

Hello fellow recovery friends

A while back, I told you about an excellent book entitled, “12 stupid things that mess up recovery: avoiding relapse through self-awareness and right action” by Allen Berger. I don’t know if any of you have read the book since then; but, if you haven’t- do yourself a favor and purchase this book, or borrow it from a friend, or check it out at your local library. If you are like me, and you like to highlight, and mark up your books with clever insights that you get while reading, I know that this book can be purchased from Hazelden for under \$15.00. It can even be purchased as an ebook. Ask for it for a Holiday Gift!

In the nature of full disclosure: I am not working with Mr. Berger, or Hazelden, so I don’t get a kick back from any book sales. But, I do benefit when my fellow recovering people are more happy, more joyous, and more free. I am just saying. (wink wink)

It really is a must read for everyone in recovery [from any addiction]. Although, Berger talks from an alcoholic/drug addict perspective, the themes are universal for all addictions. It has been a few 24 hours since I surrendered to my addiction and embraced recovery, but Berger’s “12 Stupid Things,” brings me back and keeps it green for me.

As a reminder, in the book’s introduction, Dr. Berger, wrote “I believe that if we are truly to recover from the disease of addiction, we must grow up-emotionally. True recovery is the product of humility that emerges from living and practicing a conscious and spiritual life. In order to attain humility, we must be honest with ourselves. This necessarily includes looking at the stupid things that we do, today, in our recovery. I use the term *stupid* to indicate the things we do that are self-destructive and not in our best interest.” (Berger, 2008 p.1)

I hope that you have had plenty of time to contemplate the “stupid thing 1.” But with the holidays fast approaching, I feel it timely to move on to the next “stupid thing.” Berger’s “stupid thing 2” that we do to mess up our recovery is “Believing sobriety will fix everything.” Now, if you were like me, your life was pretty messed up before you gave up your best friend-be it Scotch, Tequila, Crack, Oxys, Dope, Beer, Weed, Cake, Pizza, Shopping, Gambling, or Porn.

It is true that for me, by getting clean and sober my life started to change for the better. I felt better. I looked better. I could carry my head a bit higher. I had a place to sleep-even if it was rehab (at first) and then I graduated to a Women’s Oxford House (for an entire year), *which truly saved my life and forced me to grow up!* Eventually, I was able to move into an apartment, and then into a nicer one. I moved onto a house, and then a second house.... Isn’t that better? Of course as far as housing is concerned.

It sure beats my bottom: it was a frigid night on February 26th 1990. I had no money in my purse. I was jonesing, and I was desperate and alone. I lost my coat at one of the bars, so I was cold- wearing only a mini skirt, knit top, and a guy’s (I don’t know which guy’s) cardigan sweater; I ended up putting the sleeves of the sweater on my legs (like pants) because I was freezing. [Yes, remember I am a crack head of the 80’s and my legs were **that thin** back then-yah recovery!?!?!] I was sitting on a cold cement slab under a stairwell of the apartment complex that my roommates had kicked me out of. They apparently had issue with me using crack again and borrowing one of their cars (aka stealing) to purchase said crack!

Merely, getting clean and sober and going to daily meetings did fix a lot in my life. I was starting to have real friends; I was no longer waking up in strange places, or peeing myself in black-outs. I was no longer misplacing my clothing. I was no longer blacking-out, or crawling on my hands and knees searching for that piece of rock that I **knew** was there. The “jones” was lifted. Thank Goodness. I was sleeping in my own bed at night. I had food in the refrigerator-even if I initially had to get it from the local food bank (talk about some humility for a once spoiled little well-to-do girl). My life was fixed! Or so I thought....

But what sobriety alone did not fix was that I had evolved into a liar, and a thief, and someone whose moral compass was a bit cracked. Although, I knew right from wrong, I still had some severely bad habits...and an incredible skill at lying to myself and justifying all of my bad actions. Thank God for sponsorship!

In early sobriety, one of my roommates and I “borrowed” (aka stole) another one of our roommate’s car. *Well it was Loraine’s idea and she drove and she really did need to see her daughter at her baby daddy’s house in DC-where I used to “cop” drugs. But, I had 4 months clean and I could handle it. I was just going along for the ride. I didn’t know that Loraine did not have permission to take the car, and on and on my perception went....* [This experience later was reflected on with my first sponsor as yet another example of a Higher Power working in my life that at four months clean and sober I would be party to stealing a car and driving into Crack Central section of DC and not relapse. I have since made amends to all parties involved.] For those of you who have been paying attention know that stealing a car was involved at my bottom. So while I was free of any mood or mind altering chemicals-I was still practicing bad behavior and poor decision making. This would slowly change with working the steps with a sponsor.

I have heard countless stories of the crazy things that we do in early (and sometimes not so early) sobriety. I heard in an AA meeting once, that “you can take the alcohol out of the alcoholic and you still have ic (*pronounced ick*). This definitely has been my reality.

In “12 Stupid things,” Berger reminds us that “alcoholics and addicts have emotional problems, and those problems have contributed to their use of alcohol or other drugs” (2008, p. 24). He reminds us that it is also important to remember that addressing “emotional issues” does not mean that an alcoholic can return to drinking safely. This has not been my experience. Nor, has it been the experience of anyone that I know from the rooms. My sponsor in OA used to say, “if psychiatrists, preachers, therapists, or counselors could get us sober alone-there would be none of them in the rooms.” Addiction does not discriminate. And guess what, I know people of the cloth, doctors and therapists that are recovering in AA/NA; as well as GA, SLAA, OA, and DA. And probably every other –A out there!

How many of you have thought (at least to some degree) that sobriety and AA fixes **everything**? Okay. Be honest with yourself now. Nobody is keeping score. I know many alcoholics that have been “sober” for many years and it is apparent to everyone *but them* that there is something else going on. Be it another hidden compulsion (as we saw in “stupid thing 1,” or an undiagnosed, untreated mental health issue. The Co-morbidity of mental health and addiction in this country is high. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) addicts are “roughly twice as likely to suffer from mood and anxiety disorders.” The high incidence of co-morbidity is often believed

to be due to the idea that untreated mental health issues may lead us to “self-medicate” with drugs and alcohol. It is a strong, plausible argument.

But, then there are still others that say it is because many of the drugs of abuse can lead to brain changes and lead to mental health issues. This is also a strong theory. This discussion always reminds me of the chicken and the egg story from my childhood.

Which came first? Does it really matter?

Sometimes we suffer from unresolved trauma. This is especially true, if you are one of the thousands of us that grew up in an alcoholic or otherwise dysfunctional home. The good news: There is an –A for that! Check out your local ACA/ACoA meetings.

Berger does not get into the debate; he just discusses how both aspects need to be addressed in order to truly recover. He explains to us that one cannot get the full benefit of therapy if they are still drinking, or using their “drug of choice.”

Berger lists the components for a “complete and comprehensive approach to treating addiction. He is a clinical therapist, as well as a self disclosed recovering addict. He lists 3 requirements. First you have to deal with the drug of choice. *Obviously*. Next, you start to “repair the deleterious effects” of the disease. We start repairing the “wreckage of our past.” This happens with working the 12 steps with a sponsor. And last is “growing up emotionally,” so we can have grown-up and “healthy relationships.” This has been referred to as Stage II Recovery by Ernie Larsen. After discussing these three parts he challenges us to ask ourselves, “How do I do all of this?” And then he gives us his professional wisdom (he has 30 years experience as a clinician too). He says that “...the best results are achieved through a combination of rigorously working a twelve step program... and getting help from an experiential psychotherapist or addictions counselor who **fully understands** [bold italics mine] family dynamics and the disease process of addiction. (Berger, 2008, p. 25)

What are your experiences with this “stupid thing 2?” Can any of you relate to any of this? Have you ever told yourself that because you are clean and sober that you have no other “outside issues/problems?” Maybe you figure that your life is so much better now that you are sober that this is as good as it gets. You tell yourself that your depression is you “just feeling feelings” for the first time in years. This “stupid thing 2” makes me think of the promises in AA- “beyond our wildest dreams. “I started to truly experience happy, joyous, and free after years in recovery and working with professionals to help me with “outside issues.” And ACOA surely didn’t hurt.