

From Inside The Walls  
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Choosing Change Is A Choice  
by Barry A. Grant

It's a bit past 6:00 a.m. and the morning shift here at the East Jersey State Prison is taking their first count of the day. After fifteen or twenty minutes more a piercing voice declares over the loud speaker, "The count is clear!"

Same situation, another day is unfortunately the attitude among many whom seem complacent with these circumstances and appear to make no sincere effort regarding a positive change in attitude and behavior. One fact that I've had the pleasure of acknowledging is that regardless of what you are or have been, you have the capacity to be whatever you desire to be. It is a psychological fact that you can influence your environment and thoughts. By doing so consciously and with high purpose, you can change your habits and attitudes for the better.

The techniques taught throughout SMART Recovery<sup>®</sup> strengthen the desire to think through problems, and the degree of success you achieve depends upon the amount of sincere desire you have. Since we first form habits, then our habits form us, if we do not assertively form good habits, we will passively form bad ones. Habits aren't instincts; they're acquired reactions. Once you determine the original cause of a habit, it is within your power to either accept or reject it. Speaking from my own experience, I find that it's just as easy to form the habit of succeeding as it is to succumb to the habit of failure.

Much to my dismay, I see widespread unwillingness to understand the reality of distorted thinking caused by irrational beliefs. Especially useful in this environment, SMART Recovery<sup>®</sup> is an excellent approach for dismantling negative habits such as fear, anger, self-pity, defeatism, anxiety, hopelessness, and resignation. First, I rationally explore myself and then the situation. To know the true reality of yourself, you must be aware not only of your conscious thoughts but also your prejudices, biases, and habits. Then, I accept the "what is" of a given situation. Accepting what is at a particular time and place isn't a defeatist attitude. On the contrary, it engenders respect for all involved. Lacking this respect is likely to produce negative consequences, whereas a moment's reflection can deter you from abusing your rights—or the rights of others. To this end, I often tell people, "It's not what you think of me; it's what I think of you." You'd be surprised how that simple saying can put a situation into positive perspective.

By my using the benefits of what I've learned and thought through, I can choose to stand up and be counted for the things that count. Of course, whether in here or in free society, uncomfortable situations will arise. As my approach to these situations has been skillfully fine-tuned by my SMART Recovery<sup>®</sup> training, the reality of their temporary standing is easily absorbed, and I view them as learning experiences.

From what I've seen, regarding individuals who justify their recidivistic behavior, one of the most common reasons given is the distorted view that positive aspirations are unreal or unacceptable by peers. Also, as addictive behavior is widely accepted as the norm, many find it difficult to differentiate negative destructive behavior from positive constructive behavior. Those who are open, interested, and receptive to positive change often feel discouraged for fear of being ridiculed. I can tell you, as one who abused himself with substances for over twenty years, this is classic pusher/addict, misery loves company stuff—not unlike where a great many of us began our journeys. I now know better, and I choose to do better!

Another deeply troubling phenomenon is the false sense of connectedness and grandeur associated with being a "successful" recidivist. I ask you, do phrases like "I can do three or four years standing on my head" make any rational sense? I believe this is a quintessential example of profoundly distorted thinking. The money made from selling drugs is an addiction in itself. It is irrational and unrealistic to believe that one can successfully evade the danger and almost certain loss of freedom which accompanies such a choice. I hear it time and time again, that by selling drugs they're not hurting anyone. Well, that's another article entirely!

There are individuals who truly seek genuine character development and cognitive-behavioral adjustment, but opportunities to learn about SMART Recovery<sup>®</sup> are limited. I think making SMART Recovery<sup>®</sup> available for the entire prison system would significantly reduce the rate of recidivism. Upon returning to society, we'd bring by example a new way of thinking and living. In addition, reducing the recidivism rate would both increase the number of taxpayers and decrease the tax burden.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to Commissioner Jack Terhune, Assistant Commissioner Howard Beyer, Community Corrections Corporation, and Volunteers of America—Delaware Valley for their cooperation in this comprehensive solution for those willing to change.

Positively speaking: Imagine how things will look when you see them through the eyes of possibility.

Editor's Note: We welcome Barry Grant to our pages as our new "From Inside the Walls" author, taking over for Barry DeLeon, our new "From Beyond the Walls" author. Several of Barry's articles have already appeared in previous issues of News & Views, and we are glad to have him on board as a regular contributor. Readers who wish to write Barry Grant may contact him at the following address: Barry A. Grant, #289591, East Jersey State Prison, Lock Bag R, Rahway, NJ 07065. Publishers note: postage stamps are always appreciated by inmates when corresponding with them.