

The 12 Steps Explained

Ivan lay in bed, staring at the ceiling with headphones on, listening to The Talking Heads song, "Once In a Lifetime." He hears the lyrics "You may find yourself in a beautiful house, with a beautiful wife, You may ask yourself, Well, how did I get here?" He wonders where his life is heading and what has happened to him. Having turned 30, six months ago, he felt depressed. Back in high school he saw a beautiful wife, beautiful house, kids, and an impactful career by the time he turned 30 and yet currently no wife, having a girlfriend, renting a one bedroom apartment, no kids and a small business with himself as the only employee. So what went wrong? This seemed like Hell. Was he living his Hell?

Ivan had graduated college with a business degree and believed in the complete man, a Renaissance man who believed in God, books and exercise. So if he had these three things why was his life different than his brother and his friends. Ivan has brown hair, athletic body on a 6'4" frame with olive skin. A combination for success. Yet, he didn't have success. Instead he usually feels angry, rageful, depressed and headed nowhere? He needed a change. But what change? He had made so many changes already. Or so he thought.

Like in business, Ivan needed a strategy. A strategy that would work and provide what he perceived as his desired lifestyle and life. But how and what?

Ivan had read many self-help books in his twenties. He knew that you had to write down your goals if you want to achieve them. He wrote 100 goals/things he wanted to do, visit or buy. The problem was that Ivan never wrote down the steps and the obstacles to achieving these goals. Only the end goal. He had achieved some goals. Was this his mistake? Clearly everyone else he knew didn't write down all the steps and obstacles. He had checked. But why was Ivan the lost person. Sure Ivan was having fun, making money, spending money, traveling, getting drunk, gambling, having sex, having different girlfriends. He knew Utopia was a dream. Ivan wanted reality. Ivan wanted to feel successful. On this day, Ivan felt frustrated and lost.

The night before was a shock. Ivan went out with friends, drinking beer and tequila to watch his hometown Houston Rockets play in Game Six of the Western Conference Finals against the Utah Jazz. Alcohol, Gambling and Buddies, that was a recipe for a good night. Girlfriend a phone call away for a nightcap.

The night started well with beef fajitas and beer and a tequila shooter at the restaurant. At the game, more beer and tequila. Time to get rowdy and cheer on a victory and make some money. The gambling line was only 2-1/2. Sure easy win for the home team and Ivan.

The game was going as planned. Rockets with a slight lead after three quarters. Steady flow of beers to keep the buzz and push the line of drunkenness. Ivan hated the new alcohol rules that

specified no alcohol in the fourth quarter. Thank God you could do a couple of tequila shooters at the game. As the fourth quarter started, no more alcohol. Ivan needed a short break anyway. Cheer on the Rockets to victory. Make some money. That was the plan.

Well, the night and the game changed quickly. The Jazz took the lead. Comeback time. Nothing to do but cheer. Come on Rockets, do your thing. It won't take much for the Rockets to win. Unfortunately, the game soured and then it ended. Not like this. Losing his buzz while the Rockets lose the game. Season over. Two hundred bucks lost on the game. Just more bad news. Let's go to a bar and continue drowning our sorrows and talk about the game. Ivan and his buddies find a bar and order beer. An ice cold long neck beer always tastes great. The way it cascades down the throat. The equalizer for Ivan.

So after a couple of cold ones, Ivan decides to call his girlfriend, Suzy. Suzy has short blonde hair, athletic body and piercing blue eyes. She answers and can tell Ivan has been drinking. Ivan talks about the night and the game. After awhile, Ivan suggests coming over but Suzy says no. She never says no. Drunk or sober, it is always yes. Tonight, it is no. The confusion! The hurt! The rejection!

Now Ivan starts talking, then talking louder, then begging, then yelling. Trying all tactics. Still no. This sucks. After 30 minutes, Ivan finally hangs up. Dejected. Finally goes back to his friends to finish the beers. By 2am, bar is closing and everyone has to go home. Ivan has to drive drunk and back to the one bedroom apartment to sleep alone. Never the plan.

The next day, Ivan replays the evening. Got drunk, Rockets lost, lost money gambling and no sex. What an empty night. So here he is, listening to music and contemplating his life. What is the next move? The strategy? He has to do something drastic because all these incremental changes don't change anything. A decade trying this or that but no real success.

What does Ivan need to do?

He thinks and he thinks.

He is tired too. Feeling tired and more tired.

Six months earlier, Suzy suggested that Ivan's family drank too much. Ivan got defensive and told Suzy, she was crazy and a bitch. Ivan could not hear any criticism, especially about his family and life. Suzy persisted and suggested 12 Step Meetings. What? She really is crazy. The suggestion always stuck in the back of Ivan's brain.

So was Ivan really considering an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting? He was. He calls the nearest AA meeting and finds out the schedule. This is a Saturday afternoon. He knows the times of

the meetings now but let's think about it. Let's not do anything too drastic. We need to think. No alcohol today, Ivan needs a clear mind.

A Meeting

Sunday comes and goes. No alcohol and no gambling.

Now it is Monday. Off to work. Monday workday like other workdays, work some, daydream some and now think about that AA meeting. By noon, Ivan decides he will go to the 8pm meeting. What does he have to lose? What is it all about?

Ivan leaves work around 5:30pm and drives the short distance to his apartment. He is only 15 minutes from the meeting. Need to sit down on the couch for a few minutes. Breathe.

Now it is 7:30pm. Time to do a check in the bathroom and then head out. Ivan checks himself. He looks good. He leaves. Ivan arrives at the meeting at 7:50pm and figures out where to go. That club has two meetings at the same time. He picks the one with the open door. He sits down. The gavel comes down and the meeting comes to order. The meeting starts with the serenity prayer. Then they ask, if anyone is at their first meeting. Ivan raises his hand. Everyone looks at him but he is oblivious. Meeting starts. People talk. Ivan hears some things of interest and at times his mind drifts – that person looks cool, that person is weird. At times, people seem to be talking at him or to him. At some point, the guy running the meeting asks Ivan if he wants to share and why is he here tonight.

Ivan begins by giving a recap from Friday night and about the family tradition that the males drink. Period. He acknowledges driving drunk and wants more direction in his life. Then he finishes talking. The meeting continues. Other people share. At the end of the meeting, they ask if anyone has a desire to stop drinking. Pick up a Desire Chip. Ivan just sits there. He doesn't know they are asking him a question or that Ivan is making a statement about his drinking. Ivan is confused so he stays put in his chair. They finish with the announcements. Stand up, hold hands and recite the Lord's Prayer. Meeting over. A few people talk to Ivan after the meeting. He gets some phone numbers. Then Ivan goes home.

The next day, Ivan goes to another meeting. They say go to 90 meetings in 90 days. Just listen. Ivan realizes he can do that. Knowledge is a good thing. He keeps going to meetings. Speaking very little. No drinking. Just gambling. Having sex with the girlfriend again. Make up sex and now regular sex. Ivan's brain is still in a fog. He has no clue what he is feeling. Ivan never got taught how to process a feeling. So, he is clueless about feelings and emotions.

Thirty Days go by and Ivan has attended 28 meetings. At his 30 day meeting, Ivan does go to the front of the room and gets his 30 day chip, a bright red chip. The blood chip. Ivan tells Suzy. That weekend Ivan visits Suzy and brings dinner. Sushi. They love sushi. Before they eat,

Suzy has presents. How cool. So Suzy asks Ivan some questions because she feels that she knows him and already knows the answers. "Do you have a Desire Chip?" Ivan answers no. So Suzy presents a shiny silver Desire Chip. She states I had a feeling you didn't have one. It warms Ivan's heart because Ivan wanted a Desire Chip but was too embarrassed to ask for one after the first meeting. Next question, "Do you have a Big Book?" Again the answer is no. Again, Ivan was too embarrassed to ask for help or ask where do I buy a book. So Suzy says wait and quickly writes a few lines on the inside cover of the book. Suzy writes that she is proud of him and to not forget The Promises. Ivan has heard of The Promises in the meeting but is still unclear what that means. Ivan feels warm inside, he feels loved. Finally a gesture of someone listening to him. He wanted a Desire Chip to go along with his 30 Day Chip. Ivan loves to read. Now, he can begin reading and discovering more about AA and what this group is about and understand the meetings and recovery better. The mission is self-discovery. To answer the existential question, "What am I doing with my life?" and "What do I want to do with my life?" These questions baffled Ivan and most people. Ivan was dying to find answers.

Ivan and Suzy enjoyed their dinner and night.

Early Recovery

Onward to the second month of no drinking, reading those first 164 pages. Wow, this Big Book speaks life into the crazy absurd thinking that had occupied Ivan's brain and still does. Life begins to make some sense. The AA program makes more sense. Ivan is still cautious. He doesn't want to make friends yet, doesn't get a sponsor and goes to different meetings, 12:15pm, 6:30pm, 8pm and different clubs so no one truly knows him. Ivan works part of the program. Half measure Ivan! He is learning about the program as he is learning about himself. Excitement oozes because self-discovery produces its own internal dopamine. The body relaxes and anxiety diminishes. Ivan needs both. Easy to stop drinking when some results appear. Gambling is a constant too, to relieve any other stress or anxiety. The program plus another addiction, the primary addiction still in effect. People talk about a journey. Self-help books preach this mantra. Begin the journey. Ivan understands it intellectually, yet no GPS or program can get him to the desired end location, his content life. What to do first? That paralyzes and confuses Ivan. If Ivan had the slightest clue, he could begin. This spiritual talk about just begin somewhere. WTF?? Ivan hates asking for help yet no one tells him anything concrete. Just vague sayings. Now Ivan gets annoyed.

Ivan continues on his journey. Continues reading. Continues to go to meetings. Continues to try to figure out things by himself. The reality is that Ivan has many issues and, having zero emotional intelligence, beginning slowly is a smart move. Life changes so slightly. Ivan still runs his small business, still has the one bedroom apartment and still has Suzy, his girlfriend.

Ivan goes to 54 meetings in 60 days. Finishes reading the AA Big Book, the first 164 pages and all the Stories. Reads about the Promises yet they still don't make much sense. The Story about Acceptance touched his soul. Ivan realizes he needs to accept his life and seeks acceptance from others. That is a must. Ivan still gambling. Doesn't want to quit gambling. Ivan enjoys betting on sports and the horses. Doesn't want to get a sponsor and tries to work Step One and Step Two. Impossible to work The Steps without guidance and a sponsor but Ivan attempts anyway. Ivan in a holding pattern, no more driving home drunk or being buzzed and no hangovers. Able to wake up early to run, lift or research gambling. Yet no improvement in the way he feels or in getting to the end destination, his desired life.

Ivan stays stuck for another 15 months. In certain ways Ivan is more isolated and miserable than ever. No meeting buddies at the bar. No AA meetings either. Just work, working out, reading, gambling, having sex infrequently. More distance between Ivan and Suzy. Suzy doesn't want to hang out as much. Sex once or twice a month. Seeing each other once or twice a month. Talking infrequently. Just much more isolation. Gambling now everyday. Good news you can bet on football, basketball or baseball everyday of the year except the Monday and Wednesday, before and after the Baseball All-Star game in July. Horses run on that Wednesday but no gambling on that Monday. That day is depressing. More gambling means more isolation, more loneliness. More escaping reality and feelings. More depression.

Stopping drinking should be the necessary first step in this vague journey. Ivan's life seemed to get worse in many aspects. The only bright spot, Ivan has a reduced desire to drink. Ivan does get very insecure about business people, family and friends judging him about his zero drinking. Ivan is just insecure about his life. "Hell with them," he says in his head yet he desperately wants their approval and acceptance. Gets neither, especially from his family. The family either doesn't ask about this new way of life or flat out rejects it by continuing to ask Ivan if he wants something to drink at family gatherings and holidays. That is depressing and annoying. Depressing that no one hears him except his sister-in-law. No one asks questions or the simple, "How are you doing?" Not his parents, brother, cousins or friends. Annoying because he is invisible, everyone seems lost in their own worlds. Ivan wants to scream but why, no one will hear him. Ivan wants to disappear. No one cares in his mind except Suzy, a little bit, and his sister-in-law. So Ivan starts to question himself. Where am I headed? What should I do? Drink some, a cold beer. Then some gambling. Escape again.

After thinking about it, Ivan makes a choice. Continue sobriety without drinking alcohol. Gamble. Stay away from meetings but keep reading about Program material and emotional topics like Boundaries and Love and Co-Dependency and Making Love to a Woman and Meditation. So much to learn about life and relationships. Ivan needs knowledge. Still very confused about life. Ivan feels angry. Not knowing he is in a depression. A college educated 30 year old lost. College never taught students about financial literacy or emotional intelligence. No wonder many people suffer. Not knowing about emotions or how to feel, that is Ivan's

biggest problem. That is the real source of the depression. Ivan continues his plan without consulting anyone or getting feedback.

Months go by, then a year. Ivan steps into a meeting to pick up his one year sobriety chip. He is proud of himself. Celebrates with a big juicy cheeseburger. Spends a night with Suzy. Feeling a little better but still edgy. Suzy suggests therapy.

Therapy

What????

That is a huge suggestion. Ivan thinks only rich people or crazy people seek therapy. Ivan is neither rich nor crazy. Suzy talks calmly. Suzy explains therapy is for anyone seeking guidance on emotional issues, big decisions, depression, anxiety, host of mental disorders, family issues and life questions. That sounds reasonable. Ivan thinks about the suggestion. Suzy then lowers the boom, "Ivan you control your therapy. You talk about what you want to talk about and you control how many times you see your therapist." Ivan loves that advice.

The following week, Ivan gets the names of two male therapists. Ivan feels comfortable talking to males. He sets up an appointment with one later in the week. The day before the appointment, Ivan gets a message that the therapist can't make it. Need to reschedule. Ivan gets furious. Again, someone not listening to him. Rejecting him. Ivan calls the second therapist, Dr. David, and this therapist tries to push Ivan onto his female partner. Ivan says no, that he needs to see a male therapist. Ivan starts thinking therapy is a waste. The doctors are crazy too. Luckily, the second male therapist hears Ivan and schedules a session.

Going into therapy, Ivan has his walls up. Immediately, Ivan is judging the guy. Sweater with glasses so he looks soft and frumpy. Ivan thinking, "Will this guy get me? I doubt it." Ivan sits down. Explains that he last drank 18 months ago and just stopped gambling. His first lie to his therapist that he hired to help him. So who is the crazy one?

Therapy begins with the life story. Who is Ivan? Parents, childhood, schools, brother, friends, neighborhood, culture and feelings. Immigrant parents from Bolivia, speaking Spanish at home, born and early childhood on the East Coast and then growing up in Houston, growing up Catholic and Catholic schools, academics/homework and playing various sports – football, basketball and track. Then comes the odd part. Dr. David asks Ivan what he is feeling. Ivan feels confused because he doesn't know. He doesn't know what he is feeling right now. It feels like a trick question. Dr. David asks again. Ivan mumbles anxiety. Ivan guesses. Dr. David asks what else is he feeling? Ivan thinks, Damn more questions, more feelings. Ivan is stuck. Dr. David goes on to explain that people have many feelings at the same time. That only five-year-olds have only one feeling at a time. Ivan was pushed academically, athletically and spiritually

but never emotionally. Ivan's family never talked about feelings. So Ivan is at a five or seven-year-old level emotionally. Hard to imagine a 31-year-old man at a child's level, emotionally. This explains many things and why many people are in the same predicament. Yet this is Ivan's reality and life.

Dr. David shows Ivan an emotional chart with 32 feelings. Wow, interesting to know that a person can feel something other than anger, sadness, excitement and satisfaction. This is how Ivan operated. Moments of happiness too. Dr. David goes on to explain that you can have many more feelings. 32 was a starting point. Enlightening for Ivan. He can grow from here. Starting from the basics, how do you feel? Just one at a time.

Dr. David is patient and encouraging. Dr. David asks, "Do you feel irritated, what else are you feeling?" Ivan says, "I feel anxious." Ivan goes slow, he is excited to identify two feelings at once. Progress.

Therapy progresses with the life story of Ivan and the teachings of everyday feelings. Ivan feels more in control because therapy has made inroads. Still gambling. The need to release to escape his feelings still exists. No more AA meetings for the present time. Self-help, psychological and life-skill books help understand the mind and body better. Still more intellectual than everyday practice. Ivan needs time. Ivan feels confused and scared. Right now getting information and evaluating his life. Keep learning. No life clarity yet or life purpose or what to do with his life. The key, Ivan feels a little bit better. Keeps moving ahead but also feeling a bit stuck.

He continues this schedule for another six months. Feeling tired. Ivan calls The Gamblers Anonymous hotline and gets the location of the six meetings in Houston. Damn, only six GA meetings in the whole city. There are thousands of AA meetings but those alcoholics don't understand gambling. They are gambling at the clubhouse. Feeling petrified, Ivan does not go to any GA meetings. Ivan still going to therapy. Stagnating in therapy but the ability to talk for those 45 minutes each week, as Ivan gambles everyday, is a life preserver. Ivan needs to talk about his feelings in therapy, but at the same time needs to gamble daily to remain numb to feel sane. Two steps forward and one step back. Sometimes it is one step forward and two steps back. Either way, not making much progress.

Now What??

Good Question.

Not another year of the same

Yup another year of small progress, slowly accepting reality, living in fear and going through the motions. He knows he is on the right track yet Ivan needs to gamble to feel alive. Self-sabotage at its best.

Ivan heard “How It Works” in AA – “Half measures availed us nothing.”
Also, “Are you willing to go to any length.”

Half measures feel safe. Ivan does not want to fail but is he willing to win. To succeed you have to commit but commitment feels scary, and Ivan is terrified.

The biggest step is accepting the whole reality. Ivan needs to confront his gambling and increase his emotional intelligence. If only he could stop on his own. He has tried numerous times. Going one day, three days even six days without a bet. Always returning to his addiction. His muse. His lifeline.

What now?

Go to GA! Go back to AA! Get honest in Therapy!

Hit the trifecta.

Let's start with one.

Gambling

Ivan decides to put another toe in the water. Go to a GA meeting and see if there is a difference compared to an AA meeting. Same as last year, GA has a meeting on Thursday night at a church. A Catholic church. The irony.

Ivan feels better equipped to attend his first GA meeting since he has been to 12 Step Meetings before. No pep talk or clearing the mind. Just go.

The meeting is at 7pm at St. Michael's Catholic Church. Five people in the room. That is it. Good with Ivan. Meeting starts and they read from the GA Combo Book. A 17 page pamphlet with good information. The part that jumps out at Ivan is the characteristics of a compulsive gambler – inability to accept reality, immaturity and emotional insecurity. It says a compulsive gambler only feels alive when “in action.” That statement hits the heart. So true. As a gambler Ivan only wants to be in action, it is not about the money. Ivan relaxes because this literature and these people know the insanity and the mindset of a compulsive gambler.

Because Ivan is a compulsive gambler he couldn't go into the meeting without gambling first. Ivan needed to be high first. Bet on the Sweet Sixteen, college basketball games, two games going as Ivan enters the meeting and one game for later after the meeting. Not knowing how his gambling will change after the meeting.

Ivan enjoys the meeting, the literature and the people in it. Ivan feels at home. More at home than at AA or in therapy. These people understand. Ivan no longer speaking a foreign language. Ivan commits to not gamble the next day and go to another GA meeting.

Ivan does that: Doesn't gamble and goes to a larger meeting with 20 members and some people who live with the disease/gambler, but are not compulsive gamblers themselves. Again, Ivan enjoys the meeting and the people. No meetings on the weekends. That sucks. One member calls Ivan on Saturday to check in on him. Ivan appreciates the kindness. Doesn't gamble on Saturday. Sunday feels lonely, so Ivan gambles only one game. To take the edge off.

The next week, Ivan attends four GA meetings and therapy. And gambles three days. Ivan will always self-sabotage. If it feels too good, something must change that. Ivan needs to feel down, depressed or anxious. That is his baseline.

Ivan never changes his gambling sobriety date in the meetings and continues to talk and share and go to therapy. No need to divulge the truth. No need to hear comments or feedback. Ivan tries to figure out the GA meetings and the Program. Meetings, Therapy and gambling – feeling more connected to people but not advancing in emotional intelligence.

After five weeks of this schedule, Ivan had a vacation planned from six months ago. The luck. Frequent flier miles. Have to use the free airline miles. See something new. Staying in Houston creates too many urges to gamble, to call the bookie when any emotion surfaces.

Some people leave their environment to eliminate the urges: go to a treatment center and change their geography.

Naw, vacation sounds better. Ivan needs to get out of the country. Really run away from business, gambling, emotions and life.

Portugal

Ivan goes to Portugal.

First stop is Lisbon. What a city and history. Ivan enjoys the oranges and the naval museum. Seeing how the Portuguese were the real risk takers on ships. Traveling to the West Coast of Africa, venturing out in the Atlantic to find the Azores islands and being naval pioneers. They pushed others countries to explore and claim land. That is how Europe eventually discovered America.

The theme – Go All In. Take a Risk.

After three days in Lisbon, Ivan heads north by bus to visit Fatima. Fatima is a mystical village, one hour north of Lisbon. Catholics believe The Virgin Mary appeared to two girls and one boy in 1917. The Virgin Mary talked about peace and the end of World War I. She was called the Angel of Peace.

Ivan disembarks from the bus and walks around the village. Small village. Lots of sellers of religious artifacts. Ivan finds a hotel. The hotel is basic in its amenities. Nothing special. A bed and hot water. That is all Ivan needs. He sets down his luggage and leaves the room to explore Fatima. Fatima has a nickname, The Altar of the World.

Ivan ventures to the place where the apparitions appeared. Near the location there is a paved path with the Stations of the Cross. Ivan begins to walk and stops by each Station, reading any information at the Station and saying a short prayer at each Station. Ivan visits each of the 14 Stations, walking slowly, thinking about his life/addictions/emotions. After about two hours, Ivan heads to the Basilica. The Basilica was built on the spot of an apparition. The Basilica looks large with an immense open cobblestone area. In this area is a long wall with an open door and a white path that begins outside the door and goes through the door and leads up to the steps of the Basilica. The inscription above the door states, "If you walk through this door, praying to God, God will assist and help you." So Ivan retreats and goes to the beginning of the path. He stands on cobblestone. Getting ready to walk, Ivan decides to start trusting the process. This is like an athletic competition, you warm up, you get your mind right and you visualize.

Ivan closes his eyes and says "Let's Go." Ivan begins walking on the white path while praying. Before he gets to the door, Ivan feels overwhelmed and starts crying. Walking, praying and crying. Ivan is outside the door. Praying harder, Ivan goes through the door, a certain weight is released and Ivan keeps walking until the end of the path. Ivan completes the process.

Standing outside the Basilica. He takes a deep breath and sees a covered open air church with an altar and chairs, a grotto with The Virgin Mary surrounded by candles with an area for kneeling and a small stand selling candles and other religious items. Ivan walks over to the stand and notices different sized candles. Ivan buys three candles, one large fat candle and two medium skinny candles. The fat one for Ivan and two skinny ones for his parents. His mom and dad needs prayers and help, true enough. Ivan needs massive amounts of prayer, help and support. The stand takes the money and places the candles by the grotto. Ivan goes to the area, kneels and prays. Still kneeling, Ivan stops praying and observes, the day is beautiful and sunny. There is spiritual power here. There is calm and peace. Something in the air.

Ivan feels different. It must be God or some special life force. This injection of power in his blood. His desire for honesty, trust and love. Finally feeling alive. No longer feeling alone. This is magic. Ivan decides that he will enjoy the rest of his trip and when he lands in Houston, he will attend AA, get honest and work therapy and change his date in GA as he continues those meetings too.

The food in Portugal fills the soul. Oranges, bread and the biggest prawns Ivan has ever seen and tasted. The last week has Ivan thinking about his life, his business, Suzy and his recovery. Looking at his history, relationships never became a love story because Ivan did relationships in half measures. Get into a relationship and constantly cheat and look around because Ivan assumed the woman will cheat or leave. Always be prepared. In business, work and gamble, do business in half measures. Business doesn't grow because Ivan is either gambling or not spending enough time growing the business and getting new clients or products. Friendships are done in half measures. No real intimate relationships: all the relationships are surface relationships because Ivan doesn't invest himself in the relationship to truly know one person.

Ivan's life has been an exercise in halfway in, halfway out. No wonder life has been a struggle. Reading the AA Big Book and looking at the naval explorers, the concept of all-in makes sense. Scary and terrifying but logically it is the only way to face life. Commit and see what happens. Succeed or fail. Ivan did it when he played football and basketball in high school. Since then, life has been playing it safe. Safe never wins, you survive and eek out an existence. Ivan is ready to live and live his best life.

Ivan returns to Houston. A new man. Energized.

New Recovery

Ivan begins by going to AA at 6:30am in the morning. Start the day fresh. Also GA is only at night so nights are for GA meetings. Ivan needs strong structure from AA meetings in the mornings to understand the 12 Step format and understand the Steps. Ivan meets an older gentleman named Tom and they connect. Tom looks like he has been through the wringer with an intellect that matches his street smarts. Ivan's kind of addict. Tall. He reads books and has been in a few fist fights. They swap stories and talk Program jargon. Tom becomes Ivan's first sponsor through the 12 Steps. Ivan also finally gets honest in therapy and in GA meetings with his new sobriety date. Ivan has new found strength. This three-pronged approach and lifestyle works with Ivan's energy and need to go all in and recover.

Recovery becomes his mantra. His reason for living. Do what it takes.

Tom takes Ivan's desire to change and tells him: Structure, Desire and Network can lead you into the land of contentment. Tom explains Contentment is the end goal. How to be content each and every day so you do what is needed for yourself and your family and that is why Tom wrote The 12 Steps Explained. The 12 Steps Explained take you through the original 12 Steps and the new 12 Steps. These new Steps guide you to have self-awareness, clarity on your purpose and a new belief system for your life.

Tom has been in the 12 Step rooms for more than 20 years and has been to therapy for seven years. Been married to his wife, Kelly, for 11 years. His knowledge of the Program, feelings, therapy, business and life leave Ivan relaxed and hungry for his knowledge and guidance. Tom explains, "I will help you to the promised land." Ivan's Best Life in an unorthodox way. We will use the original 12 Steps with the revamped 12 Steps from Tom. Tom rewrote the 12 Steps to better help addicts understand their purpose, life, addiction, recovery, emotional intelligence and therapy so each person doesn't waste time or money not getting the essence of recovery. Recovery takes on multiple forms and each layer builds the foundation to a new life. A living life. Addiction is a slow death. Recovery is alive and breathing. Recovery is 24 Hours at a time. Recovery allows someone to make plans with their future. The lifestyle of their choosing. Purpose, find your purpose.

Tom states that sobriety becomes uncomfortable if done correctly. Sobriety challenges you. Emotional healing hurts. Emotional healing exhausts each person as they write out their feelings and work The Steps. That is how healing begins. A person cries and then processes the feelings. Crying is healthy. Feeling all feelings heals a person. Finally, stop being emotionally stunted. Content people feel all their feelings.

Tom goes on that Structure provides the framework for this healing. Establish a full process to allow for maximum growth. A balanced weekly process allows a person to go to meetings, therapy, exercise, prayer, reading, meditation, fellowship, work, hobbies and family time. Every person needs some type of structure to succeed in life. Look at sporting teams, the military and Fortune 500 companies. Ivan played sports where discipline and order were placed in a schedule to lift weights and run to keep him in shape. Running the same plays in practice, the repetition, allowed the team to move in sync. Once this was established, a team was ready to be flexible because every game was different. The goal was to win the games. Same with sobriety. The goal is to recover, to win in life. If someone lacks discipline then the process and the repetition of meetings and working The Steps can instill discipline into that person. Working with others motivates people to stick with the process to heal themselves. A good process combined with desire gets the ball rolling. So, follow the process and the results will trickle in and then pour in. Processes and structures work for individuals, teams and corporations.

Tom puts these questions to Ivan:
What do you want? Where are you going?

Those are questions we all need to continuously ask ourselves so our purpose surfaces. We look in the mirror, become honest with ourselves and see what we want and how we need to improve ourselves to get it.

We are our greatest strength and our greatest weakness.
We are our hero and our biggest enemy.

We need to believe in ourselves, to see our true selves and what makes us content. It is hard because fear and doubt creep in; there are too many doubters in our lives – ourselves, family, friends, society. The thing called our identities are fragile. Tom will say for many of us, that is our baseline. We need to build up our identities. The science of human psychology has us less than our best because our minds and the people in our lives encourage negative beliefs. That “record in our heads” needs to change. It feeds us faulty information. The trick is to change our record. To see ourselves in a honest way which means see ourselves as all-powerful.

Tom gets excited. He loves recovery. He quotes Marianne Williamson: Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.

Yes, become our own light. Light inside us. Big and bright. Rushing blood in our arteries. Neither one can be diminished, only made stronger. Bright Light and Raging Blood. You become ready to explode and people can feel it. Tom goes on. The Steps build you up from the inside. Your desire. Desire for your life. The foundation. Your spiritual and emotional bases. This becomes the source of power and strength. Then you can do anything you want. People are attracted to your energy, your spirit and your love. The essence of being a strong human being. Clear on every emotional level, clear on your spiritual beliefs and clear on your purpose.

Human beings are social animals. We need people. The right people. People who listen to us, support us and build us up. People who push us to uncomfortable places so we can grow. We don't need toxic people who tear us down. People have a major influence on our minds. That is why we check our mindsets. Ivan notices when he has lived in faith and when he has lived in fear. People elevate us or bring us down.

Tom tells Ivan everyone in your life needs an audit. Especially family members. Family members will tell you, “I Love You,” and also be jealous, envious and talk behind your back. Be clear on their motives. Many people get stuck because their families pull them down. Ivan noticed that his immediate family members and best friends didn't support him going to a meeting. Ivan felt hurt and depressed. Ivan understands what Tom is telling him.

Right now, we have a blank canvas, Tom says. We will add people to the network. We have a blank canvas for beliefs, too. Recovery means starting from zero. People need to evaluate everything. The network is crucial. Who do we want as emotional guides, spiritual guides and life guides? We start there. Then we add the others. Step Work requires guidance and experience to navigate all the buttons that will be pushed. Ivan feels like Dr. David and Tom are the first two to enter the network plus Suzy. Ivan has Dr. David to explore therapy, Tom to explore The Steps and Suzy to explore one intimate relationship. Tom likes the plan. A good sponsor, a good therapist and one close intimate relationship will catapult Ivan's recovery.

Tom circles back to that structure, each person's desire and their network funnels each person to their success. No one can stop a person in which their mind is clear and focused. Your mindset dictates your actions. Tom becomes loud, talking about one's own mindset. The words we tell ourselves have life. The thoughts we visualize makes dreams real. The actions we take each hour lead us on the road of recovery. Tom wants Ivan to live his best life. These tools are the blueprint. Tom repeats contentment is the goal for every human.

So how do we become content? Become All Powerful? The journey takes time. Answers come – sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. Open your mind to change, to radical suggestions. Try different ways. Remember the big picture, the journey of the 12 Steps is to find ourselves.

Follow the formula – Get Desire + Follow a Structure + Build Your Network = Contentment

Tom talks about real freedom. Real freedom is no fear and complete honesty. Have faith in yourself and your talents. Tom has a philosophy on life:

Life is Love. Life is Pain.

So where do we start?

Tom unveils his 12 Steps Explained.

Step One We Believed a Lie

All you need to know is I want more, more
Looking for more
I want more, more
'Cause I want more

Lyrics from Kaleo "I Want More"

Tom sits Ivan down in a diner booth. Red vinyl seating. Empty except the two of them there. Eating cherry pie with coffee and water. Let the lessons begin.

Tom explains that we addicts have always believed our addiction would take us to a safe place, a fun place and our home, the perfect high. We couldn't be more wrong. We believed the lie of addiction. We believed a lie. Somehow we would be funny, rich, sexy, friendly and secure in ourselves. That we would feel better. Alive. Instead it was death. Addiction is slow suicide. Recovery is life. Recovery allows us to live life on life's terms.

Addiction plays tricks on our emotions and our beliefs. Somehow the addiction will make us feel better about ourselves. That the escape is necessary. Instead the addiction stunts our growth emotionally and we remain stuck unbeknownst to each of us. Tom asks Ivan if he truly believes in himself. Ivan says no. His self esteem is low. This low self esteem comes up being defensive and insecure. Remember when Ivan became defensive with Suzy when she mentioned something about his drinking and his family's drinking. Tom also asked Ivan how he felt when someone gave him some constructive feedback to help his recovery. Ivan gets furious and wants to tell the person to shove it and sometimes to punch the person in the face. This rage shows Ivan's emotional intelligence. This shows that addiction is an emotional disease.

Addiction acts like a total eclipse which occurs when the dark silhouette of the Moon totally obscures the incredibly bright light of the Sun. Addiction casts darkness over the bright Light of each individual. This darkness blocks our emotions, calm and serenity.

We all need emotional calmness. To remain composed in every situation. We look at movies and see the hero always doing and saying the right thing to save the day. Save the world. Tom lets Ivan know that as we explore the right questions and follow the process, even Ivan can recover and live an emotionally clear life. A life where Ivan can identify and process all feelings. To the amazement of others. Ivan perfected the adult tantrum, so being calm and collective in every situation would be a miracle. Ivan feels excited.

Tom says, "Let's look at the original first Step according to Bill Wilson, the founder of AA."

Step One - We admitted we are powerless over (our addiction) and that our lives had become unmanageable.

Tom says when we are in our addiction, we are powerless over our emotions. We become slaves to our emotions. The goal of recovery would be to be all powerful over our emotions. Tom goes on, many addicts fail because they get stuck on the word powerless saying I am not weak and saying I am not powerless over alcohol or gambling. Never asking for clarification. This again is how addicts believe a lie. They think they know better. Step One talks about power. The incredible power in each person that walks into their first meeting. The power to take control over their unmanageable insane life.

Tom remembers his biggest problem was never being in the moment. No power in his life. Never living life as it came. If he was working, Tom's mind wandered to which games he would gamble on. When he was gambling later that night, Tom would wander and think about sex. When he was having sex, again Tom's mind would wander to money won or lost and how he would protect his winnings or come up with the money for the losses. Not work, not gambling, not sex would ever keep Tom in the moment. His mind raced and raced like an Indy 500 driver. His mind would be at 200 mph and his body would remain at the activity. This was not living. Life is about enjoying each moment. Life should feel exciting. It could be working, eating, being with people, sex, sleep or doing errands. Each person enjoying each moment, each hour and each day. Being alive.

We circle back to a content life. A content life enjoys each moment. Contentment believes in living your life each second. Also knowing each feeling and becoming present. Be present in your life.

As we enter our first meeting, Tom talks about the courage and the bravery. You do need bravery to go to your first meeting. Bravery is showing up. Nothing more unknown than that first meeting because the unexpected is always near. Recovery is living in the unexpected. Recovery feels terrifying. Good or bad. Waiting to challenge us. We begin anew. That is life.

Tom asks, "Why do most people enter their first meeting?" "Why work Step One?" Tom quotes Frederick Nietzsche:

To live is to suffer. To survive is to find some meaning in the suffering.

Addicts know about suffering. They suffer every day. They usually let you know how life and people have screwed them over. Addicts love to whine. When they finally want to start

working the Steps, the motivation comes from the pain and the suffering. To answer the why they became addicted? Addicts focus on the addiction and not the emotional disease. You can't get recovery when the disease is all you think about. Every addict has a drinking story, a gambling story, a getting high story and a sex story to prove how much fun they were having and that this Program and Steps are lifeless and boring. Tom challenges every addict, if life was awesome, why are you here? If you had emotional control over your life then you wouldn't need a 12 Step program. The Steps make meaning of the suffering. The Steps allow the person to feel and heal. This helps finding your purpose. So you live your best life.

The people who recover are motivated by the combination of ending their pain and creating a new life. How does this happen? "Work The Steps" is what you hear. Tom confirms that The Steps are divine. Even divinity comes with hard work. Faith without works is dead. It is in the Bible and the AA Big Book. Nothing is accomplished without work. Nothing great is accomplished without hard work. The hardest work is emotional work. Buckle up, the ride gets bumpy. Much turbulence. How does everyone handle these emotions if they are emotionally insecure. Tom adds, his experience shows that three components are vital before you work The Steps and those are Desire, Routine and Network. The formula works. Tom believes in repetition because addicts and people with mental health issues forget. We talked about this formula already. The formula needs repeating and repeating again. Each person constantly checks his or her desire each day, always examines their routine/process and evaluates all the supportive people in their network/support team. Tom will explain each item more and their importance before he divulges how The Steps can do their magic.

Desire

A key component for this ride is desire. Recovery moves faster with desire. Tom asks Ivan, what do you want? Ivan says recovery. Ivan reconfirms his desire from Portugal. Ivan wants whatever comes at him. Desire becomes unstoppable especially with a sponsor and therapist to guide and push the person. Tom states emphatically that you cannot recover on your own. We have all tried. We have all failed. Build your network. A teacher, sponsor and therapist become essential in this journey. At some point you will hate your teacher, sponsor and therapist and that means you are on the right track. That means they are pushing your emotional buttons. Your triggers.

Add others to your network like a physical trainer, nutritionist, yoga instructor, massage therapist, spiritual guide – basically anyone who adds to your overall health. We all need help in all areas – emotional, spiritual, mental, physical, financial, and social parts of your being. This Life School requires books, movies and podcasts too, to lift the mindset. Mold the mindset. To input healthier information. This mindset, this positive mindset requires work. Desire for the better life. You need desire for this makeover. Desire begins in the brain and then flows into the body. Tom goes on, that experience shows, you can't recover without desire.

The Third Tradition of AA speaks only about desire. It says that the only requirement for membership is the desire to stop drinking: all you need is desire. Tom asks Ivan if he understands the difference between The Steps and The Traditions. Ivan shakes his head. Tom quotes meeting jargon, "Steps are designed so we can live with ourselves and Traditions are designed so we can live with each other. The Steps are individualistic and The Traditions are group oriented. Both are designed so we re-enter life with ourselves and with others." Desire can make miracles happen. Miracles happen when you combine this desire with hard work.

People enter the 12 Step rooms with problems. Many problems. Tom lays the foundation to grasp the disease and cure which leads to recovery and this better life. To get Step One, we need to understand the lie, the power within us, the bravery to go to the first meeting, the necessity of teachers/sponsors/therapists, our emotions, the necessary hard work, the key of desire, the process/routine and your support network. Tom explains The Steps build on each other. That is why the beginning becomes most critical. Understand the program. Understand the journey. But the understanding will be incomplete at first.

Putting Desire Into Action

Most people feel overwhelmed. Take some deep breaths.

People will always ask HOW. Thank you, the perfect word for recovery:

H – Honesty

O – Open mindedness

W – Willingness

In Step One, Tom felt miserable and could easily see the unmanageability. Then someone shouted HOW, Honesty, Open Mindedness and Willingness. These three principles started to change him.

Tom had been lying for a long time, so Honesty was hard. Complete honesty became easier once he began doing it. Tom freaked out everyone. Everyone knew he was a liar. That he told stories that made zero sense. Only in his addicted mind. Tom started spewing the truth and he was amazed that getting through the day became easier, with less tension. No need to remember the dumb stories. Tom started to feel free.

Tom also incorporated Open Mindedness which began this complete honesty thing. Be open to any suggestion. The suggestions felt awkward and Tom needed to push through and not listen to his own brain. His own brain got him into these addictions and rooms so maybe Tom needed to be open minded about the new and different suggestions. It was hard to be truly open minded and to give things a chance. Tom got stubborn. This is where people pushed Tom into better thinking because he was willing to be open. Not judgmental with the suggestions.

Willingness works in conjunction with honesty and open mindedness. One part of HOW is needed with the other to get through The Steps and live the program. The first reflex from the addict is no. Rebel. Willingness got Tom into new and better situations and around people which aided his growth. Addiction made him lazy about everything but his addictions. Recovery did the opposite. Tom started to be willing to do anything for recovery. Tom heard, "send the body and the mind will follow." This advice was simple.

After explaining the word HOW, Tom knows that he has to continue to work on Ivan's mindset. Tom knows the addict in Ivan sees his problems and not the process or the solution. That is why addicts fail to grasp The Steps. The Rooms say, "Work the Steps." That is what Ivan hears repeatedly. Unfortunately without the correct mindset and processes in place, most addicts either don't recover until much later in life or go back to the addictions. Desire and Discipline work in tandem when a person has that shift in mindset. It is so easy to relapse and go back to the old way of life. That life is known. Even though it is slow suicide. The addict would rather live that way and justify to themselves that they are not living that poorly. They lie to themselves. Again we must break this lie.

Overcoming the Subconscious

Back to the mindset, the subconscious. Tom states that many of us have bad records spinning in our brains; telling us negative information about ourselves from our families, friends, society and the world. No wonder many us seek approval in the wrong ways or with the wrong people. The world is not taught emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence needs to be taught in schools like math and English. Without emotional intelligence and financial literacy people end up living more depressing lives. Tom goes on that the mind can be a powerful weapon in the betterment of ourselves or facilitate our destruction. People would rather stay in the known and average than get uncomfortable and grow and live more fulfilled. People avoid pain instead of reach for pleasure. Break this cycle, the sanctuary of misery. We all deserve growth, fulfillment and pleasure.

Tom says "Work The Steps" feels disingenuous. Because when Ivan first heard these words, he said to himself, "I have so many problems, how do these steps help me. I don't think they can. I have an addiction problem. I have money problems. I have relationship problems. I have family issues. I have stress. I have employment stress. God is really not working in my life. So I want better advice."

Tom laughs.

Tom lowers his voice, "I am giving you better advice. You cannot comprehend the process and roadmap. That is okay." Tom assures Ivan that he is leading him on the correct path. Tom sternly says, "Fellowship." Ivan hears these words and asks, "How will all these words and

ideas help me?” Tom repeats an open mind will allow the body and brain to heal. These are spiritual medicines to cure your insecurity, emotional immaturity, anxiety, low self-esteem, and smallish goals. Step One needs a mindset, a process and a support network. That is the breakthrough.

So again how do these wonderful steps fix my problems. Ivan doesn’t see the connection. Tom needs to break some faulty misconceptions around addiction. It is wise to understand that addiction is not about will power, but rather about emotions, feelings. So few of us get emotional teachings at home. Most homes tell their kids to do well in school. Well, schools don’t teach students about emotions and mental health or finances. Is it any wonder why so many people have problems with emotions, sex and money? Most everyone has a desire to feel content and happy, have great sex and make tons of money. Yet few of us is getting the guidance we need for life. “Figure it out,” that is the message. Then we wonder why so many struggle. Unfortunately, parents got emotional training from their parents who got emotional training from their parents. It is like the blind teaching the blind. No wonder many people struggle with emotions. It is hard to learn about emotions when we don’t know where to start or who can give good information to us. Addicts love to talk in the meetings about how they escaped their feelings by doing their addiction.

We learn through pain. Emotional pain is the teacher we listen to.

Rock Bottom

Tom goes on and utters, “rock bottom.” Let’s define rock bottom. You don’t have get a divorce or breakup, lose a job, house foreclosed, car repossessed, stealing money from family to hit rock bottom. Unfortunately, many people lose something or someone. Their actions led to these outcomes. Rock bottom is a feeling. Ivan says he felt totally miserable. Tom assures him that is a normal feeling. Pain coming from ourselves or from others drives us to that first meeting. It takes courage to address the pain whether we enter the room “voluntarily” or someone pushes us into that meeting. Tom says first timers need to be told that everyone feels different feelings, and what those feelings may be. Many feelings arise and people feel the hurt, fear and misery. First timers should also be told of their courage, taking that unfamiliar step. Even now Ivan remembers only feeling miserable. That was it. Ivan, like others, is emotionally stunted and he and they do not even know exactly what they felt. An experienced old timer can guide and suggest feelings so the first timer can feel welcomed and their feelings acknowledged. A safe and encouraging place will allow someone to go to those deep painful emotional places that are needed so that person can heal. More urgently, that the person feels safe to return for that even harder second meeting.

Sadly, many people claim and rationalize that their addiction is manageable. That they still have their relationship, their career and their house. They only got really drunk these two times. They only lost big on one weekend. They only blacked out once. Etc, etc, etc.

Tom reminds Ivan that it is human nature to gloss over the negative events and inflate the good times. Or how well each person is doing in their financials, marriage, businesses without ever pausing to listen to others evaluation of them. Who wants a 360 degree evaluation from spouse, parents, kids, boss and friends? These people might not know the extent of the addiction but they notice behaviors and lies. Just look in the mirror and ask what type of life do you want instead of trying to convince a stranger of your mediocre life. Yes it could be 100X better. Tom speaks from experience. Tom tells Ivan that he had to look in the mirror and be completely honest. That Tom wanted more from life. Tom wanted abundance, not just survival. Tom realized he could have it all if he worked on himself in all areas: Read all the 12 Step literature, dive deep into therapy, do the Steps thoroughly, workout intensely, eat correctly, learn to pray, go back to school and develop intimate relationships. Life equals relationships. In the end, the only thing that counts is the number of intimate relationships in your life. Where you are open and vulnerable and tell a number of people your biggest dreams. Studies show people with at least four or five intimate friends live longer and happier. The success in life is a reflection of how well you know people and know yourself. Relationships are what you hear in obituaries. Relationships with their family, friends and faith. Tom understands the secret in life starts and ends with relationships. First his relationship with himself. Then relationships with God and others. Tom wants Ivan excited about all the possibilities.

Routine And Discipline

Tom tells Ivan, "Before we talk about networks, I need to understand your routines and processes. What are they?" Ivan lists out, "I go to meetings, work, gym, Suzy, our work together and reading."

Tom tells Ivan that he started in a similar way until he realized the routine/process needed to be strengthened.

Tom joyfully tells Ivan, "I start off on my knees in prayers of gratitude, then I read for 20 minutes so my mind wakes up. Then I stretch my body because flexibility is key. I feed the cats and eat fruit for breakfast with several glasses of water. Shower. Communicate with my wife Kelly. Go to work. This is my daily routine." Ivan tells Tom, "I need more structure and discipline." Tom agrees. Tom continues, "I workout four times a week, go to at least one 12 Step meeting, check with family and friends by phone calls or text, look at Goal List and work on several goals every day/week and review weekly business activities. A strong process allows a person to do what they need to do and deal with the unexpected that always appears."

Every successful business organization has a process to generate revenue and deliverables. The same mindset is needed in people, especially people in early recovery or people feeling lost in their lives. A process gets a person moving in the right direction before they feel it or know it. A process includes a work/school schedule, a 12 Step schedule, exercise, prayer/meditation, family/friend time, time for hobbies, nutrition list, working towards goals and alone time. A good process highlights which people you need in your network.

Tom assures Ivan, "We will continually strengthen your process as we go through The 12 Steps Explained. A process like a life and a program is constantly evolving." Tom laughs. "Always something to learn in recovery. Recovery keeps us alert."

Network

How to be a friend? The best of friends listen and support. Ask questions. Cheer each other on and push each other to get more out of life. Every relationship will have ups and downs yet the strong relationships survive and thrive as each person battles life, jobs and romantic interludes. The biggest factor in a strong relationship depends on both parties to communicate and bond with each other.

Ivan seems to think Tom is going off on tangents. Talking about everything but the addictions and the Program. Tom lets Ivan know that he has seen too many people leave the program, stop therapy and stop working The Steps.

Why does this happen?

People get scared of the unknown, people get complacent with the idea that good is good enough, and emotional issues shut people down. Few have the drive to complete the whole process. Many start the program, no different than the many who start New Years resolutions only to have 75% of resolutions stop before 75 days have lapsed. In the end the formula works for recovery and New Years resolutions. Both need desire, a process/system and a network.

Tom clearly says, "Imagine, Living Your Best Life."

Tom says, "Everyone deserves the best life, unfortunately most don't live it." Everyone has reasons and explanations. Many are valid. We all need to push through these obstacles and live the life we imagine. The life we deserve.

The foundation defines the stability of the structure in architecture, the foundation dictates the strength of your program. Tom explains that everyone will have bad days in recovery especially in the first two years. Everyone has urges, many have dreams and that is why the phone and the meetings play a significant role in the success of each addict. We need to lean

on others before we let our old mindset take over, that somehow a drink/drug/sex/food/gamble will soothe us.

Tom tells Ivan the story of Temple Grandin and her self soothing hugging machine. She built a hug machine saying, "Pressure is calming to the nervous system." Temple Grandin is an American scientist and a person with autism. She explains that kids and adults with autism use hug machines and weighted blankets to provide safe, self-soothing pressure. Tom goes on that people in early recovery need self-soothing activities to regulate their emotional states and to eliminate any relapse. People relapse with 40 days, 5 months and 11 years of sobriety when they don't know how or they forget to self soothe. Whether we are babies, children or adults – our emotions will get out of control at some point and that is normal. We are human and we have feelings everyday. In those days where everything seems to push our buttons, remember to self soothe so we can regulate our nervous system. Babies will wake up and cry, self soothe and go back to sleep. Children and adults need suggestions on how to self soothe themselves.

Tom lists his favorite ones:

- Squeezing a Stress Ball
- Listening to Music
- Taking a Bath
- Shooting Hoops
- Bench Press
- Punching a Heavy Boxing Bag
- Going for a Walk
- Getting a Facial
- Talking About Feelings
- Writing About Feelings
- Praying on His Knees
- Drinking a Smoothie

Each person should make a list of things that help them become calm. The list could be endless. Each person needs to think about what feels calming to them. Any phase of life will have stressful days and everyone needs to know what is a healthy release and what is an unhealthy release of emotions. Life gets hard. Deal with it. Now deal with your emotions. Tom wants Ivan to be prepared for everything: The great days, the good days and the horrible days. Tom's goal is to get Ivan through The Steps and to understand how to live his best life.

Once Ivan understands how emotional diseases are attacked, Ivan gets the extra preparation that Tom lays out. The goal in Step One is to understand our emotions and the emotional disease of addiction. How emotions play a part in our lives. How self-regulation of emotions leads to this wonderful life. Letting emotions pass through our bodies without attachment. To understand ourselves better. To process emotions and release emotions from our bodies. That

way no emotion triggers us or controls us. Tom emphatically states that everyone should be okay with crying, getting depressed and having anxiety. These feelings can be felt and then processed so each person feels free and healthy while expressing these feelings. There is no such thing as a bad feeling or someone saying that you shouldn't feel sad, angry, depressed, anxious or stressed. Feel everything including joy, excitement, happiness, pride and contentment. Tom goes on that society puts labels on everything which damages our everyday living.

Again the formula is necessary to develop the framework for each newcomer to get the program and get The Steps. To finish understanding Step One, Tom wants Ivan to accept that addiction is a lie and that coming to the meetings is a powerful step to regain his life. That the unmanageability and insanity of the addict life has now flipped 180 degrees so the addict's life has purpose and meaning.

Ivan feels the power of The 12 Steps. Also the power of The Fellowship. That one person can guide another person to their freedom. The fellowship is similar to the African proverb, Each One Teach One where one slave was responsible to teach the next slave how to read and write. With addiction we break the slavery of each addict by helping each shed the shackles and begin the process of healing and feeling. Ivan wants his desired life.

Tom encourages Ivan to use his desire to change his life. Telling Ivan, "We don't have a say in how our book begins but we do have a say in how our book ends. You can always restart your life today with The Steps. Today is the beginning of the new you."

Tom finishes by repeating his phrase,

Imagine, Living Your Best Life!