

This is a 'bite' from Roger Smith's email series "Mood and Recovery Bites"

(Based on an article written by Roger in 2006)

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Bite 042 - Recovery Concepts

The work of Mary Ellen Copeland introduced the world to 5 recovery concepts. These concepts apply when recovering from all kinds of crisis whether: work related or from an accident, financial, relationships and probably any crisis you could be struggling with at the moment. They are known to aid recovery from most illnesses whether mainly physical or mental. These basic concepts are sometimes called **principles or pillars of recovery**. They support effective recovery actions.

Five concepts/principles/pillars:

1. HOPE

When something traumatic happens we can temporarily lose hope. We may for a while not be able to imagine how we can ever rebuild our lives. Sometimes hope disappears gradually as we try again and again with each time things not working out right. Hope can disappear in an instant if for example you are diagnosed with an illness that you are told is incurable. Often we do not, so much, lose hope as have it taken away by others. For example, a health professional saying, "We are treating a chemical imbalance here, do not think about recovery."

How much hope do we need to start recovering? My experience is: Just one tiny spark! In helping people recover, just the tiniest bit of hope is often all that is needed to make a huge difference.

2. PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

"As one goes through life, one learns that if you don't paddle your own canoe, you don't move."
Katharine Hepburn

Whatever crisis we go through, we know that recovery takes a long time if we are looking for others to do everything for us. When we decide that it is up to us to recover, things really start to happen.

How much personal responsibility do we need to start recovering? We probably do not need as much personal responsibility as most people imagine. It is human nature that everyone wants to be associated with people who want to do well. When we are seen to be *determined* to recover, we will start to find others who want to help us, so we will not be struggling on our own for long.

3. SELF – AGENCY (using your strengths)

This used to be called self-advocacy, meaning speaking up for yourself. The agency idea is that rather than relying on someone else to say what it is that we *need*, we start saying what we *need* for ourselves.

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Example: I contacted Stephen Fry's agent to ask if Stephen would like to read my book. The reply was... "Stephen is not doing MD (Manic Depression) now..... He has moved onto other things." I could not believe what I was hearing and said to my wife that after nearly 30 years of `doing' MD, I would love to stop `doing' MD (be instantly cured) and move onto other things. Then I realised that Mr Fry's agent never asked Stephen about my book, probably having judged there was no money in it. We do not need agents like this. Recovery depends on being able to say what it is we need and want to do.

Adding the words `using your strengths' takes the idea a step further in that we recover best as we start to DO recovery based activities for ourselves. It could be as simple as deciding that you will go for a walk every morning before breakfast or that you will phone your best friend every Sunday evening. It is a principle about DOING things when *you need* to do them for your recovery. Strengths: It is also about learning what you are good at and doing more of the things you are good at, rather than always being told what to do by some expert.

4. EDUCATION

How much education do we need for recovery? LOADS! Whatever crisis you have been through, *ongoing* education is essential to avoid that same awful thing happening again. It is said that, "We are creatures of habit" and "History has a habit of repeating itself" and "If you always do what you have always done, you will get always get what you have always got!"

I have found through painful experience that all the above ideas are true. Reluctantly I have come to accept that I need to know about a disorder and about how people stay well. When my life is not working out as I want, I learn all I can about the challenges I am facing. This sounds painful. Loads of text books to read? It doesn't need to be so hard. The best way I have found is to get connected to people who are experts by experience.

Whatever problem/challenge/disorder/illness you have, someone else will have had similar in the past. Most likely they learned to live with it/cope/recover. Most likely they will be keen to share their experience and the wisdom they have gained.

Learning about recovery doesn't have to be hard work if you start by listening to people who have learnt by experience. This does not mean education is an easy principle. If you are going to be really robust then you probably will need to read books, leaflets, watch documentaries, listen to experts on the radio. Sometimes the exact answers you need can be in the most unlikely places, like in films or song lyrics. Education is a life long activity – it can and should be fun.

5. SUPPORT

Support is a massive subject. We each need many types of support and we all need different amounts of support. When something bad happens support can make the difference between us falling into a crisis or being able to take events in our stride.

It can be hard to admit that we do not have the best skills for gaining support. It is like admitting that we struggle to make and keep friends. But if we can HOPE to be better, take RESPONSIBILITY for learning new skills and can EDUCATE ourselves about how to gain the SUPPORT we need, then we can recover from almost anything.
