

7 KEYS TO FLOURISHING IN RECOVERY

by Leilani Faber, MS, LPC, CRAADC, CPPP

So you've quit using substances. Now what? Are you thinking, "Why do they call it 'recovery'? What am I recovering that I had before, and do I even want it back? How can I 'recover' what I never had?" You may even be thinking that this whole recovery thing sucks!

For the first time in a long time, or maybe EVER, you are dealing with life on life's terms. You no longer have your substance of choice to help you avoid life's pain and trauma. Face it, that's what we addicts do—avoid pain, discomfort, sadness, shame, anger—all of those emotions that don't feel "good." What's even worse is that your nervous system is still healing and your neurotransmitters continue to be in low supply. The normal things that everyone else enjoys (e.g., a good meal, going to the movies, bowling with the family, sex, fishing, etc.) leave you feeling rather underwhelmed.

I know that I felt that way during the early years of my own recovery. In June of 2004, I quit using methamphetamine after my boyfriend ended up in the burn unit and I went to jail for five months when our meth lab caught fire. I lost everything including custody of my daughter, my home, two businesses and my self-respect. Shame is a very powerful emotion that keeps many of us trapped in our addiction.

I continued to use alcohol for three more years because my life sucked and I couldn't stand to face what I had done to myself and my loved ones. I chose to stay numb and "checked out" so that I wouldn't have to deal with it. Meanwhile, I was having supervised visitation with my daughter, with my ex-husband supervising. I was homeless for several months living in cheap hotels and working cleaning rooms for cash in a Branson resort. I was fired from several jobs because the state was garnishing wages for back child support, I had several felonies pending, and I was drinking on the job which did not help with the quality of my work.

I won't go into any great detail here, but you can read about it in my book [Vision of Hope: Rebuilding a Life Destroyed by Drugs and Alcohol](#) 2nd Edition/Remastered by URLink Media in 2023. It's also available on Amazon and Barnes & Noble:

What I want to focus on right now is how I unconsciously, and then purposefully, developed these **7 Keys to Flourishing in Recovery**.

What does it mean to "flourish in recovery?" Have you ever thought about why 12-step programs encourage addicts to take it "one day at a time?" It's because the thought of staying sober for the rest of your life can be an overwhelming thought and a daunting task. I also believe that, for many people, just "staying sober" does not sound or feel like any great prize. We want more. So much more. And many return to substance use several months or even years into their sobriety because the life they have is lacking something. Here's the cold, hard truth. The only way to "flourish in recovery" is to CREATE A LIFE WORTH STAYING SOBER FOR!!!

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Here are the 7 keys that I developed and have personally used to achieve that very goal:

KEY #1: QUIT USING

Don't do like I did and substitute one drug for another. After I quit using other drugs in 2004, I told myself that alcohol is legal and I was of legal age to drink. I wasn't breaking any laws or hurting anybody. I should be able to drink, if that's what I wanted to do. That's rationalization at its finest! Are you rationalizing the continued use of some other drug like alcohol or marijuana?

You may need to ask yourself what purpose this legal or less harmful substance serves for you. If the answer is to relax, unwind, de-stress, have fun, or whatever, you need to know that there are lots of healthy ways to do all of these things. If you have already made this important first step, and are free of mind-altering chemicals, congratulations! That is no small feat and you should be very proud of yourself.

When I finally quit drinking in May of 2007, three years after I quit other drugs, things began to improve for me. I had to let go of my crutch, stand up and face the music. After all, who can really dance well on crutches? The truth is that I was there in body, but not in mind or spirit. Until you are 100% present, as a feeling, fully conscious human being, you cannot be an active and committed participant in your own life or the lives of those who love you.

KEY #2: CREATE MEANING

Creating meaning from your past helps you to create a new purpose for your life—ultimately changing shame and guilt into hope. In other words, you need to write your own redemptive narrative. For me, that was literally a book. For you, it may just be taking what you've been through; drawing conclusions and figuring out the life lessons; and then taking your message of courage, strength and hope out to those who are still suffering.

Some are able to find "purpose in the pain" so to speak. The first time I was able to speak to my boyfriend from my jail cell, he said to me, "We have to do something about this meth problem." He was still in the hospital and had just awoken from a medically-induced coma so that they could treat his burns. I was unsure about reconnecting with him again because I knew that I could not be with him if he planned to continue using drugs. It turned out that using drugs was not in his plans. We married a few months later, after I completed inpatient treatment and he was released from a nursing home. To this day, although we are no longer together, we continue to help addicts recover in our own ways. That is how we created meaning and found our higher purpose.

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KEY #3: ACCOMPLISH SOMETHING

Accomplishments build both self-efficacy and self-esteem. For me, I was blessed with being “let go” from my last job in a window and door factory so that I could finally wake up and make some difficult decisions. It didn’t feel like a blessing at the time, but if I hadn’t been fired, I may be making windows right now instead of helping thousands of people create lives worth staying sober for. I went back to college and obtained a second bachelor’s degree and a master’s degree which has prepared me for the work I do now.

That being said, accomplishing something or having achievements in your life can look like many different things. It could be that you’re the best widget maker in the widget factory. Or you could start your own home business. You could also approach every day at your job with the intention of giving more than you take from your employer. Walking out the door each day feeling like you got x, y and z done is an awesome feeling that improves your wellbeing and ends your day with a sense of accomplishment.

Even if you are a full-time mother or father who does not work outside the home, making a list of everything you do each day and crossing them off one by one can feel very rewarding. Nobody has a more important, more difficult job than you. Make sure you and your partner know just how much you do for your family!

KEY #4: GET HEALTHY

Emotional wellbeing is built on the foundation of physical and spiritual wellbeing. In recovery, we often focus on emotional wellbeing because it may be the first time in a long time that we are feeling our feelings. What we really want is to create vitality. Vitality encompasses body, mind and spirit. You can’t really have one without the others and scientists are discovering just how intertwined these are.

For me, learning to eat healthy again and removing junk food (i.e., sugar) from my diet were very important. I also quit eating meat and all other animal-based products, except for organic, pastured eggs. I have been known to brag about how many pills I can swallow at one time, then I have to clarify and say that they are all vitamins, probiotics and other supplements. Repopulating your intestines with good bacteria and balancing the vitamins, minerals and amino acids in your body is one of the most effective ways to combat depression, anxiety, weight gain, inflammatory diseases, and a host of other health problems.

Getting active, meditating, practicing gratitude, paying attention to “gut” or intuitive feelings, and being kind to others all lead to greater vitality and wellbeing. Do what you can and take baby steps, if necessary. Any movement toward vitality is a step in the right direction.

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KEY #5: PRACTICE POSITIVITY

Positivity is a way of being that goes beyond “thinking positive thoughts.” It’s about practicing behaviors and thinking styles that lead to more positive emotions and positive outcomes in your life. It’s about understanding your mindset and the schemas that color everything you see, say and do. It’s about your explanatory style, your perceptions, and your attributional style.

Are you someone who believes that everything always works out in your best interest? Or are you someone who is constantly waiting and expecting the rug to be pulled out from under you? Are you someone who will pull over on the side of the road to admire a beautiful rainbow or field of wild flowers? Or are you someone who is constantly in your head, rushing from here to there, and missing hundreds of special moments each day? Are you someone who allows those around you to just be, without judgment or unsolicited advice? Or are you the one who has an opinion about everybody else, what they’re doing wrong and how they can fix it?

I love the saying, “What you appreciate, appreciates.” Another way of saying that is that what you focus on, you get more of, in spades! Whatever you want more of in this world, you have to put out there, be, say, see, represent, cultivate, etc., etc., etc. Another saying I love is that you have to “fake it ‘til you make it.” So even if you are not feeling particularly cheerful, try smiling, or better yet, laughing. Even forced smiles and laughter will release the same neurotransmitters as the real thing. And before you know it, you actually ARE happy.

KEY #6: FIND YOUR FLOW

This is my favorite key, but the most difficult one to explain and to understand, especially if you’ve never experienced it. The best way for me to explain it is in terms of time. Have you ever been doing something that you are so in to and hyper-focused on that time just flew? You looked at your watch startled to realize that four, six or eight hours had gone by? (It is usually at this point that I have to tell the audience that “tweaking” activities do not count.) This is known as “flow,” “engagement,” or for athletes, being “in the zone.”

For me, writing this article created flow. This phenomenon is usually, but not always, a creative process. I especially enjoy creating documents with borders, pictures and other graphics. When I’m standing in front of a large group of people, teaching the concepts that I am passionate about, I am in flow and my body literally tingles with the energy and excitement of it.

I have had clients tell me that they experience flow playing an instrument, writing music, riding dirt bikes, painting, fly fishing, rock climbing, surfing, programming computers, and many other activities. Can you think of something that you do that creates flow? Don’t worry about it if you can’t think of anything right now. Just keep looking. When you find it, you’ll know.

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KEY #7: RENEW RELATIONSHIPS

Nurturing healthy relationships can improve life satisfaction and increase your lifespan by 10-15 years. In the case of relationships, more is not necessarily better. You need “high quality connections” in order to thrive. So, just because you have over 1,000 friends on Facebook, it does not mean that you are set in this department.

The way to get more nurturing relationships is through improving your communication style, transforming negativity, setting and honoring boundaries, using humor and laughter, practicing altruism and kindness, practicing non-judgment and forgiveness...for others, as well as yourself.

Asking for forgiveness (making amends) will be an important part of your recovery. It is a necessary first step in repairing the broken relationships that your substance use may have caused. Just remember that not everyone is going to forgive you, and that’s alright. Do not let that stop you from asking.

Next Steps:

I hope that you have enjoyed this article about flourishing in recovery and that it has helped you to see what is possible for your life. I am currently working on my next book, **“Positive Recovery through Hope, Health and Happiness.”** This book will explain all of these concepts in much greater detail, including the research behind it. It will also include several resources, worksheets and assessment tools to help readers understand themselves better and access existing tools to help them create a life worth staying sober for. [Get on my author’s mailing list to receive notification of publication and much more!](#) (Click Here→) [Vision of Hope, LLC](#)

Meanwhile, I work with individuals, one-on-one, using the concepts of what I call “Positive Recovery” to help them to:

- 1) get crystal clear about their vision for a flourishing recovery;
- 2) uncover any hidden challenges that may be holding them back or sabotaging their sobriety;
- 3) implement the Positive Recovery concepts and tools;
- 4) optimize their environments (home, work, school, social, etc.); and,
- 5) master their psychology around addiction, recovery and living a flourishing life!

If you are interested in a **free positive recovery coaching session**, please go to my website and book your first session by clicking “Book Now” at the top of the page. You can also email me directly at the email address listed on page 6. Bless you and may you live a healthy, happy and prosperous life!

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Leilani Faber is a recovering addict who has been serving those with mental health diagnoses, including substance use disorders, since 2011. She began her career by working with clients who were incarcerated or court-ordered to attend various types and levels of treatment. Her

journey of recovery included involvement with the criminal justice system, so she has a passion and special empathy for this population.

Her company, Vision of Hope, LLC, was established in 2015 to provide services to clients who need assistance with creating “a life worth staying sober for.” She named it for her N.A. home group and the book she was working on at the time and later published—[Vision of Hope: Rebuilding a Life Destroyed by Drugs and Alcohol](#).

Leilani has created trainings, classes and entire programs that provide services to specific niches. She is a writer, speaker, recovery coach and trainer. Her unique philosophy to treatment is called “Positive Recovery” and it incorporates the theories of positive psychology, cognitive behavioral therapy, and client-centered therapy.

She recently moved to Washington so that she could be near her family and have time to pursue her dream of reaching a world-wide audience. Her current clients are seriously and persistently mentally ill people in crisis, many of whom also have substance use disorders.

Leilani is a Licensed Professional Counselor, Certified Reciprocal Advanced Alcohol Drug Counselor, Medication Assisted Recovery Specialist, Certified Mental Health Investigator, and a Certified Positive Psychology Practitioner.

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