

A DRUG ADDICT MUST WANT TO CHANGE

We know from experience that old habits die hard. They die hard precisely because they are old. The more you repeat an action, the stronger the habit becomes. This is why we parents and educators work so hard to get our children into good habits. We know that it is only through repetition that habits take hold.

What you need to understand is that we also get into thinking patterns that are just as difficult to break. In fact, I believe that thought patterns are even more difficult to break than behavior patterns.

You can push a person into a routine that controls his actions, but, even if you succeed in doing so, there is no guarantee that his thinking is in line with what he is doing. In fact, he might even be cursing you in his head and under his breath even as he smiles and follows.

That is what is so hard about rehab work. Unlike medicine where x-rays, blood tests and the like will tell you what is happening in the body, in rehab there is no such thing that allows you to scan a man's thinking. It isn't pure science at work, but mostly an art. Sure, there are tests and some psychological tools you can use to measure what is going on in a guy's head, but that is very limited. You cannot give an injection and expect that suddenly the addict will start thinking straight.

Instead, there are long hours of hard work that are designed to chip away at those hardened thought and behavioral patterns. When we staffers see a little bit of progress, we rejoice because we know that rehab is a journey of a thousand steps. Any movement forward is cause for rejoicing. Any progress gives an adrenaline rush. Just as medical doctors get their rush when the patients get well, we get ours when the addict makes even a little progress to recover.

Even if he follows the routines very well and doesn't complain, that does not mean he is truly progressing. Addicts are great manipulators. They are good at faking behavior and telling you what you think you want to hear. Look at how they lied to their families and did so much foolishness when their loved ones were not looking.

Progress is marked by consistency in thought and behavior. If the resident is faking it, sooner or later he will slip back into his old ways. Then we know that the new way has not struck well enough to prevent him from sliding back.

Rehab is all about replacing the old with the new. It's about easing the resident into the new while pulling him away from the old. It isn't at all easy, but it's the only way he will have a fight chance to get well.