

Recovery *Companion*

A Handbook for overcoming significant challenges



This short guide is titled "*companion*" because everyone dealing with significant challenges needs a friend. It is a summary of observations and feelings based on my experience in dealing with my own challenges. It is unlikely that any of this material is original, but it consists of concepts that I have found helpful and I can vouch for their effectiveness. I apologize in advance for not providing detailed footnotes and properly crediting each source, but a partial Reading List is included in *Appendix 1* which most likely covers the source where I encountered these concepts. I wish you peace and success on your own journey of recovery.

James McCullough

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1. Attitude is everything

Very few of us are trained in advance to deal with life altering changes. But we are all far better equipped to handle them than we realize. It's just that we don't know it because we've never had reason to draw upon our inherent inner strength. Before rushing to embrace the notion that we've suffered a "catastrophe", "disaster", or "calamity" and possibly conceding defeat, the first thing we should do is tell ourselves that we have what it takes to meet the challenge – *even if we don't fully understand the extent of the challenge yet*. We all have hidden reserves of great power that will emerge when required. First and foremost, believe in yourself! It is not a matter of arrogance, but simply quiet confidence in your ability to prevail.

A positive attitude minimizes suffering. *Knowing* that you will overcome a challenge provides hope. And hope is the antidote for suffering. It breaks the downward spiral of self-pity. To suffer or not to suffer is a choice and entirely up to you. You can decide not to suffer by adopting a positive attitude. It is really just as simple as that.

A positive attitude alone can make the difference between success and failure. This is not to say that we should fool ourselves by downplaying or underestimating the challenge. Acknowledge that it won't be easy, but also tell yourself that you can do whatever it takes. Feel it in your bones. Believe with all your heart that this is a temporary setback and then visualize yourself successfully overcoming it. This is not merely "wishful thinking". Visualizing a successful outcome establishes your goal and lays the necessary groundwork for victory. Whatever you believe will become a self-fulfilling prophesy, so believe you will succeed. With this firmly in mind, unseen forces will be marshalled to come to your aid. With your active participation, the Universe is ready, willing and able to fulfill the result for which you have laid the foundation.

2. *"A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step"*

This well-known line from the *Tao Te Ching* speaks to the importance of taking action. It can be daunting to consider how far you have to go, but the more time you waste contemplating the challenge, the longer it will take you to overcome it – if ever!

By all means, take a moment to adopt a positive attitude and size up the task at hand, but then begin. Whether you take it one step at a time or one day at a time, keep moving forward. Even if it is only baby steps, you are accomplishing something and accomplishment feels good. Every step you take today is one less step you will have to take in the future.

Once you have started, it is important to keep moving. Recovery is about progress, be it large or small. So keep plugging away. Eventually your thousand mile journey will be behind you.

In keeping with the single step metaphor, don't get frustrated if you don't suddenly cover ten steps all at once in one giant leap. That may happen, but don't count on it. Be patient and keep it simple. *Slow and steady wins the race*. Or if you prefer, think of it in terms of baseball. A home run or grand slam may be exciting and dramatic, but teams win more consistently by hitting a steady succession of singles.

Patience, combined with determination and consistency, is the best approach. Take that first step, and then another, and then another, and then another...

3. Look within and be thankful

Do you see the glass as half empty or half full? The list of things potentially missing from your life is endless. As long as they are perceived as "missing" they all carry the potential for negativity and frustration. Do not depend on external things, people or opinions to determine your sense of well-being or worth. They are all irrelevant and, quite frankly, *none of your business* (to paraphrase the title of a well-known recent self-help book). Look in the mirror. If you like the person looking back at you, that is all that matters. If you don't, then do something about it. **Be** the person you want to be!

Bemoaning what's missing is a trap. Avoid it. Count your blessings and be thankful for the glass being half full. Make the most of what you've got and don't waste a single second worrying about what isn't there. As Hubert Humphrey said, *it is not what they take away from you that counts. It's what you do with what you have left.*

What about the help you now so desperately need? Where will it come from? Some will most likely come from elsewhere, but don't insist on it. You have everything you need within. If help does arrive from an external source, be grateful for it and redouble your efforts to draw upon your own inner strength, but don't expect it to continue. If it does, be grateful all over again and stick to the business of recovering.

Feeling gratitude is an important aspect of a positive attitude and having an *attitude of gratitude* is vitally important to a successful recovery. The opposite of feeling grateful is feeling entitled. When we feel entitled and we don't get what we think we are owed, we feel that we've been cheated. This leads to frustration, resentment and anger. Again, these emotions are illusions wholly manufactured within our minds. Be thankful for whatever good things happen to come your way, but don't assume they're your birthright. And don't rely on external institutions, agencies or people to look after you. Each of us is responsible for our own happiness, success and inner peace.

Maintain a positive attitude of gratitude and rely on your inner strength. Take that first step and keep moving toward your goal. Any external help you get along the way is a bonus!

4. Don't be attached to any particular outcome

Visualize your ultimate success and work hard to achieve it, but let whatever happens happen without any preconceived notion of what the results *must* be. You may surpass your goal or you may fall short, but that is irrelevant. What is important is that you give it your best shot and make progress. If your destiny is "only" a partial recovery, so be it. Be thankful for any improvement you've made and while you're at it, be thankful that you're alive.

Even the smallest of improvements means you are better off today than you were yesterday. So be grateful for any and all improvements without worrying about your ultimate goal. Clinging to a preconceived notion that is different than what you have achieved will only be a source of frustration. Let it go and feel good that you are making headway.

After you have visualized your success and started heading towards it, also let go of all notions of *how* it is supposed to happen. It is likely that your vision will be accomplished in ways you could not have dreamt beforehand. Be open to any and all avenues for therapy or recovery, no matter how conventional or unconventional. You never know where the next helpful or beneficial thing will come from.

If you happen to wind up in a different place than you envisioned, let it go and be thankful.

5. Give up control

Closely related to the concept of non-attachment to particular outcomes and the way in which they are achieved is that of abandoning the belief that we are in control of what happens. All we can really control is our own reactions to whatever happens externally.

The ego is a wily imposter that perpetuates the illusion that we have control of external things. Let them take care of themselves and work on internal matters. Don't beat yourself up over being in your present predicament. If you contributed to it, you likely didn't know any better. Grant yourself the gift of forgiveness and move on to better things. *Live and learn*, as the saying goes.

Live and let live is another wise saying. What a relief it is to only have to worry about our own reactions! By tempering them, we remain focused on recovery and ultimately control whether we are happy or unhappy.

The outside world is what it is. Our inside world is whatever we choose to make it. Whether it's a good day or a bad day is entirely subjective. So do yourself a favour and make it a good day!

6. Watch your inner monologue

We all maintain an inner monologue. It is as though we have an internal narrator providing unending colour commentary on everything that happens or *could* happen in our lives. This narrator should be closely monitored and censored whenever it is not making a positive contribution.

What is this endless chatter in our minds saying? Is it lifting us up or dragging us down? The first step is to notice it. The next step is to alter it. Ultimately, the goal is to minimize it. At advanced levels of consciousness, it is eliminated altogether. Until that can be achieved, make every effort to keep it positive.

In order to achieve positive results, it is very important not to be immersed in negative thoughts. As noted previously, they will become a self-fulfilling prophesy. Notice them coming from your narrator and put a stop to them instantly!

This is surprisingly easy to do. It turns out that the negative narration occurs only as long as it is not the centre of attention. As soon as it gets noticed, it clams up. Then, while it is waiting to see what will happen next, change the channel with one flip of the switch to one with a more positive commentary.

This is far more important than commonly realized. We all have conscious minds that we are aware of, and unconscious minds that we aren't. Although we tend to think that the conscious mind is all there is (because that's all we are familiar with), in fact consciousness only accounts for 10% of the total activity of the brain.

Notwithstanding all the logic, reasoning and decision making our conscious minds do, their most critical function is to be the gatekeeper for what is allowed into our unconsciousness, which comprises 90% of our mental activity. Keeping this input positive is critical to eventually achieving positive results.

Once you are aware of the narrator and its message, take control and use it to your advantage. Give it a positive script to read. Let *that* become your self-fulfilling prophesy!

7. Find a way to get the job done

In the introduction to the long running reality television series *Little People, Big World*, which airs on TLC and is about a family where the mother, father and one of their four children have dwarfism, Amy Roloff (the mother) states "*we can do the things that most people do, but we just do them in our own way*" (or words to that effect). This "can do" attitude is undoubtedly a big reason why the entire family has thrived.

It belies a willingness and confidence that anyone facing physical or psychological challenges would do well to emulate. Just because things can't be done the way they used to be, or in the way that most other people do them, that doesn't mean they can't be done. With determination and creativity a way can be found to accomplish all sorts of things that may seem impossible at first.

When your reality changes, don't deny it, embrace it. Whether you now move slower, can't lift as much, can't speak, write or think as well as you used to, don't let these limitations stop you. Don't tell yourself you can't do something, ask yourself *how can I do it now?*

As with the glass half-empty philosophy, there is no end to the list of why things can't be done. Shift your perspective to work out how they *can* be done. *Where there's a will, there's a way!*

8. Seek Peer Support

As much as it is important to look within for strength and motivation, we all need external empathy and support from time to time. Family and friends may be well-intentioned and supportive, but no one understands what you are going through like someone who is dealing with a similar condition.

Whether you join a formal peer support group, participate in online forums of people faced with similar challenges, or encounter more informal feedback, there is great benefit in being able to discuss common issues, concerns or questions with other people who are in the same boat. It is very common for people who are faced with unusual challenges to feel that they are all alone. This can increase the risk of frustration, depression and the subsequent descent into negative thought patterns. A network of peers can provide critical mutual support.

Peers can not only compare notes on common issues, they can share in each other's success and provide positive motivation. On one occasion you may benefit from the experience or outlook of others, but at other times you may provide inspiration that will assist someone else. A healthy peer support situation is one of give and take, with an upbeat, positive atmosphere.

Helping other people feels good and it carries an unsuspected benefit: in helping others, you help yourself just as much, if not more. *You get what you give* in life. Interacting with peers in a positive manner can go a long way toward helping you achieve a successful recovery and it is highly recommended.

9. Take time to celebrate your successes

As you can tell, I am a fan of the folk wisdom found in many common everyday sayings. Here is my final one: *all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy*.

When you have serious issues and there is a long way to go, it is all too easy to become single-mindedly focused on recovery. While a certain degree of commitment is essential, it is best to remember: *all things in moderation*. (OK, that was my last one!)

In addition to keeping your goal clearly in mind, it is also important to pause every now and then to appreciate how far you have come in your journey. Don't rest on your laurels for too long when there is still work to be done, but congratulate yourself when you deserve it and feel good about your progress.

Use your success as motivation to keep going. Share your success with peers and draw motivation from their achievements as well.

Good luck with your journey. We may not know why we are faced with difficult challenges, but that doesn't mean there isn't an important reason that they exist. If this guide helps you, it will make my own journey that much more worthwhile!

Peace and best wishes,

James

Appendix 1

Selected Reading List

A New Earth	Eckhart Tolle
An Open Heart	The Dalai Lama
The Art of Happiness	The Dalai Lama
Baseballs Don't Bounce	Forrest Willett
Becoming Enlightened	The Dalai Lama
Buddha Is As Buddha Does	Lama Surya Das
Change Your Thoughts – Change Your Life	Wayne W Dyer
Inspiration	Wayne W Dyer
Letting Go of the Person You Used To Be	Lama Surya Das
Look Within or Do Without	Tom Bay
Man's Search for Meaning	Victor Frankl
The Master Key System	Charles Haanel
The Nature of Personal Reality	Jane Roberts
The Power of Intention	Wayne W Dyer
The Power of Kindness	Piero Ferrucci
The Power of Now	Eckhart Tolle
Power Over Stress	Kenford Nedd
Power vs Force	David R Hawkins
The Secret	Rhonda Byrne
The Seth Material	Jane Roberts
Transcending the Levels of Consciousness	David R Hawkins
Wisdom of the Ages	Wayne W Dyer
Your Destiny Switch	Peggy McColl
Your Sacred Self	Wayne W Dyer