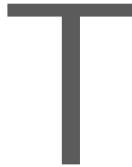


Chapter 9

Recovery-based Coping Mechanisms



*Take time to Think
It is a source of power.
Take time to Play
It is the secret to perpetual youth.
Take time to Read
It is the fountain of wisdom.
Take time to Pray
It is the greatest power on earth.
Take time to Love and be Loved
It is a God given privilege.
Take time to be Friendly
It is the road to happiness.
Take time to Laugh
It is music of the soul.
Take time to Give
It is too short a day to be selfish.
Take time to Work
It is the price of success.
Take time to Do Charity
It is the key to heaven.*

-Compliments of the Friends of the Poor

Stress is an inevitable part of living life, neither a good nor bad thing—it just is. Stress can be the residue of stretching your wings or the fallout from being in over your head in a situation in which you leapt before you looked. Stress occurs when the immovable objects of your life run up against your not to be denied force.

You're paralyzed with fear and so you feel the stress of your spirit shrinking and decaying. You challenge yourself to awaken parts of yourself that you've only read about but never dreamt you would experience for yourself and so you feel the stress of relying on never before used muscles of your soul.

You feel the joy of being loved and so you experience yet another experience of stress—the stress of feeling. Your heart feels crushed by the unmet expectations of yet another mere mortal who has let you down and you feel the stress that comes from being a part of life rather than apart from life. Whatever the experience, whatever the quality of the experience, whether at your own initiation or the initiation from the heavens above, stress is the friction that occurs when you bump up against life.

And just as in that old saying, *It's not the size of the dog but the size of the fight in the dog*, so it goes with coping with stress—it's not the stress in your life but how you cope with the stress in your life that matters. There are two ways to cope with the stress in your life. You can apply Recovery-based or self-sabotaging coping mechanisms. Recovery-based mechanisms are effective methods of coping with potential and activated stressors. Their sole purpose is to minimize the onset of a stressor or resolve the presence of and affect of stressors on your life. Self-sabotaging coping mechanisms, on the other hand,

are self-defeating, short-sighted coping mechanisms that tend to perpetuate rather than resolve the stress in your life.

Think of Recovery-based coping mechanisms as tools. These tools are what give birth to, nurture, repair, and maintain your Recovery-based lifestyle. They prevent the process of relapse from being activated by:

- 1) Preventing the onset of a personal stressor
- 2) Minimizing the onset of a personal stressor
- 3) Eliminating an already activated personal stressor
- 4) Alleviating the discomfort created by the presence of an activated personal stressor.

Pathfinder's Checklist

Recovery-based coping mechanisms

- 1) Action
- 2) Assertiveness
- 3) Choices
- 4) Conflict resolution
- 5) Deliberation
- 6) HOW-Honesty-Openness-Willingness
- 7) Listening
- 8) Mentoring
- 9) Patience
- 10) Self-Examination
- 11) Spiritual practice

The first Recovery-based coping mechanism is *action*. [Re]constructing and preserving a Recovery-based lifestyle is not a passive process. Wishing and hoping is not the way to manage your personal stressors. [Re]con-

structuring and preserving a Recovery-based lifestyle in order to stay clean and sober requires much from you. What's required most is taking action—knowing *what the next right thing to do* is and doing the next right thing. It all gets back to that simple question, *You may be able to talk the talk but can you walk the walk?* So always think action. Always think *right action*. Use the following questions as guidelines for determining what the next right thing for you to do is.

Pathfinder's Compass

Action

- 1) What action does this specific moment require of me in order to preserve my Recovery-based lifestyle?
- 2) What action does this specific moment require of me in order to preserve my abstinence from ALL alcohol and other drugs?
- 3) What action does this specific moment require of me in order to prevent the activation of a personal stressor?
- 4) What action does this specific moment require of me in order to alleviate the stress I experience?
- 5) What action does this specific moment require of me in order to return to Recovery-based thinking, believing, and acting?
- 6) What action does this specific moment require of me in order to apply my spiritual practice?

The next Recovery-based coping mechanism to discuss is *assertiveness*. For far too long you've either

renounced what is rightfully yours—happiness, love, self-respect, a loving relationship with your Higher Power. Or, you've aggressively and willfully laid claim not to what you deserve but what you believed yourself entitled to. Either path is a lose-lose proposition. To stay clean and sober you must know what you need in a specific moment, how to communicate to others what you need in that specific moment, and how to reconcile the differences that inevitably arise from acting assertively. You cannot achieve that end by abdication, entitlement, or willfulness. Use the following questions as a guide for how to act assertively in any give moment.

Pathfinder's Compass

Assertiveness

- 1) What do I need in this specific moment?
- 2) How can I express what I need in this specific moment in a way that will honor me and respect the dignity of the person that I am interacting with?
- 3) What differences may arise as a result of me articulating what I need?
- 4) How can I hear someone expressing no, disapproval, argumentativeness, or anger as something other than an attack on myself?
- 5) How can I hold on to the notion that I deserve even in the face of someone's rejection, disapproval, or hostility?
- 6) Who can I turn to for support when I begin to doubt myself?

The third Recovery-based coping mechanism is *choices*. Staying clean and sober hinges on the choices that you make. Do your choices come from your using-based or Recovery-based beliefs, behaviors, attitudes, and thoughts? That's what you must be mindful of at all times. You can *choose* what value to follow. You can *choose* what you *believe* about a person or a situation. You can *choose* which thoughts to honor and which to discard. You can *choose* where and where not to go. You can *choose* who and who not to go there with. That's what Recovery gives back to you—choice. That's what you give back to Recovery—Recovery-based choices.

Pathfinder's Compass

Choices

- 1) Choose abstinence rather than consuming alcohol and other drugs.
- 2) Choose fellowshiping rather than isolating.
- 3) Choose Recovery-based support group meetings rather than going it alone.
- 4) Choose rigorous honesty rather than deceit.
- 5) Choose self-disclosure rather than secrecy.
- 6) Choose surrender rather than willfulness.
- 7) Choose faith rather than control.
- 8) Choose humility rather than grandiosity.
- 9) Choose spirituality rather than faithlessness.
- 10) Choose asking for help rather than suffering in silence.
- 11) Choose a Recovery-based rather than a using based lifestyle.
- 12) Choose a Recovery-based rather than a using-

based belief.

- 13) Choose a Recovery-based rather than a using-based thought.
- 14) Choose a Recovery-based rather than a using-based action.
- 15) Choose a Recovery-based rather than a self-sabotaging coping mechanism.

The fourth Recovery-based coping mechanism that I want to discuss with you is *conflict resolution*. Conflict resolution—two of the scarier words in the English language. Working through rather than avoiding conflict—most people would rather go big-game hunting with a Swiss Army knife. Acknowledging to another person that they hurt you—most people would rather admit to having kidnapped the Lindbergh baby. Admitting to another person your part in harming them—most people would rather eat liver four times a week for the rest of their lives. Simply, conflict resolution is something that doesn't come easily to most of us.

Yet, your inability and/or unwillingness to confront and resolve the issues that exist between you and the people in your life will undermine your Recovery-based lifestyle. Unresolved conflict is a toxic corrosive that eats away at the heart and soul of any relationship. Unresolved conflict undermines the goodwill that two people feel towards each other. It stifles the level of openness and honesty that needs to flow between two people in order for both people to feel safe with one another.

This is problematic for staying clean and sober because your relationships are the heart and soul of a Recovery-based lifestyle. Inevitably, conflict will occur

between you and the people in your life. You simply can't afford to have those relationships stifled or shut-down altogether by an ever-increasing list of grievances that exist between you and another person. You must remain connected to and supported by the people in your life. You must have people in your life to be there *for* rather than *against* you. The best way to ensure that your relationships remain safe, supportive havens is to keep them free and clear of unresolved conflict—to keep them free and clear of issues that exist but don't get talked about between you and the person that you have the issue with. So how best to resolve conflict. Well, here's the *Reader's Digest* version.

Pathfinder's Compass

How to resolve conflict

- 1) Acknowledge that a problem exists between you and the person you're experiencing conflict with.
- 2) Encourage the person you're experiencing conflict with to talk about the conflict with you.
- 3) Talk about the disagreement only after the anger you and/or your friend may be feeling has diminished.
- 4) Stick to the spirit of the following saying—*Listen without offending, speak without defending.*
- 5) Stick to the spirit of the following saying—*Express your needs rather than defend your position.*
- 6) Stick to the spirit of the following saying—*Your partner is a person to be understood rather than a problem to be fixed.*
- 7) Stick to the facts of the dispute rather than your

interpretation of each other's motives and behaviors.

- 8) Express how you were affected by the other person's behavior rather than accuse and blame the other person.
- 9) Express what you need to express with *I* statements rather than *You* statements.
- 10) Take ownership of your behavior and the impact it has had on the other person.
- 11) Acknowledge how you could have done things differently.
- 12) Apologize for your part in the dispute.
- 13) Work at forgiving the other person.

The fifth Recovery-based coping mechanism that I want to discuss with you is *deliberation*. Deliberation is simply the act of thinking things through, looking before you leap, aiming before you fire, thinking before acting. In the Twelve-step community there's a saying, *Think the drink through*. What this means is to consider the consequences of what you're about to do or say before you do or say anything. Think about the impact of your actions before you act. Consider how what you're about to do will impact you, other people, and your Recovery-based lifestyle. In other words, *deliberate* about your actions before you act. You may have seen this list in the chapter on Recovery-based behavior but it bears repeating.

Pathfinder's Compass

How to use the tool of deliberation

- 1) What *impact* will the act that I'm considering have on my abstinence?

- 2) What *impact* will the act that I'm considering have on my Recovery-based lifestyle?
- 3) What *impact* will the act that I'm considering have on my ability to practice self-care?
- 4) What *impact* will the act that I'm considering have on my relationship with my Recovery-based support system?
- 5) What *impact* will the act that I'm considering have on my relationship with my sponsor?
- 6) What *impact* will the act that I'm considering have on my relationship with my friends and family?
- 7) What *impact* will the act that I'm considering have on my occupational well-being?
- 8) What *impact* will the act that I'm considering have on my legal and financial well-being?
- 9) What *impact* will the act that I'm considering have on my relationship with my Higher Power?
- 10) What *impact* will the act that I'm considering have on my spiritual practice?

The next Recovery-based coping mechanism we'll discuss is *HOW-Honesty-Openness-Willingness*. You need to tattoo HOW on your forehead. For every circumstance you encounter will require you to apply HOW—every circumstance, not some, not most, not when you feel like it, not when it suits your agenda, not when it causes you the least amount of inconvenience or discomfort. Every single solitary circumstance you encounter will require you to apply HOW.

Here's a rule of thumb when it comes to *honesty*. Honesty is much like an onion—there's layer beneath layer of honesty that you need to peel away in order to get

to the core of the Truth. So I promise you—no matter how honest you believe you're being about something, anything for that matter, there's more Truth for you to uncover, there's more Truth for you to cop to, there's more Truth for you to come to understand about yourself and your role in any given circumstance. If you don't believe me, if you don't accept what I've just said as the truth, then you're setting yourself up to deceive yourself about the day-to-day circumstances that you'll encounter—often times for the first time without being under the influence of alcohol and other drugs.

Openness is the oxygen of your Recovery-based lifestyle. Openness gives birth to what can be new about your life. Openness is the catalyst for change and growth. If you don't open yourself to receiving the wisdom and love of your Higher Power, if you don't open yourself to embracing the alterations that you must make in your life, if you don't open yourself up to the possibilities of what your life can be without alcohol and other drugs, you'll condemn yourself to, at best, a very *dry* abstinence.

Equally important is the necessity for opening yourself to the people in your life. Revealing who you are to yourself and the people in your Recovery-based support system is critical to your long-term health and well-being. Stepping out of the shadows and ending your life-long game of hide-and-seek with the human race will enable you to connect with yourself and the people in your life. The benefit to you of showing up in your life is that you'll be able to receive the love and support that is so vital to preserving your Recovery-based lifestyle.

Willingness and Recovery go together like love and marriage or like a horse and a carriage. No willingness, no

Recovery-based lifestyle—maybe abstinence, but no Recovery-based lifestyle. No way. No how. There’s so much about a Recovery-based lifestyle that you’ve spent a lifetime closing yourself off to—rigorous honesty, accountability, structure, involvement with other people, taking a fearless moral inventory, making amends, turning it over to a Power greater than your self. Much, if not all of that, is antagonistic to how you’ve lived your life. Without the willingness to step out of your old way of life, and to participate in your life in new and different ways, without the willingness to live your life by the laws of the Universe rather than the laws of your self-will, you may be able to remain abstinent, but you’ll cripple your efforts to experience connection, serenity, joy, and love.

Pathfinder’s Compass

Ways to practice HOW

- 1) Attend Recovery-based support group meetings.
- 2) Develop a relationship with a Recovery-based mentor known as a sponsor.
- 3) Become an active participant within the Twelve-step Fellowship that you become a part of.
- 4) Work the steps of a Twelve-step Program.

Listening is the next Recovery-based coping mechanism to be discussed. Now I can hear you already. I know what you’re thinking. I hear the clicking of your tongue against the roof of your mouth. I can see the look in your eyes as you dismiss me and my simplistic ideas as you utter, “Duh!” But never has such a simple idea been dismissed and ignored as often as the idea of simply listening

to what is being said to you. There’s a saying in the Twelve-step community, *Take the cotton out of your ears and put it in your mouth.*

That’s what listening means in this context. Stop *yea butting* all over what is being said to you. Stop protesting how you’re unique and different. Stop going on and on about what you go on and on about. Staying clean and sober is hard, hard work—hard work that you’ll at times willingly embrace and at other times fight tooth and nail. Just remember this simple truism, *It is when you’re fighting the hardest that you need to listen the most!*

Pathfinder’s Compass

Listening

- 1) Identify people at your Recovery-based support group meetings who impress you as being both informed and reliable.
- 2) Ask those people who you identify as being both informed and reliable to be a part of your Recovery-based support system.
- 3) Use those people who you identify as being both informed and reliable about Recovery as mentors and sounding boards as you struggle with the process of [re]constructing and preserving your Recovery-based lifestyle.
- 4) Commit to apply to your day-to-day life those lessons that members of your Recovery-based support system teach you—without exception.

The next Recovery-based coping mechanism is *mentoring*. Mentoring is the lifeblood of a Recovery program.

Allowing yourself to be successfully mentored requires of you the willingness to take action, apply HOW, actively listen, fellowship, and letting go of your program and start working THE PROGRAM.

I don't care how able you are to keep your head above water in any other area of your life. What has enabled you to survive in other areas of your life will work against you in Recovery. The more you struggle with Recovery, the more you'll want to rely on the tools that have kept your head above water—willfulness, pride, control, manipulation, deception, rationalization, denial, and blame.

So, the sooner you accept what I'm about to say next, the sooner Recovery will become exponentially easier for you. *You do not possess the mindset nor the know-how for how to [re]construct, protect, and preserve your Recovery-based lifestyle.* You can learn, but you must be willing and able to be mentored as to the why's and wherefore's of how to [re]construct and preserve a Recovery-based lifestyle. Mentoring is the main reason Twelve-step programs are effective. One's unwillingness to be mentored is a fundamental reason why so many people struggle with mastering the lessons of Recovery.

Pathfinder's Compass

How to be successfully mentored

- 1) Attend Recovery-based support group meetings on a regular basis.
- 2) Develop a Recovery-based support system from people you meet at your Recovery-based support group meetings.
- 3) Develop a list of people that you're willing to com-

mit to maintain daily contact with.

- 4) Ask someone to be your Recovery-based mentor known as a sponsor.
- 5) Work on a regular and consistent basis with your Recovery-based mentor known as a sponsor.
- 6) Read materials about Recovery.
- 7) Actively seek the feedback of people who are experts at how to preserve and protect your Recovery-based lifestyle.

The ninth Recovery-based coping mechanism is *patience*. I discussed patience with you in chapter 6: *Emotional Well-being: Making Peace With Yourself and The People in Your Life*. So you know how important I believe patience is. You don't have to be chemically dependent to have heard the phrase, *One day at a time*. But it's a phrase that's most applicable to the process of [re]constructing and preserving your Recovery-based lifestyle. Rome wasn't built in a day and neither will your Recovery-based lifestyle. You can't rush this process. You can't make it go any quicker than it goes. You can't impose your will on what your Higher Power's plan is. You can only go along for the ride! So lower your expectations. Narrow your focus to this moment. Don't lose yourself in the fears of all of your tomorrows. Let tomorrow take care of tomorrow—because it's going to anyway—whether or not you allow it to.

Pathfinder's Compass

Patience

- 1) This is not a race—focus only on the next right action.

- 2) Don't impose your expectations on the outcome of any action that you take.
- 3) Remind yourself that Recovery is about spiritual progression rather than perfection.
- 4) Don't catastrophize about tomorrow.
- 5) Stay focused on this specific moment.

That brings us to the tenth Recovery-based coping mechanism list—*self-examination*. There's so much for you to learn about you—feelings to [re]connect with, behaviors to take responsibility for, parts of yourself to [re]claim. To successfully accomplish all of that and more, you must begin to look at rather than continue to escape from yourself.

Until you better understand yourself—what you think and believe, what you feel and don't feel, why you do what you do, you'll remain a prisoner to your old patterns of thinking and behaving. If you're not able to disentangle from your old patterns of thinking and behaving, you'll likely continue to act-out old, familiar self-defeating behaviors that may eventually endanger the well-being of your Recovery-based lifestyle. So, get to know yourself. Better understand the choices that you make by better understanding the person who you are!

Pathfinder's Compass

Self-examination

- 1) Actively listen and comment during your Recovery-based support group meetings.
- 2) Talk to people before and after Recovery-based support group meetings.
- 3) Develop a close relationship with your Recovery-

- based mentor known as a sponsor.
- 4) Actively work the Twelve-steps.
- 5) Read books that facilitate a deeper understanding of who you are.
- 6) Attend seminars and workshops that facilitate a deeper understanding of who you are.
- 7) Hire a psychotherapist to facilitate a deeper understanding of who you are.
- 8) Join an experiential psychotherapy group to facilitate a deeper understanding of who you are.

The eleventh Recovery-based coping mechanism is a *spiritual practice*. To discuss the idea of a spiritual practice could take a lifetime. So let me limit our discussion about spiritual practice to this one point. When trying to figure out what spiritual practice means to you, focus more on the word *practice* and less on the word *spiritual*. Practicing spirituality is not a mind game but an active way of living your life. It's an active way of living in your life from a place within yourself that's most fully connected to your Higher Power.

Now, I won't get any more metaphysical than that. Let's just say that you need to [re]connect with your Higher Power, [re]discover the Divine parts within you, and aspire to live more and more from the Divine parts of who you are and less and less from the Ego-based parts of who you are.

So how do you *practice* rather than *think* about spirituality? Follow the steps in the following list.

Pathfinder's Compass

Spiritual practice

- 1) All spiritual practice is built on love.
- 2) Communicate with your Higher Power (some call such a form of communication, *prayer*).
- 3) Actively fellowship with members of your Recovery-based support system.
- 4) Take repeated fearless moral inventories of yourself.
- 5) Apologize to those people that you harm.
- 6) Participate in service work.
- 7) Commit small anonymous acts of kindness on a daily basis.
- 8) Express gratitude for the life that you've been given.
- 9) Practice tolerance for others.
- 10) Practice rigorous honesty in all of your affairs.
- 11) Practice surrender in all of your affairs.
- 12) Practice humility in all of your affairs.
- 13) Remain connected to the people that you care about.
- 14) [Re]connect with the people who you have not allowed to care about you.
- 15) Look after the well-being of your mind, body, and soul.
- 16) Take full responsibility for your actions.

These are some of the most significant Recovery-based coping mechanisms that you'll need to master. Don't allow how overwhelmed you must be feeling to discourage you from making the effort to learn these skills. Give yourself time. Offer yourself patience.

Comfort yourself with the belief that the effort you put into mastering these skills will enrich your life and help you stay clean and sober.

Let's end this chapter on a high note. Below is an exercise for you to complete. This exercise is designed for you to practice identifying day-to-day stressors, identifying what tools you can apply to the management of those stressors, making a plan as to how to best apply those tools, and asking for feedback about your plan from members of your Recovery-based support system.

Pathfinder's Exercise

For this exercise, please refer to the Recovery-based and the self-sabotaging coping mechanisms listed below in the two Pathfinder's Checklist as well as any other tools that you read about in this chapter.

- 1) Identify three day-to-day stressors.
- 2) From the Recovery-based coping mechanisms listed below, identify at least one Recovery-based coping mechanism that you could apply to each of the three day-to-day stressors that you identified in step #1 of this exercise.
- 3) From the self-sabotaging coping mechanisms listed below, identify at least one self-sabotaging coping mechanism that you could apply to each of the three day-to-day stressors that you identified in step #1 of this exercise.
- 4) For each Recovery-based coping mechanism chosen in step #2 of this exercise discuss how you might benefit from the application of that Recovery-based coping mechanism to the identi-

fied stressor in step #1 of this exercise.

- 5) For each self-sabotaging coping mechanism chosen in step #3 of this exercise discuss how you might sabotage yourself by applying that self-sabotaging coping mechanism to the identified stressor in step #1 of this exercise.
- 6) Write a plan for each identified stressor in step #1 about how you can apply the identified Recovery-based coping mechanism(s) in step #2 of this exercise.
- 7) Discuss with a member of your Recovery-based support system your answers in steps #1 through #6 of this exercise. Ask them for feedback as to what they like about your plan as identified in step #6 of this exercise, what you could improve about your plan as identified in step #6 of this exercise, and how to best implement your plan as identified in step #6 of this exercise.

Pathfinder's Checklist

Recovery-based coping mechanisms

- 1) Living life one day at a time
- 2) Structuring your day-to-day life
- 3) Asking for help
- 4) Talking about your feelings with others
- 5) Conflict resolution
- 6) Self-Care—proper nutrition, rest, exercise, and involvement with others
- 7) Balance in everything that you do
- 8) Work your Twelve-step program
- 9) Let Go and Let God

- 10) Pray
- 11) Choices
- 12) Think the drink through
- 13) Practicing the art of Trace it—Face it—Erase it—Replace it

Pathfinder's Checklist

Self-sabotaging coping mechanisms

- 1) Living in the past and the future
- 2) Live without consistency, predictability, and orderliness
- 3) Relying too much on your self and rejecting the help of others
- 4) Emotionally shut down and/or numb out
- 5) Avoiding interpersonal conflict by not talking about your problems with the people in your life
- 6) Lack of self-care of mind, body, and soul
- 7) Overinvolvement in activities, relationships, and substances
- 8) Focusing on the problem rather than living the solution to the problem
- 9) Overreliance on your willfulness
- 10) Complain, blame, and feel sorry for yourself
- 11) Doing the same thing twice expecting a different outcome the second time around
- 12) Ignore the consequences of your actions
- 13) Deny. Blame. Don't take responsibility. Do the same thing twice