

**Addiction Recovery**  
**Maintain Your Recovery Motivation Or You Will Relapse**  
**By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.**

People often find their way to recovery in the midst of a crisis. Someone standing at the crossroads of recovery, may have been arrested for DUI, may have been fired, or may have received a scary report from the doctor. He may have heard the bottom line demand from his spouse-- "Get help or we are getting a divorce." Or, the alcoholic/addict may in fact, have a moment of clarity and really be able to see that he does have a problem and that help and abstinence are called for. The alcoholic/addict feels afraid. He feels ashamed. He feels angry at others or at himself for being in this position in the first place.

Fear, coercion or crisis helps him find his way into recovery. Fear is a fairly good short term motivator, but not so good in the long run. Once the fear subsides and the crisis is over, it is very easy to lose your motivation and momentum. At the point where the cycle of addiction is interrupted by failing to take the next drink, dose, or joint, there is a lot of tension, anxiety, and mindfulness of where you are in the process. Detox or withdrawal may occur, with physical and/or emotional symptoms being very consciously experienced.

When you get to feeling better physically and emotionally after detoxing, it is easy to lose your momentum. Your focus on recovery can dissolve. Some of the problems that once motivated your recovery might be resolved now. Because you have quit drinking or using, your spouse and kids are once again speaking to you and are in the process of forgiving you. You may have even won back some trust. Everything seems to be going well.

Under these circumstances it is quite easy for you to take your eyes off the target and lose your focus on recovery. Erroneously, you may believe that your abstinence is not so fragile now. Feeling better, you may think you have it "whipped".

Without actively focusing on your continuing abstinence and recovery, your behavior can begin to drift away from the newly instituted behavioral changes that you have made. You run the risk of returning to old thinking, old feelings, and then ultimately old behavior. The reason why this would happen is that you are not consciously taking steps to continue on a path of recovery. This path involves many changes in your behavior and in your life style. Without making conscious choices in regard to how each decision affects your new recovery life or your old addiction life, you are unconsciously choosing your old life. Choosing recovery is not like jump starting your damaged car battery where once you get it started, it recharges itself as run it. You have to continuously work a program of recovery. Without doing so, your efforts will be short-lived.

You will quit going to counseling. You will quit going to meetings. You will have stopped calling your recovery support people. Your defenses will go back up and you may take exception to the feedback of significant others who tell you that you are acting like you used to before recovery.

You won't be able to see that you are on the road to relapse. You won't be able to understand why they are concerned. You won't be able to identify the behavioral changes that scare them because you will be back in denial. Being around old drinking/using environments and friends don't scare you. You can't understand why it would scare your significant others. After all, you told them that you are not going to relapse. You have learned your lesson. What more do they want?

After awhile, you will begin to think that you have your drinking or using under control now. When you think of addiction as a thing of the past, that you now have it under control, you will begin to entertain the notion that you can now drink or use without negative consequences. If any of this sounds like your recent experience, you are in big trouble. You are in the relapse process and unless you do something now, you will relapse--and soon.

Copyright 2009, Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D., <http://www.peggyferguson.com>  
Hubbard House Publishing, Stillwater, OK.