



Mastering Recovery

Rooted in the Steps



Practicing the Principles

With Barry Lehman

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Where Recovery Become Real

Five years ago this week I began the *Mastering Recovery* newsletter. I wanted to share my experience, strength, and hope from over thirty years of recovery.



I also wanted to understand something myself.

Why does recovery continue growing for some people while others begin to feel stuck?

To understand and to deepen my recovery I have continued to study and live the Twelve Steps of AA.

I have become more and more convinced that there are a common set of principles for any healthy long-term recovery. In living these principles as a daily lifestyle, new life is constantly being built.

This new life provides a sense of direction and hope each and every day. One insight seems to stand above the others.

Recovery is not something we merely maintain- recovery is something we deepen.

Beyond Maintenance:

We do not graduate from recovery.

We continue growing into it- through *practice*.

The last words of the 12th Step, then, are the starting point of year six: "*practice the principles*".

As a result I've been thinking a lot about practice.

Not performance.

Not perfection.

Practice.

As a trumpet player I found great insight and wisdom in the methods and practices of mastery in music.

Something happens when you practice seriously even after many years.

You start noticing the difference between:

- playing what you already know,
- and actually practicing.

They are not the same thing.

Most of us naturally drift toward what feels comfortable:

the songs we already play reasonably well,
the exercises that make us feel competent,
the routines that reassure us.

Growth rarely happens in what we already do well or that make us feel good.

It happens where we are still learning and when we find new paths to take us to new places.

Anyone who has tried to grow deeply eventually learns this.

Recovery works much the same way.

Especially long-term recovery.

"...and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

Maybe that's not a reminder to behave well, try harder, or just be a better person.

What if the principles are not beliefs to agree with... but capacities that are developed through repeated practice?

What if honesty, willingness and hope are things we practice?

Not perfectly. Repeatedly.

Because practice assumes something important:

we are still growing.

We are:
Not finished.
Not graduated.
Not complete.
Still learning.

And maybe that is part of why recovery can sometimes become flat after many years.

We continue attending meetings.
We continue identifying as people in recovery.
But we only practice what we already know.

In music there's a difference between rehearsal and performance.
Rehearsals are where we tune and listen, reflect, and learn how to play together.

Recovery meetings work much like rehearsals.
They are places where we tune ourselves again, listen carefully, tell the truth, reconnect, and remember what matters.

But rehearsals are not the concert.

Life is.

Practicing the Principles:

The practice happens:

- in traffic,
- in holidays
- in disappointment,
- in marriage,
- in fear,
- in celebrations
- in grief,
- in boredom,
- in ordinary Tuesday afternoons.

That's where the principles slowly become real.

Not all at once.
Not dramatically.

But through repeated lived experience.
Over time, something begins to happen.
The practices slowly become capacities.
And the capacities slowly become character.



**Freedom is the opportunity to
create ourselves.**

— Rollo May

◆ A Closing Thought

This is part of what growth in long-term recovery really looks like.

Not moving beyond the principles.
But learning how to live them more deeply.
Through practice in all that we do.

That's what I want to explore in the months ahead.
Five years ago I stepped through a new doorway.

I thought I was beginning a newsletter.
Looking back, I realize I was beginning a journey.

Today I find myself standing at another doorway as Year Six begins.

Not a new recovery program.

Not a new set of techniques.

Not a different destination.

Simply a deeper commitment to practicing the principles that have guided
recovery from the beginning.

- Practice.
- Growth.
- One day at a time.



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Upcoming Conversations and Events

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