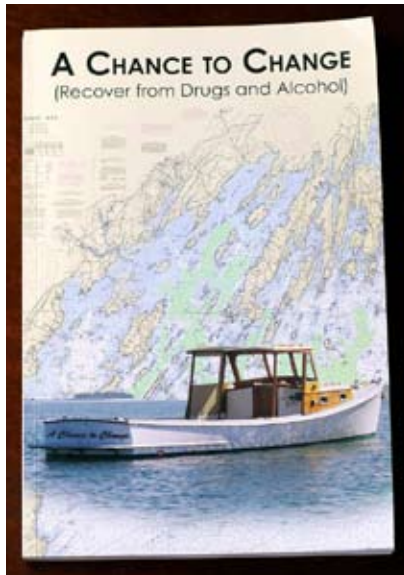


A Chance to Change: Recover from Drugs and Alcohol
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INTRODUCTION

For you to formulate an opinion on Cognitive Restructuring, you need to know my background, where I'm coming from and how I came to my conclusions.

I was first exposed to drugs as a student at Tulane University when I saw people using marijuana, cocaine, benzodiazepines like Xanax, amphetamines, LSD and mushrooms. I came to understand that a certain percentage of users, not everyone, developed problems with their drug use to the point where it started interfering with their lives.

Later, while I was at Chicago Medical School, I observed the same pattern with a certain percentage of professional, very successful people. My understanding, though, was limited at that point.

The real story began when I was in my psychiatry residency at Roosevelt Hospital in New York City. Its emergency room is one of the busiest in the country. Eighty percent of the people who came through that door had drugs in their urine and blood -- mostly cocaine, opiates and heroin back then, but there were also amphetamines, benzodiazepines, alcohol, marijuana and PCP. I started to observe the behaviors of people who were overdosing. They were self-destructive, falling, injuring themselves and getting into terrible accidents. They were doing bizarre things because they were impaired by marijuana, cocaine and heroin. One hot summer, an individual locked himself into a Port-o-let. He went into rhabdomyolysis. His whole body shut down and he died. I saw people who came into ER manipulate, lie, cheat, steal and deceive to get more drugs. Some of them, after being treated with Narcan for an overdose of heroin to save their lives, became angry and violent with us because we stopped their heroin high!

I finished that residency with a very intense appreciation for the power of drugs and alcohol and the damage they can do. I learned that drugs were a potent force that drove people to do things against their moral code and to hurt themselves and everyone around them.

After I moved to West Palm Beach in 1992, I joined a group with Dr. Alfredo Hernandez, who uses the twelve-step strategy to treat people with addiction. This was my first exposure to a twelve-step program and I came to see that it had become a universal approach and was integrated into the very fabric of our laws, hospitals and society. It was the only way people who had drug and alcohol problems were being treated, and when I kept hearing "This is the only way," I got frustrated.

Then, I became medical director at different drug-treatment centers and advised drug-treatment programs: Hanley Hazelton, Behavioral Health of the Palm Beaches, Transitions of America, Recovery Resources, Columbia Hospital. "Twelve Steps" was their mantra, the one thing common to all of them. It was twelve steps or nothing.

Around that same time, I met David Dashiv, who had been using heroin for twenty years and was an IV heroin addict. He's an interesting guy, a successful Hollywood screenwriter, very charismatic and intelligent. He wrote Summer School, Police Academy and a host of other screenplays and he was making a lot of money. Although he had fame and fortune, what did he do with them? He shot heroin. He squandered all his money, ruined his health and had some terrible things happen to him.

He came clean in 1992 and we became friends. Later, we formed a nationwide company that detoxed people from opiates. While working in that company, we realized that AA and NA were not the only way to go. David made me realize that. He'd worked in an AA program for a good twenty years, and he began to say he didn't want to spend the rest of his life in a group with sponsors. He didn't want to be helpless, have a disease for life, submit to a higher power and label himself as an addict. And I became frustrated, because those ideas were forced down people's throats everywhere they went. They had no option.

Since 2007, I've worked in halfway houses and treatment centers evenings, mornings and weekends. I started living with people who had drug problems so that I could better understand where they're coming from. I saw that "Twelve Steps" was not for everyone and that we needed to find a treatment that empowered people to think differently and instill in them the desire to move forward. That's how Cognitive Restructuring came about.