING

Recovery was not just about changing my behaviour; it was about changing my thinking; in other words, the mental side of recovery.

If I didn't change my thinking, then lasting change or permanent behavioural change would have been extremely unlikely.

The only way I would refrain from picking up drink and drugs in the long term was down to one simple detail; if I didn't want to pick them up.

In other words, I must not want to use unhealthy mind-altering substances including drugs and alcohol again rather than just staying away from them.

Initially I was able to stay away from drugs and alcohol with the power of willpower and determination but to create a lasting solution I needed to change my thinking.

Willpower and determination only work for a short period of time, that's a fact; nobody can rely on willpower for very long.

Most people including myself have relatively short mental resistance skills and if I want something, I will just about always give into it eventually.

At least I knew that about myself and when I began thinking about creating a new life for myself, clean and sober, I knew the only slim chance I had of succeeding was not to want drink and drugs again. I knew I had the 'selfish' gene or the 'I must have' gene and only knowing I must stay away from drink and drugs was not going to do it long term for me.

The mental side of recovery as far as I'm concerned is 'change' or at least 90% of it.

You see when I changed my thinking, my behaviour automatically changed too.

In simple terms;

If I want to drink and drug, I will drink and drug and

If I do not want to drink and drug, I will not drink and drug.

Some experts may say if you change your behaviour; your thinking will automatically change too but my experience was based on the more conventional school of thought; cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and

to this day I need to change upstairs thinking before downstairs behaviour changes.

One of the tricks I needed to employ was changing my association of drinking and drugging.

Just like the twelve-year-old kid who needed to visit the dentist for three fillings; he had one of the scariest days of his life and when the dentist told him this was all because of chocolate the young man had a completely new association of chocolate. He associated chocolate with pain and fear and the dentist.

So, I had to start being realistic with my association with drinking and drugging which in fact only brought me pain and misery.

I had to stop this idea that drink and drugs was doing a damn thing to make my life better; the fact was drink and drugs was destroying my life as chocolate was doing to that kid's teeth.

I talk more about 'Associations' later in this chapter.

So yes, I had to change my thinking and I would go even further to say I had to change some of my basic philosophies.

Anyone can change their thinking even although some people will not believe it is possible. We all know that we can take our body to a physical gymnasium, incorporate a stricter diet and change our physique but not many people know we can actually retrain our minds at a mental gymnasium. This chapter shares the tools and tactics I used to reprogramme my mind.

I learned how to change my thinking, which in turn changed my behaviour/actions and therefore created brand new outcomes in my life.

It is a simple process that creates a chain reaction of events and anyone can do it.

An alcoholic or drug addict must absolutely hate alcohol and drugs if they are likely to stop using them permanently. I hope you agree that makes logical sense. Why on earth would anyone stop behaving in a certain way if that's the way they want to behave; the answer is quite simple, they won't.

People may stop for a short period of time for some other motivation, but this is about lasting change, permanent change, stopping drinking and drugging for good; living a new life clean and sober.

Don't worry if you think you enjoy drinking and drugging at the moment because before I began my recovery journey I thought I loved drinking and drugging.

At the same time, I knew drink and drugs were killing me, so it was warped thinking.

This chapter explains how to train yourself mentally and change any crazy thinking that you may have too.

My mental toolbox has some amazing and magical tools that were introduced to me in my early stage recovery and other skills I learned throughout the many years I have studied psychology; so throughout this book I share my best information with you.

Basically, recovery needed to be fun for me if I was going to stick with it.

Learning to control my own thinking and therefore my outcomes is an art and the more I work at it the better and easier it becomes.

My best advice for anyone just entering recovery is to read loads of stuff and listen to as many Recovery Champions and other experts and professionals in the field of recovery as possible.

I have genuinely found recovery a lot of fun and fulfilling and have learned and discovered many new ways to improve my life.

I want to share all that information with you and hope it makes a difference.

This section is included in a workbook available free to download at www.frog.net.

HANG ABOUT LONG ENOUGH TO EXPERIENCE THE MIRACLE



CHANGE IS FRIGHTENING

People honestly don't know or believe they can change. Making change in our lives, at least the very first time, can be extremely hard although changing can be the most fulfilling, satisfying and rewarding process we ever experience. Like a smoker or nicotine addict a drug addict or an alcoholic must be mentally prepared to quit; all the information and support means nothing without the desire. It is quite normal to feel apprehensive about making change since it means replacing something we already have with something completely unknown, which may feel like a double-edged sword. No matter how dire our life is, there is still some strange degree of comfort in remaining the same. However, in life we cannot remain the same because everything living either grows or dies, it does not stand still. We either maintain our health or head for ill health and it is our choice in this case. The devil you know is better than the devil you don't know is a great excuse to stay the same and not change no matter how illogical. If you knew for certain that your life was just going to get better and better once a change was implemented surely that would excite you. Change is like an operation for a new hip or knee. Of course, there will be some discomfort, pain and rehabilitation initially but we all know it will be a hugely worthwhile exercise once complete. Treat getting

clean and sober like an operation and you will not go far wrong because you must understand the process is similar; you make a decision to lie down and accept the trauma of change and then gradually through rehabilitation you will get accustomed to your new improved life and soon the pain will be history, just like the people who are running around with new knees or hips, who have forgotten they ever had bad joints in the first place, excuse the pun! Trust me; there comes a point in time when you will not believe who you used to be. Have faith and trust, as change is for our own benefit.

Yes, there may be some discomfort for a short period of time before healing but then life becomes much-improved thereafter. Incidentally, what we define as suffering is simply experiencing new sensations or feelings because there is no actual physical pain if you think about it. Treat the uncomfortable feelings simply as your body resetting back to its normal default modes. Your life must keep improving if you keep making changes for your own benefit. Change is a skill or an art to be learned and continually reused if you want. If you keep gaining things your life must keep improving unless it's excess weight of course! Change is simple although very few people will ever find out. Many people are just not prepared to discover a better life or even try. Too many hope a new life just arrives through the letterbox; however, if you learn the art of change, then you learn an art that gives you the 'keys of opportunity' to design your own life exactly the way you dream it could be. You can create whatever you want, instead of just dreaming about who you wish you were. You can learn to control your own destiny instead of leaving it in the lap of the gods. Raise your standards and change your thinking by telling yourself you are not giving-up anything, instead you are gaining many things. The very few who are determined to make change at any cost are the special ones. Change is magical and after letting go of something negative, you'll soon experience the replacement is much better and more positive than you could ever have imagined. You must make change to fully appreciate the miracle.

Anyone who makes change properly will experience the dream, but you must be prepared to let go first and make room for the miracle arriving.

Two things you must know to successfully change;

- 1 Where are you today?
- 2 Where do you want to go?

CONQUER THE FEAR FOR A ROOM FULL OF SURPRISES



WILLPOWER or LASTING CHANGE

Never again: I've got to stop this: my life is awful: I must change.

I bet these phrases sound familiar, but they are just words and while they may have been said with good intentions we cannot recover without firstly finding out how to make proper and lasting change.

Change cannot and does not just happen, it takes action.

Think about it; **LASTING CHANGE**.

Willpower does not work long term, it has a life expectancy, as too has enthusiasm and determination.

How many people do you know that joined a health club or gym and went 5 times the first week, 3 times in week 2, twice in week 3 and only once in week 4.

By month two most folk have forgotten they ever joined, that's willpower.

How many diets after the festive season only last 3 or 4 days? Only enough time for the guilt of overeating at Christmas to wear off; then back to the usual eating habits, right?

The problem is the diet was based on the past and not the future.

However, if an individual is visualising themselves looking their best ever and lying on a beach somewhere sunny in July, then that may last long term.

I hope you understand and agree that we are talking about making a change for life not just until July, so we need powerful tools of recovery and I have them to share with you.

Remember that Sunday morning after our latest drunken binge; we decide never to drink or drug again but by Monday evening we're feeling better and the guilt has disappeared, so drinking and drugging can resume, right? It was certainly right as far as I'm concerned.

That's willpower; it does not last long, so we need to be aware of this psychological fact.

How do we make lasting change?

That is what this book is all about.

I want to share all the mental tools, skills and tactics that I learned which enabled me to change and shape my life and can help anyone do the same. Copy my blueprint for success, it's that easy.

If you like what someone else has; do exactly what they did and you get exactly what they have; it really is that simple.

Modelling someone else or copying the recipe they used is the fastest way to getting something you want that they have; there is no need to reinvent the wheel.

Just remember willpower and determination alone will not work; you must have a plan and work it, to make recovery happen.

TOTAL CERTAINTY AND ABSOLUTE CONVICTION



ADDICTED OR DEDICATED

We are past the point of me justifying the words I choose to use; however, the point I want to make remains the same even if you want to change any of the terminology.

David Beckham, Tiger Woods, Andrew Lloyd Webber, Andy Murray, Richard Branson, Winston Churchill, David Frost, Stephen Hawking, Simon Cowell, Steven Spielberg and others.

I bet you would never dream of referring to any of those champions as an addict.

It is just different language we would use to describe them, like 'dedicated', 'committed', 'relentless'.

I'm sure I can hear some of you screaming 'it's completely different' and I accept it is different as far as the outcomes are concerned but the process in every example in my opinion is fuelled by the same rush of euphoria, determination and perhaps escapism one way or another. I don't, and you don't know if any of them would pass the SDON test or not. We can probably assume they would but that is only for them to positively know.

Champions in any field whether sport, business, science, music, politics, academia etc must have what I would call 'an addictive personality' to become such superstars and field specialists.

Let me go back to something I touched on a moment ago; I do not like the current trend of associating an addict as a drug addict.

Why?

Because I personally will always be an addict by nature as I have an addictive personality, but I am not a drug addict anymore; I have recovered from drug addiction and on top of that being an addict need not be negative; just ask David Beckham the football addict.

So please don't refer to me as a recovered addict or former addict; I am a recovered drug addict and recovered alcoholic and recovered gambler, but I am still and always will be an addict.

You don't hear people referring to Tiger Woods as a golf addict but when he got into an infidelity mess in front of the public's glaring eye, everyone including him came out and conceded he was a sex addict. An addictive personality cannot be switched on or off, but the individual can make wise choices or not and I think it only fair to say until I understood this I made a hell of a lot of unwise decisions.

Having said all that, I still find it a bit tricky to convince even my supporters that I was simply very dedicated to cocaine and alcohol!

There really should be no basis for linking the word addiction, primarily or exclusively, to drug habits nor is there a basis for assuming that the most severe addictions necessarily involve drugs. For example, severely compulsive love relationships have been found to be as intense, irrational, and ultimately self-destructive as intense heroin addiction.

A review of crimes of passion in the news might suggest that the potential for tragedy is at least as severe among love addicts as among drug addicts. All recreational drugs are problem drugs for me and therefore I cannot have my first; like cocaine, alcohol, marijuana, heroin, speed, cannabis and tranquillisers etc.

I hear some people saying they use tranquillisers but absolutely for medicinal purposes. That is their business and their business alone just as some people out there use recreational drugs like cocaine or alcohol or cannabis and do not have a problem doing so.

On the flip side I use aspirin, paracetamol or co-codamol for medicinal purposes on occasions but I know some people cannot have their first co-codamol tablet.

As far as I'm concerned there is only one rule for me and that is if any of the major departments of my life is being detrimentally affected because of any substance use or the engagement of an activity then I must stop it whether I want to call it addiction or dedication; it's down to the SDON test for me and not terminology.

I recall a friend at the Fellowship profusely disagreeing with me when I said paracetamol and aspirin are mind-altering substances. I explained in simple terms why I was right with the following explanation;

If a person has tooth ache because of tooth decay they will need dental treatment to fix the tooth and thus remove the pain; no dispute there. However, if that person takes paracetamol or aspirin the pain will normally disappear without any dental treatment. Well the decay is still there so why has the pain gone? In simple terms, we have taken mind-altering substances.

In general terms when a part of our body is injured, special nerve endings send pain messages back to our brain; pain killing drugs simply block these pain messages and therefore alter our mind because the decay is still there and so too will the pain remain until the dentist treats it.

It is not just emotional pain that can be numbed but physical pain too as everyone knows but the pain is not actually removed, it is simply masked while the pain killers work and whether it is physical or emotional pain,

mind-altering substances don't fix the problem; they just block it for a period of time until we get treatment.

MY CRITICS CALL IT ADDICTION; MY SUPPORTERS CALL IT DEDICATION



WHAT PREVENTS CHANGE

What prevents drug addicts and alcoholics from making change is worthwhile understanding, so we can do the opposite.

We may not believe we can change since previous attempts have failed. We may feel that change needs to be a long and painful process. We may even argue that if we could change we already would have done so. Furthermore, if we make a change in a matter of a few minutes we may ask ourselves why didn't we make that change years ago if it was so easy or why did we waste so much time worrying and creating so much destruction. These are normal negative incentives and excuses to prevent us from making change.

We may think it should take a long time to create change because then it proves just how hard it really is to stop smoking, overeating or drinking/drugging and by taking a long time to change, others should really appreciate what we have achieved.

The truth is, we can change in a moment. New actions and behaviour will immediately create new results. We must shake off this brainwashed idea that change should take a long time. It is the wanting to change or the desire for change that can take years to develop but the actual change is instant.

We have been taught that quick shifts in behaviour, beliefs or emotions can mean we are hypocritical or unstable like the weather, whereas people who remain consistent are labelled reliable and trustworthy. These beliefs all create tremendous pressure from the tribe, to continue to do the same thing and act the same way instead of doing only what is best for us. The tribe expects us to keep voting for the same party, supporting the same team, maintaining the same religious beliefs and doing exactly what is expected of us.

Change is so much fun and, done properly, extremely rewarding so it really is worthwhile breaking the rut of routine and trying something different.

It is important to understand, if we can instantly create a problem, we can instantly create a solution, and if we take a long time to change it may have been because we really did not want to change. To make change happen immediately, we must believe we can change anything right now.

WHAT YOU PERCEIVE AND BELIEVE; YOU CAN ACHIEVE



HABITS

It is most important to understand a 'habit' is made up of 3 parts;

Part 1 is the cue (or trigger)

Part 2 is the routine

Part 3 is the reward

For example, in my previous life, after I finished work (trigger); I would go for a pint or two (routine), that made me feel relaxed and diluted any worries I had (reward).

We hear people saying we must change our 'habits' on our road of recovery but in fact we don't change our 'habits' per se, we only change Part 2, our routine.

Example above changes;

I finished work (trigger); I now go to the sports centre for a sauna and steam room (new routine), that makes me feel relaxed and dilutes any worries I had (reward).

The key is not to ignore your needs; however, you must change your routine if it is unhealthy or unhelpful in your new life today.

Many people use alcohol as a way to address stressful feelings so when a stressful event occurs, a recovering alcoholic could return to old patterns (routine) and begin drinking again. Living a completely stress-free life is incredibly difficult, maybe even impossible so recovering alcoholics and drug addicts must develop healthy coping mechanisms without returning to drink or drugs.

There are different types of cues and discovering which cues can trigger certain routines in your life is a vital part of successfully changing your behaviour (habit).

You are not trying to deny yourself the reward nor are you trying to avoid the cues, but you must change your routine if it is connected directly or indirectly with drinking or drugging.

Cues include;

the time of day

how you're feeling

what you've just finished doing

who you're with

any physiological needs you may be experiencing (hunger, anger, loneliness, thirst, tiredness etc.)

AVOID PEOPLE, PLACES AND THINGS THAT CAN UNDERMINE OUR RECOVERY AND LEAD TO TEMPTATION



OLD SIGNALS-NEW ROUTINES

Here are some of my old cues for drinking and drugging;

The sun is shining and it's a beautiful summer's day, let's use.

It's wet, grey, windy and bleak, let's use.

Winning money or losing money, let's use.

Christmas, Easter or summer holidays, let's use.

Friday nights or Monday mornings, let's use.

Falling out or making up, let's use.

Losing a job or getting promotion, let's use.

Birthdays and anniversaries, let's use.

These signals or should I say, excuses, are endless so it is imperative that we create new routines when these triggers inevitably come along.

We cannot avoid the triggers because they are part of everyday living, but we can change our reaction (routine) thus creating new habits.

Be mentally and physically prepared to change your response (routine) to the same old triggers (cues) that normally give us the urge to drink/drug.

Instead of using, go for a walk around the botanic gardens or go for a jog, maybe a cycle or listen to music or phone another recovering drug addict/alcoholic or take up star gazing, just don't use.

There are many things we can choose to do instead of reaching for an unhealthy crutch. You must be prepared for these triggers and you must change your routine if you are to change your habits. Create a new habit through intensive, persistent and regular practice.

Recovery can become our new hobby.

It is not just emotional triggers that we need to beware. I remember walking down a street I had not walked down for 11 months into my recovery when I came to a red pillar-box (not the first red pillar-box I had walked past in that time); and immediately felt the cocaine feeling, it was genuinely intense.

It was the first time I had come to this particular pillar-box where my dealer often met me to drop off supplies. The immediate association with that pillar-box made me automatically think about cocaine and using; thankfully I was experienced and anticipated triggers, so I called on my skills and that feeling was neutralised. I had dealt with dozens of other similar situations, mostly in the early days, so I was in control of my

reaction (routine) and amazingly the next time I passed that same pillar-box (which I did try to avoid, incidentally) I was not challenged which proves these tools work.

In early recovery, I visited most drop-off and collection points, either intentionally or accidentally, in a relatively short space of time to nullify them as triggers. We must all re-programme our association with these triggers too. I expected these challenges in early recovery, but I was genuinely taken by surprise on that particular day.

It happened completely out of the blue and that is why we must never become complacent.

Maybe, after work you always buy a newspaper, go for a pint and do the crossword. So, stop buying the newspaper or buy it in the morning and read it at lunchtime or have it delivered to your home so that it's there for you in the evening. Anticipate where and when you are most likely to relapse and put in place your defences and alternative arrangements.

Remember there is a big difference between knowing what to do and doing what we know. Everything in this world serves either as an example or a warning.

NEGATIVE THINKING IS VERY POWERFUL BECAUSE WE CAN EITHER LET IT DESTROY EVERYTHING OR USE IT PROPERLY TO CREATE CHANGE



TRIGGERS

Triggers or cues which can cause relapse can be physical, mental or emotional.

We may not be able to avoid all triggers since they can be out with our control; however, we must be prepared for them to avoid relapse.

If someone close to us dies we must not allow that loss to be an excuse to use. If we have an accident, we must not compound our problems by drinking or drugging. If we win the lottery we must not assume one glass of champagne is okay; who wants to be the richest person in the graveyard!

Mentally rehearse handling potentially difficult situations in which negative emotions might be triggered in the future. See, hear and feel yourself anticipating and dealing with the situation until you have conditioned yourself with a sense of certainty that you will confidently and effectively neutralise all triggers in the future.

Relapse can also be caused by environmental triggers.

These types of triggers often occur when visiting a place, talking to a particular person, or an activity the recovering alcoholic/drug addict

associates with drinking/drugging. Environmental triggers often remind us of good times we formerly associate with drinking/drugging.

Because environmental triggers can be so far-reaching, they can be very difficult to completely avoid.

Social pressure is one particular type of environmental pressure, which contributes to over 20 percent of relapse episodes, according to studies.

A relapse, sometimes called a 'slip', doesn't begin if we pick up a drink or drug; it is a slow process that begins long before we 'pick up'.

The steps to a relapse are actually changes in attitudes, feelings and behaviours that gradually lead to the final step of picking up a drink/drug.

Attitudes, Feelings and Behaviours;

Researchers have identified a set of warning signs that typically lead to relapse. If you are trying to obtain long-term sobriety and avoid having a relapse, it is important to recognise the following warning signs and if any of them appear you must take action to prevent them from progressing into full-blown relapse.

11 DANGER SIGNS POINTING TOWARDS RELAPSE

Change in Attitude

For some reason, you decide that participating in your recovery programme is just not as important as it was. You may begin to return to what some call 'stinking thinking' or unhealthy or addictive thinking. Basically, you are not working your recovery plan as you did previously. You feel something is wrong, but can't identify exactly what it is.

Elevated Stress

Increased stress, which can be due to a major change in circumstances or just little things building up. Returning to the 'real world' after a stint in residential treatment can present many stressful situations. The danger is if you begin overreacting to stressful situations. Be careful if you begin to experience mood swings or exaggerated feelings.

Reactivation of Denial

This is not denial that you have a drug/alcohol problem, it's denial that the stress is getting to you. You try to convince yourself that everything is okay but it's not. You may be scared or worried, but you dismiss those feelings and you stop sharing those feelings with others. This is dangerous because this denial is very similar to denial of drug addiction.

Recurrence of Post-Acute Withdrawal Symptoms

Anxiety, depression, sleeplessness and memory loss can continue long after quitting drinking/drugging. Known as post-acute withdrawal symptoms, they can return during times of stress and are symptoms

which are dangerous because you may be tempted to self-medicate by hiding behind alcohol/drugs.

Behaviour Change

You may begin to change the new daily routines developed in early sobriety that helped replace compulsive behaviours with healthy alternatives. You might begin to practice avoidance or become defensive in situations that call for an honest evaluation of your behaviour. You could begin using poor judgment and causing yourself problems due to impulsive behaviour without thinking things through.

Social Breakdown

You may begin feeling uncomfortable around others and making excuses not to socialise. You stop hanging around sober friends or you withdraw from family members. You stop going to your support groups or cut back on meetings you normally attend. You begin to isolate yourself.

Loss of Structure

You begin to completely abandon the daily routine or schedule that you developed in early sobriety. You may begin sleeping late or ignoring personal hygiene or skipping meals. You stop making constructive plans and when the plans you do make don't work out, you overreact. You begin focusing on one small part of life to the exclusion of everything else.

Loss of Judgment

You begin to have trouble making decisions or you make unhealthy decisions. You may experience difficulty in managing your feelings and emotions. It may be hard to think clearly, and you become confused easily. You may feel overwhelmed for no apparent reason or not be able to relax. You may become annoyed or angry easily.

Loss of Control

You make irrational choices and are unable to interrupt or alter those choices. You begin to actively cut off people who can help you. You begin to think that you can return to social drinking and recreational drug use and control it. You may begin to believe there is no hope. You lose confidence in your ability to manage your life.

Loss of Options

You begin to limit your options. You stop attending all meetings with counsellors and support groups and discontinue any pharmacotherapy treatments. You may feel loneliness, frustration, anger, resentment and tension. You might feel helpless and desperate. You come to believe that there are only three ways out: insanity, suicide, or self-medication with alcohol or drugs.

Relapse

You attempt controlled 'social' or 'short-term' alcohol or drug use; but you are disappointed at the results and immediately experience shame and guilt. You quickly lose control and your alcohol and drug use spirals further out of control. This causes you increasing problems with relationships, jobs, money, mental and physical health. You need help to get clean and sober again immediately.

PLAN PLANS BUT DON'T PLAN THE OUTCOME



EMPOWERING ALTERNATIVE

A study of reformed drug abusers found there were different relapse rates for different individuals.

Those who were forced to give up by being locked away from drink or drugs, either in jail or rehab for example immediately relapsed upon being released.

Those who were self-motivated to quit, managed to abstain for about two years.

Those who replaced their addictions with new interests such as religion, a new hobby or a new career or work skill generally never relapsed again.

Most people's efforts to change are only temporary because they fail to find an alternative way of getting out of pain and into pleasure. Old habits must not only be eliminated but must be replaced by something positive. Make sure you read Understanding Habits.

PERMANENTLY REMOVE DRUGS AND ALCOHOL FROM OUR LIST OF WAYS TO DEAL WITH LIFE



ACTION EQUALS RECOVERY

Initially I was not motivated or enthusiastic at all about putting action, effort and work into my recovery; I felt not drinking/drugging was more than plenty of action, effort and work!

Looking back, I understand the way I was thinking back then because I had become accustomed to a habit of 'fast and easy fixing' with powders, tablets, resin, gasses, liquids or whatever and I wanted to find a similar shortcut to recovery.

I wanted a magic tablet or a magic wand to sort everything out instantly, but that silver bullet doesn't exist.

When I heard other recovery buddies saying things like 'easy does it' and 'one step at a time' and 'soon you will see progress', I became less

threatened by the thought of working a little for my own benefit and recovery.

I remember becoming willing and reminded myself that Rome wasn't built in a day.

Into the bargain, as clean-time clocked up, I began to really enjoy and embrace the recovery process, as I reaped rewards from my actions.

While I thought 'work' might be like homework; it was not like school where I found myself doing pointless exercises after pointless exercises.

The exercises in this book changed my life.

If you work the exercises in this book, then they will work for you too, I guarantee.

I discovered the changes I was being encouraged to make were for my benefit and sure enough my life started to get better pretty quickly.

I gained enthusiasm and momentum from my results and soon learned that a little bit of action could produce a whole load of positive results and therefore the temptation was to do a little bit more every day.

I decided to take charge, take action and take responsibility for my outcomes and if I did not like my outcomes then I could change my action.

I decided to be one of the few who 'do' and not be amongst the many who don't'.

Action is hard work to some people, but inspired action does not feel like work at all as it is effortless like a river; flow with it and receive results.

If you try what I am suggesting throughout this book I guarantee you will succeed; action equals recovery and it works.

Remember even the longest of journey begins with one step.

THINKING CREATES ACTION; ACTION CREATES RESULTS



AFFIRMATIONS

If you adopt the tool of affirmations I guarantee it will help turn you into a vehement enemy of alcohol and drugs; a prerequisite to kicking the habit for good. Let me repeat; providing you follow my blueprint, no matter how ridiculous, disagreeable or uncomfortable you feel my suggestions are, you will hit the ground 'of your recovery journey' running. I want you to incorporate affirmations into your life immediately and reiterate to you no matter how daft this seems because if you follow my plans here you will be amazed with what actually happens to your corrupt thinking.

And if you don't believe your thinking is corrupt then I simply ask you to wait and answer that question once you are clean, sober and free from drug addiction. I am not suggesting this will happen overnight or with the wave of a magic wand; it took me about two months to really change my

thinking towards alcohol and drugs. I went from loving drink and drugs (at least thinking I did) to despising them simply by introducing affirmations into my life.

The working tool of Affirmations is great, and I ask you to embrace it regardless of your opinion at this moment. At first, I thought I was completely off my head for repeating affirmations; however, they absolutely do work and that is all that matters. Nobody else has to hear you saying them, thank goodness, I hear you cry. It takes alcoholics/drug addicts a long time to become programmed into believing getting out of our brains was acceptable behaviour, so it is bound to take a little time to reverse that insane thinking.

Remember this is all about engaging in a process which needs commitment, patience, belief and dedication; all part of the process of stopping.

Before we could expect to stop doing something, surely, we must hate the idea of doing it in the first place; why would we expect to stop doing something we enjoy or at least think we enjoy? I am going to work hard to convince you to get into the right mindset to make certain that you quit this filthy suicidal habit for good. The pain of continuing to drink and drug must outweigh the imagined benefits. All you need initially is the determination to stick with the plans, and please get excited because you are going to experience a magical journey that you probably do not believe exists at the moment.

My first gift to you for your mental toolbox is the tool of affirmations.

Let me explain how affirmations work.

Every morning, every night and regularly throughout the day for the first two months of my recovery journey, I spent 5 minutes repeating the same phrase;

'I do not need drink or drugs; I do not want drink or drugs; I hate drink and drugs'

'I do not need drink or drugs; I do not want drink or drugs; I hate drink and drugs'

'I do not need drink or drugs; I do not want drink or drugs; I hate drink and drugs'

Over and over again I would repeat this, out loud or to myself depending on the circumstances. Initially, I felt extremely awkward about repeating these affirmations; firstly, because I did not believe what I was saying, since I did need drink and drugs, therefore I did want drink and drugs and at that time, I did not hate drink and drugs.

Secondly, I did not believe this system would make a damn difference to my thinking; it just seemed altogether ridiculous. However, I woke up one

morning and did not need drink and drugs, did not want drink and drugs and hated drink and drugs and still do to this day.

That is what I call having an open mind and being willing to at least try. Minds and parachutes have one thing in common; they both work best when they're open! Had I followed my intellectual pride then I would not have experienced the incredible success affirmations gifted me and offer me today if I use the same process for changing my thinking about anything. Just as constant dripping water can wear away a rock; affirmations repeated over and over will bring about positive changes in our belief system. Our subconscious mind accepts as true what we keep feeding it irrespective of whether these beliefs are good or bad for us. Affirmations are similar to incantations; keep repeating until it becomes a belief.

Affirmations require light work and little courage; you don't even have to believe in affirmations for them to work, as long as they become your mantra. The mind reacts to what it is fed, whether it is true or false. That was what I did, and it worked. You are who you think you are; it really is that simple. Getting results depends on several factors such as the amount of time, focus, faith and the feelings we invest in repeating our affirmations, on the strength of our desire and on how badly we want something. It is advisable to have affirmations that are short and punchy. Repeat them every time your mind is not engaged in something else whether you are on the treadmill at the gym, walking the dog or simply falling asleep. You must also repeat them during two special sessions of 5 minutes (out loud if possible), twice a day ideally, once in the morning and once in the evening. Put a stopwatch on (every Smartphone has one), no cheating. Relax any physical, emotional or mental tension while affirming.

The stronger your focus and concentration, the more faith you have in what you are doing, the more feelings you put into the act, the stronger and faster your results will appear. I understand my affirmations came from the negative direction of hating drinking and drugging; however, you may respond better to positive affirmations like I love being clean and sober; I love having self-control; I love myself today for recovering or whatever. Maybe you want to try both systems, one in the morning and the other in the evening; it's up to you to figure out what will work best for you. Always affirm in the present tense, not the future tense.

Don't say 'I will love having control of my life'; say 'I love having control of my life' in the present tense because the subconscious mind will work overtime to make this happen now. The power of affirmations really works and will help you to transform your life. You will be hard pushed to find a self-help programme anywhere that does not include affirmations.

Affirmations really do work. The more determined you are to make change and the more you are prepared to accept change and let go of the past the better affirmations will work. There are other techniques you can use to supercharge the effectiveness of affirmations. Perhaps the most powerful way of using affirmations is to state them whilst looking in the mirror. Some of the most important messages we have received during our life have been from people looking us straight in the eye so by looking ourselves straight in the eye as we state and repeat our affirmations we magnify the importance of the message to ourselves. Another great way of keeping affirmations at the forefront of our mind is to write them down; leave notes or cards around the home, office and car so that you cannot help but to notice them throughout the day. Say your affirmations with passion; the higher your emotional state, the more effective they become. I just kept on repeating my affirmations with an obsession all day long until I believed exactly what I was saying.

KEEP REPEATING UNTIL YOU BELIEVE IT; RETRAIN; REPROGRAMME



IT'S NOT WHY WE SHOULDN'T DRINK AND DRUG; IT'S WHY DO WE?

It was vitally important for me to understand the reasons why I wanted to drink and drug rather than just why I shouldn't drink and drug.

This comes back to one of my cornerstones to recovery; 'Understanding drink and drugs was not my base problem'.

Drink and drugs was a secondary problem.

I had to do some honest thinking and soul searching to recognise the reasons I had been determined to escape reality in the first place.

I needed to be 100% clear and honest with myself about the primary reasons for using.

Incidentally, this is highly sensitive information and nobody else has the right or need to know what your primary reasons are so please feel one hundred percent comfortable about keeping this information private if you want; all that anybody else needs to know is, you have addressed the question and have the answers.

The primary reasons for drinking/drugging are the keys to recovery and providing these issues are resolved there will be no reason to relapse.

Drug addicts and alcoholics must not hide from issues including pain and sorrow; they must adopt a fresh philosophy in life by dealing with pain or hurt in a responsible, clean and sober way.

My golden rule is; I clear up any issues that may be troubling me, if possible, before I go to sleep.

We must make escaping reality obsolete by having nothing to escape from and therefore no reason to search for oblivion.

People use mind-altering substances including alcohol to alter their mood, to cover up their sadness, to ease their heartbreak, to lighten their stress load, to blur their painful memories, to escape their hurtful reality or to make their unbearable days and nights bearable.

Drink and drugs are just the coping mechanism that some people use to deal with their underlying difficulties; these substances simply medicate the real problem.

At the bottom of every person's dependency, there is always pain.

Discovering the cause of the pain and healing the pain is an essential step in the process of ending dependency.

Addiction became the result of what started out simply as my effort to cope with challenges in my life; things simply got out of hand.

And thankfully it is never too late to change.

After people lay down drink and drugs and successfully address the underlying issues that were responsible for them drinking and drugging in the first place it is relatively easy to stay clean and sober.

Secondary reasons for continuing to drink and drug were explained earlier and must not be ignored however this exercise focuses mainly on the primary reasons for escaping reality.

Some of us may need to get professional help to come to terms with underlying issues, from childhood for example and others may resolve issues for themselves by carefully thinking and identifying areas in their lives that they want to change.

Regardless, we must find out what we are feeling so bad about that caused us to use alcohol/drugs to escape.

Be honest with yourself and get to the bottom of the real reasons for escaping reality because that will allow you to start your recovery journey in the best possible way.

FOUR THINGS YOU CAN NEVER HAVE TOO MUCH OF; TIME, ENERGY, LOVE AND MONEY

DRINK AND DRUGS RAVAGES ALL THESE THINGS



QUESTIONS

Questions create answers and therefore power.

When I knew what I wanted and what I needed to do, to get what I wanted, I was much further down the road of recovery than the day I arrived at the starting line confused and dazed.

That power can be used to destroy any obstacle, problem or challenge. If others do not like questions, it is only in case they have no answer.

We can only grow from answers and the more powerful the question the more significant the answer. One big difference between successful people and those who are not is the quality of their questions.

If we ask better questions we get better answers. When the automobile was at its beginning, hundreds of mechanics tried building cars but, Henry Ford stood apart by asking 'how can I mass produce such a machine' and look what happened. If you let your imagination run wild you will be amazed where your questions may lead you. What new questions could you ask yourself that could improve your life immediately with the right answers? Benjamin Franklin advocated two questions we should ask ourselves every day; firstly, in the morning, 'what good shall I do today?' and in the evening, 'what good have I done today?' Learn to be as inquisitive as a child; curious people are seldom bored, and their lives are unending adventures.

Here are some questions I asked myself that definitely helped me get clean and sober;

How gutted would I feel if I was diagnosed with a terminal illness caused by drinking or drugging?

What would be easier: dealing with alcoholism and drug addiction for life or dealing with the recovery process for a few months?

What would I prefer; to be a dead drug addict or alive clean and sober?

What is enjoyable about drinking or drugging?

Why did I start drinking and drugging?

Why do I continue to drink or drug? Why do I want to stop drinking and drugging?

What scares me about living clean and sober?

Why have I failed to live a life clean and sober so far?

What is more important; drinking and drugging or seeing my grandchildren?

Who controls my life: drink, drugs or me?

Can my liver or heart take any more of this abuse?

If I have another drink or drug will I be one step closer to stopping or one step closer to death?

Who would I like to become?

Can I visualise that person and describe them?

Could the happiest days of my life be yet to come?

These were just some of my questions; you may want to ask more.

Read these questions again and answer them aloud and really listen to your answer carefully.

You may want to keep some of the answers private, nevertheless ask yourself these questions and answer them honestly.

If you have a Recovery Buddy or Sponsor, you may want to go through the list together and ask each other the questions.

By hearing yourself answer a question and most importantly, by writing down your answer it will really help you to focus and dig deep to reveal the truth so please do this exercise as soon as possible. Once done, I then want you to ask yourself more questions, for example;

What can you do to overcome the reasons you said you continue to drink and drug?

Go through every answer you gave and ask yourself more power **QUESTIONS** and write down these additional questions with your answers.

Open up a discussion with your Sponsor, counsellor, loved one or just on your own and take a close look at the questions and answers and ask yourself, where are you today, where are you going, is that what you want and if not, what can you do to change.

Create power for yourself; power is the ability to take action.

Power came from two directions for me in recovery; firstly, I was clean and sober, so I had the ability to function, and secondly, by asking myself questions, I had answers to follow.

Here are more examples of questions I asked myself;

What can I do to make sure I succeed?

Am I following a plan and learning about new tools of recovery?

Am I repeating the affirmations suggested to me?

Do I feel I'm making progress?

Do I feel proud of myself so far?

Am I feeling better yet?

Do my loved ones look happier since I began my recovery journey?

Is this easier than I expected?

Create pinpoint answers to these questions and write down your answers if you want to strengthen your resolve.

You can either skip these exercises or you can do them; the people that do them will definitely succeed. Vague and fuzzy answers kept locked away in the back of your mind will not help you get clean and sober; in fact, they may prevent you from succeeding. Ask quality questions and get quality answers.

Do this with a Recovery Buddy if you want to make a fun evening of it. Then, ask questions of others; Ask your family and friends for support and ask them if they will help you to get clean and sober? Ask them if they will provide positive support without nagging? Ask them if they will be

understanding and supportive when you are grouchy or angry or are struggling? Powerful questions will create powerful answers and those answers will give you the ability to move in the right direction, create a group of supporters and make recovery a reality.

SOLUTIONS COME FROM ANSWERS COME FROM QUESTIONS



NOW STOP ASKING AND START DOING

At some point we must stop asking questions and start taking action. Questions such as ‘What is my life really about?’ ‘Why am I here?’ ‘What am I most committed to?’ are extremely powerful questions. However, do not agonise over the perfect answer since that will not get you very far. Trust your gut instinct response and act upon it. Decide today what is most important to you and use the power of your answers to take action and start changing the quality of your life right now.

LOSERS THINK ABOUT DOING IT: WINNERS DO IT



THE RECIPE

This book may share the recipe for you to begin your recover journey from alcoholism and drug addiction; however, you need to put in the ingredients to make it happen. You need to do the work basically.

There’s an expression;

God won’t do the work for you, but He will hold a torch while you dig.

Making improvements to our health is very rewarding and is more worthwhile than you can probably ever imagine but you must try it to experience it to believe it. It is amazing seeing and feeling ourselves changing into different people. It is fantastic when loved ones tell us they are proud of us; that reward alone is special, not to mention how great it feels when others tell us how much better looking we are and happier we appear. Life can taste even better than you could ever imagine but just remember you must do the cooking!

NOTHING TASTES AS GOOD AS HEALTHY FEELS



CHUNKING

Sometimes we make it difficult to keep simple commitments by over complicating the event.

For example, instead of just deciding to go to the gym we think it's too much trouble to go and work out because we need to drive or walk to the health club. If driving, we need to find a parking space then check-in, find a coin for the locker, change into our workout gear then have a shower after our workout and then drive home and so on.

Yet when we think of things that are effortless we chunk them completely differently. Eating, going to the movies or sunbathing down at the beach for example. We don't hesitate to do these things and without contemplating all the minor logistics. We just jump in the car and get going so don't analyse the harder challenges, just do it.

And, by the way, speaking from experience the hardest thing about the gym is getting there, once you are there the rest is easy, and that rule applies to just about anything including going to recovery meetings like Cocaine Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous.

Don't procrastinate; just get going and let it happen.

HERE AND NOW: DON'T POSTPONE LIVING



COPYING or MODELLING

There are two ways to succeed – either trial and error or follow a proven blueprint that works.

I mentioned this earlier; when making a change or simply aspiring to achieve something it is a great idea to model ourselves on someone who has what we want, pretty obvious really when you think about it. If we copy someone who has what we want, then we should get the same results. Do not spend years trying to reinvent the recovery wheel when it has already been invented; instead copy someone who already has what you want. Find recovered drug addicts and recovered alcoholics and learn what they did and copy them, it is simple, and it works; no need to reinvent the recovery wheel. And you have already found one recovered drug addict/alcoholic, so you have the opportunity to copy exactly what I did and I promise you will get the exact same results. You can find other Recovery Champions on the Champions Cinema at www.frog.net and in other places like Alcoholics Anonymous, Cocaine Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous or various other self-help groups like Smart Recovery; check out Groups and Activities on our Frog website to find out where support groups are taking place in your local community.

YOU CANNOT SOLVE A PROBLEM WITH THE SAME THINKING THAT CREATED IT



SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE

Most successful people have the ability to remain centred and balanced in the midst of emotional storms. This can be accomplished by following a simple 'rule of thumb':

Never spend more than 10 percent of your time focused on the problem and always spend at least 90 percent of your time focused on the solution. Focus on being clean and sober for many more years than the few moments of difficulty making the transition. In truth, life is a balance; If we refuse to recognise weeds taking root in our gardens our delusions will destroy us and equally destructive is to misperceive our garden as overgrown. Find the right balance and feel the difference.

Of course, there will be difficult moments during the recovery process, but those moments pass as quickly as they arrived like weeds taking root but don't get caught up in panic-thinking either by envisaging things will become too much, like misperceiving your garden is overrun with weeds. Nothing can stop a person with the right mental attitude from achieving their goal;

but nothing on earth can help a person with the wrong mental attitude.

WINNERS ARE LUCKY PEOPLE; IT'S TRUE; JUST ASK ANY LOSER AND THEY'LL TELL YOU!



IMAGINE YOU COULD DO ANYTHING

If you knew for certain that you would succeed trying anything, what would you do right now?

It could be anything or let me reframe the question, who do you want to be?

I strongly believe when any of us has a desire to do something, it is a guarantee that we can do it.

You cannot have a desire if you cannot do it. You can do anything that you want if you believe you can so set your mind to it and take the appropriate action; it is that simple.

If you believe you can or you believe you can't; you're right!

Don't try to be better than others, just try to be the best you can be.

Success is to know that we did your best.

Failure is to know that we didn't do what we could have done.

DON'T SETTLE FOR LESS THAN POSSIBLE



CREATE LEVERAGE

This is an extension of asking questions so apologies if you feel I am repeating myself however I think it is vital to recognise reality from every direction so here are some more questions from another angle.

Associate massive pain to not changing now and enormous pleasure to immediately making change or at least starting your journey of recovery from drug addiction or alcoholism.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- 1 *What will drinking/drugging cost me and my family if I do not change?*
- 2 *What will I miss out on in my life if I do not change?*
- 3 *How is my alcoholism and drug addiction affecting me mentally, emotionally, physically, socially and financially?*
- 4 *How is my alcoholism and drug addiction affecting my family mentally, emotionally, physically, socially and financially?*
- 5 *How does all this affect my career?*

Now let's get upbeat and consider the positive results to change.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- 1 *When I do start my journey of change, how will that make me feel about myself?*
- 2 *What other positive behaviours could this change create in my life?*
- 3 *How will my family and friends feel?*
- 4 *How happy will I feel?*
- 5 *Do I believe I deserve these benefits?*

Please feel free to add more questions and remember this section is included a workbook which is free to download at www.frog.net.

EXPERIMENT FOR TODAY BY GIVING EVERYONE THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT THAT THEY ARE MEANING WELL



TIPS FOR LASTING CHANGE

- 1 Make certain when you think about your unhealthy addiction you always associate incredible pain to it.
- 2 Associate enormous pleasure to your new life. When you think about your new life always feel pleasure and remember your old behaviour created tremendous pain.
- 3 Be sure your new behaviour fits in with how you want to live your life. There is no point in doing something if you don't agree with it or don't

enjoy it because it will not last, so you must enjoy your new behaviour and make sure it moves you in the direction of your goals and beliefs.

4 Make sure the purposes of your addiction are not ignored. For example, if you felt a drink or drug worked to calm you, then find another way to receive that calming feeling by healthy means.

NO SUCCESS WITHOUT COMMITMENT



THE WINNING SUCCESS FORMULA (WSF)

You can achieve all your goals using this simple but incredibly effective four-stage process;

1 Start by deciding your **OUTCOME** or what you intend to achieve; and be **PRECISE**.

2 **PLAN** the action that is needed to achieve that outcome and then **TAKE ACTION** (I have written a plan for you in Chapter 6).

3 Continually **MONITOR PROGRESS** including noticing what is and isn't working for you and if you are not getting nearer your outcome or closer to your outcome quickly enough then,

4 Be **FLEXIBLE** and change your action plan (back to number 2) and keep changing your approach until you **ACHIEVE** what you want.

It is that simple, you can achieve anything you want to achieve. People who succeed follow the Winning Success Formula whether they realise it or not.

It is not whether or not you can do it; it is whether or not you want to do it or are prepared to do it. The WSF is a tried and tested technique for reaching desired outcomes which winners and achievers from all fields use whether they are in sport, music, entertainment, business, innovation, politics, engineering, science or anything you care to imagine; like sending the first man to the moon.

A slightly more obvious example might be a sprinter who visualises himself on the winner's podium receiving the Olympic gold medal (that's Step 1; deciding the outcome).

Then Step 2; they must sit down and carefully plan the training regime required to achieve the 'record time' that should win the Olympics final.

That training regime will be detailed, including what they will need to eat, drink and how much and when. It will include times for training and times for rest.

It will include absolutely everything they can think of initially.

They will probably read biographies of previous gold medal Olympians in the same field if they haven't already because the best way to succeed is copying someone else who has already got what you want.

Copy everything that they did, and you should get everything that they got. Hopefully that's what you are doing right now if you want to recover from drug addiction; copying my blueprint.

Then Step 3 in this particular example would be timing their runs every day and every week and if they are not on target to achieve the time that will win the Olympics final then they must.....Step 4; change their training regime or eating plan or sleeping habits or a combination of things and then immediately start monitoring progress again and keep monitoring and tweaking their programme until they come up with the winning formula to win the Olympic gold medal. Ask any Olympian gold medallist and I guarantee you that they have used this simple successful formula.

That is just an example, but I cannot stress how important this tool is for you if you want to be an achiever. You must carry this tool around with you for the rest of your life and use it for everything you want to achieve.

It is not luck when someone achieves greatness and living clean and sober is achieving greatness. Engineering changes in our lives is a huge achievement so please study this strategy carefully and apply it because it works.

SUCCESS SHUNS THE PERSON WHO LACKS WILLINGNESS



GOALS

Goal setting and achieving goals including mini-goals on your way to major goals is a very powerful tool that will help you get what you want and when you want it.

Goal setting is pretty simple.

While this book sets out your main target goal of living clean and sober, you should introduce lots of mini-goals during your recovery journey too and enjoy the process.

At Anonymous groups, 'clean time chips' are presented, which I found extremely motivational; 1 day clean and sober; 30 days, 60 days, 90 days, 6 months, 1 year etc.

I was determined to collect them all and I did. My big one was on November 5, 2015 for 10 years clean and sober.

As I continually aimed to achieve goals and mini-goals and focus on the new person I wanted to become, I became a better person and more knowledgeable about myself and who I was becoming. I really felt I was creating an identity for myself and an identity I was proud of. Who you become in search of goals can be a real reward in itself. Take a moment and write a brief paragraph describing all the character traits, tactics, abilities, attitudes and beliefs you must develop to achieve your goals and

pin it on the wall so that you can continually remind yourself of who you need to be and want to be to succeed.

Here is what I wrote;

Firstly, I know living a life clean and sober must be my best option since living as a drug addict/alcoholic does not work. I am a much better person than I appear to be at the moment. I want to show the world the real me. I want to experience being the real me. I want to do this for me primarily and also my family and friends. Drink and drugs is stopping me succeeding in life. I want to experience genuine happiness; simply numbing my unhappiness is not good enough anymore. I am not going to settle for this life anymore; I am going to raise my standards and create a brand-new life that I have only ever dreamed about before. It is time to do whatever it takes. I know I can do anything if I set my mind to it. I am going to focus 100% on a new and better life clean and sober. I will listen to suggestions and try anything. I will search for all the support tools I can find to give myself the best possible chance of winning this challenge. I am much stronger than drink and drugs. I am better than drink and drugs. I know that the happiest days of my life are yet to come. I have the determination and the power to make this happen and I will.

CONVINCE AND YE SHALL BE CONVINCED



SELF-TALK

If we have a weak vocabulary it can promote an emotionally weak life whereas if we possess a strong vocabulary and use a rich range of colourful words to describe our experiences this can have amazing benefits regarding how we feel.

I continually try to expand my emotionally uplifting vocabulary by learning new positive and motivating words and phrases and continually use them until they become a natural and automatic part of my daily vocabulary. Consistently using these words and phrases has improved my life and made it more fun and enjoyable.

I listen to others who lead extraordinarily happy and successful lives and listen to the words and phrases they continually choose to use; I copied them and before I knew it, I was experiencing some of their positive emotional feelings too.

It is not only the words we use that play a key role in our life but also that voice inside our heads that has a huge impact on who we are and how we live our life.

With practice, we can change our self-talk.

Developing a habit of positive self-talk is uplifting; it increases confidence and enables us to attract what our heart desires.

Positive self-talk allows us to adopt a healthier lifestyle and it reduces stress.

This is another tool for improving our life, but it can easily slip our mind to continually practise positive self-talk so just like affirmations we must make a point of practising it on a daily basis until it becomes a habit; remember habits can be positive too.

At first practising positive self-talk may sound and feel ridiculous but if you trust the recovery process, just like affirmations, positive self-talk will become natural to you; if you are changing into a different person then you need to change the way you think and that begins with how you talk to yourself.

To help you stay on track, you may like to pin up a reminder of examples below of positive self-talk. It's important to constantly remind yourself to speak kindly and positively to yourself until it becomes the norm.

Practise self-talk when you wake up, when you're driving, exercising or just lying down; use it every day and in all situations until it becomes automatic.

People very often talk about what they don't want, for example;

I don't want to drink and drug

I don't want to feel overwhelmed

I don't want to feel full of anxiety and stress

I don't want to be overweight

I don't want to be unhappy

I don't want to just exist from day to day

That's the wrong way of thinking and let me tell you why. Our brain works in mysterious ways and it has been proven that the brain filters out peripheral words and simply focuses on the main words in a sentence. For example, if we say, 'I don't want to drink and drug', the brain actually hears 'drink and drug'. That is obviously not very helpful so shift your focus on what you DO want.

I suggest your new self-talk should be along the following lines;

I want to live clean and sober

I want to be relaxed and upbeat

I want to be happy and proud

I want to be fit and healthy

I want to look and feel great

I want to feel energetic and alive

My life is unfolding beautifully

I have confidence today

*I have self-esteem today
I have self-trust today
I have real friends and gratitude today
I am my best friend today
I am a new person with new standards and beliefs
I am capable of anything I desire
I love challenges and what I learn from overcoming them
I love life today*

Your self-talk creates your reality.

You can rewire your brain and create new thoughts and habits to help bring you what you **DO** want.

DRUG FREE IS BEAUTIFUL



LOOK LIKE YOU ARE HAPPY

I had not been happy for a long long time and quite frankly I had forgotten what it was like to smile and laugh.

However, I remember vividly at my first Cocaine Anonymous meeting hearing people laugh and seeing people smile.

I had not expected that; I thought us alcoholics and drug addicts were supposed to be miserable whether we were in recovery or not. I was extremely depressed and miserable, but I had also assumed that recovery would be even worse -- after all I wasn't even going to have mind-altering substances to mask my unhappiness.

So, at my first CA meeting I discovered there was life after drink and drugs; the Recovery Champions in the 'Room' that day sent me one of the greatest messages I received in early recovery and that was quite simply, 'recovery equals happiness'.

There are ways we can promote our own happiness including smiling and acting as if we are happy whether we are or not.

Get active and look cheerful.

Get out and do things to feel happy.

Body posture is important too; walk with your shoulders up or sit up straight rather than slouching. Make your whole body say you are happy and move like you're happy with a spring in your step.

And remember to use the right language.

If I am happy or want to try to feel happier, I will use happier words; like great, brilliant, ideal, loving it, really positive, very optimistic and sound happy with the tone of my voice; don't sound monotone and down.

Be pleasant to others and nod in agreement; try not to disagree.

Laugh as often as possible even at their lousy jokes!

Keep smiling; look in the mirror and make your face look happier because research shows people who act happy, even when they are not, end up happier than if they had just wallowed in their own misery.

If we do something that is contrary to our beliefs, like smiling when we're not actually happy, we feel the tension of conflict between our beliefs and actions and as a result we will move to resolve this tension by changing one or the other. When we force ourselves to smile and keep smiling the only option is to change what we believe and believing we are happy will actually lead us to feeling happier.

There is also a reciprocal social effect; when we are happy others are more likely to be happy with us thus setting up a social mood of happiness that helps everyone.

It is worth noting that just forcing back your lips and smiling may not immediately make you ecstatic, if you have a deep unhappiness it will not necessarily go away of its own accord. Nevertheless, just smiling can provide temporary relief and help us cope with where we are now.

LAUGH YOUR WAY TO HEALTH



METAPHORS

Metaphors can often provide hope. When things look gloomy we can often think this is going to go on forever.

For example, withdrawal or craving for drink or drugs feels like it will never end but it does so be courageous and resolute. Turn to a metaphor that gives hope and certainty; like life has its seasons and I am just in winter at the moment.

Remember some people freeze in the winter while others ski.

Spring always follows winter and the sun will come out, when we can plant new seeds.

Summer then comes and finally autumn when we reap the rewards. Sometimes things do not work out exactly as we hoped or planned however if we trust in the cycle of life seasons, we know that in the long term we will reap the harvest we have sown.

I have gone long periods of time in the past when I have become frustrated that I have not seen new shoots sprouting but I can assure you that was just impatience on my part because new shoots must emerge if you plant new seeds; it is impossible for them not to, just maybe not always when we want, so be patient and have faith.

IF YOU GET DEALT LEMONS, WHY NOT MAKE LEMONADE AND LEMON PIE



NEGATIVE LISTS

Some of the following pages have examples of 'lists of negative consequences' associated with alcoholism or drug addiction.

These lists need to be understood and appreciated for the specific purpose they are intended. Let me explain what I mean; Ever since we developed a drink or drug issue; our family and friends, the medical world and anyone else who thought we might listen to them have told us all the reasons we should not be drinking or drugging, but that has not stopped us and never will stop drug addicts and alcoholics from drinking and drugging.

That is because 'fear strategies' do not work.

Fear strategies do not work because drug addicts and alcoholics do not care about the consequences; that is the nature of addictions unfortunately.

Getting supplies of our drug of choice, including alcohol, and using it, comes much higher up our priority list than the fear of any consequences.

We would be a nation of Olympians if it were simply a question of scaring people away from unhealthy habits, compulsions and addictions by handing out public health warnings.

Think about it; do you believe the government could scare everyone into being thin by explaining in great detail all the diseases an obese person is likely to experience?

Not a chance!

However, a person who changes their eating regime for other reasons can then stay on track by reminding themselves regularly about that horrific list of obesity related consequences.

It's the same principle for smokers, alcoholics and drug addicts. Negative information does not scare a drug addict into changing however that same information very often helps a recovering drug addict/alcoholic stay stopped, which is quite different.

Before I understood the dynamics of recovery and the cunningness of addiction, I seriously thought there was something abnormally wrong with me that I could be aware of all the damage I was causing myself and others and yet continue to drink and drug.

So, it really came as a huge relief when I learned that this state of mind was completely normal for drug addicts, who all dismissed consequences of their actions as entirely irrelevant.

To share an example of what I mean; in my opinion it is quite pointless putting pictures of dying smokers on the side of cigarette packets; it might be a better idea to put these pictures on the front of primary school books

to deter kids from starting smoking in the first place; or put these pictures on smoking cessation products where recovering smokers will take notice. Once someone is addicted; scare tactics, no matter how horrifying, won't do the least bit of good. Scare tactics will only help a person who wants to recover. Initially alcoholics and drug addicts need to discover why they are actually drinking and drugging rather than why they shouldn't be drinking/drugging. However, once an individual is committed to the recovery process, then that same list of negative information can provide extra motivational support and help recovering drug addicts/alcoholics to stay on the road of recovery or stay stopped.

I hope you understand, getting an alcoholic or drug addict motivated to stop requires an entirely different process than the dynamics needed to encourage that same person to stay stopped.

Indeed, an entirely different set of dynamics whether we are dealing with alcoholism, other drug addictions, overeating, shopaholics, gambling, smoking or whatever. Encouraging a sufferer to stop or change requires a completely different set of tools than helping someone stay stopped who has already agreed to the principle of change. If you are on the road of recovery from any drug addiction and need a motivational boost at any time, read the lists of negative consequences and they should reinforce your excellent decision to get clean and sober and stay that way.

SOME ADDICTS SEEM TO BLAME THE DRUG FOR THEIR ADDICTION



PERCEPTION

I changed my visualisation of an alcoholic drink; whenever I see someone with an alcoholic drink in their hand I see a glass full of my neighbour's sewage. What a disgusting thought it is, to imagine drinking a pint of my neighbour's sewage!

Let me repeat the most important principle for me as a recovered drug addict; I do not want to drink or drug. It is easy to live clean and sober for me because I want to live clean and sober; it is my choice. Just like it was my choice to drink and drug in the first place. When I'm asked if I find the thought of drinking or drugging tempting, I ask the questioner if they would find drinking a pint of their neighbour's sewage tempting.

And I'm sure you can imagine the answers. When I'm eating with friends and one of them is pouring the wine for everyone and gets to me, some of them say 'oops sorry Cal I forgot you can't drink'; I quickly tell them I can drink if I want but I don't want to, thanks very much. Nobody is stopping me drinking or drugging but myself because I do not want to. Anyway,

why on earth should I apologise for not wanting to drink inflammable liquids!

Similarly, my perception of cocaine is rat poison and cannabis is dried dung.

We can all imagine whatever we want; I just make sure it is not an attractive thought to drink or drug.

All of these tools added up together make an extremely powerful arsenal of mental weapons for me to attack any insane idea that I might ever have that drinking or drugging could be a good idea.

WHAT WE THOUGHT WAS THE SOLUTION WAS ACTUALLY THE PROBLEM



NEGATIVES and POSITIVES

In early recovery, I knew it would be tempting to use, so that is why I needed to learn mental tools, skills, tactics and strategies to stop myself.

I made a list of negative results I had previously experienced from alcohol and other drugs and then made a list of the positive results I had ultimately experienced.

Any time I thought it was a good idea to drink or drug I took a look at these lists to remind myself where drink and drugs would take me.

This is a reality check and I would suggest you do the same.

NEGATIVE LIST

Experienced Suicidal thoughts

Had a Heart attack

Overdosed

Ruined Marriage

Lost our Home

Lost Business

Spent all our Money

Crashed Car

Lived in Fear

Psychotic

Paranoid

Distressed and worried my Loved Ones

Arrested

Sectioned

Lost Friends

Looked and Smelled Hellish

Broke Back, Ribs and Wrists

Created Debt

Put my Life in Danger

POSITIVE LIST

There were no positive results to be found.

OUR LIFE IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY



GIVING UP DRINK AND DRUGS

Let's have a look at some of the things we should be delighted to give-up;

Are you giving up drink and drugs?

Here's a look at what I was actually giving-up;

I gave up a hellish life of fear

I gave up ending up in hospital

I gave up being suicidal

I gave up insane behaviour

I gave up being an alcoholic

I gave up being a drug addict

I gave up destroying my life

I gave up lying

I gave up cheating

I gave up getting arrested

I gave up feeling depressed

I gave up desperation

I gave up being sectioned

I gave up losing friends

I gave up ruining my loved ones' lives

I gave up borrowing

I gave up chasing my dealer for another hit.

These are just some of the things I gave up by stopping drinking and drugging. It was a pleasure and huge relief to give up these things. Of course, it is so easy to think when we give something up we are sacrificing something but look at that list again and ask yourself are there any sacrifices involved in that list?

Add things to that list if you like, then pin it on the wall and keep reading it every time you pass it by. It's like giving up chocolate; it's not chocolate we're giving up; it's the fat stomach, spots, rotting teeth and other more serious health risks.

Not Giving up but Gaining. Get your thinking right and it's easy to make lasting change.

BEWARE THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT TASTES SWEETER



GAINING NOT GIVING UP

Now let's have a look at some of the things I gained;

Instant health benefits

Long-term health benefits

Fresher skin complexion and younger looks

Greater self-esteem

Freedom from addiction

Friends

Happiness and peace of mind

Self-belief

A Future Admiration

Achievement

Self-trust

Sanity

Respect from others

Self-respect

Love

Lots of extra money

Many more golden years of life on this planet

Knowledge to help others escape addiction

An amazing life

These are just some advantages of living clean and sober for me.

If you have other ideas or personal goals that will create positive motivation, then add them and pin it up on the wall too.

Take a minute or two every day to read out loud everything you have to gain by stopping drinking and drugging.

These lists are additional tools to add to your mental toolbox.

I AM A BRAND-NEW PERSON WITH A NEW PERSONALITY



DISEASES of ALCOHOLISM

The following list of diseases relates to alcohol. Ask yourself if you would really like any of the following the next time you think you would really like a drink. There are of course many other side effects not mentioned in this life-threatening list that create chaos in our lives due to alcohol.

If you need reminded at any time of what's to come from alcohol abuse;

Serious liver disease – cirrhosis or hepatitis

Stomach and pancreas disorders

Anxiety and depression

Sexual problems

Muscle and heart muscle disease

High blood pressure

Damage to nervous tissue/system

Accidents, injury and death from fires, car crashes and general accidents

Mouth cancer

Gullet cancer

Liver cancer

Colon cancer

Breast cancer

Becoming overweight/obese

LIMIT THE CONFLICT WE CREATE IN OUR OWN LIFE



DEVELOP AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

I have a secret weapon in my recovery tool bag; the Gratitude List.

When was the last time you made a gratitude list?

Whenever I feel overwhelmed, stressed or in fear; the fastest way out for me is to make a quick list of 10 things that I'm grateful for.

If 10 seems like a lot to you; it's only because you're not in the habit of making gratitude lists. The secret is to list the things you're grateful for that are centred on what you are feeling anxious or fearful about.

For example, when I'm in financial fear I list all the things around finances that I'm grateful for.

These usually include things like;

I have a home and a place to sleep

I have a car

Rent is paid

Council tax is up-to-date

I have food on the table

Electricity and gas meters in credit

Money in my pocket

Working and earning a wage

New clothes

Member of a gym

This works for every topic and after you get started; 10 items should come easy.

Today my life is good, and I experience serenity because I know how to develop and live with an attitude of gratitude.

LIVE WITH AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE



MAKE CHANGE HAPPEN

What really helped me to change was when I altered the sensations that I linked to certain experiences.

For example, as long as I believed drugs and alcohol created a positive feeling, in any way shape or form, I could not expect to stop.

However, when I associated drugs and alcohol with the disgust they deserved and the hellish feelings of withdrawal including guilt, then change could occur and sure did.

Very often we can all make decisions from gut reactions rather than simple intellectual calculations.

While I understood intellectually that drugs and alcohol were destroying my life and would ultimately cause my premature death; I still continually linked positivity to the idea of getting out my brains.

Of course, that was complete insanity.

If an alcoholic or drug addict expects to change, then they had better link massive amounts of pain and negativity to drink and drugs.

The same principle applies to chocolate, gambling, overeating and other potentially unhealthy vices, in fact the same applies to almost anything we want to change.

Focus on the negative side of drink and drugs for more power in recovery.

MY APPEARANCE IS SUFFERING, I AM LOOKING OLDER THAN I SHOULD AND I'M SICK OF SPENDING SO MUCH MONEY ON DRINK AND DRUGS



FOCUS ON WHAT YOU DO WANT

Most people focus on what they don't want which does not work, trust me. If you ever get the chance to drive a racing car around a test circuit and get examined on different surfaces including an oil slick, you will have the best time of your life but will probably crash into a wall; cardboard of course! When an inexperienced driver loses control on the oil slick, all they see is the wall and no surprise they crash into it.

However, when the instructor on the second time around the circuit puts his hand on your helmet and forces your head away from looking at the wall and redirects your focus to the track, surprise surprise, more often than not, you will avoid the wall and stay on the track. What we focus on is so important with regard to our outcomes; we must focus more on where we want to go rather than where we do not want to go. Focusing on not

wanting to drink or drug is not nearly as effective as focusing on wanting to look healthier, behave normally, smell fresh, look fresh, be healthier, live longer and have more money to spend on much more positive experiences so try changing your focus on what you actually want rather than what you don't want.

WITH EVERYTHING YOU CAN ASK YOURSELF-WHAT WOULD BE A BETTER WAY OF LOOKING AT THIS



DAILY REPORT CARD

During my rehab time at the Priory, Glasgow I received a Daily Report Card to complete each evening.

At the time I really did not appreciate the benefits of what seemed a 'daily chore' rather than a 'daily report'.

However, some months after leaving the Priory; I discovered the tremendous benefit of this daily summary. It contributed to my recovery because it demonstrated to me that my life was clearly improving. I was starting to feel better and by completing a Daily Report Card it highlighted I was winning my journey of recovery.

I understand people may say if I was feeling better why did I need to write it down; well that's simple, an early stage recovering drug addict/alcoholic like myself has a cunning mind, which may try to trick me into thinking that I wasn't improving and therefore I should just use again, so writing out a Daily Report produced evidence for me to look at which reinforced my resolve to continue on my recovery journey even when I did have urges to use.

The pen is mightier than a sword.

Negative feelings encourage negative actions for me which create negative outcomes which create those negative feelings in the first place; so it was imperative that I escaped that negative cycle.

Negative thinking and negative self-talk became a habit for me during my years of drinking/drugging.

I needed to create positive thinking and a positive self-talk habit so every positive thought and feeling that I recorded on a daily basis was another significant step in the positive direction, of my recovery journey.

All these little steps are very important and eventually add up to gigantic strides.

Here are some of the questions I asked myself every evening;

1 What was good about today?

2 What good and positive feelings did I experience today?

3 How did I improve my life today?

4 What did I learn today?

5 What did I learn about myself today?

6 Why am I a better person today?

7 What can I do tomorrow to improve?

8 Am I further down the road of recovery today?

LITTLE STEPS ARE IMPORTANT; TERMITES DO MORE DAMAGE THAN EARTHQUAKES AND HURRICANES



ONE DAY AT A TIME

I don't think normal people necessarily live one day at a time and I certainly wanted to live normally so here is the way I understood this idea of living one day at a time.

Sure, during transition it is one day at a time; same when people are engineering any type of change in their life, whether it is; a new eating plan, exercise regime, new hobby, new job, stopping smoking, new golf swing, whatever change we make it is a good tactic to deal with irritations, discomforts and the awkwardness of change one day at a time until it becomes natural.

That I completely agree with and therefore living one day at a time was an important tool for me during the process of change or recovery.

However, I would submit to you that living one day at a time is not what I would naturally do and I wanted to live naturally.

I think looking ahead, plotting and planning my life is far more progressive and natural than hiding away from tomorrow; however, I can tell you first hand it is a great way of treating life in early recovery.

I used this tactic to simply prevent feeling overwhelmed; for example, when I began my recovery journey I could not imagine going the next 30 minutes without a drink or drug never mind for the rest of my life so just imagine how overwhelming that thought felt.

That was why I used this recovery tool and found it so beneficial.

I only focused on one day at a time until I was in, shall we say, a more recovered state of mind when I could start projecting further forward than just today.

But as long as I felt I was in fight mode to stay away from drink and drugs, I needed to reduce the mental pressure of thinking further ahead than just today and it really helped me.

Today I am more than comfortable to tell you that I could not imagine ever having another drink or drug again – the thought rarely if ever pops into my head but initially I couldn't get the overwhelming thought out my head.

Mental changes will occur if you put in the work talked about in this chapter and remember you can download the workbook free at www.frog.net.

If at any time you are considering letting drink or drugs win this war, then imagine how good and proud you will feel tonight when your head hits the pillow and you have managed another day towards your new life clean and sober.

I promise you that these urges and cravings, no matter how monumental they feel at the time, do pass and will pass forever at some stage during recovery so have faith in the process and please try to deal with these thoughts on that basis.

As a rule of life, I think anyone living in the 'moment' will find it much easier than living in the past or worrying about the future, so I'm not knocking the general principle of living in the 'moment' but that is slightly different from living one day at a time which is what we are discussing here.

Living in the 'moment' is a slightly more advanced skill that we don't need to worry about today.

Learn from the past but do not live in the past; let go of the past.

Many of us are handcuffed to the past; it is okay to look back but just don't stare.

Don't dwell on the past, don't live in the past, instead learn from the past and make changes for the future.

Yesterday is history and tomorrow is a mystery but today is a gift from God; that is why it is called 'The Present'.

Life is not an outcome, life is a process so enjoy the journey and find a new level of depth; problems will come, and problems will go.

Living one day at a time is another art to learn that takes practice to master.

Remember to tell yourself to slow down if you get too far ahead of yourself.

Personally, I only ever feel serene when my mind is at peace. When I'm analysing where everything went wrong in the past my mind races and this creates enormous discomfort. It is a pointless exercise to wish things were different because they cannot change however I can stop repeating my old mistakes.

The future does not need to continue being the same as the past.

It is not worth getting too caught up in the future either as the mind just ends up racing which can be mentally tiring.

Be grateful for the moment and focus on everything to be grateful for right now because right now is the only time we are alive.

It does no harm to plan but then let go and let it happen and if it's meant to be, then I believe it will happen; let the universe take care of the detail.

Many of us in recovery can feel totally overwhelmed by thinking we can never ever drink or drug again; that is understandable but there is no need to torment ourselves, just stay clean and sober for today and if that is too difficult, just stay clean and sober for the next 5 minutes.

Tell yourselves you can drink and drug right now if you want but you choose not to.

Begin the day by reading a Daily Motivator to get the day off to a positive start. There are many of these books with short daily reflections, they have actual dates so there are 365 pages and the two books I enjoy are; 'A Day at a Time' and 'The Promise of a New Day'.

Both books can be found by searching on the internet.

I decided to get stuck into recovery and not just dip my toes into it.

If you make a commitment to get stuck in, dive into the deep end, get into the middle of the bed as we say in the Fellowship; then you will reap the wonderful rewards of recovery too.

Remember this is a marathon and not a sprint.

HERE AND NOW: DON'T POSTPONE LIVING



LET GO, LET GOD

This is a basic tenet of the ancient health and relaxation art of Yoga.

Letting go is the ultimate answer to distress, when all else fails.

Resisting and rejecting our present position sometimes just keeps us locked in struggle and wastes valuable energy that could go into creative transformation into new patterns and new perceptions.

There is a wise saying that states 'what we resist will persist'.

Letting go is the ultimate protection against burnout.

Letting go and accepting what is happening does not have to mean quitting or giving up our dreams, it only means allowing a space to occur which can become a crucible of creativity.

Letting go opens the door to working in harmony with what is inevitable, rather than using our energy to fight against what is inevitable.

As I let go of my wilful need to change the world, I tapped into my own power to transform myself.

If you believe in a God or other divine power at work in the world and in your life experiences, then the 'letting go' principle is much easier to accept. If you are non-religious, it still works; just try it.

Like all human behaviour; 'letting go' has to be kept in balance; if we take it too literally or do it too often, we call this spiritual dependency and may be asking for trouble.

We are required to take some responsibility for our own lives.

Don't stay stuck; don't stay locked in struggle, suffering or obsession.

Liberate your heart, mind and soul today by letting go.

DON'T TAKE WITHOUT GIVING AND GIVE BACK A LITTLE BIT EXTRA



SURRENDER

A major block to 'letting go' is known in psychology as 'neurotic affiliation needs' also known as 'dependency'.

A condition where we are stuck or addicted to a relationship with something or someone, which no longer serves our best interests for personal growth, creativity and success.

If we are quite wilful by nature and like to have things our own way we can get very stressed and suffer terribly when frustrated by things we cannot change, for example chronic pain, stubborn people, repeated setbacks or failure.

In these situations, a surprising breakthrough can come from the simple act of surrender.

Surrendering can have a magical effect in opening up new choices or just 'stuck' things start to change and sometimes for no logical reason either.

Pain and suffering can go when we just surrender or let go of them.

Ancient wisdom says that what we resist is what we actually keep getting.

Somehow the force of our resistance can help to keep situations stuck.

This is well known in judo as suddenly giving way after a period of stuck mutual pushing or pulling with an opponent can powerfully throw them off balance and put you back on top.

Surrender to win!

DON'T EXPECT JUST ACCEPT



DAILY SUCCESS RITUALS

Here we are back to questions again folks; I cannot emphasise how important it was for me to continually ask myself questions about the reasons I had embarked on such a life transforming journey of change.

Here is another set of questions I asked myself every day during my first year of recovery.

Every morning ask yourself these three questions and think of at least two or three answers to each question.

Your answers should get you off to a great start each day;

- 1 What am I grateful for in my life today?*
- 2 What am I excited about in my life right now?*
- 3 What can I do to grow and improve today?*

Then every evening, answer these power questions below before you complete your daily report card;

- 1 What did I give today or in what way have I contributed to others?*
- 2 What did I learn today?*
- 3 How has today enhanced my life and how can I use today to benefit my recovery journey and my life in the future?*

Cultivate the emotions of appreciation and gratitude because these are among the most uplifting emotions we can have; they enhance our lives more than almost anything else.

LEARN SOMETHING NEW EVERY DAY



CLOSE THE DOOR OF THE PAST

Drug addicts and alcoholics can continue to use or relapse because of events in their past. Their attention can be focused on what they don't want rather than what they do want.

Put it another way; they can't see where they're going because they keep looking behind at where they've been.

It is only us that can give the past the power to hurt us today, so we must remove the power by dealing with the past whether we like it or not. We must deal with anything that is troubling us from the past if we are going to enjoy our future life and experience the freedom that we all deserve.

Regardless of the issue, some of us may need professional counselling and others may be able to sort themselves out for themselves. Some people are dedicated followers of the Twelve-Step programme which I discuss in the next chapter and others use various different self-help options.

The trick is to find out what works for you; I personally used a little bit of everything; no surprise there then!

The Twelve-Step programme teaches us how to make amends for our past behaviour and deal with guilt, shame and other negative feelings that may trouble us.

Of course, if we have past troubles they may not have been our doing or our fault; however, we are still responsible for our own recovery and moving on.

Don't be handcuffed to the past.

Stand up to your obstacles and don't go crawling through life on your hands and knees.

QUIT HOPING FOR A BETTER PAST



WRITE IT DOWN

The power of commitment is writing it down, so we can keep confirming what we wrote by continually reading our own words. It is too easy to change our minds if we don't write things down; it is also very difficult and unlikely we will lie if we are trying to be honest with a pen and paper. Try writing down some messages to yourself including who you want to become and why.

There are several tools of recovery in this section that require pen and paper and all I can say is please do not skip any exercise even if you do not fully believe in it.

At worst, you must find out if it works or not for you; please be open minded. Get to know who you really are and where you want to go.

Here's a simple idea for you to start with:

I WANT TO LIVE AN EXCITING AND FULFILLING LIFE CLEAN AND SOBER! Get that pen and paper out and write that down.

Now if you ever think it would be a good idea to drink or drug again, your addiction must be talking.

To confirm your addiction must be talking you only need to look at your own handwriting, which states quite clearly;

I WANT TO LIVE AN EXCITING AND FULFILLING LIFE CLEAN AND SOBER!

Surely nothing has changed when the inner voice tries to trick you into having a drink or drug.

I've already asked you to write out lists and pin them on a wall and I urge you to go back now if you have skipped any of those exercises and please do them or at least download the workbook now.

Write out as many powerful messages to yourself as you want; keep them in your pocket or a notebook or pin them on a wall; regardless of where you keep them, continually read them and reread them to constantly remind yourself what you wrote and that you mean it.

THE PEN IS MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD



PROCRASTINATION

Procrastination is one of the most common ways to try to avoid pain; however, it does not work; in fact, I only create more grief by not dealing with pending issues.

If I ignore little midge problems, they eventually add up and become big elephant problems.

I always remind myself of how good I will feel by taking action right now and being done with it, regardless of the challenge.

Whether it is a form that I must complete and return, an overdue phone call I must make, a chore in the garden, something to dig out the loft, an examination to go for, an envelope to open, a man to man conversation to have with someone or an overdue bill to discuss, I must do it and do it right now if I want to experience serenity.

I cannot risk letting simple things manifest into complicated things.

I try not to go to sleep with anything pending; peace of mind is vital for me.

There are two simple questions I ask myself when I know I have something to attend to, but I am procrastinating;

Why am I not dealing with it?

How will I feel if I just deal with it right now and be done with it?

As the Nike gospel says, 'Just Do It'.

INNER PEACE AND JOY IMPROVES ALL AREAS OF OUR LIFE



TAKE UP NEW HOBBIES

After I laid down drink and drugs I found myself with a lot of time on my hands that historically I had spent drinking and drugging.

This is logical and obviously not a bad thing however I needed to fill my new free time slots with new and constructive activities.

I started reading books, visiting the library, I went to support group meetings every day and that was not only fantastic for my recovery it was also time consuming which kept me positively occupied; I needed to walk a mile to get a train there and back, and very often after the meeting a small group of us would go for a coffee somewhere and continue our camaraderie, so meetings were a godsend to me.

I also walked our dog and took an interest in photography. I started playing golf again, joined a gym and began writing my books.

Maybe you support a football team and could go to the matches, or learn to bake or cook, take up stamp collecting, metal detecting, bird watching, paint or draw, learn to play an instrument, write poetry, join an amateur theatrical society or learn a new trade; just don't get bored otherwise there could be trouble ahead.

The devil finds work for idle hands.

It is important to understand when we take something away we need to replace it with something else and quickly; that includes free time.

Same with thoughts; if we delete negative thoughts from our mind then we need to replace those files with new positive thoughts otherwise our old negative ideas will invariably slip back into these empties pigeon-holes in our mind whether we like it or not.

We must substitute emptiness with something meaningful and constructive.

Again, it is up to everyone to make responsible decisions and take appropriate action. We can all really benefit from new interests apart from staying away from drink and drugs; it may even be the foundation for a new career.

LIKE ANYTHING IF YOU KEEP PRACTISING YOU WILL GET BETTER



NO BAD EXPERIENCES

I adopted a new belief; there doesn't need to be long term bad experiences.

Of course, we all have bad experiences and there's no taking away from that but after every experience including bad ones we can grow from the experience or slide; that is without a doubt our choice.

Some bad experiences may take longer than others to heal but ultimately, we can use every experience to learn and grow.

I remember hearing a friend of mine in a recovery meeting, incidentally this guy was an airline pilot who lost his job for being drunk as he was about to fly a plane load of people from one side of America to another, sharing his account of the abuse he suffered from his father when he was a kid. Dave, who was in his sixties at the time, shared this graphic story as if it had just happened last night; he was clearly emotional about it and all of us in the room could feel his pain and the resentment he had towards his father for spoiling his childhood. After the meeting another recovered alcoholic asked Dave how old he was, and Dave said 62; the fellow then said 'aren't you dragging your childhood on a bit?'

Not too many people would be courageous enough to make that sort of comment; although if you want to find these types of people they do go to

recovery meetings, and it's not a bad thing either to hear someone being honest with you.

This guy was basically saying to Dave isn't it time you moved on. Dave really appreciated the comment and realised indeed for all these years he had been reliving his experience over and over again and therefore experiencing the pain over and over again too.

There is a time to draw a line under negative experiences for our own good; as the saying goes; resentment is when you pour a cup of poison for your enemy, but you end up drinking it instead.

No matter what I go through in life whether it is difficult, easy, painful or pleasurable; every experience provides something of value if I look at it from various angles.

A perfect example is when I reflect on one of the worst experiences of my life when I was sectioned.

I was going ballistic in the back of a police car, thinking the cops were plotting to have me killed; I was kicking hell out the car, sliding around the floor, the handcuffs buried into my wrists which were in turn bleeding badly (I still have terrible scars to prove it); I was puking, and I had already pissed and soiled myself – just imagine the scene.

At that time nobody, certainly not the cops or myself could have guessed that this 'my rock bottom day' would have such a positive impact on my life today.

It caused me to reshape my ambitions and attitudes. It was the day I saw the light, ironically; the day I realised life clean and sober could not be any worse than the hellish life I was living. I even hesitate to suggest I was living; I was alive, but I was not living. Not many alcoholics or drug addicts do live a worthwhile life and I certainly was one of them. That was the lowest day of my life which later became the springboard I needed to throw in the towel; if I needed evidence that what I was doing was not working then there it was, literally laying out in front of me and it certainly was all lying out in front of me and what a bloody shitty mess it was too!

The power to shape our life and our destiny is gained by changing the meaning we associate with an experience or reference.

Maybe you have been mugged, fired, unfairly dismissed, divorced, betrayed, abused, bullied or have suffered a terrible experience of one sort or another; well you can gain a new resolve from that experience, in fact from any event and use it as a catalyst in finding a new direction in life.

Even bad experiences can enable us to grow far beyond the level we were heading in at the time of the event.

LIVE A NEW LIFE BY A NEW SET OF RULES OR PRINCIPLES



MIND-ALTERING ACTIVITIES

The majority of our behaviour is to mind alter and that is absolutely natural and is fine. Think about it; everything we do is to feel good one way or another or at least not to feel bad.

The two key emotional motivators in this world are pain and pleasure; avoid pain or gain pleasure.

Even sadists want to experience pain for pleasure!

Why do people go to a football match, the cinema, holidays, out for a meal or even work?

It's simply to gain pleasure or avoid pain.

Pleasure can come directly and indirectly from activities including work.

Sure, some people hate their actual job per se but love working because they associate enormous pleasure to bringing back the lolly for their family and putting food on the table.

Some folks just love staying at home and relaxing, reading a book or doing Sudoku.

Introducing new activities to help us feel good is a great idea.

There are many ways to feel good and boost our emotional state without resorting to alcohol, drugs, cigarettes, chocolate, food binges, gambling, credit card abuse or anything involving negative consequences.

Complete the two steps below;

1 List the healthy and positive activities you currently employ to receive pleasure.

2 Make a new list of at least 20 further ideas that you could add to that list including things you may never have tried but fancy trying. And keep adding to this list until you have discovered over one hundred healthy ways of changing your state of mind.

**THERE ARE ONLY TWO THINGS PEOPLE EVER WANT TO CHANGE;
THEIR FEELINGS OR THEIR BEHAVIOUR**



RECOVERY IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY

We should pride ourselves on our ability to make lasting change.

If we no longer drink or drug today, that does not mean we will always stay clean and sober, so we must continually work at our recovery at least until we absolutely do not want to drink or drug under any circumstances.

I constantly apply the tools of recovery in my life and I'm always prepared to deal with booby traps like stress, anger, sadness or disappointment for

example. I will never be caught off-guard that way. I cannot programme myself for life but I can programme myself for today.

I continually remind myself to take responsibility for my recovery on a daily basis no matter how confident I feel because complacency kills. Any change we make will only be temporary unless we make ourselves responsible for our own life. Here are three core beliefs I adopted going into recovery;

*1 I **MUST** change; simply believing I only **SHOULD** change is not sufficient.*

*2 I must create the change; **OTHERS** can coach me or supply valuable information however it is I with the ultimate responsibility to create change in my own life.*

*3 I **CAN** change; since I created who I am today, I can create who I become tomorrow.*

THE SAME KIND OF THINKING THAT BROUGHT ME HERE WILL NOT TAKE ME WHERE I WANT TO GO



SUBLIMINAL RULES

We all have rules and standards whether we are completely aware of this or not. It is easy to understand from our words and statements how powerful our conviction is; for example, if we use words and statements like 'the last thing in the world I would dream of doing would be to have a drink or drug' or 'I would have to be insane to ever drink or drug again', these comments make it pretty clear that the individual speaking is very passionate and definitive with their intentions. We should pick our words carefully when talking about self-harm behaviour like drinking or drugging.

Don't just say 'well, I shouldn't drink' or 'I ought not to have a drug'.

These words are not strong enough and allow us to easily violate our rules unlike the first two statements that are definitive, powerful and leave little room for negotiation. It appears to be a fact that if we use loose terms like; 'I should not' or 'I'm not supposed to', then we will probably break those rules as opposed to statements like; 'I must never and will never' which are rarely breached. Start immediately re-phrasing your rules and using statements like, 'I would have to be insane to have another drink or drug' or 'the last thing in the world I would dream of doing would be to drink or drug' and you will instantly enjoy more control over your own actions. Make your contract to become clean and sober a non-negotiable contract; a 'word tool' for your toolkit.

IF WE ALL DID THE THINGS WE ARE CAPABLE OF DOING, WE WOULD LITERALLY ASTOUND OURSELVES



IMAGINATION IS LIMITLESS

Our imagination is ten times stronger than our willpower, believe it or not. Imagination can provide a sense of certainty and persistent vision can take us far beyond any limitations of our past.

Tiger Woods spoke about his major golf wins and said by the time he was 12 years old he reckons he had already won the British Open 10,000 times: all in his mind of course. His consistent and vivid visualisations of victory provided him with the internal certainty that eventually delivered this in reality.

What dreams could you realise by consistently imagining they have already happened. Maybe you only need to imagine yourself living a wonderful, successful, healthy and happy life, clean and sober to be a winner like Tiger.

ASK AND YOU SHALL RECEIVE



IDENTITY CRISIS

We sometimes hear people saying they are having an identity crisis but what does that mean? The best definition, in my opinion, for this relatively common experience is that it occurs when a person acts inconsistently with who they believe they are and therefore that causes them to question everything in their life. Having said that not many alcoholics or drug addicts really know who they are until recovery begins.

Until an individual faces real challenges and adversity they may not discover what they are actually made of. For example, I did not really believe I had the power to do what I have done but once I started asking myself some serious questions, I started to find out who I really was and what in life really was important to me.

I am talking about questions like;

What is my purpose for being on this planet?

Do I want to leave this planet without firstly finding out how good I can be?

What can I actually achieve in my life?

How happy can I become?

And be warned having an identity that is specifically linked to our own age or appearance would set us up for future pain as those two examples will obviously change. If we have a broader sense of who we are, like a health fanatic, then that identity can never be threatened.

In recovery, as we change, we can make commitments and build up a new identity for ourselves and most importantly we can build an identity that we like and are very proud of.

See this as a second opportunity to really be who you always imagined you could be. That's exactly what I've done and would urge you to do the same because you will not believe what you are capable of doing or who you are able to become.

Imagine being so proud of who you are and loving who you are and having nothing really that you would change about yourself; how unbelievable does that sound?

Start by writing a description in one paragraph of who you would love to be right now; then start being that person.

BEHAVE AS IF YOU ARE A PUBLIC FIGURE AND YOUR STANDARDS SHOULD IMMEDIATELY IMPROVE



FIND A NEW IDENTITY

It is vital to believe in yourself and to have an identity that is consistent with who you believe you are or who you want to become and most importantly, you must act in accordance with that identity.

Let me share an example of what I mean;

when I attend an AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) or CA (Cocaine Anonymous) meeting I always introduce myself as Cal, a recovered alcoholic or Cal a recovered drug addict as opposed to the vast majority that attend the meetings would have me introduce myself as Cal, an alcoholic or Cal a drug addict.

Have you heard the story about the scorpion and the frog?

A scorpion and a frog meet on the bank of a stream and the scorpion asks the frog to carry him across the dangerous stream on its back. The frog asks, 'how do I know you won't sting me?' The scorpion says 'because if I do, I will die too.' The frog is satisfied with that logic and so accommodates the scorpion and they set off. But midstream the scorpion stings the frog!

The frog feels the onset of paralysis and as he starts to sink, knowing they both will soon drown, just has enough time to gasp 'why Mr Scorpion?' And the scorpion replies because 'I am a scorpion and that's what scorpions do'!

And that is why I am not Cal an alcoholic because alcoholics drink alcohol and also why I am not Cal a drug addict because drug addicts use drugs and I do not do either.

May I suggest the moment you commit to this journey of recovery from drug addiction/alcoholism that you see yourself as a recovering drug

addict or recovering alcoholic and eventually you will become a recovered drug addict or recovered alcoholic. A new life with a new label and a new you, it's magical and to a certain extent, a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Incidentally, I also changed my name to Cal from Calum.

Calum was the drug addict and alcoholic who got in trouble; Cal is the clean and sober guy who doesn't get into bother so that was kind of like wiping the slate clean too from another direction so whatever you used to be called think about changing it. Enjoy a network of friends, old and new, who respect your new way of life and your principles.

They are true friends whereas some fellow alcoholics and drug addicts will not want you to change because it makes them feel alone. They would prefer you to remain on-board the sinking ship so that they only feel half as lonely even although you will both drown like the scorpion and the frog. It's simply your choice who you are and who you become.

Be careful with your identity because your behaviour is generally consistent with your identity and vice versa.

We become who we imagine we are or believe we are so keep telling yourself that you are a recovering drug addict and you will become that person (remember the tool of affirmations). We become what we think about, as Emerson said, 'beware of what you want as you will get it'. Changing our behaviour is one thing but changing who we are and our behaviour will change for the long term. Act the way we would expect a clean and sober person to act and make it real, fuse with it and I guarantee you will become that person. I remember wanting others to immediately label me as clean and sober; however, I needed to earn that title and respect, through my behaviour and demonstrate who I was so have patience as that will happen naturally over time.

We gain respect and earn trust like a new identity; we do not demand it. There is an old expression that claims, 'if you tell yourself often enough you are a horse you will eventually start eating hay'; think about that.

**BE WHAT YOU IS AND NOT WHAT YOU AIN'T
CAUSE IF YOU IS WHAT YOU AIN'T - YOU AIN'T WHAT YOU IS**



RECOVER FOR YOU

I hear alcoholics and drug addicts say they want to recover for others like their mum, wife, husband, brother, sister, partner or whoever.

Sure, I understand there is probably some pressure from those quarters however YOU owe it to YOU first.

Unless YOU want to recover for YOU primarily, YOU will struggle and most probably fail; therefore, YOU will not be well for others whether YOU want to do it for them or not.

Recovery starts with YOU and ends with YOU although there is a lot of room for others in between.

Recovery must be for YOU first.

Here is a statistic that emphasises my point;

The three main reasons for heroin addicts going into recovery and receiving methadone scripts are;

1 To obtain a drug supply

2 To improve family relations

3 To avoid trouble from the police

And these drug addicts do not get clean and sober.

However, heroin addicts who are determined to get clean and sober for themselves; who enter into a methadone gradual reduction programme do improve family relations and do avoid trouble from the police long term and do not need or want a drug supply in the future, so remember to recover for YOU.

Don't do it for others; look what happened to Elvis, Michael Jackson, Whitney Houston, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Cory Monteith, Amy Winehouse, Heath Ledger and George Best for example; they were making everyone happy but themselves.

YOU TAKE CARE OF YOU FIRST



COURAGE & THE PAIN BARRIER

Courageous people do things they do not want to do. It is not courageous to do something you want to do no matter what it is; even if it was going to war! Admirable maybe but courage is needed to do something we do not want to do.

A drug addict or alcoholic needs a lot of courage to lay drink and drugs down.

I remember being terrified to let go of drink and drugs at first, but be assured it gets easier every single day. At first, I needed support from others who had already succeeded in the journey, so I attended support groups and spoke to recovered drug addicts and recovered alcoholics whom I found a great source of strength.

I recommend you do the same and remember you can also watch real life Recovery Champions like me sharing recovery stories on the Champions Cinema at www.frog.net. Frog Recovery Champions will tell you that the fear of fear is much worse than the reality of fear. You just need to muster

the courage to 'face the fear' although as daft as it may sound you will soon discover that you don't require as much courage as you may have imagined; it's all in the mind. We all break through the pain barrier so be strong and you will too, just like a runner breaking the pain barrier, it is tough to do but it is relatively easy thereafter. I made a bargain with myself that I would stay off drink and drugs for 100 days and if life without drink and drugs was so bad then I would start drinking/drugging again. I never went back and never will.

Drink and drugs will always be available so don't panic.

Success is like an old-fashioned hand water pump; you have to pump it hard for a while, holding the faith that the water will eventually begin to flow even when you are getting nothing but air, however once the water starts to flow it takes much less energy to keep it flowing.

ACTION CONQUERS FEAR AND CREATES CONFIDENCE



THAT FREEDOM FEELING

My personal understanding of freedom is the utopian position of 'not being controlled', whether by alcohol, drugs, gambling, cigarettes, chocolate, shopping, a person or even just a bad habit like nail biting. Freedom is magical and must be experienced to be appreciated.

The experience of freedom continues to expand to new levels every time I unlock another set of mental, emotional or physical handcuffs. Initially when I stopped drinking and drugging I felt a sense of freedom and then during my recovery journey I awoke one day and immediately knew **I NO LONGER WANTED** to drink or drug ever again and that was an entirely new level of freedom that must be experienced to believe; a bigger rush than any drug had ever given me.

And life just keeps getting better all the time.

There is never a day goes by that I don't thank God that I no longer drink or drug.

Today I don't drink, drug, smoke, gamble or eat junk food; what a turn around and what a buzz that gives me to be able to say.

I am experiencing a level of **FREEDOM** that is truly serene and more amazing than I could ever have imagined; I am mightily grateful to be in this position today. The **FREEDOM FEELING** is one truly magical reward for getting clean and sober.

I feel blessed and that same reward is waiting for you if you WANT it.

GARBAGE IN-GARBAGE OUT



EMOTIONS

This is a fascinating subject if you ever decide to study it; what emotions mean and why all emotions are there to serve us including, what we may think are, negative ones.

As a generalisation we are the source of all our emotions and at any moment we can create or change them, so why don't we? Well, for most of us, feeling bad is just natural but we need a specific reason to feel good. We should not need a reason to feel good; we can just decide to feel good right now simply because we are alive or better still because we are just about to raise the quality of our lives to a new level by living clean and sober. All emotions serve us including negative feeling emotions. Emotions that appear negative are actually just calls to action; for example, if we feel frustrated it means that we believe things could be better. This is a call to action, letting us know there is something we must do now to improve our status. This negative emotion is a warning or opportunity if understood properly, so we must react appropriately and responsibly to deal with all emotions positively.

Treat emotions as calls for action and stay positive whether it is a positive or negative feeling.

I received a lot of negative emotions during my recovery journey and the secret for me was to analyse the emotion and discover what it actually meant so that I could deal with it constructively.

I would recommend to anyone that wants to improve their life skills, investigate the subject of emotions.

RECOVERY IS AN INSIDE JOB



THE BEST TIME TO STOP

The best time to stop is right now; there will never be a perfect time. Another trick of addiction is continually making you prolong the day of quitting. The sooner you quit the sooner you don't have to quit so be done with the decision and make it a reality. Stop procrastinating and get going as soon as possible because I promise you there is an amazing life of freedom from drug addiction awaiting you and anyone else with the courage to surrender.

Throw in the towel to win. I am not saying it is a walk in the park however it is not even half as tough as you are probably imagining.

Alcoholics and drug addicts want it to be virtually impossible to quit so they have an excuse to keep drinking and drugging for the rest of their lives.

I can tell you a little secret that I only went to my first AA meeting to prove to others there was no solution for me. That is the absolute truth; I was planning to use that as an excuse to drink and drug. I was so unique there was no solution for poor old me. However, the Anonymous groups saved my life from drug addiction and alcoholism, of that there is no doubt. It is never too soon or too late to select a smarter and healthier lifestyle choice.

SHORT TERM HARDSHIP-LONG TERM GAIN



ADDICTION TALKS

This may be the single most important message this book can share with drug addicts and alcoholics. It is absolutely vital for our recovery chances that we categorically understand that our disorder talks. We may never be able to stop the voices however we can learn to recognise our disorder when it talks so that we can deal with it and that is what really counts. It is imperative that we are prepared to deal with it otherwise it will talk us into relapse.

The illness says stuff like ‘Hey Cal I think you deserve a few pints tonight’ or ‘Cal I am sure you could just have a couple of lines today’ or ‘Come on Cal you’ve been clean and sober for 10 months surely a night on the tiles or one joint won’t hurt anyone’ or ‘You deserve it man’.

It is crucial we recognise the tricks of addiction when it talks.

Unfortunately, a little bit of my brain is broken, just a little bit! In fact, to be specific the ventral medial prefrontal cortex is the part neurologists say is damaged. A little damaged piece that sends wrong messages like ‘drugs won’t hurt’, ‘just one will be okay’ or ‘everyone else does it’ and so on.

Providing we are properly prepared with the right response, it should only require a short thoughtful pause before continuing forward with our recovery journey and our new life. We must always recognise drug addiction/alcoholism talks. How could we possibly think it would be a good idea to drink or drug. Just look where it has taken us, and yet our brains send these insane messages.

See these episodes as pot-holes in the recovery road that you must avoid.

It is all part of healing and recovery. The good news is, the frontal cortex does slowly repair itself, so we gradually receive less and less of these idiotic messages over time, nevertheless we must always stand guard at the gates of our minds and make sure we don’t believe these crazy suggestions if they arrive.

Just remember where bad ideas have taken us before, so it is vital that we prepare our responses.

Our addictive mode will send misinformation, false messages and mixed up signals to try and trick us into drinking or drugging.

We must develop tools and tactics to use as defences, for example, that 'Negative' list.

If you have completed that list and written down absolutely everything negative that drink and drugs ever brought to your life, from heart attacks to police arrests to debt, relationship breakups and self-hatred, the list will go on and on and I bet the list of everything positive that drink and drugs ever brought to your life will be close to blank.

So, when we get these confused thoughts and seemingly crossed wires suggesting it may be a good idea to drink or drug, remind yourself of these two lists.

Pin them on a wall or on your fridge and continually read them until you have memorised them. It shouldn't take long to memorise the positive list.

If a voice suggests you should drink or drug, immediately ask yourself 'where does this crazy idea stem from?'

If you remain in any doubt, read the lists out loud and do it over and over again until you see sense, or should I say, hear sense.

It really is astounding that somewhere in the darkest little corner of our heads, crazy and insane thoughts are generated suggesting it would be fun or wise for us to use, after all look where drugs took us. Where on earth these ideas come from we do not need to understand logically as long as we recognise they are wrong and need neutralised immediately by deploying a mental weapon of defence.

Many of you will not believe you can stay away from drink and drugs long term if you continually have to fight these voices but every time you say NO, you are weakening the voice and I can assure you eventually you will silence it permanently.

Get a pen and paper and write down **I NEVER WANT TO USE DRINK OR DRUGS AGAIN.**

Great, that clears that up; now we know if we ever think it would be a good idea to drink or drug again, it must be our illness talking. We only need to remind ourselves of what we stated by getting that piece of paper out of our pocket which is in our own handwriting and states quite clearly; **I NEVER WANT TO USE DRINK OR DRUGS AGAIN.**

So, what could have changed when these voices appear?

In early recovery it is hugely beneficial to continually remind ourselves where drink or drugs took us and where they will take us again. We must not only understand when our disorder is talking, we must also anticipate

that it will definitely happen and prepare our defences to react positively. We must immediately recognise the voice is our worst enemy trying to kill us and we must take appropriate action to kill it.

INNER PEACE AND JOY IMPROVES ALL AREAS OF OUR LIFE



SUMMARY OF THIS SECTION

I hope you enjoyed reading this section on changing your thinking.

And more importantly I hope you read some things that made you immediately think differently towards drinking and drugging. It may only have taken you a short time to read this section; however, there are hours and hours of reading and work still to do if you are committed to the recovery process and therefore changing your association towards drink and drugs. It is absolutely essential that you utterly despise drink and drugs if you are going to succeed long term.

I do not expect you to change your thinking overnight, but I do expect you to work on it every single day until it does change. The importance of detesting something, if you are likely to stay away from it for good, cannot be overemphasised.

You probably won't stay away from drink and drugs long term if you even remotely think they are okay. They are absolutely and utterly not okay in any way whatsoever. I bet you would never drink a pint of someone else's sewage; remember?

I didn't think so and I want you to have a revolting reaction at the thought of it.

Please download the free workbook at www.frog.net and do the exercises recommended. Pin up the tools on your walls at home and the office; please do it no matter how daft you might think it is today.

Use the tools 24/7 to guarantee becoming clean and sober and staying that way for life. Read, read and read until you believe it. You will look back in a year and congratulate yourself, trust me.

Only you can make the decision to do this and probably achieve the biggest challenge of your life.

You'll become ten times better looking and tons healthier, but you must stick to the plan.

I know you can do it because I did it!

IT'S NOT A CASE OF CAN YOU; IT'S A CASE OF WILL YOU?

CHAPTER 3

THE ANONYMOUS GROUPS AND MY UNDERSTANDING OF THE TWELVE-STEP PROGRAMME

INTRODUCTION

When we stop using mind-altering substances we must understand we will be left with the problems that made us use in the first place. These problems need addressed and sorted otherwise we are likely to relapse and we definitely do not want that.

It is understandable that we may believe our problem is actually the drink and drugs, but this is not the case.

The drink and drugs certainly become a huge problem on their own merit, but they were originally a solution to our underlying problem.

What we are escaping from in the first instance needs investigated.

When we lay down drink and drugs we are left with the problem that made us use in the first place and very often it is an emotional problem that needs an emotional solution.

You may find solace in the Twelve-Step programme which is practised within Anonymous groups (aka the Fellowship).

The Fellowship is a larger than life 'recovery tool' and the Twelve-Step programme is a user's manual to good emotional health basically.

And don't worry, the 12-Step programme doesn't involve séances or anything wacky, it is simply 12 good sound guiding principles for anyone who wants to be free of their past mistakes and stay free; it's as simple as that.

It is also a physiological fact that community support works. And the scientific reason for that quite simply is community support or groups of people with a common purpose feed off each other and radiate belief.

If the Fellowship is not for you that is okay, but we must all find a type and style of recovery that we can integrate into our life and really bond with and if we get involved with a recovery plan/programme, we must agree with the basic philosophy of the programme otherwise chances are we will not enjoy it or practise it very long so it is important to learn about the Twelve-Step programme before you can decide if it is for you or not.

The Twelve-Step programme on offer at CA, AA and NA is not really religious, it is more spiritual.

We are all born with a spirit, but we need to learn religion.

Religion is man-made, and spirituality is made-in-man.

Our spiritual health is simply our feelings or emotions in my opinion.

Negative feelings are generally the underlying reason for us using mind-altering substances.

As I've already suggested, we must change our thinking and behaviour before our emotions are likely to change and the Twelve-Step programme helped me do that.

Please be open-minded and see if the Twelve-Step programme is for you.

Let me make something absolutely loud and clear here; I love peer support groups or mutual support groups and in particular the Anonymous groups, which I attended regularly during my early recovery journey including Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Cocaine Anonymous (CA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA).

These are three examples of worldwide Fellowships of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other in an effort to recover from alcoholism and other drug addictions.

The Fellowship may not work for everyone; just like paracetamol doesn't work for everyone; however, it worked for me and without a doubt saved my life from drug addiction including alcoholism.

On top of that I also made a lot of great new friends, some of whom are my closest friends today.

I think there are two main strands to peer support groups; firstly, the opportunity to interact with Recovery Champions who were once in our shoes and secondly the recovery information that is collectively shared and in the case of AA, CA and NA that information is a neatly wrapped set of philosophical principals called 'The Twelve Steps'.

At this stage let me make an important disclaimer; this book presents my personal opinions about the Twelve Steps and various Fellowships in general. I am not speaking on behalf of AA or any other organisation as I have no authority to do so.

The reason the Fellowship saved my life was thanks to the Recovery Champions I met and listened to.

I believe it is invaluable for people in recovery, suffering from any life issue, to interact with others who have suffered or are suffering the same challenges.

It was not the Twelve Steps initially that saved my life; it was recovered drug addicts and recovered alcoholics; real life walking, talking examples of recovery who shared their recovery stories with me. Sure, they may have thrown in some useful recovery nuggets from various sources,

including the Twelve Steps; however, I was simply focused on the people and their amazing stories of change.

Immediately discovering I wasn't alone was a tremendous comfort, not to mention a huge relief. These Recovery Champions were also the first people I had met in a long time who did not appear to judge me or preach to me. They gave me hope and encouragement, they shared their own stories of recovery and offered me suggestions which were enough to set me off on my own personal journey of recovery. I wanted what they all seemed to have, and I was prepared to copy what they had done to get it.

We may have arrived from different ship wrecks but we all end up in the same lifeboat.

Although I said it was the Recovery Champions who saved my life I also enjoyed learning the basic principles of the Twelve Steps as time unfolded and I use much of that information today which all helps me to stay clean and sober.

I really enjoy listening to other people's interpretations of the Twelve Steps and so much so that I have launched a website www.frog.net where you will find Twelve-Step Champions sharing their own understanding and interpretations of the individual Steps.

I have come to the conclusion that everyone's definitions are correct for them and it is up to each person to discover what makes sense individually, including the base purpose of the Twelve-Step programme in the first place.

I like to refer to it as a plan rather than a programme but it's just the same thing; it's quite simply a 'plan for change' or a 'programme of recovery'; a set of principles that can be applied to keep people clean and sober long term.

I believe there is an abundance of useful recovery nuggets to be extrapolated from each Step and I am delighted to direct you to the Champions Cinema where you can listen to worldwide Recovery Champions and 12-Step Champions sharing their thoughts and ideas about the Twelve Steps.

The 'Rooms' of AA, CA and NA are the source of invaluable recovery information and the people I met offered, delete comma only, unconditional support and camaraderie.

Many people find the miracle of sobriety by working the Twelve Steps.

It is each person's own responsibility to learn about their condition and learn the necessary skills and strategies required for recovery since nobody else can do it for us. It's not like drowning when a lifeguard can jump in and save us or when a fire fighter climbs into a burning building and drags us to safety.

Recovery is 100% our responsibility.

Recovered drug addicts/alcoholics may share lifesaving information however we must take the necessary action to benefit from the information.

We either continue to take drugs or we lay them down, that's our choice; we can decide to take responsibility for our own life or not.

Total and complete abstinence from all unhealthy mind-altering substances and activities was my only choice for lasting recovery; substitution was not an option and moderation was not either.

The Fellowships are full of recovering and recovered alcoholics and drug addicts, all at different stages of recovery, some are still using, and others are enjoying many years of clean and sober time.

It is where recovering addicts help each other; if we help someone else up a hill, we get there too.

It certainly worked for me, so I strongly advise anyone who is struggling with drug addiction or alcoholism to get along to a peer support group; nobody judged me or put me down in any way; it was the best decision I had made since I got into the huge mess with drink and drugs.

If you think you are unique, I suggest you get along because I suspect you will hear somebody else telling what will sound like your own personal story.

I remember my first ever CA meeting when someone said the most magical words to me; 'there are solutions'.

And today I can confirm there certainly is a solution because I am in my twelfth year clean and sober and before I walked into my first meeting I believed the only solution was death.

To find out where your local meetings are taking place go to Groups and Activities at www.frog.net.

REAL HOPE IS DRAWN FROM REAL EXAMPLES THAT CAN LEAD TO LASTING CHANGE



AL-ANON and OTHER GROUPS

There are also group meetings for friends and family members who have a loved one that has a drink or drug issue; meetings like Al-Anon and Alateen.

And some of the regular AA, CA and NA peer support meetings are open to anyone too.

If you would like to locate meetings in your area, you will find them on Groups and Activities at www.frog.net.

Besides Alcoholics Anonymous, Cocaine Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous there are many other support groups in most communities including smoking cessation groups, slimming classes, Gambling Anonymous, sexual issues, depression/bipolar, bereavement issues and many more that you can also find on Groups and Activities.

DON'T HOLD YOURSELF HOSTAGE; LIFE IS THE REWARD



MEETING FORMAT

Meetings are held in various places from community centres to churches; they are in quiet, uninterrupted rooms at fixed times.

I was and still am amazed at the discipline involved in meetings.

They start on time and a Chairperson opens the meeting by welcoming everyone, something like;

'Hi I'm Cal, a recovered drug addict and your Chairperson this evening; welcome to the Thursday evening Cocaine Anonymous meeting at Quaker House in Glasgow. I welcome you all and would like to give a special welcome to any newcomers and particularly anyone that is attending their first ever meeting.

The Chair will then read the Preamble (example of AA Preamble);

Alcoholics Anonymous is a Fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for AA membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions.

AA is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organisation or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes.

Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

The Chairperson will then ask a member or members to read 'How It Works' from the Alcoholics Anonymous book.

The Twelve Traditions is generally then read by a member too.

At the meetings I attend there is usually a guest who sits beside the Chair at the Top Table and he or she will now be given fifteen minutes or so to share their recovery story.

The format of meetings can vary a little and sometimes there is no guest and the Chair simply suggests a topic or one of the Twelve Steps for the Room to discuss from the offset.

After the guest shares, the Chair then opens the meeting to the Room.

When the meeting opens up to the Room there can be silence for a moment or two before someone announces their name, for example; Hi, I'm Cal, a recovered alcoholic; the group will then respond by saying, 'Hi Cal!' and then that person will get something off their chest or contribute to the nominated topic perhaps for 30 seconds or so.

It's important to make what are called 'I' statements by avoiding using 'you' or 'we' (basically speak on your own behalf). It is also completely taboo to appear to be giving advice or preaching and crosstalk is also unwelcomed (no asking of questions or discussing opinions about someone else's comments).

After someone finishes their mini-share the group will respond in chorus 'Thanks Cal'; this is intended to build respect.

When it is time for the meeting to close the Chair will run through a few formalities including presenting Clean-time Chips and then everyone will stand up, link arms and recite the Serenity Prayer together.

At the end of the Serenity Prayer it is customary for some people to say, 'keep coming back it works if you work it'.

The meeting is now over, and the attendees may stay and have informal discussion or ask questions of one another before leaving (coffee and tea may be available before or after the meeting.)

WHO YOU SEE HERE

WHAT YOU HEAR HERE

WHEN YOU LEAVE HERE

LET IT STAY HERE



SERENITY PRAYER

I just mentioned the Serenity Prayer, so I should explain what it is.

At the end of meetings and sometimes at the start of meetings too; everyone forms a circle of unity and says the Prayer together.

According to the most common attribution, Reinhold Niebuhr wrote the prayer for use in a sermon, perhaps as early as 1934; it goes like this;

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,

The courage to change the things I can

And the wisdom to know the difference.

If you research the history of the Serenity Prayer, it is fascinating, and many other similar prayers get flagged up as similar examples including my favourite from a Mother Goose rhyme (1695) expressing a similar sentiment;

For every ailment under the sun,

There is a remedy, or there is none,

**If there be one, try to find it,
If there be none, never mind it.**

The prayer became more widely known after being brought to the attention of AA in 1941 by an early member. The co-founder of AA, William Griffith Wilson and the staff liked the prayer, so they had it printed out in modified form and handed around. It has been part of Alcoholics Anonymous ever since and gets used in other Twelve-Step groups too.

LIFE IS NOT A PROBLEM TO BE SOLVED BUT A REALITY TO EXPERIENCE



THE BIG BOOK

The 'Big Book' is the slang name for the book entitled 'Alcoholics Anonymous: The Story of How Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism'.

The nickname was coined due to the large size of the original edition (due to the thickness of paper used).

The Twelve Steps are at the core of the Alcoholics Anonymous programme and are outlined in Chapter 5 'How It Works'.

The Big Book is used at AA, CA, NA and most of the Anonymous groups as they also practice the Twelve-Step programme.

The co-founders of Alcoholics Anonymous, known as Bill W. and Dr. Bob, published the text in 1939 which ultimately became one of the top-selling publications of all time.

It was originally written in 1938 by Bill Wilson and the early group members of Alcoholics Anonymous; the Twelve Steps are the Steps that the founders found helpful in their own recovery from alcoholism.

There are also stories in the Big Book about alcoholics who have been through the recovery process.

**WE ARE NOT HUMANS HAVING A SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE
WE ARE SPIRITUAL BEINGS HAVING A HUMAN EXPERIENCE**



SOBER or CLEAN-TIME CHIPS

A sobriety coin or clean-time chip is a token awarded to members of the various Fellowships to represent the amount of time they have remained clean or sober.

The meaning behind these awards was very important to me; these tokens gave me a sense of pride for staying clean and sober and motivated me to continue.

The chips and coins I received were keyring friendly, so I always had them with me and if I ever felt the desire to drink or drug; I would look at them to remind myself of the progress I had made up until that point and I would ask myself if I truly wanted to throw that away by having a drink or drug.

The answer has always been NO!

These sober and clean-time chips and coins were another recovery tool that I embraced with passion and still today I look at my collection with great pride; it reminds me of how far I have come and how grateful I should be today for my new life.

We have birthdays in the Fellowship as opposed to 'belly button' birthdays which at my age are best left forgotten!

I think rewards in general are great fun and very motivating.

I recognised the tokens from the various Fellowships as mini-rewards for achieving mini-goals and there is no doubt they were extremely motivational in my early recovery in particular.

Better to be chasing chips and coins than chasing the dragon.

Create as much encouragement as possible and be kind to yourself.

This is the AA collection you can aim for in your first year sober and there is an equivalent set available from the other groups including CA and NA.

<i>1 Day</i>	<i>Silver Chip (also known as the desire chip)</i>
<i>30 Days</i>	<i>Red Chip</i>
<i>60 Days</i>	<i>Dark Gold Chip</i>
<i>90 Days</i>	<i>Green Chip</i>
<i>4 Months</i>	<i>Purple Chip</i>
<i>5 Months</i>	<i>Pink Chip</i>
<i>6 Months</i>	<i>Blue Chip</i>
<i>7 Months</i>	<i>Copper Chip</i>
<i>8 Months</i>	<i>Red Chip</i>
<i>9 Months</i>	<i>Purple Chip</i>
<i>10 Months</i>	<i>Bright Gold Chip</i>
<i>11 Months</i>	<i>Green Chip</i>
<i>1 Year</i>	<i>Bronze Chip (1st birthday)</i>

Incidentally if someone ever accepts a chip after having secretly relapsed; it is known as a 'dirty chip'.

NO SUCCESS WITHOUT COMMITMENT



TWELVE TRADITIONS

The Twelve Traditions provide guidelines for relationships between the Twelve-Step groups, members, other groups, the global Fellowship and society at large.

Questions of finance, public relations, donations and purpose are addressed in the Traditions.

They were originally written by Bill Wilson after the founding of the first Twelve-Step group of Alcoholics Anonymous and here they are;

1 Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon AA unity.

2 For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority — a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.

3 The only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking.

4 Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or AA as a whole.

5 Each group has but one primary purpose — to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

6 An AA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the AA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

7 Every AA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

8 Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centres may employ special workers.

9 AA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

10 Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the AA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

11 Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.

12 Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

Other groups rephrase the traditions specific to their programmes but whatever group it is the Traditions protect it as a whole.

THE TWELVE STEPS TELLS US HOW IT WORKS

THE TWELVE TRADITIONS TELLS US WHY IT WORKS



LEVELS OF TWELVE-STEP INVOLVEMENT

My experience with CA, AA and NA has only ever been positive.

From the day I attended my first meeting it was clear that the Twelve-Step programme was on offer, but never did I have to agree to follow it.

Also at individual meetings when the Room was open for anyone to share, I was never and have never seen anyone being put under pressure to participate.

Quite simply, attending a meeting is unconditional; nobody is forced to do a thing, say a thing or agree to a thing; in fact, I see newcomers very often remaining silent and simply observing the meeting unfold at their first visit just to see what goes on.

Newcomers tend to get more involved on their own accord as they attend further meetings. I remember it took me a couple of meetings or so before I became comfortable about attending and getting involved.

As time passed I began to take more interest in the Twelve Steps because I constantly heard other members talking about them and what they were saying made perfectly good logical sense to me, so I wanted to find out more and therefore attended discussion groups and single topic meetings where the Room would talk about one of the Steps and what it meant to us individually.

I really enjoyed listening to various interpretations and opinions of the benefits of the various Steps and that got me sufficiently interested to ask an 18-year clean and sober veteran to be my Sponsor, so he could explain to me how the programme worked for him. I had heard this individual share a few times and really liked listening to him and enjoyed talking to him after meetings, so he was the perfect Sponsor.

As they suggest in the Fellowship; don't look for a Sponsor, listen for one, and that I did.

I began working the Steps and found myself growing in recovery and losing the desire (or need) to drink and drug.

The more I learned about the Steps and other aspects of recovery, the more I was able to share.

What worked for me may not work for others; I never tell others what to do, I just share what I have done and what has worked for me. If I heard someone sharing what worked for them, I was sufficiently intrigued and would take that little nugget of information away with me and try it for myself.

Nobody tells anyone what to do; I think that is when recovery works best.

As a result of working the Twelve Steps and picking up useful recovery information from a variety of Recovery Champions, I was in a position to help others and instead of just being sponsored, I was now sufficiently qualified to be a Sponsor.

All at the same time I was getting involved with general service work, which I thoroughly enjoyed, guided by the Twelve Traditions.

Looking back, I can see the progression I made;

Firstly, I helped myself

Secondly, I helped others

Thirdly, I helped the Fellowship as a whole.

Here's a recap of a typical progression through the Fellowship;

1 Attend meetings

2 Read and discuss literature

3 Find a Sponsor

4 Work the Twelve Steps

5 Sponsor others

6 Service guided by the Traditions.

Now let's look at these in slightly more detail.

**IN THE ROOMS WE USE EXPRESSIONS SUCH AS 'IT WILL PASS'
IF YOU HAVE A NEGATIVE THOUGHT, REMEMBER 'IT WILL PASS'
YOU DO NOT HAVE TO REACT TO IT, BE PATIENT AND 'IT WILL PASS'**



ATTEND MEETINGS

If you think you are unique, I suggest you get along to an Anonymous meeting because I suspect you will hear somebody else sharing what will sound like your own story.

If you want to get clean and sober and learn how and why others have enjoyed living a new life clean and sober then there is no better place than AA, CA, NA or other peer support groups pertinent to your life issue.

As I said earlier it was a revelation meeting Recovery Champions; I honestly did not know these people could be found.

I started working the Twelve Steps just by going and listening to others share their 12-Step experiences.

Just like the expression goes; If we bring our body, our mind will follow.

The Twelve Steps definitely rubbed off on me, as did hanging around with Champions who had a sparkle in their eyes, were constantly laughing and exuded serenity.

By getting involved it was not just extremely enjoyable, I was also benefitting enormously. The more open and honest my comments were,

the faster I was recovering. Members suggest to newcomers like myself to attend 90 meetings in 90 days. The underlying principle to 'ninety in ninety' is quite simply the more meetings attended, particularly in early recovery, the greater the chances of long term recovery.

How could one argue?

Attend as many meetings as possible is exactly what I did, whether I was enjoying a particular meeting or not or whether I was in the mood or not it did not matter, I kept going back. I made a non-negotiable promise to myself that I would go 100 days clean and sober and if at that stage I did not like it, then I could go back to drinking and drugging but not until then. Life was so hellish anyway, it was unlikely to become any worse.

The power of the Fellowship was without a doubt the lifeline to my new clean and sober life. I needed timeout from my alcohol and drug-centred world and had found the perfect place.

**PEOPLE WHO DON'T GO TO MEETINGS,
DON'T HEAR ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS,
TO PEOPLE WHO DON'T GO TO MEETINGS!**



READ AND DISCUSS LITERATURE

I took an interest in the Twelve Steps because of the Recovery Champions around me that were continually sharing their positive stories of recovery with such passion and crediting the programme.

I wanted what they had, it was that simple, so I purchased the 'Big Book' and decided to try to understand for myself what the Twelve Steps were all about and how they could help me turn my life around too.

I really enjoyed hearing and discussing various interpretations with others and listen to what the wise old men had to say.

The Steps were the 12 basic principles identified by the early members of AA that they needed to get sober and stay sober.

I have always been interested in new information, some of which I discard, but more often than not with the 12-Step programme, I retained the information because it was simple, logical and believable.

**GIVE A MAN A PIECE OF FISH AND HE WILL EAT FOR TODAY OR
TEACH THE MAN TO FISH AND HE WILL EAT FOR LIFE**



FIND A SPONSOR

Within the Fellowships we hear others suggesting that we should find a Sponsor.

A Sponsor's role is to share their experience, strength and hope with their sponsored and to help others change without laying guilt on them.

A Sponsor's role is NOT that of a legal adviser, a banker, a parent, a marriage counsellor or a social worker; a Sponsor is not a therapist either.

A Sponsor is a recovered drug addict or recovered alcoholic who is prepared and willing to share their knowledge about their journey of recovery including their understanding of the Twelve Steps.

The more information they have the more we may learn.

When trying to find a Sponsor it is suggested not to look for a Sponsor but to listen for a Sponsor.

The Big Book is your Sponsor too.

And it is customary for females to stick with females and males to stick with males.

There are predators in society and there are no special powers available to the Fellowships for weeding them out. As in mainstream society, predators exist so we must all be careful who we trust. These predators within the Rooms are aptly referred to as Thirteenth Steppers and should be avoided like the plague.

Remember a Sponsor is only supposed to be there to help. They should encourage their sponsored to go to meetings every day, particularly in the early months of recovery and sometimes that will mean the Sponsor picking up the sponsored or meeting at the train station or whatever it takes to encourage them; however, we must take full responsibility for our own recovery and play the biggest part ourselves.

WHEN THE STUDENT IS READY THE TEACHER WILL APPEAR



THE FANATICS

A word of warning; it is remarkable, wherever we go there is always someone who knows what's best for us.

Today we need to learn to decide what we think is best for us and if someone tells us 'that their way is the only way'; grab your wallet and run!

Question everything in life and if someone states that something doesn't work; what they are actually meaning is it doesn't work for them.

For example, I read Allen Carr's 'Easy Way to Stop Smoking' book and he states unambiguously that the only way any smoker can successfully stop smoking is to stop cold turkey.

Well I failed time and time again trying his method and eventually succeeded when I did the exact opposite and used nicotine replacement products and a gradual reduction programme.

What works for one person may not work for another. It is for that reason that I share all the choices available for everyone and let you decide. That is also what I have done with my book 'Quit Smoking for Life'. I accept some smokers may get on better by stopping cold turkey, but I share all options available as the outcome is much more important than the process.

I do not doubt most people handing out advice are well meaning, nevertheless we should think carefully about our actions and question everything, so we understand why we are doing what we are doing.

At the same time, avoid paralysis by analysis; the man with one watch always knows the time but the man with two watches never knows the time.

It was not that long ago we took drink and drugs without questioning our actions, so we know from that experience alone that doing things without questioning is dangerous. We should question other people's opinions and suggestions to make sense of advice before incorporating anything into our lives. That includes everything people tell us at meetings, self-help books, doctors' opinions, newspaper articles and everything put in front of us, right down to opinions about the Twelve Steps.

Questioning opinions and information academically is quite acceptable and in fact advisable. I am a critical thinker, a free thinker and do my own thinking however I still want other opinions and want to hear about other people's experiences so that I can consider and hopefully learn from them. My best thinking wasn't too smart in the past but that was probably a lot to do with the fact I wasn't actually thinking about what I was doing.

Just because someone says something convincingly does not mean we have to believe it, even if that person is expected to know. Compare two politicians who can debate an issue with totally opposite opinions and yet both sound just as plausible as each other.

Sometimes attitude is more important than facts.

Be prepared to meet recovered drug addicts and recovered alcoholics who will tell you that their way is the only way; you cannot recover any other way than their way, it's their way or the highway; we call these people the Big Book Gestapo.

Having said that please understand these people have played a positive role in my recovery but not because I have automatically done everything they have told me to do but because I consider their advice and think about their suggestions before deciding what makes sense to me.

The investigation of ideas is great fun; investigate to learn and then share your findings with others who may benefit from this new information as well.

Most of what the Big Book zealots say does make perfectly good sense but not everything so be cautious and take responsibility for your actions as this may be last chance saloon.

SOBRIETY IS A CONSTANT PROCESS OF UNCOVERING, DISCOVERING AND DISCARDING



WORKING THE TWELVE STEPS

Members of the various Fellowships often talk about ‘working the Steps’; this is the process by which a member will work through each of the Steps individually in an effort to understand the basic principles of recovery intrinsically linked with the programme.

There is not a set timeframe for doing this; however, the most successful people I met continually attended meetings as they progressed through the Steps to that they could share their experiences and garner the wisdom, support and encouragement of others.

Working the Twelve Steps is literally the heart and soul of the programme. The best way to work anything is to arm yourself with as much information about the subject as possible and at the same time do your own thinking. What I mean by that is don’t just agree with something you hear or read just to be a people pleaser; think about what is being said and decide whether or not you understand and agree. Do not be afraid to ask questions until something squares up and makes sense; and don’t be afraid to question anyone’s opinion.

If the round peg doesn’t fit through the square hole, don’t accept it until it does.

At the same time Recovery Champions who are a long time clean and sober must be doing something right, so it is reasonable to expect them to be wise and have valuable assets for others to tap into.

There is no better way of succeeding, at anything in life, than copying someone who has already achieved what we want, so having a mentor or Sponsor should be of great benefit.

There is no need to reinvent the recovery wheel when it already exists so rather than trying to decipher what the Twelve Steps means, all on your own, may I suggest you do four things if you are going to work the Steps;

1 Read literature including the Big Book

2 Go to meetings and listen to Recovery Champions sharing

3 Watch 12-Step Champions sharing on the Champions Cinema at www.frog.net

4 Find a good Sponsor and work the Steps under their experienced guidance.

I think those four ingredients will make sure you get the best information available and succeed with your journey of recovery. I do not think it is wise to put all your eggs in the one recovery basket so if someone tells you that all you need is a Sponsor, I disagree.

Members who go to meetings but refuse to work the Steps are losing out in a very valuable recovery tool and to quote the Big Book; 'Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path'.

People who genuinely want to recover do more than just want; they take action.

Many find the action required from the Twelve Steps to be very beneficial for their recovery.

KEEP COMING BACK; IT WORKS IF YOU WORK IT; AND WORK IT; BECAUSE YOU'RE WORTH IT



SPONSOR OTHERS

Sponsorship has two purposes; to help yourself and to help the person you sponsor.

It is important to understand; we sponsor others to help ourselves too.

Remember Bill W's effort to help others get sober; he did not manage very well but his wife Lois reminded him that during his first six months of touring around hospitals, bars and houses, trying to help others, he had helped the most important person, himself because he had remained sober all that time.

A Sponsor is in no way responsible for the recovery or relapse of people they sponsor; they are only responsible for the effort not the outcome.

The primary goal of a Sponsor is to share their experience, strength and hope and by doing so they help themselves and hopefully help the sponsored but there are no guarantees.

Recovery Champions help others in order to help themselves; if you help someone up to the top of a hill, you get there too.

The slogan we use in the Fellowship clearly sums it up;

In order to keep it, you have to give it away.

**WHAT WE GIVE; WE KEEP
WHAT WE SPEND; WE HAD
WHAT WE KEEP; WE LOSE
THE SECRET TO LIVING IS GIVING**



SERVICE GUIDED BY THE TRADITIONS

General service work is designed to benefit the Fellowship as a whole. Every organisation needs rules or byelaws and the Traditions are the fundamental rules that govern the Twelve-Step programme.

Once members of the various Fellowships are in stable recovery they are very welcome to get involved in service.

I really enjoyed doing this and was involved in outside meetings that my home group took to some locked institutions; the people there were so grateful to see us each week, so it was very worthwhile and very rewarding.

Service work is important to ensure the survival of the Fellowship as a whole.

WE HAVE A DISEASE THAT TELLS US WE DON'T HAVE A DISEASE



MY FIRST MEETING

Looking back, I realise how crucial my first meeting was and as dramatic as this may sound it was probably the difference between life and death.

If I had not liked it and had not gone back, I'm sure I can safely say it would have led to my death, simply because I would have continued to drink and drug on suicidal levels.

Thankfully, I thoroughly enjoyed my first Cocaine Anonymous meeting and did not hesitate to return to another meeting the next day.

I remember my first meeting like it was yesterday, when someone said the most magical words to me, 'there is a solution'.

And today I can confirm there certainly is a solution because I am now many years clean and sober.

However, before I walked into my first meeting I believed the only solution was death.

And worse than that I did not believe my first meeting was going to be a positive experience.

I was reluctantly travelling to my first ever Anonymous meeting; I had already made up my mind that I did not belong there; I was not the same as the others: I had a different type of problem.

In fact, the only reason I was going was simply to prove to my loved ones that there was no hope for me and if the Rooms couldn't help, nothing could, so leave me alone.

But I couldn't have been further from the truth.

Practically nobody looks forward to going to their first meeting and looking back I recognise I was fearful because of the feelings of shame, dread and despair.

I have since found out that it wasn't just me but the majority of individuals that attend their first meeting do so reluctantly.

The reason most people go to their first peer support meeting is because they have promised someone they'll go or because they have been directed to attend by a judge, an employer, a therapist or an addictions treatment programme.

I was only going to appease family members, to be honest and I wore my best suit to let the others know I used to be important!

Our attitudes condition and determine much of what we see and hear and how it is interpreted so on that basis it is even more remarkable that I enjoyed my first meeting as much as I did.

The reason I had such a positive experience was I listened to a top table share and the fellow sounded like he was telling my story and I promise anyone if they stick around long enough, they will hear someone telling what will sound like their own story, but for me to hear it on my first visit was a godsend.

Coincidences are just God's way of remaining anonymous.

In general, and with only a few exceptions the newcomer is looking for evidence that they are in the wrong place, with the wrong people, and taking the wrong approach to their drinking or drugging issues by attending a meeting.

Nobody wishes to be an alcoholic or drug addict.

I was certainly looking for reasons to justify my desire not to be there and not to return.

If you are considering attending your first meeting, please try to be more open-minded than I was. I know it is easy for me to say that now, but I can promise you that meetings are fantastic places to make new friends and I certainly didn't have many left during my peak of drinking and drugging; camaraderie was very important in my recovery.

The meetings will let you know that you are not alone.

It is an act of great courage to walk into your first meeting. Many people with severe drinking or drugging issues simply lack the courage to take this first step under any circumstances.

There is a famous old English recipe for ox tail stew that begins; firstly, kill an ox!

Well the first step in my recovery felt as overwhelming as having to kill an ox but it was actually easy in hindsight and without a doubt the greatest step I took in my subsequent recovery journey.

The best solution to feeling anxiety associated with attending our first meeting is to call the contact number and arrange to meet a member before the meeting who will accompany us.

DON'T QUIT 5 MINUTES BEFORE THE MIRACLE HAPPENS



THE TWELVE-STEP PROGRAMME

Drug addicts and alcoholics arrive at the Fellowship out of desperation and if they are anything like me they are completely unaware that a programme exists.

I went to the Fellowship because of despair from drug addiction and alcoholism and only heard about the Twelve-Step programme after I arrived.

The heart and soul of the Fellowship is the Twelve Steps which spell out the basic principles to recovery that AA and other Fellowships promote.

The programme was developed from the experiences of the early AA members and has been adopted and adapted by many other Fellowships including CA and NA.

The programme involves admitting we are drug addicts or alcoholics and are powerless over these substances.

The programme encourages us to examine our past errors and make amends if possible. We learn to live a new life where we think differently and develop a new code of values and behaviour.

Our recovery can lead us to help others that are still suffering from the same addictions.

Basically, we learn to help ourselves first and then to help others.

The Twelve Steps deal with emotions as well as other areas of mental and physical health.

Generally, from Step 1 to Step 12 are honesty, faith, surrender, soul searching, integrity, acceptance, humility, willingness, forgiveness, maintenance, making contact and service.

The entire spectrum of emotions is part of the programme; however, that list may offer a flavour of what the programme aims to promote and achieve.

Ultimately the programme helps us rid the worst overriding emotion of all, **FEAR**.

We are all free to understand and interpret the programme slightly differently although the basic philosophy is the same for us all.

The basic philosophy teaches us to address negative emotions responsibly and gain positive emotions naturally.

Many people find the miracle of sobriety by working the Twelve Steps and since nothing else has worked for them, many believe that the Steps are mystical and magical and as a result these same people fail to search for and identify the underlying principles that make the Steps work.

I have also met people in the Fellowship who are not prepared to look outside the ethos of the Twelve Steps to further enhance their recovery; as far as some people are concerned recovery starts with the Twelve Steps and ends with the Twelve Steps.

That is up to them, but it is certainly not the way I recovered; I recovered by exploring as much recovery information as possible including the Twelve Steps.

If I had stayed completely blinkered to the Twelve-Step programme, then I would have missed out in the depth of recovery I have found however there is no doubt in my mind that the Twelve Steps created the foundation on which I have built my recovery.

The miracle occurs for some people because working the Steps allows them to use powerful principles of recovery.

I have dug beneath the Steps on a personal basis and would now like to share my understanding of the basic principles of recovery that they taught me.

What follows is a very brief overview of what the Steps mean to me.

I would recommend, to anyone that wants to experience the benefits of the Twelve Steps, to go back a couple of pages and follows the four things I did when 'Working the Steps'.

Please understand the following chapter is only my understanding of the Twelve Steps. This is only designed to help dip your toes into the programme; there is a reservoir of other information, opinions, explanations and interpretations which I would encourage you to discover by visiting 12-Step Champions on the Champions Cinema at www.frog.net.

THE PROGRAMME BRINGS HEALING AND RESTORATION



INTERPRETATION

Here is a flavour of the Twelve Steps from my point of view;



STEP 1

We admitted that we were powerless over our addiction, that our lives had become unmanageable.

In layman's terms; I admitted that I did not have the power to only have one drink or one drug and as a result of my addiction I had thrown my life upside down.

Let me make an important point before I start talking about my individual interpretations of the Steps; the Steps are numbered sequentially for a reason and should be worked in that order. It is also recommended that Step 1 be worked thoroughly before going on to Step 2 and so on.

This recommendation is captured in a slogan we hear in the Fellowship; First things First.

The consequences of not working the Steps in the proper order are captured in the concept of a 'two-stepper'; a person who works the first Step and then skips a series of other Steps.

People are more likely to relapse if they have not put in place a solid foundation of recovery and unless a two-stepper is doing something else on top of the Twelve Steps they may leave gaps in their foundations and therefore leave themselves vulnerable by skipping Steps.

The Steps are a fantastic source for assembling vital building blocks of recovery and information; in fact, many of my recovery friends who are long term clean and sober continually work the Steps and after working through them, go back to Step 1 and start all over again.

As we grow and recover we do generally change perspective so by working the Steps for a second time and a third time we are guaranteed to find fresh meanings from them and continue to grow in our recovery journey.

For me Step 1 focuses around one main principle; I admitted I had a serious problem with drug addiction including alcoholism.

By admitting I was powerless over my addiction simply meant I was unable to control my intake if I had my first.

What I mean by 'powerless' is explained fully in Chapter 1 of this book under the heading 'I have an Addictive Personality and become Powerless

after My First' so please feel free to go back and read that again if you want to be clear about my understanding of the meaning of 'powerless'.

That said I do also want to make a very important point about my exact understanding of 'powerless over our addiction'.

I do not believe I am powerless over drugs/alcohol or Jaffa cakes unless I have my first; then I simply cannot get enough and cannot stop regardless of the consequences.

I do not dispute whatsoever that I am powerless over drugs/alcohol, but I disagree with some of my recovery friends who say their powerlessness drives them to take their first.

That certainly is not my experience and not the experience of the vast majority of my recovered friends. After my first it set something in motion and from that point onwards, on the majority of occasions, I was completely powerless and could not say no.

I am not telling others how they should or shouldn't interpret the Twelve-Step programme as that is their prerogative but I for the life of me cannot square up the circle that they are driven to drink and drugs whether they like it or not and somehow this compulsion has been removed by a God or Higher Power.

One therefore must conclude that if a supernatural entity did not exist it would be impossible for them to recover. And I know many Recovery Champions who do not believe in the supernatural but have recovered from serious drug addiction/alcoholism so how could they have done that based on that interpretation?

Of course, it comes back to the basic principle of the Twelve Steps that every man, woman and dog has the right to interpret whatever they want and while I do not have the right to question other people's interpretations I do have the right to highlight how illogical an interpretation is from my side of the street and that is why I wanted to share that example with you.

And my life had become unmanageable.

I understood this to mean quite simply my life had become uncontrolled.

And it had in many ways; I had no idea what I would do from one day to the next or where I would end up.

I didn't make my brother's wedding for example.

I had no control over my life on a day to day basis; I could not make plans or if I did that did not mean I would stick to them. I did not take care of my basic everyday responsibilities and therefore did not manage my life; my life had become unmanageable.

I had to accept my battle with drink and drugs was lost and that my predisposed addiction would never reverse itself, so I would never be able to drink or drug safely ever again; quite simply I could not have my first. Recovering drug addicts who hold onto the idea they may be able to drink or drug again normally in the future have not fully accepted their powerlessness and are susceptible to relapse. We've never been able to drink or drug in moderation in the past so how the hell are we going to suddenly have this new talent for the future?

It was only by fully accepting this powerlessness over drink and drugs that I was able to move forward effectively and begin my recovery journey with tremendous optimism.

The principle that we shall find no enduring strength until we first admit complete defeat is the main taproot from which our whole society has sprung and flowered.

Step 1 is about honesty and is the first step to freedom.

STEP 1 FOR ME IS ABOUT HONESTY



STEP 2

We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

In layman's terms; I recognised there were external sources of information, wisdom, experience and guidance that could offer me strength, hope and direction which could help me regain control of my life.

Step 1 was completely logical and made so much sense to me personally; I understood Step 1 as a statement of fact which described my experiences down to a T.

I am pretty sure had I not gone to an Anonymous meeting and had I visited a professional therapist instead, that would also have been the first step with them too.

Step 1 gave me enormous confidence in the Twelve-Step programme however I immediately felt resistance to Step 2.

I had got off to such a flying start with Step 1 and then in the blink of an eyelid, I was being told it's time to leave planet Earth and find a supernatural Power that could restore me to sanity.

How ironic as I was currently trying to get back to planet Earth!

Then as I scanned down the remaining ten Steps I noticed God being mentioned on numerous occasions, so I was really feeling uncomfortable.

Not because there may or may not be a God but because I felt I was being told I must believe in the supernatural to continue with the programme; a

kind of blackmail to a certain extent if I want to recover from drug addiction and alcoholism.

Of course, today I know I do not need to believe in God to recover but don't forget when I first entered the 'Rooms' I was a very sick drug addict, on my hands and knees, knocking at death's door and didn't need much of an excuse to do a U-turn and walk away.

I was not looking to join Sunday school; I was looking for solutions to drug addiction and alcoholism.

Incidentally, I know it does not say a 'supernatural' power greater than ourselves but that is how I immediately interpreted it and whether or not I was right there is no disputing if we believe in God we believe in the supernatural, so I was right to think the programme was based on believing in the supernatural – whether that started at Step 2 or Step 3 was the only question.

However, I quickly learned the Twelve-Step programme need not be based on the supernatural and nor should it have to be; so, I want to offer you my interpretations of the Twelve Steps that does not have to involve God, whether He is a great ally or not. My interpretations follow good sound logical recovery steps that can be applied whether you are an atheist alcoholic, an agnostic drug addict or whoever you are.

Before I go on any further let me share with you the definition of supernatural from my Oxford dictionary;

(Of a manifestation or event) attributed to some force beyond scientific understanding or the laws of nature.

That means from ghosts to Gods, if they exist, are supernatural.

And I hope there is an afterlife and a God or many Gods, but I don't know if there are or not and neither do you. It's up to every one of us what we choose to believe but it was completely unreasonable in my opinion for anyone or any programme to suggest to me that if I didn't believe in the supernatural I couldn't recover from drug addiction.

Anyway, AA and the other groups say it is not a religious programme it is a spiritual programme.

I'm sure many people immediately think of spirits and ghosts and the supernatural when spiritual is mentioned but I assume AA and the other groups are meaning spiritual as in non-supernatural and the best definition I know for that is being at one with the planet we live on and respecting all other life forms including the other animals, plants and fellow humans that we share our planet with. Spiritual to me is respecting and taking care of our wonderful planet and recognising the right for all other entities to live freely and have their own opinions and ideas. Being

spiritual involves loving; at least that is my understanding of spiritual in this particular case.

That said people who 100% believe in a God can appear happier and healthier than others in my view; however, there are equally powerful interpretations of the Twelve Steps that make perfect logical sense without having to believe in a God, which I share with you throughout this chapter.

And all at the same time hoping there is a God but if there is not, we can clearly still recover.

If there is a God I believe He offers unconditional love and unconditional recovery to all, whether they believe He exists or not.

Basically, in Step 2 we become open to the possibility that there is someone or something out there that is able to provide a way to help us solve our problem of drug addiction.

Here are my three main possibilities of someone or something; I see these combined as my Higher Power; I hope they all exist but just in case one or two of them don't exist I focus on all three options for my own recovery's benefit;

1 A God

2 My subconscious

3 Logical and evidence based recovery information

Now let me explain my understanding of these three potential sources of 'power greater than myself' and by the way that three-pronged package is my Higher Power;

A GOD

I believe God or a Higher Power both mean the same thing normally however Bill Wilson wrote in Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions that you could make the AA group your Higher Power. I also know several Recovery Champions whose HP is the Big Book or their home group so for me it would have made more sense to say God or an alternative source of intelligence.

And that is what I really mean by 'basic and logical recovery information' as that must come from an intellectual source like the Big Book or other literature or from listening to Recovery Champions sharing their positive recovery experiences.

As far as I'm concerned, a Higher Power is intended to be an intellectual power source that is scientifically explainable opposed to a God which would also be an intellectual power source but not scientifically explainable or as my dictionary describes – supernatural.

It is up to AA, CA and NA members to come to their own personal understanding of the meaning and significance of a Higher Power, but I

will tell you one thing; a HP definitely is not and cannot be an empty milk bottle, a radiator, a door knob or an empty chair!

If someone does not want to believe in a power greater than themselves then that is up to them, but I've heard some people suggest that a HP could be a dumb object like the examples above and that quite frankly is degrading the credibility of the Fellowship and listening to such garbage could easily scare away a newcomer.

If someone doesn't believe they need to tap into new intelligence, then they are free to carry on doing what clearly isn't working for them but that is the point of this Step; 'restore us to sanity'.

The Fellowship saved my life thanks to the Recovery Champions that I met and listened to, thanks to my interpretations of the Twelve Steps, thanks to the wealth of recovery information shared in the Big Book and hopefully thanks to God too who answered my prayers.

But my recovery has nothing to do with empty milk bottles, radiators, door knobs or empty chairs!

GOD; Good Orderly Direction.

* * *

MY SUB CONSCIENCE

It is perfectly feasible in my opinion after I pray for help and subsequently receive that help, that it is not necessarily God answering my prayers but my subconscious working overtime.

Of course, it is much more exciting and romantic to think God is present, He likes me and is helping me, but I must accept other possibilities and the power of my subconscious must be a reasonable alternative explanation to why so many of my prayers are answered.

I hope it is God but that may not be the case.

While most of us will be aware that we have something called a subconscious mind there are very few of us who know much more than that about it, let alone how to harness it. That is certainly the case with me however I know from first-hand experience that incantations, affirmations, 'the words we use', 'what we focus on' and many other tools I shared with you in the last chapter work and I believe the subconscious takes a lot of credit for that.

The subconscious has two main functions; firstly, to attract to us conditions and circumstances according to our predominant thought patterns.

Remember the mantra 'What we focus on, we attract'.

Our subconscious mind is not limited in any way and will forever attract to us according to our thoughts; it has no volition of its own and will simply act upon what it is fed.

Further to this our subconscious mind will act upon any request or instruction we give it. Any thought that is repeated over and over again will take an imprint within the subconscious; it cannot distinguish between what is real and what is imagined.

This is why visualisations, affirmations and repeated images can have such a powerful effect in our lives.

By doing the exercises in the previous chapter we are creating images within ourselves which the subconscious then acts upon as I explained, so it is entirely feasible to suggest that our subconscious mind can do much more lateral thinking and clever stuff than we could possibly understand.

If we continue to focus on getting clean and sober, whether through reading, listening, chanting or praying, our subconscious can play a major role in delivering that outcome so for me it was wise to keep all my recovery options open.

* * *

LOGICAL AND EVIDENCE BASED RECOVERY INFORMATION

If an individual does not believe in the supernatural they have nothing to apologise for and nothing to feel ashamed about. However, they must then gather recovery information, strength, hopes and experiences from undisputable sources.

Here are my intellectual power sources for basic and logical recovery information;

Peer Support Groups

Recovery Champions

Therapists

Recovery books and magazines including The Big Book

The Champions Cinema (www.frog.net)

General self-improvement books, workshops and seminars and other recovery events.

If you relate the entire basket of recovery resources above as a Power greater than yourself that can restore you to sanity, you cannot go wrong in my opinion.

STEP 2 FOR ME IS ABOUT HOPE



STEP 3

We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

In layman's terms; I agreed to accept help from others and follow their advice.

I remained focused on the recovery resources which I continued to receive empowerment from.

1 A God

2 My subconscious

3 Logical and evidence based recovery information

I did not know which of the three sources above supplied me the most power, but I was not concerned because I knew my life was improving and I was recovering.

I saw the three intellectual power sources, collectively, as my Higher Power, after all a HP is simply the source of expert advice, guidance, courage, strength and hope and I received all those benefits by tapping into these three resources collectively or any of the three individually.

Step 3 was suggesting I accept help and I focus on the process or the actions; have faith and leave the results to take care of themselves.

In other words, find sources for expert opinions on what we need to do to get clean and sober and then follow the advice.

No matter how stupid I thought it was I always reminded myself 'stupid and sober' is better than 'smart and drunk'.

In Step 1 I admitted 'I can't'

In Step 2 I recognised 'someone or something else can', and

In Step 3 I agreed to let them, by following their instructions.

That didn't seem hugely controversial and actually removed an enormous amount of pressure from me because I was always trying to do things my way and create specific outcomes and here was a chance to let go and just see what happened.

I just focused on mixing the suggested ingredients together; and the one thing I knew was mixing up a whole bunch of healthy ingredients was going to produce something a whole bunch healthier than I currently had, whether God was involved or not.

I hope God is involved; I think my subconscious is involved; I know the Twelve Steps, Meetings, Sponsor, Recovery Champions, the Big Book and other literature are definitely involved.

What I was currently doing was certainly not working and so it was an easy decision for me to accept help and advice from others who had already successfully followed another path and got clean and sober.

Step 3 was asking me to follow the advice of Recovery Champions and leave the outcomes to my Higher Power; to live in the reality where I am not in control of exactly how things will turn out in my life.

I easily bought into that and so made intelligent choices based on the suggestions and advice from my Higher Power sources and took the

appropriate actions recommended and then I let the results take care of themselves.

I was getting excellent results by doing what was suggested, and all without worrying about the outcomes and because of that success I was encouraged to do more and more (hmmm where have I heard that before; more and more?).

Addicted to recovery!

If someone believes in God, they may say leave it to God to take care of the results (let go, let God); the common denominator is 'let go and see what happens' and if your experience is anything like mine you will end up with a room full of surprises.

There is a Third Step Prayer that some people use as follows;

God, I offer myself to Thee-

To build with me

and to do with me as Thou wilt.

Relieve me of the bondage of self,

that I may better do Thy will.

Take away my difficulties,

that victory over them may bear witness

to those I would help of Thy Power,

Thy Love, and Thy Way of life.

May I do Thy will always! Amen.

STEP 3 FOR ME IS ABOUT FAITH



STEP 4

We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

In layman's terms; taking as much time as we need and using complete honesty, make a thorough list of all the good and bad traits we have.

After working the first three Steps I was into the programme.

I had also agreed to accept advice and do what was suggested so when Step 4 came along it was time to walk the walk and do what was being recommended.

Step 4 was about examining myself critically and start discovering who I really was and what made me tick; what were my strengths and what were my weaknesses?

I needed to make an inventory of my strengths so that I could build on them and a list of my weaknesses so that I could address them.

It was very important for me to focus equally hard on my good moral codes as well as my failings.

I'm not talking about details of actual incidents; I'm talking generally.

For example, if I had lied then I must look at the reasons why I had that characteristic not the actual incidents one by one.

Examples of character defects include;

Anger, arrogance, argumentative, attention-seeking, bitter, bossy, bully, cheater, closed-mindedness, co-dependency, controlling, deceitful, dishonest, envious, fearful, grandiose, greedy, hateful, hostile, inconsiderate, jealous, lying, resentful, selfishness, self-pity, self-seeking, short-tempered, stubborn, thieving, unfriendly, unrealistic, vindictive and vulgar.

This Step is not about a character self-assassination because we want to list our character assets too; our assets and liabilities (strengths and weaknesses); what strengths of character are we proud of and where did we let ourselves down.

Examples of character assets include;

Agreeable, attention-giving, concerned, dependable, disciplined, forgiving, friendly, generous, giving, good listener, helpful, honest, loving, open-minded, rational, realistic, selfless, thoughtful and willing.

This Step made sense to me; in fact, I think this is a good idea whether someone is chemically dependent or not; this is an exercise that anyone can benefit from.

Put down the magnifying glass and pick up a mirror.

Incidentally I believe 'moral' in this case means good or bad; however, what is good or what is bad is completely subjective and it is entirely up to each person to decide what does and what does not violate their code of morals; so you may or may not agree with my examples of character defects and character assets.

It is not for others to decide what our code of morals should be and what is good or bad in our world; it is only for us to decide if we fell short of our moral standards at any time.

Some people's moral compass may be the 7 deadly sins or 10 commandments but others including me just have a good sound set of moral principles (in my opinion) that have evolved naturally.

I needed to find out what motivated me to break my moral standards and what caused me to hide or ignore certain things; then I needed to be willing to change by challenging any misperceptions or mistaken beliefs that I held.

As I said earlier in the book, the one thing I do know about an alcoholic or a drug addict is; what kind of thinking or set of rules got them here is not the same thinking or set of rules that will get them out of here.

This Step required complete openness and honesty.

Alcoholics and drug addicts are great at blaming others for our problems; at least I certainly was, so Step 4 is designed to get us to start taking personal responsibility for our thinking, our decisions, our actions and therefore our outcomes or consequences.

If an alcoholic or drug addict is having a problem staying clean and sober it is generally because they are thinking and acting in a way that doesn't work, so Step 4 is about shining a bright light inside the cave of our minds and observing all sorts of scary things crawling around inside and addressing these issues and exterminating these bugs or character defects. In the Fellowship we refer to character defects as destructive thoughts, feelings and behaviours; which are generally mistaken beliefs, painful feelings and self-defeating behaviours.

I am not going to attempt to discuss all the possibilities and reasons for these character failings existing or how to reverse them but generally speaking they need addressed although some will naturally disappear if we stay clean and sober. However, other negative feelings and behaviours are things that will not and were the source of our original pain that formed a massive part of why we self-medicated in the first place.

If we want to feel better when we begin our recovery journey, we must start thinking better, acting better and relating to others better.

Remember drink and drugs allowed us to feel better without having to think better, act better or relate to others better; it's time to live life face on.

If we don't change, we will either;

- Relapse
- Substitute drink and drugs for other equally compulsive and destructive behaviours
- Live a life of mental torment; and we do not want any of those three options.

Step 4 is for our benefit however I think it is vital that anybody working Step 4 does it under the supervision of an experienced mentor, Sponsor or counsellor.

I think it is equally important to fully understand what Step 4 is all about before starting it or trying to complete it so do some research about Step 4 beforehand; go onto the Champions Cinema and listen to 12-Step Champions sharing their understanding of Step 4; read Twelve-Step literature (there are a lot of guidebooks available including the Big Book), talk to Recovery Champions at peer support groups and find a Sponsor that can help you.

Remember you will have a lot of plus points going for you that can act as a solid foundation for your recovery; don't just focus on the negative stuff

that we're so good at; recognise all the positive stuff too, we need to remind ourselves that we are good people who have only temporarily gone bad.

And write it down because that will force you to work this Step, day after day and take the necessary action required to change the negative feelings, thoughts and behaviours that would normally have made you reach for a drink or drug.

Step 4 is about getting to know who you are and what makes you work best and some of the reasons that made you drink and drug in the past.

STEP 4 FOR ME IS ABOUT COURAGE



STEP 5

We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

In layman's terms; it's time to start the recovery therapy.

Step 4 and Step 5 go hand in hand; we made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves during Step 4 and now we are going to share our findings with a confidant/e in Step 5.

This Step is really the path out of isolation as far as I'm concerned; as I often hear people in the Rooms say; Step 5 will set you free.

Not surprisingly, chemical dependency creates tremendous isolation; at least I certainly remember feeling completely alone.

During Step 4 I had written a list of my character defects and character assets and now it was time to discuss my findings with another person.

For me that person firstly needed to be a long-term clean and sober individual whom I trusted 100% and also needed to have had personal experience with Step 5.

I chose my Sponsor, but it could just as easily have been a professional counsellor.

And be warned; at the Fellowship just because we say, 'everything we hear here should stay here' doesn't mean it always does, so be very careful who you trust.

Step 4 is a very personal stepping stone of recovery and the purpose of sharing our findings with another person is not a confession, although weekly confessions do appear to cleanse the soul for particular groups within society; it is simply a fact that confronting reality in dialogue with another human being makes it much easier to come to terms with what has happened and who we have become through our addictive experiences.

Psychiatrists understand if you just lie on the couch and talk things out while they sit there in a non-judgmental way as best they can, it has a kind of healing power. Also in the Big Book it says confess your sins, one to another, in order that you may be healed. There is something about taking things out of the darkness and bringing them into the light that gives us the power to come to terms with certain things and the ability to change them for the future.

Sharing painful and personal past memories with another caring person who can empathise with us can provide a great sense of relief.

Very often a Sponsor will have had similar experiences and will talk about them too which can really help us and stop us feeling totally alone and unique. When we hear that others have done similar things as us, we can see that we belong in the same group and don't need to remain isolated and we can also recover if they have. We may not have terminal uniqueness after all.

By sharing our 'defects' with another person we are 'admitting' to ourselves at the same time, and whether we believe in God or not, I think it is reasonable to assume if he does exist He will already know about our 'wrongs', so I felt simply by sharing to another person meant everything else took care of itself.

Step 4 inventories are not a litany of sins; they're an honest evaluation of what we have learned about ourselves and our destructive side, traits, tendencies, characteristics and behaviours.

We refer to this in the Fellowship as humility; which means we know who we are and what made us behave in certain ways.

By the way, humility is completely different from humiliation, so don't get confused.

My Step 4 inventory reflected my deepest thoughts, feelings and beliefs about myself and other people. It described the issues that were creating pain and discomfort within me. It exposed the reasons I felt shame, guilt and fear. And quite frankly I did not really want to discuss it with anyone but had agreed to follow instructions in Step 3, so this was a huge test in many ways.

Anyway, after identifying my mistaken beliefs and character defects, I then discussed my findings with another human being (my Sponsor) and listened to his feedback.

It's self-defeating to keep these things a secret, as we say in the Fellowship; we are only as sick as our secrets.

The reason is keeping secrets keeps us in isolation.

It is self-defeating to hide important problems, keep painful memories a secret and hide our feelings and beliefs from others.

And let me repeat — taking a Fifth Step is a critical act of trust; it is of utmost importance to identify a trustworthy person in whom we can confide because if we don't completely trust this person we cannot be completely honest.

Remember we're giving this person the opportunity to hurt us and that is scary.

There are some people that we should not share intimate secrets with, so don't choose a person with short-term clean and sober time or someone with long-term clean and sober time if they do not appear emotionally balanced.

Select someone you trust, admire and respect who will not judge you or gossip and will honour the confidences you are sharing with them.

Some people do not want to hear the Fifth Step of other members so if you ask someone and they refuse, do not take it personally. The exact nature of our wrongs is very important to understand; for example, I know an ex-professional golfer who was thrown out of the profession for cheating. There is no disputing that he cheated, and he does not dispute it either.

However, people jump to a quick judgment when they hear that type of story and say things like 'quite right he got a lifetime ban'. However, if you knew that this poor fellow got physically slapped by his father if he arrived home with a golf score above a certain number, couldn't you imagine cheating in those circumstances too? I certainly could and while this individual was labelled a cheat, I say the **EXACT** nature of his wrongs was completely natural and understandable and therefore forgivable, he was only trying to protect himself from physical abuse; it wasn't about winning golf trophies or even beating other golfers, it was to stop his father beating him, so give yourself some slack where you deserve it and forgive yourself at the earliest opportunity.

Other examples include drug addicts lying or stealing to get their next fix but that does not mean they are liars and thieves by nature so Step 5 is about understanding **EXACTLY** why some of us created an unacceptable set of moral standards with a view to forgiving ourselves and understanding why drink and drugs cannot play a role in the future of our lives if we are to live a new life with a higher set of moral standards and show people including ourselves who we really are and what we stand for.

STEP 5 FOR ME IS ABOUT HUMILITY AND INTEGRITY



STEP 6

We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

In layman's terms; I am changing my life and developing my human potential.

Step 6 is about living with a conscious awareness of the character defects discovered in Step 4 and discussed in Step 5 with the desire to remove them.

Step 6 taught me that I was often driven by my character defects to do things that were in fact of little value to me or indeed of detrimental value long term.

I interpreted this Step to read slightly different as follows;

I was entirely ready to have my Higher Power help me remove these defects of character.

If you recall my Higher Power is made up of a partnership of three potential components;

1 A God

2 My subconscious

3 Logical and evidence based recovery information

From the supernatural to the evidence based, I can't leave things to chance today and I have always believed that it is I who needs to do the legwork. If you disagree and want to sit back and wait for God to intervene then good luck but you are taking a chance because He may not exist and even if He does I do not think this Step is actually meant that way; He has certainly never intervened in that way for me.

The God of my understanding wouldn't and doesn't do that.

The God of my understanding wants me to learn the human way and use that experience to improve.

If He exists and is prepared to intervene in such an instrumental way, then why didn't he intervene and remove the character defects I had which made me drink and drug and destroy my life for a number of years in the first place?

I'm not saying God does or doesn't exist on that basis; what I'm saying is regardless, He doesn't operate that way with me and I've taken full responsibility for my life today and that includes my recovery from drug addiction which includes changing my thinking, removing character defects, reviewing my standards, setting new rules and controlling my behaviour.

Whether God exists or not, I am going to work relentlessly at removing my character defects the tried and tested scientific way and if God happens to be in the background sprinkling fairy dust on me to help, then a huge big thank you very much God but I certainly don't intend to sit back and hope things change; I'm going to make sure they do.

Step 6 also states that 'we were entirely ready'; well I do not believe anyone can change unless they are entirely ready, so I wouldn't argue with that.

Being entirely ready for me was firstly believing I could change, and on top of that believing it would be worthwhile.

In a nutshell; wanting to change and being willing to change.

If you don't yet have those two ingredients for recovery, watch and listen to Recovery Champions on the Champions Cinema (www.frog.net) sharing their amazing stories of recovery and you will find those ingredients I'm sure.

The main point I'm making here is; I was entirely ready to make positive changes to my life and become a better person and by constantly reminding myself of the pain my character defects caused me, my loved ones and others, I was more than willing to remove them; in fact, I was anxious to remove and replace them as soon as possible.

And to be entirely ready to have my HP help me remove my character defects I needed to fully understand why I had these flaws and what benefits I may receive from them so that I completely understood exactly what I needed to let go of.

Character defects are not all bad; they can have upsides as well as downsides. They can give instant gratification even although they generally create long term suffering.

For example, some people like feeling sorry for themselves, it's an excuse for self-pity parties! Others feel powerful and an adrenalin rush when they are angry. Some people enjoy keeping resentments; why would they let others off the hook after everything they've done to them.

Don't forget to dig two graves if you carry resentments.

Some folks love seeing the looks of amazement on other people's faces when they tell them all sorts of made up stories.

Others think the more jealous they are, the more they must love that person, so whatever the reason for character defects and whether or not they do have an upside or not we must be completely honest with ourselves and our confidant/e and be entirely ready to remove these shortcomings before we can move onto Step 7.

Incidentally, during Step 4 when I listed my character defects, I also wrote beside each one any upside I had to be prepared to give up as well as the downsides I wanted to get rid of.

STEP 6 FOR ME IS ABOUT WILLINGNESS



STEP 7

We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

In layman's terms; it is now time to stop talking about our shortcomings and start doing something about them; take action and make change happen basically.

Incidentally a character defect or a shortcoming is the same thing as far as I'm concerned.

In Step 4 I made a list of my character defects (and assets); then during Step 5 I discussed my findings with another person (my Sponsor).

Step 6 then asked me a powerful question; was I entirely ready to change? Assuming I was, Step 7 is about beginning that process of change.

In my opinion, Step 7 was telling me that I needed to recognise and accept that I could not live exclusively from my own individual strength and intelligence, but I had to look outside my frame of reference by seeking help from my Higher Power, in solving my problems.

Of course, we do have the power to change some things in our lives, the second part of the Serenity Prayer asks for 'the courage to change the things we can'.

We may firstly need to receive better information than we currently possess; however, we do also need courage to change things when we have the power within to do so. And it is our responsibility to change certain things if we are going to fully recover.

In AA, recognising the need for help is often called 'surrendering' but I don't believe that surrendering means giving up responsibility.

It doesn't mean a God of our understanding or our Higher Power will make the changes for us either.

Pray for potatoes but be willing to pick up a hoe.

I pray to my Higher Power and at the same time seek advice from my Sponsor, other Recovery Champions, professional counsellors, literature and the tools for change I shared in a previous chapter; and at the same time, I hold a deep belief that I can solve any problem and of course I am willing to do so.

Self can't save self so external help is definitely required.

After identifying a specific character defect; I ask God to give me strength to remove it or better still to replace it with the exact opposite character

asset. At the same time, I continue to seek out expert advice on removing that particular defect.

It was good for me to completely understand the pluses and minuses of every actual character defect so that I knew why I had what I had and what I had to let go of.

I kept praying for courage, strength and the wisdom to correct these flaws; whether it was my subconscious power, help from my Sponsor or divine intervention, I was not hugely concerned, I just wanted to live a new life with a new set of moral standards that would make a positive impact in my new life and all at the same time help me to stay clean and sober.

I also believe that by simply remaining clean and sober, standards naturally improve all by themselves, so things were looking and feeling very positive at this stage of my recovery.

Step 6 for me was about giving up the character defects that were making me miserable in sobriety.

Incidentally, I know I say pray to my Higher Power or ask God; there is no right or wrong way in my opinion to pray, it is simply up to every individual to decide how to communicate with external sources. What I would say is I strongly believe that by praying/asking out loud I get better results and I know others who say they get even better results still when they fall onto their knees to pray.

If you choose to pray it is an individual thing but I love the expression 'The Camel';

we begin the day on our knees and end the day on our knees and go 24 hours in-between without a drink!

My prayers do not need to be any more complicated than 'please help me not drink and drug today' and then at night 'Thank you!'

There is a Seventh Step Prayer that some people use as follows;

My Creator,

I am now willing that You should have all of me,
good and bad.

I pray that You now remove from me
every single defect of character which stands in the way
of my usefulness to You and my fellows.

Grant me strength, as I go out from here,
to do Your bidding; Amen.

It is up to each one of us to form a bedrock upon which a happy and purposeful life can be built and I personally discovered that turning my character defects into character assets was the perfect foundation to build from.

STEP 7 FOR ME IS ABOUT ACTION



STEP 8

We made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

In layman's terms; I will do all I can to make up for the ways I have hurt others.

The first seven Steps involve internal change and now Step 8 is about starting to repair external things that we damaged because of our drug addiction and alcoholism.

Step 8 states that in order to start repairing the damage we must make a list of all the people we have harmed and become willing to make amends to them all.

That does not mean when we are writing out this list that we must be willing to make amends at that moment so just focus on the list to begin with.

Making amends means offering a sincere apology and an honest attempt to fix what we have broken, if possible. We must acknowledge that we have hurt others and we are genuinely sorry for what we did. We must be willing to do what is necessary to put things right but that does not automatically mean others will let us. The main thing is we must be willing to clean our side of the street. If we stole something we must be willing to pay it back or if we damaged something we must be willing to do whatever is in our power to fix it; that's what making amends means.

Step 8 is one of the easiest Steps to understand; firstly, we must make a list of all the people that we harmed and then secondly, become willing to make amends.

First things first; Step 8 is about writing a list of all the persons we have harmed in any way and becoming willing to make amends.

Then Step 9 is about making the actual amends however only when we feel the time is right. Step 9 is done over time but let's not get too far ahead of ourselves here, let's just focus on writing out a list of all the people we have harmed for starters.

I opened a word document and divided it into three columns;

In the first column I listed all the people I had harmed

In the second column I listed what I had done to harm them

In the third column I wrote down what I thought I needed to do in order to make amends.

My Sponsor told me to make a second list of all the people who had harmed me.

Two columns this time;

Who hurt me?

What they did to harm me?

My Sponsor told me that I needed to identify the people that had hurt me so that I would be able to forgive them, that's right!

I had to be willing to let others off the hook; we forgive others so that we can get free of the blaming and resentment that can distract and destroy our own lives.

We don't forgive other people in order to help them; we do it to help ourselves.

In the 'Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions' we are told to do this in actual fact.

Forgiveness is the antidote to resentment and anger.

Amends means to 'mend', 'fix' or 'make better'; we have to fix the damage we caused wherever possible but in Step 8 we are not fixing it, we are just becoming aware of what needs fixed and what we think we will need to do to fix it.

We do however need to examine the consequences of making amends to discover if doing so would further harm us or others.

Sometimes we could make things worse for ourselves by trying to fix them and frankly I would not recommend we do that.

Steps 8 & 9 are a two-part process just like some of the other Steps.

Firstly, make a list of the people we think we harmed and at least be willing to make amends; in other words, 'want to clear things up with others'.

We do Step 8 as if there were no Step 9.

We do not even think about making the amends, just concentrate on exactly what Step 8 says which is to make a list and to become willing. The main thing this Step does for us is to help build awareness that one Step at a time, we are gaining new attitudes about ourselves and how we deal with other people.

Then in Step 9 we begin the process of making such amends providing it will not harm us or others by doing so.

STEP 8 FOR ME IS ABOUT FORGIVENESS



STEP 9

We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

In layman's terms; I wanted to fix my wrongs the best I could.

Step 9 completes what I started in Step 8.

After I made a list of all the people I had harmed I then reflected carefully upon each instance with a view to making amends, providing it would not do anyone more harm than good.

This contrasts with what I did in Step 8 when I included everyone who I was willing to make amends to. However, in Step 9 as I prepared to execute this Step, I used a high degree of discretion regarding who I would make amends to and when this should happen. I put the list in chronological order in which I intended to make amends and I did not try to arrange to see anyone but the next person because I knew I would need time to recuperate from the stress of each encounter before being ready to make my next amends.

I hear some people suggest we must make amends even if it means going to jail; well my understanding of Step 9 is simply about seeking forgiveness not seeking punishment.

Making amends is supposed to be for our benefit as it can help to remove the guilt, shame, and remorse we may feel for our past wrongdoings. Of course, I hoped to help others in the process.

I hear some people declaring it doesn't say 'except when to do so would injure me' it says, 'except when to do so would injure them or others'; well my interpretation is I am included in 'others' so if by making amends could make matters worse for me I made a calculation not to make those amends directly to the actual person but to seek forgiveness from other sources.

Making amends may include paying back debts and doing and saying things that could help heal the damage that we have caused.

We need to have the proper attitude with Step 9.

Firstly, it is good to have forgiven both ourselves and the people we harmed regardless of anything they might have done to us.

Secondly before we communicate with the other person we need to have a good idea of what we intend to say and what we hope to accomplish.

Most importantly we must state our apology without assigning any blame to the ones we harmed.

We must act responsibly as we attempt to make amends; we should think through all the possible consequences so that we will not be caught off guard and be provoked into reacting badly because others may not accept our apology.

It may be a good idea to have a rehearsal with a Sponsor, therapist or friend beforehand and ask them to react in all sorts of different ways so we can be prepared for all possible scenarios.

We need to be open to any response we get from the people we've injured and be ready to accept their response without becoming angry.

We are not there to manipulate them into forgiving us.

We are only there to talk about our own behaviour and show contrition.

We cannot control the way others react and it is also a good idea not to take the other person by surprise, so let them know the purpose of the meeting is to make amends.

They also have the right to refuse to meet at this time so if that happens leave them an open invitation to talk whenever and wherever they might feel comfortable at some point in the future if they like — be humble.

My attitude was, if I do my best to try and fix something and cannot, then I was prepared to turn it over and let it go; fortunately, that did not happen I'm pleased to report.

However, if you try to make amends and someone will not allow you to do so, it can be painful, so you must be in a strong place of recovery before taking those chances otherwise you could find yourself tempted to relapse.

Be prepared for someone telling you they hate your guts and don't care if you are sorry or not and just want you to get out their life and stay out!

You cannot control others, but you can make sure you have strong support around you before embarking on Step 9.

We don't necessarily make amends to obtain forgiveness; when we make amends, we try to make reparations but sometimes the damage is too severe to do so but this doesn't mean that trying to make amends didn't work because you should still feel free after offering an unreserved and sincere apology; you can now let go and stop punishing yourself emotionally for what happened.

This is what making amends is all about; paying the price to break free from the past once and for all.

Making amends produced a sense of peace and wellbeing for me; I felt more centred and balanced, my shame and guilt diminished, and that constant nagging pain disappeared.

This is all part of a strong recovery programme that keeps me clean and sober today.

STEP 9 FOR ME IS ABOUT SINCERITY



STEP 10

We continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

In layman's terms; become self-aware/monitor ourselves; keep a running inventory of our thinking, feelings and actions on a daily basis with a view to building on our strengths and improving our weaknesses.

Steps 10, 11, and 12 are sometimes called the maintenance Steps because they repeat many of the points outlined in previous Steps and emphasise the value of continuing to 'work the Steps' on a day-to-day basis.

Step 4 was about correcting character defects and Step 10 is about keeping them in check as an ongoing commitment to our programme of sobriety.

The programme is about improving our general character for life and most successful people, whether they have experienced drink and drug issues or not, do daily inventories; they plan and then they review.

Many people who have achieved greatness have kept a daily journal; this is not just a tool for recovering drug addicts and alcoholics.

By confronting ourselves on paper we are forced to consciously examine our decisions, behaviours and reactions and that gives us the opportunity to improve and reach greatness too.

The Twelve Steps are a plan for a new and improved life and until things became automatic I had to keep close tabs on my thinking, my emotions and my behaviour.

If I was going to change, I had to learn to judge the quality of these three departments of my life.

Demonstrate perseverance by continually practising the skill of self-appraisal and demonstrate integrity by improving our thinking, emotions and behaviour every day.

CAN-I; Continually Aiming for Never-ending Improvement.

Correcting our mistakes should be firm but loving, the same way we would correct a child we love but don't be hard on yourself.

Everyone makes mistakes but in the case of recovering drug addicts and recovering alcoholics, spotting an error and stopping that particular thought, emotion or action is the trick if we want to learn from the experience, grow stronger and stay clean and sober.

Today I monitor my moods, emotions and actions, particularly the ones like boredom, anger, fear, frustration, resentment and depression that used to make me reach for a drink or drug.

These emotions can undermine anyone's best efforts to recover if we let them manifest, so we must not; that's the purpose of Step 10, kill the monster while it's still little.

If we monitor our moods and emotions, we can start to think about why we might be feeling that way and take action to resolve any issues in a responsible way.

I look out for negative thoughts, obsessive thoughts, recycling the past and other kinds of thinking that can put me in a mental corner.

I see the way I am getting on with others as a good indicator of my wellbeing, so I continuously monitor all my relationships.

How I handle money is an important indicator of my inner state and so is my general orderliness like timekeeping, personal presentation etc.

I monitor both my mental and physical balance and do not abuse my body any more. I take very seriously the food I consume, stay hydrated, follow an exercise programme and obtain the rest and sleep I need.

Step 10 has become something I now do habitually, and it shows in my attitude and relationships with people, places and things.

Step 10 for me is about being aware of every single department of my life and having practised self-awareness now for a while I have developed an automatic alarm system that signals to me when something is not right and through past experiences, I now know instinctively what it probably is and how to make a constructive correction.

I understand some may think Step 10 is talking about promptly admitting any wrongs we may have committed towards another person, but it also includes any wrongs within me including my thinking, my actions, my feelings, my moods and emotions.

So promptly admitting to myself means not to ignore or deny something isn't quite right and needs identified, analysed and resolved immediately and in a positive way.

If it does involve someone else, then I try to rectify the mistake if it's serious.

Step 10 for me is about keeping a clear conscience and a clean slate so that I never have a reason to hide behind unhealthy mind-altering substances or activities as a solution to deal with things.

Remember this is a programme of progress, not perfection; nobody is perfect and we all make mistakes; however, if I focus on rectifying any mistakes before I go to sleep that night then I always feel much better in the morning for it, pretty simple but not always easy.

Step 10 for me was about getting into the habit of living a comfortable problem-free life; practise, practise and practise until this discipline becomes automatic. Be kind to yourself and if you're not, do a Tenth Step immediately because it is a mistake not to be!

STEP 10 FOR ME IS ABOUT PERSEVERANCE AND INTEGRITY



STEP 11

We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

In layman's terms; continue to develop our human potential.

As I've made clear throughout my interpretation of the Steps; this programme for sobriety, serenity and happiness is not exclusive for people who believe in a God.

It may help if you do but who can say for definite.

A question some people ask themselves is 'Which will probably have better consequences for me; believing a God exists or believing a God does not exist?

Many people find it helpful to believe a God does exist whether He does or not; what is there to lose?

If you recall my Higher Power is made up of a partnership of three potential components;

1 A God

2 My subconscious

3 Logical and evidence based recovery information

I hope all three components exist and contribute to my recovery, but I have no evidence they do; however, I have got evidence at least one of the three exists and contributes to my recovery because I am many years clean and sober (start date: 5 Nov 2005).

I also know that talking aloud seems to make things happen in my life; whether you want to call that 'praying' or 'thinking out loud' is up to you.

When we pray we are talking to God and when we meditate we are listening for His answer; I like that whether it is a fact or not and it works for me.

The act of asking for strength, direction, wisdom and guidance definitely brings me results, whether that is for scientific reasons or due to supernatural powers I do not know. I am just extremely grateful for the strength, direction, wisdom and guidance that must come from somewhere; Amen.

STEP 11 FOR ME IS ABOUT INTENTIONS



STEP 12

Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to addicts, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

In layman's terms; while continuing to develop our own recovery; we actively help others who cannot control their use of drugs and alcohol.

Firstly, let me remind you that 'spiritual' for me means, my thoughts, my feelings, my attitudes and my values.

Not something supernatural that might be a spirit that lives within us that continues life after the human experience is over; I hope a spirit like that does exist but please do not confuse the two interpretations here.

A spiritual awakening doesn't happen by magic therefore. If spirituality is real, then it is governed by laws and principles and these can be learned by anyone. The Twelve-Step programme teaches how to become more spiritual.

A spiritual awakening from my point of view was about clearing the wreckage of my past and getting back in touch with that quiet but powerful voice within me that connects me with my true self and my values in life.

AA describes a 'spiritual awakening' as a radical transformation or change in perception, attitude and personality.

On that basis I think anyone who thoroughly works the first eleven Steps must experience a 'spiritual awakening'; at least I felt a changed person by Step 12; I was thinking differently, acting differently and getting different results.

That in a nutshell is the message I carry to those still suffering who are in a dark corner because of drugs or alcohol and are looking for a way out.

As we say in the Fellowship, give it away once you've got it.

In life it is best to be a giver rather than a taker and very often if you give, you get much more back; that is certainly how recovery works for me.

Help others to the top of a hill and you get there too.

Share your experiences of recovery with others and you remind yourself what you also need to hear.

There is no richer emotion than the sense of contribution; to feel that what you have said or done has touched or helped another person is the ultimate gift in life.

What we give; we keep

What we spend; we had

What we keep; we lose

The secret to living is giving.

STEP 12 FOR ME IS ABOUT CONTRIBUTION



Recap of the 12 Steps;

- 1 We admitted that we were powerless over our addiction, that our lives had become unmanageable.
- 2 We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
- 3 We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
- 4 We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
- 5 We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
- 6 We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
- 7 We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
- 8 We made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
- 9 We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
- 10 We continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
- 11 We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
- 12 Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to addicts, and to practise these principles in all our affairs.



SUMMARY

The Twelve-Step principles are general enough that we can interpret them in many different ways and as time passes and we grow in recovery, we may continually refresh our interpretations.

I hear ardent followers of the Twelve Steps say it is not a religious programme, it is a spiritual programme, and while I have interpreted the recovery plan on that basis I can't help but to be puzzled that God can be mentioned or referred to eight times within the Steps and in the same breath we're told its not religious.

It may be partly religious if God exists, but I have substituted my Higher Power where God, His or Him appears in the Steps, to demonstrate it is

not necessarily religious; recovery is available to anybody whether they believe in a God or not.

I hope that does not cause offence but if it has, see your Sponsor!

Remember if you don't believe in Him, He still knows about you and my understanding of God is an unconditional, all loving entity that will help us regardless; remember the single set of footprints.

As the various Fellowships will testify, rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path.

Thoroughly following our path means copying what long term Recovery Champions have done and that includes working each Step thoroughly to the best of our ability and in the correct order.

I have only outlined the general principles of the Steps as I see them; there is so much detail within each Step to explore and I recommend people do so.

The Twelve Steps offer sound advice and recovery tools that I have used constructively to help create a solid foundation to living a clean and sober life; however, there are many other channels of information for self-improvement which I explored over and above the Twelve Steps and I'm very grateful I did so.

My best advice is to get as much as you can from the Twelve Steps but don't stop there.

Recovery for me is like learning and we all know we can never learn too much, so don't listen to anyone that tells you the Steps is all you need. At worst learn lots of other stuff and throw it away if you find you don't need it.

Don't just agree for the sake of an easy life; people pleasing ended at the doors of the Fellowship for me and that benefitted me enormously. I didn't set out to disagree with anyone or anything; I just wasn't prepared to believe anything unless it made sense to me.

Being fully understood and accepted by everyone is not the be all and end all of life. I take full responsibility for my own life today and don't get told what to do; sure, I listen to suggestions, but I find out for myself what works and what doesn't work.

THE PROGRAMME IS AN OPERATOR'S MANUAL FOR GOOD SPIRITUAL HEALTH



THE AA PROMISES

- If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half way through.
- We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness.
- We will not regret the past or wish to shut the door on it.
- We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace.
- No matter how far down the scale we have gone; we will see how our experience can benefit others.
- That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear.
- We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows.
- Self-seeking will slip away.
- Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change.
- Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us.
- We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us.
- We will suddenly realise that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Are these extravagant promises...we think not?

They are being fulfilled among us; sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly.

They will always materialize if we work for them.

CHAPTER 4

GENERAL

RECOVERY ISN'T FOR PEOPLE WHO NEED IT; IT'S FOR PEOPLE WHO WANT IT

Just because I've got my life in order today does not mean other people should do the same; the truth is for years I needed help, but I had better ideas.

It wasn't until I hit rock bottom that I was a willing participant in recovery. Today I understand why people in recovery say to drug addicts and alcoholics; 'I wish you desperation'!

Of course, after experiencing the miracle of recovery I want to tell people who are struggling that there are solutions and providing there's no preaching, there is no harm in that; however recovery isn't for people who need it, it's for people who want it.

If everyone who needed recovery attended meetings we would have to rent out stadiums, not rooms.

Generally, it's only the desperate or the driven who become willing enough to do what we did, to get what we got.

If you are struggling and cannot be convinced to go to a meeting, please let me ask you to at least go to the Champions Cinema (www.frog.net) and watch Recovery Champions sharing their amazing stories.

If you do that, I bet you'll get the drive for change and the belief that you can do it too and it'll be worthwhile.

Don't wait until you are desperate enough for a new life or until you hit rock bottom because you may not get that far.

RECOVERY IS A REALITY



FINDING A SOLUTION

In early recovery we learn that before we can work out a solution we firstly need to completely understand the problem. That may seem obvious but many of us assumed our problem was drink and drugs. We soon learn that drink or drugs are generally not the primary problem and using drink/drugs was a reaction or symptom to our underlying problem.

Drugs may not be the underlying issue, but they sure develop into another major problem, compounding our whole situation.

If we lay down drink and drugs we will be left with the problem that made us use in the first place and that is the primary reason or problem needing to be solved. I hope that makes sense, although ironically it is called secondary treatment.

The primary question is; why do we use unhealthy mind-altering substances in the first place and what are we using drink/drugs to escape from? We must investigate and find answers because only then are we going to get closer to finding a lasting solution.

Solve those mysteries and deal with the underlying issues and you have a very good chance of succeeding on your journey of recovery.

Replace the mask of mind-altering substances with a happy and content reality. If we find serenity, we find peace and that means we have probably found the solution.

WHAT I NEVER HAD I CANNOT FEAR TO LOSE



TOP TEN PROBLEMS

When I started using drink and drugs heavily, I blamed my top ten problems but by the time I was halfway towards killing myself, my top ten problems had become problems 11 to 20.

I got a brand-new top ten list of even bigger problems because of drink and drugs. Drink and drugs do not solve problems, they create problems; they are the problem.

GET YOURSELF UNSTUCK NOW



SORRY

If I have to apologise for something once it is perfectly acceptable.

If I have to apologise for the same thing twice it is unacceptable.

If I have to apologise for the same thing three times it is a lie and I cannot really be sorry.

At that stage sorry is no good, it is not an excuse.

Just because I could get away with it doesn't mean it's okay; it certainly is not okay.

Truly sorry means I will not do it again; it doesn't mean, forget about it until the next time.

Treat others the way you would want and expect others to treat you.

BE A GIVER AND NOT A TAKER



PHYSICAL DEPENDENCY AND MENTAL OBSESSION

When a drug addict/alcoholic has any quantity of drink/drugs in their system, they physically crave for more and more. Add to that a mental obsession and it doesn't take much imagination to work out the temptation is extremely powerful to continue using.

We 'used' to live and lived to 'use'.

Looking back now it's obvious that I did not feel good after using; I just did not feel so bad and there is a distinct difference; regardless, nothing else mattered except drink and drugs. My life became controlled and ruled by drink and drugs mentally and physically.

Drugs became my God, followed very closely by my dealer of course.

The first stage or primary recovery is very tough because it involves a serious physical come down intermingled with attacking depression. I was told to have faith as it would pass and pass it did.

There is no middle ground to come off cocaine, although tranquillizers may be prescribed otherwise it must be 'cold turkey', an old expression once used only to describe coming off heroin unassisted.

When I went through withdrawal I slept a lot and every time I woke up I felt slightly better which was all the encouragement I needed to continue. After a week or two of being clean and sober I began to feel the reducing sense of desperation to use which indicated the worst was over, at least physically.

Then the mental battle began — the battle to fight the mental obsession. The mental battle is the long-term battle that I needed to win to create lasting change. Stopping is relatively easy, staying stopped is the trick.

Immediate action and effort is required plus daily support is essential.

Friends, family and the Fellowship became the most important 'Fs' in my life at this stage.

I went to support groups on a daily basis, sometimes two or three meetings in the same day and attending meetings was perfect groundwork in helping me reverse my mental obsession.

There were other recovering drug addicts/alcoholics setting out on their recovery journey too which I found very comforting. I shared my pain with them and they did likewise; it really helped me.

Recovered drug addicts and alcoholics shared with me what to expect and how they dealt with certain situations, which again I found very encouraging and very helpful.

My obsession didn't disappear immediately, and I knew to **STAY STOPPED** I needed to change my thinking fast; it was a matter of urgency!

I had become 'sick and tired' of being 'sick and tired' so I concentrated on the mental tools and skills shared in Chapter 2 and ultimately, those tools worked and were responsible for my mental obsession disappearing. What an amazing milestone that is on the road of recovery and I urge you to dig deep and find the courage and strength to reach that life-changing junction.

Some recovered drug addicts/alcoholics tell me that God removed their mental obsession. They must be very lucky because I had to work very hard at ridding these mental obsessions myself. I explain quite scientifically how I removed my mental obsession in Chapter 2 and urge you to do the same.

By the way, I do not doubt for a moment that my Higher Power put these tools in front of me, but I had to do the work.

GOD MAY HOLD THE TORCH, BUT WE MUST DO THE DIGGING



I KNOW I HAVE ANOTHER DRUNK IN ME, BUT I DON'T KNOW IF I HAVE ANOTHER RECOVERY IN ME

A shiver shot down my spine when I first heard this quote.

During my early stage recovery, it would have been easy for me to pick up a cold bottle of beer or glass of cabernet sauvignon at a nice restaurant.

And my crazy thinking even tries to convince me that I could handle it.

It's been weeks since I've had a drink, or I can drink normally now, my head may say but that is what we in the Fellowship call 'stinkin thinkin'.

Sure, I might get away with a tippie now and again but inevitably I would end up drunk because that's what happens to alcoholics.

Every alcoholic has another drunk in them, but have they got another recovery in them?

If the fires of alcoholism were lit once more I don't know if I would ever be able to contain them again, so for me, it was best to assume this was my last chance.

Getting clean and sober took a lot of work and very good work and today I have no such thoughts because I do not want a cold beer or glass of wine; however, during my early recovery it was vital that I understood 'stinkin thinkin' would be a part of the recovery process which I had to be prepared for and overcome.

Thankfully, I was fully prepared and ignored the crazy thoughts when they occasionally did surface.

ALCOHOLICS AND DRUG ADDICTS ARE NOT BAD PEOPLE TRYING TO BECOME GOOD; THEY ARE SICK PEOPLE TRYING TO BECOME WELL



IF YOU CAN'T LEARN TO LAUGH AT YOURSELF; WE'LL DO IT FOR YOU

Everything was so serious when I first entered recovery.

At the same time, I was understandably overwhelmed with the problems I had created;

Life shambolic

Homeless

Class 'A' drug addict

Alcoholic

Unemployed and unemployable

Separated

Business lost

Broke

It's no real wonder that I didn't find things very funny.

But the people in the rooms did!

I regularly sat in amazement as one person after another shared what seemed like horrendous experiences about things they had done or what had happened to them, while the entire room roared with laughter.

What was wrong with these people I thought to myself?

The way people were able to laugh at themselves and make fun of the things they had done seemed incredible to me.

I was filled with secret shame of my own experiences, stories and thoughts and was much too self-conscious to share my experiences.

Never mind laugh at my stories, I was sure if people knew what I had done they would banish me from the Rooms leaving me with nowhere to go.

Once again, I felt trapped but the deeper I got into my recovery journey and as I worked my way through the Steps, the more my life started to improve and soon I found myself loosening up. I started identifying with other people's stories and soon found myself laughing along with everyone else.

I started to see the funny side of my own warped behaviour and crazy thinking, including some of the situations I had got myself into.

As my recovery strengthened, I developed compassion and empathy for myself which allowed me to laugh again.

What a gift that has been.

LAUGH YOUR WAY TO HEALTH



SUICIDAL FEELINGS

We have literally been killing ourselves with drink and drugs for years, whether we have been aware of it or not.

Put simply, we have been slowly but surely committing suicide.

Some of us will not realise that, despite many of us truly believing at one point the only solution from alcohol and drug addiction was death.

The subconscious can work in mysterious ways.

Many people in the Fellowship state they tried to commit suicide on occasions.

I always ask myself, what went wrong? Did they not climb high enough before jumping off or did they not stay under the water long enough or did they not completely cut through the artery; what went wrong?

Apologies if I do not appear very sympathetic but many of us recovering drug addicts and alcoholics still have the ability and desire to switch into self-pity mode and I have no time for myself in that mode so why the heck should I be all ears for someone else?

Don't get me wrong, I understand that lending an ear may be all it takes to help others at times but we all have our limits.

I spent about ten months in what I thought was suicidal mode but today I recognise I was not suicidal and I really did not want to die otherwise surely, I would have.

The truth is, I just did not want to live the life I had created for myself; there is a big difference.

It took some time into recovery before I truly accepted that I had in fact created this awful life for myself; blaming others was only an excuse, and suicidal pranks were just attention seeking, or a cry for help when I think back with complete honesty.

Having said that, the principle of suicide being an option at the back of my mind offered me the comfort of knowing that if all else failed and life continued to spiral out of control, there really was a way out.

Suicide rates from chemically dependent people increases by about fifty times so if someone who is full of drugs or alcohol suggests they are contemplating suicide, then I take them completely seriously, but if someone in recovery tells me about all the times they tried to commit suicide I ask them; what went wrong?

SUICIDE IS A PERMANENT SOLUTION TO A TEMPORARY PROBLEM



FEELING GOOD or NOT FEELING BAD

Feeling good or not feeling bad are two entirely different feelings.

Some people may think they feel good when they use alcohol or other mind-altering drugs but in fact most are only moving from an emotionally bad place to an emotionally numb place.

That is not a sustainable solution.

Think of it as if you were driving your car and suddenly the oil warning light started flashing. Do you think removing the bulb would be the solution? Of course it wouldn't be the solution; stopping and filling the oil tank with oil would be the only real solution?

When I was full of mind-altering substances, nothing else seemed to matter and frankly, I didn't care about anything else.

I was only escaping reality and to make long term sobriety a possibility I had to learn to remedy negative feelings naturally by addressing them and dealing with them instead of hiding from them.

By using mood and mind-altering substances we are only putting a problem on hold or removing the 'oil light warning bulb'; the problem will grow arms and legs and we will end up with much bigger problems than those we are trying to avoid – in the case of the lack of 'engine oil', the car engine will eventually blow.

Dealing with negative emotions is a simple living skill that most people either do possess or should possess.

Dealing with life on life's terms; in the long run it is the most rewarding and, ironically, easier option.

My key secret is I've learned to recognise feelings and emotions and discovered how to use them to my advantage.

Emotions are only signals for our benefit, whether we feel positive or negative about them. Problems simply don't disappear with drugs; they are only put on hold.

Emotions and feelings are early warning signals telling us we must react to something immediately and in a positive way.

For example, if we deal with something that is causing us fear, the fear disappears.

Make life living clean and sober a joy and remember, the thought of doing something is ten times heavier than just doing it.

AN EXCUSE IS JUST A REASON STUFFED WITH A LIE



EMOTIONS

We are the source of all our emotions and at any moment we can create or change them.

So why don't we?

Well, for most of us, feeling bad is natural but we need a reason to feel good. But we should not need a reason to feel good; we can quite simply decide right now to feel good.

In fact, if you are clean and sober right now, you should feel great.

All emotions serve us including negative feelings and emotions. Emotions we think are negative are actually just calls to action. For example, if I feel frustrated it means I believe things could be better and that is a call to action letting me know there is something I must do immediately to improve. This negative emotion or warning signal is a gift if understood and reacted to properly. So how about from now on, when you receive a negative emotion, you welcome it and treat it as a call for action and react positively until it is resolved.

RECOVERY IS AN INSIDE JOB



THAT FREEDOM FEELING

My understanding of freedom is the utopian position of 'not being controlled', whether by drink, drugs, gambling, cigarettes, chocolate, a person or even just a bad habit like nail-biting.

Freedom is magical and needs to be experienced to be fully appreciated.

A feeling of freedom which will keep growing to new levels every time we can unlock another set of mental, emotional or physical handcuffs.

Initially, when I laid down drink and drugs I felt the first sense of freedom.

Then during my recovery journey, one day I woke up and realised I no longer WANTED or NEEDED mind-altering substances; that was an entirely new level of freedom, a feeling that must be experienced to believe, a bigger rush than any drug ever gave me.

Many of my recovered drug addict friends smoked or still smoke.

Personally, I hated being a smoker and for many reasons but most of all because I was still an unhealthy drug addict.

A smoker is a nicotine addict and therefore a drug addict and I did not want to fit the description of a drug addict in any shape or form so I stopped smoking on 14 October 2006.

Today I can say, I don't drink, I don't drug, and I don't smoke; what a buzz that gives me. What an amazing statement for me to be able to make.

I am experiencing a level of **FREEDOM** that is beyond belief; it's truly serene and more amazing than I could ever have imagined. I am so grateful to be in this position and the feeling of **FREEDOM** is one truly magical reward for being totally clean today.

I truly feel blessed and this same feeling of **FREEDOM** awaits anyone who **WANTS** it.

EVERY DAY'S A FRIDAY FEELING



IT'S NOT OLD BEHAVIOUR IF I'M STILL DOING IT

We may be prepared to let go of things that are causing more pain than pleasure; like drinking and drugging but are we prepared to get rid of character defects that are in fact of little value to us or indeed of detrimental value long term.

Living clean and sober really is the easier and softer way for me but I still had a lot of old ideas and behaviours (character defects) that occasionally still appeared to work, so letting go of them was not so easy.

At meetings I would hear Recovery Champions say, 'the result is nil until we let go absolutely'.

I never really understood that at first; I mean I was getting results; I was clean and sober, what more do you want!

But there were also times in early recovery when I was intensely unhappy, irritable or in self-pity mode and wanted a drink/drug, so I really needed to change these particular feelings, and fast if I was truly determined to remain clean and sober long term.

The further my recovery journey travels, the more I understand the importance of changing my thinking and my reactions to other people's behaviour.

I had to stop getting irritated or allowing myself to have self-pity parties.

I had to remove as many character defects as I could to distance myself from drink and drugs (I guess that's what Steps 6 and 7 are all about) and that million-dollar question; was I entirely ready to change?

I think recovering drug addicts and alcoholics must be very careful with their emotions; at least I recognised if I got angry, hurt, depressed, irritated, sad or even simply bored it was natural for me to turn to the bottle or some other substance.

Alcoholics and drug addicts are normally very sensitive people and use negative feelings as reasons to escape reality.

This was certainly the case for me and had been for such a long time that I had formed a rock-solid habit, so now I needed to break this habit to recover further.

I tried to remove character defects where possible and if not possible, at least stop things manifesting out of control, like anger.

Some negative emotions cannot be avoided like sadness, disappointment or being insulted; I see them as 'calls to action' when I must ask myself questions to resolve them.

Recovery for me is about facing my emotions and trying to understand why I am experiencing particular emotions and dealing with them as quickly and as responsibly as possible.

Face life on life's terms.

Although I must confess I am not very good at it, but I am continually improving with practice.

I try not to hold grudges or carry resentments.

Ironically if I do carry resentments or grudges it is only me who suffers; resentment is when we pour a cup of poison for our enemy, but we drink it instead.

I try not to judge or control others.

I try to smile and laugh more.

I try not to take life too seriously.

I am not great at keeping anger or frustration at bay; I am not a Sage however I am aware of that and keep trying to improve.

I continually practise at being more centred and balanced, particularly when challenged or threatened in some way; I have a long way to go and may never master my emotions but at least I no longer drink and drug as a result of them and will keep aspiring to improve.

I still need to do a lot of work, focusing on emotional improvement and the way I respond to various feelings and experiences.

I know if any of my emotions get turbulent I am at my most vulnerable and while I do not believe I will ever use unhealthy mind-altering substances again I still welcome the thought of increased peace in my life so in that respect I am still trying to improve and get rid of some old behaviours.

WHAT LOOKS LIKE A PROBLEM MAY BE AN OPPORTUNITY



ALCOHOLISM, DRUG ADDICTION AND DEPRESSION

Scientists have long observed a link between drinking and drugging and depression. A study of alcoholics and drug addicts has found that heavy drinking/drugging and depression affect each other reciprocally, creating a self-perpetuating pattern of unhealthy behaviour with negative effect.

Alcoholics and drug addicts are more likely to grow depressed over time than those who don't drink or drug and people who have persistent depressive symptoms are more likely to increase their drink and drug consumption than people who are not depressed. The cycle of depression may be especially pronounced in young people because as a group they are more likely than adults to experience depressive symptoms and to mistakenly take up drinking and drugging, thinking it is a way to self-medicate. Over time, tolerance to alcohol and other drugs develops and therefore it requires more to achieve the same effects. Drug addiction and alcoholism is also linked to a range of other issues from memory loss to suicidal thoughts.

Alcoholics and drug addicts who begin recovery are more likely to experience depressed mood and if they are not properly prepared for this temporary mood change they may relapse so be prepared for the possibility of short-term depression in the early stages of recovery.

Our brains rely on a delicate balance of chemicals and processes; alcohol and other drugs can disrupt that balance and affect our thoughts, feelings and actions so be prepared for a slight emotional rollercoaster of a ride in early stage recovery and ideally don't do it alone.

FAMILY AND FRIENDS WORRY ABOUT ME BECAUSE MY HEALTH IS SUFFERING



REHAB SHOULD BE UNDERSTOOD

When I hear about the next celebrity who has checked themselves into rehab it really makes me cringe and I do not think they send out the right message to people.

There seems to be this underlying message that they've popped into rehab as a kind of spur of the moment decision to sort out their drug or alcohol issues and they'll be back shortly.

I think rehab should be understood.

Rehab does not fix us; it can however present us with valuable recovery tools to take away and incorporate into our new life; just like the Twelve-Step programme which is full of valuable ideas and principles of recovery from addictive behaviour, but nobody walks into an AA meeting and walks out recovered.

Recovery takes time, it took me one year to fully recover and I know some people who never fully recover (they never really change their thinking).

Of course, rehab centres can safely supervise detox/withdrawal symptoms and an in-house medical team can prescribe medicine and monitor that awful and sometimes dangerous detox journey, but I am not talking about

preliminary recovery. I am talking about, in my case, recovering from class 'A' drug addiction and alcoholism which meant stopping using drink and drugs and never wanting to use them ever again.

That's recovery to me and even if I did have a spare £250k to spend and extend my six week stay for a complete year that would still not have allowed me to fully recover in the same amount of time that it took me because recovery is not about being locked away from drink and drugs; it's about living a fulfilling life without drugs or alcohol despite being unavoidably surrounded by them 24/7 as everyone is these days.

In my opinion it is impossible to fully recover from drug addiction/alcoholism in isolation whether that is rehab, jail or locked up anywhere because we must learn to live side-by-side with drink and drugs as they will always be there.

I chose not to use them because I no longer needed them or wanted them which cannot be learned in theory; recovery must take place in the real world.

It is just about impossible to go to a group recovery meeting without passing pubs or shady characters selling drugs on street corners, so recovery is ultimately about us not wanting to drink or drug because you cannot hide from drink and drugs; that is not a long term option or tactic; short-term maybe but we don't fully recover short-term.

We must take ownership of our lives and don't think there's always rehab if things get any more out of control because you ultimately must take responsibility for your own recovery whether you go to rehab initially or not.

I am not criticising rehab in any way here because I owe a great debt of gratitude to all the staff and therapists at the Priory, Glasgow where they taught me a lot about my condition and there is no doubt the good folks at the Priory had a significant impact on my subsequent and successful journey of recovery.

I just wanted to clear up this idea that being in rehab for a month could sort things out because that is definitely not the case.

Rehab is recommended because it is a safe place to be, in early recovery, and learning about recovery is hugely important but don't think you'll come out a totally different person; you will have the recovery tools to be a totally different person but must be prepared to put in genuine effort to succeed long term.

There is no 'magic wand treatment' or 'silver bullet' I'm afraid.

You can drag a horse to water, but you can't force it to drink it.

We must change our thinking and in rehab or prison we can be given recovery tools to use and indeed we can start the process of change;

however, recovery for me ultimately needs to take place in the big bad world.

NOBODY CAN TELL YOU THAT YOU ARE AN ALCOHOLIC OR DRUG ADDICT BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN YOU CANNOT BE IN DENIAL



BODY

Physically, we are a direct result of how we treat our bodies inasmuch as we are what we eat and drink.

Our exercise regime also plays a major part in how healthy we are internally and externally.

Of course, the input of poisons like drugs, alcohol, nicotine and other substances like sugar and salt can play a detrimental role.

Whilst it is not the purpose of this book to recommend diets, it is fair to say, it is the responsibility of each of us to learn which foods are needed to create maximum health if that's a goal.

My attitude towards food is simply; 'Food for Fuel'.

Let us not be fooled here, food can be used as a drug or mind-altering substance; it's called emotional eating or comfort eating.

Our bodies are simply engines or vehicles, just like cars but you don't see people at petrol stations squeezing chocolate donuts into their fuel tank or pouring salt into their oil tank. Of course not, because they know their engine would seize, so how come it's okay for us humans to do it to ourselves and yet unlike cars we cannot be easily replaced.

Everything we eat over and above what we physically need is unnecessary and therefore comfort or emotional eating.

Society or commercialism is to blame in a big way for our ignorance and bad eating habits because the moment we can see and hear television we get conditioned by adverts and programmes to associate food with taste and smell rather than energy and vitality.

We are commercially brainwashed by the food industry from an early age. We should actually be taught which foods give us the necessary energy for doing certain activities and which foods repair tissue, which foods prevent disease, supply us with key vitamins, minerals and so on.

How many people understand the specific benefits of eating an apple, banana or orange? What benefits do meat or fish offer us?

Why do we need water and how much should we drink?

We need foods to live, grow and prevent disease and yet most people have no idea what individual foods are specifically for and how much and when they should be eaten.

Why are we so uncaring about ourselves?

Our priorities with food are all mixed up it appears.

It's all about commercialism but it doesn't need to be; you can choose wisely and nutritionally.

We wouldn't cross a road without looking so we should be eating without knowing what we are putting into our precious bodies.

EAT TO LIVE, DON'T LIVE TO EAT



WORRY: ANXIETY: FEAR: PANIC

People often try to categorise what level of worry, anxiety, fear or panic they experience but essentially, they're just different levels of the same state. A sort of 'anxiety scale' where worry and mild concern are at one end of the spectrum, progressing through to anxiety, fear and blind panic at the other.

Life can be like a series of dark corridors shielded by doors that we shut as tight as possible.

Even the most courageous people have worries and fears.

Some are afraid of tangibles like spiders, heights or flying in planes.

Some are just constantly worried or fretting about life in general.

Sadly, most people don't realise they can change this state of mind.

Fear of tangibles or phobias can generally be sorted or at worst avoided; after all you don't need to fly or worry if you scream when a mouse sprints across the floor!

Constantly worrying about the past or the future is debilitating and frankly unhealthy; in truth it is a common pain people, quite rightly, want to escape.

The solution is to eliminate the feelings rather than masking them by using unhealthy mind-altering substances.

Interestingly when I analysed specifically what was I worried about or fearing, there really wasn't anything.

It was predominantly a bad and negative habit without grounds.

The key to resolving this for me was simply asking a series of self-questions;

What exactly am I worried about?

Why am I worried about that?

What is the worst-case scenario?

Would this disappear if I dealt with it right now?

What would I tell a friend to do if they were experiencing the same feeling?

Worry, anxiety, fear and panic are all part of the same family.

Fear is slightly different as it is our protection mechanism against danger but that's not what I'm referring to here; alcoholics and drug addicts tend to be very sensitive people and blow things way out of proportion, so the secret is to shrink them back to reality by asking self-questions.

Get to the bottom of what it is we really are concerned about and then sort it out.

Fear of change comes because it is natural to fear the unknown or perhaps fear the risk of failure. These two fears are simple to eliminate because you will not fail if you follow a tried and tested plan and the 'unknown' will probably surprise you beyond your wildest dreams.

Swap the known for a room full of unknown surprises.

No matter what it is that makes me feel uncomfortable today, I have learned to acknowledge, confront, question and take ownership of these 'apparent' fears, if I want to prevent them from holding me back in life.

Standing still is much worse than moving forward and tripping up.

Where you stumble may lie your treasure.

I use a triple-pronged tool that helps me dig my way out of negative states;

1 Ask questions

2 Make decisions

3 Take action.

In the past it was easy for me to become paralysed by fear without really questioning what was specifically troubling me.

Fear of the past, fear of the future, fear of an event or situation; often I would find myself numb, indecisive and unable to do anything except obsess over the numerous negative outcomes awaiting me. Fear dominated my life and I didn't know how to escape it; however, that changed when I set off on my recovery journey.

First of all, I made a decision that all the things I did not like about my previous life were going to change; otherwise it wouldn't be a new life.

One of the first things I began building when I started working the Steps was a recovery toolkit. The tools in this kit helped me to begin living life on life's terms and taught me how to handle situations that used to baffle me.

Two of the most important tools taught me how to deal with my fears.

The first tool I use to get out of worry-mode or fear-mode is to make a decision.

Since worry or fear are generally just imagined in my head, gaining power by my obsessive thinking, I find that simply making a firm decision often disempowers it and frees me from its grip.

That decision will dictate an action which will generally dissolve the feeling.

For example, let's say I'm behind with my rent. Of course, that is not good and can create some anxiety but to ignore my landlord and the demand letters will make this situation far more dominating in my head than it deserves to be.

So, my decision could be as simple as; I'm going to talk with my landlord and try to find a solution. That solution could be a number of things but will probably involve agreeing a payment plan with the landlord. Now that entire area of my head that was being negatively consumed with this issue has just been completely released and it generally isn't difficult either.

To escape fear; we must go through it, not try to find a way around it.

Conquer fear for a healthy and stress-free life, free from mental obligations.

The corridors will light up and there will be many more paths shining bright.

Feel happier and more optimistic than ever before; it still amazes me that such a simple technique has transformed my life so much.

THERE IS NO ILLUSION GREATER THAN FEAR



DEATH by DRUG ADDICTION or ALCOHOLISM

Imagine you were to die in your sleep, let's say aged 88 — that would be a pretty good innings and a painless and dignified way to go, wouldn't you say?

However, death by drug addiction or alcoholism is physically painful, mentally tormenting, emotionally crucifying and destroys our loved ones all at the same time.

It would be emotional torture because drug addiction sucks every piece of goodness out of our soul en route to death.

Imagine lying on your deathbed hating yourself and regretting what you had done.

I know this to be a fact because I've been at Death's Door in that condition; I only survived by the skin of my teeth and by the grace of God.

I remember the feeling of no self-worth, no self-respect, no self-esteem, no self-trust or no self-love in any shape or form.

I had already been left with very few true friends around me; most of my friends had long gone.

Families may remain, but they would secretly be looking forward to life without the terrible burden we impose on them. Sure, they'll miss us but the old us not the person we had turned into; my family did not recognise me anymore.

It will actually be a relief to our friends and family if we die since they had long got over the shock of what we were doing to ourselves and the terrible pain and sadness they were enduring every single day because of us; in fact, they have already resigned themselves to our premature death. What a miraculous turnaround this could be for you; I've done it and you can do it too!

We have all brought tremendous pain to our loved ones; every time they see or speak to us or even when they think about us, it often brings them private tears.

They may love us, but they badly need to end their pain and our death will allow them to begin healing.

There will not be a lavish funeral for us and it will probably be attended by very few. Some people may actually feel slight resentment or anger towards us as they could not fully understand our selfishness; remember it is not their duty to understand the plight of addiction.

We would easily be forgotten by many; we had become extremely unimportant and in some quarters, we had become despised and unwelcome.

We can waste our lives and take a piece of our loved ones' lives with us but it's not fair.

I understand addiction and exactly how this can all come about but you now know; people do change so what's stopping you?

It does not need to be this way, it does not need to be such a horrific ending, you have the choice to change things and I want to help you.

Surely you do not want your headstone to read 'A Wasted Life' (think about it!).

Drug addiction and alcoholism strips everything from us; financially, socially, physically, mentally and emotionally.

It does not have to be that way, there are solutions, recovery is a reality and you can do it too so please check out the Champions Cinema (www.frog.net) and find a local support group to go to today where I bet you will meet people who were once where you are today.

DEATH IS NATURE'S WAY OF TELLING US TO SLOW DOWN



ADDICTION

Allow me to introduce myself;

I am the disease of addiction; I am cunning, baffling and powerful

I have killed millions of people and I will kill millions more but slowly of course

I will catch you by surprise

I will convince you that we are friends, and I will always wait for you
If you want to die, you can call on me
And I'll make sure you are so numb you can neither hurt nor cry
But you must invite me into your life;
I do not come uninvited
I can be there for you; if you're lonely, desperate or sad
If you think you don't deserve good things, I'll agree with you
And together we can destroy all the good things in your life
People don't take me seriously enough
People fear strokes, heart attacks and seizures but without my help these things would not be so possible
As I say, I do not come uninvited
You must choose to have me
And I will lie here quietly so you cannot see nor hear me and I will wait for my chance to kill you
Alcoholics and drug addicts choose me instead of reality
I will help you lose your marriages, businesses, houses, cars and money
I will take away your spirit for life
I will take away your friends, your loved ones and your life
I am drug addiction

DRUG ADDICTION IS A BEAST; STRONGER, SMARTER AND SNEAKIER THAN WE COULD EVER IMAGINE



DON'T BE A PEOPLE PLEASER

Before recovery, I wasn't always very good at setting personal boundaries and when people asked me to do things I almost always said yes despite any emotional, physical or financial costs to me.

For years I blamed and resented people for taking advantage of me and it took me a long time in recovery to believe that saying no was not only my right but my responsibility to myself.

It's still hard for me to say no to people even though I'm much better at it and do so more frequently.

I still feel like I'm letting someone down and often feel guilty.

But I must do what is best for me and my recovery today, so if I ever have to say 'No' to others it means saying 'Yes' to me.

Having been raised to be helpful and accommodating to others; saying 'No' is still a concept that is foreign to me, but I must do what is best for me.

I'm still perfectly polite and helpful when I can be.

TODAY IT'S A LITTLE EASIER TO SAY 'NO' TO OTHERS BECAUSE IT FEELS BETTER WHEN I SAY 'YES' TO MYSELF



LET US LOVE YOU UNTIL YOU LEARN TO LOVE YOURSELF

When I first started attending support groups my head was filled with voices of self-hatred and shame; it was destroying my life.

I remember sitting in a meeting and feeling really depressed and down on myself when I heard someone say, 'let us love you until you learn to love yourself'.

A light of hope shone through me at that moment and I thought if these people are willing to love and accept me, then maybe I'm not a lost cause after all.

On many occasions, particularly during early recovery, I received boosts of encouragement like that from the wonderful and understanding people of the Fellowship.

Developing healthy self-esteem is a process that does takes work.

I am eternally grateful to my brothers and sisters of the Fellowship who unconditionally helped me turn my life around; I absolutely could not have managed it without them.

People in the 'Rooms' are clearly pleased to help others while they work, grow and learn to love themselves again; that made a huge difference to me in early recovery.

It was not always easy as we drug addicts can be our own worst critics; however, by letting others in and listening to their perception of me and accepting their love and kindness, I learned to show love to myself and what a precious miracle that was for me.

**O' GOD, THOU KNOWEST HOW BUSY I MUST BE TODAY
IF I FORGET THEE, PLEASE DO NOT THOU FORGET ME**



WHO IS AN ALCOHOLIC or DRUG ADDICT?

I used to think to be an alcoholic or drug addict you must sleep rough, beg, dress like a bum, smell, remain unshaven, appear dirty, drink or drug all day long and have a half-bottle (wrapped up in brown paper) in your inside pocket to be an alcoholic or inject to be a drug addict and you must be unemployed and possibly even homeless.

That was my stereotypical image of an alcoholic or drug addict.

How wrong I was; I certainly did not think an alcoholic or drug addict could be of any age and live a functional life. I did not think they could stay clean and sober for a few days or have a successful night out where they got home safely. I did not realise drug addicts could hide amongst us,

whether we are talking about the discreet cocaine addict or the housewife addicted to over-the-counter or prescription drugs.

I did not realise that an alcoholic could occasionally get away with just a few drinks. I did not appreciate there are white-collar drug addicts and alcoholics. I didn't know so many people hide their addictions from spouses, partners and work colleagues either; at least until I entered recovery and met some.

I listened to other Recovery Champions sharing their recovery stories and describing just that.

For example, if I went out for a session on a Friday night; sometimes I would arrive back home relatively unharmed by drink/drugs. But I had always assumed an alcoholic or drug addict couldn't ever have a semi-normal night out.

I once heard a Champion saying they did not know if tonight would end up an insane night or not, but they knew for absolute certainty if they went out three times over the course of a week, at least one night would end up being total insanity.

That summed me up to a tee and that was when a clear understanding sunk in that I was an alcoholic.

After a drug addict or alcoholic has their first dram, line, joint, tablet or injection, a reaction is triggered that creates a physical craving and a mental obsession for another and another regardless of the consequences.

I may well have arrived at the pub only intending to have a quick pint or two before scooting off home but that was not the way it turned out more often than not. In fact, after my first, nothing else in the world mattered; whether I had an appointment to be somewhere else or another commitment of any description, whether I could afford it or not, whether I was scheduled to get up early the next day or even if I had the car, it didn't matter.

I missed my brother's wedding, from start to finish.

Consequences do not matter to an alcoholic or drug addict.

We become physically and mentally obsessed with having another and we generally do.

After our 'first' we become powerless; one is too many and a thousand is not enough.

The cardinal sin for a drug addict/alcoholic is having our first; it's the top of the bottle we must worry about not the bottom!

Nine out of ten times we do not just have one.

We may genuinely only intend to have just one and would pass a lie detector at the front doors of the pub but that is not how things unfold.

How often I got into all sorts of bother; drinking/drugging and driving my car home and driving my wife crazy. Her voicemail seemed remarkably heated considering I was only three hours late for dinner!

My only real concern was; where could I get my next drink or hit, particularly after the pub closed.

There are some other tell-tale signs that things are not all well if we continue to drink or drug after our drinking or drugging reaches a level that causes recurrent problems; for example, continuing to drink after it causes us to miss work; drinking and driving; neglecting or endangering our family; shirking responsibilities; damaging relationships; spending too much of the family budget or getting into trouble with the law.

Incidentally there are many functional alcoholics and drug addicts in denial.

Don't think an alcoholic or drug addict needs to be wasted all the time. Until the latter stage alcoholism/drug addiction when things escalated to 24/7 for me, I could go a week without drinking or drugging but when I had my first it was generally up, up and away and nobody knew where I would land.

I learned a lot about drug addiction and alcoholism from recovering drug addicts and alcoholics at the Anonymous groups and you can do the same. Firstly, I admitted I was a drug addict/alcoholic and then accepted that meant I was powerless over drink and drugs and therefore could not have my first; that was the first step of my recovery journey (and literally Step 1 of the 12-Step programme).

Every journey must begin with a small step and if you can relate to the above, then maybe you are ready to admit it's time to throw in the towel too.

The sooner you do, the sooner you can sort yourself out and start your recovery journey just like I did over eleven years ago now; once we admit we have a problem we can begin focusing on the solution.

Nobody can tell you whether you are an alcoholic or drug addict; only you can decide but if you quack like a duck, waddle like a duck and act like a duck, maybe you are a duck.

WHAT LIES BEHIND US AND WHAT LIES BEFORE US ARE TINY MATTERS COMPARED TO WHAT LIES WITHIN US



KEEP THE LESSONS BUT THROW AWAY NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES

Most successful people have a solid set of life skills.

Most of these tools are skills that we learn as we get older and more experienced; you do not have to be a recovering alcoholic or recovering drug addict to need them or benefit from them.

A word that I really like is 'upgrading'; who doesn't want to upgrade their life?

Well that is what life skills or recovery tools will create for us.

Upgrades or improvements in the way we feel, behave, get treated, expect, deserve, act, give and receive.

For years I was so wrapped up in the drama of my life that I never stopped to study what I could learn from it.

Events, incidents and accidents seemed to descend on me; each like the one before but I wasn't learning the lessons from these experiences; I just kept repeating the way I was living, and it never really registered until early recovery that I was destined to keep experiencing the same events, incidents and accidents.

Keep using the same ingredients and you will keep baking the same cake; why would it be different?

In early recovery I used to complain to my Sponsor all the time; 'this happened to me' and 'she didn't do this', 'he did that' and 'they told me this' and so on and so on.

He would listen very patiently then ask, 'what was your part again?'

That got me thinking about my side of the street and when I focused on what I could have done differently to avoid the situation there were always answers and ultimately a solution to avoid it repeating.

The first time something negative happens it may not be entirely my fault but to let the same negative thing happen twice is most certainly my fault.

Today I always figure out where I was at fault or at least what could I have done differently because that is the 'lesson' I must learn and keep.

Think about it; why do you hear people saying he has the experience?

It's not because he can't avoid a certain outcome; it's the very opposite; he knows what he must do or what he must not do in certain situations to avoid a negative experience.

We can all learn from the past, but we must be willing to think about our part in it; our thoughts, actions and reactions.

Today I don't have to repeat negative experiences, nor do I have to drag the past into the future, so I learn from the past but throw away any negative experiences.

Step 10 encourages us to take personal inventory and recognise our mistakes, presumably so that we don't make them again.

Every night of my life I review my day and ask myself how can I grow from my experiences today and what lessons have I learned.

CONTINUALLY AIM FOR NEVER-ENDING IMPROVEMENT



SUBSTANCE MISUSE or ABUSE

It is not substance misuse or abuse; it is human misuse and abuse.

Self-abuse to be precise.

The compound itself is not a menace to society until a human being treats it as if consumption bestowed a temporary licence to act like an asshole!

Not to mention the greater and more harmful dangers.

It is we humans who get misused and abused by these dangerous substances; the substances themselves are absolutely fine.

I abused myself mentally, physically and emotionally; it is a form of self-harm, slow suicide.

Why did I hate myself or hate life so much that I would do such a thing?

That was a powerful question that needed answered before I would stand a great chance of recovering.

A drug is neither moral nor immoral; it's simply a chemical compound.

YOU'RE PROBABLY AN ALCOHOLIC IF YOU THINK SPILLING BEER IS ALCOHOL ABUSE



IT'S MY CALL

For a long time, I used to think that life was dealing me a bad hand; however, today I understand that I am the dealer and better still the cards are face-up.

That's right, it is my choice whether or not I have a good day or a bad day, at least most of the time.

Bet some people find that hard to believe.

I am not suggesting everything around us is controlled, for example, the weather, some physical and mental illnesses or the winning lottery numbers; some events are obviously out with individual control.

It is important for me to continually remind myself what is or what is not within my control, hence why I subscribe to the Serenity Prayer.

The weather and the winning lottery numbers are obviously out with my control and so are other people's behaviours, actions and reactions;

however, the way I respond to these outside agencies is entirely within my power.

Whether I choose to eat healthily is within my control, whether I choose to drink and drug is my decision, how I act and react to other people is my choice, how I perceive or interpret things is entirely personal, and that list of examples can go on and on but the point is we all have a huge influence on our own destiny.

The majority of outcomes stem from previous choices which directly or indirectly dictate results.

I take responsibility for my life today and I make choices which dictate the most likely outcomes.

MANY OF US HARBOUR PAIN AND BROKENNESS IN OUR HEARTS



IT'S THE FIRST DRINK THAT GETS ME DRUNK

For years this saying made no sense to me; it wasn't the first drink that got me drunk, it was the ninth or tenth I would argue.

For many years I believed I was able to control my drinking, at least some of the time; with a lot of will power I had been able to limit my drinking to a few glasses (only on occasions mind you) however towards the end of my drinking/drugging days, I simply could never say no to the second, third, ninth, tenth and one hundredth one and would end up roaring drunk and AWOL.

If only I could control my drinking and stop after four or five drinks, I thought and so when I entered recovery I secretly hoped this trick could be learned.

I remember sharing my desire with my Sponsor.

He said, 'Cal when you controlled your drinking you didn't enjoy it' and 'when you enjoyed your drinking you couldn't control it'.

Wow did that make sense!

For we alcoholics; one drink is too many and a thousand is not enough.

Once we drug addicts/alcoholics start; we simply cannot stop.

And that's when I began to understand some hard truths about myself.

I was definitely a drug addict/alcoholic; in fact, I had never been able to control my drinking since my first quarter-bottle of vodka aged 13.

Today I understand if I have my first drink, it will lead to more and more and more. Maybe not every single time but 3 out of 4 sessions is as serious as every time.

Alcoholism/drug addiction is not reversible; I completely accept there is no going back.

The good news is that I no longer want my first drink or drug.

KEEP THE PLUG ON THE JUG



THE POWER BEHIND ME IS GREATER THAN ANY PROBLEM IN FRONT OF ME

During the worst years of my drug addiction/alcoholism I had isolated myself and faced life alone, always managing life to get what I wanted, and spending too much time solving the problems I created.

What an exhausting way of life!

The mere thought of the next set of problems to come would overwhelm me, leaving me depressed and feeling hopeless; it's no wonder I didn't want to get up or wake up feeling that way.

When I attended my first Anonymous meeting I remember feeling an incredible intake of energy from the collective spirit of all the people in the Room, who were also in recovery.

To discover I wasn't alone was just amazing and the warmest feeling and to this day it is still the most amazing feeling whenever I go to a meeting.

That positivity contributed enormously to my recovery and it convinced me to try my best to get what many others had already got.

These wonderful people shared information and a variety of personal solutions they had discovered about a new way of living and dealing with life.

What a relief that was for me and to know that life without drink and drugs was not just normal for so many people, but it was also a million times better than the steep uphill road I was insanely trudging.

Most importantly I discovered a Power greater than myself that I grew to trust and rely on that I now call my Allies.

Today after years of recovery with the help and support of my Allies, I have the confidence and faith to rely on that mystical source for solutions if and when I need them.

Whenever I pray to my Allies for help, guidance, strength and solutions, I am always amazed and thrilled as my problems disappear and situations change; my life flows like a River of Peace when I ask for help from my Allies.

And it's not all about getting as I ask my Allies what can I do to serve them.

BUILD A COLLECTION OF INSPIRATIONAL BOOKS AND USE THEM ON A DAILY BASIS; THE EFFECT WILL PROBABLY BE GREATER THAN YOU COULD IMAGINE



HEALTH AND FITNESS

Health and fitness are not the same.

Fitness is the physical ability to perform athletic activity and health is the state where all the systems of the body (vital organs in particular) are working in an optimal way.

Many people think fitness implies health; however, the two do not necessarily go hand in hand.

If you achieve fitness at the expense of health, for example by using steroids, then you may not live long enough to enjoy your spectacular physique.

Winners create a balance between health and fitness.

Like everything in life today, I find a balance or if I cannot then I don't do it (unless it is healthy of course).

I focus on health from the inside out today unlike the past when I used to train at the gym but the minute I got out the front doors, I would light up a cigarette or after going to a spin class for an hour stop at McDonalds for Mclunch.

People care about what they look like, or they wouldn't train, diet, visit sun bed salons, get spray tans, wear make-up, get their hair done, wear nice clothes, get their teeth whitened and other more expensive cosmetic surgeries but why don't as many people care about what they look like from the inside?

I think it is a lot to do with being unseen. So, I challenge you to start thinking about your insides as much if not more than your outsides.

BECOME A HEALTH ADDICT



STAY ON THE ROAD OF RECOVERY LONG ENOUGH AND THE SCENERY WILL CHANGE

If you stick with your recovery journey for long enough, the scenery will definitely change, of that there is no debate.

Whenever I talk with newcomers it often reminds me of my attitude in early recovery.

I used to talk in endless circles about my problems and the people, places and things that were responsible for them.

I went on and on about the reasons I would never be able to stop drinking/drugging and was convinced the 12-Step programme wouldn't work for me.

And I didn't believe it when people told me 'This too shall pass'.

However, I was completely out of options, so I kept 'going back', hoping they were right.

It took many weeks of discipline, staying clean and sober, going back and listening to these Recovery Champions sharing their experiences and right enough things really did begin to change.

I began feeling better physically, mentally and emotionally; my head started to clear, and I became open to a new way of living. As I took different actions I got different results and after a few months my life was most demonstrably improving.

I had developed perspective of recovery and soon learned things definitely do change providing I'm willing to change in the first place.

Today I know I will continue to grow if I stay on the right road.

No matter how the scenery looks today, and sometimes it's not pretty, as long as I continue to turn up, things will keep getting better.

That has been my experience after 11 years and I live by that knowledge today.

The Fellowship is all about the newcomer and one of the main reasons long term Recovery Champions continue to return to the Rooms is because newcomers remind us of where we were and where we don't want to go back to so it's a win-win situation for all.

THE ROAD OF RECOVERY BEGINS WITH SURRENDERING



HALT

We have talked about the need to build a mental toolkit that contains new strategies to successfully handle life's stressful situations and our rollercoaster of emotions without resorting to substances.

Before my recovery journey began many people and situations used to baffle me and if something arose that I didn't like I would simply drink or drug to make it disappear, so it was no great surprise once I laid down drink and drugs to find that my lack of coping skills was fully revealed.

I was ill prepared and in truth unprepared to deal with certain situations, so I urgently needed to learn how to deal with life on life's terms.

This is one of the most important skills and key areas of change needed for sustainable recovery to be a reality.

Recovery is not about carrying on using the same life-systems but avoiding the pot-holes; it's about going down a different road and learning better life-systems and techniques to make life more enjoyable and not allowing niggles and pressures to exist if they are avoidable or resolvable in some way.

Otherwise all these little problems stack up on top of each other and collectively become overwhelming.

Lots of little mosquito problems eventually become one big elephant problem.

Living clean and sober wouldn't be easy or even possible for me if I didn't adopt new attitudes towards the inevitability of what life will throw at me, after all that is generally why I turned to drink and drugs in the first place. I made a decision in early recovery to never hide away from anything, whether it was people, places, emotions, incidents, accidents, events or any other thing.

I would never brush stuff under the carpet or ignore it; I would resolve everything within my power as quickly as it came my way and as professionally and cleverly as possible.

I was introduced to the acronym HALT.

I was taught if I was ever feeling anxious, worried, angry or out of sorts in anyway whatsoever there was a very good chance I needed to take care of myself immediately.

I was told to HALT and ask myself;

Am I Hungry?

Am I Angry?

Am I Lonely?

Am I Tired?

If so, it was my personal duty to stop and attend to any of these issues at once.

What a wonderful tool this has been for me.

I have learned it is within my power to take care of myself and once I am feeling centred, the outside stuff is so much easier to deal with.

It has become second nature to HALT when something is bothering me.

Today my solutions start from the inside and work their way out.

One of my favourite new words is 'hangry'; I'm sure you can understand and relate.

MY GOAL IS TO BE HAPPY, BEFORE ACHIEVING OR HAVING OR OWNING



PUT THE MAGNIFYING GLASS DOWN AND PICK UP A MIRROR

If only others would stop doing this and that or stop acting certain ways, then I wouldn't need to drink and drug. If only others would start doing this and that and start behaving differently then finally I could be happy.

Relieved of the responsibility of 'self' it was so easy to be critical, resentful and dependent on the way others behaved.

Blaming others for my problems was always the easiest explanation.

If they only knew what they were doing to me.

If they loved me they wouldn't act this way.

Don't they care about me?

Why are they doing this to me?

These were my constant thoughts before I entered the Rooms, then my Sponsor told me something shocking; he told me that my happiness and wellbeing were MY responsibility!

He told me it was and always will be up to me to make my life enjoyable and safe.

But what happens when others do these things, I protested.

Put down the magnifying glass and pick up a mirror he told me.

Focusing on what I was doing to cause or contribute to outcomes or how I reacted to others should be my only concern, he told me.

Simply put; Take ownership of your own life.

I must admit it took a while to see the profound wisdom of this new way of thinking but once I shone the focus on myself, I gained the power to influence and control my own life and my happiness.

If my life is in the control of others, then I will forever be a victim because I have absolutely no control over how others act or what they say (remember the Serenity Prayer).

When I take responsibility for my own life that's when I feel best and do best.

It is all about the mirror and not the magnifying glass for me today.

LIFE IS NOT A PROBLEM TO BE SOLVED BUT A REALITY TO EXPERIENCE



WAIT 24 HOURS BEFORE I DO OR SAY SOMETHING STUPID

Most normal people consistently have thoughts but most also have what I call a 'holding room' before they share these sometimes potentially offensive thoughts.

My 'holding room' is located halfway between my brain and my tongue and has about a half second delay in real-time so that I get the chance to let these thoughts remain only as thoughts.

Well unfortunately I found alcohol and other drugs short circuited this process; when I was drinking and drugging, I no longer seemed to have a 'holding room'; my thoughts and my tongue just worked in unison; the 'holding room' got bypassed!

Now that I no longer drink or drug this doesn't happen anymore; right?

Wrong!

Restraint of pen and tongue was a foreign concept to me before I entered recovery and today, clean and sober, restraint is still a rare life-skill I appear not to possess, at least to any great degree.

I am guilty of being hot-headed and acting or should I say over-reacting to situations. This is without a doubt my worst character defect.

I still find it hard today to stop reacting to the many perceived wrongs I feel people and things are committing against me.

This is my biggest challenge and I want to change because it's me that suffers.

When I put a space between how I feel and how I react; I make judgements that are a million times calmer and more rational which improves my life dramatically.

I remember a very good friend of mine and long-term Recovery Champion Gus, whom I met at a meeting in Thailand, who told me that he never reacted to anything until he felt completely balanced and centred and generally, that was not until the next day.

Gus died in a tragic accident when he was twenty odd years clean and sober, an amazing example of recovery and was hugely influential in my recovery journey.

I'm not talking about flash incidents like road rage; that is another challenge. I'm talking about experiences when something happens that I react angrily or aggressively towards but don't actually need to react or respond immediately.

For example, if I have a bad experience somewhere, I can't get back to my PC quickly enough to send off a multi-page high detailed report relating my account to the CEO of whichever major institution, explaining to him why his entire organisation needs a complete philosophical overhaul, reshuffle of personnel and clear-out of unhelpful staff!

I'll cc the email to the local branch that spoiled my day, the local rag and my local Member of Parliament (that's after finding out that Lord Whoever and Lady Wherever weren't available by phone).

Then the next day when I wake up and my head is a bit clearer, I think maybe it is fair enough there's no trash cans at that particular bank or traffic lights are designed or sequenced that way or whatever my gripe was.

But too late; the emails have been sent.

As I said about the mirror and the magnifying glass, when I began working the Steps I learned to take the focus off what other people or things were doing to me and look at my own behaviour instead.

After all that's all I can control and so says the Serenity Prayer.

Today I've come to rely on the wisdom and the miracles that can happen in between my thoughts and my actions if I wait 24 hours.

Time after time situations will automatically clear themselves up if I only wait or pray on them.

I am much less likely to become excited or agitated and I'm much less likely to make things worse or overreact if I can just pause before I react.

Today I've learned that before I do something stupid, I should wait at least 24 hours or at least wait until the door to my 'holding room' reopens.

IT IS BETTER TO TRUST AND BE DISAPPOINTED EVERY LITTLE WHILE THAN DISTRUST AND BE MISERABLE ALL THE TIME



THOSE WHO LAUGH; LAST

When I first arrived at the Fellowship I remember hearing the phrase; we are not a glum lot.

I didn't believe it. I mean here I was sentenced to attending meetings, prohibited from drinking, drugging, partying and forced to believe in God; things looked pretty glum to me!

If it weren't for the laughter I heard in the Rooms I may not have stuck around.

As I have already said, I couldn't understand what others found so funny. People would share embarrassing, demoralising and even tragic experiences and the Room would burst into laughter.

I don't get it, I told my Sponsor, and he told me, those who can laugh at themselves tend to last.

That has been one of the most valuable lessons I've learned in recovery; not to take myself so seriously.

I allow myself to make mistakes today and if I step on someone else's toes I'm quick to make amends.

Because of this, my life is lighter today and I find it easy to laugh at myself and this not only makes the journey more enjoyable but it's why it has lasted so long.

IF I COULD DRINK LIKE A NORMAL DRINKER, I'D DRINK ALL THE TIME



RESENTMENT; DRINKING POISON AND HOPING THE OTHER PERSON DIES

In early recovery I had so many resentments I didn't even know about them all, nor did I realise that the people, places and things I resented

didn't know or care about how I felt so the only person suffering from my resentments — was me.

When I started working Step 4, I 'made a searching and fearless moral inventory' and all the resentments I had secretly been harbouring became visible.

As I uncovered, discovered and discarded them, I felt a new level of freedom and a sense of serenity and happiness entering my life.

Today I understand the danger and futility of having resentments.

Today I prefer to remain comfortable in my own skin so whenever I'm upset or feeling offended I examine my part and clean my side of the street.

If I still feel resentful I pray for the other person and this always works.

Today I no longer let resentments poison me because today I choose to live happy, joyous and free.

Resentment is the inability to forgive, for which we pay a steep price.

THE MAN WHO OPTS FOR REVENGE SHOULD DIG TWO GRAVES



THE LONGER I'M SOBER, THE DRUNKER I REALISE I WAS

Denial is one of the most cunning, baffling and powerful traits of drug addiction/alcoholism.

At the peak of my using, I did not actually accept I had a problem, at least with alcohol, despite drinking two bottles of spirits every day. Yes, I did accept I had a drug problem as my cocaine use had got out of control. But alcohol is a drug, it just comes in liquid form and to deny it was a problem was ridiculous but that's how damaged my thinking had become.

Another form of denial that many of us experience during recovery and particularly in early recovery is looking back and imagining things were not actually that bad, which of course is complete nonsense too.

When I look back now it's hard to imagine that I didn't recognise my drinking was a huge problem and indeed a big part of an overall drug problem.

To avoid the truth, I just kept lowering my standards!

When I first entered recovery, I had no intention of staying clean and sober forever; I just needed to pull things together for a while and gain some control again.

I certainly wasn't in the same category as thoroughbred alcoholics and drug addicts.

I was uniquely different and was genuinely convinced I could control my drinking once I cooled downed a bit.

I remember telling Counsellor Joe at The Priory Rehab that I was only there to sort out my cocaine problem; as for any alcohol issues, I didn't have any, so I intended to continue drinking alcohol once I sorted out my class 'A' drug problem.

I recall Joe being softly-softly and tactfully accommodating towards my insane thinking at that time; however, as the future unfolded I came to understand it wasn't the various mind-altering substances that were or were not the problem, it was the fact that I wanted to escape reality, regardless of the consequences, that was the real issue.

Whether my drug of choice was cocaine, alcohol, marijuana, heroin, LSD, cannabis, ecstasy or any other unhealthy mind-altering substance (or unhealthy mind-altering activity for that matter) they are all the same.

None is any different or any better than the other; they are all exactly the same as one another in principle. Sure, they all deliver different sensations, side-effects and symptoms but they are all one-way tickets to oblivion.

Recovery is about not wanting to 'visit oblivion' regardless of the choice of transportation.

As the fog continued to clear I began journaling and working the Steps in conjunction with other recovery tools, all of which helped me change.

I especially remember sitting in meetings and listening to people sharing their graphic stories including times some had been arrested for drunk driving.

I was listening to these war stories and thinking these things never really happened to me.

Then I started getting real with myself and lost count of how many times I put my car in a ditch and needed to be towed out in the early hours.

Once I had a pretty serious accident after losing control of my car while out on a country road one night; I was lucky to collide into newly erected crash barriers that stopped me falling about 200 feet. I was arrested and charged with drinking/drugging while driving although the case was eventually deserted due to a technicality at Glasgow Sheriff Court on 1st December 2005.

I was so out of my brains that I don't remember the cops arriving, but I do remember waking up handcuffed behind my back and facedown having been unconscious for a while.

Later I was charged with a list of offences; including drink/drug driving, resisting arrest and assaulting a police officer; apparently, I fought with the first two, of several, traffic cops that arrived.

That was partly why I was unconscious; I had a cracking big lump on my forehead after one of those lovely lads in blue smacked me on the head

with their truncheon and four broken ribs from the accident, so I was in some discomfort.

The court case was delayed because of adjournments for various reasons and 18 months after the incident/accident (I was 27 days clean and sober; the longest I had managed since I was 13 years old) the case against me collapsed for technical reasons.

As shameful as I feel looking back on my irresponsible behaviour the night of the crash, I feel the court case collapsing was part karma against the cop who used excessive force and was a reward from my Allies because I had begun my recovery journey which required transport to get to and fro to meetings and other recovery places.

I have not let my Allies down as I have remained clean and sober since; I celebrated ten years clean and sober on 5 November 2015.

I have many more war stories including the time I crushed two vertebrae (resulting in wearing a metal cage for a month) and breaking my wrist during another insane episode but let's keep that for another day. I'm at the stage where I have learned from my past experiences and see no reason to relive them again.

All recovered drug addicts/alcoholics have many deep scars and I'm sure you will have many too; some make mine look like apple pie and ice-cream stories.

As I peel back the layers of my past and uncover the truth about the history of my drinking and drugging including the incidents and accidents, I'm amazed at how lucky I have been.

Prisons are packed with alcoholics and drug addicts who never found sobriety and I could easily have been one of them but for the grace of God. Today my denial is gone and the longer I stay clean and sober the worse I realise it was.

DRUG ADDICTION WANTS EVERY PIECE OF OUR LIVES UNTIL IT KILLS US



IF NOTHING CHANGES; NOTHING WILL CHANGE

In early recovery I heard someone say;

If you get a horse thief sober, all you have is a sober horse thief.

I learned if I wanted to be a different person I had to change who I was and not simply what I was doing.

I changed who I was by using the recovery tools shared in this book including the 12-Step programme and you can do it too.

Simply getting clean and sober is not full recovery because that doesn't mean the person has changed; it just means a routine has changed but all the rest may remain the same.

I know people who have entered the Rooms, stopped drinking/drugging, but failed to change who they were and soon found they still had all the same old problems, feelings and circumstances that they had while drinking/drugging; we call them 'dry drunks'.

Apart from not drinking and drugging not much else had changed.

The **SAME** man will most likely drink and drug again.

Driven and haunted by the pain of 'old self', it is a short distance to temporary relief by drinking and drugging.

The miracle of recovery and real change will come to anyone who works the Steps and other recovery tools.

Let us abandon our old ideas and discard our 'old self'.

The Big Book tells us that we become 'reborn' as a result of working the Steps and it is this 'new self' that is capable of living a new life that is happy, joyous and free.

The good news is that change is much easier than it sounds and is a natural result of working the Steps and other recovery tools.

Ultimately everything changes as we change but be warned, if nothing changes, nothing will change, and the same person will soon drink/drug again.

RECOVERY IS AVAILABLE TO US ALL THAT WANT IT



DON'T TAKE YOURSELF SO DAMN SERIOUSLY

When I first arrived at the Fellowship, everything was a big deal.

I was obviously very serious and no wonder; I had wrecked my health, my marriage, our finances, my business, my future, my golf and other relationships so everything was understandably overwhelming.

However, as I have already said, I remember attending meetings and hearing loud laughter and thinking, what can be so damn funny?

The only reason we're here is because our lives suck!

What's funny about that? It took me quite a while before I could join in with that laughter and the moment I did my life began to change.

As I got further into recovery that sense of impending doom began to dissipate, and it felt like I could breathe again. The secrets and shame I had been feeling for so long began to come out and as I shared what was inside me with others I began to feel lighter.

Once I started laughing with others, including at myself, I finally started feeling human again and part of life.

Most of all, I started to realise what was truly important.

Today I know that the future will take care of itself if I take care of today.

I have faith that my Allies are working in my life and even if things don't appear to be going my way, it is okay because things more often than not turn out for the better.

Today, money is not as important as relationships, friends, health, happiness and sobriety.

Today I have learned to live life on life's terms and most importantly not to take myself so damn seriously.

DREAD DISAPPEARS IF YOU DO WHAT YOU WERE DREADING



WITHOUT HOPE DEATH IS A FORMALITY

Before embarking on the road of recovery, my life was spiralling out of control in every department and every direction and things were just getting worse and worse.

My business was lost, as too was my marriage, our house, our savings, my relationships and I had completely lost hope of my future getting better ever again.

In some of my darker hours I had lost the desire to continue living; death seemed relatively attractive, so I completely understand this feeling and empathise with you if that is how you are feeling today; however, I want you to know that your life will change for the better the first day you decide to start your recovery journey.

On my first day, I attended a support group and would recommend you consider doing the same; however, if you would prefer to visit a counsellor or therapist on a one-to-one basis that is for you to decide.

I heard someone saying, suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem.

That made so much sense to me. In fact, I needed to hear that because it gave me a real sense of hope, knowing others had experienced the same feelings and thoughts. I had also thought I had a permanent problem but that also emphasised problems are only temporary, which I can guarantee is true.

I understand drug addiction/alcoholism may feel like a permanent problem, and certainly creates a whole new basket of secondary problems, but all of your problems will start disappearing the moment you begin the recovery process.

I'm talking about the exact moment I began my recovery journey things immediately started improving, for example, my self-esteem and hope

immediately rocketed when I met others who had turned their lives around from the exact same place I was now at.

I understand the desire to live may have all but ended so please trust me when I tell you that you can start a new life today.

I've experienced it and urge you to get yourself back on your feet right now. Use every last piece of strength you have and drag yourself out of that dark corner and get yourself to a peer support group today. Find your nearest meeting now at www.frog.net and make today one of the greatest days of your life.

I remember the only glimmer of hope I used to get was from my first line of cocaine or my first few drinks, but that instant euphoria disappeared pretty quickly and turned into absolute depression and hopelessness.

Recovery does the opposite; you get hope and belief instantly and that euphoric feeling keeps getting better and better. I am into my twelfth year of recovery and still today things keep improving.

In my darkest days of drug addiction, I could not believe things could keep getting worse and worse, so it should be no great surprise when I tell you the opposite is true, and things can and do keep getting better and better in recovery.

What we do equals what we get.

It wasn't until I finally surrendered that real hope began, as one of my favourite paradoxes states; Surrender to win!

I first witnessed hope on the faces of Recovery Champions in meetings and heard it from their recovery stories; I witnessed miracles taking place in their lives and soon believed there was a miracle waiting for me too. There was, and the same miracle awaits you today if you want to experience it.

After a couple of weeks, I found bucket loads of hope and true belief had returned to my life. It really did feel like a miracle; I had begun to live again and love life again.

Today I have a healthy fear for death again; I love life today and want to live forever, so I try to pack as much into the gift of life as I can and pray you do the same.

SURRENDER TO WIN



USING MADE ME USE

Ironically, part of the reason or excuse I 'used' is because I 'used'.

Think about it, drinking or drugging is a vicious circle where self-esteem, self-trust, self-belief, self-worth and every other negative emotion you can imagine haunt us in our own heads. We hate being who we are so we escape from ourselves by using mind-altering substances.

It is insanity but understandable nonetheless.

Of course, we are our own worst enemies but that does not mean we do not suffer. The very instant we start our new life, drink and drugs free, our self-esteem, self-confidence et cetera immediately start returning which is an instant reward for good behaviour shall we say and a small catalyst to staying stopped.

**IF YOU HAD MY PROBLEMS YOU WOULD DRINK AS MUCH AS ME,
IF I DRANK AS MUCH AS YOU I WOULD HAVE YOUR PROBLEMS**



AND VICE VERSA

Staying clean and sober promotes positive emotions and helps to reverse poor, distorted, negative and self-defeating thinking.

Self-trust, self-respect and self-esteem return and continue to build within. Although family and friends give love freely, we must earn trust and respect from them. Do this properly and the desire to 'use' will leave and remember, one step at a time is fine.

VICTORY TO VICTORY



FRIEND TURNS ENEMY

As recovery unfolded I soon recognised that what I thought was my friend – alcohol and drugs – was actually my greatest enemy and thankfully my defeated enemy in recovery.

DON'T BELIEVE YOUR OWN LIES



SOCIAL DRINKERS and RECREATIONAL DRUG USERS

When people in recovery say they wish they could be a social drinker or recreational drug user, I say to myself, they just don't get it.

Had we not reached rock bottom we would not have been given this amazing opportunity for a new way of life and understanding. If a recovering alcoholic/drug addict wants any amount of mind-altering substance, they clearly still haven't got it and should work the recovery tools hard.

Today I accept how I feel and if I want a buzz, then I find a natural way to get a buzz. Life offers plenty of substance-free opportunities to get high. Get high on life.

If I wanted to hide behind the mask of drugs, even for one night, I would recognise this signal is a call for urgent action. I would immediately deal with the issue that was troubling me because I know I cannot hide behind mind-altering substances under any circumstances.

Mind-altering substances only change reality, even for the so called 'social drinker/user'. Many people do not drink/drug by choice, and not because they are in recovery but because they do not want to lose control.

Social drinkers and recreational drug users are still escaping reality, albeit in a more controlled manner than we managed and probably not for the same reasons but just because alcohol is legal and socially acceptable does not mean it is a clever, healthy or a smart choice.

If I thought for a second that I was missing out, then I would live life with a mental wrestling match going on in my head and most likely relapse at some stage, so I had to change my thinking and learn to utterly hate the thought of any amount of any mind-altering substance at any time.

SOME PEOPLE WITHOUT A DRINK OR DRUG PROBLEM CHOOSE TO BE TEETOTAL



WE ARE EXACTLY WHERE WE ARE SUPPOSED TO BE

We are the exact sum total of everything we have previously done in our lives — who we are, what we are, our net worth, the state of our health, relationships and friendships etc.

The various departments of our life have been gradually built through past decisions and actions.

That may sound a little general and I completely accept some of us may find we have been burdened with issues and ailments from birth or on other occasions; things we may not have been able to control but generally speaking the formula applies 99% of the time.

For example, if a kid works hard at school and subsequently gets accepted to university, and then sacrifices most days and nights to study as a doctor, lawyer or some other profession, then that kid is probably going to have a very high standard of living and own a wonderful home. They will look prosperous and behave like a winner and they'll probably find the perfect spouse and make healthy and beautiful kids.

But if that same kid hated school and didn't try a jot, they better be damn good at something non-academic if they expect to finish up with the same success story.

People who don't try hard, tend to be less happy with their lot in life and that gives them a good reason to escape reality, so it is no coincidence that

when things go bad in our lives we tend to make them even worse with further negative choices.

The exact opposite also applies; when things are going great we tend to eat healthier, drink and drug less (if at all), spend more time with our loved ones, go places together, socialise in general, smile, laugh, feel and look happy.

I know because I have experienced both scenarios.

It is entirely up to each one of us today to decide what quality of life we would like, in fact, what quality of life we demand.

We can put the building blocks in place to have the life we desire.

We never have a desire if we cannot achieve it; that's my belief anyway. I haven't.

Successful people are not lucky and unsuccessful people are not unlucky; we are who we are because of choices.

Past decisions always come out in the wash; they are the components that made us who we are today. However, if we decide to rebuild our lives, we will make a different person.

Use different ingredients and you'll get a different product.

We all have choices and today I make the choices to become the person I desire to be.

A big part of my recovery journey began by accepting where I was today.

Up until my recovery journey began I tended to do whatever I wanted to do every day, but when I understood that who I wanted to be in the future was more important, I started doing things differently today.

I remember complaining to my Sponsor that things were not getting better quickly. He listened patiently and then said, 'You're exactly where you're supposed to be'.

That didn't make sense to me at the time; however, today, I fully understand what he meant and know that I'm exactly where I should be and know how to make it better.

KNOCK AND IT SHALL BE OPENED UNTO YOU



I'M PROBABLY A LOT BETTER THAN I THINK I AM

I have learned so much from the wonderful Recovery Champions who frequent the various Anonymous groups. An example came from overhearing someone being asked how he was and he replied, 'probably a lot better than I think I am!'

I couldn't help laughing when I heard that, and I immediately thought that's me down to a T.

It resonated deep inside; what a perfect and accurate way to answer that question which we get asked on many occasions each day.

And how true it is. So often we can have a completely distorted picture of how we're doing. Sometimes it's hard to distinguish between thoughts and the reality.

My head rarely tells me the truth, instead it's busy painting dark scenarios and building cases against why and how things won't work out for me. I am without a doubt my biggest critic, it's no wonder I drank and drugged so much.

One of the gifts of recovery is the tools that can be used to step outside our thinking.

If my thoughts take me down a dark path, then I gently bring them back by reminding myself of all the things today that I should be grateful for.

When I do that I know the truth; I'm a lot better than I thought.

LIVE LIFE ON LIFE'S TERMS



COURAGE and THE PAIN BARRIER

Courageous people do things they don't want to do.

It is not courageous to do something you want to do, even if for example it was going to war. Admirable maybe, but courage is needed to do something we do not want to do.

We generally need a lot of courage in early recovery since it takes a lot of courage to live without drink or drugs at first.

It can be scary to let go of drink and drugs, but rest assured it gets easier every day.

Courage is needed and so is support; Recovery Champions are a great source of strength, particularly in early recovery, when the idea of living without drink and drugs may seem impossible.

You will break through the pain barrier. Be strong like a runner breaking the pain barrier; it is tough to do but it is relatively easy thereafter.

I made a bargain with myself that I would stay off drink & drugs for 100 days and if life without them was so terrible, then I would go back to my old hopeless ways.

Life was not even close to being terrible and I never returned to drink and drugs after my first 100 days clean and sober.

Success is like an old-fashioned hand water pump when you have to pump it hard for a while, holding the faith that the water will eventually begin to flow even when you are getting nothing but air, and once the water starts to flow it takes much less energy to keep it flowing.

ACTION CONQUERS FEAR AND CREATES CONFIDENCE



THE WORLD RECORD IS 24 HOURS

The first Anonymous meeting I ever attended was within the Priory Rehab, Glasgow when I was an inpatient. It was an AA meeting, which I believe still takes place in the same room at the same time each week.

I was accompanied by James, one of the therapists and as surreal as this feels today I turned up in my pyjamas! If I ever need a reminder of how ill I really was.

Upon arriving I spotted the most delicious looking two-tier cake exploding with cream and icing from all sides sitting on the top table. It only had one candle, so I immediately realised this must be for me, the newcomer, as it was my first ever meeting.

Throughout the entire meeting, I sat rehearsing what I would say and how thankful I felt towards these kind-hearted strangers who had heard I was coming along that evening and had gone to such great length to organise this scrumptious looking cake for Cal.

Anyway, to cut a long story short, at the end of the meeting when it was cake presentation time and the Chairman was just about to present me with the cake, (I was sitting at the edge of my seat in anticipation), the whole room cheered as the Chair announced the cake was for Carol who was celebrating her first year clean and sober.

Oh well, wishful thinking!

As the first few months of my recovery journey unfolded, I watched on as other Recovery Champions collected cakes, cards and clean-time chips. Some for 1 year, others for multiple years and some, only for 1 day.

I remember wondering if they had something that I didn't (apart from my cake!). I'm talking about the ability to stay clean and sober long term.

When I shared my concerns about this, I was told that we all have the same amount of time, and that is only 'today'.

Then as I kept going back to meetings I started to see people return who had relapsed, and I'm talking about Champions with long term recovery, so I quickly learned how important it was to value and focus on 'today'.

My journey was amazing, and I eventually got my cake too!

And as I got a few clean and sober years under my belt I began trying to figure out what to do with my life and once again I got impatient when I saw others around me had accomplished so much more and seemed to have many of the things that I wanted.

When I shared this, I was once again reminded that the world record for staying clean and sober was 'just for today', 24 hours. And if I set goals and

adopted a laser like focus on 'daily action' then I would also accomplish anything I set my mind on.

Over the years I have come to see the immense wisdom and simplicity of that advice.

When tasks or goals seem impossible to accomplish or issues seem impossible to resolve or overcome, I simply remind myself that I do not need to get any further ahead of myself than today.

Anyone can do it 'just for today'.

And what I've found is that when I take the right action, one day at a time, obstacles are overcome, and dreams do come true.

GOD'S DELAYS ARE NOT GOD'S DENIALS



WE'RE NOT BAD PEOPLE GETTING GOOD: WE'RE SICK PEOPLE GETTING BETTER

At a meeting I heard a newcomer complain about the shame he felt.

He shared that he had only been clean and sober a very short time and the list of destruction he had created was sinking in and becoming overwhelming.

As he was recovering he was becoming more and more aware of all the damage he had caused, and his feelings of remorse were intense. I think we could all relate to what he was saying.

Like the rest of us; he couldn't believe the things he had done.

That's when someone reminded the Room 'we're not bad people getting good; we're sick people getting better'.

I was grateful to be reminded of that, as were many in the Room; alcoholism and drug addiction are not a moral failing.

Of course, when we are full of drink/drugs we are much more likely to behave irresponsibly but that's what drink/drugs can do to us humans.

And the result of reckless behaviour causes wreckage.

Most of us are not bad people, it is only because we are full of drink and drugs that we may appear that way; take away the drink/drugs and our behaviour almost always gets better.

My Sponsor told me, 'don't focus on your old behaviour, focus on your new recovery journey'.

After entering recovery, I automatically stopped behaving irresponsibly and it was no coincidence that no new wreckage appeared and better still I was able to start clearing up the old wreckage.

SOBRIETY IS A GIFT OF LIFE



ADVICE THAT IS NOT ASKED FOR IS CRITICISM

I have no time for others who volunteer advice for others.

How often I hear people telling others ‘what’s best for them’ and unless they asked, as far as I’m concerned, that’s called ‘criticism’.

Unasked-for advice is generally unwelcome advice and is quite simply thinly veiled criticism.

Thank God, the people in the Fellowship don’t behave that way.

If people in the Rooms had handed out unasked-for advice or told me what was best for me, I would have left immediately.

Instead people would share suggestions, as the conch was passed around the Room.

I also asked for advice based on other peoples’ experiences; if they had a similar first-hand situation and found something that worked for them, then I wanted to hear about it.

Thanks to this learning curve I try to apply this style of sharing in my other relationships too.

And being a good listener is a good way to learn.

Sometimes that’s all people really want at times, to be heard and understood, for someone to just listen, empathise and try to help them process their experience.

LEARN TO LISTEN AND LISTEN TO LEARN



WHAT OTHER PEOPLE THINK OF ME IS NONE OF MY BUSINESS

During my life I have striven to be liked, not to upset people, and to keep the peace but I soon found all I managed to do was put myself in a twist trying to please everyone all of the time.

It was a revolutionary concept the first time I heard; ‘what other people think of you is none of your business’.

When I first heard this quote, it was one of those light bulb moments when I realised, what people think about me isn’t about me, it’s about them.

Other people’s thoughts are not my business, it’s their business, just like my thoughts about others are not their business.

We may strive to be thought of positively by others and while it is flattering to succeed, it is far more beneficial to be highly thought of by ourselves.

Our moods and feelings should not depend on what other people think about us.

Why on earth should we allow others to control our feelings and emotions? Surely, we must take ownership of them, just as others could not suggest I control their feelings or emotions.

I understand a loved one's thoughts are more powerful than a stranger's thoughts but just because a loved one may feel or think a certain way about us doesn't mean we should change how we feel.

For example, if we are feeling really happy, it would be a crime to give someone else the power to change that beautiful state.

As I began changing I soon recognised that to allow others the ability to control my emotions was a defect of character and I had the power to change it.

People pleasers tend to harbour deep felt resentments in doing so.

It is impossible to make everyone happy with the choices we make so if we worry about getting everyone's approval we will never get anywhere.

If I let what others think of me become my business, it will consume all of my time and energy and drain me of the ability to move on in my life.

Don't get me wrong, I don't mean I completely ignore other people's needs and feelings, I just don't worry and stress about what they think of me.

The only thing I need to focus on is what can I do to be the person I am truly meant to be and be the person that I will feel comfortable spending my time being.

I have done a lot of soul searching in recent years and have finally learned to accept and love the person I am without having to put on any fronts. I no longer live my life based on what I think others may expect of me.

What I was lacking was a clear sense of 'self'.

After much work and practice I have come to experience the freedom this new skill offers.

Today I take complete responsibility and ownership of how I feel about myself and what I think and believe about myself; I do not need confirmation from others.

I take actions based on a valid and worthwhile sense of self.

Today I know that others may have ideas and opinions about me but it's my own thoughts, ideas and opinions about me that matter most or perhaps, only matter at all.

As Anthony Hopkins said;

My philosophy is, it's none of my business what people say of me and think of me. I am what I am, and I do what I do. I expect nothing and accept everything as it makes life so much easier.

THE WORDS FROM OTHERS ARE USELESS UNLESS WE BELIEVE THEM TO BE TRUE IN OUR OWN HEARTS



LIFE CIRCUMSTANCES AND LIFESTYLES

Changes may have to be made to our life circumstances and lifestyles to allow us to be able to recover.

As the old adage goes; if you go to a barbers' shop often enough, you'll eventually get a haircut.

Recovery is about getting into the right environment to stand your best chance of staying clean and sober.

This is supported by the fact that the majority of servicemen who became addicted to heroin whilst fighting in the Vietnam War went into complete remission on their return to the USA.

That highlights the importance of social or environmental change, possibly, being necessary for recovery.

We should not care if we need to get a new job or maybe even a new wife or friends. Don't worry about upsetting them or your kids because you will do plenty more upsetting if you die instead.

Friends should support your intentions and encourage your new lifestyle. The people you allow into the circle of your life can make the difference in the quality of your life. Old drinking and drugging companions can trigger relapse, so be warned. If you want to be a musician, you wouldn't hang about with people that hate music, would you?

DON'T WASTE YOUR LIFE FOR YOUR NEIGHBOURS



THINGS MIGHT NOT GET BETTER FOR ME: BUT I CAN GET BETTER DESPITE THINGS

In early recovery I was convinced that by living clean and sober, things in my life would naturally get better.

I was certain my business career would get back on track; my relationships would flourish and everything else that was important to me would improve.

As these things pieced together I would finally find happiness and satisfaction with life.

In fact, I secretly believed I deserved for 'things' to improve now that I was being 'good'!

Boy was I wrong and what actually happened was that my life started to spiral out of control.

It was as if things had a natural momentum to them and even although I wasn't drinking and drugging or acting the same way, the wreckage of my past was beginning to catch up with me.

As I grew more and more miserable my Sponsor taught me something that set me free.

I remember he sat me down and asked if I could make it through the day without a drink or a drug; I told him I could and that is when he taught me that while I may not be able to control all the 'things' in my life, I could control the most important 'thing' of all, my sobriety and my recovery.

He told me that if I took care of that, then all the other 'things' would eventually work out.

While at first, I didn't completely believe him, it turns out he was entirely right.

Today I know that while 'things' may not always get better for me, I can get better if I focus on the one 'thing' that matters, my recovery.

RECOVERY IS AN ONGOING COMMITMENT LIKE BATHING, YOU NEED TO DO IT EVERY DAY AND IF YOU DO BOTH YOU WILL LIVE LONGER, AND YOU'LL SMELL MUCH BETTER TOO



PROBLEMS ARE SOLUTIONS IN TRAINING

This was definitely not the way I used to look at problems.

My problems used to overwhelm me, there appeared to be no solutions and there was a long list of them.

I would bounce from one problem to another and as I tried to solve them, it just seemed to create another problem.

When I embarked in recovery, I surrendered both my problems and my solutions.

My Sponsor kept pounding into my head that my best thinking was what got me here in the first place and if I turned my will over to a power greater than myself, real solutions will start to appear, and he was right.

I remained clean and stayed sober, worked the 12 Steps and my problems began to solve themselves. As I became more experienced with 'turning them over' and working the Steps plus deploying other tools I used, my problems became opportunities for me to grow.

Today my problems have become my teachers, leading me to solutions, providing I am willing to look for them.

Today my problems truly are solutions in training.

WE ALL GET KNOCKED DOWN IN LIFE, BUT WE MUST NEVER STAY DOWN; FIND THE STRENGTH TO RISE UP AND GIVE YOURSELF THE CHANCE TO START AGAIN



QUIT WITH THE THINKING AND START WITH THE DOING

It took me quite some time to learn that I can't 'think myself into feeling better'.

If I'm sitting at home depressed and I wait until I feel like going to a meeting or feel like calling someone it means I'm going to be at home depressed a long time.

Early on I learned about contrary action and when I take it, I always feel better.

There is a chapter in the Big Book called 'Into Action'.

There is not a chapter called 'Into Thinking'!

Feelings always follow actions and every time we take a positive action, we'll get a positive result.

The opposite is also true. If I stay in my head, I almost always feel bad or grow more depressed.

One of the best actions I've learned to take is to work with another. The power of this action means we always help each other and it immediately takes me out of 'thinking about myself' and into 'being of service' mode.

The magic of service is that while I'm helping someone else, I'm helping myself too. Today it's much easier for me to get out of thinking and get into doing.

THE TRANSFORMED BECOME GOD'S INSTRUMENTS OF CHANGE FOR OTHERS



PEOPLE WHO TRY TO FIGURE IT OUT GO BACK OUT

I like to think of myself as a pretty smart guy, and when I was new to the Programme, I kept trying to figure out how the Programme worked and why my Sponsor wanted me to do certain things.

For example, when he told me to put the chairs away after a meeting or pick up cigarette butts outside the front door, I was offended, so I asked, 'what's that got to do with me getting clean and sober' and he asked me, 'are you willing to do what we do around here'?

I was, so I agreed to his suggestions.

There are a lot of other pretty smart people who come into the Rooms and when given the same suggestions, they balk or refuse because they first want to figure out how it all works. They constantly ask questions (which I recommend) but they never hear the answer they want.

I just give them simple answers like, it worked for me and countless others, but that is not good enough for some.

Some people have a resistance to follow direction and an unwillingness to do the recovery work, but I think this is just a tactic to hide an ego that hasn't yet surrendered. Unfortunately, this insistence on figuring it out first often leads them to go back out.

Fortunately for me, I had hit a bottom that allowed me to be completely willing and open to reasonable suggestions.

I surrendered to the Group of Drunks (GOD) because they could do something I couldn't do; stay clean and sober!

As my Sponsor kept telling me, your best thinking got you into the Rooms so stop trying to figure it out and just follow the suggestions.

I'm so pleased I took his advice as my life got better and over eleven years later, I still haven't found it necessary to go back out.

THROW IN THE TOWEL



FEELINGS ARE NOT FACTS

When I was new to the Fellowship, my Sponsor would constantly tell me that my feelings are not facts, they are just feelings.

But it's a fact I'm having these feelings, I'd argue.

I paid a steep price for my stubbornness as my feelings would often hit me like a freight train and drag me far down the tracks.

After I got a little clean-time under my belt, I began to understand that my feelings only became facts when I acted on them.

For example, if I felt depressed, that was okay but if I then stayed in bed all day, that was not okay and then the feeling would become a fact.

This taught me that I could have feelings but providing I did not act on them or better still took contrary action, my feelings changed as quickly as they arrived.

Now when I see the freight train of feelings approaching, I simply step aside and watch as it passes by.

Today I know my feelings are not facts, they are just feelings and if I pause long enough or take immediate action to neutralise them, they will always pass by like a speeding train.

STOP HOLDING ON



I MAY NOT KNOW HOW TO MAKE IT BETTER: BUT I SURE KNOW HOW TO MAKE IT WORSE

I remember how bad things were before my recovery journey began and how easy it was for me to make things worse.

If I wasn't enjoying work I wouldn't show up; if my relationship wasn't going well I wouldn't return home; if I was drinking too much, I'd drink even more. No matter what was going wrong I always found a way to make it worse.

When I stepped onto the road of recovery, my Sponsor taught me that what happened in my life was entirely my responsibility, full stop.

He demonstrated to me how I had a part in everything that happened to me and everything I experienced and why my solutions often created a bigger problem than the original problem I was trying to solve.

It took many years for me to understand this, accept this and many more years to learn how to consistently make better choices.

I once heard someone say that the 12-Step programme was the life manual they always wished they had when growing up.

I completely relate to that because I too have learned new life skills from various recovery tools, self-help books and the 12-Step programme, they have taught me that there are much better ways to handle certain situations apart from jumping in headfirst without thinking it through.

I was told to react to every situation in my life, firstly with silence and think through the way a chess Grand Master would respond.

React with intelligence or in other words, don't behave like Popeye would!

Today I have a choice between making situations better or worse and if I focus my attention on my side of the street, I know how to make things better.

LEAVE YOUR PRIDE AT HOME



I DON'T HAVE A REWIND BUTTON IN MY LIFE, BUT I DO HAVE A PAUSE BUTTON

I cannot remember how many times I've said or done something that I've later regretted. It's generally when I'm angry or offended or in the heat of the moment when I felt the need to defend or justify myself, that I have acted in ways that may have hurt others but ultimately hurt me.

Just because I'm clean and sober doesn't mean I can't be angered or offended.

I still get cut up in traffic, doors slammed in my face and receive critique from people that I think would do the world a much bigger favour looking in a mirror than looking at me; however, in order to continue grow in recovery I have enjoyed learning to deal with these events.

At first it was simply based on restraint, but I discovered that instead of feeling low later on about a previous outburst, the very opposite occurred and later on, after not acting the hothead, I got a rush of satisfaction for behaving with restraint.

There are penalties or rewards for all our behaviours, whether we like it or not.

I have tried to train myself to react calmly to annoying situations; it's not easy but if I give myself time to focus on a controlled response, I have a chance.

Practising restraint of pen and tongue has been one of the most practical things I have learned in recovery. I was taught not to react when upset but rather to call someone and run my reactions by them first.

I can still write that email, text or letter but I had to show it to my Sponsor before I sent it (not many, if any, were sent).

Pausing and praying to my Allies always restores my power of choice.

Today I pause which often saves me from later wishing I had a rewind button which nobody has; however, we all have a pause button.

PEOPLE HONESTLY DON'T REALISE THEY CAN CHANGE



LIVE LIFE TODAY AS IF IT'S OUR LAST DAY

We've all heard sayings like this and for many years my reaction was simply 'Yeah, but it's not really my last day and the rent is due at the end of the month, I'm still unemployed, I don't feel overly happy and as for relationships' etc.

My many worries consumed me, and the precious days and years passed by without me and I sometimes wonder where all the time has gone.

When I was 30 days clean and sober, an old timer with 24 years of sobriety shook my hand and congratulated me; I said, 'wow I wish I had 24 years under my belt' and I'll never forget what he said, 'I'll trade you my 24 years right now for your 30 days!'

Eventually, I understood his wisdom; it's about the journey, not the destination.

Today I'm very grateful for the gift of another day clean and sober, alive and happy.

I've witnessed friends relapse, some of whom have died, so I live within a place of supreme gratitude.

I appreciate life is very precious and beautiful and won't last forever. Today, I have an opportunity to help others who are where I once was. I appreciate the gift of life today and I'm grateful that I'm clean and sober and present enough to enjoy it.

ALWAYS GRATEFUL



MY RECOVERY JOURNEY CHANGED DIRECTION WHEN I GAVE UP HOPING FOR A DIFFERENT PAST

We can all be a bit guilty of focusing too much on the past and worrying too much about the future instead of enjoying the moment.

I certainly spent far too much of my time and energy, in early recovery, dwelling on my past.

But it will never be different.

My past will be my past, good or bad, it is uniquely mine.

When I was introduced to the Twelve-Step programme, I was taught to stop fighting everybody and everything, in other words, 'surrender'.

One definition of surrender is to lay down our arms and join the winning side.

By surrendering old feelings about my past, I started to see it in a completely new light and by working the Programme, I was able to make peace with my past.

I began to feed off my past as a learning tool and used the lessons and gifts it had to offer.

As time has kept unfolding and my new life has evolved, I have seen how valuable my experiences are, if used positively and how my past experiences can be used to help others too.

My deepest wounds have become my greatest power.

My past has healed, and I am a much stronger person today thanks to that.

Our past will never change but our future can change.

IF I COULD KICK IN THE BACKSIDE THE PERSON RESPONSIBLE FOR MY TROUBLES, I WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO SIT FOR A MONTH



WHEN I'M ALONE AND BY MYSELF; I'M OUTNUMBERED

I remember the first time I heard about the 'Committee'.

Someone shared a story; when she went to sleep, the Committee in her head got together and started going over all the things that were wrong and why her life was never going to work out.

They collected evidence and put solid cases together before reaching their decisions.

When she woke up in the morning the Committee handed her their verdict; guilty and sentenced her to a miserable life!

I could certainly relate to that as I also have my own Committee that constantly tell me things aren't going to work out and that my past mistakes are insurmountable.

The Committee used to tell me no matter how hard I try I will never be happy.

When I'm alone, the Committee is especially active and after a few days of listening to their decrees I'm easily overwhelmed and defeated.

During my recovery journey I learned that being alone and listening to my own thinking almost always leads to negativity.

It is a fact that our thinking gets distorted by drug addiction/alcoholism.

Therefore, I fired the Committee!

And instead run my thoughts by my Sponsor or other Recovery Champions.

TODAY I RECOGNISE THE DANGER OF BEING ALONE AND THEREFORE OUTNUMBERED



LISTEN FOR THE SIMILARITIES NOT THE DIFFERENCES

It is easy to criticise or disagree with others just for the sake of it.

We can all mistakenly judge others or play Devil's advocate if we want, however, we can also do the opposite if we choose.

I'm sure you've heard of the phrase 'Devil's advocate' and my father was the original!

To side-track for a moment, during the canonisation process employed by the Roman Catholic Church, the Promoter of the Faith popularly known as the Devil's advocate was a canon lawyer appointed by Church authorities to argue against the canonisation of a candidate. It was this person's job to take a sceptical view of the candidate's character and to look for holes in the evidence, thus arguing any miracles attributed to the candidate were fraudulent and so on. That's the origin and I certainly know, from years of being on the receiving end, that we are all capable of looking at the same thing from two completely opposite directions.

I think it depends somewhat on how we are feeling, for example, my late father was seriously ill for many years and that'll make anybody pretty grumpy and when we're grumpy, we can all be nitpickers.

As opposed to, for example, thinking about the time a new love enters our life; they can do or say anything, and we'll agree 100%, before their lips even move!

Therefore, the reality is, our attitude is much more to do with how we feel than what is actually being discussed.

On that basis when I was given the suggestion; 'listen for the similarities and not the differences' I fully understood this is a definite choice.

I decided to treat recovery and all those that wanted to help me with the same unconditional attitude of gratitude and that really helped me change. I was extremely grateful to get reminded of this at my first ever meeting and today I still only grab hold of similarities when I listen to a Recovery Champion sharing.

Let go of differences as they are trivial detail and entirely irrelevant.

Please don't misinterpret me, I'm not and never will be a yes-man; if someone suggested something that I violently disagreed with I would be the first to speak up, but I don't split hairs because I'm feeling grumpy, there's a huge difference.

I don't take my eye off the 'Big Picture'.

The greatest thing about that attitude is I kept listening for similarities and constantly heard other Recovery Champions sharing pieces of my story and that really helped me feel like I fitted in.

Besides identifying with others in this way, it also helped me understand the various stages of recovery.

When someone shared their experience of working the Steps, I began relating this to my own journey of recovery, which gave me hope, strength and the courage to keep going.

There have been many principal lessons in recovery that I have applied in all areas of my life, listening for the similarities and trying hard to agree with others, particularly loved ones.

The biggest winner is me; try it and you'll experience the ease of conversing.

The next time your spouse, child, friend, colleague or parent suggests something, try hard to explore all the reasons for agreeing and share those reasons back, you'll find as many as you want, and you won't believe how good it feels.

IDENTIFY DON'T COMPARE



RECOVERY ISN'T FOR PEOPLE WHO NEED IT; IT'S FOR PEOPLE WHO WANT IT

After I was clean and sober a little while, I started thinking about all the people I knew who could really benefit from, in fact really needed, the recovery programme I had found. This was especially true of the newcomers who kept relapsing, they clearly needed a recovery plan.

Why can't they get it, I would ask myself?

The answer was simple, recovery isn't for people who need it, it's for people who want it. If everyone who needed help attended meetings, they'd need to rent stadiums, not rooms! It seems only the desperate become willing enough to do what we've done; to get what we've got.

For years I needed recovery, but I still had better ideas.

It wasn't until rock bottom that I was willing to abandon my old ideas and begin a new recovery journey.

Today, I understand when someone at a meeting says to a newcomer, 'I wish you desperation'.

It is only by becoming desperate that people tend to go from needing help, to wanting it.

Today I recognise everyone is on their own journey and although many may need recovery, until they want recovery, they won't be able to get recovery.

START A NEW LIFE



WHEN ONE DOOR CLOSSES ANOTHER ONE OPENS, BUT IT'S HELL IN THE HALLWAYS

Most people dislike or perhaps fear change.

Certainly, before my recovery journey started, I had very few if any 'tools for change' and healthy ways of dealing with change.

If something ended in my life, it often felt like the end of my life and once I entered the hallway, it was very dark indeed.

As I travelled along the road of recovery, I learned many valuable life lessons.

The first was 'one day at a time'; I constantly remind myself that I can do anything just for today, and get through anything if I keep my focus simply on today.

That way the hallway doesn't look so long and dark.

Another valuable lesson learned was; this too shall pass. No matter how bad things appear or not matter what is happening, it does pass.

Things will change and with change comes new openings, new opportunities and new beginnings.

Today if one door closes, I have powerful tools to support me in the hallways while I wait and watch for new doors to open.

WHITE KNUCKLE SOBRIETY



NEGATIVITY IS MY DISEASE ASKING ME TO COME OUT TO PLAY

I used to think I had one voice in my head; sometimes it was encouraging and optimistic and other times it was negative and defeatist.

Latterly, during my worst days of drug addiction, the good part of that voice went away and all I heard was how bad things were and how much worse they were going to get. It told me things weren't going to get better so why bother trying.

It said life was so bad why not at least try to feel better by drinking and drugging.

It's no wonder I agreed.

When I first entered the Rooms, I heard a lot of talk about the disease of drug addiction/alcoholism.

At first my voice told me that was a bunch of nonsense and that I was just badly behaved, weak-willed and a loser.

However, as I started getting better, the positive voice returned, and I discovered it was separate from the negative one. I realised there were two voices inside me and I began to understand how cunning alcoholism/drug addiction actually was.

It took some time to nurture and grow the positive voice again; however today I recognise it is my true voice, my Allies.

ASKING FOR HELP IS A SIGN OF STRENGTH



I'VE LEARNED TO SAY, 'YOU MAY BE RIGHT'

Before recovery I thought I knew it all.

When someone disagreed with me, I'd argue and go out of my way to set them straight.

As the saying goes, 'Those people who think they know it all are especially annoying to those of us who do'.

When I began working with my Sponsor, I started arguing with him too. At first, he listened but after a while he had enough and said;

Why don't you take the cotton out of your ears and put it in your mouth!
 I was too desperate to be indignant, so I followed his advice and began listening to what others were sharing in meetings.
 And that's when the miracle began for me.
 Through listening to the experience, strength and hope of others I learned that my way was not the only way.
 I learned that others had their own path, made their own mistakes and grew from their own experiences.
 Most of all I learned to stop arguing because I learned how to say, 'You may be right'.

CHASING THE IMPOSSIBLE



BEHAVIOUR IS LIKE A TENNIS RACKET; IF YOURS IS BROKEN, GET A NEW ONE

A woman at a meeting once said behaviour is like a tennis racket.
 A tennis racket works for a while, even years, but eventually the strings wear out, the grip comes apart and after a while a new one is needed.
 She said for years she was using rackets of behaviour long after they had stopped working.

It was only after she 'got a new racket' that her life improved.
 When I first entered recovery, I had a lot of old, worn out rackets too but what I didn't realise was, that was the reason my life wasn't working. I kept trying to use old rackets to achieve different results.
 Unless we behave differently the results in our lives will stay the same.
 Today I'm much better at recognising my old 'rackets of behaviour' and thankfully I'm more willing to try something different.
 Today when areas of my life aren't working, I look at my behaviour and when my racket isn't working, I'm quick to get a new one.

TODAY I KNOW I CANNOT WIN IF I CONTINUE TO PLAY WITH AN OLD RACKET



FOR EVERY NUT IN THE PROGRAMME, THERE IS A BOLT

When I first entered the Rooms, I was a little taken aback by some of the strange characters I heard share.
 Some had been to prison, some had lived on the streets, some had been prostitutes, some were gangsters, and some were still pretty crazy.
 I thought these people had nothing in common with me and so, how are they going to help me get clean and sober.

My Sponsor told me, some of these people may not be able to help you directly but the fact they get this thing and stay clean and sober shows that you can too.

I saw his point.

Besides that, even if they haven't had the exact same experience, there will be someone who has.

No matter who you are, there will always be somebody who has the experience, strength and hope that you'll need.

Over the years I've found this to be so true for everyone that has ever appeared at various support groups. One of the things I've learned to count on is that there is always someone who can help someone else, regardless of what they're going through.

This has taught me the value of everyone in the Programme, not just those that I can identify with.

Today I know there is a bolt for every nut in the Rooms!

WISDOM IS KNOWLEDGE YOU LEARN AFTER YOU KNOW IT ALL



GOD: GOOD ORDERLY DIRECTION

Like many newcomers I had a lot of conflicting feelings and ideas about the God concept.

I still don't agree with the principle that I must believe in God to be able to recover.

However, my Sponsor came to my aid by telling me to first stop trying to figure out who or what God was.

My job was simply to come to believe that there is a power greater than myself out there somewhere. Who or what that is isn't important; what's important is that it's not me.

That put me in my place but how do I do that I asked.

The answer, he told me was to take Good Orderly Direction.

He suggested that I start by attending regular meetings and that I refrain from drinking or drugging between those meetings.

Next, he said I should begin reading the literature and start working the Steps. He also encouraged me to begin sharing my feelings honestly with him and with others in recovery.

If you continue to move in a Good Orderly Direction, you'll come to know God, he said.

NEVER WAKE UP COMPLACENT



JUST BECAUSE YOU'RE HAVING A BAD DAY DOESN'T MEAN YOU'RE HAVING A BAD LIFE

It's amazing the way my mind used to work.

When things were good, it told me they wouldn't last.

When things were bad, it told me they were going to get worse.

When I was having a bad day, it told me every other day was going to be just as bad and that no matter how hard I tried, my life would end in failure.

However, when I entered recovery, the first thing I learned was that alcoholism/drug addiction was a perception disorder.

I was told what was happening in my head didn't always reflect what was happening in my life and I was given tools to help me tell the difference.

Gratitude lists helped me see the good as well as the bad and running my thinking past others helped me see any unnecessary negativity.

Working with others always helped me feel better no matter what was going on.

It took a long time to develop a new perspective on my thinking but by being willing to change and by working hard, I now know that most of what my mind tells me is inaccurate at best.

To counter this today when I wake up I turn my thoughts over to my Allies and let Them direct my thinking.

If I'm having a bad day I can start it over at any time by saying to myself;

Thy will, not mine, be done; and that always works.

Today I know if I'm having a bad day it doesn't mean I'm having a bad life, it just means it's time to turn it over.

START EACH DAY WITH A POSITIVE READING



I'D RATHER GO THROUGH LIFE SOBER BELIEVING I'M AN ALCOHOLIC, THAN GO THROUGH LIFE DRUNK, TRYING TO PROVE I'M NOT

I love it when newcomers share at meetings that they don't think they are alcoholics.

Sure, they admit they like to party and perhaps have lost a job or two, have lost their driving licence for drunk-driving and they've been arrested after making a scene or two, but they can control their drinking when they have to.

Eventually someone points out that people who don't have a drinking problem are rarely at meetings, trying to defend or explain their drinking!

For a long time, I also resisted the idea that I might be an alcoholic/drug addict; however, the longer I stayed clean and sober, learned about the condition and the more I compared my behaviour with alcoholics and drug addicts around me, the more I had to admit, that I probably was one too, in fact, it was an easy decision!

However, rather than it being a sentence, it turned out to be the key that set me free.

Today the debating is over, and I choose to live a life clean and sober. It's kind of like that saying about whether to believe in God or not: I'd rather live my life believing that there is a God and find out in the end there isn't, than live my life believing there isn't and find out there is.

Ultimately, it's about living a good life and that is what sobriety allows me to do.

THROW IN THE TOWEL



DON'T COUNT THE DAYS, MAKE THE DAYS COUNT

I remember counting the days in early recovery.

I remember how difficult it sometimes was to make it through the weekend or even the evening and can still feel how grateful I was to make it through another day, early on.

Those 30, 60 and 90 days 'Clean-time' chips were a big deal to me; with each chip I felt a growing relief as if I had escaped from prison and was still free.

As the months turned into years, my focus shifted, and I began to wonder what I wanted to do with my life and after a while I began to dream of what I might become and what my Allies had in store for me and once I settled on a direction I began living my life with purpose.

Today my days are filled with the joy of living. My focus is away from mere survival and instead I focus on what I can pack into the stream of life today.

I no longer wake up and say, oh God not another day, but rather, thank God, I have another day.

I'm grateful that I no longer count the days but rather look for ways to make each day count.

WHEN I RECEIVED A SECOND CHANCE AT LIFE I WAS PREPARED TO TRY A DIFFERENT APPROACH

**I DON'T BELIEVE IN MIRACLES, I DEPEND ON THEM!**

If you had asked me before recovery if I believed in miracles, I would have laughed in your face.

Look at my life I would have said, there are certainly no miracles happening here.

In hindsight I wasn't aware of how miraculous it was that I hadn't killed myself or anybody else or how the miracle of recovery was about to happen for me.

During the first few years of recovery, the occurrence of miracles was so subtle, I sometimes missed them.

My physical sobriety was something I initially struggled with but eventually took for granted; this was surely my first miracle. Later, the miracle of emotional recovery and the emerging awareness and appreciation for my spiritual self were also examples of the miracles taking place in my life. All at the same time, I was witnessing miracles happening to others in the Rooms.

These days, I've come to rely on the existence of miracles, even though they may not always look like what I expect them to look like.

Today I realise it's enough just to believe in miracles.

If I show up and be of service, God will do the rest.

Today, I believe in miracles.

SEEK AND YE SHALL FIND

CHAPTER 5

UNDERSTANDING THE NUMBER ONE REASONS THAT CAN PREVENT SUCCESS AND LONG-TERM SOBRIETY

Do not think for a moment that relapsing is acceptable in any way shape or form; it absolutely is not.

This may be your last chance so please grab it with both hands and do not relapse under any circumstances.

This chapter is intended to warn you of danger signs to watch out for as well as what to do to prevent relapse.

A relapse can be called a 'slip', 'fall' or 'slide' but regardless of how we label it, it doesn't just happen; at some point in the process we have invariably said 'Yes'. In many instances a recovering drug addict/alcoholic will be looking for an excuse to relapse and any old trigger will provide an excuse.

When people manage to quit alcohol or drug abuse they get a second chance in life. Some individuals will make the most of this opportunity and go on to achieve amazing things. Some build a new life in recovery that is a complete contrast to their previous life. There are other individuals who do less well and end up returning to substance abuse after a period of sobriety. This is a terrible waste of an opportunity and that individual may never get another chance. There will always be relapse triggers that could cause an individual to recommence the maladaptive behaviour but if they are able to recognise these triggers beforehand they will have the power to prevent relapsing.

That is what this chapter is all about.

You are not alone and do not need to try and recover or change all by yourself either.

On more occasions than I care to remember I would hold my head in my hands and say, 'never again' but never again would happen again and again and again. In fact, it is no coincidence that I hear other recovered drug addicts/alcoholics saying they were totally sick and tired of being totally sick and tired. Up until that point I had assumed it might be nicer for some people around me if I stopped drinking/drugging, but it would not be for my benefit.

In life, we either grow or die, climb or slide, we do not stand still; nothing living does. Things don't change without us making them change and it is we who must make the changes, but first we must learn how to make the changes.

A SMOOTH SEA NEVER MADE A GOOD SAILOR



THE CHANCES OF RECOVERY

Very few alcoholics and drug addicts actually recover.

Statistics are a bit mixed but if we assume there is a 15% chance of recovery then that is a realistic if not slightly optimistic target.

That is frightening because that means 85 people out of 100 will relapse in the first month of recovery.

With such poor odds stacked against recovery, may I suggest if you put the same effort into recovering as you did when drinking and drugging, your odds will dramatically increase towards success.

Living clean and sober has given me a life beyond my wildest dreams, but why do some get it and others do not?

The answer I think is some people **MUST** have certain standards in their life and others only **SHOULD** have.

Remember we must resolve the underlying reasons for escaping reality to really stand a great chance of recovery success.

INSTEAD OF HIDING FROM MY CHALLENGES, I DECIDED TO TRY DEALING WITH THEM HEAD ON



BEWARE of SUPPRESSED FEELINGS

Feelings get suppressed by drinking/drugging, therefore when we lay down drink/drugs, the feelings will start to surface. We must be prepared to deal with these feelings in a mature and responsible way if we really want to recover and grow.

There are two sets of emotions to deal with, firstly the original feelings we used substances to escape from and the second bunch of negative feelings we are sure to have developed about ourselves, during our dark days.

It is far more constructive and fulfilling to resolve challenges rather than hiding from them; we instantly gain self-esteem, confidence and self-respect reacting that way.

We can learn new routines that bring us natural rewards but early into recovery, it's an emotional rollercoaster, which makes relapse a high risk so be warned.

It may be tempting to take the quick way out and escape from our true feelings, but behind the mask of mind-altering substances, as we surely all know by now, this only creates further misery because our feelings do not go away; they are only temporarily numbed.

My best advice is, go to meetings and listen to Recovery Champions sharing how they successfully addressed these early tide emotions as they surfaced.

Don't think you are unique.

Feelings come flooding back to our lives as we begin sobering up. In fact, these emotions are already within us; they are simply going to defrost. Be prepared for feelings of guilt, shame, remorse, anger, resentment and self-hatred.

But don't panic and relapse, just deal with each feeling as it surfaces, that is what the Twelve-Step programme teaches us to do.

The real fun part is replacing these negative feelings with self-respect, pride, peace, forgiveness and even love.

We are literally building a new life for ourselves, building a new person and right now is the best time to begin.

A SNAKE BITE DOESN'T KILL YOU, IT'S JUST A BITE; IT'S THE POISON THAT CIRCULATES IN YOUR BODY THAT KILLS YOU, LIKE ANGER, RESENTMENT AND FEAR



DO IT FOR YOURSELF

Recovering drug addicts/alcoholics often relapse if they are only in recovery for someone else.

For example, if a Drug Court orders an individual into recovery or a loved one persuades an individual into recovery; unless the person wants to change it will only last short term at best.

The drug addict/alcoholic may appear very convincing or may even be kidding themselves on too, but the truth is they may appear excited, not because they are entering recovery but because they are not starting jail time or because they are improving family relations.

It is vital that the individual wants to change.

The prerequisites to 'wanting to recover' are; believing you can change and thinking it will be worthwhile.

Those two ingredients can be discovered at the Champions Cinema (www.frog.net).

Let me explain that in more detail; by watching and listening to real life recovery examples, it gives us the belief that we can do it too.

And it gives us evidence that living clean and sober is magical and not a prison sentence, as I remember thinking it would be.

When I woke up one day and wanted to recover for myself, from that moment, I knew I would do it.

IF IT IS IMPORTANT TO YOU, YOU WILL FIND A WAY; IF NOT, YOU'LL FIND AN EXCUSE



CRUCIAL TO AVOID RELAPSE

It is crucial that people in recovery avoid relapse because:

- if people return to alcohol or drug abuse, there is no guarantee they will ever get the motivation to quit again
- for some people a relapse back to addiction can mean a death sentence
- there is only so long that the human body is able to put up with the abuse of this type of behaviour before serious illness develops
- relapse will reduce an individual's self-esteem and the lower the self-esteem the harder it will be to ever stop again
- family and friends can be deeply impacted by someone's relapse; all their hopes will be dashed, and they will find it difficult to trust the person again
- many people have found that when they relapsed after a period of sobriety, things felt way worse than before.

DON'T TASTE FREEDOM, THEN LOSE IT



COMMON RELAPSE TRIGGERS

The most common relapse triggers include;

- overconfidence
- self-pity
- unrealistic expectations for recovery
- lying and other forms of dishonesty
- depression
- frustration
- false expectations
- taking recovery for granted
- abusing other substances/activities
- HALT; hunger, anger, loneliness, tiredness

Let's look at these individually;

Overconfidence

It is normal for drug addicts/alcoholics to suffer from low self-esteem so developing a bit of confidence is a positive thing; however, if someone becomes overconfident it can be dangerous, particularly in early recovery. This often happens when an individual is experiencing pink cloud syndrome (see further notes).

In a nutshell, if a recovering drug addict/alcoholic thinks their problems are over and comes to the conclusion that they no longer need to put as much effort into their recovery, this can mean they stop doing the things that have been helping them stay clean and sober.

Self-pity

At Alcoholics Anonymous, we describe self-pity as; poor me, poor me, pour me a drink. Self-pity can be defined as pitying oneself in an exaggerated or overindulgent manner.

Having a self-pity party.

It means the individual feels like a victim and blames other people, places or things for their situation.

Self-pity needs to be snapped out of immediately, otherwise it makes us powerless and unwilling to deal with the real cause of our problems.

Unrealistic expectations for recovery

Unrealistic expectations can be one of the most common relapse triggers. When people enter recovery, some may expect their life to improve immediately and while it may naturally improve in some departments, it is less reasonable to think all departments will improve without any real effort.

Giving up alcohol and drugs is a vital step, but it is only the start of the process.

People must work hard to create the type of life that they want.

Lying and other forms of dishonesty

When people enter recovery, they are making a decision to have a more honest approach to life.

While trapped in the midst of addiction, a person is also likely to be trapped in delusion and denial.

In order to maintain a constant supply of drugs/alcohol most people need to behave dishonestly at some point and if people turn clean and sober

and continue to behave this way it is usually a sign that they are a dry drunk (see further notes).

Basically, a dry drunk may be clean and sober, but their behaviour is just as it always has been, and dishonesty will prevent them from finding real happiness in recovery and will probably cause them to relapse.

Depression

It is fairly common for people in recovery to deal with symptoms of depression due to withdrawal symptoms.

It is also possible for an individual to be dealing with undiagnosed depression.

The symptoms of depression can make life feel unbearable in recovery, so it is vital to take action to overcome the symptoms; generally, this involves seeking professional advice.

Frustration

If things are not going as expected in recovery it can mean people feel frustrated.

These frustrations can make anybody feel disheartened and they may use this as an excuse to relapse.

Nobody gets a free ride in life; dealing with frustrations, whether recovering from drug addiction/alcoholism or just living normally, is something we must all learn to defuse.

False expectations

Another common relapse trigger is expecting too much from other people. It is common for drug addicts to have low expectations for themselves but high expectations for everyone else. This way of thinking is destructive because it always leads to disappointment and pain.

Nobody is perfect, and it is not right for adults to rely too much on other people. It is up to each individual to sort out their own life. We could not sort other people's lives so how could we expect them to do our work.

Another unrealistic expectation is to think family and friends will just forget the past.

Alcoholics/drug addicts must appreciate how much their behaviour will have hurt others and understand that forgiveness and, in particular, healing take time.

There may even be some loved ones who will never let go of that pain, but we cannot control that; as long as we focus on recovery and building a good life, keeping our side of the street clean, that is the best we can do.

We may receive love, as it is unconditional, however we must win back trust and earn forgiveness, by demonstrating that we have genuinely changed.

Taking recovery for granted

After being clean and sober for a bit of time, it is easy, albeit a mistake, to take things for granted.

There is a great deal of truth in the old adage; 'time heals all wounds'.

We can easily forget how horrific things really were; in fact, our mind plays cunning tricks and may even suggest that we have overreacted to the situation, and things were not that bad.

Be careful not to take recovery for granted and romance the bad old days as our minds can filter all the negative experiences and encourage us to focus on the times when alcohol or drugs seemed to be a positive thing.

If we ever start to take our recovery for granted, we are skating on thin ice, because we may stop doing the things that keep us clean and sober.

Abusing other substances/activities

Another dangerous activity for people in recovery is to try other mind and mood-altering substances (or activities).

Every drug addict has their drug of choice and when that drug becomes unavailable they can easily transfer their allegiance; this is called 'substitution'.

Those who seek treatment generally have an honest desire to remain abstinent from their drug of choice but sometimes they think they can safely consume other addictive substances. They may think it's less dangerous; for example, an opioid dependent may think drinking alcohol is not so bad, but this type of behaviour is wholly unacceptable and ultimately leads them back to their drug of choice.

Cross addiction happens when one form of addiction leads to another. This is not limited to substance abuse; in other words, gambling, over-eating, sex, sleep, game consoles and other psychological behaviours can be just as damaging to one's health. Plus, the fact, if we ever think we are destroying our own health, then it is simply a matter of time before we resort back to our drug of choice; it is the single greatest relapse factor.

HALT

Four of the most common relapse triggers are identified using the acronym HALT.

This stands for;

- Hunger

- Anger
- Loneliness
- Tiredness

This is covered in more detail elsewhere in this book but in summary; when someone in recovery experiences any of these feelings, they are at a much higher risk of relapse.



HOW TO AVOID RELAPSE TRIGGERS

There is no reason why anyone should relapse as a result of those triggers, however here are a few tools that can help avert catastrophe.

The first step is being aware of the different relapse triggers as most of them are easily dealt with. For example, if you feel hungry; eat something or if you feel lonely; go to the Fellowship or visit a sober friend.

In order to be aware of these relapse triggers you should be looking for them because it is too easy to slip towards relapse without even noticing what is happening.

As covered elsewhere in this book it can be a good idea to keep a daily recovery journal because you'll be better able to spot warning signs or a negative pattern developing.

Techniques such as mindfulness meditation are great for helping us to understand our inner landscape better. Self-awareness and more insight into our own behaviour and thought processes make it less likely we'll be caught unawares.

As long as our priority is living clean and sober, we should never fall victim to relapse triggers.

TROUBLE REALLY STARTS IF YOU TAKE YOUR EYE OFF THE BALL



THE PINK CLOUD

Early recovery is often referred to as a rollercoaster ride because it involves a mixture of great highs and tremendous lows.

Emotions previously anesthetised by alcohol and drugs suddenly awaken and feelings can be particularly intense.

As the body and mind adjust to this new life, there can be rapid changes in mood; however, there will usually come a time when a recovering drug addict/alcoholic hits a smooth patch when life will feel wonderful and the future appears exceptionally bright.

Staying free from alcohol and drugs will feel effortless; you may even wonder what was all the fuss about.

The term 'pink cloud' is generally used negatively to describe people who are too high on life; people who have lost touch with reality and are living in fantasy land. The emotions this person is experiencing do not realistically reflect their actual situation.

The pink cloud syndrome in addiction recovery was first described by Alcoholics Anonymous.

Of course, becoming free from drugs/alcohol is something to celebrate, as it destroys lives and escaping this hell is a wonderful achievement. Enjoying the freedom and newness of early recovery is to be encouraged. It is a time for waking up to the possibilities of life and benefits of improved relationships with friends and family. The nightmare is over so there is plenty to smile about but sometimes early recovery can feel so good that it actually becomes dangerous.

Let me explain; we may feel exceptionally good for weeks or even months in early recovery as this pink cloud period is undoubtedly enjoyable, but it can also be risky because some of us come back down to reality with a bang which can be extremely painful. It can also lead to overconfidence which puts us at an increased risk of relapse.

Just because we are feeling so good, we must not fail to do the work we need to do to stay on the recovery tracks.

The Dangers of the Pink Cloud

It might seem odd to claim that there would be any disadvantages to feeling good, particularly since we may have spent years or decades battling problems and feeling rotten.

Surely it is reasonable we should get to feel great now.

Of course, recovery should be about enjoying life but there can be problems if we become too confident or complacent. Some friends of mine concluded their problems were over and there was no need to maintain their recovery and guess what?

There is also a risk when the pink cloud period ends, unless you are prepared because it could lead to huge disappointment so that is why it is vital to be aware.

Relapse is most likely to occur during the first few months and the most common reason is that the recovering individual stops putting enough effort into staying free of drink and drugs. Never ignore problems and never stop asking for help.

The relapse process describes people beginning the road back to drug addiction, as soon as they reach a junction on the recovery journey that they fail to get beyond, so don't get stuck on pink clouds.

If a particularly pleasant period in recovery ends, keep working hard until it begins again.

People can feel cheated when the super highs of early recovery are replaced by more modest emotions, but life is full of ups and downs; nobody can stay up forever; however, we can all get back up.

Be prepared, that's the trick.

Emotions will eventually settle down as the body adjusts to recovery and the highs and lows become less intense. Don't think when the pink cloud ends, you have done something wrong as you have not; this is just what happens, and you must work naturally for the next pink cloud to arrive. Don't ever lose faith in the tools that have kept you clean and sober.

GOOD THINGS COME TO THOSE WHO WORK THEIR ASSES OFF AND NEVER GIVE UP



DRY DRUNK SYNDROME

Some people are able to break free from addictive substances although they still exhibit the traits of someone who is dependent.

You may have heard the slang term 'dry drunk'; the syndrome is best described as someone who fits one of two conditions.

The first condition is a person with chemical dependency issues who is no longer using or abusing alcohol/drugs, but they are still displaying the old characteristics of a drug addict or alcoholic such as anger, depression, insomnia, irritability, lying, emotionally distant, low self-esteem, low self-confidence, denial of their condition, immaturity, insecurity, anxiety or other negative emotional behaviours outside the norm.

These are generally the symptoms we'll see if someone lays down drink/drugs but leaves their underlying condition unresolved or untreated.

Being active in addiction ingrains many negative trains of thought, attitudes, feelings and actions, so simply removing alcohol/drugs without treating underlying conditions is likely to produce a 'dry drunk'.

Another tell-tale sign of untreated issues is substitution which we discuss elsewhere in this book.

A dry drunk or in other words; if you sober up a horse thief, you only get a sober horse thief.

The second condition is a person with chemical dependency issues who is currently abstinent but regressing in their recovery journey.

This may be due to little or no group meeting attendance; minimal relationship with Sponsor/supporters and little or no involvement in a recovery plan/programme.

Clean and sober alcoholics/drug addicts in this category will likely begin exhibiting negative thinking, isolation behaviour and a general uneasiness/restlessness with life.

It is important to recognise regression to old ways of thinking and acting, or lack of progression on the road of recovery; in the Fellowship it is referred to as 'untreated alcoholism or drug addiction'.

The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous describes dry drunk syndrome and untreated alcoholism with the phrase 'restless, irritable, and discontented'.

Basically, if you happen to be a clean and sober alcoholic/drug addict, and find yourself consistently dissatisfied with life, you may be in the thick of untreated alcoholism or drug addiction.

Another way of looking at the 'dry drunk' condition rests in the two distinct dangers it presents someone on the road of recovery;

Negative attitudes and mental postures that return or develop in a recovering person who has not worked on underlying emotional issues or behaviours can start to impact on their quality of life in potentially very harmful ways including relapse and in some cases suicide, if left unchecked.

Here are some attitudes and mental postures common with dry drunk syndrome;

The dry drunk may display Superiority

Superiority or grandiosity basically means a return to a self-centred disposition where the world is seen to revolve around oneself. Chemically dependent people can be self-centred in the extreme, as any therapist or psychiatrist will be quick to confirm.

With grandiosity, we set ourselves up to be the centre of attention, either by feeling we are superior to everyone around us, or by playing the victim.

Either way, this distances us from the people and the world around us. What we're really saying is 'we are not like you' with the implication that rules don't apply in our particular case.

In the 12-Step programme, this is commonly known as 'terminal uniqueness,' or the belief that we are so unique, no one could possibly understand or relate to us.

Self-pity or superiority characterises this mentality and the only thing we'll ever get from sitting on the 'pity pot' is a ring around our butt!

The dry drunk may display Impulsivity

One of the most common attitudes or observable behaviours of people with addiction issues is poor impulse control and impatience. We tend to

do what we want, when we want, with little regard for self-harm or the hurt caused towards others.

When impulsivity is combined with grandiosity, attention-seeking behaviour accelerates to intergalactic speed. Warped expectations that characterise virtually every alcoholic and drug addict feed this impulsiveness. Chemical dependency instils a taste for immediate relief. Years of alcohol and drug abuse almost mould it into addiction's nature.

I heard the phrase 'time takes time' so often, in early sobriety, that I wanted to punch something. Ironically, this frustration was a manifestation of impulsiveness.

The dry drunk may display negative Judgement

This may be one of those most destructive mental aspects of drug addiction. According to the Big Book, this unfortunate characteristic of addiction is like a man who looks at a beautiful forest and points out the only dead tree. Alcoholics and drug addicts tend to exhibit particularly negative perspectives about themselves, others and the world around them.

When we judge a person as being 'better than or less than,' we are creating a situation where we manipulate our internal condition in much the same way a drink or drug functions. On the other hand, if we judge ourselves or others as 'falling short or less than,' we can feel bitter and cultivate resentment.

In both cases, people with chemical dependency are at risk of separating themselves through mental isolation. By negatively contrasting ourselves or the outside world, we invite regression in recovery. This is another reason why drug addiction and alcoholism are commonly referred to as mind-powered diseases.

The dry drunk may display Complacency

This is not only an attitude of somebody in dry drunk syndrome, but is a red flag warning sign of someone who is dangerously treading the path towards relapse. An important facet of being in active recovery is just that, being active. It does not matter how quickly an alcoholic or drug addict progresses, just that progress is being made. It is easy to regress into laziness or disinterest, usually with a return to addictive behaviours.

Once lured into these attitudes, thinking begins to tread on choppy waters and twisted thinking invites destructive, self-centred thoughts and there is a high chance these thoughts will influence our actions in negative ways.

I see my sobriety as a journey; it's always on the move. I am either moving toward a drink/drug or distancing myself from drink/drugs. The reality is,

if I isolate myself and do not progress in recovery, the prospect of relapse dramatically rises. It's like parking a car on a hill; sooner or later, the brakes will give way and the car will run away, out of control.

Complacency may actually be fear rather than laziness so be sure to diagnose correctly. You see some people feel afraid of success just as much as some fear failure. Don't be afraid of success; don't sit around waiting for things to work out the way you want them to. We all need to put in the necessary effort to succeed. Find the willingness to meet your fears head-on with the tools you now have otherwise a full recovery is tenuous at best.

The dry drunk may display Negativity

I was guilty of this for quite some time in early recovery. I kept asking, when good things would come to pass, always neglecting to recognise that many positive events had already transpired.

If negativity sets in, it is very important to determine if any underlying issues are present. What's going on beneath the surface? Is it anger or resentment, or is a person, place or thing not working out the way we anticipated? Is excessive anxiety and worry beginning to creep into various threads of your life? If so, you should work closely with a Sponsor, recovery buddies, and if necessary, a licensed medical professional.

One of the most futile emotions is anxiety because our focus tends to shift towards future events and I don't know anyone who can genuinely foresee future events; not even Nostradamus could.

High stress consumes mental energy, so it is virtually impossible to retain feelings of happiness and serenity when anxiety permeates life. Here are some destructive behaviours and actions that can result from the dreaded dry drunk thinking;

We become restless, irritable and discontent

Little things start to annoy us. We start to look for differences in those around us, which causes separation. If you remember, this is the first stage in the relapse process. It is also the trickiest because we often fail to recognise that 'separation mentality' is present.

Without a support system of trusted people around us, a world of trouble awaits. The people we associate with in recovery may offer their concern, feedback and direction. This is given out of love, not out of spite. It is important to open our ears and listen, despite feeling singled-out.

We become bored or dissatisfied

We are easily distracted from productive tasks. I visualise this as having the electrifying vigour of recovery diminish to a small spark. Nothing excites us anymore; the 'pink cloud' has vanished and our initial euphoria has been replaced with disillusionment.

We may start to wonder why we got clean and sober in the first place. This is an ideal time to start a gratitude list under a Sponsor's guidance. If we become unable to see the progress we're making in recovery, or we start taking it for granted, it is easy for sobriety to lose top priority.

It is my belief that for those in long-term recovery, complacency is the biggest demon we must guard against. On the flip side, I believe the most viable asset one can have in recovery is persistence. When life is rolling along, and things seem to be working well, the temptation can be to lose focus on continually growing in recovery.

Many sick people stop taking medication once they start feeling better, only to see illness re-emerge. The same principle holds for those on the road of recovery, so don't stop taking the medication offered through the Fellowship and other support mechanisms you should have in place.

Our emotions and feelings get listless and dull or we start overreacting

Either we become emotionally dull, or we catapult into hyper emotionalism. Our reactions are not proportional to the events. Maybe an everyday occurrence results in seething anger, or a simple comment from a co-worker causes a war of words.

At this point, it's a good idea to seek emotional support or feedback from trusted members of the recovery community. Let's face it, recovery and life offer ups and downs, peaks and troughs. These situations can be amplified in the absence of an anesthetising substance, but we must meet life's challenges with the recovery tools we have earned. In some situations, however, pain can be an incredible motivator. In the absence of pain, change is usually non-existent.

We start to engage in 'euphoric recall'

Euphoric recall is another way of saying we only remember the good times. We remember how much fun we had when using, how much more social, clever, witty and awesome we were. It really is a journey into the past's fantasy land.

At the same time, we also choose to ignore all of the misery that resulted from alcohol and drug abuse. We tend to forget the times where we made

a total fool of ourselves at parties or social events. Perhaps we ignore memories of legal troubles.

An objective inventory can quickly put a stop to euphoric recall. Make sure you have those positive and negative lists written out and pinned to the wall.

Most alcoholics and drug addicts will have a laundry list of negative consequences, so write them out so that you can easily remember them.

We start to engage in magical thinking

We get unrealistic with magical expectations and fanciful dreams. This characteristic is similar to euphoric recall, but not necessarily confined to past events. Magical thinking can involve unrealistic expectations, unreasonable goals, and simply believing that things will occur if we wish for them hard enough.

Or maybe we've been clean and sober so long, we think one drink won't hurt. If you find yourself travelling down Magical Thinking Avenue, reach out to trusted, sober friends and talk with your Sponsor.

We lose interest in self-improvement

There's a fine line between becoming peaceful and becoming complacent. What happened to all those plans for a 'new you'; instead of walking the walk, we start talking the talk. The 'action' part of the Programme disappears, and we lose momentum that we had built over days, months or years in recovery. We become content to sit back and let other people do the work. This condition doesn't usually last long, as people either recapture the motivation to continually improve and grow in recovery, or relapse. Remember in life we either climb or slide.

We start to become unfulfilled

As a result of any combination of the points already discussed, a feeling of not having our dreams fulfilled can takeover. Many people thought being clean and sober would solve all their problems, but that is not the case.

Don't get me wrong, sobriety is definitely a gigantic step in the right direction; however, there is a good chance that wreckage of the past will take time to heal or resolve. This starts to move into the realm of having unrealistic expectations when we want things to happen quicker than possible. Remember without action and continual self-improvement, not much will change.

Final thoughts on Dry Drunk Syndrome

Looking back at the list of attitudes and the actions dry drunk syndrome can generate, it is easy to see how this condition is nothing more than regression to thoughts and behaviours exhibited during active alcoholism and drug addiction.

If you are starting to notice some of the attitudes discussed above creeping back into your life, it is time to start paying attention to the possibility of relapse. You should quadruple your recovery efforts, starting from right now. Dry drunk syndrome can be a harbinger of relapse but don't let it take your recovery and if you need help, get to a meeting today.

HABIT IS EITHER THE BEST OF SERVANTS OR THE WORST OF MASTERS



DIVIDEND STAMPS

Early in recovery some people think it is quite acceptable to stay clean and sober for a few days and then drink and drug again. I remember thinking I deserved a reward for good behaviour.

That is what I now understand to be 'stinking thinking'.

We don't get dividend stamps for every clean and sober day, to trade-in at the weekend or at the end of the month.

I remember at my first ever AA meeting, a lady received a cake for her first 'clean and sober' Birthday.

I honestly thought this was a joke. I did not believe anyone could stay off drink and drugs completely, so I assumed she had been granted immunity, perhaps on Friday evenings or Sunday afternoons and I just hadn't been given the wink yet.

Sorry folks there are no loopholes or nods or winks; recovery is a new way of life and what a fantastic way of life it has been for me. It is not the same old way of life, just trying to avoid the potholes; no, recovery does not work that way. Life without drink and drugs means life without drink and drugs. It is a wonderful new way of life, not a penance. We must stop buying into this idea that we can use a substance for long term happiness because we have proved we cannot. Happiness is not for sale; try the natural drug of 'Living Life'.

ABSENCE MAKES THE HEART GROW FONDER



WITHDRAWAL

Different addictive drugs have different withdrawal symptoms.

There are two stages of withdrawal.

The first stage is the acute stage, which usually lasts, at most, a few weeks. During this stage, you may experience physical withdrawal symptoms including; nausea, dizziness, muscle aches, muscle spasms, bone aches, headaches, intestinal cramping, sweating, diarrhoea etc.

The length of times it takes to withdraw varies from drug to drug; every drug is different, and every person is different.

The second stage of withdrawal is called Post-Acute Withdrawal Syndrome (PAWS). During this withdrawal stage you'll experience fewer physical symptoms but more emotional and psychological symptoms.

Post-acute withdrawal occurs because your brain chemistry is gradually returning to normal and as your brain improves, the levels of your brain chemicals fluctuate, as they approach the new equilibrium, causing post-acute withdrawal symptoms.

Most people experience some post-acute withdrawal symptoms, the most common of which are;

mood swings, anxiety, irritability, tiredness, variable energy, low enthusiasm, variable concentration, disturbed sleep.

Post-acute withdrawal feels like a rollercoaster of symptoms.

In the beginning, symptoms change from minute to minute and hour to hour; later into recovery, they will disappear.

There is no obvious trigger for most episodes; you'll simply wake up one day feeling irritable and have low energy. If you hang on, it will lift just as quickly as it started.

After a while you'll develop confidence that you can get through post-acute withdrawal, because you'll know that each episode is time limited.

Be patient, you can't hurry recovery, but you can get through it one day at a time.

Post-acute withdrawal symptoms are a sign that your brain is recovering so don't panic and don't let withdrawal be a trigger for relapse.

Relaxing will help you get through withdrawal.

If you're tense you tend to dwell on your symptoms and make them worse but when you're relaxed it's easier not to get caught up in them.

It is important to understand the possible withdrawal symptoms you will experience so you don't worry when they come or feel they are an excuse to use.

BEWARE THE DOCTOR WHO PRESCRIBES MEDICATION WITHOUT FIRST ENDEAVOURING TO DISCOVER THE CAUSE OF THE MALADY OR IMBALANCE



REMEMBER

Go to peer support meetings

Adopt a recovery programme/plan

Create a circle of Recovery Buddies and other Supporters

Find a Sponsor

Read or listen to recovery books

Watch Recovery Champions and 12-Step Champions on the Champions Cinema at www.frog.net.

Enjoy your new life

Don't get involved in an emotionally turbulent relationship

Avoid the old crowd

Get employed

Don't ignore reality

Don't become complacent

It does not matter how slowly you go as long as you do not stop

You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream

With the new day comes new strength and new thoughts

Problems are not stop signs; they are guidelines

The secret of getting ahead is getting started

The key is to keep company only with people who uplift you, whose presence calls forth your best

There is always room at the top

Practise an attitude of gratitude

Bend your knees before you bend your elbow

The first step in overcoming mistakes is to admit them

Recovery is a lifestyle, not a turnstile

Abstinence is a journey, not a destination

Sorrow is looking back; worry is looking around; hope is looking forward

Coincidences are God's way of remaining anonymous

Keep your abstinence first, to make it last

Plan for tomorrow, but live for today

Getting something that you've never had requires doing something you've never done

You can't think your way into a new way of living; you have to live your way into a new way of thinking

The time to attend a meeting is when you least feel like going

Firstly, we stay abstinent because we have to, then because we are willing to and finally because we want to

If you find a path with no obstacles, it probably doesn't lead anywhere

My worst day in recovery is better than my best day of drinking and drugging

There is no magic in recovery, only miracles

Cunning, baffling, powerful, and patient

Don't let unpleasant people rent space in your head

Try it for 100 days, and if you don't like it, we'll gladly refund your misery

Go to meetings when you want to, and go to meetings when you don't want to.

We have a disease that tells us we don't have a disease

If you don't have a Higher Power, you can borrow mine

If you keep doing what you're doing, you'll keep getting what you're getting

CONSULT NOT YOUR FEARS BUT YOUR HOPES AND YOUR DREAMS

THINK NOT ABOUT YOUR FRUSTRATIONS, BUT ABOUT YOUR UNFULFILLED POTENTIAL

CONCERN YOURSELF NOT WITH WHAT YOU TRIED AND FAILED IN, BUT WITH WHAT IT IS STILL POSSIBLE FOR YOU TO DO

CHAPTER 6

THE PLAN I USED FOR THE FIRST YEAR

Success is all about planning and sticking to those plans at all times. According to statistics and my own recovery experience, it takes us recovering drug addicts/alcoholics approximately a year to get into a much safer place.

When I say a much safer place, I mean after a year we have experienced birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas, the four seasons and probably a lot of everyday life that used to make us reach for a drink or drug, so after one year I feel there are no big surprises to come and that is why I say, 'a much safer place'.

I remember feeling jubilant from day one because I had begun my 'recovery journey' and I felt very proud of myself, something I had not felt for many a time.

If you have a problem with drink and drugs you must stop using them and in order to stop permanently you must follow suggestions, advice and instructions.

To hear suggestions, advice and instructions you must surround yourself with Recovery Champions, so the most important piece of advice I can give you is, get along to as many support groups as possible. You'll find out where they are on www.frog.net. By the way, get along to two or three in the early days if you can.

Find a Sponsor and supporters.

Investigate recovery material including Twelve-Step literature.

Explore the Champions Cinema on www.frog.net.

Ask questions.

The key to long term sobriety is consistency and that is why I have uploaded a Workbook for you to download free on www.frog.net.

I have put this first-year workbook together because it is vital for your chances of success to be relentless with your determination to recover. Remember in your first year, you are recovering; I want you to graduate and become a recovered drug addict or recovered alcoholic. I want to watch your recovery story on the Champions Cinema at www.frog.net.

If you do what is suggested, you will succeed, I guarantee.

Recovery is a lifestyle, and lifestyles are created through repetition, so you must work at recovery in the first year like there's no tomorrow and then it will become automatic.

As a general rule of thumb, in the first year of recovery, you need to spend as much time in a recovery oriented environment as you used to spend in a drink or drug oriented environment.

The more recovery hours you get under your belt the more chance you have of staying clean and sober for life.

Year 1 is going to be the biggest and best year of your life and it is an honour to be travelling the journey with you.

Download your workbook today at www.frog.net.

FAILING TO PLAN IS PLANNING TO FAIL



REMEMBER MY ROCK BOTTOM

You may recall that near the start I shared my rock bottom day.

The worst day of my life it felt at the time when I was lying in the back of the police van with my wrists broken, feeling suicidal and rolling around in my own urine, vomit, diarrhoea, sweat and blood, in the process of being sectioned.

Ironically, today I look back at that awful day and recognise it has become one of the best days of my life. It made me change and helped me shape who I am today.

It really seemed like the end at the time but in fact it was just the beginning. The pain was so excruciatingly bad it made me change and if I can do it you can do it too.

Don't regret this amazing opportunity; bring out the warrior within and give it all you've got!

Remember life is not about how many times you fall down; it is all about how many times you get back up.

It's not where you start out, it's where you end up that counts.

When people who are on their deathbed are asked if they regret anything, it tends only to be things they have not done (as opposed to mistakes they have made).

If life isn't working for you today the way you're doing things, try a different approach.

Communicating what we have to offer is what life is all about for me, so I hope I have done that with this book.

This book was written for you, my friend.

Please don't wait until you end up in the back of a police van to begin a new life.

God Bless you or should I say, Higher Power Bless you!

**THE TWO THINGS THAT MOTIVATE PEOPLE TO SUCCESS:
INSPIRATION AND DESPERATION**

Best wishes,
Cal

'Cal's unique journey through recovery from addiction, sharing his own take on what gets people well and what keeps them there. Loads of recovery gems, aphorisms and practices are unpacked and explained from the perspective of Cal's long term recovery.

A book that could be a recovery companion for many people.'

Kuladharini, Chief Executive - Scottish Recovery Consortium

During the last few months of my drug addiction, things had escalated beyond belief;

I was snorting ten thousand pounds worth of cocaine a month,
necking 2 bottles of spirits a day and smoking 3 packs of cigarettes.

I only slept every five or six days and hardly ate.

I had been rushed to A & E after suffering a heart attack and was heading for another.

I had also been sectioned for my own safety.

Our large beautiful home was lost, as too was my business, our finances, my car,
my wife and I was just about to lose my life.

So, on 5th November 2006 when I celebrated my first year clean and sober I'm sure you can understand
why I thought that would have been an impossible landmark to reach!

Today I am over twelve years clean and sober and have written this book to share the
toolkit of recovery tools that saved my life, that anyone can use to change.

This book is not about me; it is simply about how I got clean and sober and how you can do it too.

CONFUCIUS WHO LIVED 2500 YEARS AGO SAID; 'IT IS THE SADDEST THING OF ALL WHEN A PERSON GIVES UP'.

If you find yourself trapped in a dark corner, this book will give you hope and solutions,
as I had given up at one stage, not believing there was a solution, however today I am living proof that anyone can change.



Sponsored by...



www.frog.net

ISBN 978-1-908898-39-5

