

Hooked On Recovery

May 28, 2004

Priorities

Early in my recovery, my sponsor (sober person offering newcomers suggestions on recovery – in case you missed the last column) seemed like he talked incessantly about priorities. His voice still rings in my head, “You got to stay sober first, without sobriety you got nothing else”. If I didn’t stay clean, I’d have no family, no job, no friends, no nothing. (What’s happened to my grammar?) Today, after 16 years of walking my road of recovery I sum it up this way: recovery, family, work.

Priority #1: Recovery. My recovery comes first; it has to. The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous reminds me that “what (I) really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of (my) spiritual condition”. Maintenance means putting in some kind of effort. I have to work at my spiritual condition. For me, it’s an early morning ritual of prayer, journaling and Bible reading along with active church service and an occasional recovery support meeting. Another aspect of my spiritual condition is how I take care of myself. Diet, exercise, recreation, vacation all play into this as well. I *need* to fish and fish a lot. OK, my wife Sandy doesn’t buy that one either, but the rest is what works for me and fishing *is* a time when I recharge. It’s another time I connect with God. So you see, how I take care of my recovery must be flexible. I have learned to adjust and do what I need to do. Recovery, my personal recovery, comes first. Without it, I ain’t got nothing else.

Priority #2: Family. On any given day, the people who really know how I’m doing are the ones closest to me. Ask Sandy. She’ll tell you. And she’d tell you that some days are much better than others. I cannot hide my spiritual condition from her, nor would I want to. I’m married to an astounding woman; we share a deep commitment to one another and to our family. We work at our marriage, on our relationship. Maybe “what we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our marriage”. Sandy and I have 3 children (9, 7, 2), one due December 20th and a 16-year old daughter from my first marriage. Sandy and I *have* to work as a team. Right now, we have spring travel soccer (I’m the coach), baseball, dance, music lessons, school and church activities to juggle and coordinate. What’s fun about it is that it’s all done in love, amazing amounts of love. I love the way Sandy and I work together, talk with one another, laugh with our children and share concerns. And when I tap into the love I have for my children, I get a tiny glimpse into the depth of the love my Father in heaven has for me... I also understand the love my parents have for me.

Priority #3: Work. I believe that by being diligent about my own recovery and trying to keep my own house in order, I have been blessed to have a challenging job that has incredible significance, personally and for a larger community. I work for the greater good. “Putting a face on recovery” and “building recovery capital” are incredible, noble causes. They bring deep purpose to my life. I see myself as a trusted servant to all of you in the recovery community; not a position I could possibly take lightly. This work is demanding, consuming and rewarding and I must take care that my priorities don’t shift. It’s what we in recovery know as balance, maybe a topic for another day. Without my recovery, I ain’t got nothing.

Hooked on Recovery is a biweekly message from CCAR Executive Director Phillip Valentine, person in recovery since 12/28/87, devoted husband, father of four and just another surf fisherman. He welcomes all your comments and suggestions on this column, email him phillip@ccar.us. Or visit the website at www.ccar.us to see previous articles.