

## Start Now to Develop the Self-discipline You Need to Return To School In Early Addiction Recovery

**By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.**

With the beginning of the next semester just around the corner, now is the time to begin to develop the self-discipline skills you need for a successful return to academics. For many people in early recovery (or late recovery for that matter), self-discipline has been a vaguely understood concept and a mostly illusive goal that still baffles, frustrates, and serves as an emotional "hot" button in relationships.

Lack of self-discipline is often a cornerstone issue in addiction. Without self-discipline, many people struggle in vain to accomplish goals, to achieve their potential, and to develop self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-determination. By the time that alcoholics and addicts have found their way into recovery, they have identified low self-esteem and poor self-confidence to be core addiction and recovery issues. Many recovering folks have not believed that their own behaviors, decisions, thoughts, and feelings have very little actual impact on their life circumstances. Many have believed themselves to be victims of "bad luck", of being disliked and mistreated, and of being misunderstood.

The idea that it takes more than intention to accomplish change in your life, is part of the disconnect that makes self-discipline so illusive. You can intend to run a marathon next year, but unless you develop a plan, get off couch and train on a regular basis, you probably will not accomplish your goal.

Self-discipline comes in after you have the burst of inspiration and are ready to act. If your goal is to return to school after being temporarily derailed by your alcoholism/addiction, you must do more than enroll, rent an apartment, and buy books. Without a solid plan of action, along with daily practice to develop your self-discipline skills, you may be setting yourself up for failure and possible relapse. Many people in early recovery have yet to get their days and nights turned back around. It is common for alcoholics/addicts (and those early in recovery) to be up and about when the rest of the "work" world is sleeping, and to sleep late into the work day, minimizing the amount of things they can accomplish that day. To jump start your self-discipline development, begin now to set an early rise time, set your alarm, and get up and start your day. Don't wait until the first week of school, to try to get into a new habit of waking up early. You will be starting out already "behind" in the semester.

If in your recovery, you do not have a structured day set up, develop a temporary structure for yourself before you start back to school. If you are not working, find someplace to volunteer. Get a schedule for volunteering or making some other contribution. Get up early. Go to work/volunteer. Go to meetings. Schedule a regular time to meet with your sponsor. Schedule time to study your recovery literature. Get back into the habit of study. Find someone to be your accountability partner. Stick to the routine or the structure that you develop. Schedule time for having fun with a sober support group, but practice saying "no" to yourself or to those who would distract you from your structure/routine.

Going back to school implies that you have a long term goal. Developing the self-discipline to accomplish it, starts with a plan, and develops with practice over time.

Self-discipline is not a natural endowment. It is deliberately learned over time with practice. Something as simple as waking up early to an alarm and getting an early start on your day, can set in motion, the genesis of new self-discipline skills.

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