

Hooked On Recovery

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Giving Back

“You must give some time to your fellow men. Even if it's a little thing, do something for others - something for which you get no pay but the privilege of doing it.” –Albert Schweitzer

“Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics. It works when other activities fail. This is our twelfth suggestion: Carry this message to other alcoholics! You can help when no one else can. You can secure their confidence when others fail. Remember they are very ill.” –Alcoholics Anonymous, pg. 89

Giving back has become ingrained in my life. And maybe I'm still selfish, because I always get more than I give. Always. Yet, there's a catch in talking about giving back. I'm conscious of self-will run riot and letting my own ego run the show. In the rooms of recovery the acronym for EGO is Edging God Out. So how do I write something about giving back without sounding like I'm bragging? Can someone truly be humble writing about their own humility? As soon as I say I'm humble, I no longer am. Ah, the things I wrestle with. Phillip, just write the column.

In my experience with countless people in recovery, I have observed a common thread, a desire to give back that I believe stems from three sources – gratitude, obligation and obedience. I've written often about how grateful I am. To this day, I am thankful for my “rescue from the pit”. I never want to forget how dark, horrible and frightening it was in there. All of us in recovery have been given a second chance, an opportunity at a new life and we have embraced it. We express our gratitude by helping others. I also recognize that during my addiction I left a wake of destruction. We have to clean up, to the best of our ability, the wreckage of our past. It's the least we can do. It's the honorable thing to do. Making amends is not an option if we want to sustain our recovery – it's an obligation. After 17 years, I still have things I'm cleaning up. My program also taught me that “in order to keep it, I had to give it away”. If I don't want to use again, I have to help others. So maybe, there is a healthy fear factor thrown into the mix again. I've seen too many people go back out and make a total mess of their lives. I don't want to be one. I must be obedient to my program of recovery.

Over the years, I've been blessed to have small parts in many amazing recoverys. I've had many opportunities to give back to others sick and suffering. As I got better, I found other avenues of service as well. One of those avenues is coaching my kids' soccer teams. All over our country countless dads and moms help out with their kids' sports activities. I'm no different. In fact, the “normalcy” of it reminds me again of how lucky I am. One player taught me more about coaching than any other. JJ was not gifted physically, he may have had a touch of palsy; I'm not sure. The boys were mostly seven years old and we were the Golden Anacondas, undefeated. JJ was not a star player, but he was a star teammate. He showed up at every practice, never complained, worked hard. Near the end of the season, every player had scored several goals, all except JJ. He had none. We were winning this particular game and I sent JJ in to the striker position and told him to stay in front of the goal. I pulled my son Joshua aside and said, “Get JJ a goal”. Joshua's eyes lit up, he smiled and trotted on the field. He talked to the other Anacondas, and sure enough within a few minutes, some deft passing, Joshua made a brilliant pass on to the foot of JJ who knocked it in. He raised his arms in triumph, his teammates

mobbed him, laughing, jumping up and down for joy. Then JJ scanned the sidelines for his parents. Sadly, they weren't there. At the last game, we gave out little trophies to all the players. When it came to JJ, I said something like, "This guy was the ultimate team player, showed up at every practice, worked his tail off. And he scored his first goal! You're a terrific kid. It's been my pleasure to coach you these last few years." He had been looking at the ground, and with his teammates clapping, he looked at me and a single tear rolled down his cheek. I choked up and a tear rolled down my cheek as I handed him his trophy. Several tears rolled down several cheeks. My lesson? Coaching is much, much more than wins and losses.

I'll never forget that moment. Joshua and the rest of the Anacondas were happier about JJ's goal than any they had scored. They got it. They experienced the joy of giving back. You know, I never would have been a coach if it wasn't for recovery.

"Freely you have received, freely give." –Matthew 10:8

Hooked on Recovery is a biweekly message from CCAR Executive Director Phillip Valentine, person in recovery since 12/28/87, devoted husband, a father of five and one more in a long line of surf fishermen. These thoughts, views and opinions reflect on his personal recovery and are not meant in any way to speak for the entire recovery community. He welcomes all your comments and suggestions on this column, email him at phillip@ccar.us. Visit the website at www.ccar.us to read the entire series.