

Chapter 14

*B*ehaviors That Sabotage  
Your Abstinence

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*Thinking to get at once all the gold the goose  
could give, he killed it and opened it..  
only to find—nothing!*

-Aesop

*As you well* know, chemical dependency is a cunning and baffling disease. What this means in practical terms is that despite your best intentions the choices that you make can lead you right back to consuming alcohol and other drugs without even realizing that you've put yourself on that path.

This means that you need to be sober not only in mind and body but in actions as well. For the process of relapse can be activated by the emotional, physical, and spiritual stress created by behaviors that are maladaptive, self-defeating, or self-destructive in nature.

Why are these types of behaviors so dangerous to your abstinence? All of these behaviors tend to have adverse consequences. And it's the adverse consequences that activate stress, activate the need to alleviate that stress, and can potentially activate the process of relapse.

So what are the behavioral stressors that pose a danger to your abstinence? Below is a list of four behavioral stressors that we'll discuss in this chapter.

## Pathfinder's Checklist

*Behavioral stressors that may adversely affect your psychological well-being.*

- 1) Slippery behavior
- 2) Controlling behavior
- 3) Self-destructive behavior
- 4) Isolation

The first behavioral stressor we'll discuss is *slippery behavior*. Slippery behavior is any type of behavior that you use to act in a secretive or dishonest fashion.

Examples of slippery behavior would be lying, manipulation, deception, secrecy, cheating, fraud, half-truths, criminal behavior, and compartmentalization. Each of these behaviors pose a threat to your long-term abstinence because slippery behavior activates a cycle of stress that you cope with by relying on more slippery behavior, which only creates more stress. Why is this so?

Remember what we discussed about the elements of a Recovery-based lifestyle in chapter 1, *What is a Recovery-based Lifestyle?* Remember that I identified accountability, consistency, integrity, and rigorous honesty as important elements of a Recovery-based lifestyle? When you start acting in a slippery manner, those four qualities go out the window. As you can well imagine, as you become more slippery and less accountable for your actions, people in your life will trust you less than they already do. The more mistrustful that the people in your life feel towards you, the more insinuations and accusations will be cast your way. The more insinuations and accusations that are cast your way, the more violated you'll feel by other people's insinuations and accusations. The more you're questioned, the more defensive you're going to feel towards those who question you. The more violated and defensive you feel, the more resentful you'll feel towards the people who make you feel defensive. The more violated, defensive, and resentful that you feel towards the people who mistrust you, the more secretive and slippery you're likely to act.

As the cycle of mistrust unfolds between you and the people in your life, conflict will pervade your relationships. As conflict pervades more and more of your interactions with the people in your life, you're going to feel

more resentment towards the people in your life. The more conflict and resentment you experience with the people in your life, the more stress you'll experience. The more stress that you experience, the more compelled you'll feel to alleviate the emotional and spiritual pain caused by the unfolding drama between you and the people in your life. And the question becomes, just how will you most likely alleviate the sense of hostility and alienation that you're feeling?

But slippery behavior infects more than just your relationships. Slippery behavior is dangerous because slippery behavior begets not only more slippery behavior but the use of using-based thinking to justify your slippery behavior. That's right, the more involved you get with slippery behavior the more that you'll feel compelled to defend your slippery behavior. And so you bring out your old buddies—blame, rationalization, justification, and denial.

You'll tell yourself that it's okay that you tried to get over on your best friend because he won't miss the money that you stole. You'll console yourself about telling your wife that you were at a Recovery-based support group meeting when you were actually meeting old friends that she wouldn't approve of with the thought that it's okay to lie because this way you're just keeping her from needlessly worrying about you. You'll comfort yourself by telling yourself that your sponsor is unreasonable when you tell your sponsor that you've been reading the *Big Book* even though you haven't even started it. You tell yourself that it's okay to have your life partner lie for you because that way she's helping you out—which is something that you've convinced yourself that she lives for.

But slippery behavior creates bigger problems than

the mere act of stealing, lying, or manipulating. Slippery behavior does more than infect your relationships with mistrust, defensiveness, conflict, and resentment. Slippery behavior does more than activate your using-based thinking. You see, you don't use slippery behavior selectively. Once you start back with your slippery behavior, it becomes a way of life that you apply across the board to solve all of your problems, not just some of them.

And so what happens is one white lie here, or *just this once will you bail me out of this mess* there, or *I'll do it just this once and nobody will be the wiser* here, or *one you owe me...*, or one *if it wasn't for me you wouldn't...*, or one *if you didn't create so many problems for me I wouldn't...*, leads to using old coping mechanisms to get you out of situations you shouldn't be in in the first place.

Where once you were using Recovery-based behaviors and thinking to cope with your day-to-day stressors, soon you're back to relying on using-based thinking to justify not one or some or most of your actions, but eventually, all of your actions. And it's your old ways of thinking combined with your old ways of acting that got you into trouble in the first place.

It's just that simple. It's that black and white. Slippery behavior will lead you right back out there. Just like with alcohol and other drugs when it comes to slippery behavior it's all or nothing. You're either always honest or you're not honest at all. And believe me, in the end, the only one who you're fooling is yourself.

So what's the antidote for slippery behavior? One hundred percent rigorous honesty! Not just picking your spots. Not 50 percent. Not 99 percent. 100 percent rigorous honesty with yourself and every person in your life!

## Pathfinder's Compass

### *Antidote for slippery behavior:*

- 1) Commit to rigorous honesty
- 2) Develop a network of people to whom you're willing to be 100% accountable to.
- 3) Practice HOW—Honesty—Openness—Willingness in all of your affairs.
- 4) Commit to taking responsibility for your actions.
- 5) Commit to taking responsibility for getting your needs met.

## Pathfinder's Exercise

- 1) Identify a circumstance in the last week where you chose to lie rather than apply rigorous honesty.
- 2) Identify why you chose to lie rather than apply rigorous honesty to that circumstance.
- 3) Identify the impact lying may have on your spiritual practice.
- 4) Identify the impact lying may have on your Recovery-based lifestyle.
- 5) Identify the impact lying may have on your abstinence.
- 6) Apply steps #1 through #5 to the following types of slippery behavior used in a circumstance in the last week: a) manipulation, b) keeping secrets, c) compartmentalization, d) criminal behavior, e) cheating, f) telling half-truths

The second behavioral stressor I want to discuss with you is *controlling behavior*. Controlling behaviors are

those behaviors that protect you from experiencing powerlessness in your life. Examples of controlling behaviors would be a willful act, blame, people-pleasing, caretaking, overresponsibility, emotional withholding, and impression management. What each of these behaviors share in common is that you use them as a way of defending yourself from feeling powerless within yourself, with other people, and with your relationship with the universe.

A willful act is an act that relies on your willfulness rather than surrender to cope with being powerless over the object of your willful act. You perform a willful act by imposing your will on the object of your will in order to attempt to force the outcome that you desire. An example of a willful act would be trying to consume alcohol and other drugs in a controlled fashion. Another example of a willful act would be manipulating an individual to do what your will would have them do rather than what they would choose to do. A third example of a willful act is attempting to be somebody who you're not in order to remain in relationship with somebody who you fear would otherwise abandon you. Yet another example of a willful act is your sense of overresponsibility for even the most random occurrence in order to feel that you're in control of your life and the environment in which you live your life. A final example of willfulness would be overinvolvement in a compulsive activity such as eating, gambling, sexing, spending money, pornography, and/or exercising in order to control what you do and don't feel.

What each of these acts have in common is your unwillingness to surrender your will to a power greater than your self. In refusing to surrender your will to a power greater than your self you're declaring your unwill-

ingness to have faith in the workings of the universe. However by clinging to your unwillingness to have faith in the workings of the universe, you remain forever estranged from your Higher Power. The longer you remain estranged, the longer you remain spiritually bankrupt. The longer you remain spiritually bankrupt the longer you'll experience spiritual pain. The longer you experience spiritual pain, the more you'll need to find some way to alleviate the pain. And the question becomes, just how will you alleviate your spiritual pain?

What is the antidote for controlling behavior?

## Pathfinder's Compass

*Antidote for controlling behavior:*

- 1) You must be willing to admit that you're powerless over substances, people, and circumstances.
- 2) You must be willing to develop a relationship with a power greater than your self.
- 3) You must be willing to turn your will over to a power greater than your self.
- 4) You must be willing to practice the act of surrender in all of your life circumstances.
- 5) You must be willing to develop and practice daily a spiritual practice.
- 6) You must be willing to become a member of a Recovery-based support system.
- 7) You must be willing to ask for help.
- 8) You must make amends to people you've harmed.
- 9) You must be willing to do service work for others.

Nothing new here, but *It works if you work it!*

## Pathfinder's Exercise

- 1) Identify a current circumstance in your life in which you feel powerless.
- 2) Identify the acts of control you commit in order to not experience your sense of powerlessness.
- 3) Identify the impact that the acts of control that you've identified in step #2 have on your spiritual practice.
- 4) Identify the impact that the acts of control that you've identified in step #2 have on your Recovery-based lifestyle.
- 5) Identify the impact that the acts of control that you've identified in step #2 have on your abstinence.
- 6) Identify what act(s) of surrender you must commit in order to cope with the experience of powerlessness that has been activated by the circumstance that you've identified in step #1 of this exercise.
- 7) Apply steps #1 through 6 to the following: a) a person in your life that makes you feel powerless, b) a substance that makes you feel powerless, c) a self-destructive act you feel powerless to stop.

The third behavioral stressor is *self-destructive behaviors*. Self-destructive behaviors are those behaviors that have an adverse impact on your emotional, physical, and/or spiritual well-being. Examples of self-destructive behaviors would be shame-based relationships, sexual promiscuity, victimizing relationships, going to places that pose a danger to your abstinence, maintaining contact with people who pose a threat to your abstinence,

behaviors that cause physical harm to yourself such as high risk behaviors, or behaviors that undermine principles of self-care such as sleeplessness or lack of eating.

Self-destructive behaviors can activate the process of relapse for obvious reasons. Simply put, self-destructive behaviors have an adverse impact on some or all aspects of your emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. There's nothing complicated about why that would be so. Self-destructive behaviors place an inordinate amount of stress on you. The source of that stress could be physical pain caused from participating in high-risk activities. The source of that stress could be emotional pain caused by involvement with people who shame and disrespect you. The source of that stress could be environmental by putting yourself in certain places that activate emotional and physical cravings associated with consuming alcohol and other drugs. The source of that stress could be interpersonal by continuing to associate with people who would prefer to see you return to consuming alcohol and other drugs. And the question becomes, just how will you most likely alleviate the stress caused by the pain that you're experiencing?

The antidote for self-destructive behaviors is taking an honest inventory of those behaviors that you participate in that cause you harm and stop participating in them. What that means in practical terms is the following.

## Pathfinder's Compass

*Antidote for self-destructive behaviors.*

- 1) Identify those places that you should stay away from and stay away from those places.

- 2) Identify using-based relationships you can no longer maintain and break them off.
- 3) Identify behaviors that pose a risk to your physical well-being and discontinue participating in them.
- 4) Identify relationships that are organized around victimizing you and stop volunteering to be hurt.
- 5) Identify behaviors that activate HALT—Hungry—Angry—Lonely—Tired and stop participating in them.
- 6) Identify relationships that are organized around blame and shame and transform them or eliminate them.
- 7) Identify behaviors you use to escape from your life and begin to live in rather than away from your life.
- 8) Identify behaviors you use to keep crisis a constant in your life and eliminate those behaviors.

## Pathfinder's Exercise

- 1) Identify those places that pose a threat to your abstinence.
- 2) Write about or discuss your unwillingness to stop frequenting those places that pose a threat to your abstinence.
- 3) Identify those people who pose a threat to your abstinence.
- 4) Write about or discuss your unwillingness to stop associating with those people that pose a threat to your abstinence.
- 5) Identify those behaviors that you participate in that pose a threat to your physical well-being.
- 6) Write about or discuss your unwillingness to stop

participating in those behaviors that pose a threat to your physical well-being.

- 7) Identify those behaviors that activate HALT—Hungry—Angry—Lonely—Tired.
- 8) Write about or discuss your unwillingness to stop participating in those behaviors that activate HALT—Hungry—Angry—Lonely—Tired.

The fourth behavioral stressor that we'll discuss is *isolation*. Isolation is debilitating, incapacitating, and paralyzing. Isolation immobilizes you. The more isolated you become, the more incapable you become of taking the necessary steps to get out of your isolation and do *the next right thing*.

Isolation activates within you emotions that can be dangerous to your Recovery. There's an old saying that illustrates this point—*Isolation is the darkroom where negatives are developed*. Feelings such as alienation, worthlessness, shame, and loneliness become activated and exaggerated when you cut yourself off from the rest of the world. And, as I'm sure that you may well know, alienation, worthlessness, shame, and loneliness feed upon themselves and become larger than life. Once they become larger than life, they become self-fulfilling because the bigger these emotions become, the more prone to isolating you become.

Isolation activates using-based thinking. It tends to activate the type of thinking that is created by denial, rationalization, minimization, and blame. The more you isolate the less grounded you are to the following Truths:

- 1) You have a disease.
- 2) You have a disease that you must manage.

- 3) You have a disease that you must manage by remaining abstinent from ALL alcohol and other drugs.
- 4) You have a disease that you must manage by remaining abstinent from ALL alcohol and other drugs and admitting that you're powerless over ALL alcohol and other drugs.
- 5) You have a disease that you must manage by remaining abstinent from ALL alcohol and other drugs and admitting that you're powerless over ALL alcohol and other drugs and that your life has become unmanageable.
- 6) You have a disease that you must manage by remaining abstinent from ALL alcohol and other drugs and admitting that you're powerless over ALL alcohol and other drugs and that your life has become unmanageable and that you must turn your will over to a power greater than your self.

Although you can never lose sight of these Truths, isolation turns these truths into mush in no time at all.

Isolation activates self-pity, inflames resentments, and amplifies self-doubt. It activates every toxic belief you've ever had, incites every self-hating thought you've ever formed, and amplifies every fear you've ever imagined. Once this symphony is cranked up to full volume, it becomes all that you can do to get out of bed in the morning.

Finally, and obviously, isolation cuts you off from people. Isolation cuts you off from the support that you need, the connections that you crave, the fellowship that you must have.

So, again the question must be asked, what's the antidote for isolation?

## Pathfinder's Compass

### *Antidote for isolation.*

- 1) Develop a Recovery-based support system.
- 2) Attend Recovery-based support group meetings.
- 3) Ask somebody to be your Recovery-based mentor known as a sponsor.
- 4) Form a list of Recovery-based people with whom you'll connect every day and twice on Sunday.
- 5) Become involved with leisure activities that involve other people.
- 6) Hire a psychotherapist in order to work through those personal issues that limit your willingness to be involved with other people.
- 7) Do experiential group therapy in order to work through those personal issues that limit your willingness to be involved with other people.

## Pathfinder's Exercise

- 1) Write about or discuss the fears that you have about joining a Recovery-based support system.
- 2) Write about or discuss the fears you have about depending on other people.
- 3) Write about or discuss the fears you have about other people depending on you.
- 4) Write about or discuss the fears you have about letting other people get to know you.
- 5) Write about or discuss the fears you have about

getting to know other people.

- 6) Write about or discuss the fears you have about being accountable to other people.

Don't underestimate the danger that behavioral stressors pose to your Recovery-based lifestyle and your long-term abstinence. Don't underestimate the necessity of taking Recovery-based actions to eliminate these behavioral stressors from your life. And as always, I feel compelled to tell you what I've told you throughout this book. Don't do this alone. Don't try to manage your behavioral stressors by yourself.

Don't kid yourself into believing that you can manage these stressors without any help or feedback from other people. You just can't do it alone. The very nature of slippery behavior is deception. The very nature of controlling behavior is to empower you through the independent nature of your willfulness. Self-destructive behaviors feed on your apathy and the belief that you don't deserve the help of others. Isolation, by definition, cuts you off from the help of others. So to best manage your behavioral stressors, stay plugged in, remain a part of rather than separate from a larger whole.