

What is Recovery?

By Jim Rachels



What is recovery? What does it mean to you? What does it mean to others? Is it abstinence? Is it a medication-assisted treatment? How do we define recovery? Also, how do we handle our recovery?

Recovery can mean so many different things to so many people. Some people say abstinence is their definition of recovery. Just making sure they stay one hundred percent clean. So people will go as far as saying that even if you're taking medication from a doctor that you are not sober. I personally do not believe that. But more about that later.

So what does recovery mean to me? For me it can mean a mixture of a few different things. To me recovery is somewhat a state of mind. What I mean by that is you have to amp yourself up daily and really keep your head on straight. It is a daily battle and you can never let up. Recovery is about so much more than just that. It can also mean doing things like starting to eat healthily and getting the right amount of sleep. Taking the proper medications if need be and prescribed and monitored by a doctor.

My recovery is still in the process. Then again recovery is a lifelong journey. My recovery meant first a change of environment. I can home to my apartment and it was like returning to the scene of the crime. I couldn't afford to move either. So I redid my entire apartment. I literally made it like I was furnishing a new apartment and replaced everything. Everything from my couches, my bath towels and a new dining room table. I did what I could to make this apartment completely changed from the old one. I did it and it felt great. Like a new apartment with new memories to form. No old bad memories anymore. They say in recovery you need to look out for people, places and things and I stuck to that. I made sure I don't talk to anyone that could get and would sell me drugs. I've told friends who used to sell me drugs about my issue and asked them even if I begged not to ever sell me anything again. My good friend totally agreed and has been a great support. Things that also need changing can range from your routine to hobbies that you should take up to fill the time from when you used to use.

Is recovery abstinence and abstinence only? This seems to be a heavily debated topic. For now I'm going to state my personal opinion. I think that everyone that has an addiction problem should make getting sober one of their main goals in life. I understand the idea of harm reduction and I'm for certain aspects of it and against others. But no one is ever going to show me an instance where it is better for an addict to be using versus not using. Not using wins every time. If that changes one day then I will also have to change my opinion since I base it off of facts. So if the facts change my opinion changes. If you can't quit I get it. Then at least use safely.

Recovery can also mean emotional healing. Many of us have been through quite a bit of emotional turmoil in our lives during our active addiction. Many of us have fought with almost everyone in our entire family and our friends about our addiction and how everyone wanted us to stop. A lot of us have a lot of amends to make. This is an important part of the Addicts Anonymous Ten Steps. We have a different set of steps than AA or NA but making amends was borrowed from AA and put into our steps. I think if you are to truly recover you must clear your conscience and get all the skeletons out of your closet.

So how do we heal emotionally? I think there are many different tools to try out. I very much believe in self-reflection and meditation. Whenever I am having a real tough issue and I need to collect myself I sit down and meditate. Even if it's only for five minutes it can help immensely. At least for me it does. For some it might be prayer that helps them out. If that's the case do it and do it with all your heart just like everything else you do in recovery. Everybody is different and it's great to have different options out there. Also having someone to speak to such as a therapist, good friend or family is good to have. It is always good to have different types of support systems in place. These things can all be ways to help you deal with your emotional healing.

Recovery can also mean getting something back. Many of us have dealt with losing our friends, family and even our jobs from addiction. Then some of the other things we might want to get back include our dignity, pride and moral compass. These are things that many of us have lost along the way in our active addiction.

Recovery is also about wiping the slate clean. It is about starting your life over again. Eventually, as you go through the process you will slowly start to be able to rebuild a new life for yourself. Hopefully one that has everything you want and need.

Recovery can also be about letting go. As we spoke about earlier we need to change people, places and things and part of this is letting go. For some it might be more difficult than others. Some may have been stuck in a routine for so long that it's hard to break it and let go of it. Let's say we've got someone who went to the bar quite often to watch sports with his drinking pals. This might be something extremely hard to let go of simply for the fact that that person may have been doing that for a long time and it's a part of his daily routine. It's a habit that has developed over many years. This is a great example of some of the things we addicts are facing during our recovery.

Letting go is also part of working the Addicts Anonymous Ten Steps. In Step Five "We are entirely ready to abandon and no longer live the lifestyle we were living." To abandon the current lifestyle is to let go of

it. And let go of everything that went along with it. This is about change. And for me, our Ten Steps have gotten me this far and I intend to keep going. The biggest thing that has gotten me through my recovery is the Four Pillars of Addicts Anonymous. The Four Pillars are self-love, discipline, hard work and community. These are all the things in my life that needed work, and I mean a lot of work. So I applied the Four Pillars to my life and it was life-changing and now I want to share what I have learned through firsthand experience.

Here is how the Four Pillars saved my life during my recovery. The first of the four pillars is self-love and mine was nearly none at all. Every now and then I would say to myself "you're useless and nobody loves you" other times I would say "you're a fucking loser go kill yourself." This was my normal way of thinking. I had said it so many times throughout the years that it had become almost second nature. I had to apply self-love and retrain my brain. For me personally, it took a lot of self-reflection and meditation. I credit meditation to a lot of my sobriety. And this took discipline which is the next pillar in The Four Pillars. I had to meditate and tell myself that people like my mother, my sister and my brother do love me. My aunt, uncle and cousins love me. I had to see that I did have people who cared. I had to stay disciplined every day but I did finally have a breakthrough and things started changing for the better. Then came "Hard Work", the next of the Four Pillars. Once I was able to tackle self-love and discipline I had to take everything I had accomplished and work hard at it. No ifs, ands, or buts. I had to do it.

Now while I was learning to love myself, disciplining myself properly and working hard at all of this I was also building a community around myself. For me personally this has been the most helpful of the pillars. I created Addicts Anonymous to provide a community in which everyone could speak their mind and the rules are not as strict. I noticed some people in these meetings for AA and NA were very uncomfortable and everyone seemed nervous all time especially when they were sharing. I felt like they were trying to say the right thing as not to upset the old-timers. I felt this was wrong and that everyone should be able to speak their mind judgment-free. So that's when I got the idea for Addicts Anonymous. Now we have a community of over eleven hundred members. We've got a great group of people that also help me run the group. So this has been such a strong part of the program as I know that at any given time I can reach out and I won't be alone. The community that has grown around me is absolutely amazing and I couldn't have asked for anything more. I say this quite a bit but this is a group for addicts by addicts and all are welcome. This has been my recovery.

In the end, everybody's recovery is completely different. There are no two people exactly alike. So everyone is going to have to figure out what tools and tricks they should be using in their recovery. This was just an

article with my opinions. I hope everybody can take some information away from this and at the very least know that you are not alone in your journey.