



Activity 0– Getting Honest: Principle Zero

Principle Zero states that if setbacks or relapses keep on occurring, it is often a matter of lack of **insight** or **motivation** that may be at the root of the problem.

Breaking down Principle Zero in Simple Terms:

1. A person is in a situation where he/she is supposed to be working on substance use issues.
2. This person keeps on returning to use of substances repeatedly despite making an effort.
3. This person realizes that he/she is not merely experiencing setbacks in their change process but rather the real underlying issue is that he/she is not motivated enough to stick with the process or he/she just don't fully believe in the need to change.

Putting this in even simpler terms, **Principle Zero** applies when someone comes to terms with the fact that –

“The main reason I keep using is that I am not fully convinced that I need to stop”

(Lack of Insight)

Or:

“The main reason that I keep using is because I really don't want to stop bad enough yet”

(Lack of Motivation)

Consider two examples:

Ryan: Ryan was in a situation that in effect forced him into stopping his use of cocaine as he was recently arrested for the second time for possession of cocaine. As a result, Ryan was concerned that he would be drug tested at his next court appearance. Ryan was able to stop using cocaine successfully after his arrest based on his current fear of consequences. Ryan's parents and girlfriend all expressed concern that Ryan has a drug abuse problem especially after he was arrested for the second time, however Ryan secretly thought to himself that there is no real problem and his arrests were really just “bad luck”. After Ryan's initial successful six weeks of not using cocaine, he went to court and although he should have been found guilty of a second cocaine charge, the charges were dropped due to a legal technicality. Ryan's mother then called his counselor days later to report: “Ryan is snorting cocaine again after he went to court and his charges were dropped – He RELAPSED!”

Discuss – Instead of looking at this as a “relapse”, how could principle zero apply in this case? (Think about Ryan's real insight and motivation)



Mandy: Mandy told her new counselor that she wanted to stop drinking because she was aware that drinking contributes to her depression because she usually feels worse and more depressed on days after she drinks. Mandy has Bipolar Disorder and was aware that if she drank again, eventually she would end up getting depressed again at some point. After three weeks of not drinking, Mandy's depressed mood improved and she felt a lot better and a lot happier again. Along with Mandy's improved mood she experienced a renewed sense of confidence that she would be alright if she started drinking again once in a while, so soon she started drinking again. Her counselor eventually found out that Mandy was drinking again and when asked Mandy simply stated "I RELAPSED" even though she made a conscious decision to start drinking again not long after she decided that she felt better. Mandy's counselor told her that it only seems like she wants to stop drinking when she is depressed but as soon as she feels better she soon forgets all about it.

Discuss – Instead of looking at this as a “relapse”, how could principle zero apply in this case? (Again, think in terms of insight and motivation – Does badly does Mandy really want to stop?)

Can anyone else come up with an example of a situation where you experienced repeated setbacks because you may not have been ready to change or you didn't want it bad enough?

Some examples:

- ***Person on a diet – “I'll starve myself all week but as soon as the weekend comes I somehow can convince myself that I deserve a double bacon cheeseburger or two. I need to get more motivated and stay that way!”***

- ***Person in bad relationship – “I know Jimmy is only nice to me when he wants something and otherwise he is a liar and a cheater but whenever he texts me, I can't help but respond and usually that ends up with us hanging out again. I guess deep down I still want to be with him even though I know he is no good for me”***

Your example:



Of course, quite often principle zero does not apply. There may be a strong level of insight and motivation needed for change and the reason for relapse, setbacks or other mistakes may be related to other issues. Still it is always beneficial to be in the habit of checking and rechecking your insight and motivation levels because they can change over time.

Follow Up - Whatever your situation may be, answer the following questions as honestly as possible.

1. Check which one may apply to you right now and then discuss your answer:

- I recognize that I need to change and so far I am motivated and doing well
- I have my good periods but I am still experiencing mistakes & setbacks on occasion
- I am pretty much still using and I have more work to do
- Other? (Describe) - _____

2. What would you say is the biggest challenge for you, when it comes to keeping your motivation level strong?

3. What may be a challenge to you maintaining insight? (For example, do you ever have doubts about or forget about your need to change?)

4. Is there anything else that you did not yet mention that may be holding you back?

5. What would happen if you decided to just give up with all of this right now? Keep in mind:

- *What may be some of the short term consequences?*
- *What might be some of the long term consequences?*
- *Getting honest and thinking ahead: If you could speak with your future self, how do you think you will feel about things if you gave up right now? (Is it likely you will wish that you just stuck with this and didn't give up?)*

6. To end on a positive note, list some honest reasons why you should not give up right now?