

Recovery vs Sobriety vs Abstinence

There is a chasm between the three, recovery and sobriety and abstinence. Many don't see the difference or understand what is missing from their lives that is why so many interchange the words. Each word is a different stage in the road to this New Freedom. Freedom is the goal. Freedom from our past, emotional freedom and freedom to live our best life. We need all three types of freedom to be truly free and live a joyful life.

People in addiction and the family that lives with an addict just wants some normalcy. Addiction creates chaos with the feelings of extreme frustration, anger and hurt for everyone. To many, abstinence, sobriety and recovery are all welcomed in the beginning. Just stop the chaos.

Words are powerful and what you tell yourself and the world will affect your self esteem and the way you approach life. It becomes tenfold with an addict. This is my experience. It has been 25 years since I drank any alcohol and 22 years since I placed any gambling bet. I have lived the stages – addiction, abstinence, sobriety, recovery and freedom. The ultimate goal is freedom and peace.

Abstinence

So the journey begins at the first meeting, a person just trying to absorb some information. What do I need? Am I this bad? That first day is abstinence. A person who has just stopped using their addiction for one day and that one day can turn into two days even a week. This is abstinence. A person that stops doing an addiction and does zero inner work is just abstinent from an addiction. Your brain is in a fog. The body is detoxing. The body is also rebelling and wanting a fix. The urges can be overwhelming. That is why people relapse. They go back to the known, safe unhealthy way of life in the addiction instead of fighting for the unknown, unsafe world of recovery. This becomes the enormous struggle. Most people live in fear instead of faith. There is a reason the 30 day chip is red, hard earned blood and sweat to not use those 30 days. Hard earned 30 days. This accomplishment needs to be celebrated. Go for a walk or eat an ice cream cone. We should always congratulate ourselves to boost our self esteem. People stay in this phase for a month or longer. The quicker that a person can get out of the abstinence phase, the higher the outcome for long term healing. Congratulations but we need to move on. We need sobriety.

Sobriety

The inner work begins with sobriety. Sobriety is an important stage because it gets the body to change and heal. Addiction has effected us in many ways – mentally, physically, spiritually, financially and emotionally. We addicts need changing in all these areas. Addiction starts killing us at all levels. Yes, we can still function during our addictions but not at a high level or our best level. Life needs to be enjoyed not survived. Sobriety plays the key role in getting us to the next level. It takes awhile for the body to accept everything that needs changing. We

take two steps forward and one step backward. Our bodies fight against themselves. Our addictive minds like to self sabotage. We press on and start healing. As long as we remain sober, we are making progress. Slowly yet moving forward. We begin to start purging our bodies of the emotional and chemical toxins. That is why Step One through Step Nine becomes vital. The work to accept a new life, a healthy understanding with our Higher Power, revealing those secrets, building up our character and finally asking for forgiveness for our behavior. What a relief to work these first Nine Steps. We can feel the difference. Sobriety also has people going to meetings, reading literature, getting a sponsor, understanding and working The Steps, service work and talking about recovery. This phase includes good growth, getting through that initial reluctance and moving forward to recovery. Our body is healing yet still diseased and not recovered yet.

People in sobriety still have alcoholic, drug filled and gambling dreams where the addiction dream feels pleasurable. Our brains and our subconscious still need more healing. Constantly talking about addiction stories instead of How The Steps Work in Your Life stories speaks to the disease of addiction. People in this stage need more emotional healing and emotional intelligence. Therapy becomes vital at this stage. To push people into this next dimension. Too many people in Twelve Steps Rooms love to talk about their addiction. To me, that is not emotional growth. They get more joy talking about their past than all the wonderful feelings that a body feels in sobriety. We heal in many ways and we need to be looking at all our behaviors – the food we eat, exercising, mediating and our breathing. Are we transferring our addictions? Be clear about other addictions and outlets for our emotions like smoking cigarettes, smoking weed, gambling, porn and food. It is perfectly acceptable to use an outlet to get a person through the first month or first year. I used gambling and sugar to help with any urges and to relax so I could stop drinking during that first year. When I stopped gambling, I was not drinking so I used sugar to calm myself. We still keep our sobriety dates even though we needed emotional releases. I know many alcoholics who used cigarettes during the first few years. We are still in sobriety at this stage. We all heal in different ways. That is the beauty of recovery. Still in sobriety stage we finish working Steps Ten, Eleven and Twelve. We have that spiritual awakening. We feel The Promises. This proves our growth and our healing. Yes we need to keep going. Too many people stop along their journey. I wish them the strength to push through and to get that extra motivation to finish The Steps. Once done we can look back and be proud of ourselves. Life continues so we must move on.

Recovery

The next stage is moving from sobriety to recovery. The important piece of recovery is removing this badge of honor in constantly talking about our addictions in order to elevate ourselves and to stop bragging in meetings. We must mainly focus on The Steps, feelings and our overall health. We will bring up the past only to make a point or to help a newcomer. I hear in meetings, people will say so and so went back out after 5 years, 12 years, even 30 years

of sobriety. My point is these people still want to talk about the disease instead of the solution. The solution is harder. We have to practice talking in emotional terms. We can all do it.

Recovery is a beautiful state of mind and being. Recovery means we are finally able to address our overall health. We first need to understand our emotional state. If we still get triggered by words, romantic lovers, family and past traumas, we need to come to terms with all these things, events and people. Nothing should trigger you where you are ready to fight someone or get defensive. If our intensity levels shoot through the roof then we are still emotionally insecure. Insecurities in people are normal, yet too few are willing to admit them. We just need to identify our insecurities so we can then process them and come to terms with our insecurities and grow. Unfortunately society has played tricks on our minds, thinking we have to always be strong and knowing. We don't. We need to become vulnerable so we can find peace and serenity. We rework The Steps and we go deep in therapy so we can recover. We addicts need both. We need The Steps to feel a part of something and the Fellowship helps us to feel connected to others. The Fellowship creates family that we need and crave. The Steps provide self discovery. We need therapy to feel whole, to remove any void inside us. Therapy gets us to feel whole on the inside so we can feel family within The Fellowship and in our own families.

Recovery heals our minds, bodies and soul. Recovery in our minds means clarity of mind where we can think about our lives and interests. Be present and focused. Recovery in our bodies means that we are not putting chemicals and toxins into our bodies, so we have a clean inside. Alcohol, cigarettes, processed foods and sugar which damage our organs and well being, need to be avoided if we want a recovered inside free of mucus, bloating, inflammation, etc. These substances also affect our mental states and emotional states. We want our bodies in peak physical form. Finally, not removing emotional toxins will keep our bodies stunted from peace and serenity. We need to remove these emotional toxins to recover our soul. We become closer to our Higher Power and this calms our soul. There are many steps to total recovery. It takes time.

Freedom

The final stage is freedom. As we incorporate all of these recovery items, we move from recovery to freedom. The true freedom that is talked about in the literature, Bill Wilson wrote in The Big Book in the preface, "High Road to a New Freedom." To me we always need to keep working to get to contentment. Contentment is freedom, contentment keeps the body in a constant joyful emotionally available state. The Dalai Lama exudes this contentment and peace. Each day is a gift and we live each day in peace with ourselves. We know exactly who we are and what we want our life to be each day. Then we have achieved freedom.