

Honesty and Recovery...



By Darcy B.

I attended a meeting yesterday and the topic was “honesty”. I was given the opportunity to share, and I thought it would be good to put my thoughts on the topic into words for others to think about. The words presented here are just my thoughts on the topic and your opinions may be quite different. That’s okay.

Here we go...

Honesty is often treated like a central pillar in recovery spaces. “Rigorous honesty” comes up a lot. While “honesty at any cost” is not usually stated outright, it often seems to be how honesty gets interpreted in practice. Say everything. Hold back nothing. Full exposure (honesty) is treated as automatically good.

At the same time, we are told to “fake it ‘til you make it.” One points toward total truth telling, the other openly endorses acting without belief. This tension does get mentioned, but it rarely seems to be examined very deeply.

I see things a bit differently (at least I think I do).

For me, the goal is not honesty but integrity. I try to live my life with integrity, which for me means that what I believe, think, say, and do are aligned in everything and anything I do. One can be honest and still be reactive, cruel, ego driven, controlling, and completely out of

alignment with our actual values. Honesty without integrity is just unfiltered output. It can be destructive and can serve the wrong purpose.

Many of us live as if our perception of reality is the truth. But this perception is filtered through fear, bias, memory, trauma, identity, and defensiveness. So, what feels true can often be distorted. This is not a moral failure but just part of being human. This is why I believe curiosity matters more than certainty. The moment certainty hardens, honesty stops being exploration and starts being enforcement.

Honesty can still harm. Being accurate does not automatically make something wise. Being blunt is not the same thing as being clear. This is why, for me, kindness comes before honesty. Kindness regulates how and when truth is expressed. It asks why I am saying something, who it serves, and what outcome I am trying to produce. If honesty repeatedly leaves damage behind, the problem is not honesty but a lack of restraint.

Even with myself, truth needs timing. There are times when one is simply not emotionally or psychologically ready to face certain truths without destabilizing oneself. Nervous systems have limits. So yes, sometimes I delay truth on purpose. I call that planned complacency. Not denial. Not permanent avoidance. But strategic delay until I can metabolize what is real without fragmenting. Compassion applies inward just as much as it does outward.

For me, the only adjective that truly fits in front of love is unconditional. That is my perspective, and I own that it is a personal one. From my point of view, what gets called “tough love” often ends up being a way to rationalize harshness, punishment, fear driven control, or emotional discharge. Love can have boundaries. Love can say no. Love can walk away. But when empathy, compassion, and humility disappear, calling what is left “love” becomes questionable.

This is the structure I try to live by: Honesty must answer to integrity. Integrity must be governed by kindness. Truth must be held with curiosity rather than certainty. Compassion determines timing rather than avoidance.

What matters most to me is living a life of integrity. In practice, that means making sure what I believe, think, say, and do are aligned in anything and everything I do. It means letting kindness regulate honesty, letting curiosity regulate certainty, and letting compassion regulate timing. It means paying attention to motive, impact, and restraint, not just whether something is technically true.

Honesty still matters. But it no longer stands alone. It now answers to integrity.

Darcy attended his first AA meeting in 1989 and entered treatment in 1990. It would take another 21 years before he reached his final breaking point and it was in the summer of 2011 that he admitted he was an alcoholic and made sobriety his top priority.

Over time, he embraced his agnostic beliefs and developed a personal approach to recovery rooted in the idea that the strength to stay sober comes from within, while remaining connected to the AA and recovery community for support when needed.

Darcy is the father of three and a proud grandfather of four. He has a lifelong passion for music and spends much of his free time designing and building guitars.
