

SereneScene

Magazine For Long Term Healthy Lifestyles of Recovery

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of the Street
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MBA, CADC II, SAP, CA-CCS

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TAKING CARE OF MY SIDE OF THE STREET

BY ANDREW T. MARTIN, MBA, CADC II, SAP, CA-CCS

Learning how to live a long-term lifestyle of recovery is no small feat. It takes persistence, careful consideration, and willingness to change behaviors and thinking. For many, these characteristics are achieved through working with self-help support programs, clinicians, and peer groups; all powerful change agents in the effort to discover new methodology for living life.

Challenges abound for the individual in early recovery, and sometimes one can think they are doing the right thing when the reality is that their actions are harmful to themselves and others. This article is dedicated to a selection of the many situations I have witnessed as a clinician treating substance use disorders. Each story is followed by the concept of "Taking Care of My Side of the Street", and applying prudence and self-efficacy in handling the situation. I hope you enjoy the vignettes.

It's Not My Job, the Story of Ace

I was an over-fifty unemployed alcoholic stuck in a sober living because I had to complete twelve months for the courts. I knew I needed to be there, and I am not bitter about it, but I was not prepared for the challenges I would face. I got along well with my roommates, although I was the most mature of the bunch. It turned out I made a couple of very good friends. There was one guy that was about ten years younger than I was, and we didn't have that much in common. We got along just fine, but I would not consider us close friends.

One evening this guy came home drunk. My fellow roommates and I talked about it and decided that we would let it slide because this guy was going through a rough time in his life. A couple of days later, this guy

came home drunk again. This time I told him he had to knock it off, because I was not willing to live with someone who is drinking. He promised to stop drinking and to recommit to his meetings. A few more days passed and I noticed that this guy would be away from the house a lot more than usual, and he would often come in and go straight to his room. I figured something was going on, but I did not pursue it. I didn't think it was my place to interfere with his personal business.

After a few weeks, I noticed that much of my food was disappearing from the shelves. I asked around and my roommates were having the same experience. All of us confronted the guy who was having problems and he admitted to taking the food because he had no money. This seemed curious to me because he had a decent job. We told him that he could not steal our food, and he agreed that it was wrong and apologized. None of us felt that we should go to the sober living management at that time.

One night this guy came home and literally fell into me after walking in the door. He was completely blitzed and stunk to high heaven. I told him I was going to tell the house manager and he pled with me not to. He laid it on thick, begging me not to tell, and to remember my own experiences when all I needed was a little help to get back on the horse. He asked me to give him one last chance, and I did.

The next time he showed up drunk was with another roommate, a friend of mine, who he had roped into drinking with him. Now he had gone too far. I remember having such huge resentments for this guy: after all, I was giving him break after break, and I was willing to look the other way at his reassurance that he would stop the drinking. My friend was now pleading with me not to tell anyone as he had no place to go. So, once again, I did not tell.

Now my anxiety was very high; I was worried about my friend and I was developing larger resentments and anger every day. At this point, the sober living management had noticed some strange behavior and was asking around to see if anyone knew what was going on. I denied everything, and then I started to feel guilty and shameful for the old deceitful nature,



that I had possessed in my addiction, coming back to life. It wasn't long before I started isolating and having thoughts of using as well. I figured I could get away with it if they were, and I did for about a week.

Then everything came crashing down around me when I was caught by a drug test. I was kicked out of the sober living home, my probation was violated, and I was back in court in no time. I was left thinking about how all this could happen to someone that was so dedicated to their own recovery. I wanted sobriety more than anything, yet I had destroyed my opportunity.

How Ace Could Have Taken Care of His Side of the Street

Ace fell into the trap of false loyalty. He felt a close camaraderie with a fellow addict who was struggling to be sober. What Ace forgot is that they were living in a sober living home for a reason. A sober living home must be alcohol and drug free, or the environment does not work to the benefit of the residents. Ace thought that it was not his job to be the enforcer of the sobriety rules of the sober living home, and instead chose to look the other way and hope that someone else would handle it. Ace did not realize that making that simple ethical breach would end up costing him his own sobriety and freedom.

Prudence would dictate that Ace would immediately report the first instance of the roommate drinking to the sober living staff. In doing so, Ace is watching out for his own health, and he is also supporting his roommate who enrolled at the sober living home because

he felt a need for support in order to stay sober. It is likely that an early intervention could have helped the roommate re-engage in a faltering recovery effort, and Ace would have been a part of helping someone to improve the quality of their lives. In turn, Ace would have had the reinforcement that taking the necessary healthy action, despite any potential negative repercussions, results in a strengthening of his own recovery effort and helps to support the recovery efforts of those around him as well.

It's True Love, the Story of Barbie

I was doing great, I had a job, I was sober more than four months, and I was working my program well. Then I met him, the man that was everything I ever wanted. I met him at one of my meetings and immediately knew he was my match made in heaven. After talking with him at the break, we set up a date for the next day. I was so happy to finally have found someone that I could relate to: we were just so compatible. We started hanging out every day. We started making love after a few days as well. Before I knew it, we were head over heels for one another.

As time went on, he became very possessive over me. At times, he would yell and become very jealous of other guys looking at me. It got to the point where I could not speak to anyone at my meetings or he would get really upset. We would have big fights, but we would always make up in the end. Making up after a fight was the best.

Our relationship became so strong that I decided to move in with him. He made me feel loved in every way. Once I moved in he started to yell at me and call me belittling names. I did not like that very much, but I knew that if I really tried, I could make our relationship as beautiful as it was in the beginning. Since he would always apologize after a fight, I knew that he loved me as much as I loved him.

After a couple of months, he started to go out a lot. I was not allowed to leave our apartment when he was gone. One time I had to run to the corner store for paper towels and he came home when I was gone. That was the first time he hit me. I hadn't been hit for a very



long time, and all sorts of abusive memories came back instantly. I could not deal with his being gone so much, and his constant control over me, so I started to smoke methamphetamine again to escape the pain. When he found out I was smoking meth again, I thought he would kill me, but to my surprise he encouraged me. And soon afterward, I had found myself right back in the same type of relationship that I had before going into treatment.

How Barbie Could Have Taken Care of Her Side of the Street

Barbie was looking for fulfillment in her heart, but it was far too soon. Barbie had only just begun her journey of discovery of her authentic self. She had not had enough time to find out who she really was before jumping into an intimate relationship that would distract her from her important recovery work.

It seems clear that Barbie had encountered traumatic episodes with her previous abusive relationship. Barbie had used methamphetamine to escape the emotional turmoil caused by those experiences. In engaging with another man that would abuse her further, it was simply a matter of time before Barbie would turn to her old behaviors and use methamphetamine once again.

If Barbie would have set clear boundaries for herself she may have avoided this situation. Perhaps developing a plan of action that included milestones in her recovery work would have helped her stay on track. Because Barbie was so eager to find a relationship with a man, it may have been a good idea for her to

set boundaries around intimate relationships. Because Barbie was carrying a significant amount of trauma related to abuse, it may have been a good idea to set boundaries around trust and judgment systems. A great idea would have been for Barbie to have a confidante, perhaps a therapist, to talk to about her thinking process and decision making.

A Family Affair, the Story of Christian

I had completed treatment for 30 days, and then decided to go to sober living for another 90 days, mostly because my home life was so messed up. I was only nineteen years old, so I never had a job or had been on my own before. Both my parents were applying a lot of pressure for me to start working and pay my own way. I was worried sick that I would let them down again.

My Mom would fill out resumes for me online, and my Dad would take me to the big stores he thought would be good employers in the area to fill out job applications. I needed clothes so my parents bought them for me, and they supplied me with food and spending money too. They seemed very supportive. When I made a mistake and relapsed, I was suspended from the sober living and my Mom picked me up and let me stay at the house until I was sober and could return to the sober living. They watched me like a hawk to make sure I stayed sober.

Part of my contract when I returned to sober living was that I do counseling with my parents. Unfortunately, my parents did not show up. They basically said it was my problem and I had to deal with it. They did, howev-



er, pay for more counseling for me.

When the family program came around, I was able to get my parents to come to support me in my program. Halfway through the family program my parents took me outside and told me to pack my stuff, and that I was leaving immediately. I was shocked, and when I asked why they said that the program was saying that part of the problem was with them, and they thought that was ridiculous. When I said I did not want to go, they said they would stop paying for everything if I did not go with them immediately. With no choice, I left the sober living program.

Shortly after returning home, I relapsed and realized I could not remain there. So I left and returned to the sober living where they were able to sponsor me financially until I could get a job and support myself.

How Christian Could Have Taken Care of His Side of the Street

Christian was not taking initiative to take care of himself, and remained locked in a codependent dance with his parents. As a result, he could not imagine being independent with his actions, or being responsible for his own choices.

If Christian would have set healthy boundaries for himself, his parents may have allowed him to take more responsibility which would give him the experience of accomplishment without the help of his parents. Allowing his parents to apply for jobs on his behalf, to do his shopping, and to take him around to their choice of businesses to fill out applications was beyond the scope of reasonable healthy boundaries. Eventually Christian did separate himself from his parents, but only after life circumstances became too painful.

If Christian would have advocated for his needs more, his parents may have been more inclined to accept their part in the behaviors that were keeping the family system bound in a cycle of addiction and codependency. Perhaps writing a letter to his parents, or asking his parents to attend self-help meetings would have helped to change the family dynamic.

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Andrew Martin
M.B.A., CADDC II, 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 Center, a 36 bed transitional sober living facility in Long Beach, CA which also conducts outpatient counseling services, drug testing and monitoring, and outpatient detoxification. Serene Connections, a publishing and professional educational conference production company catering to the field of addiction treatment. Serene Directory, an online directory of professionals and organizations affiliated with behavioral and mental health. Serene Foundation, a micro loan lender providing funding for the continuum of addiction care.

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, 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 in the California Association of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Counselors (CAADAC) Board of Directors and Sober Living Network. Andrew also keynotes for many organizations.

NOTICE

YOUR PARTICIPATION IS REQUESTED

WRITE YOUR STORY

INSPIRE OTHERS

HELP OTHERS

BE REWARDED

Point of Return Book Three is now scheduled for publication.

Serene Center is seeking individual stories of addiction, the point at which the addict found sobriety, and the one thing that makes the difference in their long-term recovery effort.

More information about the article requirements and contest for Point of Return Book Three can be found at www.serenecenter.com/self-help.php

