



# **Beyond Parody: Guided by Principles Like Honesty, Respect, and Not Controlling the Outcome, You Can Reach New Heights**

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I am back! I apologize for the unofficial sabbatical; I was experiencing some life events that surprised me that I am still slightly adjusting from. In past articles of “Beyond Parody,” I have been honest about my personal history regarding my past addiction, mental health diagnoses, and long-term recovery, which I feel makes this column special (and necessary). I believe self-praise can leave an unwarranted stench, but I wanted to discuss how motivation to change one’s life can create a domino effect of consequences. Moreover, life still happens whether you are in recovery or not, and what better way to talk about motivational change than from personal experiences.

It is no trade secret that my active drug addiction ravaged its way through my life, my family’s, and anyone’s life within my orbit that was close to me. I committed shameful acts of misdeeds and broke the trust I spent most of my life building with my family and friends. Billionaire and business mogul, Warren Buffet, said, “It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you’ll do things

differently.” Buffet has a reputation outside of his incurred fortune for his wisdom and simple living, even though his net worth is over \$100 billion. I believe there is something true in this quote for all of us, especially in an over-stimulated society when information is spread quickly and vastly over digital airwaves and directly to our phones and laptops.

Living in guilt, shame, and fear probably is not truly living but is more like survival. We have seen since approximately 2011 or 2012 an extreme upheaval in our nation that sometimes seems to be orchestrated but could be the evolution of change. From citizens openly talking about how they hate the United States and wanting to watch the American flag burn to Hollywood celebrities openly talking about assassinating a former President of the United States of America, we have reached the pinnacle of a now looks like a severed and visionless country so eerily close to my life in active addiction.

In 2020, we watched prominent doctors attempt to discuss early COVID-19 preventative treatments, and social media giants banned them. The free flow of information and discussion was hijacked by new digital overlords that gather and mine our data and sell it for a profit. It became taboo to fly the American flag. If you support America’s freedom, liberties, and future successes, the supporter of a brighter, safer, and more unified nation is called names in some ad hominem attack. Though it is painful to watch, this is where resentment and anger have moved us individually and as a nation.

I highlight this current chaos and carnage unleashed through our nation, universities and colleges, and local communities because the chaos and carnage in my active addiction had many commonalities. Instead of hating a country, I hated myself and experienced self-loathing that led to suicidal ideations. When the addiction began taking over my life, I had no direction except to find the nearest drug dealer that practiced his capitalistic endeavors to provide for himself.

I would recoil from society, hide, and fester, mostly because I was scared and could not admit it. My emotions were all over the place, and my survival instincts went haywire. I suddenly worried about my dark ideology that was nothing short of a misguided, one-person cult. I began looking for someone or something to blame instead of looking inward and willing to execute the action it takes to make meaningful, long-lasting, and positive change. It was easy for me to be angry at myself and others. Anger is an emotion we all understand and are typically not afraid to show. Sadness, on the other hand, is a little more complicated. And when someone is pouring their heart out in a tearful way, it can be viewed as a weakness, as if we should hide our vulnerabilities.

I was hurting in active addiction, and the stronger my addiction got, the more drugs I put inside my body to make the pain go away, which the pain never seemed to leave. The

pain was amplified because I was not doing anything to resolve it except throwing an ill-guided temper tantrum, which left me lost and my family and friends turning the other cheek. I was spiritually and emotionally void, and darkness consumed me even on the sunniest days. My personal brand was a thief and liar, and I treated myself as such.

It was not until I learned that I had to view change in my personal life from forgiving and loving myself to hating myself. I had to be willing to learn a new way of living that was enshrined in honesty, love, and tolerance. It was not until I asked myself what I wanted to be before action could take hold. I had children and wanted to be a great father that protected and provided for them. I had friends and wanted to be reliable and available if they needed me. I had neighbors and wanted to wave and say hello when I saw them. I had an exhilarating feeling in my heart and soul to help our communities heal and work together.

Once I developed this idea for a healthier, personal brand and reasonable happiness, I went to work. I looked deep inside myself and went on an exploration into uncharted territory. What I discovered was humanness lost and the flame of spirituality nearly extinguished. I was not only scared of human beings and the insidious horror of history but I was also scared of myself and felt powerless beyond comprehension.

Today, guided by principles like honesty, respect, and not controlling the outcome, I have been able to reach heights I never even dreamed of. I am the founding Executive Director of a small (but mighty) nonprofit, Amare. We, as a team, get to deploy help to our communities and build lasting relationships along the way. I am blessed beyond measure and look forward to growing my relationship with Riverbender.com and all the readers of this column. This is not a parody; our communities will benefit from coming together for the common good, and I am so here to witness and be a part of it. So, until next time, forgive yourself and hug someone. Life is too short.