

Hats Off to Those Who Do the Toughest Job They Will Ever Love



This is my last of 31 posts for the year. At the beginning of 2024, I set a goal of posting roughly one piece every two weeks, which would be 26. The 26th post was [Once Bitten Twice Shy - the Recovery Community and the False Promise of Harmless Drugs](#) which I completed October 23rd. When I reflected back on my pieces here this year, many of them are critical of our care system and raise deep concerns about the direction our field is heading.

I suspect that for those who read what I write regularly (which is humbling to consider) it would be reasonable to believe because of the issues I raise that I am a disgruntled person deeply jaded in respect to the field and related matters. Nothing could be farther from the truth. It is a field I love and work that has been the dedication of a significant part of my life to this point and for as long as I can foresee. I write what I write because I love the field, I am dedicated to the work and I care deeply about the future field. One tries to constructively support

positive change for things they love because it matters to them.

When I was thinking about what to write for my final post in 2024, I was reflecting on the spirit of the Holidays ([plural as there are at least 11](#)) and wanted to pause for a minute to affirm all the people out in the world who wake up every day and serve in our care systems. Those who help people heal and do so in the face of profound challenges. I came up with the title above (not really mine). It is the title of a [2003 workforce paper](#) published in the Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment. If you follow the link and read it, you will note that all of the challenges expressed we still face a generation later. That is also the nature of this work, change if it comes occurs slowly and with herculean effort on the part of many.

I do what I do for the same reason a lot of us do. I owe my recovery and any success in life I have to people who were there for me when I initially needed help, to visionaries who helped pave the way to create places and communities that support healing from substance use conditions, and mentors across my career. People who showed up in my path to help me stick, stay and flourish despite of, or perhaps because of all the challenges faced. Truth be told our field is replete with people who have dedicated their lives to this very difficult work because they love what we can do. Because someone had to do it and often that person is the one they see in the mirror in the morning. They have found the truth in the title of that old paper from 2003, they do the toughest job that they will ever love.

For readers outside of the field, the truth in the trenches for many out there is doubly difficult this time of year. The holidays for many we serve are charged with historic loss and an impossible narrative of familial perfection that few if any families meet. The Holidays can be very painful for those we serve. As you read this, workers in the field are trying to help people navigate through such challenges in the midst of stress that seems endemic in our society at this time of year. Thank you for doing the tough job that you do because you love the work despite all the barriers and challenges. Without you, I would have never made it. Without you, so many people would not be living in recovery today, but rather they would be still suffering or dead. You deserve praise for the often difficult and very rough work you do.

I hope you see your value even when things don't seem to be going very well with the people you serve. Being involved in this work across my entire adulthood, I can recall every loss, and I find I need to reflect more intentionally on seeing the long game of the effort to help people heal from the complex and all-encompassing condition that addiction is. Many were people who I saw as part of their journey, I did not see them in their finest moments. Years later when I would cross paths with them and saw they were well, and would often note some thing I said or did that stuck with them, I would realize that I played a bit part in their recovery process. I realized that it was likely that I did not see the positive outcome that occurred because of all the efforts of many people over the long term and that those efforts included my small part. In this way, if you are reading this out in the field, please be slow to count your efforts as ineffective. Healing takes time and we do not always see the outcome in the time span of our efforts.

To all out there who have served or continue to serve in the trenches helping people heal from substance use conditions, thank you for doing the toughest job you will ever love. You matter a great deal, perhaps more than you know on a day-to-day basis. Whatever you celebrate at this time of the year, I wish you and yours all the very best!

Sources

Gallon, S. L., Gabriel, R. M., & Knudsen, J. R. W. (2003). The toughest job you'll ever love: A Pacific Northwest Treatment Workforce Survey. *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*, 24(3), 183–196. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0740-5472\(03\)00032-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0740-5472(03)00032-1)

Stauffer, W. (2024, October 23). Recovery Review. *Once Bitten Twice Shy – the Recovery Community and the False Promise of Harmless Drugs*. Recovery Review. <https://recoveryreview.blog/2024/10/23/once-bitten-twice-shy-the-recovery-community-and-the-false-promise-of-harmless-drugs/>

Post link – [HERE](#)