



Breaking the Cycle of Broken Promises

**COMMITMENT MEANS
STAYING LOYAL TO
WHAT YOU SAID YOU
WERE GOING TO DO
LONG AFTER THE
MOOD YOU SAID IT IN
HAS LEFT YOU.**

Renegé – verb: to go back on one’s word or break a promise

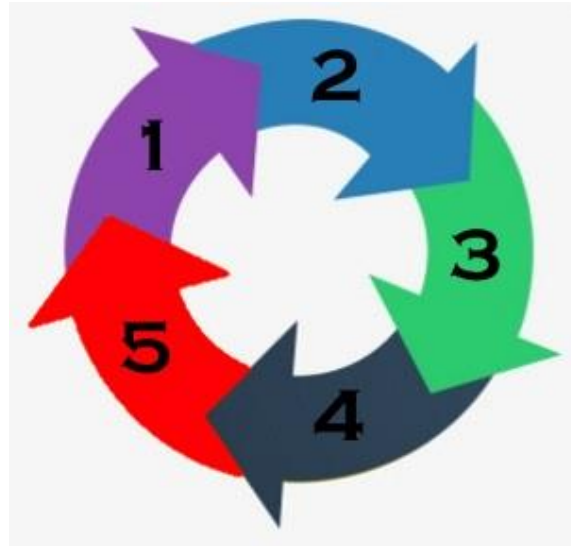
Have you ever found yourself stuck in a repeating rut of promising you will change, then working on it for a while, but then before you know it you are back at square one again? Almost everyone has had this experience.

An individual might find him or herself stuck in this cycle for months, years or even for an entire lifetime. Let’s look at this “***Cycle of Broken Promises***” closer to better understand what may be going on and to try to figure out what exactly may be perpetuating this negative cycle over and over again.

See the **Cycle of Broken Promises**
Diagram on the following page:



The Cycle of Broken Promises



- 1. Pleasurable but Problematic Behavior:** For example, bad habits, compulsions, addictions, etc.
- 2. Consequence, Complaint or Complication:** The pleasurable but problematic behavior leads to some kind of problem, anxiety or trouble. For example, someone we care about may complain, we may jeopardize our situation, we may experience a loss related to the behavior – *any negative consequence or other event that makes one think about changing would apply*
- 3. Promise or Pledge to Change:** The consequence, complaint or concern leads us to make a declaration of change. For example “That’s it, since I missed work again on Monday, no more drinking for me!”
- 4. The Decline of Enthusiasm:** This is where the energy, excitement and drive to actually stick with the commitment to change dies down. The initial burst of motivation that comes soon after a consequence may not last as long as we want it too. Excuse making and compromising often starts in this phase
- 5. Desire to Resume Pleasurable Behavior Returns** – This can happen gradually over time as we may start to spend increased time thinking about how “enjoyable” we think our bad habit once was. Or, the desire can feel like it returned suddenly without much warning if we do not make an effort to stay self-aware.

EVENTUAL RETURN TO PLEASURABLE BUT PROBLEMATIC BEHAVIOR



Breaking the Cycle: There are many reasons why this negative cycle of returning to negative behaviors over and over again can continue. Consider just a few common scenarios for these **Recyclers**:

“Erica the Excuse Maker” – Erica found herself stuck on the cycle of broken promises with her drinking. Her significant other would complain about how she acted when she was drinking, or Erica would ruin a whole Sunday because she was hung over, or Erica would get upset with herself every time she blew her paycheck at the bar over the weekend. Whenever these consequences started getting to her, Erica would make a declaration that she would change her drinking patterns. Sometimes she would promise to cut down, and other times she would even promise to try to abstain from drinking altogether.

However, with time her enthusiasm to quit would usually die down. Erica often found herself making excuses why she needed to drink to relax. She would soon start thinking that she earned the right to have a few drinks after all that she puts up with during the week. The excuses always had the same result: She was back to overdrinking again and the consequences were right back with it soon after. – **SIMPLE ADVICE: Stop Making Excuses**

“It wasn’t so bad” – Isaac – Isaac was on the cycle of broken promises for years. He was pretty good at using drugs and avoiding serious consequences for weeks and even months at a time. Sooner or later, however, eventually something caught up with him and made him try changing. This last time he was arrested he declared it would be the last as he would stop messing with the “hard stuff” and change his life. After a while of not using, Isaac felt better every time.

However, what would happen to Isaac is that he would start to forget about the consequences. He would think more about the times he was able to sustain using without getting caught. “It wasn’t so bad when I was using” became a thought that was hard for Isaac to escape. Eventually he was back in the cycle of broken promises when he returned to his old lifestyle, yet again. **SIMPLE ADVICE: Don’t forget – Keep your memory fresh**

“One more time” – Omar – Omar was well aware that he was a compulsive gambler. He made lots of money but he also lost a lot, as most gamblers eventually do. Omar was stuck in the cycle of broken promises because every time he lost big gambling, he renewed his promise to stop gambling.

Omar would do great for weeks and sometimes even months but eventually a “can’t miss” game would come up in his life. Omar would reason to himself “I’ll just gamble again this one last time and then stop again”. Sadly, when Omar gambled with his own life like that he ended up back again where he was at the start, gambling out of control after thinking he could do it “just once more”
SIMPLE ADVICE: Remember: Just one more time is a lie

“Dubious” Doug – Doug struggled so much on and off with his opioid use issues but deep down he knew he needed to change however he loved the escape that drugs provided. With the opioid abusing lifestyle, consequences would often come up, which constantly reminded Doug to renew his commitment to change and he often would promise he would finally do it.

The problem was with Doug that when a little time passed, he started to doubt in his abilities to maintain progress. “There is no way I can keep this going – its way too hard” was a common thought that crept into his head after a while without the drugs. Before he knew it, Doug was back to using opioids again and right back in the same cycle especially because he lacked the self-confidence and motivation to push through the difficult times. **SIMPLE ADVICE – Work to build self confidence**

“Plan-Breaker” Pam – Pam knew a lot about addiction but she also knew a lot about recovery and what it takes to change for the better. When Pam experienced enough consequences, she would make a new commitment to change. She wouldn’t stop there. Pam was good at making excellent plans to structure her change efforts. “I’m going to go to 12 Step meetings, get a sponsor, find a job, and clear my phone of all my using friends numbers” – These types of plans were laid out so that change could be possible

Over time though, Pam soon started breaking her own plans for making changes. “I’m too busy to go to meetings” became an excuse to break her plan to go to meetings. “There are no good sponsors out there anyway” eventually became her excuse why she didn’t get a sponsor, as promised. When her counselor encouraged her to stick to her plans, Pam was good for coming up with a reason or excuse why she couldn’t follow through as promised. **SIMPLE ADVICE: Follow through: Stick with the plan**



Interactive Group Exercise: Learning from each other

Directions: Make copies of the following page after this one, and give everyone in the group a copy of the page. Fill out a box for each person in the group by writing in the person's name and then check off which **advice for breaking the cycle of broken promises** that you would give to that person.

There is the option to check "Not Sure/None" if needed. However the only reason why someone should check "Not Sure/None" is if - 1) You really do not know the person well enough to make a good guess or 2) The person has been doing well for so long that he or she is not stuck in the cycle of broken promises so none of the examples fit. For everyone else, do your best to make a guess by checking something if you can. Your answers are anonymous.

When everyone's grid is filled out, everyone should get scissors and cut out all the individual boxes into individualized cards (one per name on the card). Every group member should then give the cards that they have to the person whose name is on it. If this is done correctly, each person will have all the cards that were filled out about them (the cards with their names on them). For example if someone the group is named Bob, then when the cards are all cut out then handed out, Bob will have all of the cards about him and he will be able to see what the rest of the group checked off by viewing all of his cards

Process:

Take a little time to review the cards written about you. Then go around the room and share your thoughts and feelings about the feedback you received from others in the group by answering and discussing the following questions:

1. Which advice did your group check off most commonly for you?
2. What do you *think* about what your group said based on what they checked for you? (Do you agree or disagree?)
3. How do you feel about how your group viewed you? – Be honest and use a feeling word – Surprised? Agreeable? Disappointed? Intrigued? Concerned?
4. Be honest: Which item on the card would you have checked for yourself and why? What do you feel like you need to work on the most in your own opinion of your situation?



Closing Information – How Can We Break the Cycle of Broken Promises?

First, Remember: It isn't easy. It can take many tries to break the cycle of broken promises – BUT – **it is possible if you are consistent, persistent and do not give up**

- If you tend to be an **Excuse Maker** then the answer is clear – **Stop making excuses.** How does one do that?
 - ❑ Make a commitment not only to change but also to stop making excuses about changing
 - ❑ Know what kinds of excuses you tend to make so you can prepare yourself not to buy into your own excuses, tricks or self-lies
 - ❑ Find someone close to you whom you trust who can help you to keep your commitment to not make excuses any longer

Ninety-nine
percent of the
failures come
from people who
have the habit of
making excuses.

George Washington Carver

- If you tend to be a person who forgets how bad the consequences were and starts to say “**It wasn't that bad**” – Then the answer is - **Don't forget: Keep your memory fresh.** What are some ways to do that?
 - ❑ When you are motivated and self-aware about how bad the consequences feel then make some kind of record. Write a note to yourself. Record yourself speaking in a video about how you feel. Make some kind of record that you can turn to if you start to forget how things were and you find yourself starting to say “It wasn't that bad”
 - ❑ Make a commitment every day to remember how bad the consequences and other problems associated with your substance use (or other bad habit) felt. If you remember every day that can help you not to forget how things felt and it can keep you from going backward in your thinking
 - ❑ When you are low, let a trusted friend know. Have that friend be available to help remind you not to go backward. Your friend should help you renew your memory if you start to reason that “things weren't so bad” when you were using and facing consequences

"Turn your words into wisdom"
- Oprah Winfrey



- If you find yourself saying “I’ll just use (or do the behavior) **Just one more time**” then the answer is to work on fully convincing yourself that **“Just one more time is a lie!”** - How can you do that?
 - Meditate (or think deeply) about how telling yourself “Just one more time” is really just code for saying “I just want to keep using (or doing the negative behavior)” Take “just one more time” off the table as an excuse because it is a one of the worst forms of lying – It is lying to yourself.
 - Have a plan in place beforehand. Come up with something you will do differently when you find yourself saying “just one more time” – Any alternate activity that can get you away from that harmful pattern of thinking and behaving and distract you can be an effective tool in this fight
 - Have a friend or other support on standby. Is there someone you can call or text when you find yourself saying “Just one more?” – Perhaps this person can talk you out of it or at least distract you long enough to change your mind

*Sometimes "Later" becomes "Never"
Make change happen now*

- If you are person who starts to **doubt and lack self-confidence** then the answer is to simply – **work to build self-confidence and become more self-assured**
 - Practice affirmations (positive self-statements) each and every day. Starting the day with positive affirmations can truly help build confidence and determination over time
 - Have a “go to” confidence-building phrase you can repeat in your mind during times when you feel weak. Praying or deeply thinking about this energizing phrase can help bridge the gap when you start feeling a loss of confidence. “I can do this” or “I have the strength to get through this” or something to that nature can be helpful but it has to be something you feel works for you specifically
 - Seek out at least one (or more) encouraging friend or support person. Having an encouraging, positive and supportive person who is ready and willing to help build you up when you are feeling down on yourself can be a huge difference-maker

***“If you have a dream, don’t just sit there.
Gather courage to believe that you can succeed
and leave no stone unturned to make it a reality.”
— Dr Roopleen***



- If you are a “**Plan breaker**” and you find it easier to make a change plan than to follow it then you need to work on **following through and sticking with it**
 - Make sure not to just make the plan then walk away. It is important to keep the plan in front of you at all times. Write out your plan and hang it up where you can see it. Take a picture of it on your phone and make it your background. Do whatever you can to keep that plan an active part of your daily life so you don't go back on it
 - Use the principle “Something is better than nothing” – Consider this example – Let's say you are a plan breaker by nature and part of your plan was to go to the gym 4 times a week for an hour but one day you just don't feel like going. Instead of not going at all just go for 15 minutes. It is better to make some effort to keep the plan going than to drop the plan altogether
 - Finally, just like with all the other strategies, having a supportive friend or helper who can participate in your plan with you or at least help you monitor it can help you not to quit. Let someone whom you trust know all about the details of your change plan and schedule time to review your progress so you have a cheerleader to help you stay focused and motivated not to give up

***‘A goal without a plan is just a wish.’
— Antoine de Saint-Exupéry***