

# Together AZ

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Inspiring Success on the Road to Recovery

## A Recipe for Sobriety

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Having worked in the field of addiction treatment and behavioral health as a therapist and Director for 30 years, it has been my experience that everyone who follows the suggestions in the AA Big Book gets better, *everyone*. They are suggestions, similar to when I went skydiving. I jumped out of a plane at 10,500 feet and after one minute of freefall, the instructors, tugging on my side, “suggested” that I pull the ripcord. We all have choices.

A metaphor I like to use is the Tollhouse Cookie Recipe. Back in the ‘30s Ruth Wakefield, living in a Cape Cod style house on the outskirts of Whitman, MA. in the “Tollhouse Inn,” (the original house built in 1709 charged passengers tolls for changing horses, meals, etc.) decided to add bits of chocolate to a cookie dough from an old Colonial Day recipe for Butter Drop Do cookies. She thought the chocolate would just melt out of the cookie, but it didn’t — and they turned out delicious. In 1939 the Nestles Tollhouse cookie recipe was published and printed on all the bags of chocolate chips. Today, 76 years later, if we buy the ingredients listed on the bag of chocolate chips, and follow the directions exactly as they are written, we get great cookies every time.

That’s why I say there is a 100% recovery rate for people who follow the directions.

In the same year, 1939, the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* first edition was published. The AA Big Book says, “Clear cut directions are given showing how we recovered.” Page 29. It is simple. It is straightforward and “it works, it really does.”

This article is about how to get and stay clean and sober the rest of your life, one day at a time. Relapse does not have to be part of recovery. The problem arises when we hear, “But you don’t understand, my case is different.” If one believes this, the “recipe” doesn’t apply or work to them.

I always say to those who feel they’re different, “surely in the millions of people in long-term successful recovery in the world (23 million people in the U.S. alone in “long term successful recovery”) – (*Anonymous People* movie) there are people who have gone through nearly exact circumstances as yourself, applied the program of recovery outlined in the Big Book to their lives, received any outside help needed, and had the promises come true for them (each and every promise..pg.83).

I also remind folks of the Herbert Spencer quote in the Spiritual Experience Appendix of the AA Big Book: “There is a principle which is a bar against information, proof against all arguments, and cannot fail to keep a man in everlasting ignorance; that principle is contempt prior to investigation.”

In nearly every AA meeting in the world we read, “Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path. Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program.”



In addition to the Big Book of AA, there are many tools and skills required, (*trauma work, family of origin work, psychiatric services*) if practiced and utilized can guarantee great results in sobriety. The following is my interpretation of the “Recipe for Sobriety.”

### Total Abstinence

Most people who think they’re chronic relapsers are not. They simply have not given up their right to a chemical peace of mind. The first step means, I can’t have anymore — ever, one day at a time. And, no switching to another addictive drug. I get a sobriety or clean date, meaning I’m clean and sober. The good news is one only has to do this a day at a time. This is AA’s most well-known slogan for a reason. I always say, “Just don’t drink or use before you go to sleep.” If you do that, you’ll die clean and sober at the end of a long run of sobriety.

The trick is, it appears difficult to stay clean and sober one day at a time, if one hasn’t given up their “right” to do a “little sumpin’ sumpin’ “ for life. The AA Big Book states, “We have seen the truth demonstrated again and again: “*Once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic. Commencing to drink after a period of sobriety, we are in a short time as bad as ever. If we are planning to stop drinking, there must be no reservation of any kind, nor any lurking notion that someday we will be immune to alcohol.*” (p.33)

The most important ingredient in this recipe is to give up your right to drink and drug— for life....and then, immediately snap back in to just doing it One Day at a Time.

Don’t worry about the whole day, focus on this hour or minute, don’t drink or drug right now. If you not drink or drug right now, you’ll stay sober the rest of your life, as it is always now.

There is a sign behind some bars that reads, “Free Drinks Tomorrow!” That’s the idea, give up your right to do it today — just for today. This is doable, isn’t it?

The common denominator that makes all alcoholics and addicts the same — is they think they’re unique. It’s the voice in your head saying your case is different — this kind of thinking can lead to disaster.

Here’s how it is explained in the AA Big Book, “*Most of us have been unwilling to admit that we were real alcoholics. No person likes to think he is bodily and mentally different from his fellows. Therefore, it is not surprising that our drinking careers are characterized by countless vain attempts to prove we could drink like other people. The idea that somehow, someday, he will control and enjoy his drinking is the great obsession of every abnormal drinker. The persistence of this illusion is astonishing. Many pursue it into the gates of insanity or death. We learned that we had to fully concede to our innermost selves that we were alcoholics. This is the first step in recovery. The delusion that we are like other people, or presently may be, has to be smashed.*” (p.30)

### The Switches

Switching from one thing to another. Many people get into trouble in early recovery because they reserve  
Recipe continued page 8



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### Recipe from page 1

the right to take something, other than their drug of choice, to deal with whatever is going on in their lives. There are hundreds of switches that have been tried: whiskey to beer, beer to wine, alcohol to marijuana, oxycontin to percocet, percocet to heroin, shooting cocaine to smoking it, smoking heroin to snorting it, pot to ambien, whiskey to soma, methamphetamine to Ritalin, Ritalin to Adderall, and Lunesta to marijuana. (*A need to medicate feelings can manifest in process addictions as well*).

There is a pamphlet: *AA Members, Medications and Other Drugs*. It is highly recommended to read. In the summary it states, "No AA member plays doctor," and "consult a physician with demonstrated experience in the treatment of alcoholism." Consult an addiction medicine MD ([www.abam.net](http://www.abam.net)) American Board of Addiction Medicine Board Certified to treat addiction, and who is committed to the total abstinence model about what medications are safe to take. Some medications are life-saving; others will change your sobriety date. As far as products containing alcohol (C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>5</sub>OH), I say 0.000% is how much I can have in my body. There are many products that contain alcohol. One also simultaneously recognizes that we don't have the "power" to stay away from alcohol/other drugs on our own.....we are "powerless" against the first drink/drug alone. That power must come from a "Higher Power" (God).

### Find the Right Meeting

There are numerous 12 step groups (AA, PA, NA, CA, HA, etc.). When people tell me they didn't like a meeting they tried I believe them. There are meetings that aren't right for everyone. It is imperative to search them out until one feels right. We should feel a sense of hope, and experienced a solution to our problem. Keep attending until one fits. It is important, eventually to attend meetings where you will find identification.

The reason Dr. Bob listened to Bill W. on Mother's

Day in 1935 is he believed, sitting across from him, was a man who completely and totally understood what he had been through, and he identified with the details of his story. If an 18 year old heroin addict, who has never had a problem with alcohol, goes to an AA meeting in Sun City, they will most likely not come back. Identification is huge, and why there are so many 12 step meetings, for identification.

I say, "Find your chair, the place where you feel I belong here, I am not a visitor." If you feel like you are watching a fish tank, you may not be in the right room. Or, you might not be ready for sobriety yet. Once you find the right meeting, find the good ones. Ask around, have a meeting list with you when you attend a recommended meeting. Listen for someone who makes real sense to you and after go over to that person and ask them to point out in your meeting list what their favorite meetings are. They've already done the research for you!

### The Sponsor and Sponsee

The first person that comes along may not be the best fit for you. Look for someone happy, and of the same gender. This is a program of attraction, not promotion. People who sell themselves may not be the right choice. You get to choose, so trust your gut. The AA pamphlet, *Questions and Answers on Sponsorship* is helpful. The literature carries the cumulative wisdom and experience of many years and people. Heed the suggestions in the literature. Remember, you're not married to sponsors, if it doesn't work out, keep searching. After all, your life is at stake, it is very important to have a guide you can learn from. "He, who sponsors himself, is sponsored by a fool."

It is never a burden to ask for help, we help each other stay clean and sober. "You have to give it away to keep it." A sponsor's main task is to guide you through taking the 12 steps. When we are new to recovery, it is helpful to have a weekly, face to face appointment with

your sponsor to talk about what is going on in your life. It keeps you on the path. No matter how far down the road of recovery we go, we are the same distance from the ditch! In the beginning, we need to pay attention to the bumps on the road to alert us when we are getting close to ditching. A sponsor can do that for us. We often can't see when we are off track, so this standing appointment can make the difference between making it or not. Working with others helps the sponsor as well. In fact, this is really where the magic of recovery transpires, one person, talking to another person, one on one.

### Take the 12 Steps

The "program" is the steps. "Here are the steps we took which are suggested as a program of recovery." Remember, ripcord, right? Suggested? Simple. A sponsor's purpose is to guide you through the 12 steps according to the literature. All of the steps lead to 12 — carry the message. In the middle of the 9th step is when the promises begin to happen. The steps are the directions. People who have relapsed may believe are failures — often are not if they look deeper. They may have unresolved trauma that was never dealt with or was overlooked in the step work. Working at The Meadows has allowed me to see the real necessity and benefit of doing family of origin work, which if not looked at, can prevent someone from taking the steps thoroughly. Perhaps there are still secrets after a 5th step; or amends were not made to everyone harmed by the behavior.

### Join a Homegroup

This is your home. Be picky, shop around. You'll know your homegroup when you find it. Get involved. Ask when the next business meeting is and attend, offer to help setting up for a meeting, or volunteer to make coffee. Until you join a homegroup, attend the business meetings of that group. When you participate in all the group conscience processes and decisions, you'll gain a better understanding of the service structure in 12 step groups. Make a commitment to the group and keep it. Many people worldwide when identifying themselves in their program will state their name, homegroup, sponsor's name and service commitment.

### Daily Prayer and Meditation

"What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition", it doesn't have to be complicated. On my knees I say, "God please keep me clean and sober today." I say the 3rd and 7th step prayer and the Serenity Prayer. I read several daily devotional or meditation books, seeking God. "God could and would if he were sought." At night I thank my Higher Power on my knees for all the blessings and my sobriety. I pray for others. This is how I "plug in" to the power. Remember, "Lack of power, that was our dilemma."

I like to use the metaphor of the orange extension cord. Like the one hanging in your garage, it has no power. To make it useful, we have to plug it in to a source of power. Then it has potential, but not purpose. To make it useful and purposeful, we have to plug something else in to it. Only then do we have something going on. The juice is transferring energy (the source) to something that needs it (us). The cord is the instrument used to transmit the power, it is not the source. If you have many things (people) plugged in to you (the cord), if we get unplugged for a while the juice will still flow.

That's why some oldtimers fight over newcomers; they know they need someone plugged in to them to survive themselves. While most of us don't understand electricity; we need it, so use it and benefit from it. In the 3rd step where it reads, "God as we understood him," don't let that stump you, nobody "understands God" ... it means "experienced God."

The 11th step suggests, "*Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood him, praying only for knowledge of his will for us and the power to carry that out.*" The AA Big Book states "what we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition." We must

remember, it is not a time release medicine, we go to sleep and the reset button is hit. We wake up sober to start again — literally a day at a time. What I did yesterday has nothing to do with treating my disease today. It's like Groundhog Day.

### Get a Service Commitment

There are numerous ways to do this, clean up, set up, make coffee, and volunteer for various group offices. Have your sponsor help you find something. Getting a formal service commitment approved by one's sponsor is imperative.

### Connection

The telephone, we all have one. Talk with several other recovering people each day. Call and check in on them, call your sponsor and tell the truth about how you are. This helps us stay connected. Our disease is a disease of isolation. If you isolate, don't be surprised if you slide into "restless, irritable and discontentment. Get connected — stay connected.

### Stick with the Winners

I think we are a lot like chameleons. Whomever we hang around, we start to become just like they are. I think we are spiritually permeable. Pick your company wisely. Find the people who are happy and have what you want, then stick to them like glue. Ask them what meetings they attend, do they hang out together after and if you can join them. You have no obligation to give attention or spend time with negative people.

### Read the Literature

The literature is where the answers are, not in someone's opinion. There are many books and pamphlets to read. Start with ones you haven't read.

### Help Others

This is the essence of how AA got started. Bill W. knew that unless he found another alcoholic to try and help, he would be doomed. And, by the way, recalling that day in The Mayflower Hotel in Akron, Bill called eight churches from a pay phone trying to find someone who could connect him to another alcoholic to try to help. Had he stopped after one or two calls, history would be different.

You can start this way, the next time you're at a meeting, look for someone who looks worse than you feel that day, approach them, get them a cup of coffee without asking. Just say hello, ask them about themselves and listen as if you were interested. You don't have to remember anything they say except their name, remember their name. The next time you see them, be welcoming, call them by name. You'll be amazed how this simple exercise (*getting out or yourself*) can positively affect lives. Be a vendor of hope.

### Have Fun, Enjoy this Life!

Page 132 in the AA Big Book says in the middle of the page, "*We absolutely insist on enjoying life.*"

The people I hang around live this way. Remember, who you keep company with you become just like them. Stay away from the sad asses. I work with people who have had major traumas all day long, yet in my recovery and my life outside of work, I choose to be around people who are having fun.

If you are young, there are many young people in recovery. Connect at The Pigeon Coop, attend ASCYPAA events, and get involved. Play sober softball. [www.azssl.org](http://www.azssl.org). Ask around in your homegroup or meeting, what do people do for fun. When I was new, in my 20's, attending a Friday night meeting in Columbia, MD., I asked that question and a few people said, "some of us are going over to the mall food court, would you like to come?" I thought, "OMG, is this what my life has come to, a food court mall on a Friday night?" It sounded so depressing. I went along anyway. They were laughing, having fun, enjoying each other's company, and shared with me about all kinds of activities they did. Over time, I joined in. I've been whitewater rafting, skydiving, hot air ballooning, many travels and adventures; none of which I would have experienced had I been chained to a barstool.

Stay with us on this journey, and your life unfold in ways in you may never have imagined. A day at a time.

Feel free to call me on my cell anytime: Jim C. 602-740-8403.



*Jim Corrington, JR., MSW, LCSW, Director of Outpatient Services*

Jim's personal recovery from addiction and trauma began 30 years ago, and he brings strong passion to the process. He is very active in his personal 12-step program. Jim earned his Master's Degree in Social Work at The University of Maryland. He has been in the recovery field as a Director/Therapist for outpatient programs for 28 years during which time thousands of patients and families have been treated in his IOP programs. He has also spent 15 years working with the Arizona Medical

Board and Arizona Board of Pharmacy monitoring programs running weekly Relapse Prevention groups for impaired professionals. In addition, as a former athlete, Jim also has extensive experience working with impaired professional athletes. Jim believes recovery and miracles happen every single day.

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