

# The RELAPSE Solution

## Day 14 – The Relapse Solution

*Recognizing, Redefining and Responding to Relapse*

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*Success is the result of good judgment, good judgment is a result of experience, experience is often the result of bad judgment.*

TONY ROBBINS

Best-selling author, renowned speaker and life coach

What do you think of when you hear the word relapse? If you are like most of us, it isn't positive. In fact, you probably equate relapse to failure. And you might even believe that if you relapse, you are beyond help and might as well give up.

The truth is relapse gets a bad rap! If you are learning how to ski and you fall down repeatedly does that mean you failed? If you start a new job and find yourself a bit overwhelmed, and you end up making some slightly embarrassing mistakes, do you quit and write yourself off in that career? Of course not.

If you are going to improve you have to push yourself. And if you push yourself you will occasionally "fall down." "Falling down" is part of the learning process, and some say if you are not falling down you are not learning. Yet, when we relapse or "fall down" when we are learning how to live a new life thriving in sobriety, we label ourselves as a "failure"—someone who isn't capable of sobriety. Today you will discover how to recognize, redefine, and respond to relapse, which will help pave the way to lasting sobriety.

## Redefining Relapse

Relapse is not a requirement to attaining lasting sobriety. In fact, there are countless stories of people who successfully quit drinking the very first time they tried, and never looked back. We love hearing those stories, and if you can follow in their footsteps that excites us even more.

But everyone who goes from being a problem drinker to being sober “falls down” at some point. They might experience intense emotions frequently over a longer period of time, such as anger, sadness or jealousy, or they might act out in other unhealthy ways, such as watching too much TV, excessively eating sugary and fatty foods, or constantly complaining about life. They might not “relapse” by drinking, but they still “fall down,” and they still have to find a way to pick themselves back up.

Relapse comes in a wide variety of “shapes” and “sizes.” When you redefine and recognize that sometimes relapse is just a normal and natural part of the learning process, you finally free yourself from an unrealistic expectation that your journey to thriving in sobriety won’t result in some “bumps” and “bruises” along the way. Accepting that relapse is part of the process will allow you to learn and grow from the experience instead of fearing it or labeling yourself as a “hopeless failure” or “loser drunk,” which only leads to guilt, shame, and even more drinking.

Take a minute to redefine what relapse means to you in your journal. Acknowledge that relapse is part of recovery and comes in many forms, which may or may not include drinking. Often times relapse is an indicator that you are pushing yourself and doing the work you need to do to become a better version of yourself. When you grow, you occasionally experience growing pains, and every time you work through these “growing pains” you will find greater joy, happiness, and success waiting for you on the other side.

## **Your Relapse Response**

*Nobody can go back and start a new beginning,  
but anyone can start today and make a new ending.*

**MARIA ROBINSON**

*Author of Understanding Behaviour and Development in Early Childhood*

Maybe you are experiencing an unexpected challenging situation or a craving like you have never had before, or maybe you are feeling overwhelmed by intense emotions that lead to poor decision making. So you drink. Maybe a lot, maybe a little, but regardless, you make a choice that is in direct contradiction to what you have promised yourself and others. Now what?

If you have successfully redefined relapse, then you realize it isn’t a failure, it is just feedback. It’s a small bump in a long and exciting road, and an opportunity to learn and grow. If you haven’t redefined relapse, then your response is likely very different.

Remember the equation **E (Event) + R (Response) = O (Outcome)** in Day 1? If you focus on the event while considering relapse a failure, your response might include going on a weeklong

bender. You might tell yourself, “Well, everything I have done so far is clearly a waste of time, so I might as well go out and make the most of it for a while.”

## So You Relapsed, Now What?

Have you ever watched babies learn how to walk? When they fell down did you tell them to just give up and that they would never be able to learn how to walk? Of course not! If you relapse or fall down you can decide to learn from it, or you can decide to use it as an excuse to drink. And let’s face it, using it as an excuse to continue drinking is far easier. Just like you learned in Day 6, The Outcome Solution, giving in to the short-term satisfaction of drinking is far easier than making decisions focused on your long-term success.

You wouldn’t tell your best friend to quit his or her job because of one bad day. You also wouldn’t decide it’s not worth the effort to teach your child how to ride a bike if he or she couldn’t stay up on the first try. So don’t write yourself off as a failure just because you experienced a setback. That “setback” might be the exact thing you need, which leads to a breakthrough that will change the rest of your life. But you have to redefine relapse first.

If you do drink, here is what we recommend.

- **Don’t Jump to Negative Conclusions** – The most dangerous thing you can do is let relapse define you in a negative way. Getting angry at yourself, believing you are a bad person, or believing that sobriety is too hard or not possible for you are all destructive beliefs. These beliefs are far more likely to lead you back to excessive drinking rather than freeing you from it.
- **Journal** – Capturing your thoughts and feelings in a journal after relapse is one of the most valuable things you can do. Take some time and write about what led up to your drinking, how you felt while you drank, and how you felt afterwards. Was it a positive or negative experience overall? Explore it from other perspectives, such as what would the “future” you say to you if they could. Write down the options you have moving forward, and what choices you could make, and might be tempted to make, after your experience.
- **The Time Travel Technique** – Go back and listen to The Time Travel Technique on Day 1 again. This helps you re-establish the pain and pleasure “points” around your drinking and reminds you of the long-term pleasure sobriety will bring, and the long-term pain that you will experience when you drink excessively. This will help you learn and grow from the experience, rather than staying stuck.
- **Briefly Review Past Notes, Journal Entries & Action Steps** – After a relapse it can be useful to go back and review the past solutions, including your notes and favorite action steps. However, unless you really feel drawn to re-do a past solution, we find it best that you keep moving forward in the program. So if you were on Day 11 and relapsed, you could spend a day doing the Time Travel Technique, journaling, and reviewing past solutions, and then start on Day 12 the next day. We recommend this because sometimes the solutions you haven’t completed contain the exact answers you need to thrive in sobriety. Also it is important that you don’t feel like you are “punishing” yourself, and

starting the program over is often interpreted that way. Don't worry, you can always start the program over after you complete it. In fact, many people go through the program again whether they relapsed or not.

## **It's Only a Matter of Time**

*We pay a heavy price for our fear of failure. It is a powerful obstacle to growth. It assures the progressive narrowing of the personality and prevents exploration and experimentation. There is no learning without some difficulty and fumbling. If you want to keep on learning, you must keep on risking failure—all your life.*

**JOHN W. GARDNER**

Best-selling author and founder of the lobby Common Cause

The greatest obstacle for you is, and always has been, the same when it comes to avoiding relapse—YOU. Take Terry for example, one of our coaching clients who was making steady progress working through the solutions. In spite of being in the middle of some major life challenges, he understood that drinking would only make them worse. Even though he seemed to be doing well, the stress of his divorce, his child moving to another state, and a job change in the near future pushed him to the edge. His desire to drink suddenly seemed impossible to resist.

So Terry gave in to his temptation. And he did what so many other drinkers do—he rationalized that he had nothing else to lose. He told himself that this would be one last “hurrah” before he really got sober, and that he might as well make the most of it and really party.

Over a three-day holiday weekend, he consumed a gallon and a pint of liquor, as well as some other alcoholic beverages. At the end of the weekend he was disgusted with himself, and finally came to terms with a harsh reality—it had been a long time since he had any pleasure from drinking. And this weekend binge gave him no pleasure. In fact, it only made things worse.

As much pain as Terry was in, he knew from reading *The Relapse Solution* that his only way out was *through*. He knew the worst thing he could do was continue to run away from his problems by drinking. And because he had a sobriety coach, he knew that help was just a phone call away.

That weekend could have easily taken Terry's life or been the start of a several month long binge. Instead, he was able to use it as leverage to create massive change in his life. It was the last reminder Terry needed about how destructive alcohol was in his life. He used that experience to better understand his drinking triggers, to get clear about how alcohol shaped his life, and to write a specific plan to overcome any similar future challenges he might face.

In the end, he turned what could have been a devastating decision with deadly consequences into a rite of passage. Now because of his relapse experience, sobriety has become second nature and Terry hasn't been tempted to drink since that weekend. He overcame his greatest obstacle—

himself. Relapse stories like Terry's are not only common, they often extend far beyond three days.

Deep down most people that struggle with excessive drinking believe that it's only a matter of time before they fail, and if they are going to fail, why not go all out. They relapse, prove to themselves that they were right all along and it was only a matter of time, and then use it as a rationalization to keep drinking. The sad truth is sometimes the alcohol kills them, in one way or another, before they get the courage and strength to give sobriety another chance.

Don't let this be your story! Instead, think of Terry and know that you, too, can find a way through to sobriety.

## **The Ultimate Irony**

Any behavior you do on a regular basis, especially to change the way you feel, eventually becomes your "new normal." Excessive drinking often leads to a wide range of emotions, from the feeling of discomfort during the morning hangover, to the initial "high" from the first drink, to the overall sadness and let down towards the end of the night. This roller coaster of emotions becomes a regular part of your life.

But when you get sober you eventually slow down or stop the roller coaster, or at least flatten it out significantly. The life of discomfort and uncertainty that excessive drinking creates goes away, and it is replaced with a very different experience that you are not used to. And it doesn't feel comfortable. The ultimate irony is that this healthy emotional stability your newfound sobriety brings to your life often feels so uncomfortable that your desire to drink increases. Specifically, you want to drink because you know that it will bring back the hectic life and roller coaster of emotions you are accustomed to.

So as you continue forward don't be surprised if parts of your new life feel uncomfortable at first, even if it doesn't seem to make sense.

## **Your Relapse Radar**

Relapse doesn't have to be part of recovery. But even if you successfully avoid relapse, it is still likely you will have some close calls, especially in early sobriety. The good news is if you want to avoid relapse, it is far easier when you know the warning signs.

Here are some of the signs that your recovery might be headed in the wrong direction.

- **Isolation** – Addiction and isolation go hand in hand. As you become more addicted, you almost always become more isolated. If you find that you are isolating more, it can put you

at higher risk of relapse. Use the community forums, and other forms of positive social dynamics that don't trigger your desire to drink.

- **Not Asking for Help** – We all need help sometimes, whether we struggle with addiction or not. And most of the time we appreciate it when others ask us for help. Don't be afraid to ask for help if you find yourself struggling.
- **The Quick Fix** – People sometimes comment that our 30-day program seems like a quick fix, but if you have done the work through today you know that is false. There is no quick fix or magic pill. You have to do the work, and not just over these 30 days. You have to embrace personal growth on a regular basis. But guess what—everyone does. If someone is really happy, you can virtually guarantee he or she has various healthy practices that are re-energizing and helping with continued growth. And these don't include watching reality TV or their favorite sports team.
- **Rationalizing Poor Decisions** – Relapse is rarely about one or two bad decisions, rather it is about a series of poor decisions that you continue to rationalize as “not a big deal,” but eventually lead you to a tipping point. So pay attention and stop it before it gets that far!
- **Believing Failure is Inevitable** – Just because you failed in the past, doesn't mean you will again. If you believe you will relapse, you will. If you believe you will learn how to get it right this time, you will. In the simplest of explanations, that is how our brains work.
- **Congratulations, You're Cured** – We don't believe in the idea that you are always in recovery. To us, if you identify as being in recovery the rest of your life, you will naturally gravitate to making decisions that match what that means to you (which usually isn't positive). For example, Dave considers himself a recovered alcoholic. He believes that part of his life is behind him, but along with that belief he also believes that anyone (even those that have never struggled with addictive behaviors a day in their life) can fall victim to drugs and alcohol if they don't embrace the concept of always growing and learning.
- **Stress, Frustration and Anger** – When you experience these types of intense emotions frequently it should come as no surprise that you are at higher risk of relapsing. You are far more likely to give in to poor decision making, have lower willpower, and experience less joy and happiness, all of which can lead to relapse.
- **Not Isolating** – Isolation isn't always a bad idea. If you don't isolate yourself from the negative people in your life, especially those that are likely to socially pressure you to drink or are negative and hurtful towards you, it could quickly derail your sobriety.
- **Alcohol Triggers** – Especially in early sobriety you want to avoid the big alcohol triggers. These likely include going to bars and certain parties, driving by certain liquor stores, and smelling your favorite drinks. They also include other activities you often did while drinking or associate with drinking, such as sitting in a chair on the beach or watching your favorite sports teams. If you always drank doing some of those activities, you should do your best to avoid them.
- **Guilt, Shame & Embarrassment** – If you are one of those people who believe shame is actually a good thing to help you avoid relapse, read this article in [Time Magazine](#). And use common sense. If you feel guilty and ashamed, you are more likely to want to escape those feelings by drinking.
- **Negativity** – Complaining, blaming, and gossiping are unhealthy addictive behaviors, which is why it is so easy to unknowingly let them take over your predominant thoughts. Ask people you spend time with to point it out if they notice you complaining a lot.

- **Boredom** – You will hear us mention the phrase “sobriety killer” many times in the program. We consider boredom one of the sobriety killers, meaning the more bored you are, the more likely you will drink. You must keep yourself busy if you want to thrive in sobriety.
- **The Opposite of Insanity** – You have probably heard the definition of insanity as doing the same thing over and over again but expecting different results. Well the reverse is also true. If you stop doing everything that helped you get sober, you will likely stop experiencing many or all of those same positive results.
- **Testing the Water** – On Day 30 we explore this further, but even though cutting back is possible, we would be remiss to not mention this as a high risk behavior that can easily and quickly lead you back to excessive drinking.
- **Romanticizing Your Drinking Past** – One of the easiest things to do as time passes is to forget your painful drinking experiences and remember the positive ones. That is where your journal can jolt you back to reality.

Recovery usually gets easier over time. And when you practice everything we teach in this program you often experience so many positive results from your sobriety that you have no interest in drinking again. But these warning signs are great indicators for when you might be getting off track. And in early sobriety, especially if you find yourself struggling, review this list. Once you know what warning signs are present, it is far easier to understand how to resolve them.

## Wrapping Up Day 14

*You have to face your fear. And do the same with anger, do the same with jealousy, do the same with hatred. And a significant point to remember is: if you witness anything—fear, anger, hate—if you simply watch them as they arise, without any judgment or condemnation, they will disappear, leaving a tremendous amount of energy that you can use for creativity. You will have to use it; the leaks have disappeared and you will be overflowing with energy. But if you witness your love, compassion, kindness, humbleness, they will not disappear. They also have tremendous energy, but the more you witness them the stronger they will become in you; they will overwhelm you.*

OSHO

From *The Book of Understanding*

*The 30-Day Sobriety Solution* is packed with tools and techniques that you can use to not only avoid relapse, but also respond to it. Alongside these solutions, all you need to be successful is willingness for honest self-awareness and an attitude of love. When you unconditionally accept and love yourself, and when you are willing to see yourself as you really are, there is virtually nothing you can't accomplish. Let's look at the key points from today's solution.

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- 1) **Redefine Relapse** – When you redefine relapse you free yourself from the guilt and shame that often leads to extended binges, allowing yourself to learn and grow from the experience and reduce the odds of a future relapse.
  - 2) **If You Relapse** – If you relapse don't let it define who you are. Instead journal about the experience, do the Time Travel Technique on Day 1 again, review your past notes and action steps, and then start where you left off.
  - 3) **You'll Fail Again** – Problem drinkers assume they will fail again, and it is this predominant belief that is so destructive to your success. You must believe that this time is different, and you must be willing to fail forward (we cover this more in Day 22).
  - 4) **Comfort & Discomfort** – Drinking provided an overall state of discomfort, which became familiar over time (your drinking “norm”). The significant shift to being in an overall state of emotional stability and certainty (your new sobriety “norm”) can feel very awkward initially, and you might be tempted to go back to the familiar discomfort of drinking.
  - 5) **Relapse Warning Signs** – There are all kinds of warning signs that you are moving closer to relapsing, especially in early sobriety. Watch out for these in your life. And by embracing an attitude of love—especially self-love—and a willing and honest self-awareness, you can use the solutions in the book to overcome virtually any challenge or obstacle you face.
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