

## President's Letter

### A Review of Some SMART Recovery<sup>®</sup> Fundamentals

Two newsletters ago, we reprinted the SMART Recovery<sup>®</sup> "Purposes and Methods" statement. It is also found on pages four and five of the *Members Manual* and on the website ([smartrecovery.org](http://smartrecovery.org)). This statement is the single most important document in SMART Recovery<sup>®</sup>. In this "back to basics" column, I will review several aspects and implications of this statement.

SMART Recovery<sup>®</sup> is a program for individuals who desire to abstain from one or more addictive behaviors (substances or activities). SMART Recovery<sup>®</sup> supports abstinence for individuals who desire it, but SMART Recovery<sup>®</sup> does not advocate abstinence for anyone. Unless we were to advocate abstinence for everyone (i.e., unless we were prohibitionists), we would need to define for whom we advocate abstinence. Other approaches have a quick response on this issue: they advocate abstinence only for alcoholics or addicts. But we do not use these concepts. We view addictive behavior as lying on a continuum. Certainly some addiction problems are worse than others, but on a continuum there is no clear point at which "alcoholism" or "addiction" begins. Therefore we support abstinence for those who desire it, regardless of their level of problems.

SMART Recovery<sup>®</sup> supports abstinence from the addictive behaviors chosen by the individual but does not expect that the individual will abstain from all potentially addictive behaviors. For instance, someone abstaining from pot may not desire to abstain from alcohol or gambling. It may be that alcohol and gambling do not cause significant problems for this individual (i.e., the individual moderates involvement with both) or simply that the individual is uninterested in abstaining from them. Because almost any activity or substance is potentially addicting, to abstain from all that is potentially addictive might well be the functional equivalent of death. To be sure, we may frequently see SMART Recovery<sup>®</sup> participants who would be much better off by pursuing a more serious and far-reaching approach to abstinence. We may even strongly encourage them to conduct rigorous cost-benefit analyses of their addictive behaviors. But we recognize and respect their right to make their own decisions, inasmuch as they will also live with the consequences of them.

SMART Recovery<sup>®</sup> is not opposed to other approaches to recovery and assumes that almost any approach would be beneficial for some individuals. In particular, SMART Recovery<sup>®</sup> encourages those who are pursuing 12-step approaches, other religious approaches, or moderation approaches to use them if they are helpful. SMART Recovery<sup>®</sup> hopes that all individuals seeking outside assistance for addiction problems will be informed about and have made available to them the whole range of recovery approaches. SMART Recovery<sup>®</sup> actively advocates for this type of freedom of choice.

Although SMART Recovery<sup>®</sup> supports the idea that individuals will pursue and be successful with various approaches to recovery, our meetings are not a forum for extended comparison of SMART Recovery<sup>®</sup> with other approaches. From time to time, brief comparisons will undoubtedly be made; however, the best way for someone to compare SMART Recovery<sup>®</sup> with other approaches is to have a thorough understanding of SMART Recovery<sup>®</sup> as a foundation for comparison. This thorough understanding can be gained by experiencing good SMART Recovery<sup>®</sup> meetings and reading from the SMART Recovery<sup>®</sup> recommended reading list. In a future column I will review what makes a SMART Recovery<sup>®</sup> meeting a good one.

Although SMART Recovery<sup>®</sup> does not suggest any particular spiritual or religious beliefs to its members, it strongly encourages its members to consider what their fundamental beliefs are. The fourth point of the SMART Recovery<sup>®</sup> 4-Point Program (balancing momentary and enduring satisfactions) assumes that you have some awareness of your deepest beliefs. Without this awareness you won't be able to say what an enduring satisfaction for you might be. Whether you consider your deepest beliefs as spiritual beliefs, religious beliefs, deeply held values, the meaning you find in life, or something else, these deepest beliefs are the framework within which you experience your life. Without at least outlining this framework, the differentiation of satisfactions into more or less enduring ones would make no sense.

Compared to how treatment and support groups are normally conducted in the US, the SMART Recovery<sup>®</sup> approach is radically different in many respects. Many of us have been so indoctrinated into the traditional approach that it is easy to slip back into it and hardly notice that we have done so. For this reason, an occasional review of our approach is valuable. But don't get too fixated on our current approach. As the scientific findings point us in new directions in the years ahead, that is where we will go!