


**Okay, I quit.**

**Now  
what?**



**By:  
Mark  
Tuschel**

**Becoming  
A  
Re-Invented  
Alcoholic**



*Quitting destructive drinking is the easy part - staying quit is the hard part. What do you do tonight, tomorrow, next weekend, when you go on vacation, for the rest of your life?*

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## Chapter #1) Facing reality

*“It’s never too early to start.” – Jeff K.*

What reality do you have to face? The reality that YOU no longer drink. You might tell yourself, “I’ll never drink again.” But some people don’t like to think in “never” terms, so instead maybe you tell yourself, “I’m not going to drink today, tomorrow or in the near future.” You could also say, “I’m not going to drink indefinitely.” However you want to say it to yourself, the reality is that YOU no longer drink. You don’t need to add qualifiers like, “I can’t” or “I shouldn’t” drink. Simply accept the fact that YOU no longer drink.

Don’t worry about anyone else, just worry about YOU. That’s another part of sober reality – other people can and will continue to drink, some socially, some to excess, some to death. That’s not your problem, it’s theirs. The sooner you accept this reality the sooner you will stop feeling as if you have been singled out to suffer. You won’t be as tempted to look down at anyone else who does drink and you won’t feel compelled to spread the “good word” of sobriety to everyone you meet.

Here are more realities that you will inevitably face: temptation, self-doubt and self-pity. Anger, guilt, frustration and sadness. Feelings of loneliness and isolation; like you’re the odd person in a group or party. The dissolution of friendships and relationships. Excess time on your hands and unspent money in your pocket. Feelings of superiority, boredom, a lack of enthusiasm. These are just a few realities you’re likely to encounter. I’m sure there will be others that I haven’t mentioned that you will experience.

Some would say that many of these items that I term as *realities* are emotions or conditions which are clinical symptoms of depression. If you’re being treated for depression you probably exhibit many of those traits, but every former drunk is not clinically depressed. As a Re-Invented Alcoholic you will, at some point in your life, struggle with temptation, be angry, have unspent money in your pocket and be bored – but that doesn’t mean you’re suffering from depression. I believe that we former drunks feel these emotions differently than someone who suffers from depression. I consider them *realities* that must be faced up to and dealt with for the rest of our sober lives. So allow me to briefly touch on the *realities* I just listed.

**Temptation:** There is no question that you will inevitably encounter moments of temptation, unless of course you’ve locked yourself away into your own prison or refuse to engage with the rest of the world. At some point you’re going to be somewhere and you’re going to feel like drinking. An event will occur in your life (good or bad) and you’ll feel like drinking. Many functions pre-pour or set out glasses and bottles of wine. Just because complimentary champagne is offered at a wedding reception doesn’t mean you have to grab a glass. You can toast with your water goblet or coffee cup. You never know when someone is innocently going to offer you a drink, or worse, someone who’s drunk will push a drink on you. “Aw c’mon you pussy, you can have one drink. It’s my birthday, c’mon. What’s the matter with you?” Those are the dicey moments, the few seconds where you can still say, “no thanks.”

Accept the reality that temptation will come at the most peculiar and inconvenient times. A lot of former drunks talk about “triggers.” An aroma, a song, an activity, event or certain people can *trigger* your temptation to drink. You may not know why these *triggers* hit. Some are obvious triggers, for example you’re at a wine tasting party or a beer guzzling contest. Other times triggers will come out of nowhere at the least expected moment. You need to always have your own reminder statements ready in your head. Not that you walk around constantly repeating



a mantra, just have them ready because temptation is inevitable. Here are a few examples of reminder statements for you to keep in your mind. Naturally you want to come up with some on your own or special ones that resonate with you.

*“Drinking right now will NOT make my life better in the future.”*

*“I promised myself, I can’t let myself down.”*

*“Don’t do it, you know better.”*

*“This too shall pass.”*

*“I will NOT let the motherfuckers win.”*

(The last one happens to be my favorite.)

Self preservation mantras are only one part of controlling temptations. The reality is that you might have to remove yourself from an event and leave the tempting environment. That’s right, you might have to leave a party early or walk away from a group of people. Plan ahead and bring your own car so you can leave when you want. If you don’t have your own car or can’t get a ride with a sober friend then you might have to pass on some invitations – that’s the reality.

**Self-doubt and self-pity:** These thoughts will also be inevitable, especially when you’re feeling lonely or you have to pass on some tempting invitations. Every time shit doesn’t turn out as you had hoped, you will be plagued by these feelings. “My friends all abandoned me, my kids still disobey me, my wife/husband/partner has become distant from me. Was this really worth it?”

When almost anything goes wrong in life, you’ll think of some reason, some twisted logic to correlate your getting sober as the cause of this situation. Then you’ll doubt your decision and feel sorry for yourself. But if you stop and look for the real causes, you will likely see that your sobriety has nothing to do with it or that the situation would have been far worse if this particular event took place and you were still drinking.

There will be some situations that are directly related or linked to your sobriety. The ending of friendships or relationships is one example (I’ll touch on this shortly). Factual periods of loneliness and missing old friends are real, and can get you doubting your decision to live sober. But please remember that if these friendships ended because you no longer drink, were these true friendships? Why would you want to live a life of self-destruction just to keep someone as a friend?

Self-pity typically arises when you see other people drinking. “How come they can drink and I can’t?” Well, you could drink, you have every legal right to do so, but will it make your life better? Will drinking get you closer to your goals and what you want out of life? Will drinking bring you closer to the friends and relationships that you really care about?

Feelings of self-doubt and self-pity are natural. Accept that these feelings will occur and at times they will cross your mind. Have positive affirmations ready to think about. Remind yourself of the reasons why you sobered up in the first place. Force yourself to recall all of the good things that have come about and all of the bad things that you have undoubtedly avoided due to your sobriety. It may be helpful for you to make a list of all the bad things you have avoided and that have left your life since you quit drinking and refer to it when you’re feeling self-doubt.

Regardless of whether you’re drunk or sober, every plan and desire will not come to fruition – that’s just a reality. Consider all the other people in this world who don’t get everything or

anything they hope for. While that doesn't change your personal situation, it can help you overcome your feelings of self-doubt and self-pity.

**Anger:** You might find yourself getting angry at people who drink (including social drinkers). You find yourself getting angry at beer commercials on TV and angry at alcohol in general. This is another natural emotion, but there's nothing to validate it. This type of anger goes hand-in-hand with self-pity: "I feel sorry for myself because I can't drink, so I'll get angry at those who do."

Instead of being angry, try to see the humor in these things. Beer commercials for example. You can laugh at the humor and appreciate the creativity of the ad. You can also laugh at the reality of how *unreal* these ads are; the depictions of dopey guys getting hot women simply because they drink a certain brand of beer or that a certain beer makes them appear cooler, more coordinated and adept at sports... yeah right. Then there's all the commercials that show only cool, beautiful young people dancing while the DJ plays hip songs, or they're playing volleyball on a beach, everyone with tan, toned bodies. I know that that isn't reality. So what? I can still enjoy the good looking people in the commercial, laugh at the humor or even joke about how it isn't a reality.

When I find myself feeling anger towards others who are drinking, I stop myself and force myself to watch what is REALLY occurring. I frequently witness people progressively becoming drunker and drunker. I've seen many a happy couple turn vicious towards each other after they've both been drinking for a while. I watch the dynamics that evolve between people as they become increasingly drunker and arguments ensue. That's when I'm able to say to myself, "I'm glad I'm no longer like that. That used to be me. How sad." You might also become angry at yourself. Angry for things you have done, angry because you've been weak in the past, angry because you didn't sober up sooner. You can't change what WAS but you can change what will be.

Your anger can be used as a positive driving force. Anger is part of normal human *fight or flight* behavior. You *fight* through the urges to drink, you *fight* off destructive behaviors for your own self preservation, you *fight* for your right to be normal and go anywhere and everywhere you want. Your anger can be mustered to tell yourself, "I will not lose to alcohol, I have control over it." The *flight* part is when you leave tempting environments or avoid them altogether. You flee from unhealthy people and bad influences in your life. You take *flight* to preserve your own health.

Anger can also be used to prove to others that you are strong. I use self-directed anger to stay sober. This may sound psychologically unhealthy but it works for me. Plenty of people said, "Mark will never stay sober, he can't do it." I want to prove them wrong. I will not give anyone who does not support my sobriety or thinks that I can't stay sober the pleasure of being right. I will stay sober to prove any naysayer wrong. I don't gloat or flaunt my sober power; I simply allow them to witness it. My anger serves me, so long as I don't direct it towards any other person.

**Guilt:** You might feel guilty of your past behaviors. While you can't undo things that you have actually done, you can accept responsibility for them. Some things you can (metaphorically) pay restitution for, some you can never repay or repair. If it's something or someone that is important to you, then do your best to live amends. Notice that I didn't say, "make amends," but I said, "live amends." Anyone can say, "I'm sorry" and then go on acting

like an asshole. How you behave now and how you behave in the future is living your amends. If you're truly sorry then you must live it.

You can offer a sincere and genuine apology. If the other person doesn't accept it, so be it. You can't be angry at them if they don't accept your apology. Your apology doesn't erase what you may have done (or what they think you did), but you can feel good about yourself for at least making the effort. I'm not suggesting that you hide from or deny your guilt. You have to live with the knowledge of what you may have done. You can only make sure that you don't repeat the same behavior in the future. Sometimes others may try to make you feel guilty. Again, all you can do is offer an apology and attempt to make restitution. If all the other person wants to do is make you feel guilty, then you can either agree to their abuse or liberate yourself from knowing them. Feeling guilty won't make you stronger. Acceptance of reality will make you stronger.

**Frustration:** You will battle with multiple types of frustration. Some examples are: Why do I keep thinking about alcohol? Why isn't anything going as I planned? Why didn't I do this sooner? I want to be happier with my sobriety but I'm not. I want more, now, faster!

People often feel frustrated because they think that they're doing the "wrong" things. Don't spend so much time thinking about, "what am I doing wrong?" Spend more time thinking about, "What have I done right? What can I do that is right" and then do more of those right things. You have to analyze and consider what isn't working and what might be wrong, but you can't dwell on the wrong. Make a note of what isn't working and don't repeat it. Focus more on thinking about the right things you can do and the right things that have worked for you in the past.

When you drank, problems, frustrations and inadequacies disappeared from your mind within the time it took you to catch a buzz – but the problems, frustrations and inadequacies still existed in reality. They usually showed up again the next morning when you were sober. Sobriety brings with it harsh realizations of your own personal limitations. Knowledge and acceptance of your limitations allows you to focus more on what your actual capabilities and strengths are, and then you can make the most of them. Most of us will never get everything (if anything) that we want – that's reality – but it doesn't mean that you can't try. Quite often the process of trying is just as enjoyable and memorable as the final accomplishment.

Fixing relationships, furthering your education or learning new skills all take time, but we usually want them NOW. Frustration is a natural emotion, especially when you don't get to where you want to be as fast as you want to be there. Life isn't completed in an hour – it takes as long as you are alive to complete your life. You must accept the fact that you will have to be patient with yourself and patient with others as well.

**Sadness and depression:** Sadness can stem from many causes such as: Missing your old friend alcohol. Missing all the excitement you thought you once had or that you actually did have. Missing certain drinking friends. Missing the sensation of getting drunk. Sobriety not turning out to be what you were told it would be or had hoped that it would be. This might surprise you and it may not make you feel any better, but people who have never had a drink or rarely drink get sad and depressed too. Sadness and depression are normal, natural human emotions. Drinking was a way to mask or avoid those emotions. Now that you're sober, you won't be able to temporarily numb them; you'll have to deal with those natural emotions in a new way.

Under normal conditions sadness comes and goes within a person's life. Sometimes you have to just accept that you are sad on a given day and it may even go on for a few days. Typically sadness will dissolve away if you stay active and busy. If it continues for an extended period of time or if it debilitates you from leading a normal life, then you have to find out what the root cause of the sadness is. You might want to seek professional counseling, therapy, a physician, a personal coach or spiritual help. Those people can help you discover your root cause of sadness, but don't expect them to bear your burden for you. You will have to be an active participant in its discovery and cure.

Trying to find a replacement for the excitement of alcohol can be destructive. Some replacements can be more detrimental to your health than drinking. Chasing after a quick substitute can lead to a substitute addiction and disappointment, which in turn will lead to more depression. Accept the reality that NOTHING can or will replace the mind and body altering sensation of getting drunk. There is nothing else like it. Accepting this may not rid you of your immediate sadness and depression, but it will help you come to terms with the reality that you no longer drink. You will then have to focus your mind on other healthy, productive and pleasant activities that *do* bring you joy. Do not seek an exact replacement for alcohol – there is NONE.

**Feeling like the odd person in the group or at a party:** It's natural to feel isolated when you no longer drink. When you're at a party or social gathering the only people you *see* are the ones who are drinking. If you go sit in a bar, that's what most people are doing there – drinking. However, if you go to a concert, a comedy club, sporting event, wedding reception or party, and you were to look a bit closer, you'll see that not everyone is drinking.

If you obsess about it and you're constantly watching everyone else to see who is or isn't drinking, you'll never have fun at social events and you'll never be able to interact normally. Other people who drink, that are not a part of your immediate life, are not your problem. Mind your own business. If it's too much of a struggle for you or you're too tempted to watch everyone else, then don't go to public events or social gatherings where alcohol is served. Sorry, but you just gotta get over the urge to watch everyone else.

In the event you do venture out to social gatherings where alcohol is served, you can always carry a non-alcoholic drink in your hand if that helps you feel more normal. For example, I like to carry a glass of seltzer water with a twist of lemon. That way people aren't always asking me if they can get me a drink. If they do ask, I say, "No thanks, I'm fine" and I leave it at that. I don't explain anything. If they offer to buy me a shot I say, "No I'm okay." If I have to join in on a toast, I raise my glass of seltzer in celebration. If the person keeps pushing and prodding me to drink I impolitely tell them to, "fuck off and leave me alone." If you feel odd, it's only because YOU feel that way. You are not odd and if anyone tries to make you feel odd, get away from them immediately, they're not healthy for you.

**The dissolution of friendships and relationships:** Some friendships and relationships will end as a result of your sober lifestyle and some will end by your own choosing. If you think about it, I'm sure that you've had plenty of friendships or relationships come and go while you were a drinker. A few (if not most) probably ended in drunken arguments. But now that you're living sober, the ending of friendships seems to stand out more. We seem to miss the *memory* of how good a friendship was. If it was a friendship or relationship based predominantly on being drinking partners, then it wasn't a good friendship to begin with.

It's tempting to revisit old drinking friends because you miss them. I've done it. I've gone out with old friends and it wasn't the best experience for me. I watched as they got plowed and I felt embarrassed and sad for them. But then I felt sorry for myself. I missed *the memory* of having drunken fun with them and it quietly made me wonder, "Maybe I could go back out with them and have only a couple of drinks?" They weren't tempting me – I was tempting and teasing myself. I had to accept the reality that if a friendship isn't good for my sober health then I'm better off without it, as painful as that may be. I've found new friends and the ones that have remained have become even better friends.

**Excess time on your hands:** Drinking takes up a lot of time; it requires dedication and focus. Don't laugh, it does. When I drank, my every thought was planning ahead – planning how and when I could start drinking. Once I quit, I had a lot of time on my hands and I had no idea what to do with it. I'll cover this subject in greater detail in Chapters #4 & #5.

The reality of feeling bored or overwhelmed can't be avoided either. I had never seen my life through sober eyes before. Suddenly everything blatantly stood out; debt, clutter, halfhearted efforts, failed efforts, responsibilities. Having no experience at knowing what to do with all this time (and these ugly realities) made my newly undertaken sobriety even more agonizing. Sober, *time* felt like the enemy.

Initially I started attending meetings, randomly cleaning my house, doing odd projects around my house and occasionally exercising. I wanted to use up time, but I had no sense of purposeful direction so I was still bored with these activities. As I finally came to accept the reality that I was going to have a lot of time on my hands, I realized that I needed to have something purposeful to do. I didn't want to just putter along doing random busy work or go sit in meetings night after night. I wanted to harness the power of my sobriety and make my sobriety reward me. That is when I asked myself the question: "What do you want out of sobriety?" (You'll be asked this question in Chapter #2.)

When I had answers to those questions, I was able to work on my plan. Having a plan gave me focus. This completely changed the reality of excess time on my hands. Yes, I still get bored and yes, I still have excess time on my hands, but when that occurs, I can always go back to my plan for, "What do you want out of sobriety?"

**Boredom:** This dovetails with excess time on your hands. No doubt about it, you will get bored. I'm sure that you felt bored at times when you drank, but when you're drunk you don't notice the feeling. Even if you experience less actual *bored time* than you did when you were drinking, sober boredom will feel more intense. The reality is that it is no one else's responsibility to keep you entertained. It is no one else's responsibility to find something for you to do. You have to do things on your own. You can just sit there and be bored if you want – but sitting there, wondering what you *feel* like doing can be dangerous for your continued sobriety. Self-pity and self-doubt shows up, and sadness follows. Then what looks tempting as an easy out from boredom would be to drink again.

During the inevitable periods of boredom that will strike is when you turn to your "What do you want out of sobriety list." Checking your list will at least bring your focus back to thinking about why you want to live sober and it will remind you of things you can and should do (that's if you made a list). You can be busy as hell and still feel bored (most of us call that "having a job"). Boredom is part of human life, whether you're drunk or sober.



**Unspent money in your pocket:** This is a new dilemma for most drunks because you will have unspent money and you WILL have to do something with it. What are you going to do with the money you're no longer spending? If you don't have plans for it, it will migrate to an unknown invisible planet. If you never stash away what you *would have* spent on drinking, you'll miss seeing the financial benefits and never enjoy your savings. You want to be able to have some fun with it, treat yourself or do something nice for the people you care about. This will be part of the reward system that you'll develop for yourself explained in Chapter #3.

**Feelings of superiority:** This is a fine line that must be held. I am a firm believer in being proud of yourself, but when you cross over into a *self-righteous preacher* you are actually diminishing your own pride. You are just a normal person like everyone else; the only difference is that you are no longer a slave to alcohol.

Feelings of superiority can happen when a group of "recovered alcoholics" get together. They start talking about all the other weak and despicable drunks and begin to compliment one another on how wonderful, smart and enlightened each of them is. There's nothing wrong with sober fellowship, joking and talking about your own past foibles and gossiping about other's debacles. But a sense of humility and a gracious attitude will serve you best. This goes back to seeing old drinking friends. You may want to go "show off" your new sobriety skills. Don't do it. Bragging about your sobriety and belittling others will make you look like an arrogant asshole. And if you hang out with them long enough, you may crack and relapse – then you'll *be* an asshole.

Remember that you were just like all the drunks you see fault in, possibly even worse. Just because you saw "the light" doesn't make you a better person than someone else. It only means that you took control of your own life. Be proud of yourself and your own accomplishments regarding your sobriety. The reality is that there's always somebody who's better at something than you are.

**Lack of enthusiasm:** Life might feel flat and dull after you begin sobriety. Being responsible, doing what needs to be done, taking care of obligations and spending time with certain people isn't always as wildly exciting as getting drunk. But being responsible can bring you deeper, more rewarding experiences.

You can always force yourself to feign enthusiasm (women have been doing this with me for years). Seriously, forcing yourself to express interest in something or faking a bit of enthusiasm isn't shallow advice. The reality is that you HAVE to do whatever it is that you are doing, so why not rally up some enthusiasm. There is evidence to support that when you "act" excited, your body chemistry will respond in kind and you will feel better. (I have no idea where this evidence came from. Look it up yourself when you get bored.)

Don't expect everything to be a riveting experience just because you're sober. If that's what you've been told or that's what you're expecting, you'll rapidly be disappointed and become disenchanted with sobriety. Life is not a carnival, unless of course you work at a carnival – and then I'm sure you have bigger life issues than just alcoholism.

**Summary:** Ultimately, the theme of this chapter is for you to accept the reality that you no longer drink. You don't have to accept (or constantly remind yourself) that you are a weak, powerless or hopeless eternal alcoholic, riddled with flaws and defects. You can if you want to – but why would anyone want to speak about themselves in those terms, especially if you've

already turned your life around or are working on it? I'm not going to live in the land of make-believe, but I'm certainly not going to belittle and berate myself. I must simply accept the reality that I no longer drink and I must accept many of the realities that come with being a Re-Invented Alcoholic. I have to approach, appreciate and control my life without the crutch of alcohol.

## **Reality Worksheet:**

What realities listed here must I personally face?:

What other realities do I have that weren't listed here?:

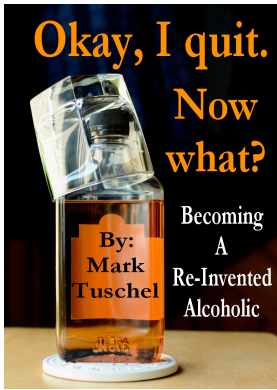
How can I make the best of these realities?:

What realities am I avoiding?:

What can I do to better understand my realities?:

What actions will I take to deal with my realities?:

What behaviors can I get better at so I can accept and control my realities?:



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