

Using Logic Based Therapy in Recovery

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Abstract: This paper applies basic concepts of Logic-Based Therapy (LBT) to the case of a person in recovery from drug and alcohol addiction after relapse. The paper has been written in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the online Practical Reasoning course taught by Dr. Elliot D. Cohen at Indian River State College.

In addiction recovery, relapse is an often discussed topic. For those who have been there before, we ask, what led up to your relapse? What decisions did you make that you would change in the future to prevent it? What is relapse prevention? Clients are given information on the ways to avoid going back down the same road, and may sometimes do role play to strengthen the ability to say no. Even with the detailed information one is given in rehab or in therapy, unfortunately, relapse may be inevitable at some point in the recovery process for many if not most. Relapse is defined as “the recurrence of any disease that has gone into remission or recovery.” In this case the disease at hand is addiction. This is such a basic description of such a broad series of events. It’s said that relapse happens before you use again. Either way, relapse can be one occurrence, or it can be multiple occurrences over time, spiraling back down the dark hole you once worked so hard and did so well at climbing out of. The thoughts, actions and events leading to relapse may differ from person to person, however the end result leads to similar feelings. For someone who has been clean a week or a decade a relapse may feel like failure; it gives you feelings of guilt, depression, worthlessness and hopelessness. These feelings may be normal given the situation. The thoughts behind them, the actions you choose may either further your future demise or by changing your thoughts you can change your actions, and look towards a more hopeful future.

Billy is a 55 year old male who for 10 years was addicted to alcohol and drugs, mainly opiates. After multiple tries and multiple rehabs he managed to stay sober for 8 years. He became closer to his family, started working and felt as if life was finally looking up. In the beginning he went to meetings, called his sponsor when he felt he was weak and stayed away from his prior contacts. After time, as often recovering addicts do, he believed he was fine; he was sober for life. Thinking that his years of using were behind him Billy thought he was cured and discontinued going to meetings or even acknowledging his past substance abuse.

His downward spiral began with his thoughts. After 5 years of working the same job, Billy was let go. His health was steadily declining, and he felt he had no skills to find something new. Rather than seeing this as an opportunity to find another job, gain another skill, he let the job loss bring him down in spirit. He was too proud to turn to anyone for help, and slowly stopped talking to others. Friends and family weren’t sure what was going on; they only noticed he seemed depressed and withdrawn. Admittedly, losing a job is awful, but is it the worst thing that could happen? Are there not much worse things in life than losing a job? With nothing to fall back on or to make him feel whole, Billy soon began to think having a job defined him as a person. He thought if he was no longer working, he had no worth. In having no worth, this makes him a worthless person. At this point, his anxiety, depression and anger kicked in. He thought to

himself that there was no point; he couldn't accept himself as a worthless person and didn't want to live this way. Billy was awfulizing his situation in that he took a bad situation and viewed it as "the worst and shittiest thing that could possibly ever happen." (Cohen) Unfortunately, as he would see, things could and would get much worse. Prior to his relapse, had he just taken his irrational thoughts and refuted them, this situation could have gone up rather than down. Billy would best learn from Epictetus: "Compare what seems awful to you to much worse things and content yourself with how much worse things could truly have been."

After the job loss, Billy started to look for easier ways to make money. One bad decision led to another and after time he found himself back in the black hole of addiction. Heroin once again became his comfort- while he was high. After the job loss, not being able to make ends meet, he lost his house. Now homeless, with nobody but drugs to turn to, he fell deeper into depression. Every day seemed pointless, just going through the motions. Wake up, find a way to make money, buy heroin, use, enjoy the short lived high, start over. In turning to drugs, he no longer cared to think of others. Stealing, lying, and using people to get a high was his new way. The guilt that ate at him was quickly replaced by the grand feeling of being high. Realizing he screwed up, knowing he's back in the tight grip of addiction, Billy began to feel there was no longer a point in living. Who wants to be around somebody when they are high? Who wants to help a person who is so worthless and has no life worth living? These thoughts continued in his head over and over, further pushing him to use more often in order to silence them. At this point, Billy is damning himself, thinking "If I screw up or do something shitty, then I am myself a worthless screw up or shit." (Cohen) Although he has made decisions up to this point that have led him to a bad place in life, he is not a screw up, he is not a bad person. Bad decisions don't make bad people. Bad decisions make us human, and don't give us the right to damn ourselves. Although the levels may differ, we all make bad decisions. Often we are lucky enough that they don't completely place us at what we feel is rock bottom, but we are all capable of this.

In believing this fallacy, Billy is only furthering himself into the blackness. Descartes and Sartre would best provide the antidote to this thinking, "Stop treating yourself like mindless, inert garbage. You're a thinking, conscious, self-aware being capable of conceiving and fashioning your own, unique future. Act like it." The irrational emotions he is feeling at this point include depression, anxiety, and fear. The depression comes from thinking of himself as a worthless person not capable or deserving of a better future. Though his decisions have led to a bleak present, this does not mean his future must follow. He needs to decide for himself his life is worth it, he is worth it, and work towards something better. For him a better future would begin with getting himself back into rehab where he can first detox from his drug use. To get to this point, however, he needs to think to this point. In changing his thinking, Billy can change his actions. He needs to stop treating himself as if he's not worth a future in recovery, a future void of drugs. Going into recovery with these thoughts will only deepen his depression, further pushing him to self-destruction. Billy must begin to think of himself as merely human, allowing himself to make mistakes. Once he comes to terms that his mistakes can be fixed, he can continue to better his future and once again come out successful in treatment.

As we know Billy has relapsed from a previous 8 years of sobriety; he should also take from Hume and Ellis, "Instead of withdrawing from life for fear of failing, live and learn from your past mistakes." Billy is certainly afraid of failing, which is causing him anxiety. Fear of failure is something we are all familiar with, but it is more familiar when you have experienced it. Relapsing to Billy feels like failure since the point of recovery is to no longer succumb to drug

use. Aren't we all capable of failing temporarily? Does this mean our failure is permanent? Billy would need to change his thoughts and know that this failure is not permanent. He is still alive, and still capable of overcoming the choice that led to this "failure." It's temporarily where he is at in life. He should embrace the fact that he now knows where he took a wrong turn to keep from doing it again in the future. Without experiencing this relapse, he wouldn't have learned how to be stronger in recovery. His fears could easily be refuted with thoughts of knowing his experience has given him more knowledge. He is able to correct his mistakes, correct his actions, and correct his thoughts. In expressing Locke's view, "In the end, experience- living and learning- provides your basis for making practical decisions."

Relapse is not always inevitable, though unfortunately it often happens. In recovery we use therapy and psychology to treat our clients, to try to figure out why they went to drugs, what happened in life to make them more vulnerable to drugs or alcohol. This is helpful, however we should also have them look at the faulty thinking that allows them to only blame experience. Our thoughts have more power than we realize. Although there are more options than the examples used above, by acknowledging the irrational fallacies and refuting the faulty thinking, we can add another option to further assist those in recovery. Our mind is a powerful thing when we use it to our benefit.

Bibliography

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