



# Dry January? How about "Just for Today?" *keep the 24* in our resolutions for 2024

DRY JANUARY (and every month) Part II—This Blog's for you (sounds like a beer commercial !?!?!), if you are either test-driving abstinence or if you have devoted yourself to being clean and sober as a new way of life. **Just for Today** is a conceptual game-changer, if your physically shaky or fighting ambivalence, but especially for the slippers among us who have sincerely tried to maintain sobriety and fell off the wagon. Dry January 2024 explores an idea we entertain as the #1 hack against cravings, temptation, doubt, crisis, or hopelessness: **One Day @ a Time** (ODAAT).



If you are new to recovery, you may not get there from here without this new way of framing how to do recovery, how to do life as it comes. If you are skeptical, we take time with your “But why?” with more details than, “Because—that’s why!”

This blog can feed the need of your troubled head and heart. By the end of this, you’ll know why, when others ask, “How have you stayed sober since \_\_\_\_\_?” why the answer is “Just for today.”

Applying Just for Today to sobriety and all it’s:

1. regrets of the past,
2. dread of tomorrow,
3. cravings and ambivalence,

is borrowed from past millennium Eastern philosophy but is best know today, as AA bumper sticker folk-wisdom. In a fusion of old and new, one breath at a time, “describes the convergence

of two vital traditions, one ancient, the other contemporary, and shows how they are working together to create a rich spiritual path for our times.”<sup>1</sup>

I Say “folk-wisdom” because it was non-professional trial and correction, one person with addiction helping another that brought this mantra to an ingredient in arresting process/substance use disorders, but today, it is scientifically sound, as we will point out.

This idea of not quitting forever, just staying abstinent for the rest of the day was offered to me when I felt overwhelmed by the task before me, and personally insufficient in the integrity required to stay sober forever. And it’s true with long-term clean time, too.

On anniversaries, we hear, “Kumar has stayed clean another year and we celebrate his recovery tonight,” but Kumar, Katie or Ken do not actually quit for a one-year stretch—after decades, sobriety is still living in the now, managing our recovery, daily. While slightly different in text, I’ve heard and sometimes read aloud these centering affirmations in Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous.

Our last blog looked at the 20 Questions (John Hopkins Hospital) and over a half-century of measuring the severity of alcohol or other drug use disorders. Mid-1970s Montreal AA group literature tables had a yellow trifold that included contact information for meetings or someone to talk to, “Are you an alcoholic? (20 questions)” and the Just for Today prose, sometimes read aloud at meetings.

## **The science of One Day @ a Time**

From Michigan State University, we learn of the 1921 Boston Globe publication of the ten affirmations, adopted and still popular in AA, over a century later. We also learn the science behind one-day-at-a-time’s efficacy.

“... oftentimes we tend to tackle behavioral change by breaking the behavior into smaller more manageable chunks; this is what is known as partializing. If one thinks about never using substances again it can be extremely overwhelming, and can cause additional anxiety, which in and of itself may lead to continued use of substances. However, if an individual takes the ‘Just for Today’ approach towards sobriety, 24 hours seems a lot more manageable than 20, 30, or even 40 years from now.

This approach of partializing and focusing on the present moment, rather than the unknown future, can help keep us grounded when we are considering sobriety. This method can also be used for issues beyond addiction such as anxiety, depression, or any other lifestyle changes you may want to make. Some folks see this tactic as very similar to mindfulness.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kevin Griffin, One Breath at a Time: Buddhism and the Twelve Steps (2004) <https://amzn.to/3U4MKg4>

<sup>2</sup> <https://health4u.msu.edu/articles/2018-being-aware-just-for-today>

## NA's Just for Today

Tell Yourself:

JUST FOR TODAY my thoughts will be on my recovery, living and enjoying life without the use of drugs.

JUST FOR TODAY I will have faith in someone in NA who believes in me and wants to help me in my recovery.

JUST FOR TODAY I will have a program. I will try to follow it to the best of my ability.

JUST FOR TODAY, through NA, I will try to get a better perspective on my life.

JUST FOR TODAY I will be unafraid. My thoughts will be on my new associations, people who are not using and who have found a new way of life. So long as I follow that way, I have nothing to fear.

Sometimes read, sometimes with the group chanting the “Just for today” refrain, along with the reader, what can be a more core message for recovery newcomers?

Of course, while we learn to endure almost anything—just don't use—this grin and bear it go-to is no replacement for therapy or more intense peer work, or commitment to a program for self-exploration and emotional regulation.

Especially in early recovery, if/when your dealer calls, or you're offered a drink by a waiter, or shit just hit the fan at home or work, ODAAT is a winner. It's a coping mechanism.

The Just for Today mantra, reminds us that while recovery is our responsibility, we don't go through it alone; there is a program we can gradually work through, others will support us, connection and hope abound in our recovery community. Hearing it, or even more, saying it, daily or regularly reinforces and normalizes this new normal. NA's Just for Today facilitates the “partializing” ideas, easing anxiety by taking life, mental health and recovery one step at a time and not letting infinite unknowns overwhelm us.

Repetition teaches us; learning new chords on a musical instrument, the practice becomes muscle memory, we go from frustrated to mastery. This use of repetition as a ritual is embraced by some 12-Step meetings more than others. Re-framing attitude and outlook by replacing defeatist ideas like “I can't quit forever,” with empowering ideas such as, “Just for today, I will abstain,” this re-wires our thinking and has proven to positively drive outcome rates and positively inform our own self-concept.

But is this mind-control; is 12-Step a cult?

I have reported on AA's harshest contemporary critics and the cult-card is too tempting not to be played in a warning about 12-step meetings.<sup>3</sup> Maybe a new article on AA and the cult test would be timely. Every community, from woke culture, to church, to *Rocky Horror Picture Show* fanatics, or Dungeons & Dragons clans, like 12-Step communities, have an in-crowd language and an in-crowd familiarity with phrases, rituals that in-crowd members habitually fall back on. This crowd-speak can mostly be set aside in other environments, such as when they are at work.

A cautionary warning about 12-step is that as you shop around different groups and formats and meet more and more members, we find a range, from freethinking members to fundamentalist members. Every group sets its own path and rules and attracts like-minded members. Some groups test the cult-qualifying boundaries in my opinion, most do not cross the line from altruism and enthusiasm to controlling and harmful. Different strokes for different folks and people change groups as their needs and preferences change over time.

In 1963 a critical article about AA offended members. Dr. Cain's "AA: Cult or Cure?" was widely read and members asked founder, Bill W to do something, to defend AA's reputation.

A side point, "charismatic leaders" are a cult-characteristic and plenty of people have painted Bill Wilson as such a man. Bill called himself, "AA's co-flounderer." When asked what he was going to do about this published criticism of AA, Bill responded that he thought the Doctor made some good points that we should all pay attention to. While the majority of academics and health professionals research points to AA efficacy vs other popular therapies, AA, rightly still has critics, some of which throw the "small-c" cult word around, maybe for impact. *Harper's* in January 2011 published "The Drunk's Club: A.A., the Cult that Cures," by Clancy Martin.<sup>4</sup>

That's quite a side-tangent and maybe I'll go hog-wild on it in another article.

My early AA meetings made me uncomfortable for a number of reasons and the slogans and AA-speak gave me the creeps at first. I didn't grow up in 12-Step rooms that encouraged a lot of shout-out and call back group participation. Not every group responds with a chorus of, "Hi Kim," when a member announces themselves, "My name is Kim and I'm an alcoholic." So, I eventually acclimatized to one particular 12-Step culture and I still get the willies when I visit groups that liberally and routinely incorporate cued group chanting. Of course it warms the hearts of those members and I do not think they should stop on my account. But all of us find a home group that suits us, one day at a time.

True to form, AA just plagiarized the 1921 Boston Daily Globe ten ideas written by Dr. Frank Crane. And because, as my story goes, this was the version that helped my days become years

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<sup>3</sup> <https://rebelliondogspublishing.com/blog/blog/2882642/sober-truths-50-years-of-aa-critics-bad-science-and-bad-attitudes> Some of AA's harshest critics and what they say about fundamentalism, outcome rates, and seeming anti-science devotion to age-old literature.

<sup>4</sup> <https://hivdatf.files.wordpress.com/2010/12/harpersmagazine-2011-01-0083250.pdf>

through moody moments and tense situations, let's go through the ten Just for Today thoughts:

### **Just for Today – my indoctrination into living sober**

#### JUST for TODAY

1. Just for today, I will try to live through this day only, and not tackle my whole life problem at once. I can do something for twelve hours that would appal me if I felt that I had to keep it up for a lifetime.
2. Just for today I will be happy. This assumes that what Abraham Lincoln said is true, that “most folks are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.” Happiness is from within; it is not a matter of externals.
3. Just for today, I will adjust myself to what is, and not try to adjust everything to my own desires. I will take my ‘luck’ as it comes and fit myself to it.
4. Just for today I will take care of my body. I will exercise it, care for it, nourish it, not abuse or neglect it, so that it will be a perfect machine for my bidding.
5. Just for today, I will try to strengthen my mind. I will study. I will learn something useful. I will not be a mental loafer. I will read something that requires effort though and concentration.
6. Just for today, I will exercise my soul in three ways: I will do somebody a good turn, and not be found out; if anyone knows of it, it will not count. I will do at least two things I don't want to do—just for exercise. I will not show anyone that my feelings are hurt; they may be hurt but today, I will not show it.
7. Just for today, I will be agreeable. I will look as well as I can, dress becomingly, talk low, act courteously, criticize not one bit, not find fault with anything and not try to improve or regulate anybody except myself.
8. Just for today, I will have a programme. I may not follow it exactly, but I will have it. I will save myself from two pests: hurry and indecision.
9. Just for today, I will have a quiet half hour all by myself and relax. During this half hour, sometimes, I will try to get a better perspective on my life.
10. Just for today, I will be unafraid. Especially I will not be afraid to enjoy what is beautiful, and to believe that as I give to the world, so the world will give to me.

One key to draw from here is the principle of partializing is what counts a century later, not the literal, word-for-word privilege from a 1921 American doctor. I am sure any doctor today who would think this exact way, would articulate themselves in an obviously different, sensitive and inclusive manner. I note the dated, white-male, protestant work-ethic bias at play here. A trauma-informed adaptation might consider a work-around for not expressing ones needs or feelings or conforming to social expectations for dress and obedience.

Adaptation does not need to discount these Just for Today aphorisms. Some days/circumstances would not recognize being happy as emotional regulation; some days speaking out and being mad is emotional sobriety. But being reactive is almost never helpful for me. A classic scenario—being cut off in traffic—is a good time to take-five, as in five deep breaths, and consider what reaction, if any, is called for. Narcotics Anonymous adapted them for all groups, focusing more on addiction and our community. Any person in recovery, any group of people in recovery can decide for themselves, how Just for Today can be customized and if it ought to be read in the meeting.

When struck with anxiety or the fuck-its, Just for Today is grounding, “Maybe I will use drugs again, but not today. I’m going to get through today and call someone and/or go to a meeting.”

Social workers and fitness coaches tease out goals from their client and then break it down into bite-size, day by day actions that will fulfill these goals. SMART Recovery (Self-Management And Recovery Training), utilizing a cognitive behavioral therapy approach talks about S.M.A.R.T. goals, Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound. Defining these parameters as they pertain to your goal, helps ensure that your objectives are attainable within a certain time frame. Yes, this can help get a family from broken to healing, train and prepare for a new career, financial planning, the most fundamental specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound priority is to not drink, or engage in your process or substance of choice.

How did I pick and choose through these ten daily challenges? Keeping an open mind, I tried each Just for Today out for size at least once. All of them, in my experience, turned me away from my natural inclinations—to be preoccupied, ruminate, be anxious, melancholy, reactive and self-destructive. While they may not be customized trauma-informed affirmations specific to me and my situation, any and all of them would be better than me and my thinking process, left to my own devices.

Some of the Just for Today mantras reinforce:

- negative self-image issues I have in terms of wanting/needing the approval of others and conforming socially,
- pushing away negative feelings and experiences indefinitely.

“I will be agreeable. I will look as well as I can, dress as becomingly as possible, talk low, act courteously, be liberal with praise, criticize not at all, nor find fault with anything.”

This isn’t “bad” advice, but cautionary for anyone with low self-esteem or from an abusive environment—try it before you buy it and modify it to your needs and goals. I tried it and while it dashes my antisocial predisposition, it also triggered other unhealthy attachment and psycho-social issues. Consulting someone trusted and getting feedback is better than just going it alone. Others were just right for me. All of them demonstrated what I heard in

meetings: “It’s easier to act my way into good thinking, than think my way into good acting.”

Some were hard, some came naturally. Being quiet for a half an hour was near impossible; calming down, I couldn’t relax without getting worried, horny or otherwise distracted. I was a teenager, after all, not the middle aged, married has-been who was what I imagined was the ideal candidate that these helpful ideas were intended for. In my case, some of this encouragement wasn’t age appropriate. For others, it may be overtly privileged or patriarchal, or tone-deaf to certain neurodivergent conditions.

There is nothing here that I was pressured to do as a right of passage. And, none of the ten aphorisms were completely out of reach for me. I had to adapt it and I think everyone is well served by cherry picking, toss away as they would choose, vs. going along to get along.

Being in the company of others in the same one-day-at-a-time dilemma helped. There was always someone to talk with about my reluctance or experiences. The following was often said at meetings, and it proved to be true.

“If you came with a problem, don’t leave with the problem. Share it; a problem shared is a problem halved.”

Practicing Just for Today for me, the idea of finding ways to help other people without getting caught, shifted my diminished self-worth and it brought joy and connection to my attitude about the people around me and the world in general. Having a plan for the day (a program) and not having to follow it perfectly—this was the money-shot for me; this helped me learn to be an average everyday human—not the scum of the earth, not better than anyone else.

And of course, me a worried teen perplexed about staying sober for the next 40 New Years Eves, just focusing on this day of sobriety. I’m thinking about New Years Eves through the coming decades, while others in the rooms may have wondered if I’d stay sober through the coming weekend.

Someone always told me when I was future-gazing, “Don’t worry about it, just for today, all of us stay sober one day at a time.” I had to hear it; I had to read it, sometimes several times a day in my early recovery. My tendencies to panic and get overwhelmed were always triggers to my substance use. One day at a time, was my new armor, my new coping mechanism.

As a poem—made into an indispensable ritual in some Toronto AA meetings—suggests, anyone can fight the burdens of today; it is only when you or I add the burdens of those two awful eternities—yesterday and tomorrow—that we break down... let us therefore live one day @ a time.

The pictures you see here of One Day @ a Time are part of shits-and giggles Rebellion Dogs swag we started in 2023. People asked how they could support podcasting and blogging. We could have a virtual tip jar, but swag and merch just seemed like more fun. We are still working on ideas. If you have ideas, suggestions, or there's something you would like us to offer, let us know. Half of our gift store ideas came from the community. Proceeds from mugs, tees and hoodies etc., go to research, production and webhosting of Rebellion Dogs content. If you or someone you care about would like one, click the link for details.

[2-sided sweats](#) – [2 sided Tee-shirts](#)



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