

## JUST FOR TODAY.....

I know, I know. “Just for today” is the mantra for a number of organizations loosely or even tightly connected to the addiction issue, but I don’t buy it. The theory is that if one can just get through today without using a substance, a worthy accomplishment will have been achieved. Do it again tomorrow, and likewise another worthy achievement will have been attained. Repeat this for the rest of your life and you will achieve a successful recovery. Well, that may be true if your definition of “recovery” is simply staying free of chemicals. I believe that a focus that goes no further than to the end of the current day and which defines recovery as abstinence, is flawed, invites “relapse,” and cannot contribute to a genuine recovery.

As many of us have come to learn, true “recovery” is hallmarked by a 180-degree reversal of the addict’s mind-set. What are the typical attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics demonstrated by most addicts? Among others, I have observed the following:

- Loathing of self and disrespect for others
- Laziness, lack of ambition
- Irresponsibility
- Dangerous risk-taking/thrill seeking
- Selfishness
- Turpitude (vile language/promiscuous behavior)
- Dishonesty, characterized by lying, stealing, cheating, etc.; lack of conscience
- Living in the present with no awareness or concern about the past or future

I believe that for genuine recovery to take place, the mindset which led to these traits and behaviors has to change. To me, living “day to day” would logically seem more likely to **perpetuate** the addictive mindset than to **change** it. Let’s look at these eight commonalities of addicts and think about what it would take for the addict to change them.

### LOATHING OF SELF AND DISRESPECT FOR OTHERS

The single biggest contributor to high self-esteem is **accomplishment**. I suppose one could make the case that staying clean “just for today” is an accomplishment; but is it really? Staying clean simply brings the addict up to expected civilized behavior and is indistinguishable from any other person’s choice to not use chemicals. What the addict needs to acquire positive self-esteem is accomplishment of life challenges that are not associated with his or her addiction. Examples would be scholastic achievement, obtaining, holding and being promoted in a job, or “giving back” to a support group or rehabilitation center. These are the types of successes that contribute to reversal of self-loathing and lead to respect for others in society....and they can’t happen in a “just for today” thought process. This type of success requires one to set short term objectives, long term goals, and create plans for achieving them **way past today**.

## LAZINESS, LACK OF AMBITION

Unless the addict is independently wealthy, or content to live on the meager handouts provided by public welfare, the family's ending of enabling can profoundly contribute to solving this problem. Most people, including addicts, don't want to live a life under a bridge, in jail, or in a homeless shelter. If the addict isn't being enabled, ambition will enter the picture pretty much on its own, especially if there has been a conscious decision to recover. Once ambition to survive and thrive enters the picture, the time frame for making it happen must go beyond today by sheer necessity. "Just for today" won't work in the development of this or any other positive lifestyle habit that is needed for long-term success, whether it is the process of recovery, vocation, relationships or any other worthwhile endeavor.

## IRRESPONSIBILITY

This very term implies that no thought is being given to the future, either short term or long term. How can we ask our addict to become responsible and also promote a credo that encourages living one day at a time? People simply cannot become responsible in all aspects of their lives living one day at a time. Obviously, we do have to think about our daily responsibilities; but what about next week? Next month? Later this year? The little things count when we become responsible...boring things like when are the bills due? When does the car need to be inspected? How much money will I need this month? Next month? The month after that? What provisions am I making now for my needs in the **future**? This is what responsibility is all about and it requires a longer term focus!

## DANGEROUS RISK-TAKING/THRILL SEEKING

Do we want to encourage our addict to change this behavior? I suspect that we all do! But how can we make the argument that dangerous risk-taking and dangerous thrill-seeking are bad, if we also encourage our addict to live his life "just for today?" I mean, what the heck, if I only care about today, I will probably want it to be packed with as much adventure as possible, since tomorrow (whatever that is) may or may not ever come! Sheesh! What a conflict! It has to be clear to anyone that risky behavior would be far less appealing if conscious thought were given to the **future**.

## SELFISHNESS

In my mind, one of the most selfish attitudes in life would be "just for today." The credo might as well be "just for **me**, just for today." No regard for tomorrow, no plans to contribute to the good of the family or community, no future... regardless of the impact on the addict or those who love him or her. Let's face it...successful recovery will most likely need the support and involvement of others. If everyone took the position that it's "just for me, just for today," there would be no resources to move the recovery process forward. Thinking beyond today and to the **future** has to be a requirement for ending selfishness.

### TURPITUDE (BASENESS, VILENESS)

If our addict is only thinking about today, there would be no reason to change this disgusting behavior. If he or she is not thinking about the effect and **future** consequences that turpitude will have on potential employers, teachers, family, community, and society in general as he or she begins the process of recovery, success will definitely be elusive, if not impossible. Turpitude is an aberration in society. Recovery is a return to normal. Concern for the **future** must play a role in ending vile behavior and advancing recovery.

### DISHONESTY; LACK OF CONSCIENCE

Here again, concern for **future** consequences needs to be a part of the rehabilitation of a dishonest nature. Beyond that, though, a spiritual re-birth can be extraordinarily beneficial in helping the addict discern between right and wrong. Finding peace with God and acceptance of His teachings adds depth to the recovery process and provides a solid foundation for living a drug-free and productive life. Needless to say, when the planning for **eternity** becomes part of the process, “just for today” thinking will be woefully inadequate!

### LIVING IN THE PRESENT

This is what the addict did all during his or her active addiction! Why would we encourage more of the same during recovery by reinforcing the concept of “just for today?” Planning for the **future**, achieving short term objectives, and realizing long term goals may be the most important change of all in moving the recovery process forward, as it can precipitate change in all of the destructive behaviors we have identified and many that we haven’t identified.

Today is yesterday’s tomorrow and tomorrow’s yesterday. Yesterday, today and tomorrow are all equally important in forging a true recovery. Memories of the past (yesterday) give the addict an **incentive** to change; the present (today) provides the **opportunity** to change; and a well planned future (tomorrow) **holds the benefits of those changes**. So, let’s encourage our recovering addict to take advantage of **all** aspects of the time spectrum including the **future**!

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