

TOOL: Hierarchy of Values

We all have values that motivate us, whether we've identified them or not. Chances are that you haven't recently thought about your values. The Hierarchy of Values (HOV) will help reintroduce what is most important to you.

Start by writing down as many of your values as you can think of. There are no right or wrong answers as these are very personal. When you have written as many as you can, group them into main categories, ultimately narrowing your list to five. In Figure 3.1, list them in order of importance.

Figure 3.1. My Hierarchy of Values worksheet.

What I value most:
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Your list may look something like this:

What I value most:
1. My relationship with my partner
2. My children
3. My physical health
4. My financial well-being
5. Personal integrity

Look over your list again. Do you notice anything missing? It's rare that a person lists their addictive behavior as a value even though it's likely the most important priority in their life. An addictive behavior can become the most important priority in your life, without you even realizing it.

Now, think about how your addictive behavior impacts each of your values. Every time you engage in your addictive behavior, you choose it over your values. You gamble with what you treasure and hold dear; you compromise your value system. A successful recovery requires sobriety to be a valued priority in your life.

When people do this exercise, they often come away with an “ah ha” moment. At one SMART meeting, a woman who was new to recovery did this exercise with the help of the facilitator. When he asked her why alcohol wasn’t on her list, she burst into tears. She hasn’t had a drink since!

You may now have a clearer picture of how your addictive behavior affects what you value most. These next two exercises will help you look deeper into what you want for yourself and help you identify specific and important goals you want to achieve to bring more meaning to your life.

EXERCISE: The Three Questions

Your goal is to stop using or acting out. Your desire to change is your motivation to stop your addictive behavior. It is sometimes hard to see a difference between what you *are* doing and what you could do differently to achieve your goals. This exercise can help you bring these two perspectives into focus so you can identify the discrepancy between them.

Ask yourself these questions:

1. What do I want for my future?
2. What am I currently doing to achieve that?
3. How do I feel about what I’m currently doing?

An example of answers to these questions:

1. What do I want for my future? *To be a good partner, parent, employee.*
2. What am I currently doing to achieve that? *Nothing, because I’m drunk and stoned all the time.*
3. How do I feel about what I’m currently doing? *Guilty, ashamed, depressed, frustrated, stressed, trapped.*

Now, answer the next two questions:

4. What could I do differently to achieve the future I want?
5. How would changing what I do or getting what I want make me feel?

Once you see the discrepancy between your feelings about what you’re currently doing (2) and your feelings about changing your behavior (5), you can use that difference as further motivation to stop using. As you start to feel better about being abstinent, you feel more empowered to achieve your goal in #1: Be a good partner, parent, and employee.

Figure 3.2. My Three Questions worksheet.

1. What do I want for my future?
2. What am I doing now?
3. How do I feel about what I'm doing now?
What could I do differently to help me get what I want?
How would changing what I do or getting what I want make me feel?