

WILLING RECOVERY ALONG

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The writers of Green Lantern surmised that the will of living things is the strongest force in the universe. Green was chosen to represent that will; it is ironic that green also represents envy. If will is the strongest power in the universe, addicts and their family members may be in more serious trouble than they realize. It is my opinion, however, that will is not the most powerful force in the universe. I think will is something else altogether.

So often I hear statements from addicts in early recovery such as;

I can stay sober because I need to stay sober.
I will stay sober because I don't want to drink and use any more.
I have no desire to drink and use any longer.

All of these phrases have a common theme, they are derived from a sense of self-will that, left un-addressed, will likely lead to relapse. How can I make such a statement? Because I have seen first-hand the incredibly deceptive force of will interfere with recovery progress countless times.

The dynamic of will can be broken down into two distinct effects: first, will is manifest as willfulness; and second, will is manifest as confidence. Let's examine the first effect, willfulness.

Willfulness implies that the recovering person wants something so badly that it is bound to happen. Unfortunately, this type of will is based upon a principal that will can provide for the recovering addict when the recovering addict cannot provide for themselves. This experience is reinforced by the recovering addict's emotional connection between will and using wherein the addict wants to escape some emotional pain, so he/she uses, and he/she temporarily escapes the emotional pain. In the context of using in order to avoid pain, it seems that willfulness works most of the time. However, take away the unhealthy avoidance, and the behavioral pattern of wanting to avoid the pain is still present. Assuming the recovering addict is not going to use, the willfulness to escape the pain remains, leaving the recovering addict with seemingly nowhere to turn other than to themselves. So, the recovering addict uses their distorted emotional connection between will and avoidance, and neatly compartmentalizes the pain in an effort of will. The recovering addict's will is able to temporarily provide an escape from the pain they so desperately want to avoid.



This circular cycle of willfulness and avoidance goes around and around, and no real work is being performed to create coping mechanisms for the recovering person to deal with the pain in a healthy way. Eventually, the recovering addict's luck runs out, and the pain becomes too great. In the end, the recovering addict's only option is to turn back to using for relief.

The second effect of will, confidence, is also based on a distorted understanding of emotional reality. The recovering addict has likely not experienced much success in coping with emotional pain and suffering. However, the recovering addict likely has experienced success in other arenas of life at one time or another. Somehow, the success experienced in other arenas of life is confused with success coping with emotional pain, and confidence in the ability to cope is reinforced. The recovering addict now feels confident that his/her will to cope with their pain will be successful. However, the confidence is based upon false evidence, and relapse is likely.



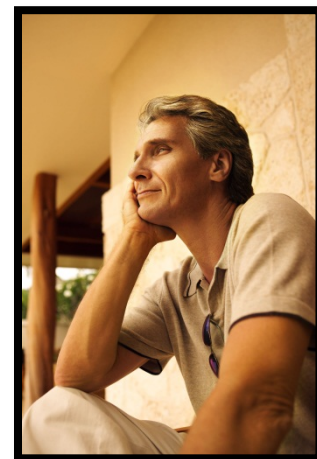
In both of these effects of will, the recovering addict is setting up absolutes based on distorted emotional experiences. Therefore, the recovering addict has built an expectation of success based upon a false foundation. And, since the expectation is resolved to succeed, the recovering addict has no intention of any experience other than success. This type of thinking is win or lose. It is as if the recovering addict is going to war, and success is the only option. Unfortunately, the outcome will likely be far less than success, and the recovering addict will think themselves a failure once again. The feelings of failure will feed the shameful part of their psyche, and then they will feel the need to avoid the pain. Once again, the recovering addict has entered into a circular behavior process.

Will is simply not the answer for keeping people engaged in their recovery effort. There is, however, a variant of will that is tremendously useful for anyone's recovery effort; willingness.

Willingness trumps willfulness in every way when being applied to the journey of recovery. For the recovering addict to be willing means that he/she is accepting of present circumstances and is happy to entertain the idea of change. Willingness is an open stance, allowing opportunity into the moment, where work can be done to help the recovering addict build coping mechanisms that are functional in a sober life.

Willingness allows for alternative experiences, not based on past beliefs or entrenched emotions. Willingness welcomes different experiences and the possibility that different approaches may provide relief from the suffering.

The best part of willingness is that it comes so easily when the recovering addict is able to set aside their pride and ego. For the recovering addict,



it is imperative to understand that continued recovery is found when seeking a spiritual connection with, and enlightenment from, others. It is often pride and ego that get in the way of allowing that spiritual connection to grow and benefit all parties, not to mention the ability to be willing.

To sum up the simple concepts of will, willfulness and willingness in graphic form:



Much of what's being discussed in this article is related to one of the principles of Balanced Center Living; Accurate Thought. Within the scope of accurate thought, being present provides delivers clarity and the personal ability to think and act in a healthy way. Some consider being present a spiritual connection revealed, or a direct link to one's soul. Being present can also be interpreted as having mind, body and spirit connected together all at once.

Being mindful is a state of non-judgmental awareness of one's thoughts and behaviors in the present moment and is the basis for one's independent existence. Willingness is partially the result of remaining mindful.

Acceptance is the belief that a circumstance does not require one's efforts to change the circumstance which creates agreement between the reality of the circumstance and one's self-will. With this balance, openness develops and willingness is welcomed.

Wisdom is one's ability to form an opinion, after careful consideration, of what is true, right or lasting will result in healthy attitudes, beliefs and courses of action. With willingness comes spiritual union with others and enlightenment through interpersonal exchange.

Self-awareness is understanding that one exists as an individual with private thoughts, personal traits, particular emotions and unique behaviors. Understanding one's self is a precursor to be willing to accept change.



HEALTH
INTENTION
SPIRITUALITY
PRUDENCE
ACCURATE THOUGHT
LOVE
SELF-EFFICACY



I am hopeful that a realization has been reinforced that recovery cannot be willed along. Nobody can force another into recovery. If that were possible, then addiction treatment centers would be tremendously successful and addiction would be an insignificant part of our humanity. However, the admission of addiction accounts for nearly 15% of the population, and only about 3% actually get treatment. Of those receiving treatment, about 40% remain sober in the long-term. Clearly, recovery cannot be willed into existence.

Instead, recovery is the result of the willingness of an individual to participate in their own recovery. With willingness and effort, the recovering individual can build a long-term quality of life that will be fulfilling and joyful.