

RECOVERY & ME

This Above All

Anonymous

Recovery & Me is a monthly column that will appear the first Sunday of each month. This column will address issues that thousands of people in our area have faced or will face during the course of their recovery. I will try and blend what I have learned in the hope that this may in some way make a positive impact on your own personal recovery.

***This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.
(Hamlet; Act I, Scene III)***

In the play *Hamlet*, Polonius offers his son Laertes advice to help him guide his life. Polonius concludes his counsel with his son by impressing upon him that honesty with oneself is one of the highest attributes that anyone can possess. It is reasonable to assume that Polonius saved this piece of advice until last to emphasize to Laertes that all the preceding information in his farewell dialog is mute and insignificant without the principle of self-honesty.

I was once asked by an AA friend whether or not I knew how you can tell when an active alcoholic is lying. I thought I knew so I began an elongated diatribe about body language, eye contact and a lot of other psychological mumbo-jumble, much to his amusement. After I completed all my rhetoric, my friend simply smiled and told me that the simplest way to tell whether or not an alcoholic was lying was to observe whether or not his lips were moving. As I reflected upon these words of wisdom it became apparently clear to me that while active in my alcoholism and early in my recovery these words were pretty much accurate.

Growing up in the “war zone” which was my home, lying and dishonesty was less of an inappropriate behavior; it was more of a survival tactic. I had been taught as a child that telling the truth was not just expected, but was the proper and correct thing to do. However, telling the truth in my family seemed only to get me into trouble, so to avoid the consequences of honesty; I learned at a very young age to effectively lie rather than tell the truth. I had acquired an uncanny ability to look someone directly in their eyes, lie, while my mind would intellectualize, rationalize and justify the appropriateness of this behavior. My life had become one falsehood built upon another. Now maybe this would not have been so bad but for this ongoing, nagging sense of guilt and shame that refused to quiet itself within my head. The only relief that I could find for this discomfort was alcohol. Not only was the emotional toll extraordinary, my mental and spiritual wellbeing was severely impaired. Living a life of lies, deceit and deception was extremely draining and eventually brought me to my knees. As my alcoholism progressed, the relief from guilt and shame that was once provided by alcohol no longer existed. I knew that I needed to make a change. I hated the world, all the lies I had been telling and living, but more than anything else, I could no longer tolerate me. What I had developed as a young child as a method of survival was slowly killing me. I needed to change or I was certain that I would die either through my actions or by my own hand.

In the book “Alcoholics Anonymous” chapter five is titled “How It Works”. It begins with the promise statement; “Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path. Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program, usually men and women who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves. There are such unfortunates. They are not at fault; they seem to have been born that way. They are naturally incapable of grasping and developing a manner of living which *demand*s rigorous honesty” (pg.58). This information cut me to the quick. How was I to develop this ability to be honest with myself and others when, for the most part, my entire life had been a lie? I was assured by others within the program that I wasn’t to worry. If I was willing to follow some simple directions and realize that it was “progress not perfection” that I was to seek in my life I too could live free from the bondage of alcohol. It was to be a process; not an event. It was to begin with the ability to admit to my innermost self that I was licked. Next, I was to seek “a Power greater than myself” that could restore me to sanity (wholeness of mind). Turn myself, unreservedly, over to the care of the Higher Power. Do the needed soul-searching housecleaning with the help of someone else who had successfully done this themselves and be willing to admit my faults of character to my Higher Power and ask for the relief of these less desirable characteristics. Make right those things that I had done. Continued the process of honest self-examination, and help others along the same journey.

They were right. It does work and I, along with thousands of others have proven that it does. And what I’ve discovered about myself along the way is that it will only work and continue to work if I endeavor to be honest with me and “practice these principles in all my affairs”.

A Dose of Humor:

A man well intoxicated stumbled into a bar and asked the bartender if he was willing to make a wager with him. The bartender, being a gambling man asked him “What is your wager?” The gentleman was willing to bet the bartender that he could name the capitals of every state in the union. He told the bartender that if he couldn’t name every capital he would give the bartender \$250.00. However, if he could name every capital, the bartender would allow him to drink for free for the remainder of the evening. The bartender took the man’s wager.

The gentleman began:

“The capital of Alabama is “A”, the capital of Alaska is also “A” the capital of Arizona too is “A”.....

I welcome your questions, your ideas for recovery topics or perhaps a personal story or two. Don’t forget, a dose of good humor about recovery or addiction is always welcomed...it has certainly helped me and many others through some tough times! Please send your submissions to: Council on Chemical Abuse, Attn: Recovery & Me, 601 Penn St., Ste. 600, Reading, PA 19601. You may choose to remain anonymous by including only your first name with your submission, as it may in part be reprinted in a future article.