

LEAP OF POWER

You may have been told that you are powerless over alcohol and other drugs. You may even feel that way yourself. Well, I've got some very good news for you: You absolutely are not powerless. Right now, you can take a *leap of power* and gain control over drugs and the rest of your life. Millions of people with very serious drug problems, including addiction, have done it. I'm not assuming all readers of this book have a drug problem. If you're uncertain whether you do or don't, you'll get a chance to figure it out for yourself as you continue reading. But if you do have a drug problem, even if you feel frustrated and overwhelmed, you can take the leap.

Many people read a book like this when their lives are in disarray. They may feel hopeless, confused, and tempted to give up. Some may even desperately crave drugs and feel that they can't make it through the day without them. A leap of power means rising above your situation and what you feel at the time. It's about believing *the possibility* that somewhere within yourself, you have the power and energy to step up to the plate and make things right. Even if you doubt yourself and don't feel that you can do it, I'm telling you right now that you can. I've seen it time and time again. People grit their teeth, decide they want a better life, and say, "I'm going for it." They take a leap of power and surprise the doubters and even themselves.

I won't pretend that it's easy. If you have a serious drug problem and decide to quit or set new limits, it will be a huge challenge with no quick fix. I'm certain there will be mistakes and setbacks along the way. It will be important to draw upon all available resources including the possibility of counseling and the use of medication to assist you. However, there is no substitute for your own power and persistence. You can do it. As you read this book, you will see there are ways to organize your efforts, prepare, stay focused and do what we all must do: learn from mistakes and keep improving.

Some people are quite certain and may have been told that if they take one sip of alcohol or the slightest amount of another drug they will lose control, feel powerless, and won't be able to stop. Even in such circumstances, these individuals still have the power within themselves to *not* take the first sip or the slightest amount. They

are not powerless. The last thing people need when they are feeling weak and vulnerable is to doubt their personal power, even when it comes to alcohol, the opioids, crack, and all the other drugs.

I HOPE YOU'LL LIKE THIS BOOK

You're probably reading this book for one or more of these reasons.

1. You're concerned about your use of alcohol or other drugs; either wondering if you have a problem or convinced that you do.
2. Someone who cares about you thinks you have a problem with alcohol or other drugs and has given you this book.
3. Someone who has authority over you, such as an employer, judge, or probation officer has sent you to a counselor or counseling agency that uses this book.

Whatever your reasons, I hope you'll like what you read and benefit from it.

If *you are concerned* about your use of alcohol or other drugs, I think you'll find this book offers a respectful way to look at your life, including your drug use, without telling you what to do. You make the decisions. If you want to make changes, it will help you succeed. If you've had difficulty changing in the past – even repeated setbacks and failure – don't give up. You can learn from previous experience, consider new options, apply new ideas, and succeed this time.

If *someone who cares about you is concerned* about your use of alcohol or other drugs, this person could be right...or wrong. If you are open-minded – which is a good thing to be – and want to evaluate this matter yourself, you should find this book helpful. If, at the end, you don't want to make changes, at least you'll know that you carefully thought about it and didn't simply rush to defend yourself.

If *you are being forced to read this book* because you're in a drug program, I'm sorry about that. It never feels good to be forced to do anything. However, I hope you'll be pleasantly surprised to see that this book offers a respectful way to look at your life, including your drug use – without judgments, put downs, or pressure of any sort.

NOTE: Throughout this book I'll be talking about alcohol and other drugs. To simplify, I'll often just say "drugs." Alcohol is a drug, but people sometimes forget that. Occasionally, I'll use the expression "alcohol and other drugs" as a reminder.

JUDGMENTAL PEOPLE

The general public can be very harsh, critical, and judgmental about drugs. You've probably heard the putdowns that say or imply that people who use drugs are one or more of the following: irresponsible; weak-willed; moral failures; selfish pleasure-seekers; conformists who can't say no; or stupid losers who aren't smart enough to see the harm.

I can assure you that you won't be judged or put down in this book. There's no blaming and finger pointing. In fact, this book recognizes that people use drugs for a wide variety of valid reasons that can be entirely understood without blaming and shaming them, and without passing moral judgments.

There are many benefits to drug use, as well as many risks. This book will support you in making your own informed decisions about drugs. If you want to make changes in your life, it will help you find your own course of action and succeed with it.

BOSSY PEOPLE

The general public tends to get pretty bossy toward individuals who are using drugs. They tell them that they have a problem and need to quit. They bombard them with lectures about drug dangers or with a barrage of clever questions designed to convince them they have a serious problem. They argue, often dogmatically, that there is only one solution for everyone, abstinence, which isn't true. It's the right choice for some people, but not everyone. Other people with drug problems have the power to decrease their use and stay within the limits they set for themselves.

Bossy pressure stirs up resistance. No one wants to be criticized, told what to do, or backed into a corner. Many people fight back and defend their drug use. Then they are told: "You are defensive. You are in denial." This creates even more resentment. Sometimes, though, to put an end to the drama, people simply fake it by saying that they're going to quit, though they have no such intentions.

You may expect that a book like this is going to argue a point: Maybe try to convince you to quit or at least cut back. Maybe harp on the dangers of drugs. Maybe assume that you have a problem. There is *no* hidden agenda in this book; *no* attempt to convince you that you have a problem; *no one* telling you that you must change and dictating what this change will look like. It's not an *intervention* with a room full of people ranting and "laying it on the line." There's no shame. No blame. No passing judgment. No one telling you what to do.

I wrote this book to provide a free-thinking zone; to help you organize your own thoughts about your life and use of drugs; and to support you in making your own wise decisions. You'll have an opportunity to consider the benefits and harm from your drug use; the role that drugs play in your life; and the options available to you. In the end, you draw your own conclusions – whatever they may be. If you conclude that you have a drug problem and want to change, you decide how to proceed and when to start. Many people overcome drug problems by committing to abstinence. Many people do it by setting new limits and adhering to them. Readers of this book are encouraged to determine for themselves which strategy works best for them in their own lives. If right now, or at any point, you believe you have a problem and want to set new limits or quit, you'll find guidance and support on these pages.

BLESSING AND BURDEN

I'm guessing that you'll be pleased that the words on these pages are not yet another "voice" ranting at you and telling you what to do about drugs. Of course, that puts the burden on you. You have to think things through for yourself and make your own decisions about your life, including your use of alcohol and other drugs. It makes sense: You know yourself best. You're the most affected by the decisions. You have the most at stake.

Leap of Power challenges you to do the work of honestly and carefully thinking about your life; making your own decisions; successfully following through on whatever you decide; and holding yourself accountable.

Some people have tried to change and failed in their attempts. They may have "lost everything" and feel powerless. This doesn't

mean that they are powerless. This means they need to figure out what has stood in their way. If this has been your experience, you'll find help in figuring out the obstacles and overcoming them. You'll see some of the subtleties that are typically ignored in making decisions to change, the importance of preparation, the need for determination, the value of support, and the type of self-monitoring and problem solving that will help you achieve success. You can find solutions that work for you. But remember this: Change takes practice. It's important to persevere with your effort because your life will be a whole lot better when you overcome a drug problem.

SO, WHO WROTE THIS, AND WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

On these first few pages, I keep saying "I," so maybe you've been wondering who is this "I?"

Well, I'm an old and very unconventional psychologist who has been working with people who have alcohol and other drug problems for almost 50 years, starting even before I got my Ph.D. I've helped people overcome everything ranging from serious, long standing addictions to minor (but pesky) drug problems. Early on I saw, beyond a shadow of doubt, that people could overcome drug problems and lead healthy, satisfying lives. It also seemed obvious to me, though professionals have been slow to recognize this, that people use drugs for a reason – to satisfy or attempt to satisfy personal needs. If they stop relying on drugs for this, they have to find other ways to meet these needs, or learn to live without them being met. In short, this means that people who are overcoming drug problems must also make changes in the "rest of their lives." For the past 25 years, I have been training counselors across the country to use The Seven Challenges[®], a comprehensive counseling program for people with drug problems.

Nobody has a perfect life. We all have issues. People who want to take charge of their own lives must work on their personal issues to make things better. My profession (psychology) speaks about diagnoses of mental illness and mental disorders. Although this has some value in some circumstances, it also misses something important: The personal problems of individuals can never be reduced to these oversimplified categories. Our problems are complex. They're the product of our experiences in families and communities,

which in turn, are strongly influenced by the conditions in which we live. So, you'll find no diagnoses in this book, and no talk of mental illness or mental disorders. Rather, this book offers you an opportunity to look at the issues in your personal life that matter to you, take control of things, and make changes *without* any label or stigma.

I offer no easy solution. Sometimes people with drug problems are miserably depressed or terribly anxious; or have serious relationship or family problems; or have severely low self-esteem; or big trouble managing emotions. Sometimes, they've lost their family, home and job. If they want to overcome drug problems, they have to work on these other issues as well. This book is for self-help. I never want to underestimate what people can do on their own with dedicated effort and willpower. By the same token, support is invaluable. Furthermore, I don't want to pretend that this book can solve all your problems. On these pages you'll find suggestions that you focus on certain problems. At times, you may be thinking: "I don't have any idea how to do this." That's why I often mention the possibility of seeking good, skilled counseling from a non-judgmental person. This book can be a valuable complement to counseling. At a minimum, I hope it will be inspirational and get you started. With or without help, you will have to invest a huge effort if you want to take a leap of power and overcome drug problems. You can do it. You can take control of your own life.

THE SEVEN CHALLENGES®

To make things simple, each chapter of this book is based on one of the critical challenges in making informed decisions about drugs ... and succeeding with them. There are seven challenges and therefore seven chapters. The challenges are listed below and briefly described.

CHALLENGE ONE: Challenging yourself to honestly look at your life, including your use of alcohol and other drugs

This is crucial to all that follows. You need to be brutally honest in looking at your life so you can figure out what's really happening and make the best possible decisions.

TAKING ACTION

The first six challenges in this book are about evaluating your life and making decisions. The better informed you are, the better the decisions you can make, the better you can prepare to take action on your decisions, and the more likely you will be to succeed with them. It's one thing to make a decision. It's still another to follow through successfully. This challenge is about taking action and following through with your decisions. You could say: This is where the rubber meets the road.

Much of the emphasis of this challenge is about following through on drug decisions, but there is also discussion about following through on other decisions about other aspects of your life, including ones that will support you in succeeding with your drug decisions.

QUITTING OR SETTING NEW LIMITS

If you made it this far into the book, I'm guessing you want to make some changes with regard to drugs. If so, it should be noted that there are basically two possibilities: *quit* or *set new limits*. For some people, it's a no-brainer.

You may have already ruled out one of these two very different options, as in:

“Are you kidding me, set new limits? No way I could ever do that. I need to quit.”

Or the alternative:

“Are you kidding me, quit? No way I would ever quit. I'm going to set limits and keep within them.”

It's your choice. Some of you may decide or believe that you'd better not use drugs again. You may feel that if you were to start, you wouldn't stop. On the other hand, some of you may be confident that you could succeed with limits. Then, there are still others who are uncertain about limits. Some of them say: “I don't know, but I'm not taking chances” and others want to try limits and test it for themselves. If they can't stay within their limits, they could then choose abstinence.

I'm not advocating one solution or another. However, from years

of experience watching people make changes, I have found that most people with serious drug problems who want to set limits get the best results when they first have a substantial period of no drug use. Nevertheless, others can keep within limits right from the start. Despite what ardent “believers” of one ideology or another might say about drug problems, there’s no one-size-fits-all solution. Everyone is different. You have to find a solution that works for you.

CHANGING DRUG USE BEHAVIOR

If you’ve decided to set new limits or quit using drugs, a strong relapse prevention plan starts with a clear understanding of what happens on Day One when you act on your decision. You will have forfeited drug benefits that helped you cope with life. You may be facing situations that had been made all the more difficult because of the impact of your drug use. You might have lost friends, a job, housing, or the trust of family members. You might be suffering financial straits, maybe legal consequences. It’s important to recognize reality about your starting point: You’ll probably feel worse, rather than better at first. Change of this sort requires sacrifice. That’s the price you pay. (Just like dieting: You don’t lose weight by eating all the high calorie foods you love whenever you want them.) By virtue of deciding to take control of your drug use, you might get a morale boost at first. It might help you resist temptation for a while. However, the backbone to perseverance is a clear picture of how you want your life to improve. You have to engage your smart brain and remind yourself of what you want and that things will get better over time. You need a future orientation. Then, brace yourself and start preparing for Day One and the days that follow. Think ahead and make plans right now for how you will begin to address the multitude of problems you’ll face right from the beginning and how you’ll cope with temptation. This chapter will give you some ideas.

As you move forward, hopefully you will use massive willpower because (1) you possess the power (whether you know it or not) and (2) you’re going to need to apply it. Hopefully you’re willing to work hard because it will require enormous and persistent effort.

Don’t confuse wishful thinking (“I hope I quit” or “I hope I can cut back”) with a real commitment to change (“I’m going to do

it”). To succeed, you will need to use a Challenging Voice – not to doubt yourself – but to get fully motivated and help you rise to the occasion.

The Challenging Voice asks: “Do you mean business?”

If the answer is “Yes,” then the Challenging Voice says: “Work hard and don’t relent.”

It also says, “I’m going to watch you closely and hold you accountable.” The intent is not at all to put you down or catch you failing. Rather it is to support you in being successful and motivate you to devote all your energy toward accomplishing your goal.

Anyone can say they’re going to change: Think, for example, about New Year’s resolutions. The real test is when it’s time to follow through with the decisions. A Challenging Voice will keep you honest.

SHOW ME RESULTS

When the Challenging Voice says “Show me results,” it means if you decided to quit using drugs, then you don’t use them. If you set limits, then you stick to them. It’s a daunting task. Your unevolved right-now brain seeks immediate gratification and wants to indulge, so you will *always have to keep your goal in mind*. You will have to frequently and consistently resist urges to use (or use beyond your limits). You will encounter one situation after another that could cause temptation. Your Oppressive Self-talk will make one excuse after another for indulging, perhaps based on claims about the all encompassing power of drugs; the grip of alcohol or extreme addictiveness of opioids or crack cocaine. It will be tricky, too. Oppressive Self-talk pretends to act in your best interest – offering you pleasure or relief from pain and making it sound as if there are legitimate reasons for violating your decisions.

“You deserve it.”

“You’ll feel good.”

Nurturing Self-talk has an answer:

“Sure, I can feel good for a moment, but that’s not what I want for myself. There is something more important to me than immediate pleasure.”

This is when you must engage your smart brain and remind yourself of your reasons for changing. You need a vision of a better life – something you hold more dear to your heart than momentary pleasure. This vision even opens the door to rewarding yourself in the here-and-now: Every time you resist urges and abide by your own decisions, you can give yourself a mental reward.

“Great, I did it. I did it. I’m standing strong and won’t back down. I’m going to stick with it.”

This may sound trivial, but it’s not. It’s part of how you reinforce your efforts and condition your mind for change.

Oppressive Self-talk will feed off feelings of loneliness, pain, anguish, despair, and desperation, saying: “You need drugs. You can’t resist.” Some of you may hunger for drugs and feel that you can’t make it through the day without them. However, when you take a leap of power and truly want a better life, then drugs are no match. If you have a serious drug problem, then it might be the hardest thing you ever do. However, you can fight for yourself and succeed. Every time you tell yourself it is OK to violate your own decision, it is not true. You must remember that **YOU CANNOT GIVE YOURSELF PERMISSION TO VIOLATE YOUR DECISION**. Quitting or setting limits is meaningless if you don’t follow through.

Hey, mistakes and setbacks happen, right? Yes and no. First off, they don’t necessarily have to happen. Sometimes people make up their minds about drugs and that’s that. They stick to it. They muster all their willpower, inner strength, problem solving ability, resources and energy to get it right the first time. But, yes, you might make mistakes or slip. This does not mean you have failed. However, you must make every effort to learn from mistakes and correct them. **IF YOU KEEP VIOLATING YOUR DECISION, DON’T KID YOURSELF THAT YOU ARE ON THE RIGHT TRACK. YOU’RE NOT**. Either you need more determination, better strategies, or new decisions. Never give up. Figure out what is happening, get back to work, and be serious about it. You have the