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Busting Addiction and Its Myths Season 3 Episode 9

What It Takes to Make It

Welcome back to Busting Addiction and Its Myths. This is episode 9 of Season 3. In this article, we are guided by Tony Z., a young recovering addict who has inspired and helped many a younger person new to the process.

Everything that we learn from Tony's experience at getting and staying clean and sober is 100% corroborated by best recovery practices. What follows is a narrative about What It Takes to Make It. The first "It" refers to the effort and the steps that one needs to take without fail in order to get to the next "It" which defines the goal: a worthy and productive life liberated from the obsessive compulsion to abuse drugs and alcohol, and therefore free of its negative consequences, from jail to divorce and all things in between.

Consider this my edited version of what Tony believes to be the truth as you he has experienced for himself self, what he saw happen to those who failed to do the work.

If you are a parent, spouse, son or daughter or anyone else who has a personal stake in the successful recovery of a person suffering from addictive disease, then this is for you and for the addict/alcoholic who is making the valiant try to

get life back on track. Or, as we have often found, to discover a new track that makes life fulfilling and hopeful as opposed to empty and despairing.

Let me start with the things that you should watch for that are signs of recovery in the positive sense. This assumes a scenario where the addict is in treatment or has recently come into a sober living facility or is back with his family.

This scene also assumes that he has stopped using any mind-altering substances, including marijuana, prescription drugs not specifically prescribed by that person's personal physician, alcohol, and whatever else passes for the use of substances that change mood or perception and/or are addictive in nature. Prescribed antidepressants are typically non-addictive.

You would be amazed at the number of different types of prescribed and other types of substances clients bring with them into treatment. Example is the huge number of sleep aids that exist on the market like a natural element such as melatonin all the way to narcotic-like brands such as ...fill in the blank but look at the warning label first.

Then there are the anti-anxiety drugs like the one that starts with Z, which may be highly addictive, and the addict doesn't know about that and didn't care about that at the time.

What is my point here?

My point is this: addicts new to treatment or at least early in recovery are so used to escaping reality, including dealing with their feelings to the point where they have trouble distinguishing what they can legitimately take and what they should not. There is a term for those of us (myself included) who came to rely on pharmacopeia to get through life: we are called chemically dependent. That covers all the possibilities.

Once the addict is free of chemicals, including alcohol, then we look for the following signs and encourage the change in attitude and behaviour that signal a healthy, upward ascent to long-term recovery. We use the word "you" as if you were the recovering person in or just out of treatment.

A return to a more normalized schedule that results in a healthy, predictable rhythm for the day and for the night. It helps if you have a written schedule of activity for the 24-hour period, even if you just say "play 2-4pm" as an example. Making and sticking to a schedule, and modifying it as you go, is a great way to develop discipline for living a sober life. We say: "There is liberation in discipline and victory in surrender".

Exercise/fitness: chances are, your physical body has been over-stressed by not eating right and by lack of exercise. Getting into a fitness routine is not just a nice suggestion. It is vital that you get on the fitness path, if only slowly at first. You will start to build your stamina for life as it is meant to be lived today. You will also begin to enjoy the endorphin kick which will make up for the pleasure-stimulation you once got from your favourite drugs.

Re-learning to eat right is part of your self-care program. This may sound boring, but the fact is that you have likely not been paying attention to the things that matter in life. That's not a condemnation; it's just the disease playing its destructive role in disrupting everything that is normal, including how you nourish your body, and your mind, too. There's plenty written about good nutrition today. The Harvard Medical School is a good place to start if you want the very best advice for free.

Getting a sponsor who will help you work your 12-step program is without question one of the main pillars of recovery, at least in our book. We are fully aware that the 12 steps are not the only way to recovery and God bless the other ways if they help save a life from needless suffering and even death. Yes, we say that word, because we have seen it happen when someone relapses and we are not there in time to help. Can we be any more serious about the need for a sponsor?

Returning to or starting to do the things that make us grow, give us joy and have us become a productive member of society. That includes reigniting a passion like art or music, going back to a trade school, or starting college anew, and becoming involved in giving back to our fellow travellers on the highway of recovery. The latter will keep you involved in the activity that keeps you sober, as it is part of why we attend AA meetings: to stay sober and help another alcoholic achieve sobriety.

Fully embrace that addictive disorder is just that: it's a disease that had you in its merciless grip and helps explain much of what you did that brought you shame and may still. But please understand this: there is absolutely no shame in having this disorder. None whatsoever. You are taking a courageous step in arresting this disease in its tracks and you will reverse some, but not all, of the damage that it caused you and others. Recovery is about growing up and holding ourselves accountable without condemning ourselves.

Having an objective view of ourselves when we finally make our amends is a key test of how well we are doing: "This is what I did, and I am here to say I am sorry, and I'm also here to pay you the money back". That's all we owe. Doesn't matter if we are forgiven, and that would be nice, but that is not why we are there. We are there to clear our own consciences so that we are no longer carrying shame and guilt. At some point that has to end, anyway.

Those are the seven major things that signal a beginning of the return to "normalcy" for the recovering addict; normalcy is defined as regularly doing the things that keep us clean and sober, for we are reminded that this is a program of action.

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