Resilience, Entry #1 of 3

It’s never too late to start over, reconnect with the fellowship, work steps, have a spiritual awakening, and find a new way to live. (*Living Clean*, preface).

For many of us in active addiction, starting over from scratch was practically a lifestyle choice. Things got tough, we owed back rent, our relationships or jobs got in the way of our drug use—and we were gone! We got a new place, a new job, someone new to put up with our crap. Some of us carried that behavior into Narcotics Anonymous. Instead of staying clean through snags in early recovery, we’d press the red button and clear the board. Day One again. We change road dogs, sponsors, and home groups. That’s how we know to be resilient.

When we get some time in NA, starting over might look very different. Many of us will hit major low points in our lives, but when we stay close to NA, we can immediately turn to Step One when our life becomes unmanageable—not Day One.

Others of us may accumulate years of cleantime and are so busy being functional that we don’t realize how isolated we are from NA. We haven’t relapsed, but our recovery has all but flatlined. “I woke up today and realized that it was my 25th cleantime anniversary, and I don’t even remember the last time I marked the occasion,” a member shared. “I came today because I didn’t even know I was miserable. I thought, ‘Maybe I should use so that I could come back to meetings.’ Though I’m embarrassed about how long it’s been, I’m grateful my next thought was, ‘Just go to a meeting and start over.’”

How do we come back when we haven’t really left? Instead of pulling the plug on our program, we can jumpstart it. We may feel some shame at taking NA for granted, but we are back—and can keep coming back.

It doesn’t matter when we start over or why; it only matters that we do.

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*How close am I to the Fellowship today? I will remember that I can push the recovery reset button anytime but don’t have to throw a grenade in order to start fresh.*
**Resilience, Entry #2 of 3**

As we progress, we learn that we can always begin a new journey in recovery, and we can start over whenever we need to. We don’t need to blow up our lives to get a fresh start (*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “Spirituality in Action”).

Life on life’s terms comes with some inevitable setbacks. Recovery gives us choices about how we deal with those occasional stumbling blocks or misfortunes. Do we summon our inner drama queen, back ourselves into a corner, and turn a minor set back into a full-blown catastrophe? Sometimes, yes. And, sadly, relapse can be part of that story.

Fortunately for us, recovery makes us more resilient. We learn we can reset our attitude instead of resetting our cleantime. We’re reminded that change is the only constant. Life’s challenges don’t end when we get clean. Rather, we learn to respond to change and challenges in a different way, summarized by one member: “Get knocked down three times? Get up four.”

Early on, it may have taken a toxic relationship or some regrettable financial mismanagement for us to reach for the reset button. Our tolerance for emotional pain or spiritual disconnection lessens over time, however. Our setbacks are less dramatic because we’re quicker to get into the solution. We accept new realities more readily. Instead of resisting the storms of life, we learn to bend with the wind.

The Twelve Steps offer us a spiritual path through life. It holds the same rough terrain, but we become more sure-footed. We navigate the obstacles and have the courage to explore uncharted territory. With the support of our fellow members and our Higher Power, we may stumble, but it gets easier to get back up. With the hope that our best days are ahead and the courage to make that so, we dust ourselves off and continue on our journey.

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*I will recognize the sources of my resilience today and be grateful for all that contributes to my ability to put one foot in front of the other.*
Resilience, Entry #3 of 3

Our hope is renewed throughout our recovery. Each time something new is revealed to us about our disease, the pain of that realization is accompanied by a surge of hope (NA Step Working Guides, Step 2, “Hope”).

Hope and resilience so often seem to be interconnected.

In active addiction, our resilience was largely based on our dishonesty. Many of us bounced back from difficulties thanks to our capacity for manipulation, shadiness, and flat-out denial. Hope kept us going, too—even if our only hope was to not get caught. When our kid, a coworker, or current friend-with-benefits confronted us with the truth, trying to make us see how we hurt or disappointed them, we could not and would not deal with that. Same with law enforcement: “I swear, officer, that’s not mine—these aren’t even my pants.” Anything that poked a hole in the story we told ourselves was to be soundly rejected. Or else, it was the beginning of the end...which clearly it was because here we are reading an entry from an NA book of spiritual principles.

Our resilience lands us—and then keeps us—in NA. When our powerlessness and unmanageability are revealed to us in Step One, we stay, despite the desire to escape. Through meetings, our first service commitment, relationships with other recovering addicts, and a Higher Power, we find hope that we can stay clean.

Instead of avoiding the truth, our solution is now to uncover it. The process of working the Twelve Steps thoroughly—whether it’s the very first time we are diving in or the hundredth—involves actively and methodically confronting our disease, our ego, our flaws, our fears, and our mistakes. As a result, we often experience considerable pain, regret, and shame. But hope is here, too, amongst those revelations—hope for serenity, for courage, and for wisdom. We may not experience a “surge” of hope, as in the quote above, but a spark will do just fine to keep us bouncing back and moving forward.

When I acknowledge or reveal something about myself that causes me pain, I will make every effort to acknowledge the hope that follows as well. I can get through this. I know I can.