The Seven Challenges

J O U R N A L S

R O B E R T S C H W E B E L , P h . D .

VIVA PRESS

“We decided to open up and talk honestly about ourselves and about alcohol and other drugs.”

■ Lying to yourself

It doesn't seem helpful when some people get in other people's faces and accuse them of being in denial. It usually boils down to a shouting match:

"You're in denial."
"No I'm not."
"Yes you are."

It is true, however, that people sometimes lie to themselves about their use of alcohol or other drugs. People who are lying to themselves usually don't realize what they're doing. Try now to be totally honest. Really challenge yourself. Are there ways you've been lying to yourself?

Put a check next to any of the ways listed below that you may have lied to yourself.

❑ Underestimated the amount of drugs you were using.

❑ Downplayed the trouble you were getting in.

❑ Said it would be easy to control your drug use when really it wasn't that easy.

❑ Said you could stop whenever you wanted to stop — but probably it would be harder than you admitted.

❑ Minimized your use of drugs (said it wasn't so much) by comparing yourself to bigger users.

❑ Said everyone is doing the same things as you, so it's no big deal.

❑ Said you haven't been hurt by drugs even though you secretly worried that you were.

❑ Said you don't care because you're only hurting yourself and no one else.

❑ Blamed your drug use on someone or something else.

❑ Minimized your drug use (said it wasn't so much) by saying you only used in certain limited situations.

❑ Ignored your drug use because you kept thinking you would do something about it in the future.

❑ Excused your drug use by saying "No one's perfect."

❑ Argued that the drugs you used were harmless, when really they were hurting you and had some bad effects.

❑ Felt drug problems couldn't happen to you — they only happen to other people.

❑ Made jokes about your drug use so that you wouldn't have to deal with reality.

❑ Got high so you would stop thinking about how serious your drug use had become.

SAMPLE

■ When is it safe to tell the truth?

Many young people lie to adults about drugs because they have found that when they tell the truth, they only get in more trouble. In the Seven Challenges Program, we know that we have to make it safe for you to be honest. We have to show that we respect you and will really listen to you. Otherwise, you won't want to talk about yourself, your life, and your drug use.

What sort of things do people do that sometimes makes it hard to tell them the truth?_____

_____

_____

What can people do to make it easier to tell them the truth? _____

_____

_____

Have you ever been around an adult to whom you could tell the whole truth about what you think, and feel, and do; that is, an adult who would really listen and respect what you have to say? ❑ Yes ❑ No

If yes, what was it about that person that allowed you to be honest?

_____

_____

_____

If no, what do you need from an adult in order to feel that it is safe to talk about yourself and your use of alcohol and other drugs?

_____

_____

_____

Do you have friends or peers who really know you? That is, do you have friends with whom you can talk openly and honestly about what you think, feel, and do? ❑ Yes ❑ No

If yes, what is it about these friends that allows you to be honest?

_____

_____

_____

SAMPLE

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If no, what do you need from a friend in order to feel that it is safe to talk about yourself?

_____

_____

_____

What do people say or do that makes you feel that you must lie or mislead them about yourself, or about your use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs?

_____

_____

_____

What does trust mean to you?_____

_____

What person do you trust most? _____

What is it about this person that lets you trust him or her as much as you do?_____

_____

_____

Think of who else you trust.

I trust _____ because _____

I trust _____ because _____

SAMPLE

“We looked at what we liked about alcohol and other drugs, and why we were using them.”

■ The best drug for each feeling

Think about what you sometimes felt before you drank alcohol or used other drugs. Then write down the drug(s) that you liked best when you had that feeling.

The feeling	The drug(s)
When I felt angry, the drug(s) I liked best was	_____
When I felt sad, the drug(s) I liked best was	_____
When I felt depressed, the drug(s) I liked best was	_____
When I felt bored, the drug(s) I liked best was	_____
When I felt lonely, the drug(s) I liked best was	_____
When I felt nervous or anxious, the drug(s) I liked best was	_____
When I felt happy or cheerful, the drug(s) I liked best was	_____
When I felt irritated, the drug(s) I liked best was	_____
When I felt tired, the drug(s) I liked best was	_____
When I felt scared or worried, the drug(s) I liked best was	_____
When I felt bad about myself, the drug(s) I liked best was	_____
When I felt out of control, the drug(s) I liked best was	_____
When I felt emotional pain, the drug(s) I liked best was	_____
When I felt frustrated, the drug(s) I liked best was	_____

SAMPLE

■ What you say to yourself when you drink or do drugs

Before drinking or getting high, people are usually thinking something. It's almost like they talk to themselves. For example:

- Go ahead, have fun.
- This will make your troubles go away.
- It's time to party.
- I'm so mad, I don't care.
- You know you want it, just do it

What were some of the thoughts that would run through your mind before you drank or got high? Below is some space to write them down. After you write them, talk about them with a support person or group.

1._____
_____
_____

2._____
_____
_____

3._____
_____
_____

4._____
_____
_____

5._____
_____
_____

SAMPLE

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"We looked at our use of alcohol and other drugs to see if it had caused harm, or could cause harm."

■ Stages of drug use

Drug use can be described in different stages. Read the descriptions below and put a check next to the stage that you think best describes your own use of alcohol or other drugs.

❑ **Experimental Use:** You are just trying drugs to see what they are like.

❑ **Occasional Use:** You like the effects of drugs, but use them less than once a week. You usually don't go looking for drugs.

❑ **Regular Use:** You drink or use drugs at least once a week. You want the effect. You would look for alcohol or other drugs if they were not available.

❑ **Harmful Abuse:** Drugs have had a negative impact on your life, or else you've just been lucky. You hurt yourself or others, are putting yourself at risk for harm, or could be hurting yourself or others by what you are doing. You may be doing dangerous things or getting in trouble while drinking or using drugs.

❑ **Drug Dependent:** Even though you may say you can quit whenever you want, the truth is it would be hard to stop. Most of your activities center on alcohol or other drugs.

Ask two adults and two peers you trust to say what stage of drug use they think you are in: Experimental, Occasional, Regular, Harmful Abuse, or Dependent. Write down how they rate you.

First adult rated you:_____ Signature_____

Second adult rated you: _____ Signature_____

First peer rated you: _____ Signature_____

Second peer rated you: _____ Signature_____

SAMPLE

■ The drug lifestyle

One way to know that you are headed for trouble with alcohol or other drugs is when you start living a drug lifestyle. Here are some of the characteristics of this lifestyle. Check the ones that apply to you.

❑ Starting to think it's OK to tell lies.

❑ Starting to think that you can live without pain and distress. You can avoid all unhappiness by using drugs to forget.

❑ Operating on the belief — "If it feels good, do it" — regardless of consequences to self and others.

❑ Becoming self-centered and believing it is OK to do whatever it takes to get what you want. You feel free to take whatever you want.

❑ Breaking promises to yourself or others.

❑ Starting to think that any adult authority figure is the enemy.

❑ Hurting people who care about you, sometimes without even realizing it.

❑ Becoming selfish and thinking "it has to be my way."

❑ Thinking that people who talk to you about the harm or potential harm of drugs don't know anything, don't care about you, and want to ruin your fun so that you will be unhappy.

❑ Ditching school.

❑ Using huge amounts of drugs.

❑ Sleeping during the day or sleeping a lot.

❑ Committing criminal acts

If so, which ones? _____

SAMPLE

List other ways you are living a drug lifestyle

1. _____

_____

2. _____

_____

3. _____

_____

4. _____

_____

“We looked at our responsibility and the responsibility of others for our problems.”

■ Anger

People often drink or do drugs when they are angry. They don't like the feeling of being angry, or are afraid they would hurt someone if they stayed angry. Drugs take the edge off the anger or make them forget what they feel.

Do you sometimes use alcohol or other drugs when you are angry? ❑ Yes ❑ No

The problem of coping with anger by using drugs is that you don't learn other ways to deal with anger.

Do you have other ways to deal with anger? ❑ Yes ❑ No *If you answered yes, continue with this question:*

How else do you deal with your anger (such as hit walls, talk it out, cry, yell, etc.)

1._____

2._____

3._____

4._____

Circle the one way you most often use to cope with anger.

What are other ways to cope with anger that you don't use? If you can't think of any, ask other people for help on this.

1._____

2._____

3._____

4._____

From your two lists above, what do you think are the best ways to cope with anger?_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

SAMPLE

■ Coping with moods and strong emotions

How do you handle stress or strong emotions (such as anger, hurt, pain, depression, loneliness, fear, etc.)?

- ❑ Try to ignore or forget feelings
- ❑ Yell a lot
- ❑ Talk with friends
- ❑ Talk with family
- ❑ Talk with an adult
- ❑ Hit walls, throw things
- ❑ Avoid difficult situations
- ❑ Exercise
- ❑ Seek out sex
- ❑ Cry a lot
- ❑ Get into fights
- ❑ Isolate myself
- ❑ Hurt myself physically
- ❑ Start arguments
- ❑ Hold in the feelings until I explode
- ❑ Listen to music
- ❑ Drink or use drugs to escape
- ❑ Get wise advice. If so, from whom?_____
- ❑ Other _____

Of the coping methods you use, which one(s) if any:

Usually make your situation better? _____

Usually make your situation worse? _____

Usually make you feel good right away?_____

Make you regret what you did later?_____

Make you feel good about what you did later? _____

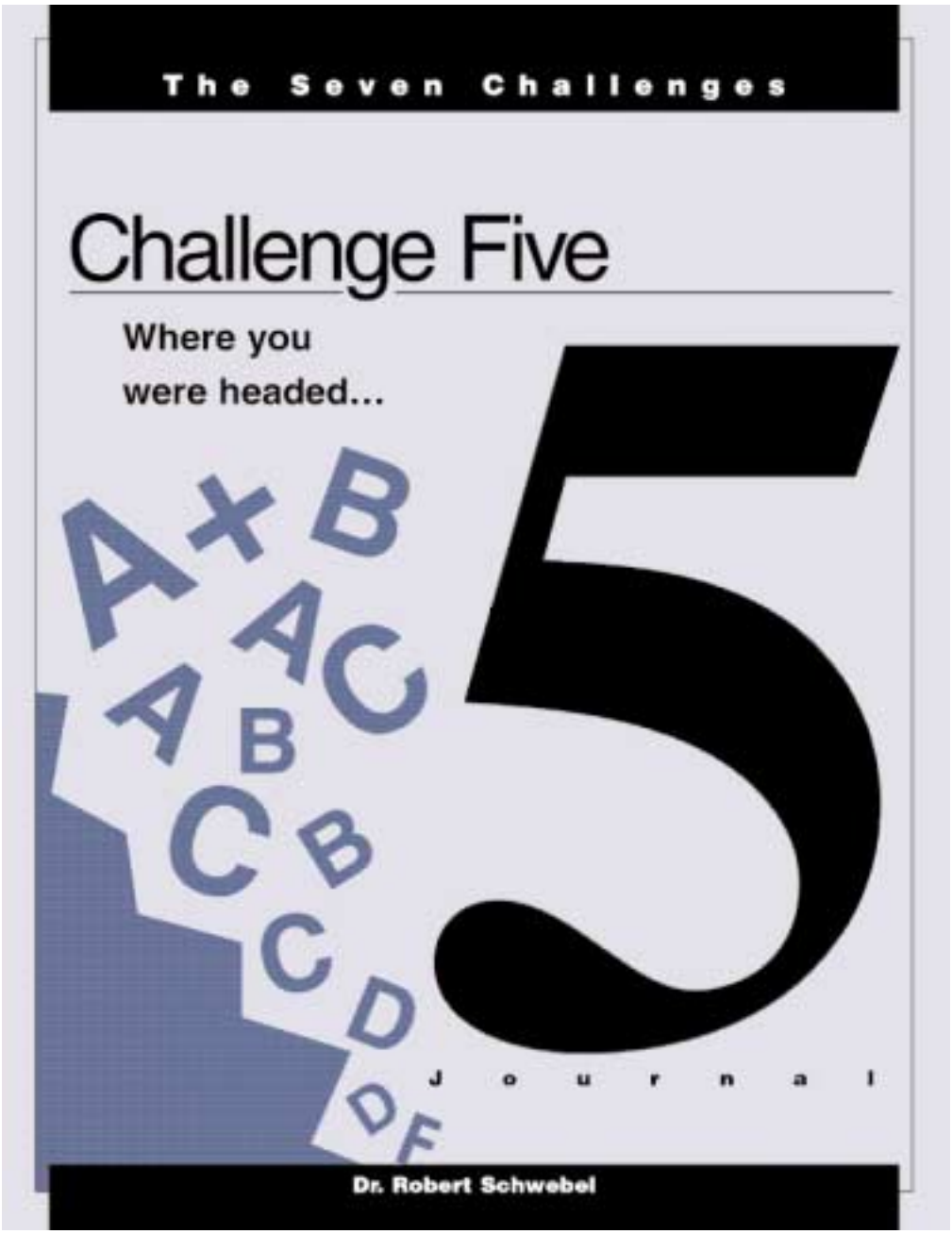
Make you feel good about yourself? _____

Make you feel bad about yourself? _____

Really help to solve problems? _____

If you have used drugs or alcohol to deal with stress or strong emotions, has this way of coping kept you from learning new ways to cope? ❑ Yes ❑ No

SAMPLE



“We thought about where we seemed to be headed, where we wanted to go, and what we wanted to accomplish.”

■ Where you are headed

Think about what is going on in your life right now.

Write here what you like about the way things are going in your life (type of person you are, things you have accomplished, your successes, your family life, your school performance, etc.):

_____

_____

_____

_____

Write here what you don't like about the ways things are going in your life (type of person you are, trouble you are in, problems, things you wish you had accomplished but haven't, problems at home, school, etc.):

_____

_____

_____

_____

If you don't change at all, describe what your life is likely to look like one year from now. Where do you think you will be? What will you be doing? What will be happening?

_____

_____

_____

_____

No one can really predict the future. But you can look at trends and use your imagination. If you don't change things, what might your life look like 10 years from now. Describe it in the space below.

_____

_____

_____

_____

SAMPLE

Where you were headed...

Now think about where your life is headed. Do you like where you seem to be headed? ❑ Yes ❑ No

Do you want to make changes in your life? ❑ Yes ❑ No

If yes, list the changes below, giving details about the way you want to change.

1. _____

_____

2. _____

_____

3. _____

_____

4. _____

_____

5. _____

_____

If no, write down your reasons for not making changes.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

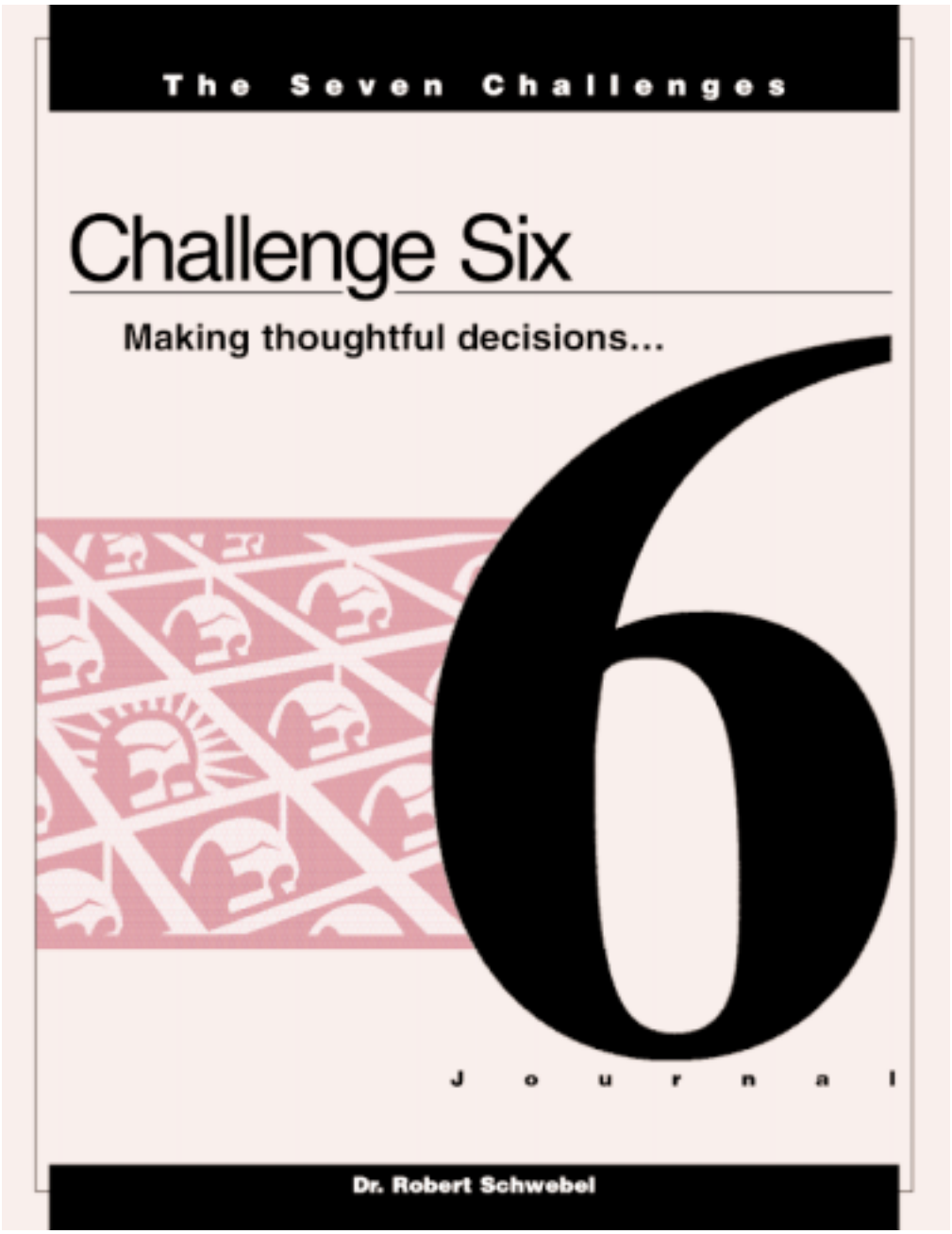
_____

_____

_____

_____

SAMPLE



“We made thoughtful decisions about our lives and about our use of alcohol and other drugs.”

■ What it means to quit

In order to quit using drugs, most people have to make major lifestyle changes. This requires a huge effort. Below are some specific questions to help you think about it.

If you stopped using drugs, how would it affect the way you deal with anger?_____

_____

_____

If you stopped using drugs, how would it affect the way you deal with hurt and sad feelings? _____

_____

_____

How would it affect the way you have fun? _____

_____

_____

Would you need to find new ways to have fun? ❑ Yes ❑ No

If you answered yes, what new ways come to mind? (Ask others for ideas if you are stuck.) _____

_____

_____

How would it affect your choice of friends? _____

_____

_____

If you stopped using drugs, what would you need to do differently at school to feel good about yourself?

_____

_____

_____

If you stopped using drugs, what changes would you need to make in your family life? _____

_____

_____

How would your life be better without drugs? _____

_____

_____

SAMPLE

■ Should quit, but not ready to quit

This is an exercise for people who know they should quit using drugs but have not decided that they will do it. If you know you should quit, but haven't decided to do so, it's important to think about why you're not quitting, and what this will mean to you. (If you are going to quit using drugs or don't believe that you should quit, skip this page.)

Are you not quitting because you feel that life would be too painful without drugs? ❑ Yes ❑ No

If yes, what skills would you need to learn or what problem(s) would you need to solve so that your life would be OK without drugs? _____

_____

_____

_____

Are you not quitting because you don't feel you could succeed in being drug-free? ❑ Yes ❑ No

If yes, what do you need to do to develop more self-confidence in your ability to quit? _____

_____

_____

_____

Are you not quitting because you say you don't care about your future? ❑ Yes ❑ No

If yes, think about your pessimism about the future. When did it begin? Why did it begin?

_____

_____

_____

If you answered "no" to all three questions above, then why aren't you quitting your use of drugs even though you know you should?

_____

_____

_____

What bad things might happen to you in the future because you are not quitting? _____

_____

_____

How bad would things have to get before you would decide to give up drugs? What would have to happen?

_____

_____

_____

SAMPLE

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■ Real decisions

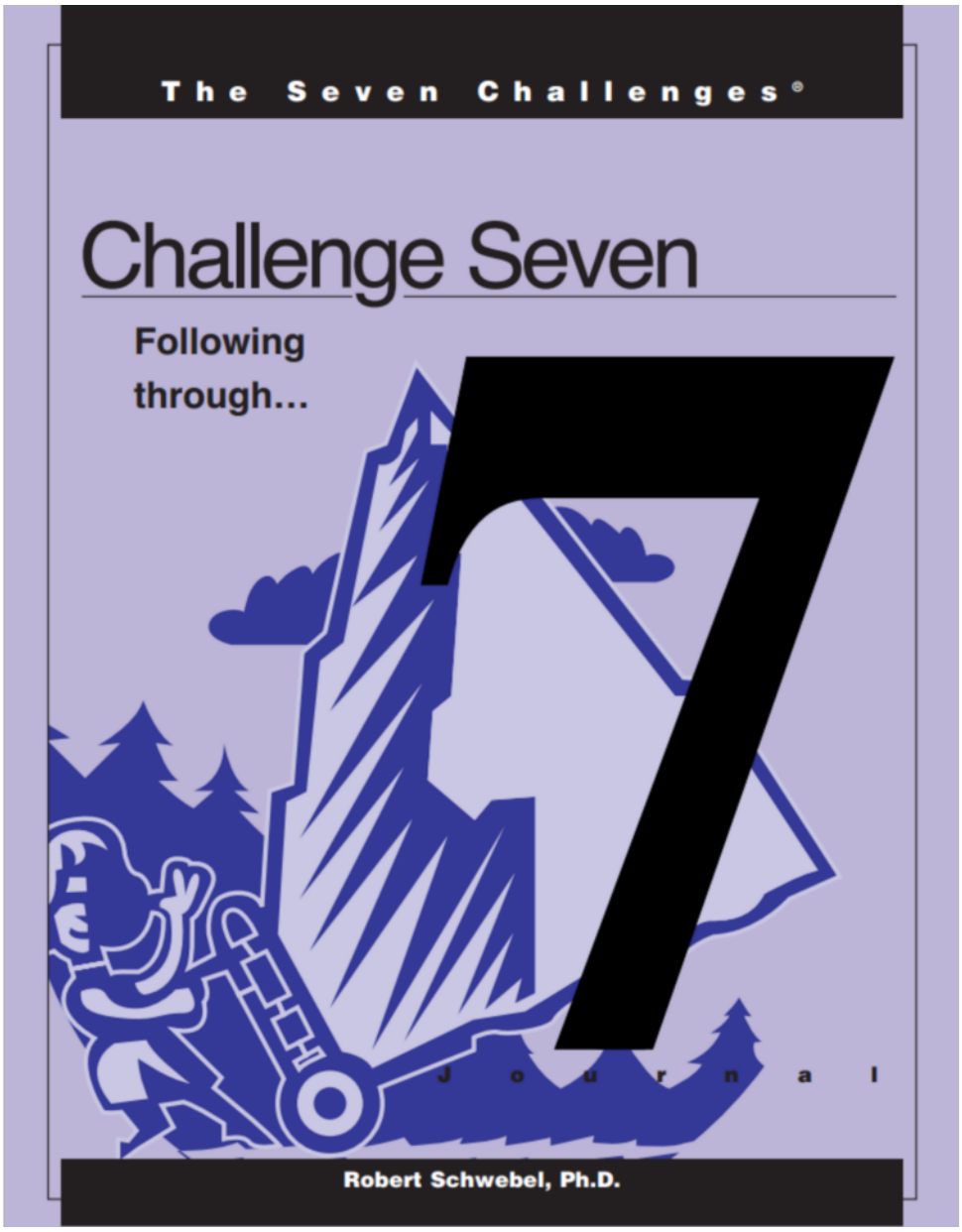
Many people fall in the category of "kind of wanting to stop." It's like a girl who said: "I want to stop, but I don't want to quit."

Half-hearted decisions to change are a set-up for failure. It's like people who say they are going to quit in order to please someone else (a parent, boyfriend, girlfriend, etc.). It doesn't work. And it's like people who say: "I can stay clean and sober if I don't see my friends. I'll try to avoid them. If I'm not near drugs, I won't use them." That's very different from saying: "I'm going to stay clean and sober, no matter what. I made up my mind. I'll do everything in my power to resist getting high."

Too often people make weak decisions to quit, and then fail. To truly succeed in overcoming a drug problem, you have to be seriously committed to change. This exercise is a chance to think for yourself about how serious you are about quitting drugs. If you don't want to quit, skip this page. If you want to quit, take this page seriously. Below is a checklist of items that experts say are important to do to stop using drugs. Put a check next to items you are committed to doing.

- ❑ Tell key people in my life that I am serious about quitting.
- ❑ Get rid of my stash and tell people not to offer or attempt to sell me drugs anymore.
- ❑ Figure out all the triggers that could get me to relapse and have a plan about how to deal with them.
- ❑ Find new ways to have fun and excitement.
- ❑ Learn new ways to deal with problems and feelings that I used to avoid by using drugs.
- ❑ Give up old friends who would eventually tempt me to use again.
- ❑ Make new friends or renew old friendships with positive people.
- ❑ Prepare to endure the pain, stress, boredom or anger I will face when I stop using drugs.
- ❑ Refuse to give in to my impulses when I feel like getting high. Realize that this might be very hard to do at times.
- ❑ Figure out the tricky excuses I will give myself why it is OK to use drugs (such as, "just once" or "no one will know" or "you can handle it"). Devise answers to all of these tricks.
- ❑ Figure out the warning signs that things aren't going well (which could eventually lead to a relapse). Have a plan for turning things around and avoiding relapse.
- ❑ Establish a support group that I can call upon for help.
- ❑ Write down all my reasons for quitting, and carry it around with me to read any time I am tempted to use drugs again.

SAMPLE



"We followed through on our decisions about our lives and drug use. If we saw problems, we went back to earlier challenges and mastered them."

■ Support from other people

Who are the people you will turn to for support in making your lifestyle changes?

Peers:

1._____

2._____

3._____

Adults:

1._____

2._____

3._____

What support groups will you use? (If you do not know of any, be sure to ask the adults with whom you are working.)

1._____

2._____

What are the three most important ways that people can support you?

1._____

2._____

3._____

Are you able to ask people for help? ❑ Yes ❑ No

If no, what keeps you from asking for help?_____

_____

_____

What can you do to overcome this problem in asking for help?_____

_____

_____

SAMPLE

■ People to avoid

Who are the people you need to avoid seeing, the ones who would most hurt your chances of recovery? This can be a difficult list to make, but it will surely help you succeed in your goal of being drug-free.

1._____

2._____

3._____

4._____

5._____

6._____

7._____

Are you committed to staying away from them? ❑ Yes ❑ No

If not, why not? _____

_____

_____

_____

If not, choose someone who will give you honest feedback. With this person, discuss your reasons for staying in touch with people on your "avoid list."

(Person's signature:_____) What did your support person say? _____

_____

_____

If you plan to avoid people on your "avoid" list, what can you do if you unexpectedly find yourself in the presence of one of them?

1._____

_____

2._____

_____

3._____

_____

SAMPLE

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