

**Avoid Passive Living and Take Massive Action**

**Spiritualriver.com**

**Patrick Meninga**

Passive living is a slow path to depression, isolation, and dependency.

Active living is about living with real purpose, setting and achieving meaningful goals, and creating the life you really want to live.

Where do you fall on the spectrum? Are you pushing yourself to do more, and achieve more, in your life?

How do you feel about your life and where it is headed?

Are you creating the fun and exciting experiences that you want to achieve in your life, or are you just drifting aimlessly and reacting to events that seem to happen to you?

Let's take a closer look at the idea of passive living. If we can avoid living passively, the quality of our life can change drastically as we actively create new experiences for ourselves that we actually want.

## **Table of Contents**

- \* **Is passive living really a problem in recovery?**
- \* **Key point: passive living is the default. Look around a bit.**
- \* **Recommendation: create a routine and use physical activity as a foundation.**
- \* **Active spirituality: seeking God's will on a daily basis.**
- \* **Creating value for others builds self esteem.**
- \* **Passive living can lead to victim mentality.**
- \* **Challenging work can give purpose and build self esteem.**
- \* **Passive living creates dependencies, active creation leads to independence.**
- \* **Massive action - the opposite of passive living.**
- \* **How passive are you?**

### **Massive Action Sections:**

- \* **Why addiction demands massive action to overcome it.**
- \* **Willingness: how surrender turns into action.**
- \* **A popular misconception: that thinking can change things in recovery.**
- \* **Dipping your toes in: how little actions can snowball into big results in early recovery.**
- \* **Go big in early recovery or go home.**
- \* **Transitioning to long term recovery: turning action into habits.**
- \* **Why you need continuous action to stay sober over the long run.**
- \* **Improving health through lifestyle changes requires massive action.**
- \* **How massive action sets you up for long term success.**
- \* **Lack of action = relapse.**

Is passive living really a problem in recovery?

Yes, living passively is most definitely a problem in recovery.

Why?

Because the default is to use drugs and alcohol. That is normal.

For an addict, using drugs is normal behavior. It is perfectly natural.

For an alcoholic, heavy drinking is normal behavior.

Real addicts and alcoholics do not need an excuse to get intoxicated. They use drugs or alcohol when things are good, when things are bad, when they are bored, when they are happy, and so on. So their automatic response to anything in their life is to use their drug of choice.

Over time, this becomes the norm. **Not** using or drinking becomes abnormal.

And what do you think happens when we live passively in recovery? We revert to what we know. We slide back into our old ways. We stick with what worked for us in the past, and that was to self medicate with chemicals. This is known as an *automatic response*.

We all know that change requires massive commitment and massive action in recovery. You don't just change on a dime, overnight, and have a magical new life. It takes sustained effort.

Why do we need a sustained effort? Why can't we just change instantly?

The reason is because addictions become *habits*. Using our drug of choice becomes an ingrained response. So changing it takes time. Changing it takes sustained effort.

And you cannot do this passively. You cannot just say "Oh, I think I will stop using my drug of choice now, I will just revert to normal living, and things will be fine again." This will never work because you have nothing "normal" to revert back to. Your new "normal" is to self medicate with drugs or alcohol. That has become your new baseline, your default method of dealing with life. So it takes real effort in order to overcome this.... a substantial, sustained effort.

Passive living doesn't cut it. If you live passively in recovery, and hope to stay clean and sober, then that is all you are doing....hoping. If you want decent long term results, then you have to work for them. Not passive. Active effort that brings about real change.

If you talk with people in recovery who have relapsed you can sometimes pick up on the idea that **they shifted from being active** in recovery to living passively before they picked up a drink again. They might say things like "well, I stopped going to my 12 step meetings," or "I stopped going to see my therapist and I quit exercising," and so on. In almost all cases you will probably be able to detect that shift from active to passive living.

They were taking real action in order to improve themselves, and then--for one reason or another--they stopped. They slowly reverted to their passive default mode. And that led them back to their drug of choice eventually.

Most people get obsessed over the details, and they blame the specific strategies, rather than seeing the big picture. They did not relapse because they stopped going to therapy or meetings....they relapsed because they weren't doing *anything*. The key is in positive action. What you do is not so important. **That you do it** is the whole secret. But most people miss this idea, and think that their specific form of therapy or support is a magic key, and that they relapsed because they drifted away from this magic bullet.

In truth, **there is no magic bullet**. There is only passive living that leads to relapse, or creative, positive action that leads to growth in recovery. The details are not important.

Direction and momentum are all that matters.

### **Key point: passive living is the default. Look around a bit**

Take a quick survey: go carefully observe a dozen recovering addicts, and see if they are living more passively, or if they are actively creating in their life with goals.

Heck, you can do this with any set of people, they don't even have to necessarily be in recovery.

Notice that nearly everyone is living passively. They are mostly just reacting to life, not pushing themselves much to make major changes, or have new growth experiences, or trying to accomplish anything too outrageous.

This is the default. Most are living passively.

Now when we see someone in recovery (or otherwise) that is really living an active, creative, and purposeful life, it is exciting, and we are generally attracted to it.

Look at some of the "winners" in AA and other 12 step programs, who share with real insight at meetings and seem to have lots of positive stuff happening in their lives. You might be instantly attracted to what they have achieved and where they are headed in their life. This is the type of person who is not living passively. And, the quality of their recovery (and of their life) reflects this.

Most people are living passively. They are not bad people, and they are not stupid people. They just have not yet made the leap to a more purposeful and growth-oriented lifestyle. It is easy to remain passive. It takes work to get active and creative.

I can look back at my own path in early recovery and see that I was more passive at the time. I was taking some good suggestions, but I was also mostly just reacting to stuff rather than really planning a future for myself.

For example, I took the suggestion to move into long term rehab, and I also took the suggestion to go back to college part time. I also took the suggestion to get a job and start earning money. Beyond that, I was just reacting to stuff that happened, and I did not have much of a plan or any long term goals to speak of. I was just going through the motions, and trying to do the next right thing, as they say.

Momentum built up over the years, and a few small victories helped push me to set more goals. I quit smoking cigarettes. I started running on a regular basis. I got my degree. I got a better job in a field that I enjoyed more. And so on. Much of this was still passive though, to be honest. It was all positive action, but a lot of it was just from taking some basic suggestions from my sponsor.

Later on I started creating with purpose, really emphasizing my strengths and talents, and figuring out how I could best leverage those talents to help others. That is when things started getting really interesting for me. I started saying "I am going to create this experience in my life" .... and it *happened*. Now I have the confidence to know that I can probably create whatever I want, with a bit of work and effort. I have come a long way from checking into rehab and saying "OK, what should I do now that I am sober?"

So I was living passively in early recovery and I sort of shifted over to a more active and creative life. How did it happen?

For the most part, I modeled what the winners were doing. Just like sponsorship in 12 step programs, I looked up to those I thought were successful and said "I want what they have." So I pushed myself to achieve the goals that would get me there.

The key for me was that **I pushed hard, and I pushed for a really long time**. Most are not willing to do that. I pushed myself to build a business. I pushed myself to run a marathon. Most people revert back to passive living before they reach their goals.

It is so much easier to just sit back, watch some television, and text your friends all day (or whatever your excuse for inaction is). That is why passive living is the default....because actively creating the life you really want takes a whole bunch of work.

### **Recommendation: create a routine and use physical activity as a foundation**

If there is one way to get a huge jump start on overcoming passive living then it would be regular, vigorous exercise.

This is just my opinion and should be taken as such. Obviously this will not work for every single person on the planet, but for most reasonably healthy people, this technique can be very powerful.

The problem is that most people will never do it.

Let's assume you are not a world class athlete. What can you do? Here is one basic suggestion:

\* Start walking, every day. If that is too much for you, walk every other day. Just get up and walk outside and keep right on going, and walk until you feel tired. Then turn around and walk back. Do this every day if you can, every other day at the minimum.

\* Increase the length of time that you walk for. Do it slowly over time. If you can take half hour walks, that is great. I would recommend that you build up to an hour.

\* Create a routine and stick with it like your life depends on it. This will build discipline. Force yourself to walk **even when you don't want to**. A large part of the benefit from this comes from the discipline, not from the exercise itself. Forcing yourself to walk even when you would rather not is one of the most valuable things you can learn, especially from a recovery standpoint.

\* Increasing intensity or speed is **optional**. The key is that you push yourself to do it consistently, that you develop a routine. The benefits of this are enormous, and will affect you on so many different levels. Within a year you would think yourself crazy not to keep exercising, it will make you feel so good, in so many ways.

\* This is more than just physical. Walking (or any regular exercise routine) becomes a meditation. **This is a spiritual activity.**

Maybe you will not get into walking and maybe you will not get into exercise at all. In my opinion that is almost always a mistake. Your body was engineered to move. So use it.

If you get into the habit of regular exercise, and stick with it for a long time, you become more powerful as a result. This power translates into other areas of your life as well. How does this happen? How do you become more powerful?

It is difficult to describe exactly. One part of it is the discipline, in knowing that you can stay the course, achieve a goal, and keep going even when you mentally want to quit. Another part of it is more about building strength, in knowing that you have mastered at least one part of your life and that you can tackle other challenges if they arise. Another part is the way that **emotional balance improves when you engage in regular, vigorous exercise**. It can become a release for anger, tension, or stress.

Using physical exercise as a foundation for better health in recovery is not only very natural, but it is quite practical as well. Mastering regular exercise will pay you dividends over and over again for the rest of your life, while strengthening all of the other parts of your recovery.

Then there is the reverse evidence argument: take a look at people who are in a routine of regular exercise, and see if they are living passively in other areas of their life. Based on my research--**not too likely**. The people I see who are active and physical, they are almost always purposefully creating an interesting future for themselves. This evidence is largely why I decided to start exercising in the first place. The "winners" in recovery all seemed to have this element of exercise in their lives, in one way or another.

Exercise may not be a foundation for everyone, and most will pass it off as being too much work, but those who really "get it"....they never look back.

## **Active spirituality: seeking God's will on a daily basis**

How many people out there claim to be spiritual, but are just going through the motions and not really taking positive action in their life?

Probably quite a few.

It is easy to become complacent in terms of spiritual growth. I would challenge anyone who is trying to push themselves to grow spiritually to ask themselves these questions:

\* What have I done today to seek the will of my higher power?

\* What have i done today to try and connect with and help others?

Now obviously, the spiritual quest will vary quite a bit from person to person. There is no perfect path, and even those two questions will merely scratch the surface for some people in recovery.

But the real key here is that you take an active role in **seeking** the spiritual life. What you find in your quest is not as important as the fact that you are earnestly seeking. This is, of course, the different between active and passive. If you sit around and expect to be graced with God's divine will and inspiration, then you will probably end up disappointed.

Instead, *actively* pursue the spiritual life. For most people, that is going to mean **reaching out and helping others** on a regular basis.

Seek the strength necessary to help others (whether you do this through prayer or otherwise). Ask your higher power (or the universe, or whatever) to empower you to better help others. When you do this on a regular basis, and put in the effort to actually try to help people, amazing things start to happen.

This is not about religious belief, so much as it is about taking action. From a religious (and Christian) standpoint, I think "active spirituality" can best be summarized by examining [the prayer of Jabez](#). It is a powerful prayer that is very "action oriented."

Some people in recovery get hung up on the details when it comes to spiritual growth. That is about the only problem. Seeking is the key. The search itself is what brings benefit. Kick it up a notch by **using your strengths and talents to serve others**. Seek more power to do that spiritually, and you are well on your way.

## **Creating value for others builds self esteem**

Self esteem is so important for recovery that it makes sense to actively pursue it. Note that this is another area where passive living will not yield you any results to speak of, but if you get creative and active about it, your life will start getting better and better.

The key for me has always been in *making a difference*. There is no boost in self esteem for a false victory. If you are not really helping people or making a real difference, then it does nothing to help your own life.

You do not have to become a self help guru or save the world from disease and starvation in order to feel good about yourself. This is about making a personal impact on others because of who you are.

If you help just one person today then you have served the universe, and yourself. Making a difference in someone else's life will pay you back in so many ways.

The really amazing part is when you are providing value for others, and society decides to reward you for this by paying you. There is a difference between volunteering and being paid for your efforts. Some people might disagree with this, but I am a firm believer that you should be headed in the direction of being compensated for the value you provide.

Why?

Because when you help others, and you are paid well for your efforts, then **it automatically boosts your self esteem**. You don't have to question the value that you provide, *because society has already valued it for you*. The world placed a price on your services and they paid you in dollars for it. You are valuable. You are valuable enough to be paid for your efforts. You are wanted, needed, and your talents are being put to good use. When they hand you money, you don't have to wonder if you are valuable or not. The money says it all, as it is our system of value.

So in my opinion, the real win is if you can get paid for serving others with **your own unique talents**. Figure out how exactly you can best help and serve others, then figure out how to get paid for doing that. Yes, the money is important in my opinion. We use currency as a substitute for value in this society. When society pays you back money (value), then you know without a doubt that you are providing real value to others.

I am sure some would argue that there are huge benefits to volunteering, and that those benefits may outweigh the benefits of being paid in dollars. But when I get really honest about my own self esteem, I can see that the money actually is important to how I feel about myself. It is all about knowing that I am making a real difference. Being paid for my effort boosts my self esteem much more than other forms of praise. I think most people would find this to be true about their own lives if they get really honest with themselves about it. It feels good to be valued.

So my suggestion is that if you are seeking to help others in your life, try to do so in a way that maximizes your own unique abilities and talents. Then, find a way to make money at it. The resulting boost in self esteem is priceless, because you will know that society values you greatly.

## **Passive living can lead to victim mentality**

One of the biggest pitfalls of living passively is that it can lead to the dreaded and immobilizing "victim mentality."

Playing the victim, or just recklessly blaming others is always a mistake. It always leads to inaction and helps to reinforce the idea that you should not do anything to help improve your own situation.

In fact, passive living can lead to victim mentality, and vice versa, so you can easily get trapped in a very negative cycle if you are not careful.

Expectations can play a huge role in this type of "victim thinking." If we think that we deserve something, and we are not getting it, then it can lead to blaming others and pointing fingers (while not doing anything about it).

The world doesn't owe us anything. The world is cruel and indifferent at least half of the time, so it is up to you to **create your own success** in life.

Now it is true that you might meet certain people who will boost you up and help you out in ways that seem to fly against this type of thinking. *But don't count on it.* If you count on it, you are setting yourself up for disappointment.

People who are living passively do this all the time. They tend to complain. The world owes them, and it almost never delivers. So they complain, and believe that they have been done wrong, and that if there were real justice in the world, they would be graced with good luck, good fortune, and lavish gifts.

My experience in recovery has been that action, hard work, and creative recovery is the path to getting good luck and good fortune. I have watched the "winners" in recovery for a long time and I can assure you that they are **not** playing the victim. They create their own success. If they suffer hardship or abuse of some sort, they turn it into a positive, a lesson, a gift that they can give to others. The winners in recovery refuse to be a victim through sheer force of will.

Playing the victim can *feel* good. It is like a familiar and comforting friend to some people. But it is a dead end road that will get you nowhere. It is **a passive solution to a problem that requires action.**

If you are playing the victim in some way, then you have a problem in your life and you need to take action in order to overcome it. If you are not clear on what that action is, then ask for help, and the path will become clear enough.

Most likely, the path will involve some form of hard work or personal growth. That is fine. At first, it might be tough to take responsibility and own the fact that you are creating your own success (or failure) in life.

But if you make the commitment to stop tolerating your own "victim thinking," then good things will start to happen. Positive action will replace blaming and whining. Each small victory in your life will build on the one before it. Confidence in yourself and your abilities will grow over time.

You might feel like you are being hard on yourself when you deny yourself the luxury of playing the victim in your head. It doesn't matter. **Keep denying yourself this luxury** and you will grow stronger over time, and your life will get better and better.

The choice is simple really: you can blame others and whine about your misfortune, or you can take positive action every single day and become increasingly successful. One is an easy trap to fall into that gets you nowhere, the other takes real commitment and hard work.

## **Challenging work can give purpose and build self esteem**

For our purposes, "work" is defined fairly simply, in a couple of different ways:

- \* Making a living.
- \* Trading your time for money.
- \* Creating something of value.

If you find challenging work then that is an active path that will only help you to succeed in recovery, even if the position brings a moderate amount of stress with it.

If you find work that is not challenging you at all, or if you do not work at all, then you might be missing out on a huge benefit of recovery.

I started my recovery by not working at all. I was hesitant to go back to work and wanted to avoid it. People who cared about me pushed me to do so anyway.

At first, the work I was doing was not particularly challenging, but this was still better (for me) than not working at all. I felt quite a bit better about myself just grinding out a paycheck.

Later on in my recovery, a good friend suggested that I apply for a job with another company, one that was a bit more challenging, and involved working directly with recovering addicts and alcoholics. Again, I hesitated, mostly out of fear. What if I was not up to the job? What if I was not smart enough to perform well there? And so on.

I took the new job and this was a real blessing. I got huge benefit from the new challenge. Later on, the company promoted me, and this again brought on more and more benefit to my recovery, my self esteem, and my ability to help others in recovery.

It was **fear** that held me back and prevented me from doing more challenging work in my life. Now I can see that pushing myself to learn the next step is always the most empowering path forward. At first it is scary, and I feel inadequate because I have not mastered the new job. But later on, the benefits kick in from having learned more and expanded myself a bit.

This is not to say that everyone has to climb a corporate ladder in order to feel good about themselves. No, it is more about:

- \* **Continuous learning.**
- \* **Personal growth, while learning more about yourself.**
- \* **Pushing yourself to grow in a way that can help and benefit others.**

Instead of chasing a bigger paycheck through the corporate ladder, I have been pushing myself to learn how to better help addicts and alcoholics. I can now do so on a much larger scale than when I first started working in recovery. This type of growth is not possible with a passive approach to life. Thank goodness I had people around me to help nudge me toward more meaningful work (and to get back to work in the first place).

Like exercise, work may not be important for everyone in recovery. But for most people, finding challenging work will pay off for them in more ways than one, and bring an important balance to their life as well.

## **Passive living creates dependencies, active creation leads to independence**

If you are living passively then chances are good that you are creating dependencies in your life, or you are already are dependent on others to some extent.

Why? Because **when you are passive, you do not take responsibility for creating your own future.** You leave the direction of your life up to others, and to circumstance.

Most people live passively, do not decide what they really want out of life, and then complain about the results they are getting. And the longer they stay in this passive mode, the more their passive lifestyle becomes more and more ingrained, and more and more reinforced.

For example, **staying at a job that is not challenging** and does not compensate you well is a form of dependency. If you are afraid to challenge yourself and step up to something new (like I was) then you are likely to keep experiencing the same frustrations in your life.

Or **maybe you are stuck in a relationship** that you have been in for years, and it is easier to just keep up with the routine, rather than to challenge yourself and change your whole life around. You might even be miserable, but your passivity has led to dependency, and it becomes easier for you to just maintain the status quo.

You are never truly free if you are living passively and depending on others for your needs. Whether it is material needs or emotional needs is irrelevant. **You empower yourself when you strive for independence** and start actively pursuing a better life.

**You can still enjoy deep emotional connections with others without being dependent on them.** You can still enjoy intense and gratifying relationships with others while still asserting your own independence. Taking such a path requires courage because remaining passive and dependent is always so much easier, and feels so much more comfortable than taking action.

The key is almost always in creating change, in taking positive action. In many cases, it is the action that we least want to do (such as checking into long term rehab, for example....or breaking off that unhealthy relationship, or applying for that job that we thought we could never get). *"You must do the thing you think you cannot do."* We grow the most when we face our fears head on, and overcome them.

I was terrified of living in long term rehab, but it was the best thing I ever did. I was also afraid to face life without self medicating with drugs and alcohol. I was afraid of facing life without my girlfriend who was still using drugs. I was afraid to be sober and feel my emotions again, without being able to wash them away with booze. But I faced these fears, all of them, and somehow was able to overcome them.

How did I do it?

Massive action.

## **Massive action - the opposite of passive living**

Massive action is the key. I don't care if you are overcoming addiction or overcoming passivity. They are the same thing. Addiction is just a type of passivity. Both are a slow death in one form or another.

In either case, massive action is the solution. We create this through sheer force of will, through using our guts to create positive change in our lives. It is hard work. **If its not hard work, then you are not doing it right.** You are probably still being passive. Creative action takes a lot of energy.

Minor changes are not enough. Even making *lots* of minor changes is not enough. You have to go big. Real big. You have to make life changing decisions that have a real impact.

Long term rehab. Daily meetings, support, therapy. Seeking spirituality like your life depends on it. Devoting your life to recovery, to change, to taking positive action. Taking massive action, every single day.

This is the level of intensity and the level of force that is required to break through dependencies in your life and overcome passivity. You can't just shake it off with a half hearted effort. You have to dive in head first and take massive action in order to break through to a new life.

This is true regardless of the hurdle you are trying to jump. Using drugs and alcohol becomes passive over time. We do it automatically. But there are other hurdles out there as well, and we will meet some of them in recovery. We still have to recognize when we are being passive, and take action to overcome this.

## **How passive are you?**

I want to challenge you to take a step back and take an honest look at your life for a moment. Doesn't matter if you are an addict or not.

Ask yourself:

**\* Am I really creating the future I want, or am I just reacting to things?**

**\* Have I deliberately set goals and achieved them lately?**

**\* Am I working towards creating great things in my life? Something uplifting, personally satisfying, or purposeful?**

**\* Do I believe I am responsible for my own happiness, or do I think it should come from outside of myself, or from other people?**

**\* Am I ready to take massive action today and change my life for the better? Keep reading for more details about how to take massive action in your recovery.**

It takes massive action in order to overcome addiction and alcoholism. You have to actually *do* something in order to recover.

Most people believe that *specific programs* of recovery hold the magic key to their sobriety, but the truth is that the path to recovery starts with action....practically any action at all. Make a decision, ask for help, and put your recovery in motion. Getting bogged down in the details is a good way to screw up early in the game, when what we really need to kick start our recovery is a leap of faith....

We learn as we go along. How could recovery be any different? You are not perfect, and your first few days, weeks, and months of recovery will probably not be perfect either. But the key is to take action rather than to sit around and complain that you will probably fail anyway. Simply act, then learn as you progress. Refine as you go along. Take action!

We can frame recovery principles in a lot of different ways--we can talk about motivation, or we can talk about willingness, or we can talk about spiritual paths, and so on. But ultimately, it all comes down to **massive action**. You gotta take action to get results.

It takes change to overcome addiction. No action, no change.

So what follows are my thoughts about taking massive action in recovery.....

## **Why addiction demands massive action to overcome it**

Drug addiction and alcoholism dominate our lives, to the point that the pursuit of our next high pretty much consumes us entirely. Our priorities change drastically as we go further and further into our addiction. Our behaviors change, who we hang out with changes, where we spend our time changes.

The disease takes over our life. Everything that we do is set up around our drug of choice. We are either using it or thinking about using it, or possibly working so that we can use it later. The mental obsession is constant and overwhelming.

We medicate all of our emotions with our drug of choice. We want to use it to celebrate happy feelings. We want to use it when we are frustrated, sad, or upset. And of course, we are constantly using our drug to medicate our fear. ***Everything becomes an excuse to use drugs or alcohol.***

Do you see what I am getting at here? Addiction is *pervasive*. It infects our lives *completely*. It is not a surface-level phenomenon.

Addiction runs deep.

All of this is true, even if the addict has only been using for a short period of time. But for every year that an addict or alcoholic continues to stay stuck in their disease, they become even *more* dependent on the addictive lifestyle.

Think about it....how many years has the addict been using? How many years has the alcoholic been drinking? These activities define our lives. Addiction is a crutch that we use every single day. It is not a trivial thing. It changes how we live, how we deal with our emotions, how we deal with relationships, and how we deal with reality.

So the idea of recovery demands massive change. For years and years you are self medicating with your drug of choice every day, and then suddenly in early recovery, you stop using all drugs and have to find a new way to deal with life. This includes:

**\* A new way to deal with relationships.**

**\* A new way to cope with reality.**

**\* A new way to handle your emotions.**

**\* A new way to deal with your fear.**

Overcoming addiction requires massive change.

And that requires massive action.

### **Willingness: how surrender turns into action**

An addict or alcoholic who is struggling and in denial is not in a position to take massive action. Instead, they are resisting everything that might actually help them. New ideas about how to live, an opportunity to get professional help, a trip to a drug rehab--they will likely resist all of this. They are not ready to take action because they are struggling for control.

This is classic denial. The addict may or may not admit that they actually have a problem. Regardless, if they are not willing to take action then they are still stuck in denial, and they are blocked from making any real change in their life.

The paradox here is that massive action starts with total surrender. Before you can dive in and start creating awesome recovery, you have to be willing to let go of everything. You have to throw up your hands and say "That's it. I can't keep doing this."

Surrender is a non-action. It is a release. You let the tension and need for control drain out of you.

You probably cannot choose to do this. It just happens. It happens when an addict is finally sick and tired of the rat race that is active addiction.

Surrender is the moment where you let go of your need to control your life. You become open to the idea that someone else might have a better way for you to live. This is how your journey in recovery can begin.

Before you reach this moment, taking massive action in recovery is not possible. Surrender is always the first step in recovery, regardless of what program you are using.

### **A popular misconception: that thinking can change things in recovery**

People make this mistake all the time. It is a subtle mistake that does not get a lot of attention, because people normally do not talk about it much. They just do it.

What they do is that they have this erroneous belief that thinking can produce recovery. They have a mental block, a thing that they stumble over, that makes them believe that they can produce a better life for themselves by simply sitting on the couch and thinking about it.

We tell ourselves things like "I have to get my thoughts straight," or "I guess I have some serious thinking to do about my recovery." This is all just a big waste of time, and masks us from what really needs to happen instead: we need to stop thinking, and take action.

Our false belief is that we can execute easily in our lives, but that we have to put extra time and effort into our thoughts and preparation for everything. We believe that we have to concentrate on our thoughts, and the rest of our lives will fall into place.

Not true.

Backwards, in fact.

Just observe the person who immerses themselves into recovery meetings and therapy, even though they may still be having thoughts of wanting to use drugs and alcohol. Notice that this person is overcoming their addiction through action. In spite of their negative thoughts, they are able to find success in early recovery, simply by taking deliberate action every day. They may be going to treatment, attending meetings, going to group therapy, or interacting with their sponsor every day. Whatever. The key is that they are taking real action, rather than becoming obsessed with their thoughts.

Our actions can easily improve our thoughts. You want to have more positive thoughts? Then forget about thinking for a while and go take action. Help other addicts in recovery, every day. Reach out and help

newcomers in recovery in any way that you can. Do this with real dedication and real energy for a few weeks, then let us know what your thoughts are doing. I can tell you already that they will have improved one hundred fold, and not because you concentrated on changing your thoughts internally. It is because you took action. Massive action.

## **Dipping your toes in: how little actions can snowball into big results in early recovery**

Willingness is a funny thing in early recovery. If you give it just half a chance, you will amaze yourself when you look back a year later.

For example, I had always been personally against the idea of long term treatment. The idea petrified me. How could I give up so much time from my life? It was unthinkable. So I continued to struggle with addiction, until one day something broke free, and I surrendered.

I agreed to check into short term, residential treatment. By doing so, I saw that the situation was acceptable. My world did not end. And, because of this smaller success of checking into rehab, I became willing to consider the idea of long term.

Of course the story ends that I did end up going to long term rehab, lived there for 20 months, and have been clean and sober ever since.

Now at my moment of surrender, I never would have been willing to agree to live in rehab for 20 months. No way.

But willingness will give way to more willingness. Thus, massive action can be discovered through taking baby steps in early recovery.

You have to do something. That is the whole key. They have a saying: "If nothing changes, then nothing changes." Well, duh.

If you want to get to massive action, you probably have to start with something small and reasonable.

Then, build on it.

## **Go big in early recovery or go home**

I am in the unique position of being able to watch a lot of recovering addicts and alcoholics in early recovery. I also have been in this unique position for the last 9 and a half years straight. I have seen hundreds of winners in recovery, and thousands who relapsed.

And what have I learned from watching all this?

That the winners go big. They take massive action. The people who relapse, they, well.....do nothing.

Well sometimes those who relapse do something, but they don't do much. They make a half hearted effort. They put in a 70 percent effort into recovery. Or maybe like a 30 percent effort.

Folks, it takes more than that. So much more.

Have you ever heard of the concept of overwhelming force? Let's say your latest goal is to lose 10 pounds. If you were using the concept of overwhelming force, you would do several things in order to achieve this goal.

First, you would hire a world class fitness trainer. Then you may hire a world class nutritionist. They would help you to drastically change your diet. You would carefully plan each meal, and snack, to be as healthy as possible. And you would start working out, hard, every single day. No excuses. You would wake up early every morning and exercise more in your first few waking hours than you used to exercise all week.

And you would keep pushing yourself to take positive action toward this goal every single day. Your actions would become ingrained, automatic habits that would redefine your lifestyle. Every activity, every meal, and every waking moment of every day would be an opportunity to help move you closer to your ideal weight and a healthier body.

That's overwhelming force. And for some things, such as learning to play the trumpet or forming a new habit of meditating every day, you will not really need to go this far. Most changes that we make in our lives are relatively easy, and do not require such ridiculous dedication, such overwhelming force.

But overcoming addiction does require overwhelming force. And that means taking massive action.

You can test this easily enough if you do not believe it: simply go interview those who are clean and sober in recovery. Ask them: "Was getting clean and sober one of the hardest things you ever had to do?" Then ask them: "Was it *the* hardest thing you ever had to do?"

Duh. They will all answer "yes."

You need massive action, people!

### **Transitioning to long term recovery: turning action into habits**

Some of the best decisions I made in early recovery involved making a commitment to myself to keep doing something positive. If an action is truly helpful to recovery and it benefits you no matter what, then it makes sense to try and turn it into a habit.

For example, I found that regular, vigorous exercise had a huge impact on my recovery. It affected me so much more than I thought it would, on so many different levels. After a particularly vigorous workout, I noticed that:

1) I felt absolutely terrific, while being both physically exhausted and yet strangely satisfied all at once. Right after an intense run, my head and heart would be pounding with natural chemicals, producing a natural endorphin rush. This rush would be very addictive if it did not require so much work!

2) I also noticed that I would feel better throughout the rest of the day, too. More calm, yet happier for having worked out.

3) Also, I slept better on the days that I ran. I would fall asleep faster and sleep more deeply.

4) I also noticed a meditative quality to distance running. You can finish a one hour run and not even realize what you thought about for the entire hour. This is awesome. Instead of constant, obsessive thought, you can just take in the countryside as you run. This meditative quality of running is very, very underrated in my opinion.

These benefits from running just kept adding up for me, and I basically made the decision the first year that I started doing it: I was going to keep on running forever. The benefits were too great to not turn this into a regular habit. And so it became a lifestyle choice for me, one that continues to pay dividends for me in recovery.

I see other people do this too, with other things that work great for them in recovery. For example, some people really connect with 12 step meetings, or they might get tremendous benefit from sponsoring newcomers in recovery. And so they turn these things into habits that carry them through into long term sobriety.

Find what works, and run with it. Not too difficult, really.

## **Why you need continuous action to stay sober over the long run**

I have the luxury of watching so many different people in recovery. Every year, I watch thousands of people in short term recovery, and hundreds of people in long term recovery. Many people from both groups frequently relapse. So what are the similarities in those who falter?

Most people get it wrong and say "they stopped going to meetings." This contains a half truth, but it is not the whole story. Meetings are just a tool, they do not keep anyone clean and sober in any sort of direct way. Anyone who is dependent on them--really dependent on them for sobriety--is not cut out to make it in the long run anyway.

No, the fact of the matter is that the people who relapsed stopped doing anything. Yes, many of them stopped going to meetings, that may be true. But it is the fact that they stopped doing anything for their recovery altogether that ended up sinking them.

Continuous, positive action. That is the only real remedy for addiction. Why? Because using drugs and alcohol is our natural state. We are most comfortable when we are getting drunk and high. That is perfectly normal for the addict to be doing. It is their natural state of being.

It takes continuous energy to divert from this course. That is why they say: "You are either working on recovery, or you are working on a relapse." There is no standing still in recovery. You have to get active, and stay active, in order to keep the threat of relapse at bay.

So what does continuous action consist of? The details are all around you on this website. Do what works. Do something positive. Help others in recovery. Seek holistic health. Take what works and turn it into a habit. Push yourself to grow personally. Actually push yourself to grow as a person.

These are not always going to be specific actions like "Do A, then do B, then move on to C." We are talking about personal growth here. It is not always perfectly linear and predictable. But one key is that you have to keep doing it, and you have to keep growing in your recovery. It is a continuous process, that, if stopped, will generally result in relapse.

## **Improving health through lifestyle changes requires massive action**

Recovery is about life. It's about embracing a healthier life for yourself.

Why would we stop at abstinence from drugs and alcohol?

Holistic health is an extension of recovery principles. Start caring for yourself in recovery and building real self esteem, and you will inevitably be led to start taking better care of yourself as a whole person.

That means taking care of yourself spiritually, physically, emotionally, mentally, nutritionally, and so on. Why would you limit your approach to just spiritual growth? Or just physical stuff (like abstaining from drugs?).

Instead, the holistic approach to recovery seeks to treat the whole person, not just the spiritual side of them. So naturally, this leads people to take a look at their whole life, and how they can improve it. A huge part of this is going to revolve around their health: physical health, mental health, emotional balance, and so on.

Most of that stuff is hard to change. Lifestyle changes do not come easy. Quitting smoking, or incorporating daily exercise, or making radical changes to your diet--none of these things are easy. And that is why holistic health demands massive action.

Think about it. If you want to make huge gains in your health, it is going to take a huge effort. You can't get something for nothing. Anything worth doing requires real work. It is no different when pursuing holistic health in recovery.

Making real changes that positively affect your health is not easy. But if you really embrace a new life in recovery, you don't have much of a choice. Start living, or start dying.....

## **How massive action sets you up for long term success**

Because of the reasons outlined above, you cannot expect to have long term success in recovery without taking massive action. It is just not possible.

At the most, you may be able to stay clean for a short while based on some minor changes in your life, but these will never last. As they say in traditional recovery circles, "you have to change everything."

You can tell when someone is still stuck in denial and they just don't get it. Maybe they are drinking heavily every night, and they try to blame it on the bar that is close to their apartment. "If I could just get a new place on the other side of town, I would be alright." This is ridiculous and anyone who understands how addiction works can tell you that the location of the bar is irrelevant. A true drunk will walk miles and miles to get their buzz on.

And yet, people do this all the time with other forms of denial. For example, say you have a struggling addict and their life is dominated by using drugs and getting high every day. Maybe they have been doing so for several years now, and they pretty much dedicate all of their free time, energy, and money to the pursuit of more drugs. They are "in deep," so to speak.

Does this person really think they are going to change their life with a few outpatient sessions each week? Do they really think they can go to an NA meeting each weekend and somehow change their whole life because of it?

These are not realistic goals, because we are dealing with an extreme situation. Addiction is hard to overcome. It takes massive action. That is why I can always spot someone who is still in denial, because they are not willing to take *massive* action. Instead, they keep hedging. They are in denial.

"No, I'd rather not go to long term treatment. In fact, I don't much like the idea of a 28 day program either. I think I would just like to do some counseling each week. That is what works well for me."

Or they might say:

"I don't understand what I am doing wrong, or why I keep relapsing. I go to 3 meetings every week...."

Ridiculous. These types of rationalizations are the sound of denial, from people who are not yet ready to change. They are only taking modest actions. Not massive.

If you take massive action in early recovery, you are automatically setting yourself up for success down the road. Anything less, and you are flirting with disaster.

### **Lack of action = relapse**

Hopefully it is clear by now what the formula for success is. Continuous, positive action.

Those who relapse are those who stop doing stuff. They simply start coasting. Whatever they were doing that helped them in recovery, they stopped doing it. Then they relapsed.

Some people believe that there is magic in certain recovery programs. There is no magic. There is only action.

You supply the magic when you put in the footwork. That is the magic of recovery. It is all in the footwork.

Ask those who have 5, 10, 20 years sober in AA: "Does it require action?"

Yup.

Ask them: "Does it require *lots* of action?"

Yup. It sure does.

Anyone who thinks that there is a mystical shortcut to long term sobriety is fooling themselves. There are no shortcuts. There is only hard work. Continuous, positive action.

If you want to stay clean and sober, you get busy. You go big, and take real action in your life.

Massive action.

The rewards are there. Life starts getting good. Real good.

But you have to work for it.

**Ask yourself: Are you willing to take massive action in order to live an awesome life in recovery?**

Be sure to visit [spiritualriver.com](http://spiritualriver.com) for more free ebooks on various topics.

Thank you for reading.

[www.spiritualriver.com](http://www.spiritualriver.com)

#### Recommended resources

These are all books that I have read and used to great effect on my journey in recovery. If you found the information here helpful at all, then you would probably benefit from reading some of these books as well.

[Codependent No More](#)  by Melody Beattie - The definitive guide to read if you are the friend, family member, or loved one of someone who is struggling with addiction or alcoholism.

[Stage II Recovery](#)  by Earnie Larsen - Talks about the idea that we can continue to grow in our recovery after we have mastered the basics of staying clean and sober.

[Creative Recovery: A Complete Addiction Treatment Program That Uses Your Natural Creativity](#)  by Eric Maisel - this book does not align perfectly with my own ideas about creative recovery, but it is pretty close, and offers a unique alternative to 12 step based approaches.

[The Zen of Recovery](#)  by Mel Ash - Awesome book if you are the least bit intrigued by zen buddhism.

[The Tao of Sobriety: Helping You to Recover from Alcohol and Drug Addiction](#)  by David Gregson - Great book if you are interested in Taoism and you are in recovery.

[Conversations With God](#)  by Neale Donald Walsch - an excellent resource if you struggle with the higher power concept in any way.

[The Prayer of Jabez](#)  by Bruce Wilkinson - One of the best books out there for Christians to read if they are interested in taking action and getting results. Really inspiring, short read.

[The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment](#)  by Eckhart Tolle - This book introduced me to the idea that I was not my mind. Very, very powerful. A must read.

[Personal Development for Smart People: The Conscious Pursuit of Personal Growth](#)  by Steve Pavlina - Extremely practical and inspiring. No fluff or filler, very actionable book.