

President's Column

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Recovery Of Vs. Recovery From

"I suppose the common definition of recovery is 'recovery from,' as in, addictions and compulsions of unlimited variety, more or less, recovery from illness. Personally, it has a different meaning for me. For me it is 'recovery of,' because when we are lost in our addictions or desperation what we need is to recover our essential selves, that which is our true nature, as it was before we got involved in self-defeating thinkings and behaviors." Monica Harris, SMART[®] member, South Florida.

I liked this statement so much I asked Monica's permission to quote it here. As we gain independence from addictive behavior, or help others to do so, we need to remember that there is a greater goal: to live a good life. Recovery from addictive behavior sets the stage for the development of, and recovery of, satisfactions and pleasures that were not possible while still engaged in addictive behavior.

The fourth point of the SMART[®] Four-Point Program concerns lifestyle balance: "to balance momentary and enduring satisfactions." Addictive behavior provides a momentary satisfaction. Of course, in some cases of stimulant use or other addictive behavior the satisfaction may get increasingly short-lived, but at least it was there at first. If it hadn't been at first, the addictive behavior would not have developed. Why do something that obviously has no future if it isn't even fun at first?

It is senseless for a helper to downplay this momentary satisfaction. Some have suggested that this satisfaction, the pleasure of the addiction, is the primary reason that the behavior continues. Others have suggested that addictive behavior is a way to cope, and that the development of new coping skills is essential to recovery. Whichever might be true for a particular individual, the momentary satisfaction was essential in establishing the addictive behavior, and may be essential in maintaining it.

As addictive behavior develops, the individual's time-frame shrinks. The focus is increasingly on obtaining momentary satisfaction. Satisfactions that require time tend to drop out of the individual's life. But it is getting those satisfactions back, or developing them (as in the case of someone whose addictive behavior began in the early teens or earlier), that is the culmination of recovery. As it states in the SMART[®] Purposes and Methods statement (which includes the Four-Point Program):

"For many sincere participants there will come a time when attending our groups, or participating in our other services, is more in conflict with the pursuit of their life goals than enhancing them. Although these participants will always be welcome back if they want to come, this conflict signals that the time for graduations has arrived."

These graduating participants have developed full and satisfying lives. They are learning, achieving, making money, helping others, raising children, and doing the myriad other things that self-actualizing individuals do with their lives. Some of them (let us not forget!) are also leading SMART[®] meetings and nurturing the SMART[®] organization, which many of us would say is a highly satisfying activity. Given how long it may take SMART[®] to achieve institutional parity with 12-step groups, its going to be an enduring one also!

SMART's[®] purpose is to help individual's gain independence from addictive behavior, and in so doing, recover (or develop) a fulfilling life. It is a delight to observe the entire process of "recovery from" leading to "recovery of." Often, of course, that process is a long one that seems at times to move backward as well as forward. There is also no clear endpoint, a point at which one has fully arrived (unless you are seeking nirvana!). But there does come a point at which one can feel definitely on the way. If you are there, congratulations! If you are still working on it, its worth the effort!