

Chapter 5

**Stability: The Foundation to
A Sober Life**

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We must be the change we wish to see in the world.

-Mahatma Gandhi

Recovery starts but doesn't stop with abstaining from all mood-altering substances. It will be necessary for you to critically evaluate every aspect of your lifestyle and determine which aspects of your lifestyle further Recovery and which aspects endanger Recovery.

Why is a rigorous examination of your lifestyle necessary? Your current lifestyle was developed with one aim in mind—enabling your continued consumption of alcohol and other drugs. Habits have developed and choices have been made without regard to the consequences of those choices. Where you live, with whom you live, how you live, are all constructions of your need to be able to drink and drug with as little opposition as possible.

Consumption of alcohol and other drugs is cultivated in an environment of chaos and instability. Recovery, on the other hand, thrives in an environment of the three *S's*—Stability, Support, and Simplicity. No matter how self-destructive your lifestyle may be, it is your lifestyle. It's what you do. It's what you know. It's what is most familiar. You'll give up very little of it willingly. Change for the best is still change, and change evokes fear. When fear dominates your desire to change, you'll likely resist and/or sabotage the changes you wish to make.

How do you avoid sabotaging Recovery just as you get started? Let's use the tool introduced in Chapter 4, *The Blueprint to an Alcohol and Other Drugs Free Life*, HOW—Honesty, Openness, Willingness, and apply it to a critical examination of your lifestyle.

Let's start by examining your living situation. It's critical that you carefully consider what aspects of your living situation might be dangerous to your continued abstinence. Again, remember the three *S's*—Stability,

Support, and Simplicity as you evaluate your current living situation and determine what would be an optimal living situation for Recovery.

Pathfinder's Checklist



Important questions for evaluating your living situation.

- 1) What about your current living situation is dangerous to your long-term abstinence?
- 2) Do you live with anyone else who consumes alcohol and other drugs?
- 3) Do you keep alcohol and other drugs in your home?
- 4) How much of your using took place at home?
- 5) If you live alone, what danger does living alone pose to your abstinence?
- 6) What threat does your neighborhood or community pose to your abstinence?
- 7) What about your current living situation is supportive of your long-term abstinence?
- 8) Who do you live with that you find helpful to remaining abstinent?
- 9) Who supports your need for an alcohol and drug free environment?

You will find time and time again in Recovery that knowing something is necessary but not sufficient for change. You must be able to *Honestly* and *Openly* answer the above questions and be *Willing* to do something

about circumstances that endanger your long-term abstinence.

When you uncover a situation that begs your Willingness to rectify, you must create, then execute, a plan of action. A plan of action can be constructed from the following information:

Pathfinder's Checklist



Steps to creating a plan of action.

- 1) Identify a circumstance of your life that you need to change to protect your abstinence.
- 2) Identify what circumstance you need to create to replace the circumstance that is dangerous to you.
- 3) Identify the steps you need to take to change the circumstance.
- 4) Identify areas you will need help with.
- 5) Identify people who can help you.
- 6) Create a timetable in which you will execute the change.
- 7) Tell a friend or mentor of your plan and be accountable for executing that plan.

For example: You live alone and you identify that living alone is dangerous for your abstinence. What circumstance do you need to create to change that situation? *Get a roommate.* How long will it take to select a roommate? *Three weeks.* How are you going to get a roommate? *Make a list of the qualities that your roommate should possess.*

Write an ad for a potential roommate. Place it in the local newspaper or at the local grocery store. Interview potential roommates. Seek feedback from friends and mentors. Select a roommate.

Now take a look at your answers to the list of questions I posed above about your living situation. What do you need to do to improve your living situation? What action(s) do you need to take? Create an action plan for each circumstance you've identified as needing to improve.

Let's next examine your Recovery support system. What I often tell people is that there are some of you who will be able to achieve abstinence from all mood-altering substances by yourself. My question to you is, "Why would you want to?"

Getting and remaining abstinent is difficult under any circumstance. It's exponentially more difficult to accomplish by yourself. For those of you who can appreciate the truth of what I've just said, it will be necessary for you to develop a support system.

How can you build a support system for Recovery? Have you ever heard the joke about Willie Sutton? When asked why he robbed banks, his response was, "Because that's where the money is." The same idea applies to Recovery and your support system. Go to the places where people practice Recovery. The most obvious places are support groups for people who have stopped consuming alcohol and other drugs. Two such support groups are Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous.

When you attend these support groups, you'll meet people like you who are struggling with the same problems. In these meetings you'll meet people who can offer

you the necessary guidance and advice you'll need to stay on the straight and narrow. These people will teach you the skills necessary to remain abstinent. You'll learn about the Twelve Steps—the blueprint group members follow to remain abstinent and experience a spiritual awakening.

When I tell people about the importance of involvement in the Twelve Step community, many are unwilling to attend meetings. Excuses may vary, but the reasons are always the same—fear of the unknown, fear of changing their attitudes about other people who are alcoholics and drug addicts, fear of letting other people know them.

Initially, people are often resistant to doing anything different to stop drinking. I ask them how many hours per week they spent preoccupied with drinking and drugging, actually drinking and drugging, and sobering up from drinking and drugging. Then I ask how many hours per week are they willing to spend on Recovery. The disparity between the two numbers is often quite revealing.

But Recovery doesn't happen by wishing and hoping. It happens by learning and doing. You can best learn what to do from others who have already walked the walk you're about to walk yourself.

Pathfinder's Checklist



*Important questions for evaluating your
Recovery support system.*

1) How effective a Recovery support system do you

have today?

- 2) What are the strengths of your Recovery support system?
- 3) What are the weaknesses of your Recovery support system?
- 4) What is missing from your Recovery support system?
- 5) How many people can you talk to about what you're going through in trying to remain abstinent?
- 6) How many people can you rely on when you're experiencing a crisis and are about to relapse?
- 7) How many people can you talk to openly about the choices you made when you were drinking and drugging?
- 8) How many people are willing to be available to you on an as needed basis to provide support and comfort?
- 9) What obstacles must you overcome to build a strong Recovery support system?
- 10) What personal characteristics prevent you from asking for help from others?

Having evaluated your Recovery support system, what have you discovered? What are its strengths? Its deficits? What action(s) do you need to take to strengthen your Recovery support system? *Write an action plan for strengthening your support system based on the outline provided for you on page 48 of this chapter.*

Another area of your life that you need to evaluate is your relationships. Chemical dependency is as toxic to the people in your life as it has been to you. It is likely that much damage has been done to the people in your life. In

Twelve Steps programs a strong emphasis is placed on acknowledging the harm you have done to others and to making amends to those people.

At the same time, other relationships have actually survived as a result of your consumption of alcohol and other drugs. Although these relationships may be horribly painful, chaotic, and even destructive, stopping your consumption of alcohol and other drugs may threaten the viability of the relationship as long as you remain abstinent. It would not be unusual if some people in your life feel threatened by your desire to abstain and as a result, do things to sabotage your attempts to remain abstinent.

Whether you've pushed people away as a result of your alcohol and other drugs consumption, or people are feeling pushed away by your desire to stop consuming alcohol and other drugs, relationships hold the potential for either healing or destruction. Your desire to be forgiven will initially exceed people's desire to forgive you. Your desire not to be held accountable for your actions when you were drinking and drugging will exceed people's resentment towards you for what you've done to them. Your desire to be welcomed back in the community of mankind will exceed people's desire to remain skeptical of your intentions and trustworthiness and to keep you at arm's length.

There are many decisions that you will need to make about the people in your life over the course of your Recovery. Sadly, many people who fit into your life when you were consuming alcohol and other drugs may not fit into your life as you remain abstinent. Other relationships may require patience and understanding as you undergo the arduous work of repairing the damage you've inflicted

ed on others. But that's all for another time and another day. For right now, you need only concern yourself with being involved with people who can support your efforts to remain sober.

Pathfinder's Checklist



Important questions for evaluating your relationships.

- 1) Which of your relationships are based on drinking and drugging?
- 2) Which of your relationships are threatened by your decision to be abstinent from alcohol and other drugs?
- 3) Which of your relationships are triggers for you to return to drinking and drugging?
- 4) Which of your relationships will destabilize Recovery?
- 5) What are the destabilizing dynamics of your relationships?
- 6) Which of your relationships are supportive of you remaining abstinent?
- 7) Which of your relationships enhance your Recovery?
- 8) What dynamics of any relationship are necessary for protecting and enriching Recovery?

Examine the answers to your questions. Consider which people may jeopardize and which people may enrich Recovery. What actions do you need to take to

lessen the threat that some people may pose to Recovery? What actions do you need to take to include those people who are willing, ready, and able to support your Recovery? In evaluating what actions you need to take, what will be most difficult for you to do? What will be difficult about the action(s) you need to take? How can you get help for what you struggle with? Finally, based on the outline I provided on page 48, make a plan of action for creating stability with the people in your life.

It's not important what state your lifestyle is in today. It's only important that you examine your lifestyle, identify the dangerous aspects, then formulate and execute a plan of action. Whether the changes you identify are small or large, change can oftentimes be slow and difficult. Be patient but persistent. Ask for help whenever and wherever you can get it. The goal is to enrich Recovery, and the first place to start is to stabilize your life.