

A Call to Integrity in Addiction Recovery Leadership



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Honoring the Call While Naming the Contradiction

Many of my writings tend to be inspirational. I love that space. I love the philosophical, the reflective, the places where we explore meaning, hope, and restoration. But sometimes, we simply need to name something directly. This is one of those moments.

What I am about to say has been building in me for more than three years, through my work within addiction recovery settings. It comes not from cynicism, but from deep respect, concern, and love for the field and for the people who serve within it.

Let me begin clearly. The men and women who work in addiction recovery are, in many cases, extraordinary. They are often individuals who have walked through addiction themselves, who have faced darkness and survived it, and who now return with a heart to serve others. That is something to be honored. It is something to be revered. There is a beauty in that kind of redemption that cannot be manufactured. It is real, it is costly, and it is powerful.

And yet, there is also something else that must be addressed.

Across many recovery environments, I have observed a troubling pattern. It is not universal, but it is common enough that it cannot be ignored. There is a disconnect, a contradiction, between the sacred nature of the work being done and the way some who are in positions of influence conduct themselves.

We all live with contradiction. That is part of the human condition. Growth itself is the gradual reduction of those contradictions. One of my favorite works on this theme is *Living with Contradiction: An Introduction to Benedictine Spirituality* by Esther de Waal, which speaks to the reality that we all carry inconsistencies, yet are called to become increasingly aligned in truth as we mature. The Christian life, in particular, is a journey out of darkness into light, a continual refining. None of us arrives fully formed.

But Scripture is clear that those who step into positions of leadership carry a greater responsibility. As it is written in James 3:1 (NIV), “Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.” That includes therapists. It includes behavioral health technicians. It includes anyone who mentors, guides, or influences those who are broken and seeking restoration.

This is not a casual role. It is sacred.

And yet, too often, I see behaviors that are inconsistent with that calling. Coarse talk. Crude joking. Sexualized comments. Conversations that should never take place within a professional environment, let alone within earshot of clients who are fragile, observant, and deeply affected by what they see and hear.

These are not minor issues.

Clients notice. They always notice. Many have spoken about it over the years. What may seem like harmless banter to a staff member can land very differently for someone in early recovery who is searching for stability, for safety, for something solid to anchor to. When the very people who are meant to represent healing demonstrate inconsistency, it creates confusion. It creates cracks.

And cracks matter.

Those cracks do not always show themselves immediately. But when clients leave treatment, they carry those impressions with them. They carry the subtle dissonance between what was taught and what was modeled. And sometimes, those inconsistencies can contribute to instability, to doubt, and in some cases, to relapse.

This is not about perfection. It is about integrity.

The Sacred Responsibility to Live What We Teach

Part of the challenge lies in the reality that many who enter this field do so not long after their own recovery. They bring passion. They bring empathy. They bring authenticity. But

they may not yet have done the deeper work required to fully stabilize their own lives, their language, their boundaries, and their internal world. Good intentions are not enough to sustain the weight of leadership.

In Christian environments, this issue can be further complicated by what I would call a diluted understanding of faith. There is often a strong emphasis on grace, redemption, and forgiveness, which are central and beautiful truths. But too often, there is a lack of depth when it comes to the cost of discipleship. The cost of transformation. The cost of living in alignment with what we profess to believe.

Grace is not a license for carelessness.

To be restored is not the end of the journey. It is the beginning of a life that is called to a higher standard. A life where we examine how we speak, how we behave, how we treat others, how we represent truth, and how we carry ourselves in positions of influence.

We are, whether we like it or not, representatives. Not just of an organization. Not just of a model. But of Christ Himself in these environments.

That should humble us.

This is a call, not of condemnation, but of invitation. An invitation to look inward. To examine our own hearts. To confront the places where our behavior does not align with our calling. To grow. To mature. To take seriously the sacred responsibility we have been given.

Lives are at stake.

This is not theoretical. The work we do has real consequences, both positive and negative. We can be instruments of profound healing, or we can unintentionally contribute to harm.

Called to Excellence, Not Mediocrity

And so the call is simple, but not easy.

Do better.

Do better in how we speak.

Do better in how we carry ourselves.

Do better in how we honor those we serve.

Do better in how we represent the God we claim to follow.

God does not call us to mediocrity. He calls us to excellence. Not perfection, but excellence rooted in humility, integrity, and continual growth. As Scripture reminds us, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters" (Colossians 3:23, NIV). This is the standard. Not performance for appearance, but wholehearted alignment in the sight of God.

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I write this first to myself. Then to my brothers and sisters in the field. But if I am honest, I feel it most strongly as a call to my brothers. We must lead well. We must guard our speech. We must embody the very transformation we speak of.

Because the people we serve are watching.

And they deserve nothing less.