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POCKET POWER

WHEN
DOORS CLOSE



Hazelden®

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WHEN DOORS CLOSE

There's a saying that when one door closes another always opens. This adage recognizes there are times when life seems to put obstacles in our paths, when all avenues appear blocked, and we're stuck. It also recognizes that such times can lead to new success and happiness, if we're only willing to look around and see what other doors are open to us. There is always at least one other door — often many. Feeling stuck is simply our perception of what's happening in our lives. When we change our perceptions, we discover we're not stuck at all.

Addiction and recovery are fine examples of closed and open doors. For years we used and abused drugs because they made us feel better about ourselves and our world. Then our addictions turned on us. We could no longer find the pleasure or relief we used to find from alcohol or other drugs. For most of us, the doors seemed to close with a bang when we hit bottom.

When we hit bottom we didn't know what to do. We were stuck on the merry-go-round of use, denial, and addiction. Our lives seemed permanently ruined; we were hopeless and helpless. We thought we had nowhere to turn. But

we know now, looking back, that this perception was wrong.

Our despair somehow led us to the process of recovery. We may have sought help on our own, or our employer, the courts, or a loved one may have insisted we enter a treatment program. We may not even be sure how it happened, but it did. No matter how it happened, a door we hadn't even known was there suddenly opened, and we stepped through to a new, productive, and satisfying way of life.

When we first begin recovery, we get a new lease on life; it's as if we've been reborn. As our minds clear, we awaken to the opportunities around us that we're now ready to act on. We have the ability to pursue dreams we once only thought about.

We often expect only good things will happen to us now that we're clean and sober, although the program certainly doesn't promise this. In fact, many people experience a "honeymoon" when they begin recovering. Many of our problems begin to clear up; we may reunite with our families; the employer who threatened to fire us may welcome us back to work. Our financial problems may clear up. We may find a new group of friends, and more importantly, have a new way of life that will bring the peace of mind we always wanted.

Eventually the honeymoon ends, however. As we go about our daily affairs and begin to live fuller lives, we find it doesn't all go smoothly. Open doors suddenly close in our faces.

For instance, we may feel ready to make a lucrative career change, but we discover the job isn't available or someone else was hired. Our heart may be set on moving to a new apartment or location, but we are unable to do so. Vacation or travel plans may be interrupted. We may think we've found our lifelong partner, only to have the romance end suddenly and unpleasantly. We often go through periods when all doors seem closed. Our best plans go awry, no matter how hard we work. Such times are incredibly frustrating.

The solution is to find the open door. Our own stories of addiction and recovery contain the keys to finding and opening new doors, and the Twelve Steps provide the method.

When a door closes, we can take constructive action rather than spending our emotions destructively. We can turn closed doors into powerful learning experiences. We can move ahead and stop spinning our wheels by drawing on the Twelve Steps. When we understand the circumstances around us, we can build a foundation that allows us to decide what to do next.

First Things First

Just as it was necessary to accept our addiction before recovery could really begin, we must accept closed doors and recognize our powerlessness. Step One isn't limited to our addiction; we can use it in any situation. The more we apply Step One, the less often we'll feel stuck.

If, for instance, we don't get a job we wanted, we can accept our powerlessness over the situation. The job isn't ours, no matter how much we wished for it, and there's nothing we can do about it. The job rejection can be used as an opportunity to increase our faith that our Higher Power has something better in store for us — a chance to practice Step Three.

This acceptance and surrender is necessary in any situation: a move that didn't work out, a broken romance, or spoiled vacation plans. When we truly believe and turn our will and lives over to our Higher Power, we can be certain our lives will work.

When a door shuts in our faces, we're likely to feel depressed about it. Even if we have accepted the fact, we're apt to feel resentful. It's easy to think our efforts are pointless because nothing seems to work. The solution to this depression is action. Such action can be as simple as getting up and fixing breakfast or as compli-

cated as going back to school. Attending more meetings and reaching out to help others are also cures for depression.

We can use Step Ten to inventory the situation. When doors shut in our faces we are upset because we are disappointed. It can help to understand what our expectations were. Taking a close look at our feelings and expectations — preferably in writing — is constructive action that clears up depression and points us toward the open door.

In the case of a job rejection, we might want to ask ourselves such questions as: Why did I expect to get that job? Did I misunderstand something the interviewer said? Did I assume I was qualified when perhaps I wasn't? Am I willing to admit the person who got the job was more qualified? Was I reaching too high, based on my qualifications and experience? Was I dealing in wishful thinking?

Questions like these put the failure in perspective, if we answer them honestly. The same kinds of questions work well in other circumstances.

Pride May Be a Problem

We shouldn't overlook pride in our inventories. When a door is shut, our egos are likely to

be wounded. We're apt to feel we deserved better treatment. Maybe we've bragged to our friends about anticipated changes, and now we feel foolish having to admit we didn't get what we wanted. When we see pride getting in our way, we can use Step Seven and ask God to remove it.

We can also ask ourselves, is that job, apartment, or relationship what I truly needed? Or were these goals merely what I wished I had or thought I should have?

In the early stages of recovery, we often fall into the trap of doing what we think we should, rather than what we truly want to do. We may fool ourselves about the kind of work we want because it has prestige or offers a high salary. We may think moving to a particular area will enhance our image, even though we prefer a simpler life-style.

It rarely works to pursue goals only because we think we should, rather than because we truly want them. When things go wrong, we have an opportunity to look within ourselves and find our true objectives.

An inventory should include some positive things too. We may discover we want a particular job or place to live. An inventory can help us take a closer look at what we have to offer. Then we can turn apparent failure into success by de-

terminating what needs to be done. For example, we may need more training or we may need to take a job that will allow us to work up the ladder. We may have to reassess how we're using our income, so our spending matches our priorities.

If we discover our objectives conflict with what we truly want, we can use this information to discover what our goals should be. Often we find clues to what we really want by looking at what we already do well. Once we know what we want, we can take the appropriate action to accomplish it.

In either case, we've taken the opportunity to find out more about ourselves, which is always an advantage.

Being Put On Hold

Other examples of doors closing are those periods when we feel as if we've been put on hold. We feel there's no movement in our lives. In the job world, it often means we wait for someone else to make a decision, so we know what to do next. Or, we apply for credit, and the bank takes longer than we think necessary to make a decision. Our love life seems stagnant — either we don't have a relationship or our current relationship is going through the doldrums. Even our program and spiritual growth seem to

have hit a plateau.

It's tempting, but unwise, to force a resolution during these periods. If we try to kick a particular door open, we're likely to discover we've created more problems than we had in the first place. It's also tempting to give up and feel nothing is worth pursuing. This is also a dead-end street. We may give up just before achieving success.

The key to tolerating these periods is patience — sometimes lots of it. After we've done everything reasonable, we can only wait hopefully, gracefully, until the situation resolves itself.

A quick way to increase our patience is through practicing Step Eleven. Improving our conscious contact with our Higher Power will result in clarity and peace of mind. Prayer and meditation can take many forms. It doesn't always have to be a formal process. Walking in the woods, listening to calming music, or taking a long, relaxing shower will often still our minds and renew our sense of connection to our Higher Power.

We can also use Step Twelve to help us feel unstuck. Reaching out to others is a sure way to take our minds off ourselves. Working with others puts our own lives in perspective. Sharing our experience, strength, and hope helps us realize how far we've come in our recovery. These

things get us out of ourselves and tend to stop the circular thinking that makes us so miserable. Even taking a job for our group such as being secretary or treasurer puts us back in the position of giving rather than receiving.

It's also helpful to talk about our frustrations at meetings and with our sponsors. When we share experiences, we'll find we're not alone; people who have gone through similar situations will be happy to share their experiences with us.

Doors We Close

Don't overlook the doors we close ourselves. It's easy to assume the door was closed by someone or something else. But often we close them without even realizing it. We may close a door by failing to follow up on an unexpected opportunity. Our recovery again provides a concrete example. Few of us, while using drugs, would have considered the threat of being fired or a conviction for drunk driving to be opportunities for recovery. But these negative situations can work out well. If we refuse chances, we might shut the door on a new and satisfying way of life.

The same is true of other situations in our lives. We may meet someone who says he or she

has a job for us. If we don't follow through, we'll never know what kind of opportunity we missed. Someone may suggest we would enjoy living in a neighborhood we never considered before. If we don't at least take a look, we may pass up the perfect location. We may get stuck in a rut of only going to certain weekly meetings. Trying a new meeting may open up a whole new view of our program. We'll never know until we try.

Each day is like a new door opening. We can either say yes and walk through, or refuse and shut the door. If we're alert, open-minded, and willing, we'll be able to see the doorways open to us. We need to be flexible and resourceful, rather than stuck in our preconceived notions of how life should be.

Summing Up

There are times when doors close — it's a fact of life. We don't need to expect them to close, but we shouldn't be surprised when it happens.

And it's true that when one door closes, another always opens. We simply have to be willing to look, often in new directions, to find the open door.

Our recovery makes it possible for us to look for the newly opened door, to take advantage of

it, and to walk through it in confidence. Just as we found the courage to walk through the open door of recovery, we can find the courage to turn our backs on closed doors and move on.

Staying alert and working Steps Ten, Eleven, and Twelve will assure our continued growth in the program and in our lives.

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