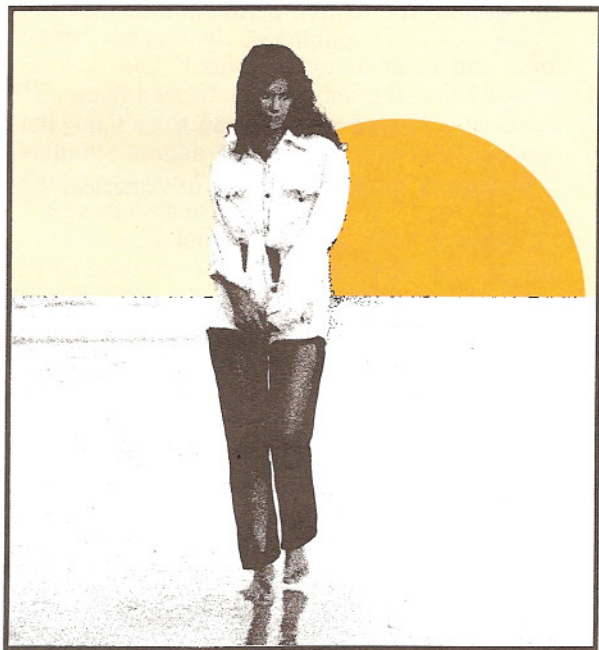


POCKET POWER

UNDERSTANDING

H5905 152

REJECTION



Hazelden®

First published April, 1987.

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ISBN: 0-89486-440-8

Printed in the United States of America.

Hazelden.

Editor's Note:

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UNDERSTANDING REJECTION

The pain of rejection can be unbearable. I'll never forget the woman who called me one midnight on the hotline. She was drunk and asked me my name. I told her, but when I asked her name, she replied, "Zero."

"No, no," I said, "Your name is not Zero. You don't have to tell me what it is, but I have to tell you it's not Zero because you are a person, a valuable human being. You have a real name. God loves you."

She was silent.

"Listen, I know how you feel," I went on, "I've been there. But that was eighteen months ago and I'm okay now; I'm in recovery. I'm in A.A. I'm glad you called because I can tell you I know there's hope for you. God has hope for you. Talk to me."

She began her story, drinking while she spoke. It was the familiar story of despair. She had no friends, no family, no job, no money. She had suffered a total loss of self-esteem. She had lost all hope. She wanted to die.

The pain of all that rejection was in her voice, a voice filled with grief and tears and mourning for herself.

A Tangle of Emotions

Rejection isn't easy under any circumstances. For the alcoholic who may be either feeling rejected or dishing rejection out, rejection is a difficult emotion because it is so entangled with other tough emotions.

When we feel rejected, we also feel certain fears and begin discounting ourselves. In self-defense, the beginning of resentment arises.

But, when we reject others it becomes another story; it becomes anger. According to a psychiatrist I once saw, anger is supposed to be okay when it is righteous. "Righteous anger is okay," she said.

I wasn't in the program then. I had not yet tried to perform the ultimate rejection upon myself that finally led me to the program and recovery. I was still in heavy denial which was rejection of myself, my alcoholism, my God, and any hope for help. Talk about righteous anger.

In our recovery, we want to be perfect. But, we learn we are not perfect and never will be perfect. With this in mind, we can sort through our anger and ask ourselves when anger is okay. When can we be angry about feeling rejected? When can anger be the instrument by which we can legitimately reject others?

We don't know much about the woman who called herself Zero, yet we can identify with her if we have ever been, in our alcoholic time and space, where she was the night she called the hotline and said she was going to have to kill herself.

She was communicating ultimate rejection. It is the place some of us alcoholics, in our insanity, arrive at after all the other rejections we have received and given in our alcoholic lives. We may have thought we should just get on with it and get it over with. But in recovery, we have to know and firmly believe this ultimate kind of rejection is no longer an option and never was.

Sometimes we need to remind ourselves that suicide is no option, no matter how painful the reminder. When we pause and give some thought to this, we are then able to help others. And helping others is a vital part of our recovery.

The Ultimate Dialogue

When the woman called the hotline that night, it presented the opportunity for the ultimate dialogue — a response to her rejection of herself and her rotten world. That call gave me an opportunity to work with God and let God direct the conversation in trying to save a life. I

was given the opportunity to tell her why staying alive is the only way to fight rejection. And I told her how we can find hope by going to meetings and being with others who are in the same boat we are.

At first she wasn't buying my words. But she called back several times throughout the night until she finally said, "I give up," and hung up the phone. It was two-way rejection: First, she rejected my words; then, she rejected herself.

However, she called again. She'd had a nap. By the sound of her voice, she had also had more alcohol. The dialogue went on until it was agreed I would call her in the morning. In the morning, my calls were unanswered. The lifeline seemed to be closed forever, and I felt rejected.

This, however, isn't the end of the story. Even though we'll never really know about the person who called herself Zero, we can't give up hope. Maybe she went to a meeting that morning. Maybe she heard the message and decided to try living one more time. Maybe she's still alive.

We can't give up on ourselves or on those who are still abusing alcohol and other drugs. We're all in the same boat. We can't stop fighting rejection for a moment — whether it's ours or someone else's — because it is a mistake we can't afford.

As practicing alcoholics we used to feel rejected in an amazingly routine way. We felt angrily rejected when the paperboy didn't deliver the paper on time. *So we got drunk.* We felt rejected when our two-year-old son didn't want a kiss. *So we got drunk.*

We felt rejected when our mother didn't call to see how we were, or when a good friend failed to invite us to a party. We felt rejected when someone at a party frowned when he saw us pour yet another hefty drink. We felt rejected again and again, so *we got drunk again and again.*

Rejection also works in the reverse direction. We proclaim, "To hell with the newspaper. I'll cancel it and get a different paper." "To hell with my child; someone else will kiss me." "As for you, dear mother, you seem to forget I called you when you needed me. But I won't do that again, because you don't care about me."

These were the reasons we gave for drinking. It's hard to believe these types of reasons now, isn't it? It's hard to believe we used to be that way, offering an open invitation to rejection in endless situations. But, in some ways we're still there. *We're not perfect.* We can remember that rejection can sometimes be a valid emotion with us, if we examine it and make it a positive outcome rather than a negative outlook.

Positive Responses to Rejection

We need to hear the music of A.A. because it is a symphony for us. It is life itself. It is a twelve-note chord, a musical score. When it is translated into a program for life, it is a blueprint for recovery. We need to turn rejection around in our thoughts and use it positively.

If we wonder if this is possible, we can look at our lives and realize we *have* done this. As alcoholics in recovery we have rejected the option of ever drinking again. We have rejected suicide. We have rejected dishonesty, disrespect, fear, grandiosity, unrealistic expectations, loneliness, impatience, and paranoia. We have done this *one day at a time*.

And by doing this, by rejecting the negatives in our lives, we have learned to accept the positive aspects of ourselves and others. Thus, some forms of rejection aren't so bad after all. Some righteous anger or rejection is okay. It goes back to the matter of sorting things out.

Some of us may be feeling rejected right now. Maybe we're having a problem sorting out feelings about ourselves or someone else who is important in our lives. We may feel inadequate or lonely. We may feel impatient, even angry with ourselves. We may feel lost and confused.

These feelings are okay. We're human. We

can relax, quiet ourselves, and say the Serenity Prayer.

We can take a few minutes right now, wherever we are, and review the program and its miraculous Twelve Steps. We can remember how they helped us begin our recovery and stay with it, one step at a time, one day at a time.

We can remember the First Step, our heavy denial, and how we finally rejected that denial and began to admit our powerlessness. We can remember the Second and Third Steps where we began to accept ourselves and our defects; we let our Higher Power into our lives to help us learn to deal with those defects and our new lives.

When we're still, we can listen to the music of the program, and we know we're not alone. Again and again, the reprise tells us we are one among many who have, at one time or another in our alcoholic lives, experienced something close to ultimate rejection.

We can no longer reject ourselves with the kind of misplaced sensitivity and loneliness that drinking brought us. God is with us.

The Larceny of Rejection

Maybe there is something to that old saying about everyone having a little larceny in their

souls. Larceny is cribbing, cheating, and deceiving for self-gain. When we felt rejected, we drank, and drinking became the theft of our personal goals, happiness, and self-respect. This was larcenous behavior, and we robbed ourselves.

In recovery, we have stopped robbing ourselves and started to look at feelings behind that rejection. Perhaps we feel *discounted*. That's a valid word and feeling, and we may feel discounted for a legitimate reason.

We need to remember that "stinkin' thinkin'" is larcenous behavior. It can sneak up on us and quickly undermine our sobriety. A negative outlook can cause us to substitute one bad habit for another, denying the problem. We may have said to ourselves or to our friends, "No more whiskey for me. I'll drink wine or beer. Then I'll be okay."

These ways of substitution only make our negative feelings escalate. For example, consider Bob, who telephoned an insurance company to take care of some important business for him. The person Bob needed to talk with wasn't there. He left a message asking that person to return his call as soon as possible. After a few days passed with no answer, he asked himself if he felt rejected, but he told himself this emotion was not *allowed*. But he did feel dis-

counted. He felt the person he called wasn't giving him the respect he deserved. He even jumped to conclusions, thinking people who deserved less attention than he were getting better service.

We get so entangled in our feelings sometimes that the end result is a feeling of rejection. We can call it hurt, neglect, ignorance, indifference, hatred, or even being discounted wholesale. In the end, it is rejection. That's the feeling, and we need to sort it out while it's happening to us. We need to think very carefully and thoughtfully about all the reasons we used in concluding we'd been rejected. We need to go beyond these feelings to all the perfectly good reasons why that person didn't call us back.

We can also experience Bob's reaction in our personal relationships. If friends are slow in returning calls, they may have forgotten. Rather than feeling rejected, we can remember our friends may have legitimate reasons for not calling us back.

We need to be as understanding of others as we want them to be of us. But, if we could always do that we might not have to take the time to read this pamphlet. We're not perfect; we're human. The only *perfect being* is our

Higher Power who is very much with us right now.

Gratitude

We may never know what happened to the woman who called herself Zero. She may have performed the ultimate rejection on herself, or she may have found the A.A. program. The most important thing for us to know is that we're alive. We will not ever reject ourselves again by drinking. God is with us. Thank God we're with Him.

We thank God every morning, every night, sometimes every hour of the day, for our recovery. We thank our Higher Power for being with us at all times as we continue to maintain, or struggle to maintain, our recovery. We thank our Higher Power for helping us work through the many emotions that sometimes get in our way, knowing that He will help us see those same emotions from a different point of view — a vantage point — that is entirely positive.

We live in a difficult world, a world of conflicts. Yet, we do not have to think entirely in terms of opposing forces. We don't have to substitute love for hate, love for jealousy, or love for anger. This approach doesn't necessarily

work. There are no absolutes in the world of emotions.

Rejection can be difficult to deal with whether it is real or imagined. The important thing right now is to care about ourselves as rational human beings by thinking carefully about whether or not we have really been rejected. If we decide we have, we can do something positive about it. We can accept the rejection, sort through it, and turn it over to God.

How we handle rejection is extremely important. As recovering alcoholics, we turn to A.A. and the support system of our recovery, and we work things out with the help of others who understand us. One of those who understands us is our Higher Power. He knows and understands us best. May we find Him now.

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