

Questions and Answers with William Cope Moyers on *What Now?*

Q.- One of the major themes of your book is dispelling the myths surrounding addiction, the portrait of an addict, what treatment offers, and what recovery means. What would you say is the most prevalent misconception families need to tackle in order to support a loved one's recovery?

A. - One of the biggest is the whole notion of hitting bottom. That an addict has to hit bottom before they can be saved...I stoutly disagree. The only bottom to this illness is death. So families shouldn't wait until the end, because that's too late. It's never too early to start moving the addict from the problem to the solution. Another myth is that treatment is the cure. There is no cure to this illness. What I hope this book expresses is that recovery is a lifelong pursuit. Another key point in the book is that whether or not the addict recovers, the family must recover. Addiction is a family disease and requires the whole family to recover as well.

Q.- At several points in the book you discuss the importance of families allowing the consequences of addiction to proceed, while keeping the door open for hope and healing when the addict is ready. What do you tell family members who have a hard time accepting that idea?

A. It's a fine line to walk for anybody who's been swayed by this illness, but especially the family members. What I try to emphasize in the book and in my daily work is the positive and proactive role they play in helping someone they love get better, even when they continue to set boundaries, say no, and take care of themselves. It's very difficult to hate this illness and still love the person who has it. And yet, it is OK to hate this illness. But remember that the person you love is hurting and needs help. So I tell families to set strong boundaries, but never close the door.

Q. - In discussing treatment, you acknowledge that treatment is just one of many paths to recovery. What do you see as the common denominator for successful recovery, regardless of the path to get there?

A. - Great question. The common thread for successful recovery is recognition...awareness on the part of the addict that they're powerless, that they can't get on top of their own free will, but they have an illness and there is hope, and there are options. It doesn't matter whether it's treatment, or Twelve Step meetings, or church. I say in the book that addiction is a group illness and the answer is community.

Q. - The power of peer recovery and shared experience is beautifully illustrated by the story of your friend Mel, a World War II veteran and AA "old-timer" who passed away recently. How important is that phenomenon of shared learning between people of different ages or backgrounds to the continued resilience of 12-Step recovery?

A. - We know there's strength in numbers. And the strength comes from the unified experience of the people who've gone through it, whether they're people like Mel or people who have just gone through it for today. That community inspires people to stay the course, trust the process, and never give up. If Mel can do it, or William, or Jane, or Denise can do it, than anyone can make it. The book is really about hope, at the end of the day. That's why the book is called *Now What?* Because people stand at the crossroads every day wondering what to do next, and unless they're shown the way by those who have gone before them, they're lost.

Q. - Your chapter on relapse attempts to unravel a complicated and scary subject for those in early recovery and their families. If you could give one piece of advice to someone coming out of treatment for the first time, what would it be?

A. - It would be that treatment is the beginning of the journey. It's not the end. And often along that journey it's easy to step in the mess again. I'm not saying that relapse is inevitable, but it is common. I would say most people I know in recovery have relapsed at least once. Sometimes it's after several months or years, and sometimes it's after a single day, but that relapse is often a teachable moment. And that moment gives us one more tool to hold onto our sobriety longer next time. Relapse is not failure; it's just a step back.

Q. - You begin the book by discussing a heartfelt letter you received from a mother dealing with a son's addiction, one of many you've received over the years. What advice do you have for those in recovery, or their family members, who receive a similar plea for help?

A. - Take it seriously...not just in terms of what the person needs, but as an opportunity to help somebody. One of the most important dynamics of recovery is helping others. It's what keeps us grounded and keeps us going in our program. And what I've learned in my recovery and my professional work is that everyone deserves help.