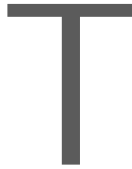


Chapter 7

*F*ighting the Compulsion to Use:
How to Live to Fight Another Day



Courage, it would seem, is nothing less than the power to overcome danger, misfortune, fear, injustice, while continuing to affirm inwardly that life with all its sorrows is good; that everything is meaningful even if in a sense beyond our understanding; and that there is always tomorrow.

-Dorothy Thompson

When you stop using alcohol and other drugs, you may continue to experience an intense desire to use. Craving alcohol and other drugs is a normal emotional and physical reaction to abstinence. Just because you've decided with your head that you no longer want to consume alcohol and other drugs, it doesn't mean that your body shares that sentiment.

Cravings will manifest symptoms such as a fast heart beat, feeling flushed, or increased salivation. The good news is, as you follow the suggestions outlined in this book, you will begin to notice a lessening of cravings and the accompanying desire to use.

For now, it's helpful to know that most urges are short-lived, lasting only minutes. At the same time, be mindful that in the beginning it's dangerous for you to have easy access to alcohol and other drugs. In the blink of an eye you can walk to the fridge, get a can of beer, and start drinking. It takes only one impulsive move to activate old habits. So it's best not to put yourself at risk. Rid your environment of all mood-altering substances.

Not only must you be on guard for an impulsive return to consuming alcohol and other drugs, you need to be careful not to be seduced by two other dynamics: 1) euphoric recall and 2) magical thinking. Euphoric recall is the process of romanticizing your past alcohol and other drug using experiences. When you are active in euphoric recall, you will notice that your memory becomes very selective in what it chooses and how it chooses to remember your past alcohol and other drug consumption. This enables you to minimize or forget altogether the consequences of your consumption.

Magical thinking occurs when you believe that con-

trolled or social consumption of alcohol and other drugs is still a choice for you. Magical thinking enables you to believe that you can use one more time and then stop without suffering any consequences.

Often times people will make a situation worse when attempting to cope with alcohol and other drug urges. There are times when a person will actually do something mistakenly to cope with an urge and wind-up prolonging it. It's helpful to know how to challenge euphoric recall and magical thinking.

Pathfinder's Checklist



How to challenge euphoric recall and magical thinking.

- 1) Short-circuit the thinking by challenging the thoughts you are having about using. You can do this by thinking through what would happen if you were to consume any alcohol or other drugs. Rehearse in your mind prior to having any using thoughts the feelings that you associate with using. Recall how using affected you physically. Make a mental list of the consequences that occur as a result of you using.
- 2) When you have using thoughts, remove yourself from any people, places, or circumstances that may be triggering those thoughts. Remember, abstinence comes first! Don't be afraid of what others might think.

- 3) Contact a supportive person you can talk with about what happened to you and the feelings the situation provoked in you. Get feedback on how to handle the situation.

Pathfinder's Exercise



- 1) Challenge euphoric recall or romanticized memories from the past by writing down a specific thought sequence about past using experiences. List the consequences of these past experiences. Include in your descriptions: a) feelings, b) people you harmed, c) business or legal issues, d) interpersonal relationships.
- 2) Magical thinking convinces you that you can go back out there and use one more time. When you notice that magical thinking is clouding your judgment, you need to create a reality check. Write a complete sequence from start to finish on what it was like when you decided to consume alcohol and other drugs, when you would consume alcohol and other drugs, what would happen to you emotionally, behaviorally, interpersonally, and spiritually as you used, and what would happen as a result of your using alcohol and other drugs.

Doing these exercises is critical. You need an anchor to return to when your mind starts playing tricks with your memory. Only by living in the honest reality of what your life has been can you remain free from returning to

that life. Be mindful of the following:

- 1) Craving and dreaming about using alcohol and other drugs are normal.
- 2) It's not wrong to crave or to dream about using alcohol and other drugs.
- 3) Cravings to use will be brief if you reach out to others for support and/or challenge your thinking.