

Powerfully Recovered! - How can she say that?

Myths of the Fellowship

The idea that one can become powerfully recovered in Alcoholics Anonymous and other 12 Step groups often raises eyebrows, and even ire. After all some argue, the First Step says we're powerless, and everyone knows alcoholism (or any true addiction) is an incurable disease.

Surely, the thinking goes, that Step must mean we are perpetually powerless and involved in never-ending recovery.

My experience, however, tells me this thinking is misguided and leads to what I've come to call the Damaging Myths of Recovery:

- The myth of perpetual powerlessness, and,
- The myth of never-ending recovery.

I call these myths because they do not reflect the information and suggestions given to us in Alcoholics Anonymous (the Big Book) and The 12 Steps and 12 Traditions, (12 and 12) the original source material for all 12 Step Recovery.

They are damaging because they prevent us from realizing the full potential the 12 Steps offer. They have grown up in the Fellowship over time, but are NOT part of the Program. By 'Program,' I mean the 12 Steps, the Big Book and the 12 and 12; 'Fellowship' refers to everything else, from meetings to coffee klatches.

The Myth of Perpetual Powerlessness

The root of the word power comes from the French and means to act.

Powerlessness is an inability, or unwillingness to take action. We all recognize the sense of powerlessness when it comes to our addiction. We were unable to stop drinking (or using or practicing) on our own. As the First Step says: We admitted we were powerless over alcohol and our lives had become unmanageable.

Look closely! It's alcohol (or addiction or practice) we were powerless over and our lives became unmanageable because of our drinking (or addiction, etc.). Nowhere does it say that we are or were powerless over everything - only our addiction, in this case, drinking.

But admitting defeat, coming to Program and working the Steps, is hardly a powerless action. We are taking a positive action on our own behalf. In fact, we are taking some of the most powerful action we ever could.

To claim we are powerless over everything in our lives is to deny the massive change the Program works in us for the good. When we continue to claim we are powerless, we are perpetuating a victim role.

On the other hand, to recognize that getting and staying sober, that letting go of our addiction is a powerful act allows us to stop being victims. We can then truly begin to live life 'on life's terms,' in all its fullness.

We can continue to take powerful action on our own behalf and watch the Promises of the Big Book (pp. 83-84) come true, day-by-day.

The Myth of Never-Ending Recovery

There is a huge reluctance among 12 Steppers to admit we are recovered alcoholics, even though the Big Book uses recovered at least 11 times in the first 164 pages. The first two sentences of the Forward to the First Edition use recovered twice! It seems safe to say that becoming recovered is the goal.

Part of the reluctance comes from an overemphasis on the disease theory of alcoholism. Although accepting alcoholism as a disease makes it easier to accept the need for help, dwelling on the concept leads to unnecessary fear of relapse.

It's certainly true the only answer for the real alcoholic is total abstinence from alcohol. But, as the Big Book promises, when we work the program: ... sanity will have returned. We will seldom be interested in liquor... We react sanely and normally...(pp. 84-85). Sounds like recovered to me!

I've come to believe another reason for the reluctance to claim to be recovered is a mostly unconscious fear that such a claim will tempt us to leave the Program and to quit practicing the spiritual discipline that has worked so well for us. Of course this need not be true at all. As a matter of fact, claiming our power and recognizing that we are recovered makes it possible for us to truly continue our growth by not getting stuck in myths that don't serve us.

Love, peace and abundance,

Anne W.

