

Chapter 7

*R*ecovery-based Environments  
and Relationships

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*You must structure your world so that you are  
constantly reminded of who you are.*

-Na'im Akbar

*Do you remember* what it used to be like? You would look around your living space and all you could see is the mess that you didn't have the energy to clean up. Do you long for the good ole days when you could freely run—go where you wanted to go with whomever you wanted to go. Do you miss those days when there was drama wherever you turned? Never a dull moment, chaos was just a part of your day—kind of like the wind and rain. Sure, people treated you like, well you know like what, but you kept coming back for more. Days started when you felt like having them start. Blowing people off had become an art form that you had perfected.

Hopefully, all of that is changing for you. Hopefully, with time and patience your life has begun to settle down. Hopefully you're discovering how it is that the heart and soul of your Recovery-based lifestyle is the third building block of a Recovery-based lifestyle, *social well-being*.

For it's the guidance and support of your Recovery-based support system that will keep you on the straight and narrow. The stability provided by your Recovery-based daily routines and rituals is what will take the highs and lows out of your life. The safety provided by creating a Recovery-based environment in which to live, work, and play will minimize stress and maximize sobriety.

As you become connected with your Recovery-based support system, you'll feel less alone and more loved. By developing a disciplined practice of daily Recovery-based routines and rituals, you'll become more grounded to each unfolding moment of your life. Recovery-proofing your living environment will create a less chaotic and more serene pace to your life.

That is why the social building block is so critical to

your long-term sobriety. In this chapter we'll examine four elements that make up your social well-being.

## Pathfinder's Checklist

*Four elements of the social well-being building block of a Recovery-based lifestyle.*

- 1) Recovery-based environments
- 2) Recovery-based support system
- 3) Recovery-based relationships
- 4) Recovery-based daily routines and rituals

A Recovery-based environment is an environment that's free and clear of ALL alcohol and other drugs as well as any paraphernalia used to assist you in acquiring, consuming, and/or hiding your consumption of any alcohol and other drugs. A Recovery-based support system is a network of people who serve as a source of support, inspiration, and guidance for how best to remain abstinent from alcohol and other drugs. A Recovery-based relationship is a relationship that exists for the sole purpose of birthing, nurturing, honoring, protecting, and preserving your abstinence from ALL alcohol and other drugs. Recovery-based daily routines are the practices and rituals that you must perform on a daily basis to [re]construct and maintain your Recovery-based lifestyle as well as remain abstinent from alcohol and other drugs.

Now let's establish one fact from the outset. You'll fight tooth and nail the integration of these elements into your life. For the most fundamental nature of these four elements is that they're black and white, all or nothing. When integrating these four elements into your life,

you'll notice just how creative you can be at applying your version of these elements rather than applying the elements as I have written about them.

Integrating these four elements into your life will activate your willfulness like nothing else we've discussed up to this point. In attempting to comply with the letter of the law as you integrate these elements into your life, you'll find yourself more times than not settling for complying with the spirit of the law. But be forewarned, settling for compliance with the spirit rather than the letter of the law is a formula for disaster and ultimately relapse.

Quite simply, you're better off living, working, and playing in environments that are free and clear of ALL alcohol and other drugs. You can convince yourself how difficult it will be to alter your lifestyle to meet such an exacting standard but you'll never convince me of the necessity to have ANY alcohol and other drugs where you live, work, and play. You can convince yourself how difficult it will be to alter your patterns of socializing at work or school or with family and friends but you'll never convince me of your ability to control a situation nor your reaction to a situation in which you're consistently exposed to alcohol and other drugs. You can convince yourself how impossible it will be for you to escape the presence of alcohol and other drugs but you'll never convince me that the genius you applied to both the acquisition and concealment of your consumption of alcohol and other drugs can't be applied to the sanitation of the environments in which you live, work, and play.

You can remain abstinent from alcohol and other drugs without becoming part of a Recovery-based support system but why would you want to. You can con-

vince yourself that you're smart enough to figure all of this out by yourself but you can't convince me that you know the first thing about what it takes to remain abstinent from ALL alcohol and other drugs. You can convince yourself that Recovery-based support group meetings are for the weak-minded, needy, and infirmed but you can't convince me that it takes more courage to go it alone than to confront your demons in front of a room full of people. You can convince yourself that attending Recovery-based support groups is doing little more than trading in one addiction for another but you can't convince me that rugged individualism is more healing than the power of community and fellowship.

You're better off transforming or discontinuing altogether those relationships that pose a threat to your abstinence. You can convince yourself that your life has become so impossibly enmeshed with people who either enabled your consumption of alcohol and other drugs and/or used with you but you'll never convince me that these very relationships, left unchanged, are not poison to your Recovery. You can convince yourself that you're afraid to stand-up for yourself and your newly evolving Recovery-based lifestyle but you'll never convince me that it isn't an absolute necessity that you negotiate Recovery-based terms with those people who will continue to be a part of your life. You can convince yourself how alone you'll feel without your old using buddies but you'll never convince me that you're better off with the devil that you know rather than establishing a new network of Recovery-based relationships.

Recovery-based daily routines that bring structure and fellowship to your chaotic, secretive, isolating lifestyle

are absolutely essential to your long-term abstinence. You can convince yourself that the fears you have of committing to a lifestyle of accountability and structure are overwhelming but you can't convince me that you can remain abstinent being accountable only to yourself. You can convince yourself that you're special and unique, but you can't convince me that you don't need disciplined daily practices that protect and preserve your emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. You can convince yourself that you're a lone wolf that needs nobody but yourself, but you can't convince me that you can fulfill your Highest Potential by going through this alone.

Let's examine a little more closely each of the four elements. The first element of the social building block of a Recovery-based lifestyle is a *Recovery-based environment*. There are two points I want to make concerning the creation of a Recovery-based environment. First, *don't expect anybody to cooperate with your need to sanitize your environment of ALL alcohol and other drugs*. Don't expect anyone to share the same urgency as I that your environment must be free and clear of ALL alcohol and other drugs. Don't expect anyone to have sympathy for the "idea" that you have a "disease" and that you're "powerless" over your consumption of ALL alcohol and other drugs. Don't expect anyone to make the tiniest sacrifice when it comes to their deprivation of alcohol and other drugs. The reasons for this are many and complex. Suffice it to say that it will be your responsibility to stand up for yourself. It is your responsibility to assert yourself. It is your responsibility to ask for help and support. It will be your responsibility to take care of yourself when no help and support is forthcoming.

The second point I want to make is that you're going to believe *you don't deserve other people's understanding and cooperation* about the *fact* that your environment at home, work, and play *must* be free and clear of ALL alcohol and other drugs. Being newly abstinent, you're going to feel lower than a snake's belly to the ground. After all, look at all the crap that you've pulled, the problems that you've created, the promises that you've broken, and the lies that you've told. These are noble thoughts indeed. And any Twelve Step program has a way of helping you address such circumstances—making amends for the harm you've caused to others.

But abdication is not part of the program. Martyrdom is not part of the program. Throwing yourself on the mercy of others is not part of the program. Expecting others to guess at what you need from them is not part of the program. You *must* be *willing to claim* what you deserve—your rights and dignity as a human being. Just because you have a disease doesn't mean you've forfeited your rights. Just because you've committed bad, perhaps even criminal acts, doesn't mean you don't deserve the right to Recover. But you must *claim* what you deserve for no one will just give it to you. And what you deserve most is a Recovery-based environment.

## Pathfinder's Compass

*What a Recovery-based environment is.*

- 1) A Recovery-based environment is an environment that's free and clear of ALL alcohol and other drugs. Not some. Not most. Not 99%. All!
- 2) A Recovery-based environment is an environment

that's free and clear of ALL information and instruments that you've used to assist you in acquiring ALL alcohol and other drugs. Examples of this would be a) Stolen and/or forged prescription pads, b) Phone numbers of people who either provided for you or assisted you in the acquisition of ALL alcohol and other drugs, c) Recorded directions that enabled you to meet with people who would assist you in the acquisition of ALL alcohol and other drugs, d) Cell phones and land-lines, e-mail addresses, fax numbers, and/or any other means of communications with and/or from those people who assisted you in the acquisition of ALL alcohol and other drugs, E) Cash, checks, debit cards, credit cards, and/or cash cards used to purchase ALL alcohol and other drugs. Not some. Not most. Not 99%. All!

- 3) A Recovery-based environment is an environment that's free and clear of ALL paraphernalia that you used to consume ALL alcohol and other drugs. Not some. Not most. Not 99%. All!
- 4) A Recovery-based environment is an environment that's free and clear of ALL paraphernalia you used to hide your consumption of ALL alcohol and other drugs. Not some. Not most. Not 99%. All!
- 5) A Recovery-based environment is an environment in which the need for an environment that protects and preserves your abstinence as well as the measures necessary to create such an environment are *honored* rather than *ignored, mocked, negotiated, paid lip service to, executed with half-measures, and/or serviced with double messages* such as

"Don't do cocaine but keep drinking so you can be my party girl," "You can no longer drink but let me have my two glasses of wine with dinner," "You can no longer drink but our social life isn't going to change one bit."

## Pathfinder's Exercise

- 1) Write down specifically what paraphernalia as well as what alcohol and other drugs need to be removed from your home.
- 2) Write down specifically every hiding place that you can think of where you've hidden what you've identified in step #1.
- 3) Write about or discuss what fears you have about ridding yourself of the paraphernalia and ALL alcohol and other drugs.
- 4) Write about or discuss what you're not ready to let go of or surrender to as a result of wanting to keep some paraphernalia as well as alcohol and other drugs in your home.
- 5) Write about or discuss what you've yet to accept about being chemically dependent and the changes you need to make in your life as a result of wanting to keep some paraphernalia as well as alcohol and other drugs in your home.
- 6) Discuss steps #1 through #6 with members of your Recovery-based support system. Get feedback.
- 7) Ask a member(s) of your Recovery-based support system (those who have solid Recovery under their belt) to go to your home with you and help you dispose of all the items identified in step #1.

- 8) Repeat steps #1 through #8 for your work and leisure environments.

The second element of the social building block of a Recovery-based lifestyle is a *Recovery-based support system*. A Recovery-based support system is a network of individuals who serve as a source of support, inspiration, guidance, expertise, and compassion.

- 1) Your Recovery-based support system should consist of only those friends and family members who are *willing* and *able* to support whatever measures are necessary for you to take in order to alter your lifestyle in order to remain abstinent from ALL alcohol and other drugs.
- 2) Your Recovery-based support system should consist of Recovering chemically dependent individuals whose guidance and support you're willing to accept and follow.
- 3) Your Recovery-based support system should consist of a Recovery-based mentor known as a sponsor. A sponsor is a Recovering chemically dependent individual whose guidance you must be willing to trust and accept as well as someone who you must be willing to confide in openly and honestly.
- 4) Your Recovery-based support system should consist of Recovering chemically dependent individuals who you meet at Recovery-based support group meetings. These individuals should be people you maintain contact with on a daily basis for support, guidance, and honest self-disclosure.
- 5) Your Recovery-based support system should consist of regularly attended Recovery-based support

group meetings. You should be willing to participate in an open and honest manner.

- 6) Your Recovery-based support system should consist of qualified professional healthcare providers who are experts in the treatment of chemical dependency. Your network of qualified healthcare providers should consist of psychologists, doctors, dentists, pharmacists, social workers, spiritual leaders, and/or psychiatrists. You should inform each of these healthcare providers that you're chemically dependent. They need this information so that they may treat you with safe, appropriate, and relevant interventions. Having said that, do not ASSUME that your physician or psychiatrist has considered your disease when prescribing medications for your consumption. Do not ASSUME that your physician or psychiatrist will not prescribe medications that pose a danger to your abstinence. You MUST be the overseer of your abstinence. You MUST be your own consumer protection advocate. You MUST know what risks any medication prescribed by a physician or psychiatrist pose to your abstinence. You MUST be willing not to comply with any proposed interventions that pose a threat to your Recovery.

## Pathfinder's Compass

*How to develop a Recovery-based support system.*

- 1) Consult local telephone book for phone numbers of local offices of Recovery-based organizations for locations and times of Recovery-based support

- group meetings in your community.
- 2) Contact local hospital for information about locations and times of Recovery-based support group meetings in your community.
  - 3) Attend ninety Recovery-based support group meetings in ninety days.
  - 4) Go to Recovery-based support group meetings early and leave late.
  - 5) Develop relationships with those individuals who are not only knowledgeable about Recovery but live Recovery.
  - 6) Collect phone numbers of those individuals at your Recovery-based support groups who you would like to maintain contact with on a daily basis and then use them.
  - 7) Ask somebody who's not only knowledgeable about Recovery but lives Recovery to be your Recovery-based mentor known as a sponsor.
  - 8) Establish a working relationship with your sponsor and stick to the procedures and routines that you and your sponsor establish.
  - 9) Actively work the steps of the program.
  - 10) Read materials about Recovery.
  - 11) Attend workshops about Recovery.

The third element of the social building block of a Recovery-based lifestyle is a *Recovery-based relationship*. Recovery-based relationships are to Recovery what food and water are to you and I. There's nothing more dangerous to your Recovery than those individuals who will consciously or unconsciously sabotage your abstinence. You must be able to identify the dangers that any indi-

vidual poses to your Recovery. You must be able to identify the action steps that you need to take to lessen or eliminate altogether the threat that a person poses to your Recovery. You must be able to negotiate new terms for old relationships—terms that place Recovery at the forefront of your relationship. You must be able to execute the action steps you need to take to protect yourself from those individuals that pose a threat to your Recovery.

Not only must you be able to either transform or rid yourself of those relationships that pose a threat to your Recovery, you must be able to develop relationships with people who are capable of supporting, mentoring, and honoring you. Although you may prefer that such relationships evolve out of a very passive process in which you need only find the right person to bestow such unconditional regard upon you, it's not going to happen that way.

Instead, you'll have to learn how to create relationships that are based on honesty, self-responsibility, respect, and willingness rather than blame, manipulation, secrecy, and deception. You'll have to learn how to participate in your relationships in ways that you've longed to experience but have lacked the courage and sobriety to manufacture.

## Pathfinder's Compass

*What a Recovery-based relationship is.*

- 1) A Recovery-based relationship is a relationship that exists for the sole purpose of birthing, nurturing, honoring, protecting, and preserving your abstinence from ALL alcohol and other drugs.
- 2) A Recovery-based relationship is a relationship that

functions *independent* of acquiring, enabling, consuming, and/or hiding the consumption of alcohol and other drugs.

- 3) A Recovery-based relationship is a relationship that hasn't been established for the purpose of assisting or enabling you in the acquisition of alcohol and other drugs.
- 4) A Recovery-based relationship is a relationship that hasn't been established for the purpose of consuming alcohol and other drugs.
- 5) A Recovery-based relationship is a relationship that hasn't been established for the purpose of hiding your consumption of alcohol and other drugs.
- 6) A Recovery-based relationship is a relationship organized around serenity rather than chaos.
- 7) A Recovery-based relationship is a relationship that's organized around faith rather than control.
- 8) A Recovery-based relationship is a relationship organized around trust rather than manipulation.
- 9) A Recovery-based relationship is a relationship organized around respect rather than shame.
- 10) A Recovery-based relationship is a relationship that's organized around taking responsibility rather than blame.
- 11) A Recovery-based relationship is a relationship organized around surrender rather than willfulness.
- 12) A Recovery-based relationship is a relationship organized around forgiveness rather than resentment.
- 13) A Recovery-based relationship is a relationship organized around humility rather than grandiosity.

- 14) A Recovery-based relationship is a relationship organized around gratitude rather than entitlement.

## Pathfinder's Exercise

- 1) Identify those individuals that pose a threat to your Recovery.
- 2) Identify the specific threat(s) that each individual identified in step #1 poses to your Recovery.
- 3) Identify the specific change(s) that need to take place between you and each person identified in step #1.
- 4) Identify the specific action steps you need to take in order to transform or terminate altogether your relationship with each person identified in step #1.
- 5) Discuss steps #1 through #4 with members of your Recovery-based support system.
- 6) Integrate the feedback that you received from your Recovery-based support system into your plan of action.
- 7) Execute your plan of action for each individual identified in step #1.

The fourth element of the social building block of a Recovery-based lifestyle is *Recovery-based daily routines and rituals*. You know the acronym, *KISS*—Keep It Simple Silly? Well that's the only guideline you need to follow when structuring your day-to-day life. What are the most *basic* acts that you *must* perform in order to care for your mind, body, and soul? What are the most *basic* acts that you *must* perform in order to protect and pre-

serve your Recovery-based lifestyle? What are the most *basic* acts that you *must* perform in order to remain abstinent from ALL alcohol and other drugs? Not most intelligent acts. Not most high-tech acts. Not most fancy-shmancy acts. Not most clever acts. Not most intricate and complex acts. Simple, basic, elemental acts—that’s all we’re after here!

When structuring your day-to-day Recovery-based life, keep in mind what we’ve already discussed about structure in chapter 1, *What is a Recovery-based Lifestyle?* Structure is the whole created out of the sum of the parts of other Recovery-based elements such as abstinence from ALL alcohol and other drugs, abstinence from ALL obsessive behaviors, accountability, balance, consistency, fellowshiping, integrity, joy, love, rigorous honesty, rituals, routines, Recovery-based environments, Recovery-based relationships, a spiritual practice, and regular attendance at Recovery-based support group meetings.

That’s all that we’re talking about—daily routines and rituals that you perform *just for today*. Simple things like eating properly, taking a quiet time, praying, and breathing. It’s the sum total of all these simple acts that will enable you to grow strong and feel confident in your abilities to manage your stressors, take care of your day-to-day responsibilities, and most important of all, remain abstinent from ALL alcohol and other drugs.

In the Pathfinder’s Compass that follows, I’ve outlined an example of what a Recovery-based day may look like. I offer it only as an example. Mold and shape this example to the circumstances of your life. To do so, identify those routines and rituals that you must perform for today. Identify in what part of your day and in what order

you’ll be able to perform each routine and ritual.

## Pathfinder’s Compass

*An example of a Recovery-based day.*

- 1) Wake-up
- 2) Prayer or meditation
- 3) Twenty to thirty minutes of exercise
- 4) Eat breakfast
- 5) Review Recovery-based actions that you need to take in the course of this day.
- 6) Attend to your responsibilities in the course of the morning.
- 7) Apply stress management skills to stressors as needed.
- 8) Contact members of Recovery-based support system.
- 9) Eat lunch.
- 10) Prayer or meditate.
- 11) Read Recovery materials (spiritual and/or inspirational).
- 12) Review Recovery-based actions that you need to take in the course of this day.
- 13) Attend to your responsibilities in the course of the afternoon.
- 14) Apply stress management skills to stressors as needed.
- 15) Contact members of Recovery-based support system.
- 16) Take care of responsibilities at home.
- 17) Maintain cleanliness and order of your home.
- 18) Eat dinner.

- 19) Attend Recovery-based support group.
- 20) Review day—identify lessons learned and lessons that need to be learned.
- 21) Pray or meditate.
- 22) Sleep

### **Pathfinder's Exercise**

Focus on your day-to-day life as it's currently structured. Identify what routines you need to add to your day-to-day life. Identify what Recovery-based rituals that you need to practice on a daily basis. Eating three meals a day. Sleeping eight hours a day. Going to work every day. Going to school every day. Exercising every day. Attending the same Recovery-based support meetings. Contacting your sponsor as scheduled. Contacting your Recovery-based support system as scheduled. Maintaining the upkeep of your home. Paying bills. Receiving treatment for physical and emotional disorders. Being where you're supposed to be when you're supposed to be there. Showing up. Contributing. Participating. Being involved. Practicing rather than thinking about spirituality.

A Recovery-based environment, a Recovery-based support system, Recovery-based relationships, and a structured Recovery-based day are the four elements of the social building block of your Recovery-based lifestyle. You'll feel greatly challenged to integrate each of these four elements into your life. You'll resist mightily applying them with any amount of precision and discipline. Don't be alarmed about your reluctance to adopt the necessary elements. Do be alarmed about the potential con-

sequences to your Recovery if you don't.

Know that as you struggle with sanitizing your environment, becoming actively involved in a Recovery-based support system, transforming your relationships, and structuring your day, that you're struggling with what we all struggle with—change, growth, and loss of self. But also know that you have what it takes to stand up for what you deserve and the right to live your life in a way that enables you to remain abstinent from alcohol and other drugs.