

Chapter 4

**The Blueprint to an Alcohol and
Other Drugs Free Life**

T

*We are enrolled in a full time, informal school
called, "Life." Each day of this school, we have
the opportunity to learn lessons. We may
like the lessons or hate them,
but they are part of the curriculum.*

*The greatest lessons we learn are about love
and fear; that every action is either an expression
of love, or a call for love.*

*And the great blessing is that every lesson
repeats itself until we learn it.*

-Mary Manin Morrissey

Neither knowledge about chemical dependency nor fear of the consequences of drinking and drugging will in and of themselves empower you to overcome your struggle with chemical dependency. Abstinence without a program of personal growth to both heal and transform your mind and spirit will most likely be short-lived. So, what necessary element must be added to the equation of knowledge and fear? Recovery. Recovery is a program of personal growth that will enable you to not only achieve and maintain abstinence, but transform your mind and spirit as well.

Recovery is a developmental process that will enable you to transform your life by letting go of your old ways of thinking and behaving by surrendering to a power greater than yourself. This process will unfold in stages. You'll find some stages more difficult than others, but each stage is equally necessary. There are no shortcuts to Recovery, though you may endlessly seek them out. Recovery holds only two promises—hard work and a return to serenity from insanity.

As I've mentioned before, Recovery begins with your decision to stop taking all mood-altering substances. But Recovery is a style of life that goes beyond abstinence. To succeed in Recovery, you need to develop a new mindset for how you'll live your life.

This mindset is captured in the acronym—HOW. HOW stands for *Honesty, Openness, and Willingness*. Rigorous honesty is the oxygen of Recovery. Chemical dependency is a disease of secrecy, denial, and deceit. Recovery requires you to be honest with yourself and the people in your life. There can be no half-truths in Recovery. The path to relapse and further self-destruction

is paved with half-truths. Recovery is predicated on your ability to be honest about the following.

Pathfinder's Checklist



Matters one needs to acknowledge to begin Recovery.

- 1) Your alcohol and other drug use.
- 2) Your inability to control your use of alcohol and other drugs.
- 3) The impact that your alcohol and other drug use has had on your life.
- 4) The kind of person you were when using drugs and alcohol.
- 5) The kind of person you are today.
- 6) The impact your alcohol and other drug use had on the people in your life.

Openness is another important element of a Recovery mindset. You have been shut down and cut-off from the world around you for as long as you've been using alcohol and other drugs. Ashamed of what your life has deteriorated into, afraid of letting others see who you have become, unwilling to admit to yourself and others who you were when you were actively using, you have entombed yourself in a life of secrecy, isolation, and control. Recovery is predicated on being open by:

- 1) Letting people in support groups know your story about alcohol and other drugs.
- 2) Letting people know your thoughts and feelings.

- 3) Letting people know when you need help.
- 4) Letting people know when you're feeling overwhelmed and tempted to use.

Abstinence and Recovery will be short-lived without a profound commitment. Commitment manifests itself as willingness. Recovery is predicated on your willingness to:

- 1) Abstain from all mood-altering substances.
- 2) Confront your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.
- 3) Follow the wisdom of others.
- 4) Let go of your willfulness.
- 5) [Re]connect with your Higher Power.
- 6) Persist even in the face of fear and adversity.

One last element of this new mindset that you must develop is acceptance. There is much that you need to accept about your disease and the methods you'll use to manage your disease. Recovery is predicated on your acceptance that:

- 1) This disease is forever and as a result you need to abstain from all mood-altering substances.
- 2) You have done much damage to your emotional and spiritual well-being and as a result you need to develop new skills to repair that damage.
- 3) Recovery unfolds at its own pace and as a result you need to be invested in the process more than the outcome.

Recovery starts with the adoption of a mindset that includes honesty, openness, willingness, *and* acceptance. As you begin to practice the elements of your Recovery mindset you'll discover that there are concrete steps to the Recovery process.

First, you must bring order to your way of life. Your lifestyle has deteriorated into chaos, unmanageability, and

loss of control. In Recovery, you must bring order and stability to your life. How best to do so? Build a stable foundation that enables you to develop the essential experience, knowledge, and skillset to sustain your Recovery. To build such a foundation you must:

- 1) Stabilize the environments where you live, work and play.
- 2) Build a program of Recovery that involves participation in support groups.
- 3) Stabilize your relationships.

In Chapter 5, *Stability: The Foundation to A Sober Life*, we'll examine issues relevant to stabilizing your living situation, workplace, relationships, and involvement in recovery support groups.

Along with stabilizing your life, you must identify those situations that endanger your long-term sobriety. In the early days of abstinence, your sobriety is vulnerable to many circumstances.

- 1) Newly emerging emotions can easily overwhelm you.
- 2) Old thinking may lead you back to using behaviors despite your best intentions.
- 3) The initial innocence of early sobriety can leave you off guard and vulnerable to the cunning way that your disease can insinuate its way back into your life.
- 4) Old places, friends, and circumstances can trigger cravings and desires that you do not yet know how to handle.

I'll discuss more about identifying high-risk situations in Chapter 6, *Identifying the People, Places and Situations That Are A Danger to Your Recovery*.

Knowledge that you are powerless over alcohol and other drugs will not protect you from the inevitable cravings and urges to consume alcohol and other drugs you'll experience. You'll need to learn specific skills to cope with your cravings and create specific plans to protect you when cravings begin to overwhelm you. I'll discuss more about how to cope with cravings in Chapter 7, *Fighting The Compulsion to Use: How to Live to Fight Another Day*.

Stability, awareness of high-risk situations and skills to cope with cravings are critical aspects of Recovery. Equally important is learning how to deal with your feelings without alcohol and other drugs to medicate them. In early Recovery you'll discover emotions awakening within you—such as anger, fear, resentment, shame, and grief—that you've never experienced before. Because of your alcohol and other drug use you never had to learn how to work through these emotions sober. Insulated from previous experiences of your emotions, you'll initially find yourself overwhelmed by emotions stimulated by the business of living your life. You'll need to develop skills to examine your feelings, discover what is stimulating your feelings, and how best to cope with your feelings when they overwhelm you. Together we'll examine how to do so in Chapter 8, *Feelings and Sobriety: How to Identify Your Feelings* and Chapter 9, *Feelings and Sobriety: How to Safely [Re]claim Your Feelings*.

Recovery is about getting to the heart of the matter. Compulsive activities, obsessive thinking, drinking, and drugging have prevented you from focusing on you. By focusing on external circumstances and activities, you have avoided dealing with yourself—your emotions, personal obstacles, and unfulfilled potential.

Isolation is another way to avoid dealing with yourself. Cutting yourself off from your internal world, losing yourself in fantasy, and withdrawing from others has enabled you to pretend to yourself and the world that everything is just fine. By isolating—disconnecting from reality—you remain oblivious to the impact your consumption of alcohol and other drugs has had on you and others. Recovery is a process of coming out of hiding and making yourself known to others. In Chapter 10, *Sabotaging Your Recovery: Behaviors to Avoid*, we'll focus on the danger of avoiding the issues of your life.

Recovery is not only admitting to powerlessness, but also admitting that you're not in control of your universe. Recovery is about [re]connecting with the divine being that is in control of the universe—your Higher Power. [Re]connecting with your Higher Power is the work that will restore your spiritual well-being, which has been damaged by your consumption of alcohol and drugs. We'll explore the spiritual concepts of Recovery in Chapter 11, *Spirituality: The Path From Insanity to Serenity*.

My goal is to empower you to learn, master, and integrate the principles of Recovery into your daily life. In so doing you'll discover how to assume responsibility for your emotional and spiritual well-being. The more responsibility you assume for your emotional and spiritual well-being the less vulnerable you'll be to relapse and going *back out there*.