

## **Addiction and Recovery: The Transition in Recovery Not So Simple**

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

Many people who find their way into treatment and ultimately into recovery, do so, kicking and screaming. Ambivalence is often present during the transition into recovery. Most addicts at the cross roads of continued active addiction vs. recovery have ambivalent feelings (to say the least) about quitting. Some may want to quit, but believe that it is not possible. Some may want to continue to use while recognizing that their use is leading them to self-destruction. Some may not believe that life can be worth living if you are not using. Some may want to quit, and may try to, yet give up (this time) when the pain of detox feels too overwhelming. Many addicts at the cross road see the need to quit using their most recent drug of choice, yet they are not motivated to “give up” all mood altering drugs.

Non-addicted family members usually have great difficulty understanding that alcoholics/addicts do not see things the way that family members do. To the family member, the drug (e.g., alcohol, prescription drugs, street drugs, etc.) is “the problem”. Even at the cross road, the addict still may not identify “the drug” as “the problem”. The alcoholic/addict has a hard time distinguishing among the difficulties in his/her life and is angry about having to change. Family members, law enforcement, the job, or other life circumstances are seen as the source of the real problem and blamed for “having to quit”. The addict may not recognize that the drinking/using is causing the problems in his/her life. They may still see the chemical as the solution to the problems that they are in having in their lives.

When the pile up of negative consequences of the addiction begins to break through some of the denial, an alcoholic/addict may become motivated to seek quit. Just as often, they become motivated to try one more time to find the magic formula that will allow them to regain control over his/her using or his/her life. By the time that the addict makes the concerted effort to become and stay abstinent, they have tried several times to regain control but failed. Sometimes the crisis is big enough that it creates enough pain or fear to generate motivation to quit. It is important to remember that pain and fear are only good for short term motivation, that both wane over time, and with a return of comfort, there is also a return to using. Without the help that the addicted person needs to learn how to get and stay sober, fear and pain are ultimately not much help in breaking the cycle of addiction. “Learning your lesson” is not a good program of recovery.

There is usually a great struggle around the decision to quit using. In the face of more and more reality, defense mechanisms can begin to fail and the addict comes face to face with enough motivators to quit drinking/using. This may or may not be before they go to some form of treatment. Many people go to treatment hopeful that they can learn to regain control over their drinking/using or to quit some drugs, but not others. At the very beginning of recovery, quitting is a great sacrifice.

To the family members of alcoholics/addicts and significant others watching from the sidelines or the middle of the fray, it is just logical, common sense, to quit drinking, when drinking is causing the problem. It is not so simple a decision for the alcoholic/addict.

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