

Chapter 16

A Prescription From Dr. Steve . . .



*When I let go of what I am,
I become what I might be.
When I let go of what I have,
I receive what I need.*

-The Tao Te Ching

Long ago, in the early days of my practice, a client said to me, “Okay, I’ve been in therapy for months now, yet I still have the problems I had before. How come these problems haven’t gone away? What’s the deal?”

I said, “You’re fine. If I understand what you’re saying, what you call the problems probably won’t go away. They’re part of who you are. I mean, the difficulties and loose ends that you and I find in everyday life are part of who we are as individuals.”

He looked up at me and said, “I came in here wanting you to promise me that I could stop being such an ass in my personal life. You only told me that I could be shown the problem, I never heard you say that I could find the solution. I want someone to give me a pill or something in order to make me better.”

I rubbed my hands against my face and said to him, “That’s not the way this deal works. I may get thrown out of town for telling you this, but, the truth is, real growth does not come from the wisdom of a psychologist, it comes from inside of you.”

“Then why am I here?” he asked.

We sat there for a long moment. Finally I said, “Let me tell you a story.”

I once worked in a hospital. Every day I would show up and do my job. I got to know the nursing staff and they got to know me. One morning this woman with a white uniform walked around the corner. I hadn’t met her, so I stood and said, “Hi, I’m Steve.”

She looked at me and boomed back in a deep voice, “Yes, I understand you are the Psychologist Intern or something.”

She spoke in a broken accent, I thought maybe it was Swedish. “I’m Nurse Svenson. I work for twenty years in hospital. I do my job,” she said simply, before she turned and walked away.

Over the next few days I asked other people on the ward about our Nurse Svenson. Their responses were the same. Everyone alluded to her bedside manner as non-existent, but she was a first rate nurse.

One morning I walked into the room of a patient who was twenty years old. He had a heart defect that was only discovered two years before. Most of his life was normal, but every few months his body would fall apart and he would find himself near death.

Evidently surgery was required to address the problem. I walked into the room while Nurse Svenson was changing a dressing. I didn’t want to bother them so I sat on the other bed for a moment.

“I hate this,” he said. “I can’t move and I can’t do stuff that I like to do. Being here sucks.”

“What does this mean, sucks?” she asked.

“You know, blows,” he said.

“Blows?” she repeated.

“Yea, bites,” he said. “Hey! That hurts!”

“I’m changing this dressing. Yes, it probably does hurt.”

“It’s all bullshit if you ask me,” he said.

“You know,” she said, “when I come to this country people tell me my way of speaking was bad, but I think you are worse. You talk bad. What are you trying to say?”

“I’m trying to say that I don’t like being in the hospital. I don’t like feeling so helpless. And I don’t like being poked and

prodded with needles and knives. I want to be playing basketball and living my life,” he said.

She worked and thought and soon replied. “I tell you something important. In my job, most people complain about being in the hospital. Most people say they belong somewhere else. So listen to me now, do what I tell you. When you feel good, act like it. Then you play. When you feel sick, you belong in hospital. Because when you are sick, this is the best place for you. The only thing worse is to feel sick and act healthy.”

She paused and said, “That could kill someone like you. You feel bad, get help, because you are the only one who knows how you feel.”

I have a gift for understanding people, I always have. Believe me when I tell you, that was one of the most subtle yet powerful things I have ever heard anyone say.

You’re confronted with the same choices as my young friend in the hospital. You can complain and moan about this person, that person, your boss, your lover, your family. How they don’t understand you or respect you. How they don’t give you what you want when you want it.

And you can make everyone else out to be the bad guy. You can stew in your hurt and anger, feeling entitled, believing that somebody other than you has to change.

But believe me, that’s not the ticket out. The only person you have control over in this world is yourself. You need to learn to pay attention to how you’re feeling. And when you’re feeling badly, you need to have people you can turn to so that you can make your world feel safe again. That’s exactly the potential that lives within each and every one of us—learning the miracle of how to transform our lives. I won’t pretend that it’s easy but I absolutely assure you that it can be done.

Every day of the week I meet with individuals just like you. They're scared, confused, and overwhelmed. They know more about what their problems are than they know about what to do about them. As we discuss their options, I invariably make the following recommendations.

For those people who are convinced that they can quit consuming alcohol and other drugs on their own, I encourage them to do just that—quit on their own. If they're able to stop consuming alcohol and other drugs by themselves and remain abstinent by themselves, that's all well and good. Nothing more need be said to those individuals who can stay abstinent from ALL alcohol and other drugs by themselves.

For those who are unable to stay abstinent by themselves I recommend that they attend ninety Recovery-based Twelve Step support group meetings in ninety days. Examples of Recovery-based Twelve Step support group meetings are Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Cocaine Anonymous, and Marijuana Anonymous. I've provided contact information for these organizations at the end of this chapter.

The reasons one should attend Recovery-based Twelve Step support group meetings and work a Twelve Step program are:

- A Recovery-based Twelve Step program is an excellent program for managing the singular behavior of abstinence from ALL alcohol and other drugs
- A Recovery-based Twelve Step program is an excellent program for providing a connection to people who can mentor your development of a Recovery-based lifestyle and Recovery-based coping mechanisms
- A Recovery-based Twelve Step program is an excellent program for providing a meaningful connection

to a supportive community of people who share in common the desire to no longer consume alcohol and other drugs

- A Recovery-based Twelve Step program is an excellent program for facilitating a spiritual awakening
- A Recovery-based Twelve Step program is an excellent program for facilitating self-awareness

When I make the recommendation to attend Recovery-based Twelve Step support group meetings, I emphasize the following point. The original Recovery-based Twelve Step program, Alcoholics Anonymous, was developed to address one issue and one issue only, a very specific behavior—how to remain abstinent from the consumption of alcohol and other drugs. For anybody who’s experiencing pre-existing or co-existing emotional issues along with chemical dependency, they would best be served to attend a Recovery-based Twelve Step program to manage the disease of chemical dependency and hire a qualified psychotherapist to treat the pre-existing or co-existing emotional issues.

For those individuals who choose to hire me to provide psychotherapy to treat their chemical dependency and pre-existing or co-existing emotional issues, I make the following recommendations. The majority of the clients that I treat do both individual psychotherapy and experiential group psychotherapy with me. Individual psychotherapy is a particularly effective treatment to work through one’s personal issues in a private setting. I recommend individual psychotherapy to address:

- Chronic unhappiness
- Construction of a Recovery-based lifestyle

- Development of Recovery-based coping mechanisms
- Development of a relapse prevention plan
- Development of relapse prevention skills
- Heal emotional wounds caused by childhood trauma
- Heal emotional wounds caused by neglectful parenting
- Heal emotional wounds caused by physical and/or sexual abuse
- Identification and resolution of distorted thinking
- Inability to tolerate emotional pain
- Reconnect with feelings that have been disowned or medicated by the chronic consumption of alcohol and other drugs
- Transform self-sabotaging patterns of behaviors
- Treat pre-existing or co-existing emotional disorders such as depression, anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, or developmental deficits
- Work through unresolved feelings of alienation, anger, fear, grief, loss of control, self-loathing, and shame
- Self-acceptance
- Self-responsibility
- Solve specific problems that exist in one's life

I recommend experiential group psychotherapy for those individuals who need to work through those issues activated by their relationships with other people. I hope you've gained an appreciation for the central role that safe, nurturing, and harmonious relationships play in staying clean and sober.

Experiential group psychotherapy is an essential therapy that empowers an individual to not only stop sabotaging their relationships, but, enables them to learn how to harvest the

emotional and spiritual nutrition that's essential for staying clean and sober from being in safe supportive relationships.

Join an experiential psychotherapy group in order to develop relationship skills such as:

- Conflict resolution skills
- Listening skills
- Self-disclosure skills
- Skills that enable an individual to affirm, support, and validate another individual
- Skills that enable an individual to give and receive love
- Skills that enable an individual to meet the emotional needs of others
- Skills that enable an individual to have their emotional needs met by others
- Skills that make a relationship emotionally, physically, and spiritually safe

Join an experiential psychotherapy group in order to work through relationship issues such as:

- Caretaking
- Codependency
- Fear of abandonment
- Fear of commitment
- Fear of intimacy
- Fear of trusting others
- Fear of vulnerability
- High tolerance for other people's inappropriate behavior
- Impression management
- Over-controlled in your relationships

- People-pleasing
- Safe expression and acceptance of the expression of negative emotions such as hostility, jealousy, aggression, insecurity, disappointment, disapproval, contempt

No matter what you choose to do to stay clean and sober, make an informed choice. Don't let a lack of information determine your choices. Don't let fear dictate your choices. Don't let how overwhelmed you're feeling influence your choices. Don't let your pride prevent you from doing the next right thing! Let a qualified healthcare provider help you sort out what would be the best choices for you for how best to manage your disease, resolve your issues, and stay clean and sober!

There are people in your community who want to help. And starting out newly sober, you could benefit from their help. That may be difficult for you to acknowledge. But what can be even more difficult is to have to go back out there one more time and wrestle with the beast.

Whatever you choose, I trust that you're on your way. I wish you one more day of abstinence, one more day of serenity, one more day of freedom from the tyranny of your self-will, and one more day of connection with your Higher Power!

G.B.U.

Steve