

Chapter 4

*B*ack to Reality:
Recovery-based Thinking

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*Forget your old ideas.
Forget the lies they told you.
Forget them all, and you will begin to remember.*

-Marianne Williamson

"I can get away with only one meeting this week. I'll just double up on them next week." "I wouldn't drink so much if she would just get off my back." "I don't see why I can't just smell the cork from the wine bottle. What harm will that do? "I don't need to worry about going out of town. I know what to do when I get into trouble."

"I don't have to listen to him. After all, what makes him such an expert?" "I can smoke some reefer now and again. After all, beer is what gave me the most problems." "Maybe that's what those weaklings have to do, but I don't need to go to meetings to stay sober."

Who hasn't thought the above or similar thoughts at one time or another? But just how far a leap is it from thinking those thoughts to actually relapsing? Well, the slope can get pretty slippery, pretty fast. There's an old saying in the Recovery community—*I came in for my drinking and I stay for my thinking*. Distorted by rationalization, warped by bargaining, perverted by blaming others, bolstered by intellectualization, and twisted by entitlement and grandiosity, your mind can easily and quickly switch the orientation of your thinking from Recovery-based to using-based in the blink of an eye. And once your thinking becomes using-based, a similar switch in orientation for your beliefs and behavior isn't far behind.

Recovery-based thinking is the second element of the psychological building block of a Recovery-based lifestyle. Recovery-based thinking is thinking that's reality-based. Reality-based thinking is thinking that's shaped and formed by honesty, openness, and taking responsibility for your thoughts, feelings, and actions. Honesty, openness, and taking responsibility for your thoughts, feelings, and actions enables you to assess and evaluate

your choices, actions, events, circumstances, and the people in your life through a clean lens, free of distortions.

Honesty, openness, and taking responsibility for your thoughts, feelings, and actions prevents you from falling prey to the distortions, misunderstandings, and confusion shaped by fear, denial, willfulness, and attachment. Without honesty, openness, and taking responsibility for your thoughts, feelings, and actions your thinking can become warped and distorted by those devices that shape and form your using-based thinking.

Using-based thinking is *distorted* thinking that's shaped and formed by isolation, secrecy, deceit, entitlement, egocentricity, shame, grandiosity, denial, minimization, rationalization, intellectualization, blame, projection, discounting, and superimposing the past on to the present. When a person's thinking is influenced by any combination of the above-mentioned dynamics, we say that that individual's thinking is *stinking thinking*.

Once denial and other perceptual distorters of reality influence your thinking, you're much more likely to invalidate your Recovery-based belief system. Once you invalidate your Recovery-based belief system and buy into the tenets of your using-based belief system, you're much more likely to make choices and take actions that are congruent with your using-based rather than your Recovery-based belief system.

Therefore it's critical that you become familiar with both your Recovery-based and using-based thinking. Being able to distinguish between using-based and Recovery-based thinking can enable you to critically evaluate how accurately you're assessing any situation that confronts you.

This is why it's so important to be a member of a Recovery-based support system. The members of your Recovery-based support system can provide a reality check for those times when your using-based thinking momentarily becomes activated. Members of your support system can help you distinguish between your using-based and your Recovery-based thinking. They can help you identify the distortions that are influencing your thinking. Ultimately, they can help guide you back to Recovery-based thinking.

To assist you in becoming more familiar with what your Recovery-based and using-based thinking sounds like, I have prepared the following two Pathfinder's Checklists. I have written down nine examples of Recovery-based thinking and nine examples of using-based thinking. The numbered examples in the Recovery-based list correspond with the numbered examples in the using-based list. For example, in the Recovery-based list, an example of Recovery-based thinking provided on #1 corresponds to the #1 using-based example in the using-based list. Please read both lists carefully. After you finish reviewing each list take some time to answer the questions in the Pathfinder's Exercise that immediately follows the using-based Pathfinder's Checklist.

Pathfinder's Checklist

Examples of Recovery-based thinking

- 1) Acknowledging that people and events affect you emotionally and spiritually.
- 2) Acknowledging that you're the only one responsible for the choices that you make to remain absti-

ment from ALL alcohol and other drugs.

- 3) Acknowledging the people, places, events, and circumstances that are a danger to your long-term abstinence.
- 4) Acknowledging that you're the creator of the dangerous situations that you find yourself in.
- 5) Embracing a program of Recovery by living the teachings of the program.
- 6) Acknowledging the importance of the people in your Recovery-based support system.
- 7) Opening yourself to the wisdom and support of your Fellowship and Higher Power.
- 8) Experiencing gratitude for who and what your Recovery-based support system is.
- 9) Taking responsibility for what you have to do in this specific moment to stay sober and doing it.

Pathfinder's Checklist

Examples of using-based thinking

- 1) *Denying* that people and events affect you emotionally and spiritually.
- 2) *Blaming* others for making it difficult for you to remain abstinent from alcohol and other drugs.
- 3) *Minimizing* the threat that a person or circumstance poses to your abstinence.
- 4) *Rationalizing* that if God wanted you to be sober, (s)he wouldn't have put you in a dangerous circumstance.
- 5) *Intellectualization* such as learning but not living what to do.
- 6) *Discounting* the importance of others who offer

their wisdom and support.

- 7) *Diminishing* the importance of your Fellowship and Higher Power.
- 8) *Attacking* your Recovery-based support system for who and what they are not.
- 9) *Bargaining* by telling yourself that you'll go to four meetings next week so that you can take this week off and go camping with your friends.

As you review the following questions you'll notice that I use the word *circumstance* as the focus of your self-examination. Think of the word *circumstance* as an action, activity, condition, conflict, dynamic, event, person, relationship, and/or situation.

Pathfinder's Exercise

- 1) Identify three circumstances that are dangerous to your abstinence.
- 2) Write about or discuss three examples of how you *justify* your continued involvement in each of those three circumstances identified in step #1 of this exercise.
- 3) Write about or discuss three things that you need to *acknowledge* about the danger that each circumstance that you identified in step #1 of this exercise poses to your abstinence.
- 4) Identify three people who are dangerous to your abstinence.
- 5) Write about or discuss three examples of how you *justify* your continued involvement with each of the three people that you identified in step #4 of

this exercise.

- 6) Write about or discuss three things that you need to *acknowledge* about the danger that each person that you identified in step #4 of this exercise poses to your abstinence.
- 7) Identify three places that are dangerous to your abstinence.
- 8) Write about three examples of how you *justify* your continued involvement with the three places that you identified in step #7 of this exercise.
- 9) Write about or discuss three things that you need to *acknowledge* about the danger that each place that you identified in step #7 of this exercise poses to your abstinence.

So, how can you maintain Recovery-based thinking that is grounded in reality? How can you make sure that your thinking is clear of the distortions and misperceptions that infect using-based thinking? How can you get off the slippery slope of stinking thinking? There's an expression used in most Twelve Step programs—*Trace it—Face it—Erase it—Replace it*. If you apply *Trace it—Face it—Erase it—Replace it* to how you evaluate your choices, actions, events, circumstances, and the people that make-up your daily life, you'll be able to maintain Recovery-based thinking. However, if you deviate from the formula—*Trace it—Face it—Erase it—Replace it*, you'll likely rely on one or more of the above-mentioned perceptual distorters to evaluate and assess the people and situations that you confront moment-by-moment.

As you review the following questions you'll notice that I use the word *circumstance* as the focus of your self-

examination. Think of the word circumstance as an action, activity, condition, conflict, dynamic, event, person, relationship, and/or situation.

Pathfinder's Compass

Trace it.

- 1) How did the circumstance that you're confronted with appear in your life?
- 2) What role did you play in the circumstance appearing in your life?
- 3) What choice(s) did you make that enabled this circumstance to appear in your life?
- 4) What action(s) did you take that enabled this circumstance to appear in your life?
- 5) What choice(s) did you refuse to make that in so doing enabled this circumstance to appear in your life?
- 6) What action(s) did you not take that in so doing enabled this circumstance to appear in your life?
- 7) How did your *rationalization* of this circumstance enable this circumstance to appear in your life?
- 8) How did your *minimization* of this circumstance enable this circumstance to appear in your life?
- 9) How did *blaming* other people or circumstances enable this circumstance to appear in your life?
- 10) How did *bargaining* enable this circumstance to appear in your life?
- 11) How did *discounting* the importance of the circumstance enable this circumstance to appear in your life?
- 12) How did *attacking* the circumstance or another

person enable the circumstance to appear in your life?

- 13) How did *denial* of the circumstance enable the circumstance to appear in your life?
- 14) How did *not taking responsibility* for your actions enable this circumstance to appear in your life?
- 15) How did *not taking responsibility* for your well-being enable this circumstance to appear in your life?
- 16) How did your *passiveness* enable this circumstance to appear in your life?
- 17) How did your *willfulness* enable this circumstance to appear in your life?
- 18) How did your *grandiosity* enable this circumstance to appear in your life?
- 19) How did your *shame* enable this circumstance to appear in your life?
- 20) How did your *sense of entitlement* enable this circumstance to appear in your life?

Pathfinder's Compass

Face it.

- 1) Does this circumstance *enrich* or *sabotage* your emotional, physical, and/or spiritual well-being?
- 2) How does this circumstance enrich or sabotage your emotional, physical, and/or spiritual well-being?
- 3) How does the effect of enriching or sabotaging your emotional, physical, and/or spiritual well-being manifest itself in your life?
- 4) What consequences does this circumstance create

- for you that you have to pro-actively and affirmatively take responsibility for addressing?
- 5) What specific actions *must* you take in order to pro-actively and affirmatively take responsibility for addressing the consequences created by the circumstance that you are confronted with?
 - 6) What is the *emotional payoff* that you experience from this circumstance being a part of your life?
 - 7) What could you do differently that would enable you to experience the same emotional payoff without the destructive aspect as identified in step #6?
 - 8) What fears do you have about creating such a change as identified in step #7?
 - 9) What lesson is embedded in the circumstance that you are confronted with?
 - 10) What fear do you have of *living the lesson* that is embedded in the circumstance that you are confronted with?
 - 11) What would you have to let go of in order to *live the lesson* that is embedded in the circumstance that you are confronted with?
 - 12) How does holding on to what you refuse to let go of keep your life the same?
 - 13) How would letting go of what you need to let go of make your life different?
 - 14) How would letting go of what you need to let go of enrich your Recovery-based lifestyle?

Pathfinder's Compass

Erase it.

- 1) What do you need to acknowledge about who you

- are that contributed to this circumstance appearing in your life?
- 2) What do you need to acknowledge about what you did and/or did not do that contributed to this circumstance appearing in your life?
 - 3) What do you need to acknowledge *to yourself* about the consequence(s) of your action(s) and/or inaction(s)?
 - 4) What do you need to acknowledge *to other people* about the consequence(s) of your action(s) and/or inaction(s)?
 - 5) To whom do you need to acknowledge what impact your choices, actions, and inactions had on that individual?
 - 6) In regards to the circumstance that you're confronted with right now, what *choices* can you make that would create an outcome that would be less destructive or hurtful to yourself and others?
 - 7) In regards to the circumstance that you're confronted with right now, what *actions* can you take that would create an outcome that was less destructive or hurtful to yourself and others?
 - 8) In regards to the circumstance that you're confronted with right now, to whom are you willing to be accountable for the execution of those actions?
 - 9) In regards to the circumstance that you're confronted with right now, to whom *must* you make amends to? Do so!
 - 10) In regards to the circumstance that you're confronted with right now, to whom *must* you offer your forgiveness? Do so!
 - 11) In regards to the circumstance that you're con-

fronted with right now to whom *must* you offer gratitude to and for? Do so!

- 12) In regards to the circumstance that you're confronted with right now, who is the object of those resentments that you *must* release?
13. In regards to the circumstance that you're confronted with right now, what interferes with releasing those resentments?
- 14) In regards to the circumstance that you're confronted with right now, to whom *must* you acknowledge your resentments and the struggles you have with letting go of them? Do so!
- 15) In regards to the circumstance that you're confronted with right now, to whom *must* you acknowledge the impact of you holding on to your resentments of them? Do so!

Pathfinder's Compass

Replace it.

- 1) Identify what is self-destructive about the circumstance that confronts you.
- 2) Identify the consequence of the self-destructive nature of the circumstance that confronts you.
- 3) Identify the choice(s) that you can make that would make a different outcome than the self-destructive outcome identified in step #1.
- 4) Identify the actions that you can take that would create a different outcome than the self-destructive outcome identified in step #1.
- 5) Identify the fears that you attach to doing things differently as identified in steps #3 and #4.

- 6) Identify the fears that you attach to experiencing a different outcome than the outcome identified in step #1.
- 7) Identify whose help you can enlist to enact the different action(s) you identified in step #4.
- 8) Ask for feedback from the people you identified in step #7 about the plan you created to take a different action as identified in steps #3 and #4.
- 9) Incorporate any feedback that you've received from those people identified in step #7 that you've asked to help.
- 10) Execute your plan of change.

Sure seems like a lot of work, doesn't it? Well, like anything else that's new, at first, it will be a lot of hard work. But if you apply *Trace it—Face it—Erase it—Replace it* consistently to your day-to-day circumstances, you'll discover the payoff is well worth the effort. And like anything else, with time, *Trace it—Face it—Erase it—Replace it* will become more and more familiar and take less and less work to execute.

Let me leave you with two final tools to help you maintain your Recovery-based thinking. Remember, the key to maintaining Recovery-based thinking is *continually getting reality checks*. To do so, you must continually check in with your Recovery-based support system and with yourself. The first Pathfinder's Checklist below describes how to receive and utilize reality checks from your support system. The second Pathfinder's Checklist below describes how you can create and utilize a reality check with yourself.

Pathfinder's Checklist

How to use reality checks from your Recovery-based support system to keep your thinking Recovery-based rather than using based.

- 1) Maintain frequent, consistent contact with your Recovery-based support system so that they know you and know what's going on with you.
- 2) Listen to rather than defend yourself from your Recovery-based support system's feedback.
- 3) Take ownership of rather than blame people or circumstances for your behavior.
- 4) Follow your Recovery-based system's recommendations when they see that your thinking is starting to become dominated by using-based thinking.
- 5) Familiarize yourself with how your using-based and Recovery-based thinking sounds in your head and in your words.
- 6) Learn how your using-based thinking influences your choices.
- 7) Learn how your Recovery-based thinking influences your choices.
- 8) Review your actions to ensure that your thinking is Recovery-based.
- 9) Review your Recovery-based belief system as a way of maintaining your thinking-based abstinence.
- 10) Ask your Recovery-based support system for frequent reality checks.
- 11) Attend more Recovery-based support group meetings when your thinking becomes dominated more and more by using-based thinking.
- 12) Read more Recovery-based materials when your

thinking becomes dominated more and more by using-based thinking.

- 13) Make more phone calls to your Recovery-based support system when your thinking becomes dominated by using-based thinking.

Pathfinder's Checklist

How to use reality checks with yourself to keep your thinking Recovery-based rather than using-based.

- 1) Identify the danger that a specific person, place and/or circumstance poses to your abstinence.
- 2) Identify three ways that a specific person, place and/or circumstance is a danger to your abstinence.
- 3) Identify three ways that a specific person, place and/or circumstance can lead to consuming alcohol and other drugs.
- 4) Identify three lessons of Recovery that exist in the specific person, place and/or circumstance that you're trying to resolve.
- 5) Identify your role in creating the specific circumstance that is posing a threat to the integrity of your Recovery-based lifestyle.
- 6) Identify what actions you can take in this circumstance to honor your Recovery-based lifestyle.
- 7) Identify any using-based thoughts that this specific circumstance may activate.
- 8) Identify any using-based beliefs that this specific circumstance may activate.
- 9) Identify any using-based behaviors that this specific moment may activate.

- 10) Identify any Recovery-based beliefs that you can rely on in order not to consume alcohol and other drugs.
- 11) Identify any Recovery-based actions that you can take in order not to use.
- 12) Identify any members of your Recovery-based support system that you can contact for support and a reality check.