

Working Your Way Down the Corporate Ladder

Deep Dives · The Recovery Files

How the Disease Chose Your Job, Your Ceiling, and Your Comfort Zone

A Career Regression Intensive — The Recovery Files

Descending · Less visibility, less accountability, more room to use · Rebuilding · Habits first, right-sized steps, structure over hiding

Career regression in addiction is rarely one dramatic fall. It is a series of reasonable-sounding decisions, each one protecting the disease.

In this workbook

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Each reading is followed by its check-in questions and exercises, in the same order as the app. Your scored results are shown in the app.

PART 1 OF 5 · READING

What Is Working Your Way Down the Corporate Ladder?

Most people picture addiction costing someone their job in a single dramatic event — the failed drug test, the accident, the walkout, the termination meeting. That version happens, but it is not the common one. The common one is quieter, slower, and almost invisible from the outside. It is a career that gradually descends instead of rises, one reasonable-sounding decision at a time, until the person looks up years later and realizes they are earning less, doing less, and being asked for less than they were a decade ago — and that at every step, they were the one who chose it.

Working your way down the corporate ladder is the pattern of career regression that occurs when a person's professional decisions begin serving their substance use instead of their future. It rarely looks like failure in the moment. It looks like turning down a promotion because the hours would be brutal. It looks like passing on the certification because the class meets on Saturday mornings. It looks like transferring to a quieter department, taking the overnight shift, going independent, or staying in a role you outgrew years ago because it is comfortable and nobody bothers you. Each individual choice is defensible. Strung together, they form a descent.

The mechanism is straightforward once you see it. Active addiction requires three things from your environment: time, privacy, and low accountability. A demanding job with high visibility threatens all three. A promotion means more eyes on you, more responsibility for outcomes, more early mornings, more travel, more moments where you have to be sharp and sober and present. So the disease begins to filter your opportunities. Not consciously — you do not sit down and decide to protect your drinking. But when the opportunity comes and you feel that flash of resistance, that immediate wave of reasons why it is not the right fit, that resistance is often the disease speaking in your voice.

Over time this creates a job that is shaped around the illness rather than around the person. You do not just tolerate the low-accountability position — you protect it. You get territorial about your schedule. You resist changes to your routine. You feel genuine anxiety when management restructures, not because you fear for your income but because you fear losing the conditions that make your use sustainable. People in this pattern often describe feeling strangely relieved when they take a step down. That relief is diagnostic. Relief at reduced responsibility, in a person who once had ambition, deserves examination.

The result is a career built to be survivable rather than meaningful, and a person who has quietly become smaller than they are. This intensive is not about shame, and it is not about the promotions themselves. It is about seeing the pattern clearly enough that you stop repeating it in recovery — because the same machinery that shrank your work life will shrink your recovery if you let it run unexamined.

Reflection Questions

1. When you look at your career from your first serious job to today, does the line go up, flat, or down? Describe the shape of it in your own words.

2. Name a specific decision where you chose the easier, quieter, or less accountable option. What reason did you give at the time?

3. Have you ever felt relief at taking a step down or letting an opportunity pass? What was that relief actually about?

4. What three things does your current job give you that active use would have needed — time, privacy, low accountability, flexible hours, no testing, something else?

5. If your substance use had never entered the picture, where do you honestly believe you would be professionally right now?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 1 OF 5

Job Accommodation to the Disease

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I have chosen or kept a job at least partly because of the freedom it gave me to use

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I have avoided jobs with drug or alcohol testing, even when they paid more

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I preferred shifts, schedules, or assignments where no one was watching me closely
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I valued a flexible start time mainly because it let me recover from the night before
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I would not consider a job that required travel, on-call hours, or early mornings
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I looked for work where I could be alone for long stretches of the day
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I have picked cash work, gig work, or self-employment partly to avoid oversight
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. If my drinking or using had not been a factor, I would have chosen a different job
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Career Timeline Reconstruction

Laying Your Work History Next to Your Use History

Why This Matters

Career regression is invisible one job at a time and unmistakable across six. Work backward or forward, whichever is easier, and fill in every position you can remember. The critical column is the last one: what your substance use looked like during that job. When the two timelines are laid side by side, the pattern usually announces itself.

Position #1

Job title, employer, and approximate years

Responsibility level: what were you accountable for, and who reported to you?

Approximate pay and how it compared to the job before it (higher, same, lower)

Why you left, or why you were let go — the reason you gave at the time

The reason you would give now, in hindsight

What your substance use looked like during this job (frequency, timing, whether it touched work)

Was this position a step up, sideways, or down from the last one? Why?

Position #2

Job title, employer, and approximate years

Responsibility level: what were you accountable for, and who reported to you?

Approximate pay and how it compared to the job before it (higher, same, lower)

Why you left, or why you were let go — the reason you gave at the time

The reason you would give now, in hindsight

What your substance use looked like during this job (frequency, timing, whether it touched work)

Was this position a step up, sideways, or down from the last one? Why?

Position #3

Job title, employer, and approximate years

Responsibility level: what were you accountable for, and who reported to you?

Approximate pay and how it compared to the job before it (higher, same, lower)

Why you left, or why you were let go — the reason you gave at the time

The reason you would give now, in hindsight

What your substance use looked like during this job (frequency, timing, whether it touched work)

Was this position a step up, sideways, or down from the last one? Why?

Position #4

Job title, employer, and approximate years

Responsibility level: what were you accountable for, and who reported to you?

Approximate pay and how it compared to the job before it (higher, same, lower)

Why you left, or why you were let go — the reason you gave at the time

The reason you would give now, in hindsight

What your substance use looked like during this job (frequency, timing, whether it touched work)

Was this position a step up, sideways, or down from the last one? Why?

Position #5

Job title, employer, and approximate years

Responsibility level: what were you accountable for, and who reported to you?

Approximate pay and how it compared to the job before it (higher, same, lower)

Why you left, or why you were let go — the reason you gave at the time

The reason you would give now, in hindsight

What your substance use looked like during this job (frequency, timing, whether it touched work)

Was this position a step up, sideways, or down from the last one? Why?

Position #6

Job title, employer, and approximate years

Responsibility level: what were you accountable for, and who reported to you?

Approximate pay and how it compared to the job before it (higher, same, lower)

Why you left, or why you were let go — the reason you gave at the time

The reason you would give now, in hindsight

What your substance use looked like during this job (frequency, timing, whether it touched work)

Was this position a step up, sideways, or down from the last one? Why?

Reading Your Timeline

1. Looking at all six positions together, what is the overall shape of the line — rising, flat, or descending? Where did it turn?

2. Which job was the high-water mark of your career? What were you capable of then that you are not doing now?

3. At what point did your use start showing up in the "why I left" column, even indirectly?

4. Was there a single position that, in hindsight, was the pivot — the one after which everything got smaller?

5. If a stranger read this timeline with no other information, what story would they say it tells?

YOUR EXERCISE

The Descending Ladder Map

Locating Yourself on the Descent

How to Use This

Tap every rung you have actually stood on. Most people find they can identify three or four. Then mark where you are today. The point is not to rank yourself — it is to see that the movement was directional, and that each rung offered the disease something the one above it did not.

○ 1 The Climb Ambitious and visible. You raised your hand, took on more, and were seen as someone going somewhere. Use had to stay hidden and tightly controlled. ○ 2 The Plateau You stopped reaching. Good enough became the target. Nobody noticed yet because your reputation was still carrying you. ○ 3 The Decline You turned things down — the lead role, the certification, the extra territory, the committee. You called it balance, or focus, or knowing yourself. ○ 4 The Sidestep A lateral move to a quieter department, a different shift, a smaller team, or a company where nobody knew your history. ○ 5 The Step Down You took a title, a wage, or a role beneath your qualifications — and felt relief instead of grief. ○ 6 The Floor Cash work, gig work, overnight solo shifts, self-employment with no oversight, sporadic employment, or no work at all.

Which rung are you standing on today?

○ 1. The Climb ○ 2. The Plateau ○ 3. The Decline ○ 4. The Sidestep ○ 5. The Step Down ○ 6. The Floor

Ladder Map Reflection

1. How many rungs down did you travel? Over how many years?

2. What did each step down give you that the rung above it did not? Name the specific benefit to the illness.

3. Which step felt like relief at the time? What does that relief look like to you now?

4. Did anyone try to tell you what was happening while it was happening? What did you say back?

5. Standing where you are today, what would one rung back up actually require of you — specifically, not generally?

PART 2 OF 5 · READING

How the Disease Selects Your Job

Addiction is not passive. It is an organizing force. Left unchecked, it will reorganize your finances, your friendships, your calendar, and your geography around a single priority: continued access. Your job is one of the largest structures in your life, and the disease will work on it relentlessly, because a job that conflicts with use is a threat and a job that accommodates use is an asset.

The first thing the disease selects for is schedule control. Any arrangement that lets you decide when your day starts is valuable, because it converts a hangover from a crisis into an inconvenience. Remote work, flexible start times, self-employment, route work, commission-based sales, night shifts, and seasonal work all offer this. None of these are bad jobs — millions of people do them well and soberly. But if you chose yours partly because of what it let you get away with, the job is doing double duty, and you know it.

The second thing it selects for is low observation. Being alone matters. A person working in an open office with a manager ten feet away is being monitored constantly, whether anyone intends it or not. A person driving a truck, working a territory, running a solo overnight, or working from a home office is not. The disease is drawn to unobserved space the way water finds a crack, and it will encourage you to interpret isolation as independence.

The third is reduced accountability for outcomes. Jobs where mistakes are visible, immediate, and consequential — surgery, aviation, litigation, front-line supervision — create enormous pressure to stay functional. Jobs where the work is diffuse, deadlines are soft, or performance is hard to measure allow decline to go unnoticed for years. This is why people in this pattern often drift toward roles with vague deliverables and away from roles with hard ones.

The fourth is screening avoidance. Drug testing, background checks, licensing boards, safety-sensitive designations, and clearance requirements all function as external gates. If you have organized your job search — even semi-consciously — around avoiding those gates, that is not a preference. That is a symptom. Many people can identify a specific job they did not apply for, or an industry they wrote off entirely, for reasons they now recognize had nothing to do with fit.

The fifth is cognitive undemand. As tolerance and consumption increase, so does the cost of any work that requires sustained sharpness, complex judgment, or next-day reliability. The disease will steer you toward work that can be done tired, foggy, or hungover. Over years, this is how a person with real capability ends up doing work that requires almost none of it — and then begins to believe that is all they were ever capable of.

Understanding this selection process is important for one specific reason: it did not stop when you got sober. The same preferences are still installed. If you go job hunting today and feel drawn to the role with the least oversight and the softest expectations, you are entitled to ask whether that is your judgment talking or the residue of an old operating system.

Reflection Questions

1. Which of the five selection pressures — schedule control, low observation, reduced accountability, screening avoidance, cognitive undemand — shaped your work history most?

2. Name a job, field, or opportunity you never pursued. Was there a gate involved — a test, a license, a clearance, a background check?

3. How much of your day, in your worst period, was spent unobserved by anyone? What did that space allow?

4. Have you ever gotten territorial or anxious about a change to your schedule or supervision? What were you actually protecting?

5. If you were job hunting this month, which of these old preferences would still show up in what appeals to you?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 2 OF 5

Advancement Avoidance

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I have turned down a promotion, a lead role, or a transfer that I was qualified for

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I stopped volunteering for projects, committees, or extra assignments

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I let a certification, license, degree, or training opportunity lapse or go unfinished
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I watched someone less experienced get promoted past me and told myself I did not care
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I deliberately kept my performance at "good enough" so nothing more would be expected
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I avoided anything that would put me in front of leadership or clients
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I declined supervisory responsibility because it would mean being accountable for others
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I stayed in a position I had outgrown because leaving would have disrupted my routine
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Missed Opportunities Inventory

The Résumé of Things That Did Not Happen

Purpose

Work through five specific opportunities you declined, avoided, sabotaged, or let expire. Promotions, transfers, certifications, degrees, business ideas, job offers, mentorships, a chance to lead something. For each one, separate the reason you gave from the reason underneath. That separation is the entire exercise.

Missed Opportunity #1

The Opportunity: What was it, and roughly when?

Were you qualified for it? What made you a real candidate?

How did you avoid it — did you decline outright, not apply, miss the deadline, or underperform on purpose?

The Reason You Gave: What did you tell your boss, your family, and yourself?

The Reason Underneath: What did it actually threaten about your use, your schedule, or your privacy?

Who got it instead? Where are they now?

The Cost: What did declining this actually cost you — financially, professionally, and in how you see yourself?

Name the feeling that comes up writing this. Then keep writing for two more sentences.

Missed Opportunity #2

The Opportunity: What was it, and roughly when?

Were you qualified for it? What made you a real candidate?

How did you avoid it — did you decline outright, not apply, miss the deadline, or underperform on purpose?

The Reason You Gave: What did you tell your boss, your family, and yourself?

The Reason Underneath: What did it actually threaten about your use, your schedule, or your privacy?

Who got it instead? Where are they now?

The Cost: What did declining this actually cost you — financially, professionally, and in how you see yourself?

Name the feeling that comes up writing this. Then keep writing for two more sentences.

Missed Opportunity #3

The Opportunity: What was it, and roughly when?

Were you qualified for it? What made you a real candidate?

How did you avoid it — did you decline outright, not apply, miss the deadline, or underperform on purpose?

The Reason You Gave: What did you tell your boss, your family, and yourself?

The Reason Underneath: What did it actually threaten about your use, your schedule, or your privacy?

Who got it instead? Where are they now?

The Cost: What did declining this actually cost you — financially, professionally, and in how you see yourself?

Name the feeling that comes up writing this. Then keep writing for two more sentences.

Missed Opportunity #4

The Opportunity: What was it, and roughly when?

Were you qualified for it? What made you a real candidate?

How did you avoid it — did you decline outright, not apply, miss the deadline, or underperform on purpose?

The Reason You Gave: What did you tell your boss, your family, and yourself?

The Reason Underneath: What did it actually threaten about your use, your schedule, or your privacy?

Who got it instead? Where are they now?

The Cost: What did declining this actually cost you — financially, professionally, and in how you see yourself?

Name the feeling that comes up writing this. Then keep writing for two more sentences.

Missed Opportunity #5

The Opportunity: What was it, and roughly when?

Were you qualified for it? What made you a real candidate?

How did you avoid it — did you decline outright, not apply, miss the deadline, or underperform on purpose?

The Reason You Gave: What did you tell your boss, your family, and yourself?

The Reason Underneath: What did it actually threaten about your use, your schedule, or your privacy?

Who got it instead? Where are they now?

The Cost: What did declining this actually cost you — financially, professionally, and in how you see yourself?

Name the feeling that comes up writing this. Then keep writing for two more sentences.

Inventory Summary

1. Across all five, what reason did you give most often? Notice the repetition.

2. Which one do you most regret? What made that one different from the others?

3. Is there an opportunity here that is genuinely still available to you, or a version of it that is?

4. Grief over lost opportunity is appropriate and finite. Shame that says do not bother trying is the disease. Which one are you feeling right now, and how can you tell?

5. Write one sentence you would say to the version of yourself who declined the first opportunity on this list.

YOUR EXERCISE

Job Protection Audit

What Your Job Gave the Disease

How to Use This

Select every feature that describes a job you have held during active use — current or past. None of these features are bad on their own; millions of people work this way soberly and well. The question is whether you selected for them, defended them, or felt anxious when they were threatened. Count your selections when you finish.

Schedule and Time Control

- ☐ Flexible start time ☐ Remote or work from home ☐ Night or overnight shift ☐ I set my own hours
- ☐ Long or unmonitored lunch breaks ☐ Weekdays off midweek ☐ Seasonal or intermittent work ☐ No early morning requirement

Which of these did you actively seek out or defend? Describe a time you protected one of them.

Add any features in this category that are not listed:

Low Observation

- ☐ No direct supervisor on site ☐ Absentee or hands-off manager ☐ Solo territory or route ☐ I work alone most of the day ☐ No performance reviews ☐ No time clock or badge in ☐ Work from a vehicle ☐ Nobody checks my output daily

Which of these did you actively seek out or defend? Describe a time you protected one of them.

Add any features in this category that are not listed:

Reduced Accountability

- ☐ No drug or alcohol testing ☐ No safety-sensitive duties ☐ No on-call rotation ☐ No required travel
- ☐ No client-facing responsibility ☐ No licensing or certification board ☐ Soft or moving deadlines ☐ Paid in cash or under the table

Which of these did you actively seek out or defend? Describe a time you protected one of them.

Add any features in this category that are not listed:

Low Cognitive or Physical Demand

- ☐ Work can be done tired or hungover ☐ Highly repetitive and predictable ☐ No public speaking or presenting ☐ No complex decision-making ☐ No physical exertion required ☐ No overtime expected ☐ Mistakes are not immediately visible ☐ Nobody depends on me to be sharp

Which of these did you actively seek out or defend? Describe a time you protected one of them.

Add any features in this category that are not listed:

Audit Summary

1. How many features did you select in total? Which category had the most?

2. Take your current or most recent job. If every one of those features were removed tomorrow, what would happen to you? Sit with that answer.

3. Have you ever turned down a job, or quietly not applied, because of a drug test, a background check, or a licensing requirement?

4. Which of these features do you still want in your next job? Is that your judgment, or is it the old operating system?

5. Name one feature you should deliberately give up in your next role because it makes hiding too easy.

PART 3 OF 5 · READING

The Invisible Résumé: What This Actually Cost You

There is the résumé you can print, and there is the invisible one — the record of everything that did not happen. The promotion you did not take. The role that went to someone else. The credential you never finished. The business you talked about for six years. The invisible résumé is where the real cost of career regression is recorded, and most people in early recovery have never looked at it directly.

Start with money, because it is the easiest to measure and the most commonly underestimated. Career earnings do not grow in a straight line; they compound. A promotion declined at thirty does not cost you the raise you turned down — it costs you that raise plus every subsequent raise calculated from a higher base, plus the roles that would have been open to you from that position, plus retirement contributions matched on a larger salary, plus the compounding growth on all of it. A single decision to stay put can easily represent several hundred thousand dollars across a working life. Most people never do this arithmetic because the result is genuinely painful.

Then there is capability. Skills that are not used degrade, and skills that are never built never exist. Every year spent in a role below your capacity is a year you did not spend developing. This is why people who step down often find, when they finally try to step back up, that the gap is wider than the number of years suggests. You were not standing still. You were falling behind a moving industry while telling yourself you could catch up whenever you wanted.

There is reputation, which is a real asset with a real balance. Colleagues who once saw you as a rising performer revised their assessment. References went quiet. The person who would have recommended you for something moved on. Reputation damage from this pattern is rarely dramatic — nobody blacklisted you — but a slow reclassification from "someone to watch" to "someone who is fine where he is" has consequences that persist long after you get sober.

There is identity, which is the cost people feel most and name least. Work is one of the primary places adults locate their sense of competence, contribution, and worth. When a person spends a decade being deliberately less than they are, something erodes that is not about money at all. Many people arrive in recovery having half-forgotten they were ever ambitious, ever good at something, ever the person others came to for answers. Recovering that memory is part of this work.

And there is the cost to other people. A partner who carried more financial weight than they signed up for. Children who did not get things you could have provided. A team that absorbed the work you stopped doing. Parents who watched capability go unused. These are amends-adjacent costs, and naming them accurately — without collapsing into shame — is part of an honest inventory.

One clarification matters here, and it matters a great deal. The point of counting these costs is not to convince you that you are behind, ruined, or out of time. It is to establish that the pattern was real and expensive, so that you take it seriously enough not to reproduce it. Grief over lost opportunity is appropriate and finite. Shame that argues you should not bother trying is the disease looking for a new job.

Reflection Questions

1. Estimate, honestly, what the last ten years cost you financially compared to the trajectory you were on. What number comes up, and what does seeing it bring up?

2. What skills did you have that have degraded? What skills would you have now if the last decade had gone differently?

3. How did the people who knew you professionally revise their view of you? What would a former manager say about you now versus then?

4. What did you stop believing about yourself and your capability? When did that belief change?

5. Who else absorbed the cost of your career decline — financially, practically, or emotionally?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 3 OF 5

Work Ethic and Habit Erosion

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. My attendance and punctuality got noticeably worse over time

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I called out sick, left early, or worked from home on days connected to my use

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. The quality of my work declined and I covered for it rather than fixing it

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I stopped following through on commitments I made at work
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I did the minimum required and stopped caring about doing things well
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I became harder to reach — slow to answer calls, emails, or messages
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I was dishonest at work about where I was, what I had done, or why something was late
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. Compared to my early career, I am a fundamentally less reliable worker today
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Work Habits Erosion Inventory

Rating Yourself Then, at Your Worst, and Now

Three Ratings, One Picture

For each habit, rate yourself at three points: early career before your use escalated, at the worst point of your use, and today. Work ethic is not a character trait you either have or lack. It is a set of behaviors that were practiced, abandoned, and can be practiced again. Seeing the three numbers side by side makes both the loss and the recovery measurable.

Punctuality and attendance

Arriving on time, staying the full shift, not calling out

Early career, before use escalated (1 = absent, 10 = excellent)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

At the worst point of my use (1 = absent, 10 = excellent)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Today, in recovery (1 = absent, 10 = excellent)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Describe one concrete example of this habit breaking down. What actually happened?

What is one small, repeatable action that would move today's number up by one point?

Post-weekend and post-holiday reliability

Mondays, days after events, days after paydays

Early career, before use escalated (1 = absent, 10 = excellent)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

At the worst point of my use (1 = absent, 10 = excellent)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Today, in recovery (1 = absent, 10 = excellent)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Describe one concrete example of this habit breaking down. What actually happened?

What is one small, repeatable action that would move today's number up by one point?

Follow-through on commitments

Doing what you said you would do, by when you said it

Early career, before use escalated (1 = absent, 10 = excellent)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

At the worst point of my use (1 = absent, 10 = excellent)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Today, in recovery (1 = absent, 10 = excellent)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Describe one concrete example of this habit breaking down. What actually happened?

What is one small, repeatable action that would move today's number up by one point?

Quality and attention to detail

Care in the work itself, catching your own errors

Early career, before use escalated (1 = absent, 10 = excellent)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

At the worst point of my use (1 = absent, 10 = excellent)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Today, in recovery (1 = absent, 10 = excellent)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Describe one concrete example of this habit breaking down. What actually happened?

What is one small, repeatable action that would move today's number up by one point?

Initiative and volunteering

Raising your hand, offering, taking things on unasked

Early career, before use escalated (1 = absent, 10 = excellent)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

At the worst point of my use (1 = absent, 10 = excellent)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Today, in recovery (1 = absent, 10 = excellent)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Describe one concrete example of this habit breaking down. What actually happened?

What is one small, repeatable action that would move today's number up by one point?

Learning and skill development

Training, certifications, staying current in your field

Early career, before use escalated (1 = absent, 10 = excellent)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

At the worst point of my use (1 = absent, 10 = excellent)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Today, in recovery (1 = absent, 10 = excellent)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Describe one concrete example of this habit breaking down. What actually happened?

What is one small, repeatable action that would move today's number up by one point?

Communication and responsiveness

Answering calls, emails, and messages in a reasonable time

Early career, before use escalated (1 = absent, 10 = excellent)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

At the worst point of my use (1 = absent, 10 = excellent)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Today, in recovery (1 = absent, 10 = excellent)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Describe one concrete example of this habit breaking down. What actually happened?

What is one small, repeatable action that would move today's number up by one point?

Handling feedback and conflict

Receiving correction without defensiveness or shutdown

Early career, before use escalated (1 = absent, 10 = excellent)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

At the worst point of my use (1 = absent, 10 = excellent)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Today, in recovery (1 = absent, 10 = excellent)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Describe one concrete example of this habit breaking down. What actually happened?

What is one small, repeatable action that would move today's number up by one point?

Physical presence and energy

Being fully there, alert, and engaged during the day

Early career, before use escalated (1 = absent, 10 = excellent)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

At the worst point of my use (1 = absent, 10 = excellent)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Today, in recovery (1 = absent, 10 = excellent)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Describe one concrete example of this habit breaking down. What actually happened?

What is one small, repeatable action that would move today's number up by one point?

Honesty and integrity at work

Truthful about status, whereabouts, mistakes, and hours

Early career, before use escalated (1 = absent, 10 = excellent)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

At the worst point of my use (1 = absent, 10 = excellent)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Today, in recovery (1 = absent, 10 = excellent)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Describe one concrete example of this habit breaking down. What actually happened?

What is one small, repeatable action that would move today's number up by one point?

Erosion Summary

1. Which habit shows the biggest drop between your early career number and your worst number?

2. Which habit has recovered the most already? What made that one come back first?

3. Which habit is still closest to its worst number today? What is holding it there?

4. Pick one habit to rebuild first. Why that one, and what makes it the foundation for the others?

5. What would need to be true, six months from now, for you to rate that habit two points higher?

YOUR EXERCISE

The Real Cost Accounting

Putting Numbers and Names to What This Took

Before You Start

This exercise is heavier than the others. Do it when you are steady, not when you are already low, and consider doing it with your sponsor, therapist, or counselor rather than alone. The purpose is not to prove you are behind. It is to establish that the pattern was real and expensive, so that you take it seriously enough not to repeat it in recovery.

Financial Cost

What was your highest annual income, and in what year?

What is your annual income now?

If the trajectory you were on had continued, what would you reasonably be earning today?

Estimate the gap over the last ten years. Do the arithmetic, even roughly. What number do you get?

Beyond salary: retirement contributions, matching, equity, benefits, and raises calculated from a higher base. What else compounds on top of that number?

What comes up looking at that figure? Write for at least three sentences rather than moving on quickly.

Capability and Credentials

What skills did you once have that have degraded from disuse?

What skills would you have today if the last decade had gone differently?

What certifications, licenses, degrees, or training did you abandon, let lapse, or never start?

How far has your field moved while you stood still? What would you need to learn to be current?

Reputation and Relationships at Work

How were you regarded professionally at your peak? What did people say about you?

How are you regarded now by people who knew you then?

Who would you have been able to call for a reference five years ago that you cannot call today?
Why?

What bridges were burned, quietly or loudly? Which of those are amends situations?

Who covered for you, absorbed your work, or protected you? Have you ever acknowledged that to them?

Identity and Others

What did you used to believe about your own capability? When did that belief change, and what changed it?

What did you want to be doing with your working life before the disease got a vote?

Who else carried the financial or practical weight of your decline — a partner, a parent, your children?

What could you have provided for the people you love that you did not?

Grief over lost opportunity is appropriate and finite. Shame that argues you should not bother trying is the disease looking for a new job. Which one is louder in you right now, and how can you tell them apart?

Closing This Exercise Well

Do Not Leave This Open

Naming losses without closing the exercise leaves the door open for shame to move in. Answer these three before you set this down, and tell one person what you found.

1. What is one thing from this accounting that is genuinely recoverable, starting this year?

Close the loop...

2. What is one thing that is permanently gone, that you need to grieve rather than chase?

Close the loop...

3. Who will you tell about doing this exercise, and when?

Close the loop...

PART 4 OF 5 · READING

The Language of Decline: Rationalization at Work

No one descends a career ladder while admitting that is what they are doing. The descent requires a narrative, and addiction is an exceptional writer. The stories are not stupid — that is what makes them effective. Each one is a legitimate position that real people hold for real reasons. Borrowed by the disease, they become perfect camouflage, because they are unfalsifiable and socially respectable.

"I'm just not the ambitious type." This is a genuine personality difference for some people, and a complete fabrication for others. The test is chronology. Were you never ambitious, or did you stop being ambitious at a specific point? If you can name the year the ambition disappeared, and that year coincides with a change in your use, you have your answer.

"I value work-life balance." A legitimate value — but examine what the protected life outside of work actually consisted of. Balance implies the other side of the scale contains something. If the hours you defended so fiercely were spent drinking alone, the word for that is not balance.

"That promotion wasn't worth the money." Sometimes true. But notice how rarely this analysis was actually run. Most people who say this never calculated the offer. The conclusion arrived first, and the reasoning was assembled afterward to support it.

"I'm not into corporate politics." This one is popular because it flatters the speaker — it recasts avoidance as integrity. But there is a difference between refusing to manipulate people and refusing to be visible. Visibility is what promotion requires. If your objection to politics is really an objection to being seen, the disease has found excellent cover.

"I'd rather do the actual work than manage people." Sometimes an accurate preference about the type of work. Sometimes an accurate description of not wanting anyone depending on you, checking on you, or noticing your patterns. Only you know which one applies.

"This job is temporary — I'll make my move once things settle down." The tell here is duration. A temporary position held for eight years is not temporary. The phrase "once things settle down" describes a condition that has never once arrived, in any life, ever.

"I'm overqualified, but at least it's easy." This is the closest to an outright confession. Easy is the point. Easy is what was being purchased, and the price was your career.

"They don't deserve my best." Resentment is the disease's favorite fuel because it feels like strength. It reframes withholding effort as a form of power. In practice, the person harmed by withheld effort is almost never the employer. It is the person whose skills atrophied while they were making a point.

The work here is not to prove that every one of these statements is false — some of them may be genuinely true for you. The work is to run each one against the timeline of your use and see which ones arrived when the drinking or using did. Statements that predate the addiction are probably yours. Statements that appeared alongside it probably belong to the disease.

Reflection Questions

1. Which of these statements have you said out loud? Pick the one you have said most often.

2. Run the chronology test on it: were you always this way, or did this belief appear at a particular point? What else was happening then?

3. What did the hours you protected outside of work actually get spent on during your worst period?

4. Is there a statement here that is genuinely true for you and not the disease talking? How do you know the difference?

5. What would you have to admit if you took away your favorite explanation for staying where you are?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 4 OF 5

Rationalization and the Story I Told

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I told people I was not the ambitious type when the real reason was my using

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I used "work-life balance" as an explanation for choices that were actually about substances

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I blamed office politics, bad management, or the company for my lack of advancement

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I told myself the extra money was not worth the extra stress
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I described myself as overqualified for a job I chose because it was easy to hide in
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I convinced myself the job was temporary and I would make my move later
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I believed my employer did not deserve my best effort
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. When I am honest, most of my explanations for staying put were cover stories
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Rationalization Decoder

Running Your Explanations Against Your Timeline

The Chronology Test

The goal is not to prove that every one of these statements is false — some may be genuinely true for you. The goal is to run each one against the timeline of your use. Beliefs that predate the addiction are probably yours. Beliefs that appeared alongside it probably belong to the disease.

"I'm just not the ambitious type."

A genuine personality difference for some people, and a complete fabrication for others. The test is chronology — were you never ambitious, or did the ambition disappear at a specific point?

How often have you used this explanation? (1 = never, 10 = it is my standard answer)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Chronology test: did you believe this before your use escalated?

☐ Yes — always believed it ☐ No — it appeared with the using ☐ Not sure

Complete this sentence: "I stopped wanting more at work around the time that..."

Who did you say this to most often? What did they say back?

Rewrite the statement as it would sound if it were completely true. What is the accurate version?

"I value work-life balance."

A legitimate value — but balance implies the other side of the scale contains something. Examine what the protected hours were actually spent on.

How often have you used this explanation? (1 = never, 10 = it is my standard answer)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Chronology test: did you believe this before your use escalated?

☐ Yes — always believed it ☐ No — it appeared with the using ☐ Not sure

Complete this sentence: "The hours I protected outside of work were actually spent..."

Who did you say this to most often? What did they say back?

Rewrite the statement as it would sound if it were completely true. What is the accurate version?

"That promotion wasn't worth the money."

Sometimes true. But notice how rarely the analysis was actually run. The conclusion usually arrived first and the reasoning was assembled afterward.

How often have you used this explanation? (1 = never, 10 = it is my standard answer)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Chronology test: did you believe this before your use escalated?

☐ Yes — always believed it ☐ No — it appeared with the using ☐ Not sure

Complete this sentence: "I never actually calculated it because..."

Who did you say this to most often? What did they say back?

Rewrite the statement as it would sound if it were completely true. What is the accurate version?

"I'm not into corporate politics."

This one flatters the speaker — it recasts avoidance as integrity. But there is a difference between refusing to manipulate people and refusing to be visible.

How often have you used this explanation? (1 = never, 10 = it is my standard answer)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Chronology test: did you believe this before your use escalated?

☐ Yes — always believed it ☐ No — it appeared with the using ☐ Not sure

Complete this sentence: "What I was really avoiding about being visible was..."

Who did you say this to most often? What did they say back?

Rewrite the statement as it would sound if it were completely true. What is the accurate version?

"I'd rather do the work than manage people."

Sometimes an accurate preference about the type of work. Sometimes an accurate description of not wanting anyone depending on you, checking on you, or noticing your patterns.

How often have you used this explanation? (1 = never, 10 = it is my standard answer)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Chronology test: did you believe this before your use escalated?

☐ Yes — always believed it ☐ No — it appeared with the using ☐ Not sure

Complete this sentence: "Having people depend on me and watch me closely would have meant..."

Who did you say this to most often? What did they say back?

Rewrite the statement as it would sound if it were completely true. What is the accurate version?

"This job is temporary — I'll make my move later."

The tell is duration. A temporary position held for eight years is not temporary. "Once things settle down" describes a condition that has never arrived in any life, ever.

How often have you used this explanation? (1 = never, 10 = it is my standard answer)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Chronology test: did you believe this before your use escalated?

☐ Yes — always believed it ☐ No — it appeared with the using ☐ Not sure

Complete this sentence: "I have been saying this for ___ years. What I was waiting for was..."

Who did you say this to most often? What did they say back?

Rewrite the statement as it would sound if it were completely true. What is the accurate version?

"I'm overqualified, but at least it's easy."

The closest thing to an outright confession. Easy was the point. Easy was what was being purchased, and the price was your career.

How often have you used this explanation? (1 = never, 10 = it is my standard answer)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Chronology test: did you believe this before your use escalated?

☐ Yes — always believed it ☐ No — it appeared with the using ☐ Not sure

Complete this sentence: "What "easy" specifically let me do was..."

Who did you say this to most often? What did they say back?

Rewrite the statement as it would sound if it were completely true. What is the accurate version?

"They don't deserve my best effort."

Resentment is the disease's favorite fuel because it feels like strength. It reframes withholding effort as power. But the person harmed by withheld effort is almost never the employer.

How often have you used this explanation? (1 = never, 10 = it is my standard answer)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Chronology test: did you believe this before your use escalated?

☐ Yes — always believed it ☐ No — it appeared with the using ☐ Not sure

Complete this sentence: “The person who actually paid for my withheld effort was...”

Who did you say this to most often? What did they say back?

Rewrite the statement as it would sound if it were completely true. What is the accurate version?

Decoder Summary

1. Which statement scored highest for frequency? How many years have you been saying it?

2. How many of these appeared with your using rather than before it? What does that count tell you?

3. Is there one on this list that is genuinely true for you and not the disease talking? How do you know the difference?

4. What would you have to admit, or do, if you gave up your favorite explanation for staying where you are?

5. Write the one sentence you have been telling yourself about work that you are now ready to stop saying.

YOUR EXERCISE

What Other People Saw

The Outside View of Your Work Life

Why the Outside View Matters

Addiction distorts self-assessment more than almost any other condition. The people around you at work were running a much more accurate evaluation than you were, and most of them said something about it at some point — in a review, a comment, a joke, a warning, or a silence. Reconstructing what they saw gives you data your own memory cannot supply.

The Official Record

What did your performance reviews say early in your career? What words were used about your potential?

What did your later reviews say? What language changed?

Were there written warnings, verbal warnings, attendance conversations, or HR involvement?
What was said?

Were you ever passed over without explanation? What do you now suspect the real reason was?

What Individual People Said

A manager or supervisor: what did they say to you about your performance, your potential, or your patterns?

A coworker: what did they notice, joke about, cover for, or confront you about?

A mentor or senior colleague who once invested in you: what did they say, and when did they stop?

A partner or family member: what did they say about your job, your ambition, or your income?

Which of these comments did you dismiss at the time? What did you tell yourself to make it go away?

Write the Review They Would Have Written

Step outside yourself. Write the honest performance review of you, at the worst point of your use, as your manager would have written it if there had been no consequences for total candor. Include what they saw, what they suspected, what they could not prove, and what they gave up expecting from you.

Write in their voice, about you, in the third person. Do not soften it and do not exaggerate it...

Witness Reflection

1. What is the gap between how you saw your work performance at the time and how others saw it?

2. Who tried hardest to tell you the truth? What happened to that relationship?

3. Is there someone from your work life who deserves an acknowledgment or an amends? Who, and for what?

4. What would the same manager write about you today? What would they still be waiting to see?

5. What is one thing you could do this month that would change what a current coworker would write about you?

PART 5 OF 5 · READING

Climbing Back Without Falling Off the Other Side

Once a person sees this pattern clearly, the impulse is almost always to fix it immediately — to make up ten lost years in ten months. That impulse is understandable and it is dangerous. Career restoration in recovery has two failure modes, not one, and the second one puts as many people back out as the first.

The first failure mode is staying put. You see the pattern, you name it in a meeting, you feel the insight, and you change nothing. The job that was built around your use is still built around your use, and now you are doing recovery inside a structure designed for active addiction. This works for a while and then stops working, because the environment keeps making relapse easy and initiative unnecessary.

The second failure mode is overcorrection. Newly sober, flooded with shame about lost years, people take the biggest job they can get, work eighty hours, and treat career restoration as penance. Work becomes the new anesthetic — same function, better reputation. It exhausts the person, crowds out meetings, therapy, sleep, and family, and generates a new set of consequences that look like productivity right up until the collapse. Early recovery has limited bandwidth. Spending all of it on career recovery is a decision to underfund everything else.

The sustainable path runs between these. A few principles hold up.

Rebuild habits before pursuing positions. Work ethic is not a personality trait; it is a set of behaviors that were practiced, then abandoned, and now must be practiced again. Showing up on time every day for six months is more valuable to your future than any title you could chase this year, because it re-establishes the substrate everything else sits on. It also generates evidence — and in early recovery, evidence about yourself is worth more than encouragement from others.

Take the next right-sized step, not the deserved one. There is a difference between the role you believe you should have and the role you can actually hold today while also holding your recovery. Chasing the first is ego work. Taking the second is recovery work, and the second one leads to the first eventually.

Choose environments that make hiding hard. This inverts the old selection criteria deliberately. Some supervision, some visibility, some accountability, some people who will notice if you do not show up. What the disease experienced as threat, recovery experiences as structure.

Expect the resistance, and read it correctly. When an opportunity appears and you feel that familiar flash of reasons why not, treat that flash as information. It is the same reflex that ran your career for a decade. You are not required to obey it now, and you are not required to argue with it. You just have to notice it before you act on it.

Give it a real timeline. Careers are rebuilt over years, in the same way they were dismantled over years. People who accept a five-year horizon tend to make it. People who need visible restoration by month six tend to burn out or give up when the market does not cooperate. The goal is not to arrive at the position you would have had. The goal is to become, again, a person whose work life is chosen rather than assigned by an illness.

Reflection Questions

1. Which failure mode is the bigger risk for you right now — staying put, or overcorrecting into work as the new escape? What is the evidence?

2. What work habit would you most benefit from rebuilding first? What would practicing it daily for ninety days actually look like?

3. Describe the next right-sized step in your work life — not the job you think you deserve, the one you could hold today alongside your recovery.

4. Does your current work environment make hiding easy or hard? What would need to change for it to support you rather than accommodate the illness?

5. What is your honest timeline for rebuilding, and who will you tell it to so that you do not quietly abandon it?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 5 OF 5

Recovery Work Capacity

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I show up on time and stay for my full shift

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I follow through on what I say I will do at work

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I can accept feedback or correction without shutting down or getting defensive

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I have taken on at least one new responsibility since entering recovery

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I am honest at work about what I have and have not completed

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I can tolerate the discomfort of learning something new or being a beginner again

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I have a realistic sense of what I am capable of professionally right now

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I believe my work life can be rebuilt, even if it takes years

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

7-Day Work Integrity Practice

Rebuilding Habits Before Chasing Positions

The Practice

Work ethic is rebuilt in days, not decisions. For one week, log what you actually did — not what you intended. If you are not currently employed, apply this to job searching, volunteering, treatment attendance, or household responsibility. Showing up on time every day for six months will do more for your future than any title you could chase this year.

Day 1

One commitment I made and kept today

The task I most wanted to avoid — and what I actually did about it

Where did an old work habit show up today? (lateness, avoidance, minimum effort, dishonesty, withdrawal)

One thing I did today that a person actively building a career would do

Did I catch myself protecting comfort over growth today? How?

Work integrity rating today (1 = coasting, 10 = fully present and accountable)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Day 2

One commitment I made and kept today

The task I most wanted to avoid — and what I actually did about it

Where did an old work habit show up today? (lateness, avoidance, minimum effort, dishonesty, withdrawal)

One thing I did today that a person actively building a career would do

Did I catch myself protecting comfort over growth today? How?

Work integrity rating today (1 = coasting, 10 = fully present and accountable)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Day 3

One commitment I made and kept today

The task I most wanted to avoid — and what I actually did about it

Where did an old work habit show up today? (lateness, avoidance, minimum effort, dishonesty, withdrawal)

One thing I did today that a person actively building a career would do

Did I catch myself protecting comfort over growth today? How?

Work integrity rating today (1 = coasting, 10 = fully present and accountable)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Day 4

One commitment I made and kept today

The task I most wanted to avoid — and what I actually did about it

Where did an old work habit show up today? (lateness, avoidance, minimum effort, dishonesty, withdrawal)

One thing I did today that a person actively building a career would do

Did I catch myself protecting comfort over growth today? How?

Work integrity rating today (1 = coasting, 10 = fully present and accountable)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Day 5

One commitment I made and kept today

The task I most wanted to avoid — and what I actually did about it

Where did an old work habit show up today? (lateness, avoidance, minimum effort, dishonesty, withdrawal)

One thing I did today that a person actively building a career would do

Did I catch myself protecting comfort over growth today? How?

Work integrity rating today (1 = coasting, 10 = fully present and accountable)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Day 6

One commitment I made and kept today

The task I most wanted to avoid — and what I actually did about it

Where did an old work habit show up today? (lateness, avoidance, minimum effort, dishonesty, withdrawal)

One thing I did today that a person actively building a career would do

Did I catch myself protecting comfort over growth today? How?

Work integrity rating today (1 = coasting, 10 = fully present and accountable)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Day 7

One commitment I made and kept today

The task I most wanted to avoid — and what I actually did about it

Where did an old work habit show up today? (lateness, avoidance, minimum effort, dishonesty, withdrawal)

One thing I did today that a person actively building a career would do

Did I catch myself protecting comfort over growth today? How?

Work integrity rating today (1 = coasting, 10 = fully present and accountable)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Week in Review

1. Looking at seven days together, what pattern shows up in what you avoided?

2. Did your integrity rating change across the week? What raised it and what lowered it?

3. Which day was hardest, and what was going on — at work, in your recovery, or both?

4. What is the single habit this week showed you needs the most attention?

5. Will you continue this log? If so, for how long, and who will you show it to?

YOUR EXERCISE

Rebuilding the Ladder

A Right-Sized Plan That Does Not Cost You Your Recovery

Two Failure Modes, Not One

Staying put keeps you inside a structure built for active addiction. Overcorrecting turns work into the new anesthetic — same function, better reputation. This plan is built to avoid both.

Right-sized means the step you can hold today while also holding your recovery, not the step you believe you deserve.

Step 1: What Work Is Actually For

Beyond income, what do you want work to give you — contribution, structure, mastery, service, stability, something else?

What are you genuinely good at? List things you know to be true, not things you hope are true.

What did you want to be doing with your working life before the disease got a vote? Is any version of that still live?

What will you not do again for a paycheck? Name the conditions you will refuse.

Step 2: The Next Right-Sized Step

What is the role you believe you should have by now? Write it down, then set it aside.

What is the role or change you could actually hold today alongside your recovery? Be concrete.

What stands between those two — skills, time, credentials, trust, sobriety time? List it plainly.

What is the single first action, small enough to take this week?

When that opportunity appears and you feel the familiar flash of reasons why not, what will you do with that flash?

Step 3: Choosing an Environment That Makes Hiding Hard

This step deliberately inverts the criteria from the Job Protection Audit. What the disease experienced as threat, recovery experiences as structure.

Does your current work environment make hiding easy or hard? Give the evidence.

What accountability could you add without changing jobs — a check-in, a mentor, a visible metric, a team, a schedule?

Which comfort feature are you willing to give up in your next role because it makes hiding too easy?

Who at work would notice if you were not okay? If nobody would, what does that tell you?

Step 4: Guardrails Against Overcorrection

Select the guardrails you are willing to commit to. Work becoming the new escape is a real and common relapse pathway in the second year.

- ☐ A hard cap on weekly work hours ☐ Meetings and therapy stay on the calendar first ☐ A protected sleep schedule ☐ Protected time with family or my support people ☐ No work email or messages after a set hour ☐ Sponsor or counselor reviews any major career decision before I make it ☐ No major job change in my first year of recovery ☐ A monthly check on whether work is crowding out recovery ☐ No decisions driven by making up lost income quickly ☐ At least one full day off per week

Add your own guardrails:

What else will protect your recovery from your ambition?

What would be the early warning sign that work has become the new escape? Name the specific behavior you would see first.

Be specific enough that someone else could spot it...

Step 5: Timeline and Accountability

30 days: what will be different about how you work?

90 days: what habit will be established, and what evidence will prove it?

One year: what position, credential, or level of trust is realistic?

Five years: careers are rebuilt on the same timescale they were dismantled. What does five years of steady rebuilding look like?

Who will you tell this plan to, so that you cannot quietly abandon it? When will you tell them?

When will you review this plan, and what will make you revise it rather than drop it?

Step 6: Your Statement of Direction

Write a short statement in your own words. It should name what the disease did to your work life, what you are no longer willing to trade for comfort, and what direction you are moving. Keep it short enough to reread on a hard morning.

The goal is not to arrive at the position I would have had. The goal is to become, again, a person whose work life is chosen rather than assigned by an illness...
