

MY SEARCH FOR SUPERSOBERMAN

LIKE MANY OF US, I WAS PRETTY BEATEN UP WHEN I FIRST came to CMA. While I didn't necessarily understand what being a crystal meth addict meant, I knew I had a problem and needed help. I did not identify as an alcoholic, however, and balked at the concept that in order to be in CMA and participate in the outpatient rehab program in which I had enrolled, I would have to give up alcohol. The response from fellows and counselors alike was, "If you don't have a problem with it, then you won't have a problem not drinking for a while." Always up for a challenge, I put the drinking issue on "the shelf." For the next twelve months, I managed to stay clean through exhausting effort, fellowship, rehab, an immense amount of support from my sponsor, Step work, and months of white knuckling.

At the same time, I was building an enormous resentment toward concepts in the program that I was told were fact but that I didn't really buy into: "Alcohol will lead you back to crystal. Don't question the arcane language in the 'Big Book' when it's worked for thousands of people! Just follow (accept) suggestions and eventually you'll get it." I developed the erroneous impression that if I didn't do things the way everyone else did, I was just deluding myself and being terminally unique. I began to feel like everyone was taking my inventory, lighting it on fire, and hurling it back at me. By contrast, most of the people I met in program who supposedly had "gotten it" (which I took to mean as having clean time) seemed far from perfect and, in fact, individually did not have everything I was seeking for

myself. In effect, I was looking for Supersoberman, who skipped through life happy, joyous and free, just like the “Big Book” says.

Separately, while I was the only crystal meth addict in my group of nonprogram friends, I became painfully aware that their cocaine addictions were spiraling out of control. So there I was, feeling stuck between two groups of people, not wanting to be part of either one. So was I surprised when, in my fourteenth month, I relapsed? Not really. Nor was I surprised that my time in CMA had given me the determination to take action and deal with the issues that “broke the shelf.” I worked diligently to change my program and made some progress. If all else failed, though, I had told myself that I could still have an “emergency” relapse. When I lost my job a couple of months later—after having for the first time felt as if my side of the street was clean—I had very strong feelings of failure, professionally and in my program. The pain just wouldn’t go away no matter what I tried, and I coped the only way I knew how—hence relapse No. 2.

First, I think it’s important to provide the caveat that I don’t feel as if I’ve found The Answer, as I believe that this is an ever-changing concept for me. I believe that I have gained some powerful tools that have helped put my program back on track.

Our Step work teaches us acceptance and action. Action is not generally a problem for me, but acceptance...ugh! For me to accept, I need to understand through experience, but often I lose my objectivity. Nothing like a couple of relapses to point out what I needed to work on.

I expressed to a fellow one night my failures in identifying with sober people, and his response shocked me. “Joe, I haven’t found anyone in program who has everything I want, but I’m not going to use over it,” he said. How dare he derail my frenzied, months-long search for the perfect sober example and deprive me of my self-righteous protestations that the program wasn’t working for me!

My fellow was pointing out that I was searching so diligently for a certain experience that I had forgotten why I was looking in the first place. He also helped me understand that taking pieces of others’ sobriety and weaving them into my own program was healthy—and had nothing to do with terminal uniqueness. Letting go of the incessant desire to find that one individual with whom I could identify has allowed me to go back and see which aspects of other people’s programs might be beneficial

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to my own and allows me to express compassion and loving kindness toward them.

After my first drug relapse, I resolved to decide, once and for all, if I would ever drink alcohol again. (The only thing I knew for sure at the time was that I didn't ever want to get drunk.) What I learned after a couple of drinks was that I had no tolerance for the stuff. I felt uncomfortable and foggy, which I didn't like. I had spent so much time stewing over the total abstinence issue that I missed what now seems to have been the obvious outcome. This is a lesson I've begun applying to my other reservations as well.

Letting go is probably my biggest challenge. Gradually, I've come to the understanding that I'll be taken care of over the long term, but my addict behavior creates tunnel vision in the present and only allows me to feel the pain of a lost job, of a failed relationship, or of declining health. Through working with my therapist and jumping headlong into my study of Buddhism, I am throwing all of my energy into just being present for everything in my life at any given moment. My mind can only process so much at one time, but if I can remain open, pain or whichever other emotion I may be facing eventually will fade. This practice (more like sobriety boot camp!) has helped me to knock out some gigantic cravings.

This is what seems to be working for now, but I understand it might not in the future. My challenge is to change my program to keep up with life, to keep my shelf free of reservations and let my addiction do all of the pushups it wants in the other room—as long as that door stays locked. —*Joe S.*