

# Chapter 1 My Decision

## 1 Introduction

Yogi Berra said, when you come to a fork in the road, pick it up. We say, when you come to a fork in the road, make a Sobriety Priority T-chart.

Every real-life decision has two basic branches. One leads you to a stronger recovery, the other leads you toward relapse. Sometimes that's true in an obvious way. You come to a corner. Turn one way, you'll pass a familiar bar or a drug house and you may relapse. Turn the other way, and you may be OK.

Most times what lies ahead is not so obvious. You may want a tool for seeing around the corner. Like a chess player, you may want to think a few moves ahead. The SP T-Chart is a simple but effective device for applying the Sobriety Priority when life hands you a less than obvious decision to make.

You work the SP T-Chart this way.

First, define the issue. Examples: Should I go to a party where people will be drinking? What if I move in with a new roommate? Should I switch from five eight-hour days to a four tens work schedule?

Keep the issue narrow and practical. Frame it so that it can be answered yes or no.

Then, on one side of the T-chart, list all the ways that going to the party (or moving in with the roommate, or switching your schedule) will strengthen your sobriety. On the other side of the chart, list all the ways that this move could endanger your sobriety and lead you toward relapse.

Then think about it, weigh the sides, discuss it with people, sleep on it if necessary, and make your move.

Applying the Sobriety Priority to every issue is a way to make sense out of the messy confusion that life sometimes hands us. Even when you don't have paper and pencil handy, the mental habit of weighing every decision in terms of sobriety v. relapse is a powerful recovery tool.

## 2 Basic Sobriety Priority T-Chart (Example)

Suppose a friend, D., has told you there is a room available in D.'s apartment and asked you whether you are interested. Write the issue on the top of the chart. Below, on the left side, write all the specific ways in which moving in with D. would probably count against your recovery and increase your risk factors for relapse. On the right side, write all the specific ways in which moving in with D. would probably help your recovery.

Worksheet 1-1: Sobriety Priority T-Chart (Example 1)

Issue : <i>Should I move in with D.?</i>			
How it would endanger my recovery	-	+	How it would help my recovery
<i>D's main squeeze is probably a drunk D's other roommate keeps wine in fridge There is a liquor store right on the corner I'll have to work longer hours to afford it I hate the purple paint trim in the hallway, makes me want to drink I'll have to listen to D's dog barking at night sometimes, drive me nuts</i>			<i>D does not drink or use or smoke I will be in a neighborhood with less drugs I'll have a nicer room, less stress It's quieter, not so much loud partying I'll be able to bicycle to work, save commute money I'll live closer to F and L (sober friends) and spend more time with them I'll get away from my druggy roommates I'll get to play with D's dog There's a washer-dryer there, don't have to go to the stinky laundromat Good light, I can have house plants Eventually I can find my own place in that neighborhood</i>

You may find that you can't decide right away whether some factor is a plus or a minus for your recovery. In this example, the fact that D. has a dog has its pluses and its minuses, and at first the person who made this chart couldn't decide where to put the dog. By breaking "dog" down into more detail (companion to play with, v. pest that robs you of sleep) the over-all choice may become clearer.

You may also find yourself moving things from one side to the other as you think about them ... that's par for the course. One of the most useful things about the SP T-Chart is to get your brain asking everything whether it helps or hurts your sobriety.

If the decision doesn't become clear in short order after you list the pro-sobriety and the pro-relapse factors, you may want to set up a more elaborate SP-T Chart that uses weights, as in Example 2 below.

Worksheet 1-2: Sobriety Priority T-Chart Using Weights (Example 2)

Issue: Move in with D?			
How it would endanger my recovery	-	+	How it would help my recovery
D's main squeeze is probably a drunk	-2	5	D does not drink or use or smoke
There is a liquor store right on the corner	-2	3	I will be in a neighborhood with less drugs
I'll have to work longer hours to afford it	-2	3	I'll have a nicer room, I'll feel better about myself, less stress
		1	It's quieter, not so much loud partying
		1	I'll be able to bicycle to work, good exercise
		2	I'll live closer to F and L (sober friends) and spend more time with them getting support
D's other roommate keeps wine in fridge	-3	5	I'll get away from my druggie roommates
I'll have to listen to D's dog barking at night sometimes	-1	2	I'll get to play with D's dog, good company
I hate the purple paint trim in the hallway, makes me want to drink	-1	2	Good light, I can have house plants, cheer me up
		1	Eventually I can find my own place in that neighborhood

The maker of this SP T-Chart has used a rating system of 1-5 to assign a personal weight to each factor in the decision. The weights you use are up to you. For example, how should you weigh the fact that D's other roommate keeps wine in the fridge? If wine was your thing, and drinking somebody else's was never a real problem for you (in fact, you kind of preferred that!), then you might want to give this factor your heaviest minus score. But if refrigerator wine held no charm for you and you never sneaked other people's drinks (at least when there was a chance to get caught!) then this fact would get negligible weight in your scheme of things.

After you've assigned each factor its weight, you can almost make your decision by arithmetic. Almost, because a long list of small plus factors probably shouldn't be allowed to outweigh a single deadly negative. For example, what if the maker of this T-chart has a history of relapsing or near-relapsing when walking by a liquor store?

Some decisions are too complex to be solved in a single T-chart, and you might have to make several charts, and ultimately make your decision by intuition. But your gut feeling will be more educated and trustworthy if you've first worked through the details of the various options by analyzing each factor in terms of the Sobriety Priority.

Note also that your SP-T chart can be the start for action plans that help your sobriety. For example, if the purple trim in the hallway bothers you, talk to D. about letting you paint it over. Also, if you move there, you'll want to be shopping for houseplants. Reshaping your environment to support your sobriety is a strong thing you can do for yourself – and your SP T-Chart led you there.

On the next page is a blank T-chart to photocopy. You can also make your own any time on a napkin or the back of an envelope. They're simple but deep. Their basic idea – to make sobriety your priority in life – is the guiding thread of this workbook.

Worksheet 1-3: Sobriety Priority T-Chart

SOBRIETY PRIORITY T-CHART			
The issue: _____			
How it would endanger my recovery	-	+	How it would help my recovery

My decision:

\_\_\_\_\_

1 Decision

2 Body

3 Exposure

4 Activities

5 People

6 Feelings

7 Life Style

8 History

9 Culture

10 Treatment

11 Relapse

12 Day Plan

13 Week Plan

14 Life Plan

My reasoning:

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---