

Sobriety or Recovery?

By Jean Kirkpatrick, Ph.D., WFS Founder

This year the WFS “New Life” Program is 20 years old. That's so hard for me to believe. However, during those 20 years, many women have recovered; have gone on to fulfilling lives.

- **Drinking -- sobriety**
- **Problems of gender -- recovery**

To have a fulfilling life requires 2 stages. The first stage is to overcome drinking. This is a period of sobriety.

It is possible to stop at this stage but it does not produce a fulfilling life. Just being sober has little back up when something drastic happens. The immediate response is to go back to drinking because there is no solid basis for the sobriety. Probably the sobriety is a day-by-day management of life. The sobriety is tenuous. It can be upset by troubling news. Its maintenance is always a sometimes thing.

And what of the “New Life” Program? Maintaining sobriety is merely practicing the First Statement.

Going beyond the First Statement, going beyond just the maintenance of sobriety, is the beginning of your pursuit of a full recovery.

The “New Life” Program differs from many others because it is a comprehensive program; it asks its users to make a total change in life to affect a recovery. It asks for a new way of thinking about life and a way of unlocking the key to individual strengths.

When I laid out the program 20 years ago, I saw it as Thirteen Statements of Recovery, with each Statement dealing with one aspect of recovery. In the early years, when I was making speeches, I began to layout a life plan; to illustrate, I'd discuss the different levels of recovery as I saw them. Gradually I began adding the 13 Statements. Finally, I began to see that all 13 could be laid out in a pattern.

So the two aspects are:

- 1) **Sobriety (Statement #1)**
- 2) **Recovery (Statements #2-13)**

After achieving our sobriety, we should want to begin to work on our recovery. Some few don't want to, being satisfied with sobriety and nothing more.

However, I urge all of you to move into the challenge of recovery. It can be exciting to mold a new person - ourselves - to find the best of ourselves.

So the **First Stage** -- dealing with our alcoholism -- is getting sober. This is Statement #1.

The process of recovery begins with **Stage Two**.

Now we begin to work on ourselves. To begin we must examine our thoughts and our language. We become conscious of the many negative thoughts and actions we have in our life. We notice that we are very pessimistic in some of our attitudes: *"I know it won't work,"* or *"I'll never be able to do that"* or *"My life is a mess and I know I can't change it."*

These thoughts must be weeded out of our vocabulary and our life. And we begin to become aware of how much we are reacting (still) to things that happened to us years ago. Guilt trips have been a part of our life. Now, as we begin to see how much this is a part of our negative person, we begin to recognize what we must do in this stage of our recovery.

This is a good time to write down the negative elements you recognize in your life. This helps us to realize what we must change.

Each day, 20 minutes before any family member awakens, is the time to begin these exercises of personal and emotional growth. This stage is probably the most important stage of recovery, because it puts us in touch with ourselves, something we have been avoiding during our drinking periods. Then we were running away from life. Now, in recovery, we must turn all of this around. Because this contrast is so great, that's why this stage is so important even though difficult.

During this stage: examine your thoughts and your language and begin to abolish the negativism, the guilt feelings, the fear and worry. Know that you can handle all of these feelings because you are stronger than they are. Begin to transfer these negative feelings from your mind onto a piece of paper. You are literally house-cleaning your mind.

This stage will always be. It is a process that should go on for the remainder of your life: checking your thoughts and analyzing them.

Stage Three:

Now that we have recognized our negatives, this is the time to fill our minds with positives. Begin creating positive statements about yourself. Begin with, "I am a competent woman." Then add many positive statements to this. Each morning, after you have examined your thoughts for the negatives and removed them, then put into their place positive statements about yourself. Make a list of them for yourself but always include, *"I am a competent woman."*

Stage Four:

Now that you are becoming a positive person, this is a good time to add other elements to your life -- joy and happiness that you are a new person. Feel enthusiasm for each

day, knowing that you have discovered a secret of life: we are what we make of ourselves.

Stage Five:

Perhaps feeling and expressing love has been difficult in the past. Perhaps we aren't even sure we know what love is, but now that we have acquired some good feelings about ourselves, we can begin to think about relationships -- all kinds of relationships now that we feel sure of ourselves to express the love we feel toward others. We will be unafraid to express our true feelings.

Stage Six:

Now is the time to begin to delve deeper into ourselves to experience the growing spirituality we have been feeling.

First we overcame our problem; next we began to understand ourselves; then we turned to relationships and now we are free to deal with our spiritual self. For the first time, we feel in tune with the universe and not as if we are drifting off into space all alone.

We have come to the fruition of ourselves and we know that each morning we must make the time to renew ourselves to ourselves.

This is the new you in the New Year.

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