

From Inside the Walls May 1999

by Barry DeLeon

"He is the best sailor who can steer within the fewest points of the wind, and exact a motive power out of the greatest obstacles." Henry David Thoreau

I recently spoke to a friend whom I met in prison. He had moved on into the halfway house program. He told me about this "new program" that was being introduced to him and how it seemed to make sense, and offer basic methods that will intrinsically enable him to acclimate himself back into a society from which he has been absent for so long. The program is SMART Recovery[®].

It brings me great joy to see SMART Recovery[®] (grow and expand. I challenge all who read this column to work towards bringing SMART Recovery[®] (into jails and prisons everywhere as well as schools, organizations and clubs. It will undoubtedly assist those in prison, whether the prison be of the accepted understanding, or simply a "prison of addiction", to recognize their innate worth and help them to embrace the rewards of life instead of the risks of death.

I can't help but write my columns from the point of view of a prisoner. I mean, no matter how I present my point of view, that is what I am: A prisoner. I am in prison, but I am no longer in a prison to addiction or to obsessive, compulsive behavior. And that in and of itself has changed my life. The cognitive thinking techniques behind SMART Recovery[®] (and the rational emotive behavioral therapy that I have come to learn and use in my daily life has helped me to change. I no longer have a lack of self-reflection. I can work thing out through a logical thought process and foresee consequences before I take a particular action. And I can't emphasize enough that this basic practice is what would benefit those in prison more so than anything else.

This environment is one that is replete with rules and regulations. It houses those of us who, for the most part, rebelled against authority and the very societal rules that would keep most people out of trouble. To use this time in prison, not only to protect society, but to rehabilitate and re-educate the offender should be the ultimate goal. Understanding rules and regulations as well as learning to live as a productive member of society will be a benefit both to the community and to the offender. This must be our shared objective.

That feat and elemental achievement is where we all can find true meaning and purpose in life; overcome that shallow self-image; get beyond that short-term thinking; no longer give in to instant gratification and false desire; begin to use rational, logical thinking.

Prisoners need a simple method to begin to understand how to think rationally. The ABCs of cognitive thinking are perfect for those who tend to look for the quick and simple way. Prisoners need to understand the direction their lives took, not just realize where they went wrong. To do that, we have to learn how and why we think and just what rational and irrational thinking is. We need to understand ourselves and prison can be a place to discover self rather than escape from self. We need SMART Recovery[®] (to help us gain that understanding. We might begin to realize

that the happiest people don't necessarily have the best of everything; they just make the best of everything. For many in the world today, this might seem like common sense. But sometimes even the self-evident needs a road map and compass to get through to the logically obtuse.

Editor's Note: Barry would welcome your letters and thoughts regarding this and previous "From Inside the Walls" columns. Letters may be addressed to: Barry DeLeon, #131953, G.S.Y.C.F., PO Box 11401, Yardville, NJ 08620.