



Recovery Lessons I Keep Learning

by Matt T.

Recovery, at its heart, is about **freedom**. It's not just about freedom *from* something — not just freedom from my addict, from acting out, or from the chaos I created. It's also about freedom *to* live. To grow. To show up for my life and the people I care about.

It's been a slow progression for me. In the early days, it was mostly about protecting myself, trying desperately *not* to do certain things. Now it's increasingly about focusing on what I want to build in my life. Recovery means moving beyond just avoidance into growth, connection, and meaning.

Recovery is About Honest Awareness

Recovery has demanded a new kind of awareness from me. An honest awareness of **who I am and how I think and feel**. Awareness of a higher power — and maybe even more importantly, an awareness that **I am not that higher power**.

I've also had to become aware that I'm not always okay — and that's actually okay. Being human means having tough days, old wounds, and feelings I don't always understand.

Recovery is About Recognizing the Threat

I've learned that my addict is not some quirky little part of me that just needs a bit of management. **My addict wants to destroy me**. It's an existential threat to everything I hold dear and everything I want in life.

I can't baby it, reason with it, or appease it. It doesn't matter how long I've been in recovery — I can't ever forget this. My addict is patient and cunning and always waiting for an opening. Remembering that keeps me humble and alert.

Letting Go and Surrendering

Another big piece of recovery is learning to let go. It's not about figuring out how to control my addiction or my life. I love this definition of **surrender**:

“Laying down arms and awaiting further instructions.”

So what do I do while I'm awaiting those instructions? I live life. I get up in the morning, go to work, wash the dishes, call my kids, write in my journal, go to bed on time. I do the next right things, however small they might seem.

Recovery Means Working the Steps

For me, recovery is ultimately about working the steps. Meetings are important — they bring connection and support — but step work is where the real change happens.

It's like the difference between reading about swimming and actually getting into the water. Or talking about taking a walk and actually walking.

The steps give me a roadmap:

- **Steps 1–3:** admitting I can't do this on my own and need help.
- **Steps 4–9:** digging deep to see what's blocking me, where I've caused harm, and doing the work to make it right.
- **Steps 10–12:** living this out **daily**, keeping my side of the street clean and helping others along the way.

The Serenity Prayer Sums It Up

If I had to boil recovery down to one idea, it's the **Serenity Prayer**.

Serenity to accept the things I cannot change.

My past, other people, so many circumstances — these are outside my control.

Courage to change the things I can.

My own choices, my willingness to be there for my wife and kids, my honesty, my willingness to show up.

Wisdom to know the difference.

Most of the time, if I'm really honest, I can see what's mine and what isn't. But sometimes I cling to trying to change what's clearly outside my power — and it only brings anxiety. It helps to stop, breathe, and say, *"You know what, I can only do my part. The rest isn't mine to carry."*

A Few More Lessons I Keep Learning

Recovery is about **being aware of my emotions, but not always trusting their accuracy**. Just last Sunday I woke up in a pretty bad place, took a long walk, and felt totally different by the end. That reminded me again how feelings shift — they're worth paying attention to, but they're not always reliable guides.

It's also about **making peace with the past**. I love these lines from the Goo Goo Dolls' song "Come to Me":

I caught you burnin' photographs
Like that could save you from your past
History is like gravity
It holds you down away from me

...

Don't be sad and don't explain
This is where we start again.

Becoming a Student of Myself

One of the greatest gifts of recovery is getting to know my own heart. I've become a **student of myself** — a student of Matt. Through journaling, I can see my patterns in how I think, react, and feel. I've learned that when I truly follow my deepest, truest heart — not my addict's impulses — I'll be okay.

Everyone's Recovery is Their Own Responsibility

I've also had to learn that **recovery is each person's responsibility**. I've gotten calls from people who clearly needed recovery, but they just weren't ready yet. That's why I remind myself of the saying:

"Recovery isn't for those who need it... it's for those who want it."

And it's why I don't carry guilt if someone I sponsor doesn't get sober. I'm a resource for them — but what they do with it is up to them.

Why It All Matters

Recovery is about remembering that **I matter, and what I do matters**. Even small choices ripple out. It's also about realizing it's **never too late**. As that old saying goes:

"The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is today."

And finally, it's about recognizing that I, like each of you, am uniquely qualified to help someone else. Whatever my background, gifts, or even my oddities — there are people out there I'm uniquely equipped to reach. That means each of us matters in this world.

Community: The Heart of It

Recovery is about **community**. It's about getting out of my head and into my heart. It's about getting out of isolation and talking to people. It's about meetings, listening, sharing honestly, and mending relationships.

These rooms are precious. This fellowship is a gift. Thank you for being my community and for giving me the chance to keep learning, growing, and sharing with you.