

The Fog of Recovery

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When it all begins, it's hard to image ever getting clean, let alone staying clean. Yet, taking that very first step into rehabilitation and leaving substance abuse behind is a major turning point in every addict's life. Sure, it's seldom a perfect process, and relapse is almost always involved, at least a few times. However, at some point, through seemingly impossible perseverance, you finally cross a line with the words "Never More" written upon it. And when you do, you know that you've arrived, that you've made it, and that you've survived the long journey to a stable recovery.

Those who achieve stable recovery - years to decade long periods without relapse - accomplish amazing things. Having conquered the invisible daemons that once manipulated their souls, they live life with a sense of purpose and self-empowerment that others seldom know. They recreate their lives and reestablish a sense of being, belonging and community. They have, in essence, reinvented a brave new world entirely out of what was once a decent into oblivion.

Stable recovery, like time, is never one-sided. Instead, it is a three-dimensional state simultaneously connected to the past, the present and the future. Like time, recovery is lived in the present, but it is always on the move, striving for a better tomorrow while hoping to avoid the pitfalls of our pasts. That is why anyone who has achieved a stable recovery knows that to maintain it, they must always remember that relapse - even for those in stable recovery - is only one more day away. Obviously, there are never-ending, potential dangers from re-encounters with old associates and hang-outs that could trigger stressors which tip the scales against us. For the most part, however, these undermining remnants can readily be avoided by maintaining healthy occupational, social and personal boundaries. Yet, there's a less obvious hazard that lurks in our shadows, one that grows a tiny bit stronger each and every day we say no to relapse: the fog of recovery.

Stable recovery is defined as a relapse-free period measured in years or decades. It is a time of rebirth and regrowth during which we reconstruct our lives, or families, and the very values that give meaning to our existence. It is, however, also lived within the aging process that all people - addicts and non-addicts alike - go through during our

passage from birth to death. Compared to the endless possibilities that lay before us in childhood and our teen years, as we get older we are all faced with the challenge of experiencing, accepting, and adapting to the increasing limitations of both our bodies and our minds. For some, this can be a graceful and even rewarding descent from the mountain top. For others, however, it can be a painful struggle of relenting under duress to ever increasing forces our younger selves could never have imagined. It is for those, the ones with growing resistance to time, that the fog of recovery awaits.

Addiction is like a bad love relationship: it takes us to the depths of our own spiritual and emotional hell, even as we kiss its hand. I often tell my clients who have just gotten out of an unhealthy love affair to make a list of everything they never liked about the other person. Write down on a piece of paper each and every bad memory, no matter how large or small. Then, take that paper, make a dozen copies, and put one everywhere you can: by your bedside, on the bathroom mirror, taped to the refrigerator, in your car, on your desk at work, etcetera. Why? Because we have a tendency to romance the past, forgetting its pain and only remembering its pleasures. That's why we are so often drawn back to the very person from whom we once worked so very hard to escape. We forget their over-abundance of cruelty and only remember their fleeting acts of deceptive kindness. And just like this fog of relationships for lovers, there is a similar fog of recovery for addicts.

We once made love to our addictions as if they were a person: serving them as we served up ourselves. Now, having escaped and rebuilt our lives from the rock bottom up, we can at times feel a welling-up of old thoughts and feelings. Sometimes they arise as whole memories, while others appear in just small bits and fragmented pieces. Either way, their question is always the same: "Was it really all that bad?" After all, we're older now, wiser, and on much firmer ground. Yet, we still suffer, as all people do with the challenges of maintaining our stability amidst the ever increasing forces of age and temptation. Come on, why not just try a little bit? We've worked hard and it's okay to have some fun, isn't it? After all, we've earned it, and we can handle it now, right? And that quickly, with just the tiniest crack of that dark door, the fog of recovery comes wafting in.

I'm not going to bore you with all the statistics about the increased fatality rates from relapse as we get older. Suffice it to say that we're not twenty anymore and our bodies are no longer in their prime. To our now aging internal infrastructure, that bump of cocaine we easily ingested in college has now become an insurmountable mountain for our metabolisms, those thirty milligrams of oxycodone might as well be three hundred, and that hit of ecstasy is nothing more than the straw that breaks our once

strong but now frail backs. The risks are innumerable, the rewards unimaginably fleeting, and the fog becomes a self-perpetuating siren that calls to us alongside the approaching night.

When we first stepped foot into rehabilitation, the fog of recovery was an undiscovered foe that would unknowingly grow stronger the longer we were relapse free. Yet, the answers to lifting and vanquishing this fog are the very same ones we found the first time we chose to move away from our addictions: connecting with support systems and networks that keep our vision and future clear. That, however, can be a new and seemingly insurmountable challenge when we're older. It was hard enough doing the NA-AA thing in our twenties and thirties. Is that what you want to do now in your forties and fifties, or beyond? For some, the answer is yes, and it's the right answer. For others, this sort of public exposure is no longer a viable option. Where then, in our later years, can we find a different kind of help?

Privacy becomes an ever growing area of concern as we age and strive to share our lives more deeply with a select few, on-line, off-line and in-life. Given that aging is a process where we seek to enhance our achievements without empowering our failures, if I'm unexpectedly faced with the fog of recovery after years or decades of stability, do I really want to publicly expose my past to others? Even one-on-one counseling in this day of computer hacks and information sharing is no longer as private as it once used to be. Under these circumstances, how can we balance our ongoing recovery against sustaining our privacy as the fog closes in?

I have dedicated my life's work to helping people who suffer from substance abuse. Through this endeavor, I have come to deeply respect the ever growing need for preserving our privacy as we age. That is why I offer a substance abuse recovery coaching program that is confidential, anonymous, and as easy to access as a phone call. There are no forms to fill out, no records stored on someone else's computer, no interloping third party financial institutions, and no need to share any personal identifying information like your birth date, address, or even your name. The fog of recovery is a challenge that crops up later in life when we least want to revisit our past for fear that it might invade and destroy our future. Help is available, but even much of that help can be detrimental if it does not respect and honor our privacy. If you share this concern, then confidential and anonymous phone-based coaching - a private conversation focused on your future - may be the right answer for you.

As a person in stable recovery who has both thwarted the daily advances of relapse for over 25 years and has lifted himself out of the fog of recovery more than

once, I know how important confidentiality and anonymity are to those seeking help later in life. If issues of privacy are as important to you as they are to me, then it would be my honor and privilege to help you re-establish and maintain your stability if you, too, are ever challenged by the fog of recovery.

Robert offers anonymous and confidential substance abuse recovery telephone coaching to help those who wish to stabilize and maintain their recovery from substance abuse. Recovery coaching with Robert is available worldwide to anyone fluent in English who can reach him at **786-262-5750** (USA). For more information, please visit **<http://trafn.com/coach.html>**