

Intellect Over Emotion

Father Martin's Chalk Talks · The Recovery Files

Father Martin's Formula for Recovery

"You don't need brains to get sober. You need desire."

#3 Father Martin's Formula · I · INTELLECT · E · EMOTION · Healthy State · Sober / Recovery · E · EMOTION · I · INTELLECT · Addicted State · Active Addiction · I · INTELLECT · E · EMOTION · Restored State · Recovery Goal

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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

The Formula: Understanding I/E and E/I

In his landmark "Chalk Talk on Alcoholism," Father Joseph Martin — one of the most gifted educators the recovery movement ever produced — offered a deceptively simple mathematical formula to explain the relationship between alcoholism and the human mind. He characterized healthy, rational human behavior as I over E: Intellect over Emotion.

This is not a formula that diminishes the value of emotion. Father Martin was not suggesting that feelings are wrong, unimportant, or inconvenient. Quite the opposite. He recognized that emotions are essential to the human experience — they provide the color, the passion, the depth, and the meaning of life. Without emotion, we would be machines.

The formula I/E simply describes the proper relationship between the rational and emotional dimensions of human experience in a healthy, functioning person. In this healthy state, the intellect acts as a governor — a word Father Martin used deliberately. A governor, in mechanical terms, is a device that regulates speed, preventing an engine from running out of control.

In a sober person, the intellect evaluates the emotions that arise and decides what to do with them. You feel angry — the intellect considers whether the anger is justified, how to express it appropriately, and what outcome you actually want. You feel afraid — the intellect assesses whether the threat is real and determines the most rational response. The emotion provides the information; the intellect determines the action.

Then alcohol enters the picture. Father Martin was precise on this point: alcohol is a drug. Not a beverage, not a social lubricant, not a cultural artifact — a drug. Specifically, it is a drug that targets the part of the brain that controls the intellect.

As alcohol suppresses cognitive function, it does not suppress emotion — if anything, it amplifies it. The formula reverses: it becomes E over I, Emotion over Intellect.

In the E/I state, the raw, unfiltered emotional experience drives behavior without the moderating influence of rational thought. This is why intoxicated people laugh at things that are not particularly funny, cry over things that would otherwise seem minor, rage at perceived slights that a sober mind would dismiss, and make decisions that they would never make sober. The intellect — the governor — has been chemically removed. What remains is pure emotional reactivity.

Father Martin connected this directly to the description in Alcoholics Anonymous of alcoholism as "self-will run riot." Self-will, when governed by the intellect, is healthy aspiration and agency. Self-will, when unleashed from rational oversight, becomes the engine of destruction that defines active addiction: manipulation, dishonesty, recklessness, and the single-minded pursuit of the substance regardless of consequence.

Understanding this formula is not merely an intellectual exercise. It is a map of what happened to you in active addiction, and a compass pointing toward what needs to happen in recovery.

Reflection Questions

1. How do you understand the difference between intellect and emotion in your own experience? Can you give an example of a time when your intellect successfully governed your emotional reaction?

2. Think about your behavior in active addiction. Can you see the E/I formula at work — times when raw emotion drove decisions without rational oversight? What happened?

3. Father Martin says alcohol specifically targets the intellect. Looking back, what did alcohol (or your substance) do to your ability to think clearly, plan ahead, and consider consequences?

4. What does "self-will run riot" mean to you personally? Can you think of times in your using when self-will without rational guidance caused damage to yourself or others?

5. If the I/E formula represents the healthy state you are moving toward, what does that look like in your daily life? What would change if your intellect reliably governed your emotional reactions?

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 1: My Formula Self-Audit

Mapping Where I/E and E/I Play Out in My Life

Purpose

This exercise helps you identify the specific situations in your life where the formula is currently I/E (intellect governing), and where it still flips to E/I (emotion overrunning reason). Honest self-awareness is the starting point for targeted change.

Conflict with a family member

In this situation, does your formula currently tend toward I/E or E/I?

☐ Strongly I/E ☐ Somewhat I/E ☐ Mixed ☐ Somewhat E/I ☐ Strongly E/I

Describe what the E/I pattern looks like in this situation. What emotions take over, and what do you do when they do?

What would I/E look like in this same situation? What would you think, feel, and do differently?

Receiving critical feedback

In this situation, does your formula currently tend toward I/E or E/I?

☐ Strongly I/E ☐ Somewhat I/E ☐ Mixed ☐ Somewhat E/I ☐ Strongly E/I

Describe what the E/I pattern looks like in this situation. What emotions take over, and what do you do when they do?

What would I/E look like in this same situation? What would you think, feel, and do differently?

Experiencing boredom or emptiness

In this situation, does your formula currently tend toward I/E or E/I?

☐ Strongly I/E ☐ Somewhat I/E ☐ Mixed ☐ Somewhat E/I ☐ Strongly E/I

Describe what the E/I pattern looks like in this situation. What emotions take over, and what do you do when they do?

What would I/E look like in this same situation? What would you think, feel, and do differently?

Financial stress or pressure

In this situation, does your formula currently tend toward I/E or E/I?

☐ Strongly I/E ☐ Somewhat I/E ☐ Mixed ☐ Somewhat E/I ☐ Strongly E/I

Describe what the E/I pattern looks like in this situation. What emotions take over, and what do you do when they do?

What would I/E look like in this same situation? What would you think, feel, and do differently?

Social situations or gatherings

In this situation, does your formula currently tend toward I/E or E/I?

☐ Strongly I/E ☐ Somewhat I/E ☐ Mixed ☐ Somewhat E/I ☐ Strongly E/I

Describe what the E/I pattern looks like in this situation. What emotions take over, and what do you do when they do?

What would I/E look like in this same situation? What would you think, feel, and do differently?

When a craving hits

In this situation, does your formula currently tend toward I/E or E/I?

☐ Strongly I/E ☐ Somewhat I/E ☐ Mixed ☐ Somewhat E/I ☐ Strongly E/I

Describe what the E/I pattern looks like in this situation. What emotions take over, and what do you do when they do?

What would I/E look like in this same situation? What would you think, feel, and do differently?

Making important decisions

In this situation, does your formula currently tend toward I/E or E/I?

☐ Strongly I/E ☐ Somewhat I/E ☐ Mixed ☐ Somewhat E/I ☐ Strongly E/I

Describe what the E/I pattern looks like in this situation. What emotions take over, and what do you do when they do?

What would I/E look like in this same situation? What would you think, feel, and do differently?

Dealing with loneliness

In this situation, does your formula currently tend toward I/E or E/I?

☐ Strongly I/E ☐ Somewhat I/E ☐ Mixed ☐ Somewhat E/I ☐ Strongly E/I

Describe what the E/I pattern looks like in this situation. What emotions take over, and what do you do when they do?

What would I/E look like in this same situation? What would you think, feel, and do differently?

Audit Summary

1. Which situations show the strongest E/I pattern? What do they have in common — what triggers the flip?

2. Which situations show the strongest I/E functioning? What is different about these — what helps you stay governed by reason?

3. Looking at the full audit, what is the most important single area to focus on first?

4. Write a one-sentence statement of commitment: "I will practice I/E in _____ by _____."

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 9: Daily I/E Check-In

Seven Days of Reading the Formula

Taking a Reading, Not Keeping a Score

Exercise 1 audited the formula across situations; this one watches it across days. The distinction matters, because the formula is not a fixed trait — it moves with sleep, food, money, company, and the hour. Seven consecutive readings show you the conditions under which the governor disengages, which is knowledge you cannot get any other way. Fill it in the same day. A week reconstructed on Sunday is a week edited, and the editing is done by the same faculty this module is teaching you not to trust unsupervised.

Day 1

Overall today, which was governing? (1 = fully E/I, emotion ran the day; 5 = fully I/E, intellect governed)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

How were the ordinary conditions — sleep, food, and how much of the day you spent alone? (1 = badly off on all three, 5 = well rested, fed, and in company)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE FLIP — was there a moment today when emotion took the wheel, however briefly? What was the trigger and what time was it?

WHAT YOU DID WITH IT — acted on it, sat with it, called someone, or did not notice until afterward?

ONE GOVERNED MOMENT — name one point today where you felt something and thought before acting. Small counts. This is the muscle, and it needs to be noticed to grow.

Day 2

Overall today, which was governing? (1 = fully E/I, emotion ran the day; 5 = fully I/E, intellect governed)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

How were the ordinary conditions — sleep, food, and how much of the day you spent alone? (1 = badly off on all three, 5 = well rested, fed, and in company)

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Day 3

Overall today, which was governing? (1 = fully E/I, emotion ran the day; 5 = fully I/E, intellect governed)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

How were the ordinary conditions — sleep, food, and how much of the day you spent alone? (1 = badly off on all three, 5 = well rested, fed, and in company)

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Day 4

Overall today, which was governing? (1 = fully E/I, emotion ran the day; 5 = fully I/E, intellect governed)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

How were the ordinary conditions — sleep, food, and how much of the day you spent alone? (1 = badly off on all three, 5 = well rested, fed, and in company)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE FLIP — was there a moment today when emotion took the wheel, however briefly? What was the trigger and what time was it?

WHAT YOU DID WITH IT — acted on it, sat with it, called someone, or did not notice until afterward?

ONE GOVERNED MOMENT — name one point today where you felt something and thought before acting. Small counts. This is the muscle, and it needs to be noticed to grow.

Day 5

Overall today, which was governing? (1 = fully E/I, emotion ran the day; 5 = fully I/E, intellect governed)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

How were the ordinary conditions — sleep, food, and how much of the day you spent alone? (1 = badly off on all three, 5 = well rested, fed, and in company)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE FLIP — was there a moment today when emotion took the wheel, however briefly? What was the trigger and what time was it?

WHAT YOU DID WITH IT — acted on it, sat with it, called someone, or did not notice until afterward?

ONE GOVERNED MOMENT — name one point today where you felt something and thought before acting. Small counts. This is the muscle, and it needs to be noticed to grow.

Day 6

Overall today, which was governing? (1 = fully E/I, emotion ran the day; 5 = fully I/E, intellect governed)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

How were the ordinary conditions — sleep, food, and how much of the day you spent alone? (1 = badly off on all three, 5 = well rested, fed, and in company)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE FLIP — was there a moment today when emotion took the wheel, however briefly? What was the trigger and what time was it?

WHAT YOU DID WITH IT — acted on it, sat with it, called someone, or did not notice until afterward?

ONE GOVERNED MOMENT — name one point today where you felt something and thought before acting. Small counts. This is the muscle, and it needs to be noticed to grow.

Day 7

Overall today, which was governing? (1 = fully E/I, emotion ran the day; 5 = fully I/E, intellect governed)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

How were the ordinary conditions — sleep, food, and how much of the day you spent alone? (1 = badly off on all three, 5 = well rested, fed, and in company)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE FLIP — was there a moment today when emotion took the wheel, however briefly? What was the trigger and what time was it?

WHAT YOU DID WITH IT — acted on it, sat with it, called someone, or did not notice until afterward?

ONE GOVERNED MOMENT — name one point today where you felt something and thought before acting. Small counts. This is the muscle, and it needs to be noticed to grow.

The Week in Review

Read all seven days back before answering. Work from the entries, not from your memory of the week.

1. Compare your formula ratings with your conditions ratings day by day. Do they move together? For most people the formula is largely a function of sleep, food, and company — which makes those three a recovery matter, not a lifestyle matter.

2. Look at the times of day in your flip entries. Is there an hour? Name your most exposed window, and say what is currently scheduled in it.

3. Across seven days, how often did you notice the flip while it was happening versus afterward? That ratio is the single best measure of progress in this module.

4. Read your seven governed moments. What made them possible — a pause, a person, a place, a rule you had set in advance? Name what you can reproduce deliberately.

5. Your worst day: trace it from the conditions through to the action. Then look at the day before. Was the groundwork already laid in how that day ended?

6. Based on this week, write one rule for your most exposed hour. Specific enough to follow while the feeling is running, and stated as an instruction rather than an intention.

PART 2 OF 5 · READING

How Addiction Flips the Switch

The reversal from I/E to E/I does not happen all at once. Understanding how the formula gets flipped — progressively, insidiously, and often invisibly to the person experiencing it — is one of the most important pieces of self-knowledge a person in early recovery can develop.

In the early stages of substance use, most people experience what feels like a controlled adjustment. The substance does not appear to eliminate the intellect; it merely softens it. A drink or two at a social gathering seems to lower inhibitions just enough to feel comfortable, not to obliterate rational thinking.

This early experience is deceptive, because it creates an association in the brain between the substance and a sense of improved social functioning. The brain notes: "When I use this substance, I feel better. I should use this substance."

Over time, several things happen simultaneously. Neurologically, repeated substance use alters the brain's reward circuitry. The prefrontal cortex — the seat of executive function, planning, impulse control, and rational decision-making — begins to be structurally and functionally compromised by chronic substance use.

This is not a metaphor. Neuroimaging studies show measurable reductions in prefrontal cortex activity in people with substance use disorders. The governor is not just chemically silenced while the substance is active; over time, it becomes harder to access even in sobriety.

Simultaneously, the emotional system becomes increasingly dysregulated. Because the substance was used to manage emotional discomfort rather than developing genuine emotional coping skills, the person's emotional regulation capacity actually atrophies. The normal emotional bumps of daily life — frustration at work, conflict in relationships, disappointment, loneliness, boredom — become increasingly intolerable without the substance.

The emotional baseline shifts. What was once manageable becomes overwhelming. This creates a self-reinforcing cycle: the intellect is impaired, the emotional system is dysregulated, and the only thing that seems to restore equilibrium is more of the substance.

This is why people in active addiction do things they swore they would never do. It is not a failure of character — it is a consequence of a progressively flipping formula. The person who said "I would never steal from my family" was telling the truth in that moment, speaking from the I/E state. The person who later stole from their family was speaking from the E/I state — a state of emotional desperation that the impaired intellect could not contain.

The disease also uses the remaining fragments of intellect in a particularly cruel way: rationalization. Even when the intellect is substantially compromised, it retains enough function to manufacture reasons for the behavior the emotional drive is demanding.

"Just one drink won't hurt." "I'll stop after this weekend." "I deserve this — look at what I've been through." "Nobody understands the pressure I'm under."

These are not thoughts; they are rationalizations. The emotional system decides, and then the weakened intellect provides a reason that sounds like thinking but is actually emotional justification wearing intellectual clothing.

Understanding this progression does not excuse what happened in active addiction. But it provides an honest account of why it happened — which is the first step toward ensuring it does not happen again.

Reflection Questions

1. Can you trace the progression of your own addiction — from early use that felt controlled to later use that felt compelled? What were the milestones along the way?

2. When did you first notice that the formula had flipped — that emotions were driving your decisions rather than the other way around? What did that feel like?

3. Think about the rationalizations you used to justify your substance use. Can you see them now as the weakened intellect providing justifications for emotionally-driven decisions?

4. What are the most significant things you did in active addiction that contradicted your own values? How does understanding the E/I state help you make sense of those actions?

5. Knowing that the prefrontal cortex — the rational mind — is actually altered by chronic substance use, what does that tell you about why willpower alone was not enough to stop? What does it tell you about what recovery actually requires?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 1 OF 5

Emotion-Driven Behavior Patterns

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

1. I make significant decisions based on how I feel in the moment rather than careful consideration
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I have relapsed or used substances primarily to escape emotional discomfort
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. When I feel a strong negative emotion, my first impulse is to act on it immediately
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I struggle to tolerate uncomfortable feelings without doing something to change them right away
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. My emotional reactions are often disproportionate to the actual situation
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I have damaged relationships by acting from raw emotion before thinking through consequences
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. Boredom, loneliness, anger, or frustration feel urgent and unbearable without substances
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I recognize that many of my worst decisions were made from a purely emotional state
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 3: Emotion-Driven Decision Map

Where the Governor Was Not Engaged

Speed Is the Tell

A governor regulates speed — that is the whole of the metaphor Father Martin chose, and it is worth taking literally. When the intellect is governing, a decision takes time: the feeling arrives, it is examined, and the action comes afterward. When the formula is reversed, feeling and action are almost simultaneous, and the explanation is assembled later. So the most reliable question to ask of any decision you regret is not whether it was wise. It is how long it took. Map four decisions below, and pay particular attention to the seconds between the feeling and the act.

A Decision to Use

The clearest case, and the one worth mapping most carefully. Pick a specific occasion, not the pattern in general.

1. THE TRIGGER — what happened immediately before? Include the ordinary conditions: how you had slept, whether you had eaten, who you had or had not spoken to.

2. THE EMOTION — name it precisely. "Upset" is not a name. Humiliated, abandoned, cornered, exhilarated, invisible, furious, relieved.

3. THE SPEED — how long between the feeling and the action? (1 = immediate, no gap at all; 5 = hours or days of consideration)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

4. DID THE INTELLECT SPEAK AT ALL? If some part of you knew, what did it say — and what happened to it? Overruled, talked down, or never consulted?

5. THE DECISION AND ITS COST — what you did, and what it actually cost. Include the costs that arrived later.

6. THE EXPLANATION YOU GAVE — afterward, to yourself or to someone else. Write it as you gave it. This is the intellect arriving late, doing repair work.

7. THE I/E VERSION — same trigger, same emotion, intellect governing. What was the specific point at which a different action was still available, and what would it have been?

A Decision About a Person

Something you said, sent, ended, or walked out of. The message written at eleven at night counts.

1. THE TRIGGER — what happened immediately before? Include the ordinary conditions: how you had slept, whether you had eaten, who you had or had not spoken to.

2. THE EMOTION — name it precisely. "Upset" is not a name. Humiliated, abandoned, cornered, exhilarated, invisible, furious, relieved.

3. THE SPEED — how long between the feeling and the action? (1 = immediate, no gap at all; 5 = hours or days of consideration)

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7. THE I/E VERSION — same trigger, same emotion, intellect governing. What was the specific point at which a different action was still available, and what would it have been?

A Decision About Money or Work

A purchase, a resignation, a confrontation with a supervisor, a bill left unopened. Avoidance is a decision.

1. THE TRIGGER — what happened immediately before? Include the ordinary conditions: how you had slept, whether you had eaten, who you had or had not spoken to.

2. THE EMOTION — name it precisely. "Upset" is not a name. Humiliated, abandoned, cornered, exhilarated, invisible, furious, relieved.

3. THE SPEED — how long between the feeling and the action? (1 = immediate, no gap at all; 5 = hours or days of consideration)

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An Ordinary Decision This Week

Something small and recent — a skipped meeting, a canceled plan, an hour spent somewhere you did not intend. Small decisions show the formula more honestly, because you were not watching.

1. THE TRIGGER — what happened immediately before? Include the ordinary conditions: how you had slept, whether you had eaten, who you had or had not spoken to.

2. THE EMOTION — name it precisely. "Upset" is not a name. Humiliated, abandoned, cornered, exhilarated, invisible, furious, relieved.

3. THE SPEED — how long between the feeling and the action? (1 = immediate, no gap at all; 5 = hours or days of consideration)

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4. DID THE INTELLECT SPEAK AT ALL? If some part of you knew, what did it say — and what happened to it? Overruled, talked down, or never consulted?

5. THE DECISION AND ITS COST — what you did, and what it actually cost. Include the costs that arrived later.

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7. THE I/E VERSION — same trigger, same emotion, intellect governing. What was the specific point at which a different action was still available, and what would it have been?

Reading the Four Maps

1. Compare your four speed ratings. Is the pattern what you expected? The decisions that cost most are usually the fastest, and the ones you agonized over often turned out fine.

2. Look at your four emotions. Is one feeling behind more than one decision? Name the emotion that most reliably reverses your formula.

3. In how many of the four did the intellect speak and get overruled, versus never being consulted at all? These are different problems and they need different remedies — which is yours?

4. Read your four after-the-fact explanations together. Do they share a shape? That shape is what your rationalizing sounds like, and Exercise 2 will have named it.

5. The governor works by inserting time. Name one delay you could actually install — a rule about not sending messages after a certain hour, a call you make before a decision over a certain size, a walk before a reply. It has to be specific enough to follow while the feeling is running.

6. Who could be part of that delay? A governor you have to phone is harder to disable than one you keep in your own head. Name the person and say whether you have asked them.

PART 3 OF 5 · READING

The Trap of Intellectualization in Recovery

Here Father Martin makes what is perhaps his most counterintuitive — and most important — distinction. If addiction represents the domination of Emotion over Intellect (E/I), you might logically conclude that recovery is simply a matter of restoring intellectual dominance. Think your way to sobriety. Analyze the problem thoroughly. Understand all the mechanisms. Achieve insight. Get better.

Father Martin explicitly dismantles this conclusion. In one of his most famous and memorable lines, he states: "You don't need brains to get sober. You need desire."

This is not an anti-intellectual statement. Father Martin was himself a man of considerable intellectual sophistication, and he valued education and understanding in recovery. What he was warning against is intellectualization — the specific misuse of intellectual capacity to avoid the emotional, spiritual, and practical work of recovery.

Intellectualization is the defense mechanism by which a person engages with the ideas of recovery without engaging with the reality of recovery. The intellectualizer can explain the disease model of addiction with clinical precision while continuing to use. They can articulate the Steps without taking them. They can describe the dynamics of a recovery community without becoming a member of one. They can discuss willingness without becoming willing. They can talk about God — or their understanding of God — without surrendering anything.

The intellect, in these cases, has been co-opted by the disease to become its most sophisticated defense.

This is why Father Martin notes that many of the most resistant people he worked with were the most educated and the most intelligent. The disease of addiction, operating through the E/I reversal, can use a sharp mind as a weapon against the very person who possesses it.

"I've analyzed this thoroughly and here is why treatment won't work for me." "I've read the research and the 12-step model is not evidence-based." "I understand what you're saying, but my situation is different."

This is not critical thinking — it is the emotionally-driven resistance to change wearing the costume of rational analysis.

The trap also manifests in Step One. Father Martin is explicit that true acceptance of powerlessness cannot come from an intellectual understanding alone. You can understand, in an abstract sense, that you are powerless over your addiction — and still not accept it in the way that produces change.

Genuine acceptance requires what Father Martin describes as a meeting point of three qualities: willingness, open-mindedness, and honesty. None of these are primarily intellectual virtues. They are qualities of the heart — of the will, the spirit, the self. You cannot think your way into willingness. You have to want to be willing.

The practical implication is this: if you find yourself using your intelligence to delay, complicate, or avoid the practical actions of recovery — attending meetings, working with a sponsor, completing Steps, engaging in treatment — your intellect is not serving your recovery. It is serving your disease.

The question is not whether you are smart enough to understand recovery. The question is whether you want it badly enough to do it.

Reflection Questions

1. Have you ever used your intelligence against your own recovery — analyzing, debating, or rationalizing your way out of something you needed to do? What happened?

2. Father Martin says you need desire, not brains, to get sober. What does desire for recovery look like for you? How strong is it today, on a scale of 1-10?

3. Can you identify moments when you achieved intellectual understanding without genuine acceptance? What did you understand but not truly accept?

4. What specific recovery actions have you been delaying, complicating, or avoiding? Is your intellect genuinely raising valid concerns, or is it providing sophisticated cover for emotional resistance?

5. What would it look like to set aside intellectual analysis and simply take the next right action in your recovery today — without needing to fully understand it first?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 2 OF 5

Rationalization & Intellectual Defense

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

1. I have used my intelligence to talk myself out of following through on recovery commitments
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I find myself constructing arguments for why my situation is different from others in recovery
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. When someone suggests a recovery action I don't want to take, I can quickly generate reasons it won't work
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I have delayed getting help by convincing myself I needed to "figure it out" first
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I tend to debate or analyze recovery concepts rather than simply practicing them
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I have used research, logic, or personal philosophy to resist suggestions from my sponsor or counselor
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I find myself more comfortable discussing recovery than actually doing the work of recovery
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I have experienced "analysis paralysis" — thinking so much about getting sober that I didn't take action
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 2: Rationalization Spotter

E/I Wearing I/E's Clothes

What Rationalization Actually Is

A rationalization is not a failure of intelligence. It is intelligence hired after the fact. The emotion has already reached the decision — that is E over I — and then the intellect is put to work building a case for it, which is why the case is usually well constructed and hard to argue with. This is the disguise that makes the reversed formula so difficult to catch in yourself: it does not feel like being overrun by feeling, it feels like thinking clearly. Six standard forms are below. For each one, the question is not whether the argument is good. It is: which came first, the reasoning or the wanting?

The Controlled Experiment

HOW IT SOUNDS

"I will have one and see what happens. It is important to know whether I can handle it — that is useful information."

THE TELL

The experiment has been run before and the result is already known. Research is being invoked to license a conclusion that was reached first.

Write your own version of this argument, in your words. You have made it, or something near it — recover the actual sentence.

WHAT WANTED IT FIRST — name the emotion that had already decided before the reasoning started. Relief, loneliness, anger, boredom, fear, grief, pride.

How convincing is this argument to you right now, reading it cold? (1 = obviously hollow, 5 = I can still feel its pull)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE I/E VERSION — take the same true premise and let the intellect govern the emotion instead of serving it. Where does the reasoning actually lead?

The Comparison**HOW IT SOUNDS**

"I never lost a job over it. I never drank in the morning. Compared to the people in that room, I am hardly in the same category."

THE TELL

The argument is entirely about other people. Nothing in it is a fact about you — which is why it can be true and still prove nothing.

Write your own version of this argument, in your words. You have made it, or something near it — recover the actual sentence.

WHAT WANTED IT FIRST — name the emotion that had already decided before the reasoning started. Relief, loneliness, anger, boredom, fear, grief, pride.

How convincing is this argument to you right now, reading it cold? (1 = obviously hollow, 5 = I can still feel its pull)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE I/E VERSION — take the same true premise and let the intellect govern the emotion instead of serving it. Where does the reasoning actually lead?

The Technicality

HOW IT SOUNDS

"That was not my drug of choice. Wine is different. It was prescribed. It was only at the wedding."

THE TELL

A precise distinction is being drawn where the outcome does not respect it. The precision is the tell — nobody parses this carefully on a subject they are not defending.

Write your own version of this argument, in your words. You have made it, or something near it — recover the actual sentence.

WHAT WANTED IT FIRST — name the emotion that had already decided before the reasoning started. Relief, loneliness, anger, boredom, fear, grief, pride.

How convincing is this argument to you right now, reading it cold? (1 = obviously hollow, 5 = I can still feel its pull)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE I/E VERSION — take the same true premise and let the intellect govern the emotion instead of serving it. Where does the reasoning actually lead?

The Deferral

HOW IT SOUNDS

"I will deal with it properly after the holidays / after this contract / once things settle down."

THE TELL

The condition is always real and always moving. Notice whether the deadline has been quietly renewed before.

Write your own version of this argument, in your words. You have made it, or something near it — recover the actual sentence.

WHAT WANTED IT FIRST — name the emotion that had already decided before the reasoning started. Relief, loneliness, anger, boredom, fear, grief, pride.

How convincing is this argument to you right now, reading it cold? (1 = obviously hollow, 5 = I can still feel its pull)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE I/E VERSION — take the same true premise and let the intellect govern the emotion instead of serving it. Where does the reasoning actually lead?

The Expert

HOW IT SOUNDS

"I have read the research. I understand the neurochemistry better than half the people in that meeting. I do not need to be told what a craving is."

THE TELL

Father Martin called this one out directly: knowing a great deal about addiction is not recovering from it. This rationalization is the most dangerous for intelligent people, because it uses a real strength as the instrument.

Write your own version of this argument, in your words. You have made it, or something near it — recover the actual sentence.

WHAT WANTED IT FIRST — name the emotion that had already decided before the reasoning started. Relief, loneliness, anger, boredom, fear, grief, pride.

How convincing is this argument to you right now, reading it cold? (1 = obviously hollow, 5 = I can still feel its pull)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE I/E VERSION — take the same true premise and let the intellect govern the emotion instead of serving it. Where does the reasoning actually lead?

The Earned Exception

HOW IT SOUNDS

"It has been a punishing week. I have done everything right. One is not going to undo any of that."

THE TELL

The premises are true and the conclusion does not follow from them. Every rationalization needs a true premise — that is what gets it past you.

Write your own version of this argument, in your words. You have made it, or something near it — recover the actual sentence.

WHAT WANTED IT FIRST — name the emotion that had already decided before the reasoning started. Relief, loneliness, anger, boredom, fear, grief, pride.

How convincing is this argument to you right now, reading it cold? (1 = obviously hollow, 5 = I can still feel its pull)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE I/E VERSION — take the same true premise and let the intellect govern the emotion instead of serving it. Where does the reasoning actually lead?

Spotting It in Real Time

1. Which of the six still has pull for you? That is your signature rationalization — the one that will be used on you next, because it is the one that works.

2. Read your six "what wanted it first" answers together. Is the same emotion hiring the argument every time? Most people find one feeling doing the commissioning.

3. Rationalizations get better with practice and they get better in isolation. Which of your six have you ever said out loud to another person, and what happened to it when you did?

4. A rationalization builds a case. A reason survives cross-examination. Pick your most convincing one and ask: what would have to be true for this to be wrong, and is it true?

5. Write the single question you will put to yourself the next time an unusually good argument for using arrives. One sentence. It should test the order of events — which came first, the reasoning or the wanting.

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 5: The Honesty Excavation

Six Layers Down, and the Last One Is Today

Why Honesty Is a Formula Problem

Dishonesty in addiction is very rarely a character failure of the simple kind. It is the reversed formula at work: the emotion — shame, fear of loss, dread of a particular conversation — reaches the decision to conceal, and the intellect, which is often considerable, builds the concealment and maintains it. This is exhausting, and the exhaustion is itself a reason people return to using. The excavation below goes down in layers because that is how honesty actually returns: in order, from the facts to the present tense. Write what you can at each depth. A layer answered partly and truthfully is worth more than one answered fully and carefully.

Layer One — The Facts

The easiest layer, and still not easy.

How much, how often, for how long — in actual numbers. Not "too much." If you have been giving a figure to doctors or family, write that figure here as well, and then write the real one beside it.

How honest have you been at this layer, up to now? (1 = not at all, 5 = fully)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

WHAT THE CONCEALMENT PROTECTS — every omission is doing a job. What would you have to face or lose if this were known?

WHO COULD HEAR IT — name one person who could receive this layer without it costing you everything. If nobody comes to mind, write that; it is the most important finding you could record here.

Layer Two — The Omissions

Most people in recovery do not lie much. They leave things out.

What do you routinely leave out rather than deny? Name three things you have let people continue to believe by saying nothing.

How honest have you been at this layer, up to now? (1 = not at all, 5 = fully)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

WHAT THE CONCEALMENT PROTECTS — every omission is doing a job. What would you have to face or lose if this were known?

WHO COULD HEAR IT — name one person who could receive this layer without it costing you everything. If nobody comes to mind, write that; it is the most important finding you could record here.

Layer Three — The Edited History

The account you have given so often it has become the memory.

Tell the story of your addiction the way you usually tell it. Then mark the places where it has been smoothed — a cause moved, a year removed, a person left out, a consequence made lighter.

How honest have you been at this layer, up to now? (1 = not at all, 5 = fully)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

WHAT THE CONCEALMENT PROTECTS — every omission is doing a job. What would you have to face or lose if this were known?

WHO COULD HEAR IT — name one person who could receive this layer without it costing you everything. If nobody comes to mind, write that; it is the most important finding you could record here.

Layer Four — What No One Knows

Father Martin held that the thing kept entirely to yourself is the thing that keeps its power.

There is something you have told no one. You do not have to write the thing itself here if you are not ready — but write what it is about, what you are afraid would happen if it were known, and who might be capable of hearing it.

How honest have you been at this layer, up to now? (1 = not at all, 5 = fully)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

WHAT THE CONCEALMENT PROTECTS — every omission is doing a job. What would you have to face or lose if this were known?

WHO COULD HEAR IT — name one person who could receive this layer without it costing you everything. If nobody comes to mind, write that; it is the most important finding you could record here.

Layer Five — Honesty With Yourself

The hardest layer, because there is nobody to deceive and it happens anyway.

What do you already know and refuse to look at directly? The question you steer away from. The thing you would have to change if you admitted it.

How honest have you been at this layer, up to now? (1 = not at all, 5 = fully)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

WHAT THE CONCEALMENT PROTECTS — every omission is doing a job. What would you have to face or lose if this were known?

WHO COULD HEAR IT — name one person who could receive this layer without it costing you everything. If nobody comes to mind, write that; it is the most important finding you could record here.

Layer Six — The Present Tense

Every other layer is about the past, which is why they are safer to write.

What is true about your situation right now, today, that you have not said to anyone? Not history — current. This is the layer that matters most and gets written least.

How honest have you been at this layer, up to now? (1 = not at all, 5 = fully)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

WHAT THE CONCEALMENT PROTECTS — every omission is doing a job. What would you have to face or lose if this were known?

WHO COULD HEAR IT — name one person who could receive this layer without it costing you everything. If nobody comes to mind, write that; it is the most important finding you could record here.

What the Dig Turned Up

1. At which layer did your ratings fall off? That boundary is where your honesty currently ends, and it is more useful to know precisely than to feel generally bad about.

2. Read your six "what it protects" answers together. Is one thing being guarded throughout — a relationship, a job, an image of yourself, a single person's opinion? Name it.

3. Concealment is work, and it is intellect doing the work. Estimate honestly: how much of your mental energy in an average week goes to keeping the record straight? What else could that capacity be doing?

4. Look at your "who could hear it" answers. Is it the same name repeatedly, or is it blank at the deeper layers? A recovery with no one at the bottom two layers is a recovery with a floor in it.

5. Pick one layer you are willing to make honest within thirty days. Name the layer, the person, and the date. Not all of it — one layer, one person, one date.

PART 4 OF 5 · READING

Desire vs. Brains: What Recovery Actually Requires

"You don't need brains to get sober. You need desire." — Father Joseph Martin

Father Martin's formula points toward something that research in addiction recovery has increasingly confirmed: the most powerful predictor of recovery outcomes is not intelligence, insight, or even understanding of the disease. It is motivation — the deep, genuine desire to change.

But desire, in Father Martin's sense, is not simply wanting to feel better. It is not the desire to escape consequences, avoid more pain, or satisfy others' expectations, though these can be initial motivators. True desire, the kind that drives sustainable recovery, is what he calls a "deep longing" — a hunger for a different way of being that goes beyond wanting relief. It is the desire for a life that is genuinely worth living.

This distinction matters enormously in early recovery. Many people arrive in treatment or sobriety not because they deeply desire recovery, but because they deeply desire to stop suffering the consequences of active addiction. These are related but not identical motivations.

The person who wants to stop the consequences but does not yet want the recovery is at high risk of relapse the moment consequences are temporarily relieved. The person who develops a genuine longing for the life that recovery makes possible has found a motivation that can sustain them through the difficulty of the process.

How does desire develop? Father Martin points to two sources.

First, honest confrontation with reality — the willingness to look without flinching at what the disease has actually done and is doing. Not the rationalized version. Not the minimized version. The actual inventory of loss: relationships damaged, trust broken, potential unrealized, health compromised, years consumed.

When a person can see this honestly, desire for change becomes natural. The problem is not a lack of desire — it is the intellectual defenses that prevent honest seeing.

Second, Father Martin points to exposure to recovery in action. When you see people who have been where you are — who experienced the same devastation, the same hopelessness, the same powerlessness — and who are now living differently, something in you responds.

This is why meetings matter. This is why sponsorship matters. This is why community matters. The desire for recovery can be ignited by encountering its reality in the lives of others who have found it.

The role of the intellect in this process is not to produce desire — it cannot. The intellect's proper role is to remove the barriers to desire: the rationalizations, the defenses, the self-deceptions that prevent honest seeing.

When the intellect serves recovery rather than the disease, it clears away the intellectual clutter so that the genuine desire that is already present — the part of you that brought you to this moment — can emerge and be honored.

In this sense, recovery begins not with a conclusion but with a choice: the choice to stop using your mind against yourself and to start using it in service of the life you actually want.

Reflection Questions

1. How strong is your genuine desire for recovery right now — not just desire to avoid consequences, but desire for a genuinely different life? What would strengthen it?

2. What does a deeply desired recovery life look like for you? What is possible in sobriety that was impossible in active addiction?

3. What honest inventory of losses has motivated your desire for change? Can you name, without minimizing, what the disease has cost you?

4. Who in your life or recovery community embodies the kind of recovery you want? What do you see in them that you want for yourself?

5. What is one intellectual defense — one rationalization or complication — that you need to set aside so that your genuine desire for recovery can lead?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 3 OF 5

Acceptance of Powerlessness

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

1. I genuinely believe — not just intellectually, but in my gut — that I am powerless over my addiction
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I have stopped trying to "control" my using and accepted that I cannot use safely
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I no longer believe I could return to moderate use of my substance
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I have accepted Step One not just as a concept but as a lived reality
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I understand the difference between intellectually accepting powerlessness and genuinely surrendering to it
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I no longer look for exceptions, loopholes, or special circumstances that might not apply to me
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I have stopped bargaining with myself about future controlled use
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. The depth of my acceptance of powerlessness feels solid rather than tenuous
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 4 OF 5**Desire, Willingness & Open-Mindedness**

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

1. My desire for recovery is driven by something deeper than just avoiding consequences
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I am genuinely willing to do what recovery requires, even the things that feel uncomfortable
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I approach recovery suggestions with open-mindedness rather than looking for reasons to reject them
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I have a clear vision of the life that recovery makes possible, beyond just sobriety
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I am willing to ask for and accept help from others in my recovery
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I approach recovery with honesty — including honesty about what I don't yet want to do
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. When my desire for recovery weakens, I know what to do to strengthen it
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I believe recovery is genuinely possible for me — not just theoretically, but personally

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 4: My Desire Inventory

It Takes Desire, Not Brains — So What Do You Actually Want?

Why Desire and Not Intelligence

Father Martin said recovery does not take brains, it takes desire — and he said it to rooms full of people who had already proved the first half. Understanding your addiction completely changes nothing on its own; Exercise 2 showed intelligence being put to work on the wrong side. But there is a complication the slogan leaves out. You do not have one desire. You have several, they are not compatible, and they do not all show up at the same strength at the same hour. This inventory is not a test of whether you want to recover. It is a survey of everything you want, so that you know what the desire to recover is actually competing with, and when.

The Desire to Be Free of It

To not be organized around a substance. To stop calculating, hiding, and recovering. This is the desire recovery is built on — and it is rarely the only one you have.

How strong is this desire in you? (1 = barely present, 5 = it moves you)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE EVIDENCE — what has this desire actually made you do? A desire you cannot point to an action for is a preference. Name something you did because of it, recently.

WHEN IT IS STRONGEST — what hour, what conditions, what company? Desires are not constant; they have a schedule, and knowing it is most of the defense.

WHAT IT COSTS THE OTHERS — when this desire wins, which of the other five pays? Be specific about the trade.

The Desire for Relief

Not for the substance itself, but for the switch to be thrown — the noise to stop, the edge to come off, the day to be over. This is the oldest and most practiced desire you have.

How strong is this desire in you? (1 = barely present, 5 = it moves you)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE EVIDENCE — what has this desire actually made you do? A desire you cannot point to an action for is a preference. Name something you did because of it, recently.

WHEN IT IS STRONGEST — what hour, what conditions, what company? Desires are not constant; they have a schedule, and knowing it is most of the defense.

WHAT IT COSTS THE OTHERS — when this desire wins, which of the other five pays? Be specific about the trade.

The Desire to Be Seen as Fine

To be regarded as someone who has handled it. Note that this desire can be served either by recovering or by concealing, which is exactly what makes it unreliable.

How strong is this desire in you? (1 = barely present, 5 = it moves you)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE EVIDENCE — what has this desire actually made you do? A desire you cannot point to an action for is a preference. Name something you did because of it, recently.

WHEN IT IS STRONGEST — what hour, what conditions, what company? Desires are not constant; they have a schedule, and knowing it is most of the defense.

WHAT IT COSTS THE OTHERS — when this desire wins, which of the other five pays? Be specific about the trade.

The Desire to Go Back

For the people, the places, the version of yourself who was good company. Recovery costs you a social world, and pretending it did not is how the loss goes unmourned and unmanaged.

How strong is this desire in you? (1 = barely present, 5 = it moves you)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE EVIDENCE — what has this desire actually made you do? A desire you cannot point to an action for is a preference. Name something you did because of it, recently.

WHEN IT IS STRONGEST — what hour, what conditions, what company? Desires are not constant; they have a schedule, and knowing it is most of the defense.

WHAT IT COSTS THE OTHERS — when this desire wins, which of the other five pays? Be specific about the trade.

The Desire to Be Left Alone

To not be asked, monitored, checked on, or discussed. A real need for privacy and the machinery of concealment use the same words, which is why this one needs care.

How strong is this desire in you? (1 = barely present, 5 = it moves you)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE EVIDENCE — what has this desire actually made you do? A desire you cannot point to an action for is a preference. Name something you did because of it, recently.

WHEN IT IS STRONGEST — what hour, what conditions, what company? Desires are not constant; they have a schedule, and knowing it is most of the defense.

WHAT IT COSTS THE OTHERS — when this desire wins, which of the other five pays? Be specific about the trade.

The Desire to Become Someone

A specific person you want to be — for your children, in your work, to yourself. The most durable fuel there is, and the one most people cannot state without a long pause.

How strong is this desire in you? (1 = barely present, 5 = it moves you)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE EVIDENCE — what has this desire actually made you do? A desire you cannot point to an action for is a preference. Name something you did because of it, recently.

WHEN IT IS STRONGEST — what hour, what conditions, what company? Desires are not constant; they have a schedule, and knowing it is most of the defense.

WHAT IT COSTS THE OTHERS — when this desire wins, which of the other five pays? Be specific about the trade.

Ranking What You Want

1. List your six ratings in order, strongest to weakest. Write the list out — seeing it ranked is different from holding it in your head.

2. Now rank them again by the evidence rather than the rating: which desire has actually produced the most action in the last month? Where the two rankings disagree, the evidence is right.

3. Look at your "when it is strongest" answers. Is there an hour of the day when the desire to be free of it is weak and the desire for relief is strong? Name that window — it is the most important finding in this exercise.

4. Desire is not a fixed quantity; it is fed or starved by what you do. Which of your six have you been feeding, and with what? Which have you starved?

5. The desire to become someone specific is the most durable fuel available, and most people cannot state it. Try: who, exactly, are you trying to become, and for whom? If the answer will not come, write that honestly rather than writing something respectable.

6. Recovery does not require that you stop wanting relief. It requires that at the moment of decision, another desire be stronger. Name one concrete thing you will do this week to strengthen the desire that needs to win.

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 6: Willingness Gauge

Not Whether You Are Willing — Willing to Do What, Exactly

Willingness Is Not a Mood

Asked whether they are willing, almost everyone in early recovery says yes, and almost everyone means it. The word is useless at that level of generality. Willingness only becomes measurable when it is attached to a specific thing you would have to actually do, and what you find then is that it is not one dial but eight, set at different heights. Desire, from Exercise 4, is what you want. Willingness is what you will pay. This gauge reads eight concrete prices. Rate them honestly rather than aspirationally — a truthful 2 is worth far more here than a 5 you cannot cash.

To go every day for thirty days

A meeting, a call, a group — whatever your version is. Every day, including the days you are fine.

How willing are you, today, to do this? (1 = no, and I am not going to pretend; 5 = yes, and I would start this week)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE PRICE — what would this actually cost you? Time, pride, comfort, a friendship, an hour of your evening, the version of yourself you present to people.

THE OBSTACLE — if you rated this below 4, what is actually in the way? Be precise: is it that you do not believe it would work, that it would cost too much, or that you do not want to?

To take direction from another person

To be told what to do by someone who has done it, and do it, without first satisfying yourself that it makes sense.

How willing are you, today, to do this? (1 = no, and I am not going to pretend; 5 = yes, and I would start this week)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE PRICE — what would this actually cost you? Time, pride, comfort, a friendship, an hour of your evening, the version of yourself you present to people.

THE OBSTACLE — if you rated this below 4, what is actually in the way? Be precise: is it that you do not believe it would work, that it would cost too much, or that you do not want to?

To give up a specific place or person

Not people in general. The one you are thinking of right now, who you have already decided is the exception.

How willing are you, today, to do this? (1 = no, and I am not going to pretend; 5 = yes, and I would start this week)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE PRICE — what would this actually cost you? Time, pride, comfort, a friendship, an hour of your evening, the version of yourself you present to people.

THE OBSTACLE — if you rated this below 4, what is actually in the way? Be precise: is it that you do not believe it would work, that it would cost too much, or that you do not want to?

To tell one person the whole truth

The layer you identified in Exercise 5. To a real person, with a date.

How willing are you, today, to do this? (1 = no, and I am not going to pretend; 5 = yes, and I would start this week)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE PRICE — what would this actually cost you? Time, pride, comfort, a friendship, an hour of your evening, the version of yourself you present to people.

THE OBSTACLE — if you rated this below 4, what is actually in the way? Be precise: is it that you do not believe it would work, that it would cost too much, or that you do not want to?

To do something that feels foolish

To say the words, hold the hands, read aloud, cry in a room, admit it out loud. To do the thing that works even though it embarrasses you.

How willing are you, today, to do this? (1 = no, and I am not going to pretend; 5 = yes, and I would start this week)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE PRICE — what would this actually cost you? Time, pride, comfort, a friendship, an hour of your evening, the version of yourself you present to people.

THE OBSTACLE — if you rated this below 4, what is actually in the way? Be precise: is it that you do not believe it would work, that it would cost too much, or that you do not want to?

To be uncomfortable without fixing it

To feel it for an hour and take no action — no drink, no phone, no purchase, no confrontation, no distraction.

How willing are you, today, to do this? (1 = no, and I am not going to pretend; 5 = yes, and I would start this week)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE PRICE — what would this actually cost you? Time, pride, comfort, a friendship, an hour of your evening, the version of yourself you present to people.

THE OBSTACLE — if you rated this below 4, what is actually in the way? Be precise: is it that you do not believe it would work, that it would cost too much, or that you do not want to?

To ask for help before it is an emergency

To make the call while it is still small, when the request will sound unnecessary.

How willing are you, today, to do this? (1 = no, and I am not going to pretend; 5 = yes, and I would start this week)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE PRICE — what would this actually cost you? Time, pride, comfort, a friendship, an hour of your evening, the version of yourself you present to people.

THE OBSTACLE — if you rated this below 4, what is actually in the way? Be precise: is it that you do not believe it would work, that it would cost too much, or that you do not want to?

To keep going when it has not worked yet

To do the same things for another ninety days without the evidence you want having arrived.

How willing are you, today, to do this? (1 = no, and I am not going to pretend; 5 = yes, and I would start this week)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE PRICE — what would this actually cost you? Time, pride, comfort, a friendship, an hour of your evening, the version of yourself you present to people.

THE OBSTACLE — if you rated this below 4, what is actually in the way? Be precise: is it that you do not believe it would work, that it would cost too much, or that you do not want to?

Reading the Gauge

1. Write out your eight ratings. What is your average, and more usefully, what is your lowest? Willingness behaves like a chain rather than an average — the weakest link is what holds.

2. Look at your obstacles. Sort them into three piles: I do not believe it would help, it costs more than I will pay, and I simply do not want to. Which pile is biggest? Each needs a different answer, and only the first one is solved by information.

3. Which single item would move the most if it moved? Usually it is not the lowest-rated one — it is the one the others depend on.

4. Father Martin's formula says the intellect should govern the emotion. In the items you rated low, which is doing the refusing — a reasoned judgment, or a feeling with reasons attached? Use the test from Exercise 2.

5. Willingness is generally reported to grow by being spent rather than by being waited for. Pick the one item you are willing to act on in the next seven days. Name it, name the day, and name who will know.

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 7: Step One Acceptance Map

Admitting Is Said. Accepting Is Lived.

Two Halves, and a Distinction That Decides Everything

The First Step has two halves — powerlessness, and a life become unmanageable — and people commonly work the first while leaving the second untouched, or say both fluently while believing neither. That fluency is the intellect doing what Exercise 2 described: producing the correct words on behalf of a position it has not actually adopted. So this exercise does not ask whether you agree. It asks for evidence, from your own history, in six places. Gather the evidence first. The question of what you accept comes at the end, where it belongs.

The Rules You Made

POWERLESSNESS

A person without a problem does not need a rulebook. The existence of the rules is itself the evidence; what happened to them is the confirmation.

List the rules you set for yourself — only weekends, never before six, never alone, only beer, only at home, a set number. Then write what happened to each one.

What do you do with this evidence when it comes to mind? Dismiss it, explain it, decide it was a different period of your life? Name the maneuver.

The Promises to Yourself

POWERLESSNESS

These are the ones that cost most, because nobody else witnessed them and so nobody else can absolve them.

What have you promised yourself, privately, that you did not keep? Write the promise, the date if you have it, and how long it held.

What do you do with this evidence when it comes to mind? Dismiss it, explain it, decide it was a different period of your life? Name the maneuver.

The Stops That Did Not Hold

POWERLESSNESS

Stopping has never been the difficulty. Note how often the ending had nothing to do with wanting to.

Every period of abstinence you have had — how long, what made it possible, and what ended it. Include the short ones.

What do you do with this evidence when it comes to mind? Dismiss it, explain it, decide it was a different period of your life? Name the maneuver.

What You Would Not Have Predicted

UNMANAGEABILITY

Unmanageability is easier to see as a distance traveled than as a state assessed. Measure the distance.

Describe something that happened in your life that the person you were ten years ago would not have believed of you.

What do you do with this evidence when it comes to mind? Dismiss it, explain it, decide it was a different period of your life? Name the maneuver.

What Other People Absorbed

UNMANAGEABILITY

Lives look manageable when other people are quietly doing the managing. This question finds the subsidy.

Name the people who covered, adjusted, made excuses, went without, or managed around you — and what each of them actually did.

What do you do with this evidence when it comes to mind? Dismiss it, explain it, decide it was a different period of your life? Name the maneuver.

What You Cannot Trust Yourself With

BOTH HALVES

This is where the two halves of Step One meet, and it is usually the sentence people find hardest to write.

Finish honestly: "I cannot currently be trusted with ____." A place, a quantity, an hour, an amount of money, a particular person, a state of mind.

What do you do with this evidence when it comes to mind? Dismiss it, explain it, decide it was a different period of your life? Name the maneuver.

Admitting vs. Accepting

ADMITTING

A statement. It can be made accurately, repeatedly, and in public, and change nothing about how the next Friday is arranged.

ACCEPTING

An arrangement. It shows up as things you no longer keep in the house, places you no longer go, and calls you now make. It is visible from outside.

How fully do you ADMIT the first half — powerlessness? (1 = not at all, 5 = completely)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

How fully do you ACCEPT it — measured by what you have actually changed about how you live?

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

How fully do you ADMIT the second half — that your life became unmanageable?

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

How fully do you ACCEPT it — again measured in arrangements, not in agreement?

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

1. Where is your largest gap between admitting and accepting? Name the half, and name one specific arrangement in your life that still assumes the opposite of what you say you believe.

Compare what you say with how you live...

2. Which half of Step One is harder for you, and why that one? Many people accept powerlessness over the substance while holding firmly that their life is basically in order.

Compare what you say with how you live...

3. Read your six "maneuver" answers together. You have one habitual way of getting past your own evidence. Name it — and notice whether Exercise 2 already gave it a name.

Compare what you say with how you live...

Your Step One, In Your Own Words

Write your First Step in your own language, built only from evidence you gathered above. Not the standard sentence — yours, with your specifics in it.

Use your own history, not the standard wording...

Name one arrangement you will change this month so that acceptance is visible from outside and not only stated. What, and by when?

Something another person could observe...

Who will you read this to, and when? Name the person and the day.

A name and a date...

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 8: Beyond Self

A Reflection, Not a Requirement

Read This Before You Start

Father Martin was a Catholic priest and never disguised it, but he was insistent on one point: nobody is required to adopt his beliefs in order to recover. What is being asked here is narrower and harder to argue with — that running your life entirely on your own resources has been tried, and you have the results. That is not a theological claim; it is the finding of Exercise 7. Where you go from there is genuinely open. This exercise will not tell you what to believe, and it does not become unusable if your answer to every question about God is no. Answer from where you actually are. An honest refusal is more use to your recovery than a borrowed affirmation.

Where You Actually Stand

Before anything else, an honest position — not the one you think is expected of you here.

What do you actually believe right now about anything greater than yourself? Devout, lapsed, uncertain, angry, indifferent, convinced there is nothing — all of these are real answers and this exercise works from any of them. Write yours plainly.

What is uncomfortable about this question? The discomfort usually marks the part worth staying with.

What the Word Carries

For many people the word arrives already loaded, and pretending otherwise stalls the whole conversation.

What does the word "God" carry for you — from childhood, from an institution, from something that was done to you or said to you in its name? If the word is damaged for you, say how. You are allowed to set it aside and use another.

What is uncomfortable about this question? The discomfort usually marks the part worth staying with.

What Has Already Been Greater Than You

The most practical entry point, and the one that requires nothing you do not already have evidence for.

Name something outside yourself that has already done for you what you could not do alone — a group, a person, a program, a routine, the plain fact of other people in a room. What has it done that your own effort did not?

What is uncomfortable about this question? The discomfort usually marks the part worth staying with.

The Self-Reliance Problem

This is where the module's formula and this Step meet.

Your intellect is meant to govern your emotions. It was never meant to govern everything. Where has running your life entirely on your own judgment actually failed — and what did you tell yourself each time about why that was an exception?

What is uncomfortable about this question? The discomfort usually marks the part worth staying with.

What It Would Cost to Stop Being in Charge

People rarely refuse this Step on philosophical grounds. They refuse it because of what it would require.

If you accepted that something outside yourself had to be relied on, what would you have to give up? Being the competent one, being right, being unobligated, being unaccountable, being self-sufficient. Name it honestly.

What is uncomfortable about this question? The discomfort usually marks the part worth staying with.

Something to Actually Do

A belief with no practice attached tends to evaporate; a practice can precede the belief and often does.

What could you actually practice, this week, that acts as if something outside you matters? Prayer if that is yours. Or: a meeting attended without speaking, a request for help made before you need it, ten minutes of silence, one act of service, a call made because you said you would.

What is uncomfortable about this question? The discomfort usually marks the part worth staying with.

Where That Leaves You

How much of your recovery currently rests on your own resources alone? (1 = almost none, I rely on others; 5 = almost all of it is me)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

1. Look at your answer about what has already been greater than you. Whatever your beliefs, something has held you that was not your own willpower. Name it precisely, and say what you have done to stay in its reach.

2. If the word "God" is damaged for you, what word would you use instead for whatever you rely on beyond yourself? Choose your own — the word matters less than whether the thing is real to you.

3. Consider the possibility that resistance here is not intellectual. Go back to your "what it would cost" answer: is your objection a considered position, or a feeling with a well-built argument attached? Exercise 2 gave you the test.

4. What is the one practice you will actually do this week, and on which days? Write it as an instruction you could follow without deciding again.

5. Write one sentence about what you rely on beyond yourself, in words you would be willing to say out loud without embarrassment. If the honest sentence is "nothing yet, and I am looking," write that — it is a real position and an honest starting place.

PART 5 OF 5 · READING

Restoring the Balance: Recovery as Renewal

Father Martin's framework ultimately offers an understanding of recovery as restoration. Not just the removal of a substance, but the gradual return to a state of balance in which the intellect can once again take its proper place — governing, not eliminating, the emotions.

This restoration, however, cannot be accomplished through willpower alone. Father Martin is clear on this point, and it is one of the most theologically and spiritually significant elements of his teaching.

The person who has admitted in Step One that they are powerless over their addiction has, by definition, admitted that they cannot restore their own balance through their own resources. If they could have, they would have. The history of active addiction is, in most cases, the history of repeated attempts to manage the problem through self-generated force of will — and repeated failure.

Something more is required. That something more is what Father Martin, and the 12-step tradition, calls a Higher Power. Not necessarily a religious concept, though it can be. More precisely, it is the recognition that the restoration of the formula — the return to I/E — must come from a power outside the self.

For many in recovery, that power is found in a God of their understanding. For others, it is found in the collective power of the recovery community. For others still, it is found in the experience of surrender itself — the profound relief of releasing the illusion that willpower alone is sufficient.

What does this restoration actually look like in practice? It is not a sudden transformation. Recovery does not flip the formula back overnight. It is a gradual, imperfect, non-linear process of healing.

The prefrontal cortex, damaged by chronic substance use, does heal — neuroscience has confirmed this remarkable plasticity. But healing takes time, and it requires the right conditions: sustained sobriety, adequate sleep, nutrition, movement, emotional processing, connection, and meaning.

As the brain heals and as emotional regulation skills develop, the relationship between intellect and emotion gradually shifts. Emotional responses become less overwhelming. The impulse to act on raw emotion without thinking decreases. The capacity to pause, evaluate, and choose a response — rather than simply reacting — increases.

This is not the elimination of emotion; it is its integration. The recovered person feels things fully — perhaps more fully than they did in active addiction, when numbness alternated with explosion — but they feel them from a place of growing stability rather than desperation.

Recovery also restores the ability to use the intellect in genuine service of the self. Rather than manufacturing rationalizations for self-destructive behavior, the healing intellect begins to identify genuine options, evaluate consequences honestly, plan for the future, and solve problems effectively. The same cognitive capacity that was weaponized by the disease becomes a genuine asset in building the life you want.

The formula I/E is not a destination — it is a direction. Every day in recovery is a step in that direction. Every meeting attended, every honest conversation, every prayer or meditation, every act of service, every refusal of the drink or drug when the emotional pull is strong — these are all small acts of restoration.

They are the intellect, strengthened by desire and supported by a power beyond the self, reclaiming its rightful place.

Reflection Questions

1. How do you understand the concept of a Higher Power in relation to your own recovery? What gives you strength beyond your own willpower?

2. Can you already identify ways in which your intellect is functioning better in early recovery than it did in active addiction? What has improved?

3. What does the gradual restoration of I/E look like as a lived experience for you? What specific changes have you noticed in how you think and respond to situations?

4. Where do you still struggle with emotional reactions overrunning your rational judgment? What situations or triggers still flip the formula?

5. If recovery is the process of restoring I/E — and if that restoration requires support from outside yourself — what does that tell you about the importance of connection, community, and spiritual practice in your recovery?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 5 OF 5

Restoration Indicators (Recovery Strengths)

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

1. I can feel a strong emotion and choose my response rather than simply reacting to it
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I can pause between impulse and action and consider consequences before deciding
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. My thinking is clearer in recovery than it was in active addiction
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I am able to use my intellect in genuine service of my recovery rather than against it
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I am developing the ability to tolerate discomfort without immediately escaping it
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I have access to support outside myself when my own resources are insufficient
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. My emotional reactions are becoming more proportionate to actual situations
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I can see evidence that the I/E formula is being gradually restored in my daily life
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 10: Recovery Action Plan

Nine Exercises, Reduced to Six Arrangements

The Point of Assembling It

This module has spent nine exercises establishing one thing: that your intellect is a formidable instrument which has, at times, been working for the other side. A plan is how you conscript it properly. Every pillar below sends you back to a specific exercise for an answer you have already written — go and read what you actually wrote rather than reconstructing it, because the version produced in the moment of the work is more honest than the version you would produce now. And note the shape of what is being asked for. Not resolutions, which are feelings about the future. Arrangements: things another person could verify from outside.

The Window Where It Flips

FROM EXERCISES 1, 3 AND 9

THE FINDING — Name the situation and the hour in which your formula most reliably reverses. Your audit, your decision maps and your seven days should all be pointing at the same place — say whether they do.

THE ARRANGEMENT — What is scheduled in that window now, and what will be scheduled in it instead? A governor that depends on you deciding in the moment is not a governor.

How much of this is genuinely in place today? (1 = nothing yet, 5 = built and running)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE STEP — one action. What, with whom, by when. One line, with a date in it.

The Argument to Refuse

FROM EXERCISE 2

THE FINDING — Which rationalization still had pull when you read it cold? Write it out in full, in its most convincing form.

THE ARRANGEMENT — What is your answer to it — the specific counter, and the specific person you will say the argument out loud to. Rationalizations survive in private and rarely survive being spoken.

How much of this is genuinely in place today? (1 = nothing yet, 5 = built and running)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE STEP — one action. What, with whom, by when. One line, with a date in it.

The Desire to Feed

FROM EXERCISE 4

THE FINDING — Which desire has to be stronger at the moment of decision, and what is its current evidence — what has it actually made you do?

THE ARRANGEMENT — How will you feed it this month? Desire grows by being acted on. Name the actions and the days.

How much of this is genuinely in place today? (1 = nothing yet, 5 = built and running)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE STEP — one action. What, with whom, by when. One line, with a date in it.

The Truth to Tell

FROM EXERCISE 5

THE FINDING — Which layer of the excavation is the one you are willing to make honest, and what is it protecting?

THE ARRANGEMENT — Name the person, the day, and how you will open it. Write the first sentence now, while it is easier than it will be in the room.

How much of this is genuinely in place today? (1 = nothing yet, 5 = built and running)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE STEP — one action. What, with whom, by when. One line, with a date in it.

The Price You Will Pay

FROM EXERCISE 6

THE FINDING — What was your lowest willingness rating, and which of the three obstacles was it — disbelief, cost, or not wanting to?

THE ARRANGEMENT — What is the smallest version of that item you would actually do this week? Willingness is reported to grow by being spent; name the first expenditure.

How much of this is genuinely in place today? (1 = nothing yet, 5 = built and running)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE STEP — one action. What, with whom, by when. One line, with a date in it.

What You Rely On Beyond Yourself

FROM EXERCISES 7 AND 8

THE FINDING — What has already done for you what your own effort could not? Name it in whatever words are honest for you.

THE ARRANGEMENT — What practice keeps you within its reach, on which days? And what arrangement in your life will change so that acceptance is visible from outside?

How much of this is genuinely in place today? (1 = nothing yet, 5 = built and running)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE STEP — one action. What, with whom, by when. One line, with a date in it.

How the Plan Gets Checked

Exercise 9 gave you a seven-day reading of the formula. That is your instrument — this section decides when it gets used again and who else sees the result.

1. Count your six steps. How many name a person and a date? Give the number, then rewrite any that do not.

2. Look at your six strength ratings. Which pillar is weakest? Be specific about why — a plan fails at the weakest arrangement, not at the average one.

3. When will you run the seven-day check-in again? Set the date. Two weeks compared months apart is the only evidence you will get that any of this moved.

4. Who is reading this plan, and on what day? Name them. A plan nobody else has seen is a plan you can revise quietly, and quiet revision is exactly how the last one went.

5. Set a second review for six months out, when things will be going well and reading this will feel unnecessary. Write the date, and one sentence to that version of yourself about why he or she is being made to read it.

The Closing Statement

Write it in your own words: "My formula reverses when _____. The argument it uses on me is _____.

What is different now is that ____, ____, and ____ are arranged, and ____ knows about all three. What I rely on beyond myself is _____."
