

SereneScene

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MBA, CADC II, SAP, CA-CCS

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MBA, CADC II, SAP, CA-CCS

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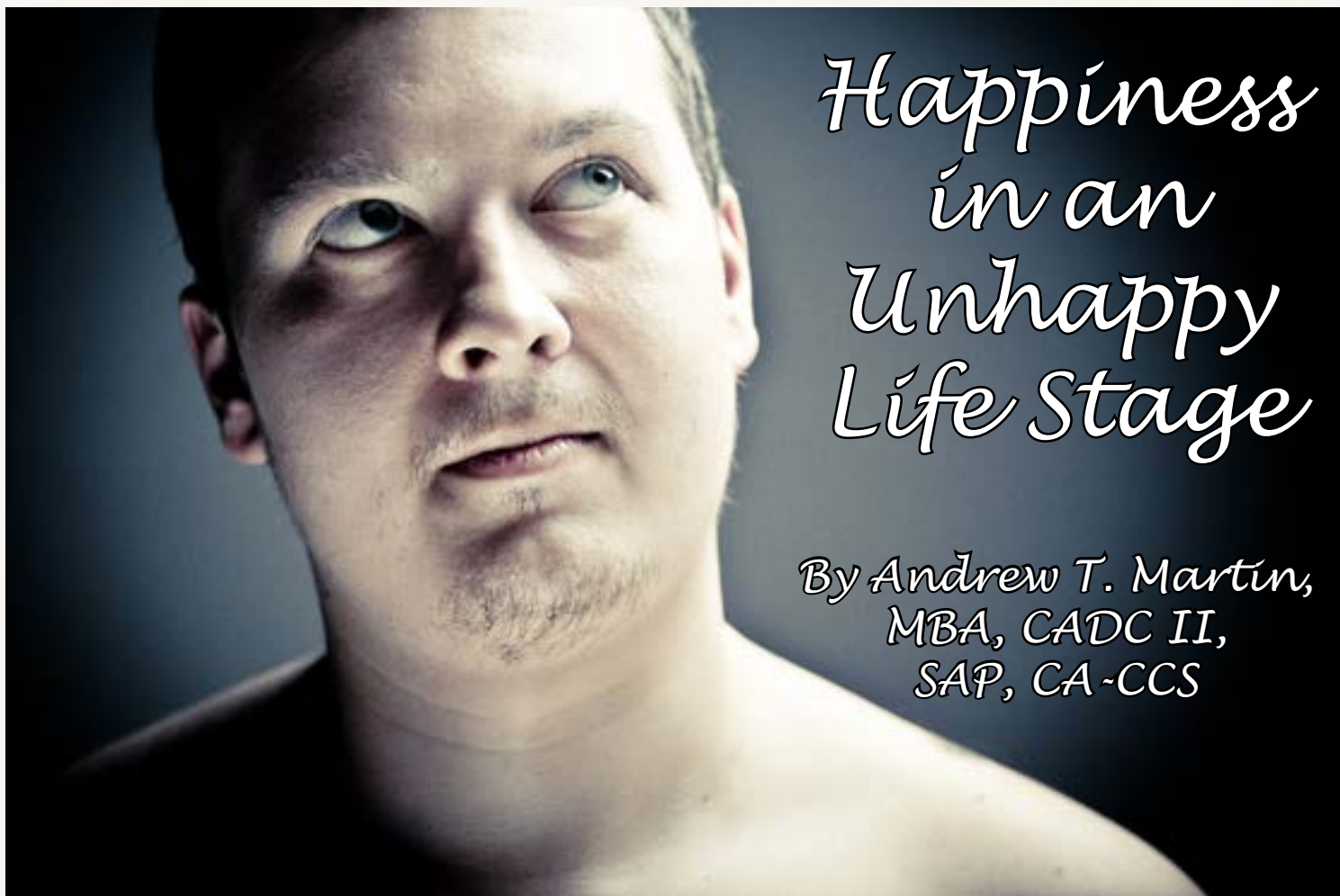
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Happiness in an Unhappy Life Stage

*By Andrew T. Martin,
MBA, CADC II,
SAP, CA-CCS*

Early recovery from alcoholism and drug addiction seems as if it may be a celebratory time in life. However, the reality is that so many changes have been happening in the recovering person's life that there is often confusion, overwhelm, and uncertainty with even the most routine of daily existence. It is often reported by the newly recovering person that they were happier when drinking or drugging or acting out. At the same time, the recovering person reports that other aspects of their lives were totally out of control and detrimental to their continued existence, and that is why they are devoted to recovery. So it is a strange paradox that recovery can bring a long-term lifestyle of joy and happiness and at the same time be so difficult to navigate, particularly in early recovery stages.

For a moment, consider the necessary changes to an individual's behaviors, thought processes, and interpersonal interactions, that are present in early recovery. Behaviorally the recovering person is confronted with the truth that many of their behaviors need to be

changed in order to support wellness and a lifestyle of recovery. Coping mechanisms learned in their addiction no longer serve them in their recovery. Furthermore, the ingrained unhealthy coping mechanisms learned in their addiction are difficult habits to break. Compounding matters, new healthy coping mechanisms must be learned and practiced under the guidance and watchful eyes of a support system that can help the recovering person identify unintentional slips back into old unhealthy behaviors.

Thought processes, or cognitions, also require attention by the newly recovering person. Addiction causes cognitive distortions which manifest themselves in the recovering person's life experience. For example, the person in early recovery will often interpret other's statements and behaviors as being directed toward the recovering person, however the truth is that no statements and behaviors were directed toward the recovering person. For the individual in early recovery, it is extremely difficult to discern between what is a cog-

nitive distortion and what is reality. It is, once again, necessary to have a support system that can assist the recovering person when distorted thinking occurs.



Interpersonal relationships are often strained in early recovery. Loved ones and family members surrounding the recovering person are not yet willing to trust that individual. Furthermore, the recovering person has had considerable experience relying on no one but themselves to obtain their need for alcohol and drugs. As a result, it is difficult for the recovering person to accept the help offered by their support system, their family, and clinicians that may be guiding them through the recovery process. It takes considerable efforts, and likely therapy, to overcome the defiant and self-reliant behaviors in early recovery.

While these changes are significant, the impact of addiction on the individual does not stop there. Tremendous upset in the recovering person's physiology also contributes to an unhappy life stage. Serious changes in the recovering person's brain have taken place as the result of the prolonged use of alcohol and drugs. A permanent change in their brain's reward center, called the nucleus accumbens, has rendered their brain permanently mutated resulting in differences in the way their body reacts to life events, and how those life events are interpreted by the individual.

This imbalance impacts several aspects of the recovering person's life. Their health is significantly depreciated by lack of nutrition, exercise, rest, and the individual's recent life experience which did not include creative outlets, play, and healthy adventure. Their life

intention is lacking in determination, courage, long-term goals, and healthy risk assessment. Spiritually, the individual may not have a sound concept of a power greater than themselves, humility may be a foreign concept, forgiveness and serenity are unknown, and kindness may be elusive at this time. Prudence, the idea that an individual must take the path that is most beneficial to themselves regardless of difficulty, is something new to the individual in early recovery. Communication skills, honesty, integrity, honor, and truthfulness are all components of life that need to be re-integrated. Accurate thought, including self-awareness, wisdom, mindfulness, presence, and acceptance, must be practiced with diligence and care. The idea of love, in relationships and with oneself, must be reintroduced to the recovering person. With love comes gratitude, participation, fellowship, laughter, optimism, and a joyful focus on life. Finally, self-efficacy has been damaged by the activity produced in their addiction. Discipline, responsibility, fulfilling work, and activity in life need to be rebuilt. The imbalance during this unhappy stage in life's journey can be overcome with practice of healthy lifestyle choices.



In early recovery life purpose is not clear for the individual. The future is not clear for the individual. Productivity is not in the usual places, such as work, academics, and parenting. Accomplishments and recognition also are not in the usual places. The possessions that one acquires throughout life have usually been lost. Familial recognition for successes and accomplishments have been lost. Self-recognition for accomplishments and pride in oneself, have been lost. Societal recognition as an upstanding citizen has been lost. All of these critical feedback mechanisms must be reestablished by the

recovering person behaving in responsible and prudent ways.



It seems clear that an individual in early recovery is not experiencing a very happy stage in their life. However, there are obviously also many factors in life that are worth celebration and recognition during the individual's transition into a long-term lifestyle of recovery.

In order to find happiness during this unhappy life stage it is absolutely necessary for the person in early recovery to adjust their perceptions and outlook. Firstly, it is of paramount importance for the individual to adjust expectations, of themselves and of life circumstances, to be reasonable for this life stage. All too often do individuals in early recovery expect far too much far too quickly. It is very helpful to have guidance in developing expectations, goals, and plans during early recovery. Ideally, the individuals assisting with this guidance have experienced similar circumstances in their own lives, and can empathize with the recovering persons concerns, hopes, and wishes. It is equally important for the individual to accept temporary setbacks and failures as a part of the change and growth process. The support of loved ones is critical in helping the recovering individual retain motivation throughout this life stage. At times, particularly during a slip backwards, family can become critical and isolated from the recovering person, and tempers can flare in disappointment, anger and frustration. It is important for family members to remember that recovery efforts will occasionally have temporary setbacks, and to remain supportive as long as the recovering person remains engaged in the recovery effort and the setback is only temporary.

The recovering individual must make the time to find opportunities in which they may discover life balance. Taking care of their health, participating in retreats to discover their intention in life, practicing spiritual principles, investing in themselves through prudent decision-making, practicing the science of accurate thinking, loving others and themselves, and pursuing self-efficacious activities will introduce a life balance that the recovering person has hereto for not experienced. With time, the individual will ask themselves what decisions will create happiness in the long term and develop plans that will serve in their best interest.

Perhaps the biggest challenge during this unhappy life stage is remaining motivated. The recovering individual should make a conscious effort to not only recognize, but also celebrate, small accomplishments in their life. Progress during this life stage is impressive, and no matter how small the progress, it should be recognized and celebrated with the recovering person's support system, family and friends. Often, people in early recovery, will experience circumstances that can be described as small miracles. When these occurrences take place it is important for the recovering person to acknowledge the happening and to rejoice in the incremental improvement in their quality of life, and to accept these small miracles with open arms, open minds, and grateful hearts.



It must be stressed that progressing through this unhappy life stage cannot be accomplished without the assistance and participation of others in the recovering addict's life. The journey to recovery is one of the most difficult journeys any individual can undertake. Because it is so difficult, it is an absolute necessity that a support

system is in place to assist the recovering individual in their journey to long-term recovery. Without a support system the recovering individual will fail. With a support system, the recovering individual may succeed, and with that success comes the promise of a vastly improved quality of life.



For the support system this unhappy life stage in the recovering addict's life is not pleasant some of the time. It is for this reason that the support system must also stay focused on the long-term goals of the recovering person, and the promise of a better quality of life for everyone involved.

Happiness in an unhappy life stage is found in the ability of the recovering person, and their support system, to recognize the progression of improvement in the recovering individual. At times it is difficult to identify the progression, however it is always possible to focus on a few small accomplishments that will encourage the recovering person to stay engaged in their recovery effort. One thing builds upon another, and then another, and then another: identifying these successes will help the recovering individual to remain motivated when the occasional setbacks and problems do arise.

The brilliance of a recovering lifestyle can be observed in so many that have remained engaged in their recovery effort. They have overcome the incredible odds, and have been delivered a quality of life that they could not imagine while in their active addiction. It can be done.

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Andrew Martin
M.B.A., CAD/CII, SAP, CA-CCS

Andrew Martin began his entrepreneurial approach to business in 1982 at the age of fifteen. Throughout his career, Andrew has fulfilled his duties as a senior executive in viable business ventures in various industries including; health care, sound reinforcement and lighting, electrical safety equipment, commercial catering, specialty metal shapes manufacturing, and the

entertainment overhead suspension industry.

Andrew's current business efforts are encompassed by Serene Recovery Network, a group of branded organizations with a common vision of helping people in early recovery to help themselves to a long-term rewarding quality of life without addiction. The individual businesses include Serene Connections, a publishing and professional educational conference production company catering to the field of addiction treatment: The Evolution of Addiction Treatment is the flagship conference. Serene Directory, an online directory of professionals and organizations affiliated with the treatment of addiction. Serene Foundation, a micro loan lender providing funding for the continuum of addiction care. Serene Scene Magazine, a publication promoting long-term healthy lifestyles of recovery. Andrew Serene Institute providing educational opportunities to professionals.

Andrew has authored many articles related to addiction treatment, health care agency productivity, industry specialties, as well as business approach and leadership and has been published in Serene Scene Magazine, Behavioral Health, Freedom Newspaper, Sound & Video Contractor, Western Wall and Ceiling Contractors Association Bulletin, Connections Magazine (Australia), dB Magazine, EQ, Lighting & Sound International (Canada), Sound & Communications, Live Sound International (UK), Recording-Engineering-Production. Additionally, many patents and trademarks have been awarded to Andrew Martin for various business related products, brand names, and service marks.

Andrew is also very active on boards related to the treatment of addiction. Andrew also keynotes for many organizations and speaks internationally on many topics relating to the treatment of addiction.