

Recovery Day 2014

Good morning,

My name is Bob Noble and I'm a grateful recovering alcoholic and addict. I'm also a loving father, caring stepfather, a son who is now welcomed with open arms into the home of his parents, and a contributing member of society who's career path has trudged (which I've learned means to walk with purpose) to the role of Director of Sales for The Residence Inn by Marriott. In no small part, I'd attribute a significant portion of my success in recovery (I just celebrated 5 years on February 4th) to having been a member of a Recovery House identical to those that are being run by Vermont Foundation of Recovery, Inc. (VFOR) The aforementioned gifts that I've been graced with were not always a part of my life, in fact, for many years (from about the age of 16 until my late 20's, I'm now 35) these things were nearly the polar opposite of the lying, cheating, stealing, violent, disrespectful daily user and abuser of drugs and alcohol that I became as a direct result of the disease of alcoholism and addiction that I have been afflicted with. I believe it to be a disease; A cunning, baffling, & incredibly powerful malady that affects the mind and body in such a way that I've been taught, left untreated, can lead the one affected into the gates of insanity or death. Some may say I'm exaggerating or sensationalizing the seriousness. To those I urge you to not only stand on the front lines of the battle against addiction for a short time, but to just take a glance through your local paper, or come be present in the fellowship that's saved my life and you'll quickly recognize that the war we've now waged against addiction is a mighty adversary. I may not be an expert on alcoholism or addiction, but I am an expert on my experience... I was there...well, I was physically present...certainly not all there...up until February 4th 2009. Which, by the way, was not my first attempt at getting sober. I recognized that I had an issue with drugs and alcohol very early on. It took years arrests, multiple DWI's, broken relationships, lost jobs, failing health, financial ruin, multiple stays in various rehabs, a trip to the Emergency Room with a Blood Alcohol

content of .39, of not being present physically or emotionally for my loved ones ... to finally have this disease beat me to the point of submission, to the point of willingness to do whatever it took to no longer be a slave to drugs and alcohol.

In my humble opinion there's a great myth that you can spend a 30 day stint (it may have even been reduced in our state) in a rehab and ... off you go, you're cured! I'm sorry to annoy the senses, but that is HORSE-****! That is NOT my experience! The rehab facility that lays the groundwork for, what I have found to be, a daily reprieve from the obsession to use drugs and alcohol based on the maintenance of a spiritual condition, and a program of recovery that surrounds you with other people who suffer from the same disease and battle the same daily challenges as you...THOSE are the rehabs that are preparing people for success with long-term sobriety. Unfortunately, it's also my experience that out of the thirty-something people who I was in the farm with, there is only 1 other person still sober today. I've attended the funerals of more than I care to count, and almost every well before their time, as either a direct or indirect result of this disease.

Upon my finishing the program at Maple Leaf Farm for the fifth time in 2009, I knew that I had to take a different path. I had tried things my way and failed time, and time again. I was completely beaten, and absolutely sick and tired, of being sick and tired. I had lived in an Oxford House in Burlington for a period of almost 2 years, but towards the end of that stint I began to think that I had outsmarted my disease...I had it all figured out...I thought, I'm not going to drink or use hard drugs... but as long as I keep going to meetings and performing my duties as house president, I'll be fine with a little "marijuana maintenance". What I've come to learn is that I cannot safely put any substance whatsoever into my body that affects my mind. Reason being, is that once my mind has been altered by any substance, it makes it that much easier for me to mentally obsess about drinking or drugging and essentially, one day, be it weeks or months down the road, going back to my drink or drug of choice. Over the course of the

next few months, I did not remain vigilant in what I had been taught would keep me sober on a daily basis. I smoked pot daily, compulsively, from the first time I had gone back to smoking. My meeting attendance dwindled. I wasn't practicing what I was preaching in the least! Besides, at the end of my tenure as Oxford House president, where was I going to go? I'm a 30 year old man, I sure don't want to move back in with mom and dad...all of the "friends" that I had outside of the safe confines of the sober house were drinking "normally" or using hard drugs recreationally (a craft I have never mastered, I have a disease of more, I can't even chew one piece of gum, I have to have 2!) and I had learned that my mind is not a good neighborhood, a place that I shouldn't go alone, so living by myself didn't seem a logical option. Ultimately, after having more than 18 months sober, and being caught with marijuana by my sober house-mates, I decided that if I was going back out, I was going to do so with a BANG and I sure as hell was going right back to drinking and my drugs of choice. So I did.

The next couple weeks of "research and development" were some of my darkest days. I've been taught that a head full of our program of recovery and a belly full of booze is an unpleasant combination...how right they were. I couldn't put enough drugs (cocaine, oxys, marijuana) and alcohol into my system to numb out and subdue all that I had been taught about a program that had helped so many before me. What saved me? My cell phone. All of the people that I had met and gotten their phone numbers in recovery had two letters (the first in the alphabet and very near front of the phone book) next to their name...and as I scrolled through looking for my old drug contacts I kept coming across all those people...man...talk about a buzz kill.

I was finally given the gift of desperation that I needed. Not only did I go back to Maple Leaf Farm, but while I was there began to look for a Sober House that would also serve to transition me from there to an additional, less structured, form of Sober Living. At the time I didn't realize that's what I needed nor that's what I was looking for, but I did know that if nothing changes, nothing changes. My

time at The Foundation House was different. I had the type of structure that kept me in line with regards to mandatory meetings, house meetings, drug/alcohol screenings, house chores and even a house dog (Trooper was a miniature pincher that you couldn't help but love) But there was more; there was a brotherhood that grew among us. There was accountability to not only each other, but to the sober and smooth running of our home. Were there challenges? Absolutely. What we all learned though, is a life skill that many not afflicted with the disease learn early on, and that is how to deal with the ebb and flow of life without having to turn to drugs and alcohol as the solution. Many of us felt as though we belonged to something positive, and some, like being on a team for the first time in their life. Were there failures? Most definitely. But, those of us who did what we were taught and learned how to live life on life's terms, were ultimately given a new lease on life...we saw people around us who were succeeding in living a life free from drugs and alcohol and who not just appeared outwardly happy, but began to have a light in their eyes of "getting it" that is most easily identifiable by those in recovery who have seen a person at the depths of their disease, and by following a set a principles and seeing those around you do the same, come to begin living a life second to none.

What's the secret? I've come to learn that if I want to have success at building a house, it's probably best to find someone with experience in building houses and have them show me how to do it. Chances are good, for me at least, that I won't learn best by simply reading a book on building houses. The same is true for recovery. The only solution that I've found that shows results, prodigious results, is to surround myself with other men in recovery who are working towards the common goal of remaining drug and alcohol free, and to practice the principals of recovery in all my affairs. That includes, but is not just limited to, going to meetings. Those take up an hour of my day, but there's another 23 that I've learned I need to fill up with recovery based activities. I know that I didn't get sober to not enjoy life, and having the solid foundation of recovering men around me, day in and day out, was paramount. I

don't know if I can firmly stress enough how critical The Foundation House was in setting me up to succeed in remaining clean and sober.

Upon exiting The Foundation House, I was blessed with the opportunity to live in another sober living environment, but this time the only requirement was that I didn't drink or use drugs, one day at a time. There weren't mandatory meetings or random urinalysis. What there was, however, was a group of men who had all decided that they wanted to live a life free from drugs and alcohol. This was where the rubber met the road; this was the time in my recovery that "big brother" wasn't watching, but I was ready and willing. The road to recovery has not been completely smooth, life generally isn't. It has been, and continues to be, absolutely, 100% worth every single step that I've trudged with my brothers and sisters in recovery. I have relationships and friendships with depth and substance that I never imagined possible. I've watched a fellowship of recovering people blossom around me to the point that much of my recovery community feels like family.

From Wednesdays Burlington Free Press: "... imprisonment in Vermont costs more than \$1,000 a week, while diversion treatment programs cost about \$136 a week." Not only do recovery houses make sense from the life experience and relationships that a person can build, it's simple math. From the same article by Beth Garbitelli: Vermont fights drug crimes with treatment, not jail: "The Chittenden program's annual budget is about \$114,000....The average annual cost of housing Vermont prisoners is more than \$50,000 each, so even if the program stopped just 10 of it's 1200 participants from going on to jail, the savings would be hundreds of thousands of dollars..."

I'm sitting here today to tell you that my experience is proper treatment and the Vermont Foundation of Recovery is an opportunity not to be missed on many levels. I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to those who showed me that there was a way to live a clean and sober life. I've also learned that I

definitely cannot keep what I have unless I give it away. One day at a time, my life is immeasurably better as a direct result of the community of recovery that has so graciously shown me the way.