

What Are You Thinking?

How Your Thoughts Affect Your Recovery from Addiction

Have you ever wondered about the impact of your thoughts?

By now, most people have either seen the movie *The Secret* or have heard about it. By showing a number of different situations and how people respond to them, *The Secret* teaches that we are creating our lives with every thought we have, every second of the day.

What an amazing idea!

What We Put Out Comes Back to Us

The Secret addresses the idea of the Law of Attraction, which you may already be familiar with. This "Law" simply states that what we attract into our lives is a direct result of what we think about. It teaches that whatever we put out, we get back. Although this is a very simple concept and makes sense to a lot of people, it can be quite difficult for many to actually put into practice in their lives.

Could it really be this straightforward? Is it possible that if we can change the way we think, we can also change the quality of our lives? If so, could this affect the quality of recovery from addictive behaviours?

Whether or not you are a firm believer in the Law of Attraction, you have probably had experiences where you found that the more negative your thinking is, the more you have in your life to feel negative about. The reverse is also true: when you're having a good day and thinking pleasant thoughts, things just keep getting better – at least for a while until your negative thoughts take over again.

Negative Thoughts and Recovery from Addiction

In 12-Step programs, these negative thought processes are called "Stinking Thinking" and they include outward behaviours like complaining, being judgmental, blaming others, and gossiping. As people work the Steps, they are encouraged to become more aware of both their negative and positive thought patterns to see how their thinking is influencing their quality of recovery.

But you don't have to be part of a 12-Step program to reap the benefits of changing your own stinking thinking. We all have negative thoughts from time to time, it's part of being human. Teaching yourself to recognize yours when they arise and changing them into something more positive can boost your emotional well-being, which will have a direct affect on the rest of your life.

For example, if you are actively using an addictive behaviour such as alcohol, drugs, disordered eating, gambling, internet addiction, compulsive overspending or codependency in your relationships, you may well be experiencing times of anxiety, depression, and self-pity. These emotional states are reflected in your thoughts and in your negative self-talk.

It is difficult to continue engaging in an addiction, especially if you already know it is ruining the quality of your life and eroding your self-respect. Once your eyes are open to this truth, it will be difficult for you to close them again, because you instinctively understand that at some point in time you will have to stop hiding in that addictive behaviour and start dealing with your life tasks. Until you do that, on some level you are aware that you can't look in the mirror and be okay with yourself.

Instead of continuing that unhealthy self-talk (which is fueled by your stinking thinking), perhaps you could learn to use positive affirmations and visualizations, focusing on how good your life can be once you stop the addiction and deal with your issues. Rather than telling yourself what a "loser" you are or how "stupid" you have been for becoming addicted to the behaviour in the first place (does that kind of self-talk sound familiar?), you could begin to imagine having the courage to change the things you are able to change about yourself.

Or maybe you are already in recovery from addiction but things don't seem to be going as well as you'd like. Once again, it will be important to check your thinking ~ are your thoughts coming mostly from a fear-based place that has its roots in your old history? Could you be telling yourself that you don't deserve a better life, or thinking that recovery will always be a struggle? If so, it will be necessary for you to bring your thinking into present time. When things seem difficult for me, I find the affirmation "Just for today, my needs are met" to be very helpful. Can you think of other tools you could use to give yourself some serenity and positive thoughts?

Developing an Attitude of Gratitude

One way to begin is to become more grateful for what you have in your life. The idea of gratitude is often the chosen topic in recovery meetings and is a very important and useful tool in getting our lives back on track. Learning to see your life challenges as opportunities for positive growth, as opposed to punishments for being a "bad" person, will completely change your outlook on a great many situations.

If you wish, you could keep a Gratitude Journal. There are two ways to do this: in the evenings, make a list of 5-10 things you were grateful for that day. On some days, the items on your lists might be the same and on other days they might be different but it doesn't matter as long as you're honest about what you write. If you know you will need to come up with 5-10 positive things about your day, you will begin looking for them and focusing on the good things that happened to you instead of consistently dwelling on the negative.

The second way is to keep your journal by your bedside and write your list first thing in the morning upon awakening. Doing this helps put a positive spin on the day from the very beginning, which can set the tone for the entire day. Either way is fine, and of course you could decide to combine the two lists if you'd like to give yourself an even bigger hit of optimism!

If your tendency is toward negativity, complaining, and your own personal brand of stinking thinking, becoming aware of your thoughts and making the conscious decision to adjust them could be the very tool you've been seeking. Try it for a few days and see if any changes happen for the better in your life.

I wish all of you the best in making your recovery from addiction more enjoyable, one day at a time.