

Changing the “Whack-A-Mole” Syndrome

Addictive personalities, in the rehab and treatment community are plentiful. Individuals who latch on to multiple methods of blocking pain and “numbing out” to life. “I’m sober for 13 months now! But I’m bingeing and purging multiple times every day.” “I’ve recovered from my bulimia, but I’m drinking like a fish”. “I finally got clean and sober from heroin and speed. I’ve made it 17 months, but I can’t eat; I’ve dropped from 115 to 96 pounds in the last 4 months.”

A lot of individuals get treated for the chemical addiction, eating disorders, or depression, but they just go out and find another unhealthy coping mechanism. So often the individuals in treatment that are working so hard to get over their addiction are outside having a smoke every chance they get; one of the strongest addictions to break, yet somehow more socially acceptable.

From the age of ten I watched people go in and out of treatment. My father was the Administrator of a psych hospital in Worthington, Ohio for 13 years. It struck me as young as I was, that people kept coming back—they weren’t getting well.

As I struggled with my own eating disorder, I began to research and study information in search of recovery. I observed that sadly the same problem exists in individuals with addictions, as those with psychiatric problems. People with eating disorders or drug and alcohol addictions go to treatment, relapse, go for more treatment, relapse again and create a new cycle of behavior sprinkled with varying lengths of sobriety, freedom from drugs or their eating disorders, before answering the call back to the addiction.

In my own experience when I was bingeing regularly back in my twenties, I always had this feeling there was something more than just my lack of self-esteem that was causing the binges. There was a chemical pull, something in my body that pushed me to binge, in addition to the fact I’d had a bad day, got embarrassed or made fun of. If I stayed off sweets I was fine. If I took the first bite I was gone on a week long sugar binge and put on 10 pounds in a matter of two to three days. I didn’t have any scientific proof back then, I just knew.

I learned about what I call the whack-a-mole syndrome first hand. Once I quit bingeing, I spent ten years using alcohol to “numb out” in exactly the same fashion. But I didn’t realize that was what had happened until I started to write a book about my recovery. When it hit me, I was stunned and disappointed to see that although I thought I had overcome my eating disorder, all I really did was find a new secret flavor to send me to my favorite hideaway where I was safe from the interaction of the world. Snickers, Oreos, pizza, pasta, Pralines n’ Cream were exchanged for an even simpler sugar in the form of wine. Part of why I missed the connection is because it started with my first job in sales. I was entertaining clients on a regular basis and it was part of the job. It’s socially acceptable to have the nickname Happy Hour Queen- always ready to entertain.

In my early forties I developed a number of health problems. I had no energy, everything I ate (and I ate very healthy foods) bloated my stomach and my right ear was completely blocked. I had ear problems throughout my life. More ear infections than I can even count. I was on antibiotics regularly as a child and numerous times in my teens and twenties. Antibiotics wreak havoc on your internal system.

In my twenties, every time I took antibiotics I asked for the Diflucan because I knew I would have a yeast infection within a day of going on the medication. This time I refused to go on antibiotics and went searching for an alternative. This search led me to recovery from my eating disorder, writing a book and finding my purpose in life.

By working with acupuncture and integrative therapy, the inner knowing I had always had about body chemistry was revealed to me; and it wasn't just body chemistry, it was also an issue of brain chemistry. I had studied diet and nutrition for years because I always wanted to compete at body building; but because of my bulimia that goal was never achieved. I'm a firm believer that diet and nutrition are the foundation for quality of life, but that was only part of the equation. The information I learned from the alternative practitioners helped me understand that it wasn't my fault, the sugar cravings weren't due to a lack of willpower and I wasn't an alcoholic.

Kathleen Des Maisons book, *Potatoes Not Prozac* details her studies in working with alcoholics and how she noticed that most AA meetings came stocked with donuts, candy and other sugar filled snacks. She interviewed her clients and found that many of them skipped breakfast and ate primarily simple carbs (bagels, pasta, white breads, etc.). By getting her clients on a diet that included complex carbs (brown rice, millet, quinoa) and adding in lots of green leafy vegetables, her clients who had never been able to *get* sober were not only getting, but staying sober.

The impact of sugar in the American diet is horrifying. Many people are addicted to sugar and don't even know it. It's is now more socially acceptable to be overweight, eat cookies someone brought into the office, drink soda all day and dump sugar in your coffee or tea. It's hidden everywhere in most processed foods that are consumed. I read an interesting article recently about how sugar was introduced to societies; it was brought in as a drug. Sugar consumption by the average American has risen from approximately 7 pounds per year in the 18th century, to over 150 pounds per year in the twentieth century!

Julia Ross's book, *The Mood Cure* details her work with clients that experience "false moods" because their brains don't have the required level of amino acids for proper brain function. By using natural supplements, her clients in some cases experienced rapid positive shifts in their obsessive behaviors, eating disorders, relief from depression and more. Julia also has written about the impact of sugar and sugar addiction in *The Diet Cure*.

By bringing these things together and adding body work I found the freedom I had so desperately sought for 34 years.

This is why I decided to write my book, *It Started With Pop-Tarts®...An Alternative Approach to Winning the Battle of Bulimia*. The five principles I detail in my book are now known as the Hot Pastry Principles™. I teach them to my clients who are ready to adopt a healthy lifestyle and want to learn how to balance their lives. We apply this to weight management (losing weight and keeping it off), eliminating stress or recovery from an eating disorder.

To eliminate the "whack-a-mole" syndrome and get the results you want in life, being free from addiction of any type, it requires study in five areas:

- Improving and maintaining healthy self-esteem

- Understanding the causes of the addictive behavior
- Diet, nutrition and natural supplements
- Reprogramming negative self-talk and beliefs using the power of the subconscious mind
- Improving physical and mental health with body work. Several modalities I've found effective are:
 - Acupuncture – helps to balance body chemistry
 - Meditation – slows down the overactive, overly analytical brain and helps individuals learn to live in the moment and make the right choices
 - Hellerwork – combination of dialogue, body movement, deep tissue massage
 - Energy work – letting go of energy blocks stored throughout the body (done with practitioner)
 - Exercise that moves energy – Tai chi, Yoga, etc.
 - Exercise that includes cardio and resistance training
 - Moderate outdoor exercise – getting ample sunlight and fresh air into the body

In March of 2009, I met Dr. Joel Robertson at the International Association of Eating Disorder Professionals Conference. He has been studying the science of neurochemistry for years. His book *Peak-Performance Living, Easy, Drug-Free Ways to Alter Your Own Brain Chemistry for Improved Productivity, Greater Energy, Sharper Thinking and Optimal Health* came from his own experience working with alcoholics early in his career. Like me, Dr. Robertson observed that traditional treatments weren't working and he got into the study of brain and body chemistry. He's doing some incredible things through his research and company.

One of the most reassuring things I learned as part of my alternative path to recovery is that it really isn't about willpower. You don't have to "work hard" on your recovery. Instead, individuals can choose to "surrender" to their healing and "allow" it to come into their life. It's a big shift for some people, but very effective.

Instead of constantly focusing on the problem (the addiction they don't want), try getting clients focused on what they DO want from life, what they want their life to look like, feel like and be like. It is very empowering. Life plays out and manifests according to focus. If a client spends all of their time focused on how much they hate their body, how much they don't want to drink, how much they don't want to be a drug addict anymore, then they are still affirming that behavior in their life by focusing on it.

Instead, help them get to a place where they can get a glimpse of what normal life would feel like, smell like, taste like, be like. Have them tell you a story about a day in the life they want, describing every detail as if they were on the phone with you. Or have them write a story of a day in their life and write a new one every day. It is a powerful tool for helping them change focus and reach a point of hope and inspiration.

By incorporating a plan that covers all aspects of mind, body and spirit. Teaching clients by incorporating a plan that covers all aspects of mind, body and spirit:

- How to use their subconscious to support them
- How to eat healthy balanced meals that will make them feel good, give them energy and help them make good choices

- How the balance of body and brain chemistry can make recovery possible, by shifting their moods instead of an exercise of will
- How to love and accept themselves and find their value and purpose in life
- How to nurture their mind and bodies through diet, exercise and quiet time

They will have a stronger connection to sustainable recovery and can live a fully balanced life.

Lori Hanson is the founder of Learn2Balance. She is a nationally known teen, college and women's speaker, Eating Disorder Coach and the award-winning author of *It Started With Pop-Tarts®...An Alternative Approach to Winning the Battle of Bulimia* and *The Secrets to Surviving and THRIVING in Your Teens*. www.Learn2Balance.com