

Don't Outsmart the Simplicity of Sobriety

Father Martin's Chalk Talks · The Recovery Files

A Simple Program for Complicated People

Embrace, Empower & Evolve · Recovery Made Simple · The Recovery Files

Thermals & Drafting · The impressive, elaborate answer · More Geese · The boring answer that is usually right

Father Martin would point at the geese over the Chesapeake and ask why one side of the V was longer. People gave brilliant answers. Then he would say: maybe — but did it occur to you there might just be more geese on that side?

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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 6 · READING

The Geese Over the Chesapeake

Father Martin's treatment center sits in Havre de Grace, Maryland, on the point of land where the Susquehanna River empties into the Chesapeake Bay. It is one of the great migratory landing hubs on the East Coast. Twice a year the sky over that water fills with geese, and the sound of them carries across the whole property.

Father Martin used to take patients outside when a flock passed overhead in its V formation and ask a simple question: why do you suppose one side of the V is longer than the other? The patients would think hard about it. They would talk about wind resistance and drafting, about the lead bird rotating out when it tired, about thermals rising off the water and the energy economics of a long migration. Some of the answers were genuinely impressive — thoughtful, well-constructed, delivered with real confidence. Father Martin would listen to every word, nod, and then say: Maybe. But did it ever occur to you that there might just be more geese on that side?

That joke is the reason this workbook exists, and it is worth sitting with rather than laughing past. Notice that nothing in those elaborate answers was stupid. That is exactly the problem. The same mind that can build a sophisticated theory of goose aerodynamics on the spot is the mind that can build a sophisticated theory of why the plain directions of recovery do not quite apply in your particular case. Go to meetings. Get a sponsor and use them. Work the steps in order. Take the medication as prescribed. Tell the truth. Ask for help before the crisis rather than after it. Rely on something larger than your own thinking. None of that is hidden, advanced, or complicated.

Recovery does not usually fail because people are not smart enough. It fails, over and over, because people are smart enough to think their way around instructions that would have worked. The intelligence that kept you alive during active addiction — the planning, the negotiating, the managing of appearances, the ability to construct a persuasive case for almost anything — does not switch off the day you walk into recovery. It keeps running at full power, and with no other job to do, it goes to work on the only target available: the program itself.

So this is not a workbook about trying harder or thinking better. It is a workbook about the specific and unglamorous discipline of doing plain things you do not fully understand, on the word of people who have already done them, before you have any evidence that they will work for you. That is the whole assignment. Everything that follows is just practice at noticing when you are outside describing thermals and drafting, when the honest answer is that there are probably just more geese on that side.

Reflection Questions

1. What is the most elaborate explanation you have given recently for why you could not do something simple?

2. When were you last told something plain and true about your recovery, and how quickly did you start looking for the exception?

3. The geese joke is funny because it is recognizable. Where do you recognize yourself in it?

4. If the boring answer were the right one — if there are just more geese on that side — what would you have to start doing this week?

5. Who in your life would say, without hesitation, that you overcomplicate things? What would they say you overcomplicate most?

YOUR EXERCISE

The Geese Check

Thermals and drafting, or just more geese?

How to Use It

Write the complicated version first, in full, without editing yourself — the sophisticated case deserves to be seen clearly, because you cannot examine an argument you will not write down. Then write the plainest possible alternative, even if it feels insultingly simple. Then answer the only question that actually matters: if the plain version is true, what do I do today?

This is the reusable tool of the whole workbook. Come back to it any time you catch yourself building a theory.

Geese Check 1

Thermals and drafting — my elaborate explanation

More geese on that side — the boring answer

If the boring answer is right, what do I do today?

Who could I say the boring version out loud to?

Geese Check 2

Thermals and drafting — my elaborate explanation

More geese on that side — the boring answer

If the boring answer is right, what do I do today?

Who could I say the boring version out loud to?

Geese Check 3

Thermals and drafting — my elaborate explanation

More geese on that side — the boring answer

If the boring answer is right, what do I do today?

Who could I say the boring version out loud to?

Geese Check 4

Thermals and drafting — my elaborate explanation

More geese on that side — the boring answer

If the boring answer is right, what do I do today?

Who could I say the boring version out loud to?

Geese Check 5

Thermals and drafting — my elaborate explanation

More geese on that side — the boring answer

If the boring answer is right, what do I do today?

Who could I say the boring version out loud to?

PART 2 OF 6 · READING

A Simple Program for Complicated People

There is an old line in the rooms: this is a simple program for complicated people. It is not an insult and it is not a joke at anyone's expense. It is one of the most clinically accurate observations ever made about recovery, and it explains a failure pattern that shows up in treatment centers and outpatient offices every single day.

The instructions fit on an index card. Do not drink or use today. Go to meetings. Get a sponsor and actually use them. Work the steps in order with someone who has worked them. Take the medication you and your prescriber agreed on, for long enough to know whether it works. Help somebody else. Ask for help early. Nothing on that card requires a graduate degree, and nothing on it is hidden, advanced, or reserved for people who have earned it.

What makes it hard is not the content. It is us. Intelligence, creativity, verbal skill, and the ability to construct a persuasive case were survival tools during active addiction and during untreated mental illness. You used them to manage appearances, to negotiate, to explain away, to reassure people, to keep an impossible number of plates spinning far past the point when anyone should have been able to. Those tools worked. That is precisely why they are dangerous now. A tool that has saved you before does not feel like a liability; it feels like competence.

So the mind arrives in recovery still armed and still looking for work, and it finds the program. It notices the contradictions in the literature. It observes that the person chairing the meeting is not especially articulate. It calculates that ninety meetings in ninety days is statistically unnecessary. It identifies which steps are essential and which are redundant. Every one of these observations may even be correct in isolation, and every one of them, added together, produces a customized program that has been quietly reduced down to whatever you were already willing to do.

The ask here is strange and specific, and it is worth naming plainly. You are not being asked to become less intelligent, less curious, or less discerning. You are being asked to stop using your intelligence as a defense attorney for the part of you that does not want to change. Simple is not the same as easy. Following a plain instruction you do not fully agree with, from a person you did not choose, at a time when you do not feel like it, is one of the hardest things a capable adult can do — and it is the actual skill this workbook is trying to build.

Reflection Questions

1. Which of your mental strengths served you best during active addiction or untreated illness? Be honest about how well it worked.

2. How does that same strength argue against your recovery now? Give a real example from the last month.

3. What have you noticed, criticized, or corrected about your program, group, or provider recently? Was noticing it useful, or was it a way out?

4. What would it look like to point your intelligence at the problem instead of at the solution?

5. Complete this sentence honestly: the part of the program I have quietly reduced or dropped is ____, and the reason I gave myself was ____.

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 1 OF 5

Overthinking & Analysis

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

1. I need to fully understand why something works before I am willing to do it

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I find flaws in advice more quickly than I find anything useful in it

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I replay conversations, decisions, and meetings long after they are over

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I would rather research a solution thoroughly than try one imperfectly

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I can argue persuasively both for and against almost any suggestion I am given

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I often feel that other people are oversimplifying my situation

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I have a detailed explanation ready for why my recovery has stalled

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I spend more time thinking about recovery than actually doing anything about it

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Insight vs. Action Ledger

Understanding is not doing

Insight Is Cheap

You can understand your addiction perfectly and still relapse. You can explain your depression with clinical precision and still not get out of bed. Understanding something feels like progress and produces a small reward in the moment that is easy to mistake for movement — which is how a person ends up with a sophisticated grasp of their own patterns and a recovery that has not changed in six months.

Convert every insight into one small action with a time attached. Not a plan. Not a goal. An action, small enough to do today, with a specific hour.

Insight 1

What I know about myself

What I have actually done about it

One small action + the specific hour I will do it

Insight 2

What I know about myself

What I have actually done about it

One small action + the specific hour I will do it

Insight 3

What I know about myself

What I have actually done about it

One small action + the specific hour I will do it

Insight 4

What I know about myself

What I have actually done about it

One small action + the specific hour I will do it

Insight 5

What I know about myself

What I have actually done about it

One small action + the specific hour I will do it

Ledger Review

1. Looking at the middle column, how much of what you know has ever been converted into behavior?

2. What is the oldest insight on this list — the one you have understood longest and acted on least?

3. Where are you currently getting ready to get ready?

4. What is one thing you could do in the next twenty-four hours that you already know you should do?

5. Who will you tell about that action, so that it exists outside your own head?

YOUR EXERCISE

Complication Log

7 Days of Catching Yourself In the Act

The Practice

Each day, take five minutes and answer four questions. You are not trying to fix anything here — you are building the habit of noticing, in close to real time, the moment you start describing thermals and drafting. Over a week, the pattern usually becomes obvious, and it is almost never the pattern people expect.

Day 1

What did I complicate today?

What was the simple version?

Which of my six directions did I actually do today?

Did I take a suggestion I did not fully agree with? What happened?

Simplicity rating today (1 = fully theorized, 10 = just followed the directions)

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

Day 2

What did I complicate today?

What was the simple version?

Which of my six directions did I actually do today?

Did I take a suggestion I did not fully agree with? What happened?

Simplicity rating today (1 = fully theorized, 10 = just followed the directions)

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

Day 3

What did I complicate today?

What was the simple version?

Which of my six directions did I actually do today?

Did I take a suggestion I did not fully agree with? What happened?

Simplicity rating today (1 = fully theorized, 10 = just followed the directions)

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

Day 4

What did I complicate today?

What was the simple version?

Which of my six directions did I actually do today?

Did I take a suggestion I did not fully agree with? What happened?

Simplicity rating today (1 = fully theorized, 10 = just followed the directions)

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

Day 5

What did I complicate today?

What was the simple version?

Which of my six directions did I actually do today?

Did I take a suggestion I did not fully agree with? What happened?

Simplicity rating today (1 = fully theorized, 10 = just followed the directions)

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

Day 6

What did I complicate today?

What was the simple version?

Which of my six directions did I actually do today?

Did I take a suggestion I did not fully agree with? What happened?

Simplicity rating today (1 = fully theorized, 10 = just followed the directions)

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

Day 7

What did I complicate today?

What was the simple version?

Which of my six directions did I actually do today?

Did I take a suggestion I did not fully agree with? What happened?

Simplicity rating today (1 = fully theorized, 10 = just followed the directions)

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

Week in Review

1. Looking at seven days of entries, what do you most reliably complicate? Is it decisions, instructions, or relationships?

2. Did your simplicity rating change over the week? What made the higher days higher?

3. Which of your six directions went missing most often?

4. What was the hardest suggestion to take without arguing, and what did arguing cost you?

5. Will you keep this log going? If so, when in your day will it live?

PART 3 OF 6 · READING

Terminal Uniqueness: "My Case Is Different"

Four words end more recoveries than any craving: my case is different. It rarely arrives as open defiance, which is what makes it so hard to catch. It arrives as reasonable qualification, usually in a calm voice, often with real evidence attached.

My job is not like theirs. My trauma is worse. My anxiety is a different kind than what those people are describing. I am not that far gone. I am much further gone than these people. The meetings near me are not my crowd. My family situation makes that impractical. My diagnosis complicates it. I have already tried that and it did not take. Each of these can be entirely true, and truth is exactly what gives them their power. Nobody talks themselves out of recovery with an obviously bad argument. They do it with twenty good-sounding ones, stacked up over months.

Here is the paradox worth sitting with. Your story genuinely is unique. The details, the people, the losses, the particular shape of your suffering belong to nobody else, and anyone who waves that away is not being helpful. But your problem is not unique at all, and neither is the solution. Terminal uniqueness takes the true part — that your story is yours alone — and uses it to smuggle in the false part, that the directions therefore do not apply to you. It is a sleight of hand performed by you, on you, and it is nearly invisible from the inside.

Watch the direction of travel. Every customization you make trends the same way: less contact, less honesty, less help, less structure, less exposure to people who might see you clearly. Nobody's terminal uniqueness ever concludes that they should go to more meetings, call their sponsor more often, or be more honest with their prescriber. When the exemption you are writing yourself always lands on doing less of what works, you have learned something important about what is actually generating the argument.

The corrective is not to flatten your story or pretend your circumstances do not matter. They do. The corrective is to notice the exact moment your circumstances stop being context and start being an argument for doing less. When you hear yourself constructing that case, you are standing outside describing thermals and drafting. Maybe. But maybe there are just more geese on that side.

Reflection Questions

1. Write out your best case for why the standard suggestions do not fully fit your situation. Do not soften it — make the strongest version you can.

2. Now read it back. If a newcomer handed you that exact paragraph, what would you honestly think?

3. Which part of your case is genuinely true, and where does the true part get used to justify doing less?

4. Has your case-is-different argument ever concluded that you should do more of what works? What does the answer tell you?

5. What has this argument actually cost you so far — in time, relationships, relapses, or months of your life?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 2 OF 5

Terminal Uniqueness

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

1. I believe my circumstances make the standard suggestions a poor fit for me

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I compare myself to others in the room and conclude I do not really belong

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I have thought that the people giving me advice do not truly understand my situation

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I qualify most suggestions with an explanation of why my case is an exception

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I feel either too far gone or not far gone enough for the help being offered

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I have left a group, meeting, or provider because they were not my kind of people
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I assume an approach built for a general population cannot address what is specific to me
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I have modified the suggestions to fit my life rather than my life to fit the suggestions
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Terminal Uniqueness Inventory

The exemptions you keep writing yourself

No Score, Just a Mirror

Tap every statement below that you have said out loud, thought privately, or quietly believed. There is no score attached and nobody is grading this. The value is entirely in seeing how many of them are yours, and in noticing that each one, taken alone, sounded perfectly reasonable at the time.

Statements I Have Made or Believed

☐ My situation is more complex than theirs ☐ I am not as bad as these people ☐ I am much worse off than these people ☐ They do not understand my job or responsibilities ☐ My trauma makes this different ☐ My diagnosis is a different kind ☐ I cannot relate to anyone in that room ☐ I already tried that and it did not work for me ☐ That works for other people, not someone like me ☐ I do not have time for what they are describing ☐ My family situation makes that impossible ☐ I am too old for that group ☐ I am too young for that group ☐ I am too educated for that approach ☐ I need something more advanced than the basics ☐ My recovery has to look different because of my career

Any others in your own words?

Your own versions...

Building and Dismantling the Case

My strongest case for why the standard suggestions do not fully fit me:

Make the best version of the argument. Do not soften it — a weak version proves nothing.

What is genuinely true in that case — the real part:

Your circumstances do matter. Name what is actually true here...

Where the true part gets used to justify doing less of what works:

This is the hinge of the whole thing. Find it and name it precisely...

Has my case-is-different argument ever concluded I should do MORE of what works?

Answer honestly, then say what that tells you...

What this argument has cost me so far:

Time, relationships, relapses, months, opportunities...

If a newcomer handed me that exact argument, I would tell them:

Say it as plainly as you would say it to them...

PART 4 OF 6 · READING

Contempt Prior to Investigation

There is a phrase that circulates in recovery literature about the one attitude that can keep a person in permanent ignorance: contempt prior to investigation. Deciding something will not work before you have honestly tried it. It is a good phrase because it is precise — it names not the refusal itself but the timing of the refusal, the verdict handed down before the evidence was ever collected.

It is worth being specific about what actually counts as trying, because most people who say they tried something did not. Reading about meetings is not going to meetings. Having a sponsor's number in your phone is not calling the sponsor. Going twice, sitting in the back, leaving before the end, and speaking to no one is not attending. Picking up a prescription is not taking it as prescribed for the full trial period your prescriber described. Attending three therapy sessions and stopping because the fourth one looked like it was going to be uncomfortable is not a course of therapy. In each case, a person has collected the appearance of an experiment and then drawn a firm conclusion from data they never gathered.

Open-mindedness is not a feeling and it is not agreement. This is the part people get wrong most often. You do not have to believe a suggestion will work, or like it, or find the people who recommend it impressive. You have to be willing to run the experiment properly while you still doubt it. That is what people mean when they say you act your way into right thinking rather than thinking your way into right action. The willingness comes first, the evidence comes second, and the belief, if it arrives at all, arrives last — which is exactly backwards from how most of us expect change to work.

There is a version of this that is even harder to see, because it looks like diligence. Some people do not dismiss the suggestion at all; they investigate it indefinitely. They compare programs, read comparative outcome literature, interview potential sponsors, wait for the right group, and never begin. Research has become the activity. It is contempt prior to investigation wearing a lab coat, and it is more socially acceptable than open refusal, which is precisely what makes it stickier.

So the work here is to design one honest trial. Pick something you have dismissed, define what a fair test would actually require in countable terms, set an end date, tell one person about it, and agree not to render a verdict until you reach that date — not on a bad day and not on a good one. If it genuinely does not work after a real trial, you will have earned the right to say so, and you will be believed, including by yourself. That is worth something. Right now, your dismissal is not evidence. It is a preference with a hypothesis attached.

Reflection Questions

1. What have you dismissed without ever running a fair test of it?

2. What did you tell people your reason was? What was the real reason?

3. What would a genuinely fair trial of that thing require of you, in specific and countable terms?

4. Where are you investigating indefinitely instead of beginning — comparing, researching, or waiting for the right version?

5. What are you afraid would happen if you ran the trial honestly and it actually worked?

YOUR EXERCISE

The Contempt Trial

Designing one honest experiment

The Rule of the Trial

One experiment. Not three. No verdict before the verdict date — not on a bad day, and not on a good one. You agreed to gather data, and a conclusion drawn on day three is not data. It is the same dismissal you started with, wearing a lab coat.

Design the Trial

The thing I have dismissed without a fair test:

Meetings, sponsorship, medication, therapy, service, prayer, a specific step...

What I told people my reason was:

The stated reason...

The real reason:

Fear, pride, discomfort, embarrassment, or not wanting it to work...

What a genuinely fair trial requires — specific and countable:

Example: six meetings in fourteen days, arriving early, staying to the end, speaking once.

How I will know whether it worked — what I am actually measuring:

Name it in advance so you cannot move the goalposts later...

Start date

MM/DD

Verdict date

MM/DD

Who I am telling about this experiment

Name, and how you will tell them...

Getting Ready to Get Ready

Where am I investigating indefinitely instead of beginning?

Comparing programs, interviewing sponsors, waiting for the right group...

What conditions have I set that must be met before I can start?

The calmer week, the new month, the resolved situation...

What am I afraid would happen if I ran this honestly and it worked?

This question is not rhetorical. Something is at stake in it being true...

PART 5 OF 6 · READING

The Directions Already Exist

An enormous amount of energy in early recovery goes into designing a personalized program, when the far harder and far more useful work is following an existing one. The directions have already been written down. Millions of people have already tested them, in every kind of life and circumstance you can imagine. Nobody is asking you to solve this from scratch, and the fact that you keep trying to is itself a symptom worth examining.

The directions come in more than one dialect, and that is genuinely fine. Twelve-step fellowships offer meetings, sponsorship, the steps, and service. SMART Recovery offers a structured cognitive and behavioral path. Refuge Recovery, LifeRing, Celebrate Recovery, and others each have their own established route. On the mental health side the instructions are equally plain and equally unglamorous: take the medication as prescribed for long enough to know, keep the therapy appointments especially in the weeks you feel fine, protect sleep, move your body, stay in regular contact with people, and have a written safety plan in place before you need it rather than after.

The dialects differ. The grammar is remarkably consistent across all of them: show up regularly, tell the truth, stay connected to other people, accept help you did not want to need, and do all of it whether or not you feel like it on the day. If you strip away the vocabulary and the culture of any of these paths, that is what is left, and that is the part that does the work.

What almost never works is the self-designed program — assembled from the parts of several approaches you already liked, with every uncomfortable element quietly removed. That is not a program. That is a preference wearing a program's vocabulary. And the parts you are most inclined to cut are almost always the parts doing the work, because the discomfort is the point of contact where change actually happens. If your plan contains nothing you dislike, you have not built a plan; you have built a mirror.

The practical form of this chapter is short. Write down six plain, countable things. Not values, not aspirations, not the person you intend to become. Six actions, small enough that you could do them on your worst day, specific enough that at the end of the day there is no arguing with yourself about whether you did them. Then do them, and when you drift — and you will drift, because everyone does — do not go looking for the deep reason first. Look at the six and find out which one went missing. It is almost always one of the six, and it is almost always the one you decided you had outgrown.

Reflection Questions

1. Whose directions are you actually following right now? Name the source honestly.

2. Which part of the standard suggestions have you quietly removed, and what reason did you give yourself?

3. Does your current plan contain anything you genuinely dislike doing? If not, what does that tell you?

4. What are you afraid would happen if you did all of it, exactly as suggested, for ninety days?

5. When you have drifted before, which direction went missing first? Can you predict your own drift?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 3 OF 5

Getting Ready to Get Ready

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

1. I prepare for change considerably more than I actually change

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I am waiting for a better week, month, or life circumstance to fully commit

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I research options instead of choosing one and beginning

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I have insights about myself that I have never once converted into an action

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I set conditions that must be met before I can start doing what works

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I say I am going to do something and then repeatedly do not do it
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I confuse understanding my problem with making progress on it
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I have been almost ready to start for longer than I would like to admit
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 4 OF 5**Teachability & Follow-Through Capacity**

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

1. I can take a suggestion I disagree with and try it anyway
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I do what I said I would do even when the feeling that motivated it has passed
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I tell my sponsor, therapist, or support person the truth including the embarrassing parts
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I go to meetings and appointments on the days I do not feel like going
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I ask for help before a situation becomes urgent rather than after
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I keep doing what works even once I start feeling better
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I can name a time I followed direction I did not understand and was glad I did
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I have someone in my life with standing permission to tell me something I do not want to hear
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE**My Six Directions**

Small enough for your worst day. Specific enough that you cannot argue.

Write Them Down

Edit the six defaults below so they fit your actual program, life, and care plan — but keep them countable. Not values, not aspirations, not the person you intend to become. Six actions, small enough that you could do them on your worst day, specific enough that at the end of the day there is no arguing with yourself about whether you did them.

Write Your Six Directions

Direction 1

Did not drink or use today

Direction 2

Went to a meeting or group

Direction 3

Talked to my sponsor or a support person

Direction 4

Took my medication as prescribed

Direction 5

Paused, prayed, or sat quietly for five minutes

Direction 6

Told the truth about one thing I wanted to hide

Which of these do I dislike most? (If none, the plan may be a mirror rather than a plan.)

Name it, and say why you are keeping it anyway...

Weekly Tracker

This week: 0 of 42 boxes0%

DirectionMonTueWedThuFriSatSun

Did not drink or use today

Went to a meeting or group

Talked to my sponsor or a support person

Took my medication as prescribed

Paused, prayed, or sat quietly for five minutes

Told the truth about one thing I wanted to hide

☐ Start a New Week

Predicting Your Own Drift

When You Drift

You will drift. Everyone does. When it happens, do not go looking for the deep reason first. Look at this grid and find which row went empty. It is almost always one of the six, and it is almost always the one you decided you had outgrown.

Which row goes empty first for me:

Predict your own drift...

What I will do the moment I notice it:

A specific action and a specific person...

Who I will show this grid to, and when:

Name and day...

YOUR EXERCISE

Excuse & Counter Table

Write the counters now, while you are calm

Why Write These In Advance

Notice how many of these excuses are true statements. That is what makes them effective — a lie is easy to dismiss, but a true statement doing the work of a lie is much harder to catch. You will not be able to compose a counter in the moment, because in the moment the excuse will not feel like an excuse. It will feel like scheduling. Write the counters now.

I am too tired tonight

Is this one of mine? What is true about it?

My counter — what I am going to do anyway

I already went earlier this week

Is this one of mine? What is true about it?

My counter — what I am going to do anyway

I am actually doing fine right now

Is this one of mine? What is true about it?

My counter — what I am going to do anyway

I do not connect with that group

Is this one of mine? What is true about it?

My counter — what I am going to do anyway

I have nothing to share

Is this one of mine? What is true about it?

My counter — what I am going to do anyway

I am too busy this week

Is this one of mine? What is true about it?

My counter — what I am going to do anyway

It is too far and parking is bad

Is this one of mine? What is true about it?

My counter — what I am going to do anyway

I will go tomorrow instead

Is this one of mine? What is true about it?

My counter — what I am going to do anyway

My Automatic Rule

Make It Dumb On Purpose

The rule that cuts through all of this is deliberately dumb, and it works because it is dumb: go anyway. Especially on the day you are fine. Especially on the day you are too tired. A rule you have to think about is a rule you will negotiate with.

My automatic rule — the one that removes the decision entirely:

Example: Tuesday and Thursday at 7, I go. No deciding. Even if I am fine. Especially if I am fine.

A time I went when I did not want to, and what actually happened:

Be specific — you will need this memory later...

Who I will text on my way, so that leaving is public:

Name and the message you will send...

PART 6 OF 6 · READING

You Are Not the Manager

The hardest instruction in recovery, and the one most aggressively over-thought, is the one about relying on a power greater than yourself. People spend months arguing about the metaphysics of it and never get around to the practice, which is a very sophisticated way of not doing the thing.

Notice what the instruction is actually asking. It does not require a doctrine, a conversion, or a settled theology, and it does not ask you to pretend to believe something you do not. It requires one working admission: that your own thinking, operating alone and unassisted, produced the results you are now trying to recover from — and that you are therefore going to stop treating it as the final authority on your life. That is a modest and entirely evidence-based claim. For some people the larger power is God as they understand God. For others it is the group itself, the accumulated experience of people who got well. For others it is the process, the natural world, or simply the plain fact that reality does not take instruction from you.

The functional version of this is easier to see and harder to dodge. There is a job you have been holding that was never yours: managing outcomes, managing other people, and managing the future. You are qualified to do the next right thing today. You are not qualified to run the results, and you never were. Almost everything called anxiety, resentment, or urgency in early recovery is the strain of a person trying to perform a job they were never able to do — and then blaming themselves for performing it badly.

Self-reliance is the hardest thing to give up because it does not feel like a defect. It feels like maturity, competence, and consideration for others. I do not want to burden anyone. I will handle it and then report it handled. I know myself better than they do. Every one of those sentences sounds like the voice of a responsible adult, and every one of them is the same self-reliance that ran the addiction, dressed in better clothes and speaking in a calmer tone.

So the practice is to resign from that post, in writing, and then behave as though you have. Not resign from responsibility — your actions are entirely yours and always will be. Resign from management. There is a real and livable difference between the two, and learning to stand inside that difference is most of what people mean when they say a program made them peaceful. It is also, not coincidentally, the thing that makes the other five chapters possible: you cannot take direction from anyone while you are still convinced you are the one in charge.

Reflection Questions

1. What are you currently trying to manage that is not actually within your control?

2. What has that management job cost you in sleep, mood, and relationships?

3. Which of the self-reliance sentences — I will not burden anyone, I will handle it first, I know myself best — is most familiar in your own voice?

4. What would you call a power greater than yourself, in your own honest words, without borrowing anyone else's language?

5. What is one concrete thing you could hand over this week, and how would you know you actually did?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 5 OF 5

Self-Reliance & Control

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

1. I try to resolve problems on my own before telling anyone they exist

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I want a struggle handled before I report it to a support person

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I feel uncomfortable or diminished when I need to ask for help

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I spend energy trying to manage outcomes and other people's reactions

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I have trouble accepting that some things are simply not mine to control

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I do not want to burden other people with what I am going through

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I trust my own judgment about my recovery more than I trust anyone else's

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. The idea of relying on a power greater than myself feels uncomfortable or unclear to me

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

My Support Roster

Five people, and the specific thing each one is for

Vague Support Is Not Support

You cannot see your own blind spot — that is the definition of the word, not a character flaw. The reason a sponsor, therapist, or peer works is not that they are wiser than you. It is that they are not standing where you are standing.

Call before it is urgent. Call about small things, on ordinary days, when nothing is wrong. The muscle you build calling about a mildly annoying Tuesday is the same muscle you will need at ten o'clock on a very bad Friday. A relationship you only activate in emergencies is not actually available in emergencies.

Support person 1

Name

Role

Phone

What I would call this person about

Last time I contacted them

Support person 2

Name

Role

Phone

What I would call this person about

Last time I contacted them

Support person 3

Name

Role

Phone

What I would call this person about

Last time I contacted them

Support person 4

Name

Role

Phone

What I would call this person about

Last time I contacted them

Support person 5

Name

Role

Phone

What I would call this person about

Last time I contacted them

The Ask Script

What usually stops me — not wanting to bother them, not wanting to admit it, or wanting to solve it first:

Which of the three is it, honestly? The third one is the most dangerous because it looks like maturity.

My opening line, written out, so I do not have to compose it in a bad moment:

Example: Hey, nothing is on fire, but I need to say something out loud before it gets bigger.

The last thing I handled entirely alone that I should have brought to someone:

And what I will do about it now...

My practice call this week — a small thing, on an ordinary day:

Who, when, and about what...

Who has standing permission to tell me something I do not want to hear?

If nobody does, who should — and when will you ask them?

YOUR EXERCISE

The Manager's Resignation

Resigning from management, not from responsibility

The Job That Was Never Yours

You are qualified to do the next right thing today. You are not qualified to run the results, and you never were. Almost everything called anxiety, resentment, or urgency in early recovery is the strain of a person trying to perform a job they were never able to do — and then blaming themselves for performing it badly.

What I Am Currently Trying to Manage

☐ Other people's opinions of me ☐ My family's reactions ☐ Whether someone forgives me ☐ My job security ☐ The outcome of a legal matter ☐ How fast I recover ☐ Whether a loved one gets sober ☐ My past ☐ The future ☐ Whether people believe I have changed ☐ Other people's recovery ☐ How I am perceived at meetings ☐ Whether my medication works ☐ What people say about me when I am not there

NOT MINE TO MANAGE

Outcomes, other people, the future...

ACTUALLY MINE TODAY

My actions, my honesty, my next right thing...

The Resignation

I resign from managing:

List the specific posts you are stepping down from...

I remain fully responsible for:

Resigning from management is not resigning from responsibility. Name the difference in your own case...

What this management job has cost me in sleep, mood, and relationships:

Be specific...

Which self-reliance sentence is most familiar in my own voice?

I will not burden anyone / I will handle it first / I know myself best...

Something Larger Than My Own Thinking

What I would call a power greater than myself, in my own honest words:

God, the group, the process, nature, reality, the accumulated experience of people who got well — your language, not anyone else's...

One concrete thing I will hand over this week:

Handing something over has a behavior attached to it. What is yours?

How I will know I actually did it:

What would be observably different?

YOUR EXERCISE

My One-Page Plan

Screenshot it. Print it. Read it to your sponsor.

One Page, Six Directions

This is not a philosophy of recovery, a set of goals, or a description of the person you intend to become. It is a short list of plain, countable actions with names and times attached. If your plan requires a good mood, a free schedule, or a stable week, it is not a plan. It is a wish.

My Six Directions

1. Did not drink or use today
2. Went to a meeting or group
3. Talked to my sponsor or a support person
4. Took my medication as prescribed
5. Paused, prayed, or sat quietly for five minutes
6. Told the truth about one thing I wanted to hide

Edit these in Exercise 4.

Write the Plan

What I learned

One sentence...

My program

The specific fellowship, treatment, or care plan I am following...

My people

Who I contact, and how often...

My early warning signs

What shows up first when I start drifting...

What I do when I see one

The first call and the first action — specific person, specific step...

The direction I will drop first

Predict it now, and say what you will do about it...

Who I am telling, and when

Name and date...

The Plan

WHAT I LEARNED

Not yet written.

MY PROGRAM

Not yet written.

MY PEOPLE

Not yet written.

MY EARLY WARNING SIGNS

Not yet written.

WHAT I DO WHEN I SEE ONE

Not yet written.

THE DIRECTION I WILL DROP FIRST

Not yet written.

WHO I AM TELLING, AND WHEN

Not yet written.

One Last Time

There are just more geese on that side. Whenever the plan starts to feel too simple to be the answer, that is the moment it is working and you are about to talk yourself out of it. Close this and go do the plain things.

A note on what this is

This workbook is educational and reflective. It is not treatment, not a substitute for medical or psychiatric care, and not a reason to change or stop any prescribed medication. Nothing here asks you to leave a clinical program — it asks you to stop editing the one you are already in. If you are in crisis, contact your provider or call or text 988 in the United States.