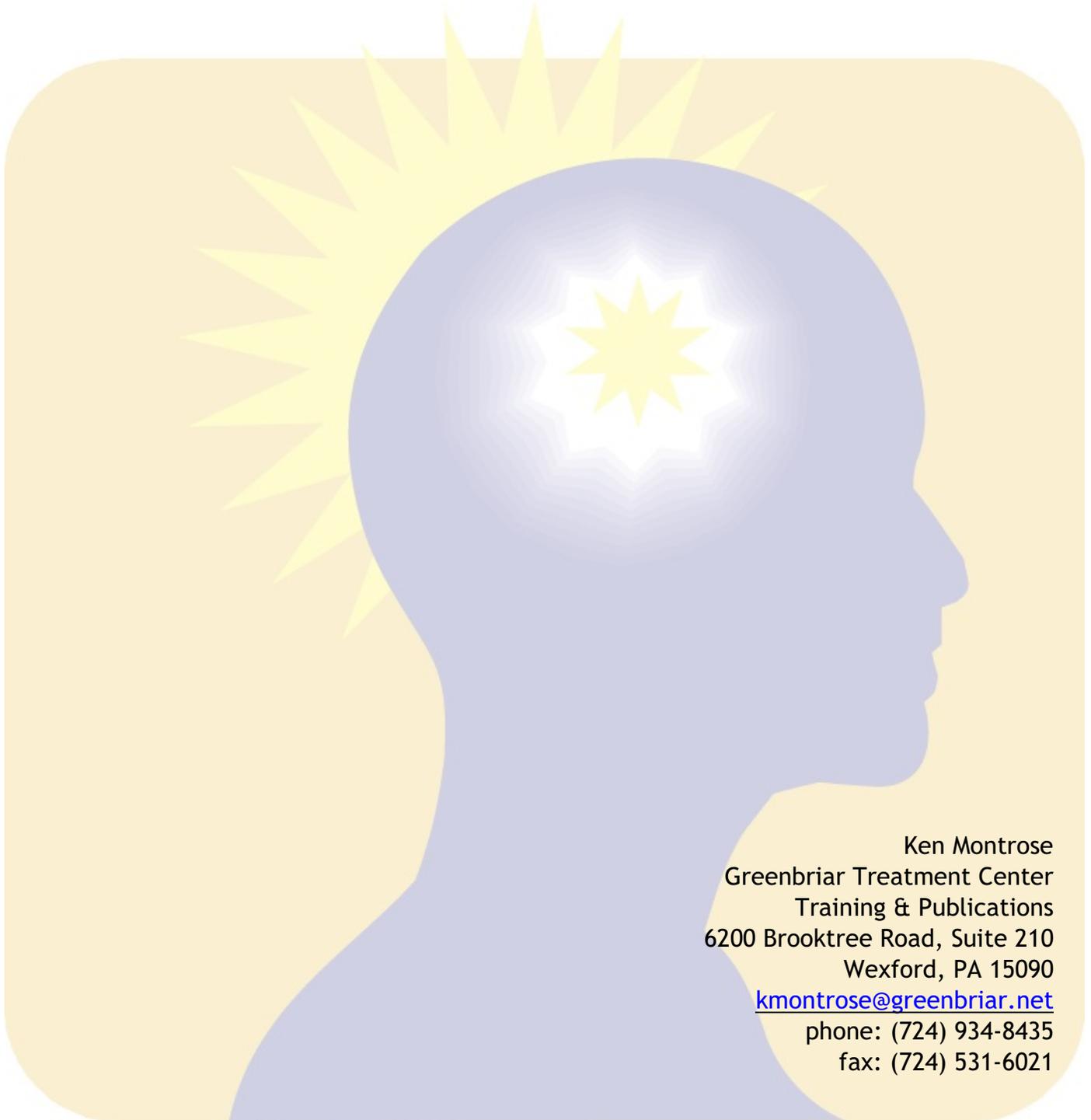


Changing Addictive Thinking: Slogans, analogies, and parables



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About Greenbriar

Greenbriar Treatment Center provides comprehensive inpatient and outpatient treatment for chemically dependent adults. Greenbriar offers dual diagnosis treatment, detoxification, inpatient rehabilitation, a halfway house for women, day and evening outpatient programs, and individual counseling. Outpatient sites are located throughout western Pennsylvania. For information please call 1-800-637-HOPE (4673).

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Introduction

This introductory course skims the surface of how popular AA/NA slogans can be helpful in changing people's automatic negative thinking. The slogans discussed here are the ones most popular in this neck of the woods. The local recovering community can help professionals gauge which slogans their clientele are most likely to hear. Clinicians may also want to visit the various recovery web sites, which list thousands of slogans.

Many people new to recovery dismiss the slogans. We will start with why people resist applying the slogans to their everyday lives.

What's Wrong With Slogans?

People resist the slogans for many reasons. Slogans tend to be simplistic. Someone facing ten years in federal prison may have difficulty focusing on the present moment. Being told that *the present is a gift* isn't likely to stop him from worrying about his future.

Many people find the slogans cliché and lacking insight. For example, the slogan *if you do what you always did, you will get what you always got* rings true, but doesn't address why someone does the same thing over and over. The adult child of an abusive alcoholic may have little idea why she hooks up with men similar to her abuser. (She may not be aware she is doing so.) This slogan doesn't provide much insight to help her change her destructive behavior.

The slogans are often misused. My favorite example is *keep coming back*. In another publication I describe two different uses of this popular slogan:

Troy's favorite slogan is *keep coming back*. He uses it to say "I enjoyed your company," or "I learned something from you." Sometimes he means "we don't agree, but let's still spend time together," or "I disagree, but you've made me think." Troy tells newcomers to *keep coming back*. If they listen carefully, they hear him say "you'll make it" or "there's always hope." His sincerity helps newcomers feel there really may be hope for them, if *they keep coming back*.

Rebecca is almost always angry when she says "well, you just *keep coming back*." Usually she means "you're an idiot," or "if you go to enough meetings you'll see that I'm right." She is no fun to be around. Many newcomers hope if they *keep coming back* they won't become as bitter as Rebecca.

Meditations for the First 30 Days: How not to become roadkill on the highway to recovery, p.5.

There are many ways to respond to these criticisms. First, point out that some truths are easily understood, but difficult to act upon. Not picking up the first drug guarantees you won't get high. No great insight is needed, just great effort. Many people who dislike the simpleness of slogans do so because they don't want to make the effort.

Second, slogans may be more meaningful than they appear at first glance. *One day at a time* is a simple slogan that has many meanings. *One day at a time* can mean:

- Don't do drugs *one day at a time*. No matter what happens today, don't get high. Do the same tomorrow.
- Squeeze the joy out of the day. Never cheat yourself of today's happiness by worrying about tomorrow's sorrow.
- Survive the bad times *one day at a time*. Learn that you are one day tougher than you thought you were.
- We build our strength *one day at a time*. Each day is an opportunity to build emotional and spiritual muscle to deal with life's challenges.
- We need to live in the present. Success is often a matter of focus and consistency.
- We need to look after today, because tomorrow is not guaranteed, and until it arrives, we cannot know what it holds.

Third, any idea can be misused. The misuse of that idea doesn't make it any less valid. The person in recovery needs to find what the slogans truly mean and use them appropriately.

Fourth, when the brain is overwhelmed by cravings and circumstances, a simple slogan may be all it can process. Like a slap to the face or a warning shot, slogans can jolt people from their confusion.

Finally, slogans are easy to remember. Not all important information has to be difficult or lengthy. Short sayings can capture both the meaningful and the mundane:

- "Do unto others, as you would have done unto you."
- "Righty tighty, lefty loosey" (Reminds people which way to turn the stuck nut.)

Common Cognitive Distortions

There is no doubt slogans can help people recover from addictions. They have been called "the handrail to the steps." They provide additional guidance along the path of recovery.

The slogans can be used in conjunction with many forms of cognitive therapy. They help people change the way they think about recovery and addiction. They become part of the recovering person's healthier automatic thinking.

Explaining cognitive distortions¹

The first step to helping people change their thinking is showing them how cognitive distortions undermine their recovery. The example below explains how these thoughts can betray an addict. It is vital the person coping with addiction understands thinking and action are intertwined.

Suppose you stay sober for three weeks. You attend a wedding where your favorite drink, champagne, is served. This triggers the thought “sooner or later I will get drunk.” You may then feel sad, frustrated, and helpless, just before you drink that first glass of champagne.

What happened?

- 1) You did not see that your thought was automatic, and that it was not necessarily true. If you could stay sober for three weeks, why do you eventually have to drink?

- 2) You may not see the connection between the automatic thought, the negative feelings, and the self-defeating behavior.

Over the next week see how many times you can catch yourself in these irrational thoughts and distortions. When you do, replace that thought with one of the slogans...

Five MI/SA Groups, p. 18; ©1998, by Ken Montrose

The box above illustrates one type of distortion, *fortune telling*. Alcoholics and other addicts suffer from other distortions as well. A brief outline of these distortions follows, with suggestions for applicable slogans. Other relevant slogans are listed at the end of each section.

Errors of generalization

Errors of generalization fall into roughly two types. The first is dwelling on the negative. People who make these errors tend to see one bad event as a pattern. They filter out the positive, and see things as black or white. They either had a perfect day, or life is a bucket of misery. If one person doesn't like them, they conclude the whole world is against them.

- “The wedding was ruined! The napkins didn't match the bridesmaids' gowns.”
- “A woman at my home-group frowned at me. I don't think anyone there likes me.”
- “I think my new car is cursed. I got a speeding ticket the day I bought it.”

¹Adapted from *The Feeling Good Handbook*, was written by David Burns, MD (1999) and is available at most bookstores. Other items were adapted from Beck, A. et al. (1979) *Cognitive Therapy of Depression*, NY: Guilford Press; and Ellis, A. (1962). *Reason and Emotion in Psychotherapy*, NY: Lyle Stuart.

Twelve Step slogans have many ways of helping people not dwell on the negative. The most common is replacing self-pity with gratitude, expressed by the slogan *an attitude of gratitude*.

Most people can be grateful when life is good. Being grateful while struggling in early recovery can be a little more challenging. The exercise on pages twenty- four to twenty-five asks people to write a gratitude list using the stick figure as a guide. The point of the exercise is to steer people to the positive, even though they may be mired in the negative. (A similar exercise asks people to list one thing they are grateful for that starts with each subsequent letter of the alphabet.)

A related slogan, *grateful not hateful*, echoes the Big Book's warning against resentment. The authors of the Big Book argue that resenting others is a luxury people in recovery cannot afford. They argue "... a life which includes deep resentment leads only to futility and unhappiness" (p. 66). They strongly suggest people in recovery focus on gratitude and look at their own contribution to disagreements, grudges, and conflicts.

Likewise, Twelve Step programs warn against self-pity. *Poor me, poor me, pour me another* comes with a warning: dwell on the negative long enough, and you are likely to relapse. A better course is to write a good gratitude list. In addition to writing a gratitude list, professionals can help clients compose lists of near misses (times they narrowly escaped severe consequences), how life could be worse, and who they wouldn't want to be.

The second type of generalization error is not recognizing the common underlying factor in a series of setbacks. Imagine someone gets fired for calling off sick three Mondays in a row. He goes to a bar to drink and to curse his former employer. Five minutes after he leaves the bar, he is arrested for driving under the influence. A week later he is extremely drunk when he arrives for his preliminary hearing. He falls down a flight of marble stairs in front of the courthouse and injures his shoulder.

We hope he recognizes drinking is the common factor in all his problems. We shouldn't be surprised if he blames his mishaps on separate causes: an unreasonable boss, unfair DUI laws, and shoddy construction of government buildings. He cannot or will not see alcohol is the common thread to his problems.

A slogan that addresses this error of generalization is *I didn't get in trouble every time I drank* (or used drugs), *but every time I was in trouble I was drunk* (or high, or trying to get high). Professionals may want to insert the word "almost" before the second "every." Otherwise, people will argue that since they also get into trouble while they were clean and sober, alcohol and other drugs aren't their problem.

Most people will find that completing a chemical abuse history will prove the accuracy of this slogan. Others may be so into denial that the professional will need to complete a timeline to help the recovering addict see the impact of alcohol and other drugs. A format for timelines, and an example of a completed timeline, can be found on page twenty-seven.

Other Applicable Slogans: *Addiction is the only disease that tells you you're alright.*

Errors of prediction

David Burns lists two types of errors of prediction, including fortune telling, which means predicting bad things are going to happen before they do. The other is mind reading, the mistaken belief one knows the negative things other people are thinking.

- “I just know she is going to fire me. I can tell from the way she looks at me.”
- “You think you’re better than me.”
- “I know that she knows that I know she knows.”

Anxious over-concern is fortune-telling’s evil cousin. It involves dwelling on horrible possibilities or worrying about what might occur if one is not watchful. Anxious over-concern is borrowing misery from the future. Worse, it is borrowing misery from an unlikely future, and then watching anxiously in an irrational effort to control something that probably won’t happen.

Twelve Step programs offer several slogans that address errors of prediction. Perhaps the most widely known is *one day at a time*. (This slogan has other meanings which we discussed earlier.) Used in this context, *one day at a time* tells the recovering person to limit her focus to today’s issues. The future may be painful, but much of what people worry about never happens. Worrying about the future makes dealing with the present much tougher.

Staying in the present isn’t always easy. The professional may want to emphasize that learning to live *one day at a time* can take practice. Fortune telling and anxious over-concern often feel more natural to people in recovery. Several techniques may help people live this slogan.

The first is to schedule the day. Rather than drifting through the day, worrying about what might be, most people do better keeping busy. Their schedule should be realistic, neither overwhelming or full of “down time” where they have little to do except worry about the future.

People in early recovery can schedule activities *one day at a time* to address fortune telling and anxious over-concern. For example, their schedule can include five minutes of worry. During this five minutes, they are to do nothing else but worry about what might happen. They may even want to pick a specific worry, and write about it for ten minutes. All worrisome thoughts that pop up during the day are to be addressed in this five to ten minute interval. (This paradoxical approach has been shown to decrease the frequency and intensity of worrisome thoughts.)

Rather than focusing on what tomorrow holds, people in early recovery do well to focus on what they accomplished in any given day. A model for doing so is contained on page twenty-nine. The professional’s role is to point out that while someone may feel a heavy weight hanging over him, he was still able to accomplish something.

Unfortunately, people misuse the slogan *one day at a time* to discourage people from planning anything. Well-intentioned people in Twelve Step fellowships confuse realistic planning with living in the future. They warn people that thinking about tomorrow is just a way to avoid doing something today. *One day at a time* can be used to divide plans into manageable pieces, i.e. only do one day’s worth of whatever you are working on.

Time Management.

Newcomers to AA/NA are often confused by contradictory messages about time, planning, the past, and the future. What follows may help them understand the core message of AA/NA slogans regarding time, changes, and planning.

Past	If nothing changes, someone's past is the best predictor of his future. If changes are made, the experiences of people who have made similar changes are the best predictor.
Present:	Live in the present, but make realistic plans. Work on one day's worth of those plans.
Future:	Doing the same thing over and over will likely yield the same results. Change is painful, but will likely bring different results. Plan and make the necessary changes, but accept that circumstances may change more slowly than behavior and attitude.

We addicts are notoriously poor at making realistic predictions of the future. We believe this time we will control our use of alcohol and other drugs, or at least avoid the consequences from using. The NA slogan *play the tape through* advises the recovering person to make a more accurate prediction, based on past experiences. If I drank much more than I planned the last five nights in a row, what is the most likely outcome the next time I drink? If my company performs truly random drug screens, is there really any way of knowing whether I will be tested before all the THC is out of my body?

Other applicable slogans: *Accept, Don't Expect*
 Turn It Over

Errors of importance

Errors of importance involve making mountains out of molehills or molehills out of mountains.

- "I'm so tired, it must be leukemia."
- "So what if I have my lunch in a bar every day?"
- "The IRS is too busy to worry about a little guy like me."

Ulcers come from mountain-climbing molehills. Unfortunately, many people can't tell a mountain from a molehill. Professionals need to help people gain perspective and establish priorities. There are issues that require immediate attention. Other issues aren't worth worrying about. Helping people figure out which is which can smooth out some of the ups and downs that rattle people in early recovery.

Errors of importance also include a belief in an indelible past. The past is important, but not so important that it must determine the future. Too many people struggling with addiction believe they have no choice but to do what they have always done. They expect whatever has happened to them will continue to happen, no matter how they change their thinking and behavior.

A good exercise for this slogan is writing short biographies of people who have made remarkable changes. These people can be the famous and not so famous. They can range from the Biblical account of Saul on the road to Damascus, to Robert Downey, Jr.

Other Applicable Slogans: *The past will never get better, but you will.*

The courage to change – which is taken from the Serenity Prayer – recognizes that change can be frightening. At the same time, *the courage to change* is widely understood to represent a crossroads. People in recovery have choices to make, they need to make different choices, and travel a different path, if they wish to recover. Traveling a familiar, addictive path while abstaining from alcohol and other drugs won't lead them to serenity.

This is a good time for the professional to help people do a cost-benefit analysis. What is the likely cost of making no changes, i.e. giving in to the progressive nature of addiction? What is the benefit of making certain changes? What will it cost to make these changes? Why delay gratification?

While discussing this slogan, professionals need to understand that what seems like a bargain to them, may seem like too high a price to their clients. Even though alcohol and other drugs destroy lives, they numb the pain. Initially at least, they fire up pleasure centers in the brain. They are reliable – when people disappoint them, alcohol, cocaine, heroin, and the like, do not. Taking away the *people, places, and things* of one's addiction can leave little to enjoy, at least in the early part of recovery.

Professionals can use a financial analogy to compare the paths of instant versus delayed gratification. Suppose a man scrapes together \$100 and deposits it in an account paying 3% interest compounded daily. Since 3% seems like a small rate of return, he decides to add \$1.00 every day. Ten years go by, and he checks his account balance. He now has \$4,340 in his account.

His brother scrapes together \$100, but blows it on drugs. He too wants to invest, but decides to score big by buying 100 lottery tickets on his credit card. None of the tickets are winners. The tickets cost \$5.00 each and he figures he needs to buy more to get back his \$500. He buys 100 more, but none are winners. Now he's run up \$1000 on his credit card and has nothing to show for it. For ten years he has to hustle to pay the minimum balance. He pays a total of \$1922 to pay off his original \$1,000 debt, even if he spends no more on drugs.

The \$100 is analogous to "scraping together" clean time. Even a little clean time can pay dividends. Someone with a week clean may be just clear-headed enough to understand she needs to make major changes.

The \$1/day lines up with going to an AA/NA meeting every day, possibly putting a dollar in the collection. Nobody gets rich saving a dollar per day, but they don't go into debt, and they have something to show for their efforts. The more they put in, the more they have.

Compound interest is literally the interest paid on interest earned. In Twelve Step programs, rewards earned often come with additional rewards, and could be called “compound rewards.” Because he got clean, my client saved his job. Because he saved his job, he met his future wife at work, and so on.

The \$4,340 is not as much as a big payoff from a lottery ticket, but it is a lot more than losing \$1,000 and paying \$922 for the privilege of doing so. Clearly the man who bought the lottery tickets needs to change his financial path.

If you do what you always did, you will get what you always got also addresses the importance of change. Many people underestimate how much they need to change:

- “I got in trouble shooting heroin, not smoking it.”
- “Tequila gets me in trouble. I’m switching to gin.”
- “Crack is whack. I’m sticking to powder from now on.”
- “I still go to the bar, but I drink soda...”
- “My dealer was my friend. We stopped doing business, but we didn’t stop being friends.”

There is a mapping exercise on page twenty-one that helps people sort out where they are spending their time in relationship to their drug of choice.

Many people in recovery want to change as few of the *people, places, and things* as possible. Often the importance of making these changes isn’t obvious.² Your job is to help them see how the more positive changes they make, the more likely they are to stay clean and sober. Explaining how triggers threaten their recovery, and why they need to change the rhythm of their day can help.

Unrealistic demands of self

These expectations can be unrealistically high, e.g. putting unrealistic demands on ourselves by saying we should, ought, or must do something. They can also take the form of personalization, where we take responsibility for things we may not have had much control over:

- “My plan is to attend 180 AA meetings in 90 days!”
- “Now that I’m done with heroin, I plan to quit smoking and lose 30 pounds.”
- “If I had been there, I could have stopped the flood.”

The demand for approval, e.g. needing everyone to like and accept us, places an impossible burden on the self. The contortions necessary to keep everyone happy are can overwhelm people.

²The story of the singing rats on page twenty-three may be useful for illustrating this point.

There are several slogans that address these self-defeating attitudes. *Easy does it* is often accompanied by the phrase *but do it*. The second half of the slogan warns against complacency and sloth. Just as doing too much can be a threat to recovery, so can doing too little. The trick is to figure out what is necessary for recovery, and pursue that with as much vigor as possible.

Suppose your client never saw a doctor or dentist in the ten years she abused heroin. *Easy does it* suggests she skip any extensive cosmetic surgery during her first year clean. *But do it* suggests she see a doctor and a dentist to see if she has any pressing health/dental issues. Forget the tummy tuck, but deal with the bleeding ulcer.

An often misunderstood slogan is *if it is to be, it is up to me*. This slogan reminds people they have much to say about their own happiness and well-being. It is not an argument for complete self-reliance. We are responsible for seeing a dentist, but we need not pull our own teeth.

If nothing changes, nothing changes reminds us that putting down the bottle, needle, or pipe is not enough. People in recovery need to clean out the wreckage of the past, and learn to be comfortable without alcohol and other drugs. This requires making major changes in one's life. People who stop using alcohol and other drugs, but make no further changes tend to stay "down in the dumps." The garbage they have accumulated can be hauled to the curb, or allowed to rot. Hauling away the garbage increases the likelihood of staying clean and sober.

“ . . . many of us suddenly realize we live in a dump. Be it a mansion or a mission, it is a dump. Every day the dump-trucks pull up, driven by bitter children, ex-spouses, angry bosses, police officers, and unsympathetic judges.

We cannot understand why they keep "dumping" on us. It takes some of us a long time to remember we ordered this garbage. It takes us even longer to realize we can refuse delivery on other people's trash.

Not using alcohol and other drugs (AAOD), slows the pace of delivery. Loads still arrive, but most often they are loads ordered before we got clean and sober. The alcoholic who stops drinking still lives in a dump, but with luck most of the garbage will rot away. He may have to deal with other people's loads.

Recovery requires cleaning out the dump. We get rid of old garbage and learn to refuse other people's garbage. In recovery we get out from under loads we don't remember ordering that arrive after we get clean and sober.

(Hauling it to the Curb: Cleaning up your life in early recovery, p. v.)

Other applicable slogans: *FEAR: Face Everything And Recover*
 Flee Everything And Relapse

Addictive Distortions

We addicts suffer from all of the same cognitive distortions that non-addicts embrace. We also fall prey to a few distortions unique to addictions. These include the many forms of denial identified here and elsewhere³ What follows are common but mistaken beliefs about substances, being clean and sober, and recovery itself.

Thoughts and Words Equal Actions

These include the idea that thoughts and words equal actions. A young man in rehab kept missing therapy groups and meetings. He got up before breakfast to smoke, went to all his meals, and found time to socialize with female members of the community. He was given several warnings before being asked to sign a contract saying that he would attend all groups. If he missed one more group, he would be administratively discharged.

The very next day he skipped the first group of the day. His counselor asked him to pack his bags, he clearly wasn't invested in treatment. The patient was incredulous.

"I planned to go to group," he said. "after breakfast I fell asleep, or I would have been at that group."

"But, you didn't go to group," his counselor pointed out.

"All I talked about last night was how I planned to make all my groups," the patient said. "You can ask my roommate how serious I am about getting to group!"

His bafflement quickly gave way to anger. "You never gave me a chance!" he yelled. "I'll sue you." He seemed unable to grasp that his intentions did not excuse his lack of action.

Actions speak louder than words, while not strictly an AA slogan, is certainly applicable. Equally applicable is the old adage, *the road to hell is paved with good intentions*. So too is the often heard question: *you talk the talk, but can you walk the walk?* All three point out that actually doing is more important than intending to do something, or being able to describe that something.

To paraphrase a popular expression, professionals need to ask *what have you done for you lately?* Professionals can explore this with clients, then asking them to describe what they have done to further their recovery. If the client can't point to things they have done, explore the thoughts that got in their way.

³For a basic overview see *Hauling it to the Curb: Cleaning up your life in early recovery* (Montrose, 2000), available from Greenbriar Training and Publications (724) 934-8435 or www.greenbriartraining.com. A more detailed description can be found in Gorski & Miller's (1986) *Staying Sober: A guide for relapse prevention*, available from Hazelden (800) 328-9000 or www.hazelden.org.

Distorted beliefs about substances

Too many people believe whatever helps them justify their continued use of alcohol and other drugs. Some would argue that these beliefs are not true distortions, but only a lack of information. Unfortunately, many people will choose to believe these distortions no matter how much information to the contrary they receive. Despite research contradicting their views, they believe:

- drinking beer “doesn’t count”
- snorting heroin is safer than injecting it
- cocaine makes me smarter
- LSD gives me insight into matters of cosmic significance

One is too many, and a thousand is never enough defines what it means to be an addict. We are not the people who can use any mind altering substance socially, at least not for long. Once the genie is out of the bottle, bad things happen. Likewise, *once a pickle, never again a cucumber* reminds people in recovery that once they have been addicted, they can never use alcohol and other drugs “socially.”

Professionals need to remind clients that a *drug is a drug is a drug* refers to the idea that alcoholics and other addicts cannot safely use alcohol and other drugs in any form. Saying that one drug is safe is akin to saying you almost drowned in a swimming pool, but you think you’ll be able to swim in the ocean.

Professionals do well to remind people there’s a reason people get addicted to alcohol and other drugs. Alcohol, cocaine, heroin, and the like can be powerfully attractive. They do things to the brain that few experiences in life can match. The pain they cause is also unmatched.

There is a “carrot and stick” to opiates. Imagine a jackass chasing a carrot dangled in front of him on a stick. The animal will chase that carrot until he is exhausted, remembering the taste of the first carrot.

Now imagine that his master finally allows him to eat the carrot in the shade. The carrot only satisfies his hunger for a few minutes. In what seems like a moment, his master will be hitting him with a stick to get him moving again. Soon his belly is rumbling, his sides hurt from the stick, and he knows he must get up to chase another carrot.

Opiates are the carrot and the stick. The high, and the escape from pain, are the carrot. Withdrawal and all the problems opiate addiction causes are the stick. Addiction is the master. Guess which role you play.

Heroin, Oxycontin, & Other Opioids: Breaking your addiction to them, p. 1.

Other applicable slogans: *It’s the engine, not the caboose, that kills you.*
When you dance with a gorilla, the gorilla decides when to stop

Permission-giving beliefs

Even people who accept that alcohol and other drugs can be harmful will find reasons to justify using them. These beliefs usually contain a sense of entitlement. The alcoholic or other addict thinks they deserve to use chemicals, usually because of something very positive or very negative.

- “I was celebrating the birth of a child. Isn’t life the most sacred reason to celebrate?”
- “The world is insane. Insanity is soberly pretending this isn’t so.”
- “If you had my boss, you’d be shooting heroin into your head.”

As was stated earlier, *play the tape through* asks people to consider the likely results of celebrating something positive. Chances are good that bad things will happen when an alcoholic or other addict celebrates by using alcohol or other drugs.

A good exercise to use with this slogan is to ask clients to list “near misses,” e.g. things that almost happened to them, and to describe what their life might be like if these near misses had been “hits.” Professionals can then point out that whatever they have narrowly avoided in the past is likely to happen in the future if they keep using. Drive drunk often enough and you will eventually get a DUI citation. Sell drugs long enough, and you will get arrested.

There is no problem so bad, a drink (or drug) cannot make it worse reminds people in recovery that while life can be difficult, substance abuse can always make the situation worse. Funerals are often painful. Getting high and disrupting the funeral service can make living with the loss of a loved one even worse.

Other applicable slogans: *There is no chemical solution to a spiritual problem.*

Entitlement born of resentment can be twisted into a perceived right to ‘prescribe’ substances to oneself. Alcohol, marijuana, and other drugs become part of the client’s formulary.

- “I smoke a little weed to deal with my high blood pressure.”
- “Vodka clears my throat.”
- “I don’t worry about migraines when I eat my mother’s Librium.”

Physician, heal thyself (Luke, 4:23) can be used to point out that addiction is a disease, and using a deadly disease to treat a less serious illness just isn’t good medicine. Like the old woman who swallowed the fly, treating one problem with an even bigger problem is likely to lead to one’s demise.⁴

⁴You may recall the old lady who swallowed the fly in turn swallowed a spider to get the fly, a mouse to get the spider, a cat to get the mouse, and so on until she died from overeating.

Distorted view of fairness

Alcoholics Anonymous (the “Big Book”) lists resentment as the number one destroyer of sobriety. A common source of resentment is a distorted view of fairness. Someone who has driven drunk 1,000 times for example, will complain about the consequences from his first DUI arrest.

Thank God life ain't fair points out that most people in trouble because of their addictions got away with a lot more than they were punished for. If life were absolutely fair, punishment would always follow crime. Most addicts agree that they don't want life to be absolutely fair.

What most people want is life to be relatively fair. They compare their rewards and punishments with people who have made similar efforts or committed similar offenses. Any perceived discrepancy can leave them resentful:

- “If I was rich, I'd be doing house arrest in a mansion, not 90 days in the county jail.”
- “I worked my butt off to get clean and sober and he got custody of the kids.”
- “My BAL was .21 and I got fired. Her's was .27 and she got sent to a rehab.”

Helping clients get over their resentment isn't easy. The professional may want to reiterate how lucky they are life isn't absolutely fair. They may also want to point out a couple of flaws in these comparisons.

The first is that most comparisons are done with incomplete data. The client may know someone who committed a similar offense and suffered a relatively minor consequence. What they may not know, or choose to ignore, is the severe consequences suffered by someone who committed less of an offense.

The second is that the game of life is unfair. The alcoholic or other addict who gets high is gambling on the outcome. The more often your client rolls the dice, the more likely he is to lose. Roll them often enough, and he will lose big. The only sensible thing for him to do is to stop gambling, i.e. stop using alcohol and other drugs.

What many people see as the luck of the draw, others see as proof life is stacked against them. *Life on life's terms* reminds them life can be harsh, regardless of whether one is an addict or not. Folks in recovery have to reconcile themselves to the fact that life is unfair, and often painfully so. Sometimes innocents suffer, while the guilty go free. Even when life is fair, it can also be tough. Everyone grows old, sometimes gracefully, sometimes painfully. Everyone dies.

Clean your side of the street advises people in recovery to focus on their own issues. Treating people fairly is a lot easier than making the world a fair and just place. Besides, focusing on other people's faults is a way to avoid dealing with one's own shortcomings.

"It is easier to wear slippers than to carpet the world."

Chinese Proverb

A Final Note: recovery can be fun

People who take Greenbriar's home-study course "How Well Do You Know The Big Book?" miss this question more often than any other:

6. *Bill W. thought:*
- a. *Recovery could be fun.*
 - b. *Laughter is the enemy of recovery*
 - c. *Levity is the enemy of serenity.*
 - d. *Prayer must replace drunken gaiety*
 - e. *None of the above.*

The correct answer is "a." Many people who miss this question reveal they have read the Big Book (*Alcoholics Anonymous*) many times. Yet they miss this passage again and again:

"There is, however, a vast amount of fun about it all." (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, p. 16)

Too many dwell on the next passage:

"But just underneath there is a deadly earnestness." (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, p. 16)

Sober not somber reminds people that recovery is a life and death business. Recovery is also great fun. The clinician's job is to show that the two ideas are not mutually exclusive.

Analogies that may illustrate this point include the idea:

- I want my surgeon to take my operation seriously, and I think my chances of survival are better if he enjoys his work.
- My children are my greatest joy and my most serious responsibility.

Likewise, helping people change their destructive thinking can be serious business. It can also be a labor of love, and a lot of fun. Professionals do well to make sure their automatic thinking doesn't rob them of the joy in this difficult work.

Slogans Exercises

Twelve step slogans can also be used to fight automatic thoughts and distortions. List below the cognitive distortions that pop up in your thinking. What slogans do you think counteract these thoughts and beliefs?⁵

	Belief	Type of distortion	Slogan
examples	<i>"I'll never stay sober forever."</i>	<i>fortune telling</i>	<i>One day at a time.</i>
	<i>"People in AA are all jerks."</i>	<i>mental filter</i>	<i>Principles before personalities.</i>
	<i>"I didn't make '90 in 90,' I might as well drink"</i>	<i>all or nothing thinking</i>	<i>One day at a time.</i>

⁵Adapted from *Five MI/SA (mental illness & substance abuse) Groups: And pointers on running them*, ©2000 by Ken Montrose. Available through Greenbriar Training & Publications: www.greenbriartraining.com, or (724) 934-8435. May be reprinted as long as this footnote is included.

What slogans are represented by the following acronyms and symbols?⁶

<i>Example: EDI: easy does it</i>
Do T N  T
D C Y I 2 O P O
D E N I A m L
D P U T 1st D
D Q 5 M B T M H
F T 1st
Go T M, R T B B
H A L T
If Y D W Y A D, Y W G W Y A G
J 4 T
K C B, It W If Y W I
K I S S
L O n L T
L & L L
M M M It

⁶Available through Greenbriar Training & Publications: www.greenbriartraining.com, or (724) 934-8435.
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1 D A A ⊙
O Is 2 M, A T I N E
P P & T
P B 4 P
S A T Of B S A T
There I N P S B A D C M It W
T T Th
T T ⊙
T T S Pa
T 12 S Pr

Answer Key

Do T N ↗ T:	<i>Do the next right thing.</i>
D C Y I 2 O P O:	<i>Don't compare your insides to other people's outsides.</i>
D E N I A m L:	<i>Don't even notice I am lying.</i>
D P U T 1st D:	<i>Don't pick up the first drink.</i>
D Q 5 M B T M H:	<i>Don't quit five minutes before the miracle happens.</i>
F T 1 st :	<i>First things first.</i>
Go T M, R T B B:	<i>Go to meetings, read the Big Book.</i>
H A L T:	<i>(Don't let yourself get too) Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired</i>
If Y D W Y A D, Y W G W Y A G:	<i>If you do what you always did, you will get what you always got.</i>
J 4 T:	<i>Just for today.</i>
K C B, It W If Y W I:	<i>Keep coming back, it works if you work it.</i>
K I S S:	<i>Keep it simple stupid</i>
L O n L T:	<i>Life on life's terms.</i>
L & L L:	<i>Live and let live.</i>
M M M It:	<i>Meeting makers make it.</i>
1 D A A ☉:	<i>One day at a time.</i>
O Is 2 M, A T I N E:	<i>One is too many, a thousand is never enough.</i>
P P & T:	<i>People, places, and things</i>
P B 4 P:	<i>Principles before personalities.</i>
S A T O f B S A T:	<i>Sick and tired of being sick and tired.</i>
There I N P S B A D C M It W:	<i>There is no problem so bad a drink (or drug) cannot make it worse.</i>
T T Th:	<i>Think, think, think.</i>
T T ☉:	<i>Time takes time.</i>
T T S Pa:	<i>This too shall pass.</i>
T 12 S Pr:	<i>The Twelve Step program.</i>

How Snakes Lost Their Legs:

A parable about taking direction, accepting responsibility, and letting go.

One day God brought candy for all of the animals. He gathered the animals together and told them they could each have as much candy as they wanted, but they had to wait until He returned from the fields with the oxen.

While He was gone, the animals sat down far away from the candy so they wouldn't be tempted to eat any. The snake, who still had legs then, walked up to the big pile of candy.

"Better get away from there," the crow said.

"I'm just going to look at it," the snake replied.

"Better put that candy down," the owl warned.

"I'm just going to feel it," the snake hissed. The snake unwrapped the candy.

"Better put that away!" the eagle shouted.

"I'm just going to smell it," the snake said. Snakes smell things with their tongues. Just as the snake was about to lick the candy, a booming voice rang out.

"Didn't I tell you not to have any candy until all the animals were gathered?" God asked, in a voice that shook the mountains. The snake was so scared that he ran for a hole in the rocks to escape God's anger.

Usually, the snake could find a hole just big enough to squeeze his body through, but not let whatever was chasing him get by. This time he was so scared, and running so fast, that he picked a hole that was too small. He ran into the hole with so much force that he scraped his arms and legs right off. God, being merciful, immediately touched the snake and healed the wounds where his limbs had been.

"But God," the snake said, "why don't you put my arms and legs back on?"

"I will always be here to heal your wounds, but sometimes what is done is done." The snake was very angry about this and slithered away.

The snake fathered babies, who had babies, who had babies. Some of these snakes were grateful that God had healed their great-great-great granddaddy snake. They lived peaceful lives. Others were very angry, and couldn't see how their great-great-great granddaddy had caused his own downfall. They got so bitter that their mouths filled with venom. To this day, these snakes poison people foolish enough to go near them.

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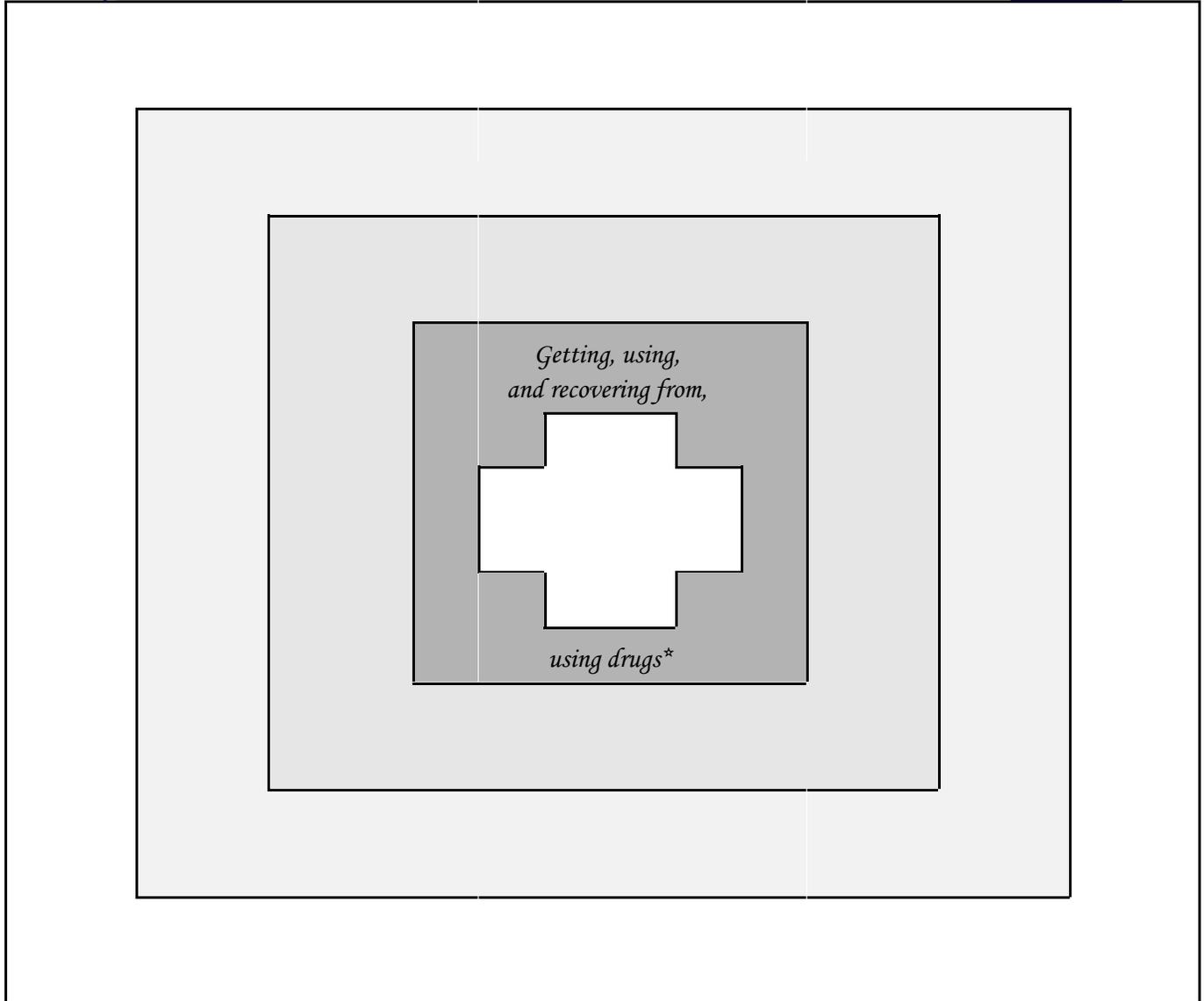
Mapping Your Addiction⁷

Drugs are the center of any addict's life. Recovery is moving as far away as possible from your favorite drugs and everything associated with them. The map below will help you evaluate how far you have moved.

In the center square, list your favorite drug or drugs. (Alcohol is a drug.) In the ring closest to your drug describe anything you're doing linked to your drug of choice. Use the middle ring to list things that help you stay clean and sober. In the outermost ring, list the best thing you have done or should do for your recovery. (There is an example of how to do this on the next page.) When you are done, ask yourself how much of your time and energy you spend in each ring.

Recovery

Recovery



Recovery

Recovery

* Remember that alcohol is a drug.

⁷Montrose Training & Consultation//PO Box 2048// Warrendale, PA 15068. Available through Greenbriar Training & Publications: www.greenbriartraining.com, or (724) 934-8435. May be reprinted as long as this footnote is included.

An Example of Mapping Your Addiction

Sue R., a young woman struggling with an addiction to heroin.

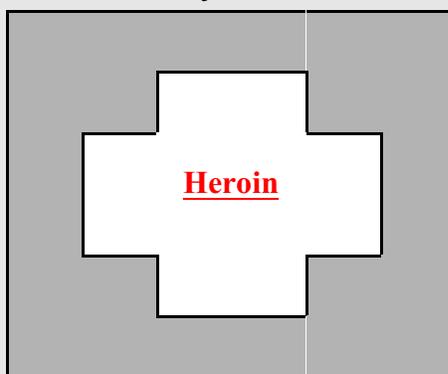
Recovery

Recovery

*Called my brother and admitted I had been craving his Vicodin.
He said he had flushed them last week.*

*Told my brother I couldn't stop by today, but that I might see
him tomorrow.*

*Spent a lot of time thinking about how I could get the bottle of
Vicodin at my brother's house.*



*Slept with
my heroin
addicted
boyfriend*

*Told him I
needed a
couple of
weeks
apart to
get
grounded.*

*I need to
tell him I
can't see
him
anymore
because he
has no
intention
of getting
clean.*

*Went out of my way to drive past
the dealer's house.*

*Drove past the county jail and reminded myself how much I
hated that place.*

Drove to my sponsor's house and had a long talk about dealing with triggers.

Recovery

Recovery

Singing Rats:

A parable about changing people, places, and things

There were three houses in a row. In each house lived one man. These houses became infested with singing rats. The rats sang special songs that touched the souls of each man, even though each rat sang a different song. These rats carried fleas, and the flea bites made the men sick. The rats ate most of the men's food, made nests in their furniture, ordered junk from the internet, and ran up huge phone bills. Soon the three houses were falling apart because the men were too busy listening to the rats to make home repairs.

Eventually, all three men realized they had to change their lives. The first man made up his mind he would live with just one rat and the rest had to go. "Once I make up my mind, I stick to my guns," He said. "I can handle a rat or two." Two months later, the rats threw him out, but kept his car and his credit cards. "Don't come back, or we'll rat you out to your probation officer," they told him.

The second man put up a tent in his yard, and decided he would only go back into his house to eat. "That way I can still have music with my meals." Two years later he replaced the rats with dancing mice. "It was the noise from the rats that was ruining my life," he said. When they buried him the mice danced on his grave.

The third man burned his house to the ground. All the rats that weren't killed ran to his neighbors' houses, too afraid to return. The third man also lived in a tent for awhile. Slowly, a little at a time, he built a new house where his old house had stood. He bought a mean cat.

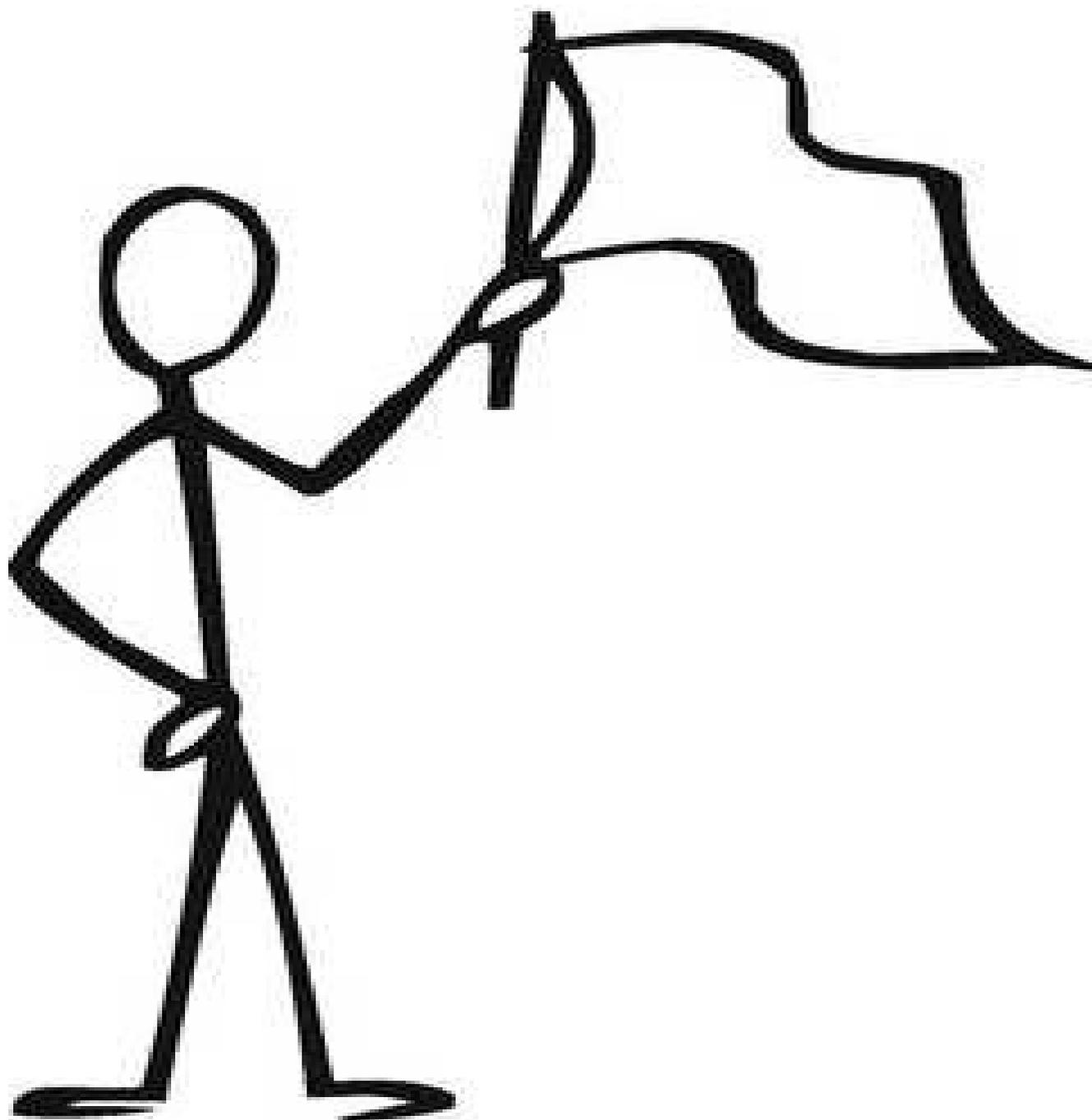
Which man are you most like?

(The Road Way Less Traveled: Starting recovery young, p. 7. © 2002 by Ken Montrose)



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An Attitude of Gratitude: Instructions

Now that you have surrendered any foolish notion of safely using alcohol and other drugs, it's time to take stock of things you can still enjoy. These can be a source of gratitude when life is tough.

Starting at the top of your head, you can be grateful that your brain still works. Bar fights, car crashes, and strokes have left many of your fellow addicts with just enough brain functioning to keep them alive. Near the top of the stick figure's head, list three good memories that have nothing to do with alcohol and other drugs. Draw eyes and list three of your favorite sights that aren't related to drinking or drugging. List your three favorite smells and three favorite tastes. List three things you like to touch.

Despite your efforts to poison your body, most of your organs still work. List the organs that you haven't destroyed and why you're grateful. For example: "My lungs still work and I can draw a deep breath. My stomach still works, so I can enjoy my meals. My liver still works, so I don't have to be on dialysis."

List the activities that you can still enjoy, or you might someday try. Don't limit yourself to the practical or commonplace. Now that you are clean and sober, you have no idea where life will take you, and what opportunities will be presented to you.

Timelines⁹: Clinician directed

Gather as much information as possible, from as many sources as possible. Combining information from an assessment with the client's own chemical abuse history is a good starting point.

In the far left column, list the dates your client was hospitalized, jailed, was involved with a child protective agency, left school, was fired, was charged with driving under the influence, disappointed someone important to them, or otherwise suffered because of his or her abuse of substances. Be as specific as possible. List any institution tied to the incident.

In the next column, describe the circumstances related to the incident. Try to keep this column as objective as possible. If you know your client's BAL was 0.15 list that rather than "he was drunk." You know exactly what the BAL was, but you could spend an eternity arguing about whether or not he was drunk. If you do not have any objective data, list the least subjective data available.

Next, list the substances used. Here again, write only what you know. If the use of cocaine was suspected but not proven, write "cocaine suspected." In the final column list any secondary consequences. For example, getting a third DUI primary consequence might be the loss of driving privileges. A secondary consequence could be losing her job as a truck driver or saleswoman.

Review the timeline with your client, expecting some level of denial. Rather than argue every point, plow ahead, hoping to plant the seeds of insight.



Use a pencil! Denial, acceptance, perspective, and memory will change how your client perceives the past.

⁹Adapted from *Celebrating Small Victories: A Counselor's manual for treating chronic mental illness and substance abuse*, by Ken Montrose & Dennis Daley. Used with permission. Available through Greenbriar Training & Publications: www.greenbriartraining.com, or (724) 934-8435. May be reprinted as long as this footnote is included.

Timeline

Name _____

Date _____

Date	Incident or Institution	Circumstances (People, Places, & Things)	Used/Abused (Alcohol & Other Drugs)	Other Consequences

Please feel free to make copies as long as the source is listed: *Celebrating Small Victories: A counselor's manual for treating chronic mental illness and addiction*, by Ken Montrose & Dennis Daley. Available through Greenbriar Training & Publications: www.greenbriartraining.com, or (724) 934-8435. May be reprinted as long as this footnote is included.

Timeline¹⁰ (Example)

Name Sue B.

Date _____

Date	Incident or Institution	Circumstances (People, Places, & Things)	Used/Abused (Alcohol & Other Drugs)	Other Consequences
2/75	Expelled from high school	Vomited at school assembly program – drinking with friends	You reported being “wasted”	Forced out of school and into the workforce uneducated
2/76	Admitted to County Memorial Hospital	Took more Valium than prescribed following the breakup of relationship	Toxicology report showed dangerous levels of Valium	30 day inpatient; mother called child welfare when pregnancy discovered
5/79	County Memorial Hospital	Took ten times the recommended dose of Benadryl	Toxic for Benadryl. BAL = 0.19	35 day inpatient stay; not allowed to return to parents’ home.
2/80	County Memorial	Toxic levels of Elavil and alcohol in your bloodstream	Six pack of beer and all your pills: by your report	3 days of intensive care, 25 days on psych unit, 91 days in state hosp.

¹⁰Adapted from *Celebrating Small Victories: A counselor’s manual for treating chronic mental illness and addiction*, by Ken Montrose & Dennis Daley.

Have You RAPT up the Day?

For the Believer¹¹

- R** Review the day with your Higher Power. What did you do with the time you were given? Imagine you are a reporter presenting your reader with the “who, what, when, where, how” of your day. Who did you spend the day with, the people of your recovery, or the people of your addiction? What did you do today to hinder or help your recovery? When did you face, fix, or find what you needed to in order to grow? When did you run from, ruin, or wreck the things you needed to grow? Where were you today? Were you in places of growth and recovery? Or were you, in person or in your mind, back to the places of your addiction? How did you strengthen your body, mind, and soul today?
- A** Apologize for times you fell short of your ideals. For example, if your Higher Power wants you to treat others with respect, and you didn’t, apologize.
- P** Petition your Higher Power for the things you will need tomorrow. You may need more patience to treat others respectfully. You may need wisdom to handle situations that still baffle you. While you are at it, why not ask for courage to change, and serenity to accept what you cannot change? (Hopefully, this sounds very familiar!)
- T** Thank your Higher Power. Review your gratitude list with your Higher Power.

For the Agnostic/Atheist

- R** Review your day with your sponsor, in your journal, or with someone important to you. What did you do with the time you were given? Imagine you are a reporter presenting your reader with the “who, what, when, where, how” of your day. Who did you spend the day with, the people of your recovery, or the people of your addiction? What did you do today to hinder or help your recovery? When did you face, fix, or find what you needed to in order to grow? When did you run from, ruin, or wreck the things you needed to grow? Where were you today? Were you in places of growth and recovery? Or were you, in person or in your mind, back to the places of your addiction? How did you strengthen your body and mind?
- A** Acknowledge where you fell short of your ideals. If you value treating people with respect, admit that you didn’t.
- P** Plan for the things you will need tomorrow. Is there anything or anybody that can help you overcome obstacles? Is there anything you need to do for yourself to make your life easier? (Getting high/drunk will never make life easier!)
- T** Be thankful for whatever you can enjoy without getting high/drunk. Write a gratitude list of all that you enjoyed today.

¹¹Adapted from *The Care and Feeding of Your Higher Power*, by Ken Montrose. Available through Greenbriar Training & Publications www.greenbriartraining.com or (724) 934-8435. May be reprinted as long as this footnote is attached.

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Scheduled Worrying:

<http://www.aafp.org/afp/20060315/1057ph.html>

http://www.sfbacct.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=66&Itemid=64

* MI/SA: Mentally Ill, Substance Abusing