

Coming Together Conference

The Recovery Ecosystem

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What is the Recovery Ecosystem:

It is an individualized internal/external systemic process that one creates for him or herself to sustain long-term recovery from substance use disorders.

Recovery Consciousness

Recovery consciousness, and self-awareness is critical; thus employing recovery to all aspects of life, for example recovery support ecosystem embraces the following; exercise, spirituality, pleasure, family, work, and education.

Recovery Ecosystem (RES)

RES is a self-awareness approach focusing on improving the quality of life while simultaneously abstaining from alcohol, heroin, opioids, cocaine, etc.

Recovery Process is non-linear

It's a circular process consisting of interconnected, interacting elements. There are many components necessary for recovery that together, as a whole, are more than simply the sum of the parts.

RE: Retraining One's Thought Process

- The way a person thinks affects the way they feel. How a person feels affects the decisions they make.
- Many people use drugs and alcohol as a coping mechanism.

RE: Retraining One's Thought Process

- To help them feel better because they are battling thoughts that produce negative feelings. (For example, a person struggling with low self-esteem feels weak, inadequate, self-conscious, anxious, envious, unsure, and the list goes on).
- Those feelings are produced by thoughts. It's hard to stay in the recovery process constantly feeling bad.

RE: Retraining One's Thought Process

- Drugs and alcohol helps people change the way they feel for short increments of time.
- Alcohol can take a person from anxious to brave instantly.
- This is why it's vitally important for people to change their thought process.

RE: Retraining One's Thought Process

- When people change the way they think about themselves, they learn to love and appreciate themselves, the feelings will change.
- Individuals who have high self-esteem experience feelings such as confident, secure, strong, capable, inspired, respected, and appreciated.
- It's easier to stay in the recovery process feeling good on a regular basis.

RE: Retraining One's Thought Process

- Often people make decisions based on the way they have been programmed to think.
- People who have been programmed to think the only way to make a living is by engaging in illegal activities, are at risk for relapse.
- They will find themselves in environments in which drugs and alcohol flow freely and/or they will feel the need to medicate the feelings of anxiety and frustration that accompany that “career” choice.

RE: Retraining One's Thought Process

Some of the feelings that come with being involved in illegal activities are: anxious, threatened, suspicious, regretful, guilty, provoked, and so forth.

A person about to commit a crime may feel the need to use a substance to help them feel better about what they are about to do. (The same occurs after the event).

RE: Retraining One's Thought Process

A person who just engaged in an illegal activity may feel the need to calm down or reduce the feelings of anxiety about getting caught.

Individuals who have learned how to generate a legitimate income, doing something they enjoy, experience a different range of feelings.

They experience feelings such as proud, respected, secure, excited, confident, optimistic, adventurous, and so forth.

RE: Retraining One's Thought Process

- Once people in recovery learn to retrain their thought process, they will begin to recognize the distorted or negative thoughts that are producing their current feelings.
- Over time, they can learn to instantly examine what they are thinking, challenge the thought, replace the thought with a healthier more functional thought, and change the way they feel.
- For example, say a person in early recovery is feeling hurt, rejected, indignant, and humiliated because he or she was not invited to a family barbecue on a holiday.

RE: Retraining One's Thought Process

- While those feelings are natural, if that person has new information stored in his or her mind, he or she can access that information, “My family doesn’t trust me because I violated their trust repeatedly for years.
- I would feel the same way about a person who violated my trust repeatedly.
- I will have to earn their trust and that will take time. I’ll attend the barbecue given by my support group and enjoy the holiday.” By the time that person arrives at the support group barbecue, his or her feelings will have changed substantially.

RE: Retraining One's Thought Process

- There may still be some feelings of hurt and rejection, but they are much less after the reframing of his or her thoughts about the situation.

Retraining One's Thought Process

Vignette:

- Cookie entered the recovery process and began working on her thought process.
- She knew that because of childhood physical and emotional abuse and countless relapses, her thinking was distorted.

Retraining One's Thought Process

Vignette:

- She entered a drug treatment program, and it was recommended that she receive therapy for untreated trauma.
- After completing trauma therapy, she began taking steps to retrain her thought process. She didn't label it "Retraining One's Thought Process," she simply began seeking out new information.

Retraining One's Thought Process

Vignette:

- Cookie moved into a recovery house to get away from her dysfunctional family. Carolyn subscribed to several email lists.
- She received a daily email quotes. She received wisdom from Mark Twain, Thomas Edison, Maya Angelo, and other wise people.
- Cookie also received a daily email from a fitness expert that shared not only specific exercise routines, but strategies to incorporate exercise into daily activities – such as parking further from the store, taking the stairs instead of the elevator.

Retraining One's Thought Process

Vignette:

- She signed up with an online dictionary to send her a “word of the day” email to expand her vocabulary. Carolyn didn't stop there! She began attending a 12-Step Program and obtain a sponsor.
- She selected a woman who spoke with wisdom, whose conversation contain spirttual principals and life strategies that she knew she needed to learn.

Retraining One's Thought Process

Vignette:

- Carolyn also enrolled in college and discovered a wealth of information not only in her textbooks but new information from interacting with her classmates and professors.
- After several years, Carolyn noticed that her reactions to people and situations were completely different than when she was in active addiction and her first year of recovery.

Retraining One's Thought Process

Vignette:

- She also noticed that the types of people with whom she associated had changed. Carolyn looked at her circle of influence and realized that she had built a network of positive, healthy people.

Not Retraining One's Thought Process

Recovery Ecosystem:

- There are various risk factors associated with not retraining one's thought process. As noted in a previous section, negative thoughts produce negative feelings.
- It's hard to stay in the recovery process feeling bad ALL the time. The way a person thinks influences their associations.
- As the old adage says, "Birds of a feather flock together." Individuals in recovery who are not actively retaining their thought processes, will find it hard to be around people with healthier thought processes.

Not Retraining One's Thought Process

Recovery Ecosystem:

- They will make statements based on how they have been programmed to think which may be totally inappropriate.
- Positive, optimistic people will not continue to entertain the presence of individuals who are negative and view life from a pessimistic lookout.

Not Retraining One's Thought Process

Recovery Ecosystem:

- Being rejected by healthy people can cause a person in recovery to feel as if they are accursed and need to return to old, using friends to be accepted.
- They may not be aware that people are not so much rejecting them as much as they are rejecting their thought process.

Not Retraining One's Thought Process

Recovery Ecosystem:

- There are risks associated with having a dysfunctional belief system about life-in-general.
- Meaning, there some specific distorted attitudes and ideologies about life that many individuals struggled with in active addiction that are not conducive to recovery.

Not Retraining One's Thought Process Recovery Ecosystem:

- Those distorted thoughts also produce negative feelings which may cause a relapse.

Not Retraining One's Thought Process

Recovery Ecosystem:

- **Distorted Thought:** The world owes me something.
 - **Negative Feelings:** indignant, angry, miserable, discontented, abandoned, cynical, estranged, bitter, etc.
- **Distorted Thought:** I cannot change situations, I can only complain about them.

Not Retraining One's Thought Process

Recovery Ecosystem:

- **Negative Feelings:** trapped, inadequate, ineffectual, dependent, anxious, cynical, miserable, hopeless, etc.
- **Distorted Thought:** Other people are responsible for my life and my well-being.
 - **Negative Feelings:** dependent, abandoned, hurt, disappointed, impatient, confused, indignant, provoked, etc.

Not Retraining One's Thought Process

Recovery Ecosystem:

- **Distorted Thought:** The people I interact with and the places I go have nothing to do with my problems.
 - **Negative Feelings:** regretful, embarrassed, trapped, apprehensive, accursed, threatened, exhausted, etc.
- **Distorted Thought:** There is nothing I can do about my future, I must rehearse my past over and over again.
 - **Negative Feelings:** worthless, inadequate, trapped, miserable, regretful, indignant, embarrassed, hurt, etc.

Not Retraining One's Thought Process

Recovery Ecosystem:

- There are also distorted beliefs (conscious and unconscious) about the recovery process that must be challenged as the OUTPUT (end product) of those distorted thoughts, produce negative feelings that can lead to relapse. For example,
- **Distorted Thought:** Old habits will not make me relapse.
 - **Negative Feelings:** trapped, regretful, confused, humiliated, angry, torn, threatened, etc.

Not Retraining One's Thought Process

Recovery Ecosystem:

- **Distorted Thought:** Recovery doesn't have to be my first priority. Getting my life together is my first priority.
 - **Negative Feelings:** regretful, embarrassed, inadequate, bewildered, depressed, overwhelmed, etc.

RE Spiritual Principles for Retraining One's Thought Process:

- **Distorted Thought:** Other people are responsible (probation officer, parole officer, wife, husband, sponsor, therapist) for my recovery.
 - **Negative Feelings:** bitter, angry, hurt, abandoned, rejected, confused, guilty, humiliated, miserable, dependent, etc.

Not Retraining One's Thought Process:

- **Distorted Thought:** I cannot transfer the same determination to my recovery that I used in active addiction – it's not possible.
 - **Negative Feelings:** frustrated, discontented, trapped, dependent, hurt, rejected, resentful, miserable, depressed, etc.

RE (3) Spiritual Principles for Retraining One's Thought Process:

- In order to engage in the process of Retraining One's Thought Process, there are certain spiritual principles that must be applied.
- There are many spiritual principles listed on the RES graphic that are important as it relates to Retraining One's Thought Process.

RE Spiritual Principles for Retraining One's Thought Process:

- The three that we will examine for this component of the Recovery Ecosystem are: admission, self-acceptance, and surrender.
- Mentors and Sponsors (healthy) will play a key role in helping individuals in recovery recognize the spiritual principles that are, or are not, being used in each of the Recovery Ecosystem categories.

RE Spiritual Principles for Retraining One's Thought Process:

Admission, is defined:

- “A voluntary acknowledgement of a fact or truth; a concession.
- In order to recognize the need to Retrain One's Thought Process, one needs to admit that there is something wrong with the way he or she currently thinks.

RE Spiritual Principles for Retraining One's Thought Process:

- An individual must acknowledge that there is information, and application guidelines, missing which are key to living and enjoying life. This admission must be made either externally or internally.

RE Spiritual Principles for Retraining One's Thought Process:

Self-Acceptance is defined:

- “Affirmation or acceptance of self in spite of weaknesses or deficiencies.”
- This spiritual principle may seem like a contradiction to the principle of “Admission” but it not. Retraining One's Thought Process is an ongoing process.

RE Spiritual Principles for Retraining One's Thought Process:

- An important aspect of recovery is learning to accept oneself in spite of where one is on his or her journey.
- Self-Acceptance empowers people to make admissions that they need help while still not comparing themselves to others or trying to rush the process to “catch up” which can result in a reduce quality of life.

RE Spiritual Principles for Retraining One's Thought Process:

Surrender is defined as:

- “To relinquish possession or control of (something) to another because of demand or compulsion.”
- In order to enter the process of Retraining One's Thought Process, it is vital to surrender one's old way of thinking and thus behaving.

RE Spiritual Principles for Retraining One's Thought Process:

- This is not a one-time event. For each category on the Recovery Ecosystem, individuals in recovery will be challenged to surrender to new ideas, and concepts.
- This spiritual principle empowers people to go from one level in life to the next.

RE Retraining One's Thought Process

- Is connected to other components of the Recovery Ecosystem such as Physical Health.
- As people begin retraining their thought process about food and exercise, they will improve their physical health.
- As people in recovery start developing Healthy Friendship, their new associates will influence how they think

RE Retraining One's Thought Process

- Engaging in the Education process will expose people in recovery to new information daily relating to various subjects.
- The Employment component will help with retaining one's thought process as it relates to accountability, responsibility, and being self-sufficient.

RE Recreational Activities:

- The dictionary defines recreation as, “Refreshment of one’s mind or body after work through activity that amuses or stimulates.
- An activity that provides such refreshment.”
- Adding recreation to one’s recovery process is important.
- It is vital to have fun and enjoy life in recovery or life becomes boring and mundane.

RE Recreational Activities:

- It is a physical necessity to refresh one's mind and body regularly.
- As the quote says, if a person does not allow his or her body to rest and rejuvenate, the body will begin to show signs of wear and tear like a car being driven nonstop.

RE Recreational Activities:

Recreational activities can include something fun and/or doing something competitive such as playing basketball with friends.

Other examples of recreational activities include: bowling, skating, playing pool, playing chess, playing dominions, reading, bike riding, hiking, swimming, painting, learning to cook (as a hobby), and so forth.

RE Recreational Activities:

- Another aspect of recreation is taking vacations, traveling - seeing the world – meeting new people and learning about other cultures.

RE Recreational Activities:

- Recreational Activities act as a protective factor because they make life fun and adventurous.
- A person in recovery needs to replace the constant activity of drug seeking with a balance life – work, rest, and play.
- If that equation is out of balance, it puts the person at risk for relapse.

RE Recreational Activities:

- Recreational activities give people breaks from work and other life obligations.
- When people are refreshed, they can approach all aspects of their lives with enthusiasm and renewed energy – recovery work, employment work, parenting, and household maintenance obligations.
- Looking forward to, or engaging in, recreational activities produce feelings such as: relaxed, happy, excited, adventurous, joyful, vibrant, and content.

RE Recreational Activities:

- Recreational activities relieve stress.
Individuals in recovery need to engage in healthy stress relieving activities so they are not drawn back to seeking temporary relief from drugs and alcohol.

RE No Recreational Activities

- Not engaging in recreational activities as a person in recovery is a risk factor for several reasons.
- As mentioned earlier in this section, being out of balance can cause a person to feel as if the recovery process is not paying off.

RE No Recreational Activities

- If all one does is work and attend to family obligations, the thought of using becomes more and more attractive as a means of escape.
- Examples of the types of feelings produced by all work and no play are: discontent, gloomy, tired, edgy, dismal, indifferent, impatient, and the list goes on. It's hard to stay in the recovery process feeling bad continuously.
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RE No Recreational Activities

- Another risk factor is the “only way to have fun is under the influence” ideology.
- Some people have used drugs and alcohol for so long that they have no recollection of having fun without a substance being involved.
- Therefore, they mistake the need to have fun and refresh as a longing to use.

RE No Recreational Activities

- The two separate activities are connected as one in their minds which puts them at risk.
- They are confusing the means to the end with the need.
- Learning to enjoy recreation, clean, will eventually make the disconnect in their minds.

RE No Recreational Activities

- An additional risk factor associated with no recreational activities in recovery is the wear and tear on one's mind and body.
- If a person does not allow their body to refresh, rejuvenate, and rest, the wear and tear will eventually manifest as physical illnesses, lack of energy, and anxiety or depression.

RE No Recreational Activities

- For a person in recovery who is not having times of refreshment, that individual may think he or she needs some artificial “energy” or manufactured “restoration” and may become addicted to energy drinks and caffeine.
- Once those methods, that are not addressing the real issue, stop working, thoughts of finding something “stronger” may ensue.

No Recreational Activities Vignette:

- Carl was raised by two very accomplished parents.
- They were very focused on academic accomplishments. Carl felt pressured all his life to perform scholastically.
- Carl's work and rest balance was off and the equation did not include a "play" component. In high school, Carl began using stimulants to stay awake and pull all night study sessions.

No Recreational Activities Vignette:

- This habit continued and progressed into stimulate abuse in college.
- Eventually, Carl's addiction to stimulants caused him to drop out of college.
- He felt resentful of his parents for the unrealistic expectations they put on him. Carl's resentment festered until he surmised, "I'll be a PERFECT drug addict! How about that mom and dad!"

No Recreational Activities Vignette:

- Carl sought help for his addiction at age 35. He entered the recovery process and went in to “repair/rebuild” mode with the same belief system he endured in childhood – work until you drop – fun is not allowed!
- Around his third month into his recovery journey, Carl noticed that he was feeling depressed, resentful, tired, lonely, and discontent.

No Recreational Activities Vignette:

- He was glad he was off drugs, he was making progress rebuilding his life, but he started thinking about his own using days and being able to “chill” and relax.

RE Spiritual Principles for Physical Health:

- In order to enjoy Recreational Activities, there are certain spiritual principles that must be applied.
- There are many spiritual principles listed on the RES graphic that are important for enjoying recreational activities.

RE Spiritual Principles for Physical Health:

- The three that we will examine for this component of the Recovery Ecosystem are: change, open-mindedness, and freedom.
- Mentors and Sponsors (healthy) will play a key role in helping individuals in recovery recognize the spiritual principles that are, or are not, being used in each of the Recovery Ecosystem categories

Change is defined:

- “To become different or undergo alteration.
- To undergo transformation or transition.”
Some people, in recovery and not in recovery, find it hard to “play” to give themselves time to refresh and relax

Change is defined:

- They will have to use the spiritual principle of change to try new activities and to put those activities on the schedule.
- Adding recreational activities to one's life can transform one's body, mind, and spirit.

Open-Mindedness is defined:

- “Receptive to new and different ideas or the opinions of others.”
- Incorporating Recreational Activities into one’s life will require, for some, being receptive to new and different ideas.

Open-Mindedness is defined:

- This is especially important for those who identify as workaholics.
- One will have to be receptive to the idea that recreation is renewal of the mind and body that actually equips a person to be more productive in the long-run.

Freedom is defined:

- “The condition of being free of restraints, especially the ability to act without control or interference by another or by circumstance.”
- Recreational Activities allow people to be free. It will take some people in recovery time to learn to enjoy times of refreshment without interference from others who feel it's not important or who try to impose on that time

Freedom is defined:

- Freedom to decide to have a work, rest, and play balance in one's life is priceless.

RE Employment

- Employment is an important component of the Recovery Ecosystem.
- Employment is a sign of productivity. Most people have a desire to be self-sufficient – to be able to provide for themselves and their families.
- Even those who are completely dependent upon the system for resources voice dissatisfaction with that way of life. It is important to mention the difference between a job and a career.

RE Employment

- The dictionary defines job as, “1) A regular activity performed in exchange for payment. 2) A task that must be done.”
- The dictionary defines career as “1) A chosen pursuit; a profession or occupation. 2) Doing what one does as a permanent occupation or lifework.”

RE Employment

- It is important to NOT send the message to people in recovery that they must relegate themselves to working a job their entire lives.
- There are many career paths available to people in general and individuals in recovery are entitled to choose their path.

RE Employment

- Conversely, be careful not to discourage individuals who employment choices differ from society's standards of "success." As Martin Luther King Junior said,

RE Employment

- “If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as a Michaelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music or Shakespeare wrote poetry.
- He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, 'Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.'”

Employment Recovery Ecosystem

- Being employed helps the recovering person feel productive, pay bills, and keep busy. As noted in other sections of the Recovery Ecosystem, people in recovery need to replace the constant drug-seeking and using activities with a balance life of work, rest, and play.
- It's easy to get bored if one is not doing something productive. Individuals who are in recovery had a "job" when they were getting high – getting high was their "job."

Employment Recovery Ecosystem

- Even if they managed to keep legitimate employment while in active addiction, they still had that job and the “job” of getting high.
- A person can only dust and vacuum the carpet but so many times – now what? The voice of addiction has an answer, “Let’s go see what our old friends are doing!” Work, rest, and play will keep a person occupied.

RE Employment

- Employment leads to a sense of pride and accomplishment that is generated by becoming self-sufficient.
- Becoming a productive, tax paying member of society generates positive feelings.

RE Employment

- Examples of the types of feelings people experience providing for themselves are: strong, respected, capable, confident, secure, relieved, excited, regarded, appreciated, and so forth.
- Experiencing those types of feelings daily can act as immunization against the need to seek those feelings temporarily through drugs and alcohol.

RE Employment

- The opportunity to lead, work as a team, learn and apply leadership techniques, and be connected to the community.
- Addiction is famous for isolating people except for when they were drug-seeking or using

RE Employment

- Many companies and organizations offer opportunities for employees to become involved in committees such as: an Event Planning Committee, or a Diversity Committee, or a Charitable Contributions Committee that coordinates volunteer activities.

RE Employment

- These types of committees help develop relationships and connect the recovering person to the community. People who feel “a part of” something important are less likely to feel the need to return to the drug-using community.

RE Spiritual Principles for Employment:

- In order to be employable, there are various spiritual principles that must be applied daily.
- There are many spiritual principles listed on the RES graphic that are important for being employable

RE Spiritual Principles for Employment:

- The three that will be examined for this component of the Recovery Ecosystem are: self-discipline, respect, and commitment.
- Mentors and Sponsors (healthy) will play a key role in helping individuals in recovery recognize the spiritual principles that are, or are not, being used.

Self-Discipline is defined:

- “The act of disciplining or power to discipline one’s own feelings, desire, etc. especially with the intention of improving oneself.”
- In order to obtain and maintain a job, or work in a career, one will have to exercise the power to control one’s feelings and desires.

Self-Discipline is defined:

- Even when people love their jobs, there are some days they do not feel like going to work.
- One doesn't have to FEEL like to going to work to show up.

Self-Discipline is defined:

- One will also have to exercise self-discipline to grow on the job, intentionally improve one's human capital.
- It's easy to become stagnant and begin to resent one's job; when that happens, it's a signal it's time to go to the next level.

Respect, is defined:

- “1) A feeling of appreciation, often deferential regard; esteem.
- 2) Due regard for something considered important or authoritative.” To maintain one’s employment, one must appreciate being able to work and provide for oneself and family – respect the gift of work.

Respect, is defined:

- In addition, it's important to respect one's superiors (supervisors; employer) to regard their authority and follow the chain of command when problems arise.
- It's also important to respect oneself and not accept abuse verbal, sexual, or physical abuse from co-workers or an employer.

Commitment, is defined:

- “A pledge or obligation, as to follow a certain course of action.”
- It is important to apply the spiritual principle of commitment in employment.

Commitment, is defined:

- When accepting a position, one is saying, “I understand the terms and conditions and I accept.”
- As an employee, people are expected to arrive to work on time, do the assignment tasks in a timely manner, and treat co-workers, supervisors, and customers with respect.

Commitment, is defined:

- Those are obligations that go with the job. If the employer is committed to paying his/her employees on payday, employees must be committed to fulfilling their pledge to do the work.

Spirituality and Religion: Are both important components for the Recovery Ecosystem.

- Religious practices and spirituality will be examined together in this section.
- First, there is a need to distinguish between the two as both terms are at times used synonymously. Rabbi Rami Shapiro (2009), an award-winning author, teacher, and speaker on the subjects of liberal Judaism and contemporary spirituality, shared his viewpoint of the differences between religion and spirituality,

Spirituality and Religion: Are both important components for the Recovery Ecosystem

- Religion is about belonging, community, shared values, shared rituals, and mutual support.
- Spirituality is about living life without a net, forever surrendered to reality and meeting each moment with curiosity, wonder, gratitude, justice, humility, and love.

Spirituality and Religion: Are both important components for the Recovery Ecosystem

- The two are not antithetical. Religion is often a container in which spiritual practices are preserved and passed on.
- Some people find the container as helpful as what it contains and choose to belong to a specific religion. Others simply take what they need from the containers and fashion their own way.

Spirituality and Religion: Are both important components for the Recovery Ecosystem

- Some individuals in recovery declare their relationships with a Higher Power as the driving force behind their decision to stop using and the force that is keeping them clean.
- Others in recovery identify as atheist while others identify as agnostics.
- There are also people in recovery who choose not to belong to any organized religion, but believe strongly in spirituality and declare their spiritual lives as one of the most important component of their recovery

Spirituality and Religion: Are both important components for the Recovery Ecosystem

- Organized religion and spirituality are components that can be found in the mind, body, and spirit sections of the Recovery Ecosystem.
- As noted in Chapter One, the Recovery Ecosystem chooses to connect each component to spiritual principles.

Spirituality and Religion: Are both important components for the Recovery Ecosystem

- This section will examine the importance of religion, spirituality in general, and the incorporation of spiritual principles into one's daily life, especially as it relates to each component of the RES.