



Addict. Alcoholic. Think of the images these words conjure up. Who do you see? A homeless person on the street? A Hollywood starlet? A washed up rock star? A criminal, perhaps? Most of us react to these two words with an image of someone in, or one foot from, the gutter or some precipice from which an individual can fall to dash their future, their career, or their family's hopes and dreams.

Today, I challenge each of us to resist these stereotypes and create another picture to go with the words addict and alcoholic. The image I ask you to insert next to your old definition is that of your neighbor, a co-worker, or someone in your own family. Is this possible? Yes...if we can add another word to the list of those we associate with alcoholic and addict. The word we all need to learn is "recovery."

What is recovery? Think of how we already use the word. Various dictionaries define recovery as the regaining of something lost or taken away, restoration or return to health from sickness, and restoration or return to any former and better state or condition. We accept that individuals recover from everything from a serious disappointment or loss to cancer. Yet, recovery from alcoholism or another addiction is either doubted or at best whispered with fingers crossed.

Do you know anyone in recovery from an addiction? Unless you live purely on-line (and even then) it is almost impossible that you would not. "Impossible," you say. More likely, you come into contact with a person in recovery from addiction every day; you just don't know it. People in recovery are invisible. They look and act just like everyone else. You probably don't even notice when they order iced tea instead of a cocktail, and their social network may involve a few more friends from a 12 Step fellowship than yours (though you have them too).

This is the way it has been for decades, so what is the problem? Simply put, keeping recovery invisible keeps addicts sick. With no role models to aspire to, there is no hope. Without hope, why seek help? When the treatment of choice for alcoholism was committing someone to an asylum, there was good reason to avoid "help." Today, that is simply not the case. Addiction is now managed diabetes and hypertension, the two chronic diseases it most closely resembles. Treatments include new medications, counseling, behavioral therapy, and support groups. And as anyone who has successfully quit smoking knows, no one treatment approach works for everyone and combination approaches are most effective.

September is National Addiction Recovery Month. There is no better time to come out about your recovery. Silence kills. Some of you have the power to inspire the person in the next office who may be suffering in silence. Others of you may yearn to know that you are not alone, and help – recovery – is possible. The rest of us can facilitate the conversation. Recovery is all around us; it is long overdue that we celebrate!

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