

Chapter 12

*B*eliefs That May Harm
Your Recovery

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*One doesn't discover new lands without consenting to
lose sight of the shore for a very long time.*

-Andre Gide

The purpose of this chapter is to put your belief system under a microscope—not so much to find out how much you know about chemical dependency and Recovery as much as to find out what you believe about chemical dependency and Recovery. For a danger exists whenever there’s a gap between what you believe and what you know about chemical dependency and Recovery.

Remember, the choices that you make about any given situation are based on what you believe, not on what you know. So as you learn more and more about chemical dependency and yourself, you may know ample Recovery-based information but that doesn’t mean that you’ll apply what you know. Why would that be so? If you haven’t let go of all of your old using-based beliefs (and it’s likely you haven’t), if you haven’t fully accepted and adopted all of the Recovery-based beliefs (and it’s likely that you haven’t), then despite what you know about chemical dependency and Recovery, your choices will still be influenced by what you believe rather than what you know about chemical dependency and Recovery.

It’s important to accept that initially there will be a gap between what you know and what you believe to be true about chemical dependency and Recovery. Do not judge yourself wherever your knowledge and beliefs don’t match. The gap will lessen over time. However, if you remain in the dark about the gap between what you know and what you believe, you’ll continue to make choices predicated on your using-based beliefs rather than your Recovery-based knowledge.

Don’t censure yourself as you do the exercises in this chapter. Don’t attempt to figure out what the right answer is. Approach the exercises in this chapter much the

way you would turning on a light in a dark closet in order to find a long-lost shirt. Remember, it’s what you don’t know about what you believe that can hurt you the most.

In the Pathfinder’s Checklist below I list six aspects of your belief system that may activate the process of relapse. After the Pathfinder’s Checklist, I’ve provided for you a Pathfinder’s Compass for each aspect of your belief system. Each Pathfinder’s Compass is made up of a list of questions to enable you identify those using-based beliefs that you need to be aware of and how those using-based beliefs may impact your life.

Pathfinder’s Checklist

Beliefs that may adversely affect your psychological well-being.

- 1) Beliefs about chemical dependency that may activate the process of relapse.
- 2) Beliefs about your relationship with alcohol and other drugs that may activate the process of relapse.
- 3) Beliefs about active involvement with a Recovery-based support system that may activate the process of relapse.
- 4) Beliefs about you being chemically dependent that may activate the process of relapse.
- 5) Beliefs that your friends and family members have about you being chemically dependent that may activate the process of relapse.
- 6) Beliefs about your relationship with a Higher Power that may activate the process of relapse.

There's a saying in the Twelve Step community—*This disease is between my ears*. The beliefs that you hold about what chemical dependency is will strongly influence how you approach [re]constructing and preserving your Recovery-based lifestyle. If you're willing to embrace the fact that chemical dependency is a disease that you're responsible for managing, it's likely that you'll be open to undertaking the work involved in altering much of your lifestyle. However, if you believe that chemical dependency is something other than a disease, it's likely that you'll not be willing to sustain for very long the work that's involved with managing your disease.

For instance, if you believe that chemical dependency is caused by a lack of willpower, you may invest much of your time and energy into enhancing your willpower. If you believe that chemical dependency is caused by moral depravity, you may not be willing to admit that you have a problem with alcohol and other drugs because of what such an admission may imply about you. If you believe that chemical dependency is caused by a nagging, blaming life partner or egomaniacal boss or the never ending financial problems that you have, you may believe the solution to your alcohol and other drugs problem is to separate from your life partner, get a new job, and/or declare bankruptcy rather than stop consuming alcohol and other drugs. If you believe that you can continue to consume some alcohol and other drugs, while remaining abstinent from your drug(s) of choice, it's likely that you won't remain abstinent from any alcohol and other drugs.

So you can see that what you believe causes chemical dependency will strongly influence what measures you do and do not take to solve your problems with alcohol and

other drugs. Below are a series of questions to help you flesh out your beliefs about what causes chemical dependency. The point of answering these questions is not to figure out the right answer but to help you uncover what your beliefs are about the cause of chemical dependency. Don't censor yourself. Be willing to uncover those beliefs that interfere with your ability to manage your disease.

Pathfinder's Compass

Beliefs about chemical dependency that may activate the process of relapse.

- 1) Write about or discuss those beliefs that you have about how chemical dependency is not really a primary, chronic, progressive, prone to relapse, and often times fatal disease.
- 2) Write about or discuss those beliefs that you have about how the idea that chemical dependency is a disease is an excuse that lets the chemically dependent individual off the hook.
- 3) Write about or discuss those beliefs that you have about how chemical dependency is caused by moral depravity.
- 4) Write about or discuss those beliefs that you have about how chemical dependency is caused by a weak character.
- 5) Write about or discuss those beliefs that you have about how chemical dependency is caused by a lack of willpower.
- 6) Write about or discuss those beliefs that you have about how chemical dependency is caused by an addictive personality.

The next series of questions I'm going to ask you to explore focus on your relationship with alcohol and other drugs. It's important for you to fully examine what you believe about your relationship with alcohol and other drugs. If you believe that chemical dependency is a chronic, progressive disease in which your body develops tolerance to the presence of alcohol and other drugs over time, how likely is it that you'll accept that you'll never be able to return to consuming any alcohol and other drugs? If you believe that you can remain abstinent from your alcohol and other drugs of choice while continuing to consume other alcohol and other drugs, how likely is it that you'll remain abstinent for any period of time? If you believe that you're able to control your consumption of alcohol and other drugs, how likely is it that you'll remain abstinent for any period of time? If you believe that you can return to consuming alcohol and other drugs the way you did when you first started consuming alcohol and other drugs years ago, how likely is it that you'll remain abstinent for any period of time? If you believe that you can learn how to consume alcohol and other drugs for social use only, how likely is it that you'll remain abstinent for any period of time?

As you answer the following questions, bear in mind that my goal is not to get you to articulate the right answer but to get you to take the time to examine your beliefs about your relationship with alcohol and other drugs. The advantage of taking the time to find out where you're at is that you can begin to identify the remaining obstacles that you need to overcome in order to more easily remain abstinent from alcohol and other drugs.

Pathfinder's Compass

Beliefs about your relationship with alcohol and other drugs that may activate the process of relapse.

- 1) Write about or discuss those beliefs that you have about how you're not really powerless over your consumption of ALL alcohol and other drugs.
- 2) Write about or discuss those beliefs that you have about how you can consume alcohol and other drugs that were not your drug of choice.
- 3) Write about or discuss those beliefs that you have about how your consumption of alcohol and other drugs did not really make your life unmanageable.
- 4) Write about or discuss those beliefs that you have about how you might be able to learn how to control your consumption of alcohol and other drugs.

The next set of beliefs that I want you to examine are your beliefs about being involved with a Recovery-based support system. This is an emotionally loaded topic for many people. Their discomfort with asking for help or needing the help of others or being a part of a community often times keep them on the outside looking in without any insight as to why they refuse to become involved with a Recovery-based support system.

It's really very simple—you need the help of others. Anything that gets in the way of your active, consistent participation with a Recovery-based support system is dangerous to your long-term abstinence. Take the time to examine what issues you have with becoming a member of a Recovery-based support system. Use your answers as an opportunity to break down the barriers that you erect between you and the Recovering community.

Pathfinder's Compass

Beliefs about not needing a Recovery-based support system that may activate the process of relapse.

- 1) Write about or discuss those beliefs that you have about what it means about you to need the help of other people.
- 2) Write about or discuss those beliefs that you have about what it means about you to ask for the help of other people.
- 3) Write about or discuss those beliefs that you have about what it means about you to accept the help of other people.
- 4) Write about or discuss those beliefs that you have about how you do not need a Recovery-based support system.
- 5) Write about or discuss those beliefs that you have about how you do not need to attend Recovery-based support group meetings.
- 6) Write about or discuss those beliefs that you have about how your program is as effective or more effective than THE PROGRAM.
- 7) Write about or discuss those beliefs that you have about how you don't need to fellowship with other Recovery people.
- 8) Write about or discuss those beliefs that you have about how you don't need to work with a Recovery-based mentor known as a sponsor.

No one that I know has ever aspired to be chemically dependent. Let's face it—what's the upside? There's so much about being chemically dependent that's hurtful,

painful, and shameful. It's unlikely that you're immune from attaching some stigma to what it means about you to be a chemically dependent individual. And it's likely that the stigma that you attach to being chemically dependent makes it all the more difficult for you to take ownership of the fact that you're chemically dependent.

But claim it you must, no matter how difficult that may be for you. In spite of what you may believe today, you're not a morally depraved individual who lacks the willpower to just say no. You're an individual who has a disease that you're able to manage—a job made all the more easy by being willing to acknowledge what it means to you about you that you're chemically dependent.

Pathfinder's Compass

Beliefs that you have about what it means about you that you're chemically dependent that may activate the process of relapse.

- 1) Write about or discuss those beliefs that you have about who and what a chemically dependent individual is.
- 2) Write about or discuss those beliefs that you have about how you're not like the individual that you described in step #1 of this exercise.
- 3) Write about or discuss those beliefs that you have about why you don't want to believe that you're like the individual described in step #1 of this exercise.
- 4) Write about or discuss those beliefs that you have about the lengths to which you're willing to go to deny that you're like the individual that you

described in #1.

- 5) Write about or discuss those beliefs that you have about what you fight accepting about yourself in order to not have to see yourself like the individual described in #1.
- 6) Write about or discuss how those beliefs identified in step #1 of this exercise make you feel about you.
- 7) Write about or discuss how those beliefs identified in step #1 make you want to hide you from you and the rest of the world.
- 8) Write about or discuss how those beliefs identified in step #1 of this exercise make you not want to let other people know you.
- 9) Write about or discuss how those beliefs identified in step #1 make you feel like you don't deserve to be helped by other people.
- 10) Write about or discuss how your beliefs that you identified in step #2 and #3 impacts your Recovery-based lifestyle.
- 11) Write about or discuss how your beliefs that you identified in step #2 and #3 impacts your ability to effectively manage your daily stressors.
- 12) Write about or discuss how your beliefs that you identified in steps #2 and #3 impacts your ability to remain abstinent from ALL alcohol and other drugs.

The issues from the section above concerning your beliefs about yourself extend to your friends and family members as well. Your friends and family members are no more immune from adopting widely held beliefs about people who are chemically dependent than you are.

If you're fearful about what others might think about

you, you're more likely not to claim that you're chemically dependent or, at the very least, you'll feel inhibited about being open and honest about your disease with your friends and family. At a time when you need the love and support of your friends and family members the most, you're likely to feel most vulnerable if you fear that your friends and family members hold judgments about you being chemically dependent. As a result, you're even less likely to open up to your friends and family members. This fear can only drive an even greater wedge between you and them—making you feel all the more isolated, all the more misunderstood, and all the more ashamed of who you are.

And again, the question begs to be asked, if that occurs how likely are you to remain abstinent for any period of time? Use the following questions as a way to identify your fears about what your friends and family members think about you and your disease. Use the following questions as an opportunity to speak openly and honestly to your friends and family members about your disease and what you fear about what they may think of you.

Pathfinder's Compass

Beliefs that your friends and family members have about what it means about you that you're chemically dependent that may activate the process of relapse.

- 1) Write about or discuss those beliefs that you have about who and what a chemically dependent individual is in the eyes of your friends and family members.
- 2) Write about or discuss how your friends and fami-

ly members' beliefs that you identified in step #1 of this exercise makes you feel about you.

- 3) Write about or discuss how your friends and family members' beliefs that you identified in step #1 of this exercise makes it difficult for you to claim your identity as a chemically dependent individual.
- 4) Write about or discuss how your friends and family members' beliefs that you identified in step #1 of this exercise makes you want to hide from them who you are.
- 5) Write about or discuss how your friends and family members' beliefs that you identified in step #1 makes you want to hide from them what you do.
- 6) Write about or discuss how your friends and family members' beliefs that you identified in step #1 of this exercise makes you want to hide from them what you're feeling.
- 7) Write about or discuss how your friends and family members' beliefs that you identified in step #1 of this exercise makes you want to hide from them what you're struggling with.
- 8) Write about or discuss how your friends and family members' beliefs that you identified in step #1 of this exercise impacts your Recovery-based lifestyle.
- 9) Write about or discuss how your friends and family members' beliefs that you identified in step #1 of this exercise impacts your ability to effectively manage your daily stressors.
- 10) Write about or discuss how your friends and family members' beliefs that you identified in step #1 of this exercise impacts your ability to remain abstinent from ALL alcohol and other drugs.

The next set of questions focus on your relationship with your Higher Power. I won't say a lot about spirituality and your belief system. You're likely to struggle with spirituality for a long time. Just remember, actively practicing spirituality makes long-term abstinence that much easier to maintain. By exploring the obstacles that prevent you from actively practicing spirituality in your day-to-day life, you'll begin to unearth the obstacles that you create in order to remain attached to your willfulness.

Pathfinder's Compass

Beliefs about your relationship with your willfulness versus your Higher Power that may activate the process of relapse.

- 1) Write about or discuss those beliefs that you have about how well your life is served when you're able to control people, places, and circumstances and how those beliefs may be the eventual precipitant for the relapse process.
- 2) Write about or discuss those beliefs that you have about the importance of imposing your will on the outcome of every circumstance in your life and how those beliefs may be the eventual precipitant for the relapse process.
- 3) Write about or discuss those beliefs that you have about how you are entitled to what you want when you want it and how those beliefs may be the eventual precipitant for the relapse process.
- 4) Write about or discuss those beliefs that you have about how a power greater than your self does not exist and how those beliefs may be the eventual precipitant for the relapse process.

- 5) Write about or discuss those beliefs that you have about how your will is more powerful than the plan that a Higher Power has for you and how those beliefs may be the eventual precipitant for the relapse process.
- 6) Write about or discuss those beliefs that you have about how you don't need to [re]connect with a Higher Power and how those beliefs may be the eventual precipitant for the relapse process.
- 7) Write about or discuss those beliefs that you have about how you don't need to [re]connect with your Higher Power and how those beliefs may be the eventual precipitant for the relapse process.

Your desire to remain abstinent will run ahead of the transformation that your belief system undergoes for quite a while. What this means in practical terms is that you must accept that the necessary transformation of your belief system will take place over time. It's as important that you know what it is that you do not believe today as it is what it is that you actually believe. The gap between what you know about Recovery and what you believe about Recovery will narrow over time. Use the questions in this chapter as a way of illuminating what your belief system is, where you are at in the transformation of your belief system, what you need help with in sorting out what you believe, and what you need to be aware of so as not to be tripped up by those currently active using-based beliefs that may activate the process of relapse.