

Why Do We With So Much, Get So Little From Recovery Programs?

Being Special: Feeling unique, different, and superior.

Are we too special to recover?

In our first blog, we offered Our Reality – The connection between wealth, status, power and Addiction and Family Dysfunction and said

Money and power are an integral part of our addiction, alcoholism, and family dysfunction. The advantages and privileges of money, fame, or power support and feed our use of alcohol and drugs. When using, the very resources distinguishing us from others are in fact part of our disease and in essence killing us.

We then identified Seven areas to explore as barriers or blocks to recovery, beginning with *BEING SPECIAL* – the topic for today.

One reason for this blog is that treatment centers that cater to the wealthy do not understand or adequately address our core issues, so we need to start identifying them in order to obtain stable recovery. If not, many of our family members and friends will continue to relapse and some, die.

Reading about “Being Special” will likely be uncomfortable for many, but we feel that unless we face some hard truths about ourselves – our reality – we will remain stuck in our addiction.

2.1 Being Special – What We Tell Ourselves

SELF -TALK

The media reports our every word. We’re the center of attention at social and professional gatherings. People want to be near us, touch us, sleep with us, drug us...

As people with WSP, we often feel "special" – better or different than most people. And, why not? It’s fun to feel accepted, sought after, and envied.

Because other people are constantly affirming that we’re important, we begin to feel that we are entitled to special treatment. This “specialness” can have a direct impact on our recovery in many ways:

- **We need to be special.** Special treatment confirms that we are, indeed, special. Without it, we feel unsafe or unloved. This demand for special treatment makes it difficult for people to tell us we need treatment and limits our ability to connect with other people in treatment programs.

- **People tell us what we want to hear.** Our publicists, lawyers, agents, and groupies tell us we are not the problem. Our use is due to our schedule or pressures; and we can't get sober because we are going to the wrong treatment center, therapist, or program.
- **We make our own rules.** We use lawyers, lobbyists, or agents to beat the system and obtain special favors for us. We believe that rules, including the rules of recovery, are for other people – not us.
- **We create a public image – and live it.** Often as result of childhood abandonment and rejection, we create a false, admirable self to assure we are never alone. We start to believe the image is who we really are – we want to be recognized, sign autographs and give gifts – even in treatment.
- **We fiercely protect our public image.** Without our public image, we fear we will have nothing. We live in constant fear that people will find out about the “real” us. Not only does this fear prohibit us from participating in recovery programs; it gets worse without drink or drugs.
- **We can never achieve enough.** The need to achieve more and more keeps us from being okay with the fact that we are an alcoholic or addict.
- **We are important to the world.** Our careers can put us on a treadmill that we can't get off. We believe our donees, fans, employees, or constituents depend on us to continue working. We don't have time for treatment, and we can't accept a program of recovery without trying to improve it.

Getting Sober

Being special can be a roadblock to healthy recovery. After we complete the seven barriers to recovery, we will move on to “Our Dilemmas” challenges to achieving sobriety and then finish up with “Our Recovery” – what practices we think work for life without alcohol or drugs. In the meantime check out the resource page on Bill's website for related information on these topics

NOW LET'S EXPLORE BEING SPECIAL IN DEPTH

Being Special: Feeling unique, different, and superior.

- What does *being special* mean?
- Where does the notion of *being special* come from?
- Why do people with WSP often feel this way?
- Give several examples of how *being special* can impact recovery.
- List the top five consequences of *being special*.
- What are some examples of the *self talk* of *being special*?
- What recovery practices combat the idea of *being special*? How?

1. What does *being special* mean?

- Feeling we are better than or different than most people.
- In the public arena, being charismatic – charming, talented (musically, artistically, intellectually, politically) magnetic – the focus of attention.

- Wanting special treatment and service.
- Being the luminous center of attention at most social or professional gatherings, where even casual remarks take on significance to our listeners.
- Being beautiful, handsome, admired, wanted.
- Creating and fostering the image that we are “larger than life” – an idealized self.
- For those related, becoming a conduit for others to access their relative’s “magic”.
Can I touch you? Can I drug you? Can I sleep with you?
- Having the ability to change people’s lives, even if it’s in small ways.
- Being seduced by our own image.

2. Where does the notion of *being special* come from?

- From our need to secure the love and affection of others.
- From our need to wield influence over the feelings and behaviors of others.
- From our experience growing up as children seeing how others treat our parents.
- From how other people treat us as adults.
- Being watched and courted for our imagined power. It’s not the size of the town that matters, the important families in the smallest of towns experience this phenomena, particularly if they are “the town”.
- Public applause and admiration are intoxicating while they last. It is fun to feel accepted, sought after, and envied. By repeating these experiences we believe we are entitled to them.

For more on this topic see Fame: The Power and Cost of a Fantasy
(Article in the Atlantic Magazine by the Daughter of Eric Erickson)

3. Why do people with WSP often feel this way?

- Why not? People treat us as important. The media tells us we are important.
- It helps us justify to ourselves that we are worthy of our money, position, prominence, or fame.
- From childhood experiences of abandonment and rejection, leading us to conclude that if we are not lovable the way we are, then we will create a loveable self. We create this false, admirable self to assure we are never abandoned or alone. Based on shame (of childhood experiences).
- When a parent’s feelings of self worth depend on the accomplishments of a child, this reinforces the child’s belief that only his/her exceptional abilities can be relied on to secure the love of someone important to his survival. The experience of being so important to the one whose love he/she needs most is the basis for later grandiosity.
- The projected public image is the reverse of the private person as experienced by him or herself and intimate others. (Supreme confidence belies pervasive private insecurity.)

In the article on acquired situational syndrome the celebrity or wealthy person is described as getting “...so used to everyone looking at him that he stops looking back at them”. We suggest this is not the case. Rather this person likely does not have the skills to relate on a personal level or has not learned to access emotions. In either case it is not arrogance, but fear and uncertainty that prevents the connection.

4. Give several examples of how *being special* can impact recovery?

We make our own rules

We see parents use lawyers and lobbyists to beat the system and obtain special favors. Or we do so as adults with the same result. The lesson is that rules (including recovery rules) are for “other people”, not us.

Needing to be treated specially to confirm we are, indeed, special

Being treated differently – specially – confirms we are special. So we must insist on unique treatment so everyone knows we are important. Without that prop, we don't feel safe. We then never connect to other alcoholics as they won't defer to us or are so offended they won't speak to us.

We believe our public image is who we really are

It is easier to buy into the image than deal with our live as it is. Our addictions live in that image. Break that image and we have nothing left. No wonder we want to give autographs, show out-takes, talk about our films, and give gifts in treatment.

We surround ourselves with people who tell us what we want to hear

And we want to hear that we are not the problem. It's the wrong treatment center, therapist, program, diagnosis - never us. Our friends, assistants, publicists, agents, lawyers and groupies will tell us so.

When will it all end? When will they know I am a fraud?

Beneath our public projections lies fear and uncertainty.

The famous live with the constant, terrifying possibility that their special gifts or their celebrities will vanish, exposing them as the insecure mortals they are in their own right. (Fame article, page 60)

Take away our drug or drink and fear hits us head on.

Never achieving enough

No matter what we do, we can never achieve enough.

*To know a famous person well is to know what cherished fantasies he has **not** fulfilled.* (Fame 60)

It is this need for more that keeps us from being “OK” with who we are as a simple addict or alcoholic.

“My mother wants me to go to extended care, but I must start my next shoot in two months.”

Enormous success is not a reliable cure for our sense of inadequacy

This puts us on the treadmill we can't get off of long enough to recover.

Same applies for inheritors, money becomes the substitute for genuine self-worth

Taking the easy ways out

Falling for any offered cure other than the self-examination, behavior changes and lifestyle adjustments in the “program”. Shamons and Gurus – send them on in.

5. List the top consequences of *being special*?

- It is difficult to find personal power that is not at the expense of other people.
- The desire for excellence to show we deserve being special leads to an inability to admit we may need help.
- Our belief that we have valuable contributions to give to others or the world. This grandiosity leads to an inability to hear from others or accept a program of recovery without trying to improve it.
- It's all about me. Lack of empathy or understanding for the points of view of others or their problems.
- Overly intense emotional reactions when things do not happen as we think they should.
- For those related, making appointments to see our "special" relative. "Dad, can we talk now?" "Call my scheduler to set up a time."

6. What are some examples of the *self talk of being special*?

- "I beat the odds in becoming a famous producer director, I will beat the odds in fighting my addiction. I will do what I want to do after leaving treatment."
- "Why isn't the world making me feel better?"
- "My family is not there for me. My friends don't really get it. My spouse long ago stopped dropping everything to meet my demands." "I need to feel better. I will spend. I will travel. I will not eat to show I know how to look good. I will gamble. I will find someone who really likes me."
- "I don't know how to talk to people."
- "I need to let people know who I am related to."
- "If I talk, more attention will be paid to my experiences and lifestyle than me as a person."

7. What recovery practices combat the idea of *being special*? How?

- Accessing the shame over childhood abandonment and rejection as part of evaluating the drive for success. Where is the trauma?
- Looking at the pros and cons of the public image – what it does or does not do for us. When the public self denies the private self, the contrast creates personal fraudulence.
- Evaluating fears about disengaging from our "entourage". What is it about being on our own with others who don't want something from us that is so frightening?
- Focusing on the let down after the performance – why is the "high" of the peak performance so elusive? Is money my mood alterer?
- Reality checks with ordinary people.
- The willingness to expose to others that which we are ashamed and, even so, being accepted for who we are by others.