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Season 04. Episode 03

## Podcast Title: The Johari Window

Back in the 50's, when the Johari Window was created for organizations to improve human communication at the company level, therapists were lightning-quick to see how the Johari Window could be used as a means of revealing the truth about ourselves as recovering addicts. Or trying to recover. Recovery also applies profoundly to family members in addicted, co-dependent relationships. That means *everyone* who has an addict "in the house".

(Co-dependency is a subject in and of itself. To learn more, check out Melody Beatty's superb book [Co-dependent No More.](#))

There are four panes (squares) to the Johari Window (although the panes will differ and change in size as therapy reveals more about myself) and this is how they are described as part of the Group Therapy process in recovery:

1. Open pane: this is what I easily reveal to others. This is what *I and others know about me*. Just the typical life facts, such as where I live, what I do for a living, and other basic self-descriptors. This zone allows me to express my wish to have the world see me in a certain way, and it also allows me to express

how I would like to see myself. The operative word here is "see", as in seeing through a Window.

Therapists say, and I was taught, that the signs of recovery include being open about ourselves and knowing what we are feeling. We are no longer "stuffing our feelings". We used drugs and alcohol to do that, and that way, we could keep those pesky feeling down there.

One technique to help open us up are the questions about our *primary feelings*: Am I Mad, Glad, Afraid, Ashamed, or Hurt?

You might be surprised to learn how many people, recovering or not, do not know what emotions they are feeling, or do not want to reveal them for fear (afraid!) of looking vulnerable or weak. Men are notorious for hiding or denying their feelings. Men are also twice as likely as women to become addicts or alcoholics. That said, I know of no research designed to explore the apparent connection between the incidence of addictive disorder between men and women and how each gender handles its feelings.

2. Secret pane. This is what I will *never ever reveal to others*, but I do know this about me. Secret to you. *Shameful to me*. What I think you should never know about me.

Much energy is expended in keeping secrets. The bigger the pane, the greater the pain. It is indeed true that healing can begin when more and more of the things that were once hidden from view are finally brought into the light.

By the way, there is a Step that's all about that, for if we do not disclose to someone exactly what we are feeling, thinking and remembering, the odds are that we will either relapse or stay miserable but "sober".

Understanding and expressing what I am really feeling and being OK with whatever I feel will help me go with the flow and not have to resist or alter my feelings. I will therefore not be compelled to drink or use drugs to stuff them, and the truth process will help me accept these feelings as just feelings, and not as an invitation to jump off the bridge or act on them in an unhealthy way.

Addicts live life in more than one dimension, at least in two, or sometimes more. We are actors, chameleons who desperately want to be accepted, to fit in, and we will lie subtly or outrageously just to keep that shameful secret in the basement where it will stay. Otherwise, we mistakenly believe, we will be voted off the island, forever a persona non grata.

The need to keep a Secret is based on yet another myth that needs that is embraced by much our own society as well: addicts are bad, weak, immoral people who brought this upon themselves and deserve whatever punishment we choose to mete out. So instead of seeing themselves as sick people trying to heal, they see themselves as weak, bad, unworthy of respect from others and for themselves. And much of society agrees.

We in recovery believe that "You're only as sick as the secrets that you keep". That's why having a sponsor to whom we can confide as part of our 12-step program is so vital.

3. Blind pane. This is what *others can readily see about me, but I am not aware of it myself*. This is the pane of Denial. This is the not knowing that I am *pretending to be normal*, but others can see, for example, that I am emotionally fragile.

One of the most powerful aspects of group therapy is the group's X-Ray vision: others see things we cannot for a variety of self-protective reasons. They see the pretences we project and are far from fooled; they see when we try to hide self-serving motives under "good" ones and call us on it; they serve as the mirror to our own attitudes and behaviour.

One of the most unpleasant moments - I signed up for this - is what we called being in the Hot Seat. This meant taking my turn every few weeks and having the group call me on my self-defeating attitude and/or dishonest behaviour. A most uncomfortable, but necessary part of the process on the road to becoming an authentic human being,

That brings to life: "Ye shall know the truth and *knowing the truth* shall set you free". It - this rigorous process - is all about liberation from the slavery of addiction after all.

4. Unknown. This is *what is not known by others and by me*. I may not know or believe something even very positive about myself such as: "I would be a great Dad because I have true empathy for others", and therefore, since it has not yet been uncovered, it's also unknown to others.

Group therapy starts with me sharing about myself for the Open pane, and for others to share about me for the Blind pane. We go around the room, and as more is revealed and more trust is built, the Secret and the Unknown panes get filled in for a more complete picture of me and of others in the room.

This *group effect* is recognized as one of the most powerful revealing and healing forces in recovery, bringing us from a place of self-deceit and sabotage into the zone of truth, compassion, and empathy.

Only by actively surrendering to Truth can we begin our journey.

What did we learn today?

1. The Johari Window is yet another useful method for therapists to use in the recovery setting involving addicts and their loved ones drawn into the dysfunctional world of addiction.
2. The whole point of the Johari Window is to uncover truths about ourselves by smashing illusions that stand in the way of healing.
3. Group therapy is a powerful tool designed to steer us from denial and unhealthy, self-defeating thinking onto the path of honest thinking. The group will catch us if we are not honest. And it will support us if we are indeed honest with ourselves and with the group.
4. Becoming more open by shining a light on our secrets will have them lose their power and ease the burden of stuffing our (misguided) feelings of shame.
5. Working through each Window in a group therapy setting i.e. working through the Open, Secret, Blind and even Unknown panes will help liberate us from old ideas that do not serve us well anymore, especially now that we see the light.