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ARE THE 12 STEPS THE ONLY WAY?

When most people think of addiction and recovery, they think of the 12 steps. This is largely because since 1935, Alcoholics Anonymous has been the mainstay of addiction treatment. There have been thousands upon thousands of successes through AA and NA (Narcotics Anonymous) over the years, but the results have been mixed for a certain part of the population. There is a large contingent that has not achieved sustainable recovery through the 12 steps and the reasons for this remain largely misunderstood.

When a person relapses, they are typically accused of lacking effort and desire. This is often true, but not always. There are many motivated and hard working individuals that keep relapsing for other, more complex reasons. They may spend years, in and out of different treatment centers, with only short stretches of sobriety to show for it. Their relapses are typically involuntary, where they really did not want to use but could not prevent it despite their best efforts. They did what they could with the tools they had, but it was not enough to contain the raw power of an addictive urge to use. This is often due to some combination of poor relapse prevention skills, untreated depression or anxiety, poor emotional support, and excessive drug and alcohol exposure. Another common reason for this is a fundamental psychological incompatibility with the 12-steps.

Not every person has the capacity to truly internalize a spirituality-based recovery system to the degree required for success. This may be due to any combination of personality traits, personal beliefs and style of thought. This is not necessarily indicative of resistance from individual, as has often been the assumption. In forcing the 12 steps, such individuals often

struggle for years before finding recovery, if they ever even do. These same individuals can do a complete turnaround if placed in a recovery system that they are psychologically compatible with and can fully internalize.

Many higher functioning and educated individuals respond well to recovery systems that are based on modern psychological and medical principles. These individuals are often used to making decisions based on tangible evidence and information. They tend to employ advanced deductive and abstract reasoning when making the more difficult decisions in their life, which in recovery would equate to a pressured decision to not relapse. A cognitive behavioral and medical science based recovery system is compatible with this thought style and helps such individuals work with their strengths. They will often demonstrate a drastic and impactful improvement when finally engaging one of these systems, even after

decades of failure.

Interpreting the reasons for failure in recovery are equally as important as interpreting success. When motivated individuals fail, it is often because of incompatibility with the recovery system made available to them. There is nothing fundamentally wrong with the 12 steps, the compatibility is just not there for everyone. Alternative recovery systems do exist and can give a motivated person a real chance at success, if they just have the courage to

try one. Educating consumers and the general public, especially those with decision making power, like judges, attorneys, physicians, and insurance companies, that there are alternatives to 12 Step programs will save lives, money, and suffering for individuals with addiction.

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