



Session Details

Date: 25/05/2026

1. Session Title

Finding Your North Star: A Guide to Purpose in Recovery

2. Session Overview

This session explores the concept of purpose as a high-level component of recovery, best addressed once foundational needs for safety, security, and connection are met. The discussion focuses on how a sense of purpose provides direction, resilience, and significant health benefits. It contrasts a life of instant gratification (hedonism) with a life of meaning (eudaimonia), framing recovery as a shift towards the latter. The session introduces a core framework based on Celtic wisdom—the 'Four Joys' and 'Four Sorrows'—to understand how all life experiences, both positive and negative, contribute to building wisdom. Practical strategies and reflective exercises are provided to help individuals identify their values and build a life of purpose.

3. Reconstructed Teaching Content

The Foundation of Purpose: Meeting Basic Needs

Before one can contemplate higher-level concepts like self-actualisation and purpose, it is essential to have the foundational needs of Maslow's hierarchy of needs met. This includes:

- * **Physiological Needs:** Food and physical well-being.
- * **Safety and Security:** A stable and safe environment.
- * **Love and Belonging:** Connection with people who understand and accept you.
- * **Esteem:** Self-love and receiving esteem from others.

Only when these layers are secure can an individual meaningfully engage with self-actualisation, which translates into defining one's values, purpose, and goals. This is the path to empowerment, hope, and finding one's "North Star."

What is Wisdom?

Wisdom is not derived from academic knowledge or being well-read. It is the profound self-knowledge acquired through reflecting on life experiences, both positive and negative. Some of the wisest individuals possess deep experiential knowledge without formal education. Wisdom requires reflection on our lived experiences to extract meaning.

A Framework for Wisdom: The Celtic 'Four Joys' and 'Four Sorrows'

An ancient Celtic poem from the seventh century, "The Cauldron of Poise," outlines eight core human experiences—four joys and four sorrows—that are essential for developing wisdom.



The Four Joys (Positive Experiences that Build Wisdom):

- * **Prosperity:** In this context, prosperity means living well. It is not about financial wealth but about meeting our fundamental needs. In modern terms, this includes eating well, exercising, sleeping adequately, and connecting with nature and other people.
- * **Poetic Ecstasy:** This refers to moments of awe and profound emotional connection. It can be experienced when deeply moved by a film, a poem, a piece of art, or the beauty of a sunset. These are moments that speak directly to the heart.
- * **Artistic Creativity:** This is the satisfaction gained from working hard to create or achieve something. It represents the authentic process of effort leading to reward, which is the direct opposite of addiction's cycle of instant gratification followed by misery. True creativity and achievement foster authenticity. Authenticity is understanding that work must precede results, whereas addiction represents inauthenticity—seeking results without the work.
- * **Sexual Passion:** On a higher level, this joy represents the deep, meaningful connection with other people. Recovery cannot be a solitary journey. The "I will try harder" mentality is often a path to failure. Recovery requires a shift to a "we" focus, involving connection with support groups and other people in a meaningful way.

The Four Sorrows (Difficult Experiences that Build Wisdom):

- * **Pilgrimage:** This is the experience of doing hard things and stepping outside your comfort zone. In the seventh-century Celtic context, it meant a literal journey fraught with danger for spiritual enlightenment. Today, it means pushing past our limits to achieve growth. There is no growth in the comfort zone. This concept highlights the difference between self-care and self-indulgence.
- * **Self-indulgence:** Staying in bed all day, avoiding responsibilities.
- * **Self-care:** The hard work of maintaining a routine, exercising, connecting with others, and showing up for your life.
- * **Longing:** This is the vital experience of wanting something you cannot have. It teaches resilience, humility, and how to function within a society where not all desires can be met. A person who always gets what they want becomes spoiled and selfish. This perspective is useful for reframing cravings in recovery.
- * **Jealousy:** The feeling of jealousy is often circular; the people you are jealous of may also be jealous of you. Experiencing jealousy can foster empathy and the ability to forgive others who feel jealous of you. It is an interconnected human emotion.
- * **Grief:** Loss is an inevitable part of life. Experiencing grief can lead to a deeper appreciation for what you have, provide perspective, help repair relationships, and ultimately open the door to identifying your purpose.

The Role of Attachment in Addiction

Attachment theory, which describes the bond with a primary caregiver, is relevant to understanding addiction.

- * **Secure Attachment:** Individuals who received consistent care often develop secure attachment and tend to be more resilient, able to navigate challenges without becoming dependent on substances.
- * **Insecure Attachment:** Anxious, avoidant, or disorganised attachment styles, often resulting from trauma or inconsistent caregiving, can make a person more vulnerable to



developing addiction as a coping mechanism.

Finding the Self: Identity in Recovery

A clear sense of identity is crucial for a meaningful recovery. To help identify who you are at your core, reflect on these questions, prefaced with the phrase "Above all else":

- * What do I fear?
- * What do I desire?
- * How do I defend myself?
- * Where do I put my focus?
- * What do I quest for?

Answering these honestly, beyond superficial wants, reveals your core motivations and values. For example, realising that your primary value is autonomy helps you understand your reactions when that value is threatened.

Hope and Your Future Self

Hope can be cultivated by connecting with a future version of yourself.

* **Reflection Exercise:** Imagine your future self, ten years from now—wise, compassionate, and successful in recovery. What guidance and hope would they offer you today? This future self has the wisdom of experience and wants you to succeed. Consider what they would say to help you begin the journey of becoming the best version of yourself.

The Miracle and Obituary Questions

Two powerful questions can provide clarity on purpose:

1. **The Miracle Question:** If a magic wand could instantly cure you of addiction, what would you do next? What would your life look like, and how would others know you were cured? This question helps reveal what you truly want for your life, free from addiction.
2. **The Obituary Question:** At the end of your life, what do you want people to say about you? Not the formal eulogy, but the honest conversation between those who knew you best. You have the power, starting today, to influence that narrative.

Inspiration, Creativity, and Execution

The inventor Thomas Edison stated that "Genius is one percent inspiration, ninety-nine percent perspiration."

* **The Hypnagogic State:** This is the relaxed, pre-sleep state where the brain's logical filter is lowered, allowing for creative free association. Edison used this state to capture ideas. This state can be accessed without substances.

* **The Artist's Paradox:** The belief that one must be drug-affected to be creative is a myth. While substances might induce a state of free association, they impair the ability to execute ideas. True creativity requires inspiration followed by the hard work of execution.

* As the engineer Carroll Shelby said, "Imagination without execution is mere hallucination."

Finding Your North Star: Values, Purpose, and Goals

Your "North Star" is the combination of your values, purpose, and goals that guides you through life.

* **Identifying Values:** Values can be identified when they are transgressed. If you do



something that makes you feel bad afterwards (e.g., insulting someone), you have likely violated a core value, such as compassion. Another way is to ask yourself: "What causes do I fight for?" and "What value am I defending?"

* **Finding Balance in Purpose (Eudaimonia):** A life of purpose is not about having no fun. It is about finding a healthy balance.

***Hedonism:** A life of 100% fun with no purpose (e.g., Bluto in Animal House*).*

***Extreme Purpose:** A life of 100% purpose with no fun (e.g., Sarah Connor in Terminator 2*).*

* **Eudaimonia:** The balanced state in the middle, a life with both purpose and enjoyment. This state is associated with proven physiological benefits, including a stronger immune system and reduced risk of heart attack, stroke, and Alzheimer's disease. As Viktor Frankl said, "We can cope with any 'how' so long as we know the 'why'."

Empowerment and Growth

Personal growth happens when we are challenged appropriately.

* **The 4% Rule:** Growth does not happen when tasks are too easy or too hard. The sweet spot for growth is to push yourself just 4% beyond your current comfort zone. This is the "extra mile" required for development.

A Final Thought on Time in Recovery

When someone asks how long you have been clean, think about your watch, not your calendar. Recovery starts fresh every day. Every day is Day One.

4. Key Mnemonics, Acronyms, and Frameworks

The Celtic 'Four Joys' and 'Four Sorrows'

This framework, from a seventh-century Celtic poem, posits that wisdom is gained from reflecting on the full spectrum of human experience.

* **The Four Joys (Positive Experiences):**

* **Prosperity:** Living well (health, connection).

* **Poetic Ecstasy:** Experiencing moments of awe.

* **Artistic Creativity:** The satisfaction of hard work leading to creation.

* **Sexual Passion:** Deep, meaningful connection with others.

* **The Four Sorrows (Difficult Experiences):**

* **Pilgrimage:** Doing hard things and stepping out of your comfort zone.

* **Longing:** The experience of wanting something you cannot have.

* **Jealousy:** A circular emotion that can teach forgiveness.

* **Grief:** Loss that can lead to appreciation and purpose.

Eudaimonia vs. Hedonism

This framework contrasts two approaches to life:

* **Hedonism:** A life focused on pleasure, fun, and instant gratification. This is often where addiction starts.

* **Eudaimonia:** A life of meaning, purpose, and balance. Recovery is the process of moving from hedonism towards eudaimonia.



The Artist's Paradox

This concept challenges the myth that creativity requires substance use. It states that while intoxication may provide "inspiration" (free association), it inhibits "perspiration" (the hard work of execution needed to bring ideas to life).

5. Key Concepts and Major Themes

- * **Purpose in Recovery:** Finding a sense of purpose is a key component of long-term, self-actualised recovery.
- * **Wisdom from Experience:** True wisdom comes from reflecting on all life experiences, both joyful and sorrowful.
- * **Authenticity:** The understanding that genuine satisfaction comes from hard work, contrasting with the inauthenticity of addiction's instant gratification.
- * **Connection:** Recovery is not possible in isolation; it requires meaningful connection with others.
- * **Self-Care vs. Self-Indulgence:** True self-care is the hard work of building a healthy life, not the passive comfort of self-indulgence.
- * **Growth Beyond the Comfort Zone:** Personal growth requires stepping into challenging territory.
- * **Balance (Eudaimonia):** A healthy life balances purpose with enjoyment and relaxation.
- * **Hope and Future Self:** Connecting with a future, wiser version of oneself can provide guidance and hope for the recovery journey.

6. Psychological, Behavioural, Recovery, or Wellness Applications

- * **Recovery:** A life of purpose is presented as a cornerstone of lasting recovery.
- * **Resilience:** Having a "why" (purpose) helps individuals cope with any "how" (adversity).
- * **Emotional Regulation:** Understanding that difficult emotions like longing, jealousy, and grief are sources of wisdom helps in processing them constructively.
- * **Purpose:** The entire session is focused on identifying and living a life of purpose.
- * **Identity:** Reflective exercises are provided to help individuals clarify their core identity and values.
- * **Self-Care:** The session distinguishes between productive self-care (hard work) and counterproductive self-indulgence.
- * **Behavioural Change:** The session advocates for pushing oneself 4% beyond one's comfort zone for sustained growth and change.
- * **Social Connection:** The importance of moving from an "I" to a "we" focus in recovery is heavily emphasised.

7. Practical Strategies, Reflections, and Exercises

- * **Connect with Others:** Actively participate in support groups and build meaningful relationships.
- * **Do Hard Things (The 4% Rule):** Consistently challenge yourself by stepping just outside



your comfort zone to foster growth.

* **Talk to Your Future Self:** Ask what guidance your wiser, future self would give you today.

* **The Miracle Question:** Ask yourself what your life would look like if you were instantly cured, and what is stopping you from starting that life now.

* **The Obituary Question:** Reflect on what you want people to say about you at the end of your life and start living in a way that aligns with that vision.

* **Identify Your Values:** Pay attention to when you transgress a value (indicated by feeling bad about an action) or identify what causes you are willing to fight for.

* **Embrace the Artist's Paradox:** Recognise that inspiration is only 1% of the equation; the other 99% is the hard work of execution.

* **Focus on Today:** When thinking about sobriety, focus on the present day ("look at your watch, not your calendar").

8. Key Stories, Analogies, and Teaching Examples

* **The Stonemasons of Notre Dame:** Two stonemasons are doing the same gruelling work. One sees it as a terrible chore. The other says, "I am building the house of my God." The one with a sense of purpose is better able to cope with the hardship.

Sarah Connor and Bluto: These film characters represent the two extremes of purpose and fun. Sarah Connor (Terminator 2) has a life of 100% purpose but no fun. Bluto (Animal House*) has a life of 100% fun but no purpose. Recovery aims for the healthy balance (eudaimonia) in between.

* **Thomas Edison's Spoon:** The story of Edison falling asleep with a metal spoon to wake himself up at the moment of inspiration illustrates how to access the creative, pre-sleep (hypnagogic) state.

* **Saint Michael of Jagger:** The Rolling Stones' lyric, "You can't always get what you want," is used to illustrate the wisdom gained from the experience of longing.

9. Key Take-Home Messages

* A life of purpose is a key element of lasting recovery and has proven health benefits.

* Wisdom is not about what you know, but about what you have learned from all of life's experiences, both the joys and the sorrows.

* Accepting that you can't always get what you want is a crucial part of personal growth.

* Imagination without execution is just hallucination; you must put in the hard work.

* We can cope with any "how" in life as long as we have a clear "why."

10. Reflection Questions

* **The Miracle Question:** If you were magically cured of addiction right now, what is the very first thing you would do? What would your life look like?

* **The Obituary Question:** At the end of your life, what do you want the people who knew you best to say about you in an honest, unguarded moment?

* **Core Identity Questions:** Above all else...



- * What do you fear?
- * What do you desire?
- * What do you quest for?
- * **Values Question:** What causes do you fight for, and what values are you defending when you do?
- * **Future Self Question:** What would your future self, 10 years from now—wise, compassionate, and successful—say to you today to give you hope and guidance?