

## **Recover!**

Stanton Peele with Ilse Thomsson  
Da Capo Press (<http://www.dacapopress.com>): Boston, MA  
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In the nearly 40 years since Peele's first major publication, *Love and Addiction* (written with Archie Brodsky), his influence has grown. There are over 20 endorsements of this book inside the cover, by a range of luminaries in addiction. Peele's ideas were ground-breaking in 1975. Although these ideas are not widely accepted in traditional (12-step, disease model oriented) treatment, they are now familiar to most research-oriented readers: Addiction can involve behaviors not just substances, the 12-step approach is not essential to recovery and may not in individual cases be as helpful as other approaches, addiction arises from social and cultural factors rather than an individual biological disease, and harm reduction and a focus on living a valued and meaningful life should be the focus of treatment rather than a primary focus on abstinence.

Peele has published a dozen books and over 200 papers. *Recover!*, his latest, is his most comprehensive workbook. The book includes 268 pages of primary text, an Introduction (by Peele) of 7 pages, 14 pages of notes providing his scientific foundation, and a 24 page index. In this hardcover format the user will need a separate place to write out the answers to exercises. For individuals using keyboards rather than a pencil this concern will be irrelevant (and electronic answers may mean there is less chance of the wrong person coming across the them).

This workbook presents a comprehensive approach to recovery, with a logical sequence of projects, and the tasks associated with each project. These projects and tasks will make good sense to most readers. In Part 1 (two chapters), Peele overviews his understanding of addiction and recovery, and summarizes the themes in his nearly 40 years of work. In particular he emphasizes that the idea of addiction as a disease is not actually supported by scientific findings, and worse, tends to impair someone's recovery efforts.

Part II translates the themes introduced in Part I into a change roadmap, the PERFECT Program. After an introductory chapter ("Preparing for change"), each letter of the acronym has a chapter devoted to it:

- Pause (become mindful about urges and options)
- Embrace (practice self-acceptance and forgiveness of self/others)
- Rediscover (re-focus on your core values)
- Fortify (learn the skills for effective life management)
- Embark (establish a sensible plan for change)
- Celebrate (experience genuine fulfillment)
- Triage (identify problems and get back on track when needed)

Each of the book's 10 chapters begins with a one page summary that identifies three to six goals for that chapter, followed by a paragraph describing the "Purpose" of these goals in the overall project of change. For example, the Rediscover chapter identifies the primary goal of developing "your focus on your true core values and sense of purpose," and the sub-goals of "creating realistic expectations of yourself, understanding the flow and change in your ability to follow your purpose, [and] putting into play a plan to reconnect with your values." The chapter text includes three case illustrations, a review of the stages of change (Prochaska & DiClemente), a 10 question values assessment (an advanced version of what has been introduced in Chapters 3

and 5), and a handful of exercises and homework suggestions, including detailed recommendations about journaling, physical exercise and meditation. Themes and motifs introduced earlier in the book carry forward throughout the chapters.

The Embark chapter has four goals: “To develop a foundation of self-knowledge, decide what to change and what to do now, take first steps into your new life, [and] understand and prevent relapse.” The discussion on relapse is especially strong. It emphasizes that “relapse is not failure, it’s information,” that a relapse does not mean “starting over from scratch,” that relapse does not mean that “you will never recover,” and that “relapse can be reversed at any stage—you do not have to pursue it to ‘rock bottom.’”

The Triage chapter addresses common issues directly and with compassion. Each section closes with information about relevant websites, books, guided meditations, and other audio resources. The sections are Difficulty with Meditation, Addictive Urges and Compulsions, Relapse and Harm Reduction, Feelings of Unworthiness, Lack of Motivation, Loneliness, Feeling Overwhelmed, Anxiety or Depression, Abusive Relationships, Finding a Therapist, Education and Career, and Financial Management.

For many individuals the first page of each chapter is enough to determine its personal relevance. For those wanting to investigate a subject thoroughly each chapter provides ample starting points. This book strikes an excellent balance between providing a “big picture” of change, as well as sufficient detail on any particular issue.

The book’s final two pages of text (“Afterword: Write your own conclusion”) offer an overarching perspective: Celebrate your own existence, count on yourself as your own best advocate and supporter, realize that you are capable of recovery.

For individuals unsure about where to start overcoming an addiction, this book would be a great place to start. For many the book might be all that is needed. Therapists could easily use this book as an adjunct to treatment. The book is also a great resource for therapists who attempt to avoid treating addiction but discover, mid-treatment, that despite reasonable screening efforts at the beginning, the client has or has developed addiction, and furthermore, is unwilling to transfer to a specialist. Although the therapist could stand firm about discharging the patient (“I don’t work with addiction”), an alternative approach is using this book as a provisional addition to the treatment plan. If the client after some time with Peele is still not making progress, insisting on a referral may be much easier.

For those who have followed Peele’s work, this book will be a welcome addition.

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