

# Recovery coaching (MM) | Sessions 1-4

## Transcripts (copy and paste into Ash or other AI)

### Intake Session

Alex Libre: Nice.

Michael Montgomery: It.

Alex Libre: Hey, Michael, how's it going?

Michael Montgomery: Hey, how you doing?

Michael Montgomery: Good, good.

Alex Libre: I'm at my office late today, but I didn't come into the office until like 5:30 or something. Ridiculous. Yeah, just work from home and my wife relieved me from child care duties late. I just get so much more done in the office.

Michael Montgomery: That's in Sausalito.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, yeah.

Michael Montgomery: Nice.

Alex Libre: Yeah, it's nice space. It's actually where my psychiatrist has his office. And one day he's like, Alex, you need like your own office space. You need separation. And they have, you know, room available in this building. And so I was just like, that day got this office spot.

Michael Montgomery: So do you. Do you guys live in Marin?

Alex Libre: No, I live in San Francisco proper, in the city. Where are you?

Michael Montgomery: Lower Haight.

Alex Libre: Oh, nice. Nice. We're in like Central Richmond, 21st.

Michael Montgomery: Love it.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Alex Libre: Nice, nice.

Michael Montgomery: Great area.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: Cool.

Alex Libre: So I was going to send you an agreement in advance just to cover our bases in a few days. I didn't get it together until right before this. Um, I'll send it to you after the basic.

Michael Montgomery: That's cool.

Alex Libre: Okay. The basic things that like you should know are obviously I'm not like an actual licensed anything, so therapist, psychologist, psychiatrist, medical doctor, blah, blah, blah. And the. All of our sessions I record and transcribe and I will only use that. Only a person would ever see that besides me is you. And I would be sharing with you, if you wanted it, the full transcripts and. Or just I find it really useful, like after sessions, kind of consolidated information and then can give you things kind of like reflect on in the days between sessions. Is that all right?

Michael Montgomery: That's okay. Just so I know, because this is. Something comes up in my line of work. How are you transcribing it?

Alex Libre: I'm using granola and Amy, which both do local transcription on my device.

Michael Montgomery: Okay. Do you know their. Just so I know. Do you know that what, what their.

Alex Libre: Protections are, like, granola is HIPAA compliant.

Michael Montgomery: Okay, great.

Alex Libre: I'm not sure about any, but I believe it's hipaa compliant. Definitely SOC2 can't find immediately whether that's okay.

Michael Montgomery: I'm cool with that. No, I just know that like in our line of work, like our voices, we use a lot of transcription services and it's not. It's a little fuzzy in terms of like the protections on that information or whatever, but I'm not worried about that.

Alex Libre: Yeah, I mean, there are reasons to be concerned in general. I agree. And then the other last thing that I thought would be good to just discuss. So cost. After this session, all sessions will be 45 minutes and 175. This one is hour and a half. But not 350. It's 250. Just take \$100 off, make it a little bit more palatable. And then scheduling like I'm going to give you a link. I just created a link that you can grab time. I don't know if each week you'll want to be the same in which it's.

Michael Montgomery: I think we should try to be consistent. But you know, you've got a kid and I've got work. But I, I think trying to be consistent would be good. But Mondays don't work for you.

Alex Libre: So they could hold on one second. Mondays can work as long as it's

not 5:30 to 6:30.

Michael Montgomery: Okay, okay, let me look at, I'll look at the thing. But anyway, I think in general having, you know, specific times.

Alex Libre: I agree.

Michael Montgomery: As slots and then you know, if we need to change them. But you know how that can get like today.

Alex Libre: Yeah, so.

Michael Montgomery: That's good. And, and, and are we looking at. I, I meant to go back to your original email. An 8 week commitment.

Alex Libre: I, I normally do that but we could do like that's mostly for the benefit of the participants. Like not just sort of change their mind halfway through. Sort of be committed. But I feel like eight weeks, maybe a little long. Maybe like four weeks commitment to twice a week or it sounds like twice a week.

Michael Montgomery: No, no, no. Twice a week is good for me and I would want to make at least a four week commitment.

Alex Libre: If you.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, I'd be good with that. I think eight weeks is good for me.

Alex Libre: Great.

Michael Montgomery: For a lot of reasons. I can explain but I think that like I need to really be more consistent and really embrace this and I, and I'm worried I'm not doing that.

Alex Libre: Nice, nice. In that case, I mean I think it'll be important to have obviously the two sessions a week plus the ones plus like every single day consume some kind of recovery related content. Like there are a lot of good recovery podcasts and I think if you find a few that you like and just cycle through articles. Don't you work in podcasting or media or something? Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Michael Montgomery: I'm a journalist so.

Alex Libre: Nice, nice.

Michael Montgomery: Not and not in, I mean in journal like investigative reporting. Like I don't. I mean my world is like all audio. But I, I actually try not to listen to podcasts because that's what I do.

Alex Libre: You can also just find a Good blog.

Michael Montgomery: I told you this app that I have and maybe there's a better one, but it's, it's, it's good because it's hitting me with stuff that I find interesting and helpful and you know, so I think consuming something every day, as you said,

is really, really important. Just like anything to get this consistency thing down.

Alex Libre: Exactly. And I was just looking at the reframe app. I forgot that it wasn't me who suggested it, but I have a lot of participants in my meeting over the past few years. So it's definitely rep. And if you like it, that's good. There are also two other apps that I would recommend. One is Waking up by basically Sam Harris's sort of meditation ish app. Whether or not you, whatever you think of Sam Harris, this app is very like, I don't know, it's just a much more kind of. It's pretty unique approach and it's not all meditation. A lot of it is like talks and like sort of conversations that he has with various people and even some that are specific to addiction. But it's not like addiction focused app.

Michael Montgomery: I just find it really useful, which is nice. That's, that's cool. Yeah.

Alex Libre: And then the other one is called Ash. It's. Do you have an iPhone or Android?

Michael Montgomery: iPhone, yeah.

Alex Libre: Great. Okay. So it's Ash AI therapy. And it is really good for like every day checking in. You can set a reminder to have a check in and then just like send an exchange messages. It's just like, you know, standard modern large language model AI. But it is useful for consolidating information over time and reminding you what you thought about things in the past and how it ties in and certain themes. I find it really useful myself. And you can even like plug the transcripts of our calls, our sessions into there so it has that as context. And then you don't need to tell everything that you already discussed me. So it could be really useful. That's the other thing. And I think that was it from the contract obviously on the river chair. Unless it's like reasonably likely that I think you're going to hurt yourself or somebody else. That's the only standard. Sort of.

Michael Montgomery: That's standard. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Alex Libre: Okay, cool. I'll send you the agreement later. But I just want to make sure you knew those basic things and then a transcription is going to be okay for you. Let's dive in. So I think my approach to recovery, as you probably know is not as like narrowly recovery focus as some recovery approaches. Some you know, rehab centers, a lot of mainstream approach to addiction. And I just think often you really do have to get it into like other aspects of your life and how all these things play together in the system that is your life in order to figure out what, what is driving you to drink or use or whatever. And so I think that like there is some overlap with like areas we might discuss that might not be like this trigger

happened and then I felt an urge. It might be like my job, whatever in an. This isn't therapy, but it might feel like it. And honestly it should feel like it at times in terms of breadth that we might cover.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, that makes sense. I mean, I mean I know that from your meetings. I mean I have some sense and actually that's what I like and that's what a lot of people like about those Wednesday meetings. I mean they're, I mean they get too big.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: Popular. But it's good, it's. It's good. I've always, I've been some other meetings, some in person meetings and honestly they're not the same. So you do. You do something distinctively different.

Alex Libre: Wow, thank you. I really appreciate that, Michael. I don't know, it feels good to you. So. Thank you.

Michael Montgomery: Can I ask you just as a digression, I mean I know you talk about your cannabis, you know, issues, but how, how did you. What, what's your trail into this to becoming a facilitator and I mean honestly.

Alex Libre: I fell into smart recovery from the, you know, weed addiction and finding it very useful to have these smart recovery meetings. I went to an in person one in Castro for a while and then when Was that? Like 2019 into 2020. Then I had a huge like manic psychotic episode in 2020 that like coming out of that in sort of July of 2020 was really when I like stopped smoking weed. I guess June when I first went into hospital. That's kind of like what I think really made it easy for me to stick to quitting weed. Honestly was having like this major negative bottom out. Exactly. But like I do friendly. They don't need something like that if you know, you decide it's. You want to make a change to have a better life at all. But then I didn't do. I was sort of inactive in smart recovery for like six months. And then I was planning on becoming a therapist and got out into this like, you know, marriage, family therapy, grad school and was going to do that. And they wanted you to have certain like, like clinical ish hours hours and smart counted I was like, all right, I'll become that. And then I dropped out of that program ten days before it started, but still stuck with the smart facilitation because I enjoyed it a lot. So that was like three and a half years ago.

Michael Montgomery: And what's your, like, what's your day job or what line of work are you in?

Alex Libre: I am a recruiter in tech. I have my own recruiting agency and I'm also building a, like a recruiting software product, sort of a small startup, working with

one other guy on that, so definitely sort of like tech, but I'm not like an actual engineer, so I wish I had honestly.

Michael Montgomery: That's good. That's like, that's. That's the bay. Yeah, that's good.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: Okay, cool.

Alex Libre: And so let's, let's start off with like, what is the immediate proximate. Try to like. And I. My general understanding is that you had a relapse and your wife found out. It sounds like there's sort of an agreement you'll be serious about this in various ways. How would you describe, like, the last, I don't know, whatever relevant period that led to us doing this? You return to meetings regularly, all of that.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah. So, um, I started. I went on a journey six years ago. So I've been a drinker my whole life. My dad's. My dad was an alcoholic. A lot of heavy drinking in my family. Some, you know, probably trauma there. Although not like crazy growing up, but.

Alex Libre: Just like your dad being, you know, drunk and stuff like that.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, or absent and not present.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: But, but. And then he, he got very into AA later in his life, so he, he, he, he dealt with it and, and I think tried to leave a mark for us because I think he knew we were all. I've got four brothers and sisters anyway, so I've been drinking my whole life, you know, from the age of 12. Actually, I was trying to. I was thinking about this conversation. I think 12 was the first time I experienced alcohol. You know, different variations. You know, I stopped at some points because of anxiety issues, but it kind of steadily built up. And then about six years ago, my wife realized that I was like, hiding it from her, like, secret, you know, hidden bottles. So I stopped and I went the.

Alex Libre: And real quick, how long had you been hiding it before she, like, found.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, good question. Probably a couple years maybe. I mean, I mean, this is a really long time span, man. I'm 62, so this has been going on a long time. These are like, like really deep rooted behaviors.

Alex Libre: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: So I went down an AA route. I had a therapist in Berkeley. This is when our offices were still out in Emeryville. And that, you know, I moved out of the house, which my father had done back in 1970 for a year and got. Got

into the AA. Sort of wasn't a perfect fit for, you know, some of the reasons that people talk about.

Alex Libre: You said this was all six years ago?

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, I think it was six years ago. Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. And. And then, you know, I kind of went back to drinking. Sort of like occasional. But. But just to be clear, when I drink, I get drunk. Like, I don't have a couple glasses of wine. Like, it's vodka. That's the only thing. In the past, it had been more socially, like, you know, just drink a lot of wine or whatever. But it became this, like, really something shifted. And I could think about the timeline on that, but something shifted where I was really hitting the hard stuff and hitting it every day.

Alex Libre: And you hadn't been like vodka only for most of your life until. No, roughly six, eight years ago, I think.

Michael Montgomery: That's right. Yeah. Six, eight, ten years ago. And. And so stepped out of it for a period of time, probably a year or two maybe with some lapses. And then the AA thing just didn't stick with me. It just wasn't. I get a great sponsor. He was really patient, but it just didn't. The meetings. Well, I mean, who am I to criticize, right? I mean, my. My addiction was strong, but somehow, you know, these meetings, and they were very formulated. It just. It just didn't stick with me.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: And I don't. I was trying to remember how I came upon smart, but. But I was trying to find some alternative because the. I just got hung up on the God thing and like, steps that just didn't make sense to me. Maybe that. But maybe that was just the alcoholic in me. I'm sorry, the addicted personality.

Alex Libre: I mean, you could refer yourself as alcohol. No, no, no.

Michael Montgomery: I don't like, actually prefer not the noun.

Alex Libre: Okay.

Michael Montgomery: I. I really appreciate the smart approach to that. But. But. But was that something in me saying, oh, yeah, like, get rid of that and you can be drinking again? So anyway, liked, smart started. Smart came across you three years ago, three and a half years ago as you check the days. And it's been really good, but it hasn't been. I haven't been consistent. I mean, when I disappear from the meetings, it's not always. Often it's work, but sometimes it's like I'm drinking and drinking Every night for weeks. Yeah, weeks. And the latest thing with. And I hide it from my wife. Like, it's up. It's, like, up. Like, I hide it because I'm so, you know, shamed. Not shamed. Embarrassed. And, like. Like, it just makes me feel

like I'm a total up. And there's some family issues there in terms of fuckups, so.

Alex Libre: And real quick, is it just that, like, it's the embarrassment, shame, or is there a genuine fear of repercussions that, like, it could jeopardize?

Michael Montgomery: Serious repercussions. Serious repercussions. Like, my wife will leave me.

Michael Montgomery: I mean.

Michael Montgomery: I mean, like, this last time. I mean, I mean, she's not. She's staying in a different room in her house right now, in part because she's got some knee issues and she can't get up the stairs. Like, we have a tall house, an old San Francisco house, but there's definitely some intimacy. Like, I don't know if she wants to be in my bed. And. And I understand that. So it's. It's impacting my marriage. It's impacting my job in terms of, like, missing deadlines and stuff. I mean, no one's raised this at work, but I see it, right? I see the signs. And I don't want that. I don't want to be drinking. I don't want to be drinking moderately. I can't drink moderately. Like, when I drink, I want to get up and I want to get lost. And I. You know, I was in touch with Doug, who's really great from our meeting, and, you know, he's like, what are your triggers? And I'm like, I'm trying to figure that out. Like, when I get drinking, I just want to get lost. And I mean, you know, I'm. I'm. I'm. I'm. You know, I'm 62. My wife's eight years older than I am. Like, you know, we're moving into the next chapter. And so there's a lot of issues weighing down in my work. But, you know, plenty of people have those pressures and aren't, you know.

Alex Libre: You mean pressures leading up to retirement, you just.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Like middle age. Like, yeah, okay. Like, I've got a lot of pressures. I got a special needs son who's very volatile is in their house. But you know what? Plenty of people have this, lots of people have that, and they don't do what I'm doing with the drinking. So I'm just saying, like, yeah, there's pressures. Yeah, there's triggers. But, like, that doesn't explain everything for me.

Alex Libre: It doesn't explain everything, but I do think it's. There's a. There's a path you can take here that's kind of like, you know, a thought path that's along the lines of, like, many people share these kinds of triggers, and it doesn't lead to the same output of drinking that it doesn't need. Therefore, those things can't explain at all. I think it is more complicated than that. Such that those things for you could explain nearly all. I think there are other factors that go into. Just like everyone, even people who share those triggers also has other shit. They have



other coping mechanisms or they don't. Maybe they. Maybe they are drinking and you just don't know about it, you know? And so I think, like, it's. We'll put a pin in some of those things. But, like, I think that there's probably more there than. I don't know, Sometimes areas that we want to write off, in my experience as being sort of irrelevant to our addictions or not the primary cause are sometimes areas that there is something in there that we're sort of not entirely comfortable with acknowledging playing a role in the addiction. And it's just something to reflect on, I think, like, over time. Another thing I want to say is just like. And we'll pick up where you left off there in a second. It's just when I ever ask a question or at any time, really don't feel like you need to immediately respond. I think, like, in my own therapy with therapists, that I feel like I need to, like, keep the conversation going, like, smoothly. It just. I don't get it. As much of it as when one of my current therapists was like, you know, if you want to just, like, sit and think for, you know, 30, 45 seconds, that's good. So the same thing for you, but. Yeah, pick up everywhere in your laptop. So you have a lot of pressures in your life. You don't really feel like those are explained at all, at least. And then.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, but I mean, I think the thing with my wife is that I hide it from her. I mean, that's a, you know, a betrayal of trust. And that. That's been something that's. We have a longer history, not just drinking, but, like, financial stuff that goes way back to our relationship. No. No womanizing issues, none of that stuff. No affairs. But it's a trigger for her. Right.

Alex Libre: You're, like, setting money aside in some. Or something.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah. Or just, like, Just not managing our finances. Right. Way back, like, you know, 25, 30 years ago, or. Or going into debt and not telling her, like. Like, none of that stuff is relevant right now. We're active. Like.

Alex Libre: Right. Like, but there's a wound. It's active.

Michael Montgomery: There's a big wound. And she has her own. She has her own history of guys, just. So there. There's. There's a complicated set of emotions.

Alex Libre: And real quick on that, one thing I would want to maybe touch on is, like, you know, without putting words in her mouth, like, there's a complicated history she has from previous relationships. I assume, like, that might be relevant in the context of, like, her sensitivities to things you do. And, like, sometimes, like, I'm sure you know these things because you would be able to tell me, like, oh, this guy did this thing. But sometimes when we just, like, talk about it a little more, like, you might realize that it's a little, like, off. That some way you're doing some

aspect of something might. I don't know, you might be able to do it slightly differently and not. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Michael Montgomery: No, I mean. I mean. I mean, we've been through. She and I have been through a lot of this stuff, and, I mean, we've had therapists, and we. We've actually worked through some of those things, which. Which I feel good about, but then me just, like, continue to lie about her to her is, like, really all that up? Or it feels like, okay, like, we did all this therapy stuff, and then you're still lying about your drinking. Like, what the. Like, what's that about? Yeah, And. And.

Alex Libre: And when she says, what the. What's that about? Or, you know, along those lines, what do you think she thinks it's about? Like, do you think she goes immediately. It's like, he doesn't really, like, care about me, otherwise he wouldn't be drinking or something else.

Michael Montgomery: Whoa. Well, it's about trust and, like, how can we be in a relationship if you're lying to me? And what else are you lying about? Right.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: I mean, I personally think that's a totally legit position. It's. I mean, it. She's corrected herself. I mean, she's aware of this issue of, like, shaming someone for drinking, who's hiding it. And, like, maybe that's not the best approach. Like, but it triggers her because of some of her history. And, like, I shouldn't be lying to her.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: She's my wife. I mean, you know, that's up. It's like, that's not healthy. That's just not healthy. I mean, I'm just. And, and it's the only, those are the only things I, like, lie to her about is when I drink.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Alex Libre: And I do think it's relevant to note that there, you said there would be significant repercussions. Maybe you would end your marriage if, you know, you, she probably drinking again. I mean, I do think that plays into, like, your ability to be honest. I mean, if she told you that she was fully comfortable with you having lapses and she's not on this journey with you, and, like, she understands this comes from stuff with you, it's not anything about your lack of love for her or trust that you want to be able to have with her. It's just sort of freezing things up a little bit to, like, openly acknowledge that the legitimate, like, likely repercussions do play a role in how honest you can be.

Michael Montgomery: So. Yeah, yeah. I mean, I, I, I've thought about that a lot, and maybe we've, I've talked about it with her, but, but, I mean, but kind of putting in

the onus on her. Oh, I can't be truthful to you about my drinking because there's something about. So I agree with that. I mean, in part, but there's something about the, the secrecy and the sneaking and the like. So, I mean, a long time ago, I was talking to, Talking about this with someone, Doug, I think, which, like, I was, I was a social drinker, and then I became a secret drinker. A long time. Like, it was all just up in my room, like, where I am right now, just, like, drinking alone, secretly. And that's a, I mean, I, I learned a lot from AA about that because there was, you know, a whole thread that I discussed with my sponsor, who had also had similar things. And so, like, just to know, like, I drink alone. Like, I don't. It's, It's. Well, it went underground a long time ago when, when, when I realized that, like, I couldn't drink in public or I drank too much or when I quote, stopped drinking, then I, then I went into the secret drinking, which goes back six, seven, eight years, you know.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Alex Libre: But it sounds like the, the secret drinking, the secrecy aspect is probably not primary in the addiction because you were drinking too much in public and whatever.

Michael Montgomery: I agree. I agree. That's right. That's right.

Alex Libre: Okay, great.

Michael Montgomery: Wanting to know the patterns that develop.

Alex Libre: Totally.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Alex Libre: Do you find you have, like, a lot of alone time in your life or sufficient, like, enough alone time even? Let's say like during periods when you're genuinely not drinking, like, do you feel like you get enough time to just sit, read whatever you want to read, like do whatever you want to do? Or do you feel like you're kind of constantly jumping between obligations to other people and other entities and then you use the secret drink, drinking, breathe by yourself?

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, that's a good question. No, I think that, you know, as a father with kids, you know, who are still young, I think maybe that was the case. I. I don't think I could say that right now. I mean, maybe, maybe I'm too much on my own. I mean, I go into the office a couple days a week. I, you know, I work collaboratively, but it's, you know, remotely. So I'd say I have a few. Fair amount of time on, on my hands. Not a ton. But I'm not like, it's not like I don't have any time.

Alex Libre: Okay, cool, cool. And one other thing before I forget before we continue is have you tried naltrexone or Antabuse or any of those?

Michael Montgomery: No, I've wondered about that and, and, and maybe I've never tried it.

Alex Libre: Okay, well that's great news because I think you probably should ask your doctor about. Naltrexone is like the, the default go to. But antabuse also works for some people and there's other ones there at least one other one too. But for many people it's just that is the missing ingredient when they really genuinely do want to make change. It's just these, you know, patterns are difficult to break without like some sort of pharmacological assistance. And these can work super.

Michael Montgomery: These are the ones that, that essentially you drink and you don't get drunk.

Alex Libre: That's part of it. Naltrexone specifically, like if you drink, you don't really get drunk and you just feel really sick and, and alcohol sort of tastes bad and that is enough of a termin also on their own, like reduce the desire drink like in absence of other things. Like lots of things just reduce its cravings. But also alcohol specifically prevents the positive effects.

Michael Montgomery: So. So that's interesting. I mean it's, it's. This has come up a lot and I've never really explored it. I mean thing for me is like I don't get like hardcore physical cravings. I mean, I think maybe in the past I did, but it's just this desire to like get lost, like just get check out, like just not just be half present, you know?

Alex Libre: Yeah, I think it's like, that's interesting because even the mental sort of cravings are obviously at the root of it on some biochemical, neurochemical level, phys, physical. And I think we often think that, yeah, it's like this mind thing when there are body things happening. And I think naltrexone also therefore reduces those mind related cravings as well.

Michael Montgomery: Right, right, right. No, that's a very good point and that's a very good point.

Alex Libre: But yeah, I just think it could be super helpful. There are like many, many people who have a, you know, like, like longstanding come and go, you know, addiction problems and then tried naltrexone and they just. It's not a non problem from that or not.

Michael Montgomery: So I think that's a really good recommendation because that's kind. I feel like that's what I'm looking for. I get off track and then I'm on track and then I'm off track.

Alex Libre: Yeah, I think that's important. The other thing is that naltrexone often works so well for people that if it truly is sort of like these mental like patterns that

are sort of orthogonal to what's happening in your physical body, but you just still don't want the escape or whatever and you would basically be tempted to not take naltrexone, you know, for days at a time so that you could get drunk at some future date. They have multiple ways of getting around. Like one is just like apps where like you have to video chat with somebody every morning for say India for like five minutes and they watch you take the thing. Another approach that I recommend is just the injectable naltrexone. You get an injection once a month and then you just have it for a month in your system and then you don't even think about it.

Michael Montgomery: So that's really good advice.

Alex Libre: Yeah. All right, so sorry I interrupted when you were talking about like life pressures and then we were talking about your wife and honesty and secrecy. And secrecy being like this kind of primary or maybe not gen primary but at least an important aspect of your addictive tendencies.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah. Before I ask, before I get into that, are there side effects to, I mean common side effects to maltrexone?

Alex Libre: Not that I am aware of, but I'm sure there are, I'm sure if you like look it up, they will say like common side effects, whatever. I don't think, I think it's a pretty well tolerated drug in general. Such as like many people can take it alongside many other kinds of drugs. But I was just like, honestly, Google side effects. Common, but probably not. Probably not outweighing the benefits, most likely.

Michael Montgomery: Sure. Okay.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Alex Libre: Cool. And then the other one was Antibus that you also looked into. I can't remember what the. I think that's just a brand name. It must be, actually. But I can't remember what the scientific name is.

Michael Montgomery: Okay. Okay.

Alex Libre: So cct, where were you with that?

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Alex Libre: Or wherever you were going.

Michael Montgomery: I don't know where I was going, but I mean, that's been so with your wife.

Alex Libre: I mean, there are real repercussions to drinking again. She is very hurt when you drink and when she finds out that you can hide anything and there's not really a world in which at this point you can just like tell her that you're going to tell

her every time you drink because a, you might not trust your own self to be that honest over time, even if she was totally like every time accepting of it. But also, it's just that that bridge has been burned and they're, it's, it's not a reliable path.

Michael Montgomery: I think that bridge has been burned. I mean, that's my feeling. I mean, I know that she's really happy that I'm talking to you. She's. I mean, I think her, her feeling is that she's had these moments when she was really believing and so, so just to backtrack. It's true that there's this pattern of like when I drink, everything is off the rails. Right. Like there's no progress. And I appreciated you talking about this in the meeting last week or two weeks ago. Last week. So. I don't know. I mean, I think that's something that she and I need to work on.

Alex Libre: But like communicating to her that you have made progress despite, you know.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Alex Libre: Or square one.

Michael Montgomery: Or finding a way to communicate with her if I slip. But. Oh, yeah, I, I.

Alex Libre: You want to just not slip, basically.

Michael Montgomery: Or I don't. It's, it's not. Because when I slip, I slip. Like, it's not like, oh, I had a glass of wine. No, I got shit drunk on my own. I mean, I didn't like, you know, get a DUI or whatever. The. But it's not, it's not healthy and she knows that.

Alex Libre: Have you, like, there's one, one other thing that on this front that I've found helpful myself is like in relationships where you can't come clean after you've used or whatever and just like tell them and accept full amnesty.

Michael Montgomery: The.

Alex Libre: I think the best way to build trust back in a shorter period of time. Especially when you are still like in this kind of like, you know, you do feel a desire to drink or whatever periods. Like I think the best thing to do is just anytime and maybe overshare. Like anytime you feel sort of a craving or something sort of triggering to you, send it to text your wife and just be like, hey, you know, quick, quick trigger text. Like I just. And then like it's just. They feel they're a part of your journey, even if it's mostly for them. It can be really helpful to build that back. But also it's a little accountability where like this, the secret times don't come up because you've already been telling her. Like if you've been telling her three times a day for a week, it's gonna be harder to hide it. Yeah, yeah.

Michael Montgomery: No, I agree. Yeah, I, I've done a little bit of that. For me, it.

It's sensitive because I've lied to her so many times about drinking, so.

Alex Libre: But it's sort of, you know, like. Do you mean like she wouldn't believe you if you were sharing that you were having thoughts about drinking or something like that or.

Michael Montgomery: No, she would believe me. It's just. It's just me feeling like, like it, you know, it's. It's funny, Alex. I mean you're young and you know, like one of the things that is a trigger is just thinking about the long history of lies and you know, emotional blow ups when I'm drunk and just what I've put her through and it. When I. Sometimes when I meditate on or when I think of that, I just want to get drunk because I don't sort.

Alex Libre: Of feels like it's deal with. You can't possibly cancel that out at this point, you know?

Michael Montgomery: Yeah. And of course that's not true. Like, like she wants to rebuild our relationship and, and you know, we're in love and like we, we want. We're committed to each other like that. That's true. Like, I feel really strongly about that. But. But there's like a. There's a history of lies and, and it can kind of be overwhelming some. You know, Alex, sometimes I feel like tired. I'm just like, I don't want to deal with it anymore. I just want to get drunk. Like, I just don't want to, like, I don't want to focus on it and I'm just tired and I want to kind of give up. Right. And that is definitely an impulse that comes around when I want to drink. It's like, it, like I just, you know, it just like. So it's not just like, oh, my son's acting up, or work is hard. It's like this, this, this, this train, this, this long legacy of stuff that's built up. And obviously that stuff that, you know, she and I need to work through. And we, we. We've had therapy and we probably need to again, but it kind of overwhelms. Like when you're 62 and you've been drinking since you're like 13, like there's a. There. It feels like there's a legacy or a just this, like, you know, long line of stuff that, you know, we've been, we've been together for 35 years. So it's like, it's like, how do I undo all that? And anyway, that can just be kind of intimidating and that, that can be a factor that makes me want to drink again.

Alex Libre: Totally. I mean, it seems like it's kind of a general, more abstract thing, but just this feeling of total overwhelmed, total being, you know, overpowered, outnumbered by the just size of your previous actions can feel like very paralyzing. Slash the only thing you feel like you can do besides being paralyzed, like drink or whatever. Were you in the meeting kind of recently when I played the audio clip about the beginning again?

Michael Montgomery: No, I don't think I was.

Alex Libre: I'll send it to you. It's a four minute video clip from Waking up. Actually.

Michael Montgomery: No, I wasn't there because I don't, I don't think you've ever played. I don't think I've ever been in a meeting where you played a video clip.

Alex Libre: Oh, really? I've done it probably like 15 times now. But it must be all the times you weren't there.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, I don't think so. I've always wondered. Oh, are you gonna play? Yeah. No, I don't. I might be wrong, but I, I think I missed that.

Alex Libre: No, I think you would remember.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah. Yeah.

Alex Libre: But there's this great clip I'll send you after this that is Sam Harris talking about beginning again. This idea of beginning again in the abstract, that it's like every moment that you feel encumbered by the past in some way, you really can just begin again in the sense of like, the clock starts now and we're moving forward and at least from now to the future, you know, only this henceforth kind of matters. And that reframe can be so useful even in a conversation. I find it where, like, I feel like Things are not going that well. And I just pause for a second imagine, like, what would it be like if from now on, things just felt really different in this conversation? And usually with my wife and my thinking, you know, what would be the best possible path forward from now on? And I find it incredibly useful. It's kind of the form of forgiveness to be able to set the past, you know, aside, not forget it, but just genuinely sort of, like, nullify the count and start fresh. But.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah. And there were some aspects of AA that were actually useful in that sense.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: I mean, I. I get. I think I get all that.

Alex Libre: And.

Michael Montgomery: And I would love to hear that. So. Sam Harris. I. I think there's also just a practical, like, relational thing that my wife and I need to work through.

Alex Libre: And so when you say that, like. And when you say, like, the. The just magnitude of all your past actions and lies and that sort of thing is in practice, what that sort of, like, operationally means is the. But you feel so overwhelmed by kind of the hurt you've caused your wife, primarily. It's like, what the impact has been on her.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Which is. Which is one thing you



mentioned about these outpatient programs was this idea that, you know, you can work with. With a. With a spouse or whatever. And. And I think down the road, that's probably some work we should do. I mean, if. And when I'm totally sober, there's still some issues, I think. And. And again, we worked with a therapist, but I wasn't completely honest and sober at the time. So, you know, and I know Jean, my wife, feels that way, so I don't know that that's not, like, top of the agenda, but it's something that. That weighs on me.

Alex Libre: And.

Michael Montgomery: And if. When I do drink and when I'm not honest with her, that just is, like, really, really intense.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Alex Libre: One thing I was going to suggest that I've done with one client in the past was have one session, 45 minutes, it can even be 30 minutes, where it's just me speaking with your partner. Get a sense of basically, like, how she views your addiction. And then also, I can share a little bit more about my approach. So she feels like she sort of understands what you and I are doing together each session. And it can give. It just. Can just create a bridge where every time you meet with me, she feels like she knows what she's.

Michael Montgomery: I mean, that could. That might be helpful. I mean, you're not a marriage counselor.

Alex Libre: Right.

Michael Montgomery: So it wouldn't be, I think, the right fit for us to be together. But I think she. I mean, she. She asked today, like, well, what am I going to be doing with you? Like, what's the goal? Blah, blah, blah. And so she's. She's obviously, you know.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, yeah.

Michael Montgomery: Cool.

Alex Libre: Well, we can arrange that very easily, and I think it would be really helpful. I mean, yeah, there's just. There's. It sounds like the bulk of why you're drinking is problematic is its impact on her or at least historically. It sounds like there are all other reasons too, because you were saying that, like, you used to drink too much in public and stuff, but maybe you can talk about that for a second, like, setting the impact aside that has on your wife and really trying to make the strongest case for alcohol in this, you know, thought process. Like. Like, what do you genuinely feel like are the other negatives about alcohol on your life besides the impact?

Michael Montgomery: Well, okay, so just to say that there. There is alcoholism in my family, right. Like, my dad, his uncle, like, there's a line, you know, Irish, Scotch, Irish, you know, there's a line of alcoholism. Yeah, Maybe. Maybe some of my siblings. Alcohol affects my work. It affects my ability to focus. It affects my ability, my ambitions. Like, and I don't mean that in a. In a. In a selfish way, but just like my ability to want to take on larger tasks. It. It makes me volatile. Has for many years. And that affected my kids growing up. They're growing up. It affects my relationship with my wife, again, in terms of volatility. It. It makes me less present. It makes me want to be removed from our relationship.

Alex Libre: And these are things that. Not just while you're drunk, but like, if you're drinking at night, during the day, you have these negative.

Michael Montgomery: Yes. Not, Not. Not just while I'm drunk, but having alcohol in my life, yes, I'm more volatile if I'm drinking, but it definitely affects me when I'm not drinking. Like, my volatility. And we have some complicated issues at the house with my son. I think those are the main things. I mean, it. Whether I'm drinking or not, it affects whether I'm drinking or in periods of drinking, but not drinking, it affects my life. And I. And it's gotten worse. Like. Like these bouts of drinking, I have found. And I think it's true as you get older, like, like, they affect your body differently and they've gotten progressively, like, more.

Alex Libre: You actually drink more during these binges?

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, yeah. I mean, more. I mean, you know, my. My standard for quite a few years was a Pint of vodka. That was like. And if I go over that, then it's like, yeah, I, I, I know that. Like, don't go over that because you're going to be right. Really not so, you know, I mean, my old sponsor at AA used to call me a high functioning drunk. I think that was his word. I mean, I, I was able to hold down a job. I've never had a dui, which maybe is bad. Like, maybe that I should have had that DUI like five years ago, right? Would have been a wake up call. But I've been able to kind of navigate that. And not with my wife, but like, like I don't get completely shit face drunk. Maybe sometimes I do, but, but I still, when I drink, have a lot of alcohol. So. What, What I know as I get older is like, it just ain't working. I mean it wasn't working back in the day, but it's working way less now. And I've been, you know, thinking about this for so long and I just want to be consistent. And especially as I get older, when you're like, oh, fuck it, I'm tired, you know, like, you know, have a drink or whatever. Like. So, yeah, I mean, alcohol makes me feel good. I mean, until I don't feel good. But I mean, I was able, you know, when I drink, you know, I have enough that makes me escape and feel good

without like horrible consequences the next day. But you know, of course there's consequences. I mean, I gained a lot of weight. I'm now, you know, exercising every day, which feels really good. You're a big believer in that. To me, the key, like one of the keys is exercising every day, not just walking, but every day getting to the gym or whatever. I go to us. I go to Corette at usf. I don't know if you know. Oh shit, it's great. That's fantastic. And I get a senior discount. So it's, it's like, you know, it's a college, it's a university gym. So there's like, you know, Olympic size swimming.

Alex Libre: My sister goes to there. They had like some summer deal for teachers or something to get maybe, I don't know.

Michael Montgomery: Well, you can go there, but you probably.

Alex Libre: Seems like a nice gym.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, great. It's like all these college athletes and old people. It's like an amazing place. Anyway, I went there years ago and started going again and it feels really good. But I gotta do it every day. Yeah, like every day otherwise, you know. And so I got, you know, I got Weight to lose. I've started losing some weight. You know, I was an athlete and I, you know, gym and working out was really important to me. So I'm really trying to get back into that.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Alex Libre: Okay, that's good. Speaking of weight loss and alcohol, I will say, I don't know if what your thoughts are on GLP1s or whether it's something you would even consider, but I like, I've been taking it for four months. I gained a bunch of weight from taking antipsychotics and just like gaining 40 pounds that I never was able to lose until I started taking Zephyrus. And what I found is like, you know, I normally drink basically a beer with dinner five nights a week, maybe even, you know, some weeks every night. I found when I started doing that I just didn't want the beer. I just like, there's something about alcohol that doesn't feel in the same way.

Michael Montgomery: Oh, that's interesting and it's wise. Which drug was that?

Alex Libre: That was first Ozempic and then was.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, I've been wondering about that. I mean, I should. I don't really have a doctor right now. I need to get like, I changed medical plans and that's another thing I need to do. Get a real checkup. Yeah, I, I thought about that. I mean, I'm at about 195.

Alex Libre: How tall are you?

Michael Montgomery: 5 10, 5 11, you know, and I've, I've lost about 10 pounds in

the last couple months. I need to get down to, you know, 185, 180. I think it's, for me, it's realistic. Maybe not how you're tall. Like, you seem tall.

Alex Libre: Yeah, I'm six four and I went from 235 to 205 in three months of taking step down and exercising, like you know, a little bit, but not my normal, you know, four years ago exercise amount.

Michael Montgomery: But you're like. I thought you were like, you're like some hardcore athlete.

Alex Libre: I do. I generally like been that way, I would say for the last like two years. I haven't been as like, I used to go to the gym like six days a week and you know, played a lot of tennis and a lot of, A lot of things. But yeah, no, I've fallen off a little bit. But now since losing the weight, I feel better about. I just have more energy again and I want to work out more. The whole thing comes together, you know.

Michael Montgomery: It's a good question. I mean, it maybe would be worth it for me to, you know, if I could drop £15. That would help me in, you know, a lot of different ways. I mean, one of the things, you know, I've. I've been into sports, you know, since a kid. So, you know, you know, I'm. I'm moving into retirement. Like, I'm 62, which is. Which is. I mentioned that. Which is like, you know, you're getting old. Like, that's a whole nother thing in your head. And my wife's older and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. So I think, like, well, what do I want to do? Well, you know, sports. Like, what do people do when they retire? Well, they play sports and they play tennis and they play golf and. And I'm like, fuck, I could get excited about that, actually.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: You know, and it would be good for me. So I'm, you know, I'm trying to think that through and think about getting my body healthy to be able to do those things better. And that's kind of exciting because retirement can be fucking scary. Like, totally scary. Like, your life is over.

Alex Libre: Yeah, totally. So, okay, that's a huge piece of information that, like, you're genuinely motivated by having a physically healthy enough body that you can do a variety of activities, especially leading into retirement and when you'll have more time to do those things. I mean. Yeah, I mean, I feel so much better having lost these 30 pounds, and, like, I just feel like I want to do more active things again and back to my normal self. So I think it all kind of plays in together. But it's good to know that that's.

Michael Montgomery: Like a. Yeah, it's not just a goal. It's like something that's

part of me. Like, you know, I've always, you know, enjoyed working out in the gym or enjoyed, you know, we were playing pickleball for a while, and then my wife's knee went out and she's kind of in crutches right now, which is hard because she's like. I said, she's a little older, and it's like, man, like, is this our future? But. But no, that's part of me. And so, you know, like, I've just made a goal. Like, I go to the gym every day. Like, I've got this circuit workout that I found from someone, and it's like, it's half hour, but it's a good workout. And I can be in and out of the gym. I can even go there at, you know, during my lunch break, and it's a pretty intensive workout. And then on off days, I'll swim in this great pool and I'm not a great swimmer, but it's just like this discipline thing about every day and that really, really helps me break. If I have the endorphins, which last all day, then I'm less likely to want to drink.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah. Yeah.

Alex Libre: Okay. Well then part of what I would prescribe you is definitely exercise every day. Like some kind of like what you consider to be actual exercise.

Michael Montgomery: Right, Right. Not just walking. I mean, I love walking. You know, we're by. We're so we're up Buena Vista Hill. It's a great freaking walk. And it's great, I love it. But that's not the full. Like, I gotta be more intensive than that.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Alex Libre: To really get the endorphins and have it make an impact on the rest of your day. Yeah, I feel the same way. Okay. And like thinking through other kind of things you're motivated by. Well, actually, I'm gonna put a pin in on that conversation. I think on the front of like everyday kind of commitments being something that frankly are good for most people, but definitely something that sounds like you are helped by every single day. You don't even think, is this not. Is this not gonna do this? Or whatever. I think you should honestly, right now just take your phone out and download the Ash AI therapy app. It has like, because it has a built in notification option where it can check in with you once a day. You can choose the time and then you can either speak into it or write out your like quick check in. I think every single day check in in the app and just say like, you know, kind of today, what did you feel like you were kind of driven by? And like, that is a useful prompt for me because then I. On the level of days, I can really realize, you know, when I zoom out what I'm motivated by in general. Sometimes when I think about that in an abstract, it's hard for me to think. But if I just think today, what did I do? Why did I do those things? You know, you go a little bit down the chain, it becomes very illuminating.

Michael Montgomery: Okay, hold on. I'm just doing this right now. Yeah, okay. Ash therapy, I mean, I'm. Hold on.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: You know, I. I've done that kind of stuff before and I'll do it and it becomes just a work thing for me. And then I'm just like. So one of my issues, I mentioned this to you before, was I compartmentalized, Like I compartmentalized, like, it's up. Like, I totally could, like, great. The Ash app is great. Great. I'm really down for it. And then just like, okay, and then, okay, I'm gonna drink. Like, it's, it's, it's really up. Like, you know, I'm glad I'm not a serial killer because you would be.

Alex Libre: Able to do it.

Michael Montgomery: But. And I think it's, it's, it's, it's growing up in an alcoholic household. I mean, definitely remember times when my dad is raging and my mom is crying, my brothers and sisters are crying, and I'm just sitting there kind of stone faced, like, yeah, it's not going to hit me. It's not going to hurt me. It's not going to hit me. And so this is a real issue for me, you know, as a journalist and I covered wars. Like, like, like the compartmentalizing can be really good, but it's not good. And so this is like a thing I need to figure out because we can have this conversation and we can have conversations and then I shut it off, you know, and maybe that's just a common addictive behavior, but it is something that concerns me because it's something that I have not been able to completely deal with.

Alex Libre: That's really interesting because you also mentioned compartmentalizing in I think last week's meeting or two weeks ago.

Michael Montgomery: Right, I did.

Alex Libre: And I was thinking about it. I mean, I guess I wonder, especially in the context of you sharing like that, you know, childhood anecdote, like, do you think it's more that when you say compartmentalizing, what are you thinking basically? That you are able to like have a conversation with someone about, you know, let's say you check in with Ash AI and you tell it how you're thinking about your day and whether you got any cravings or whatever, and then you just kind of like forget about it very quickly and are able to then go drink and not let that sort of factor into your decision. Or is it that during the use of Ash AI, even, even then you're not letting it sort of really seep all the way through the layers into your core? Or is it that like, you know, like you are letting it, seep it into your core and in that moment you truly are fully letting yourself feel you know, what you're believing and writing about and then you go forget about it. Because they're kind of two different things.

One is.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, no, I think it's, I think it's what you're just saying. It does reach me.

Alex Libre: It does.

Michael Montgomery: Okay, not superficial. I think that's true.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Alex Libre: Because it can really be like a. Almost a dissociation thing when compartmentalizing for some people basically means just, like, you can compartmentalize basically the entire world away from you and for yourself, you know, you just try not to let things in all the way and that. Yeah, like.

Michael Montgomery: It's a good question. It's a really good question. I. I think as a kid, obviously, I think not letting things come completely in would have been the strategy. Right. It's like, so do you ever feel.

Alex Libre: Like, totally elated or, like, cry from a movie or, you know, like. I don't know. How. How emotional do you feel like you get?

Michael Montgomery: Oh, yeah, Yeah. I crawl all the time.

Alex Libre: And is it, like. So I guess it sounds like probably you are just trying to intentionally forget about, like, let's say, commitments you've made on an alcohol front. When you are then walking into the luxury store, like, pick up a bottle of vodka. It's more like you just intentionally sort of setting it aside so that you're able to do the thing you want to do.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah. It's not accidental. I'm conscious. I mean, yes. I'm very conscious that I'm like, oh, I'm going to the liquor store and I've made these commitments or whatever, or I have these issues, and this isn't good for me. Yes. So maybe, you know, I say compartmentalize, like, whatever the mechanism is, I'm. I'm able to do that while I feel like, I hope, understanding the consequences of my drinking or how it impacts other people's lives, but at the same time, like, not caring or there's. There's some weird mechanism there, man, that's. That's not, you know, healthy. It's like hurting my wife. Like, hurting. Really, really hurting my wife. Like, really, you know, we do the priority values or what hierarchy. Values, values. And I like. Yeah. And then I just turn it off. Just turn it off.

Alex Libre: I feel like in this case, it's that. I know you said that you think, like, in the moment you're fully feeling it, but maybe I didn't articulate it well. It's almost like in the moment when you're doing a hierarchy of values, it might be like, yes, makes sense, whatever. But then you're easily able to set it aside and go drink, because on some level, that didn't really hit home, or it didn't feel fully true, or you didn't,

like, fully believe it. I guess in the moment, it felt like there's something missing, maybe, or some additional context.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, yeah. Like, it's logical. It Makes sense. It's something I should feel, yes, I should prioritize my family and my health and my kids. But there's a missing link there somehow.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Alex Libre: I think that's why I find it so useful to really. I always tell people like try to be the best attorney on behalf of your substance of choice that you can so that you are making them as strong as possible case when you're sober and clear headed for why. And you sometimes have to do some real thinking because you probably shove these reasons deep down. But you know, what are some of the actual things whether they're rational or not. That sort of factor in when you are going to have a last. What are you thinking like is going to be good that comes out of it. It doesn't have to be true. It could be like just feels.

Michael Montgomery: You. You did early on when I started going your, your meetings. You talked about that. It was one of the things that drew me in. It's like, oh yeah, like, like look, maybe my therapist was talking about this too. Like yeah, I think she was too. Like what are the positive things that you think you get drinking and I've looked at that and, and I, you know.

Alex Libre: Or it doesn't have to be positive things. I think what is the motivating force? Because it feels like it might be positive. Yeah. Selling.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, exactly.

Michael Montgomery: Right. Well, let's, let's go through that. I mean it makes me, it makes me feel better. Yeah, it makes me feel.

Alex Libre: And what, how does better feel?

Michael Montgomery: Like I, I, I feel less worried about the things I need to worry about. It makes me feel less connected to my problems or my feelings of insecurities. Makes me, I mean I was thinking about this, I was thinking about like my early drinking like at high school. And I was remembering this time I was at a party drinking beer, like some imported beer. I just remember thinking, you know what? This makes me feel so good. Like I just don't want this to go away like this. Like, like in a, you know, exhilarated in a, in a, in a, in a really, you know. And, and it still, I mean it's when I, when I drink sometimes it still does that for me. What changed? What definitely changed in the last, you know, I don't know, five years is I got a lot darker too. I got more angry, I got more bitter. I would think about things that I would tell me people at work or like all this dark and that. I mean that



changed. Like I, I feel like I, I became much more prone to be angry and, and, and that's something I meant. Like, I understand that. Like, I don't want to be that. Like, that's up, like, when I drink, that is not a good thing. That's not like this happy drunk kind of thing. Right. So I. I think that's a good exercise. I. I think it's still a good exercise for me of, like, what is. What does alcohol do for me?

Alex Libre: You just don't want to be caught off guard unconsciously or consciously by a selling point for alcohol that you hadn't previously been able to address and write off as not overall, you know, negating the negatives. Because then if you're like, oh, you know, all it takes is really one reason to pop. I was like, well, I hadn't considered that. And actually, alcohol, you know, by giving the occasional relief, you know, makes me a more, you know, happy person and I'm nicer to some friends when I'm sober or whatever. You just, like, you need to make the strongest case for all the things you might think of such that when they show up in the moments when you're tempted to considering, like, drinking, that you've already factored that into the equation and, you know, pull both sides and you'd still determine that it's a net negative, even including that.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, Yeah. I mean, way back in the day, like, long ago, I think I could. I could have said, oh, alcohol makes me fun to be around and I'm loquacious and, you know, all these things. And maybe that was true.

Alex Libre: But you're no longer under that delusion.

Michael Montgomery: No, no, I'm not. And, you know, the nature of the alcohol drinking changed. I mean, we talked about a little bit. I mean, like, you know, a bottle of wine was, like, a big deal, but then, like, hard alcohol came in, and that was like, you know, I think I realized, like, I could get drunk faster secretly, so that that was a much more effective way to get drunk. Right. Or to get lost. But. But, but no, I've always liked, you know, your. The way you frame that with what alcohol does for you and, And. And thinking about that.

Alex Libre: And really what you want to think about is not just what alcohol does for you, but. Which is how I usually phrase it. But it's like in the moments when you think you are tempted to drink, what are you thinking alcohol will do for you? Because that's really what you need to address rather than what, you know, you don't need to address reality. You need to address your perception and the reality in the moments before or less.

Michael Montgomery: I'm Trying to think that through.

Alex Libre: What alcohol just kind of, you know, the.

Michael Montgomery: If you tell us it's, it's. Yeah, but it's the same thing. Like, it's

going to give me a feeling exhilarating.

Alex Libre: So it generally is accurate. Okay.

Michael Montgomery: Okay. Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: Cool.

Alex Libre: And it sounds like, I mean, from what you shared in that little sort of snippet about, like, what alcohol. I feel like anxiety, fears, let's call them, it doesn't have. I feel like anxiety is too clinical. A lot of people, like, can say, I don't have anxiety. I don't really feel the anxiety. But there are underlying fears that are driving all of our actions. And I think it's important to give voice to those fears briefly so that you can at least look them in the eye, sort of shine a light on them. I think sometimes these background fears, these secret fears, we. Dark corners of our mind, we just don't even want to think about that fear. But if you shine.

Michael Montgomery: No, no, no. Failure.

Alex Libre: Keep going.

Michael Montgomery: Lack of self esteem. I mean, this, this runs through my mom big time. She wasn't an alcoholic, but like, just this sense of lack of worth and.

Alex Libre: Fearing that you might become that way or, or that you already are or there already are.

Michael Montgomery: I mean, no, that, you know, the poser syndrome and all that. Yeah, that's huge in my life and my family. I. I think I've worked on that a bit. You know, at 62, you'd hope. But that's. That is a big issue. Like, feeling. Again, appreciate. It's not anxiety. It's like, it's. It's this pressure that you're not good or you're not good enough. And it's this constant feeling thing of like, will you get this done well? Or whatever. I mean, I'm not a style. I'm not a stockbroker. I'm like, I'm not under constant pressure. But there is this idea that you need to, you know, create excellence. Like, it needs to be really, really good. And it's an intellectual thing. It's a creative, intellectual thing that I do. And so that's definitely been part of my life since I was a kid. Kid. Like, this lack of confidence, lack of self worth. And so alcohol definitely helps on that. Makes you feel like you're king of the hill, right?

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: And that's a. A really obvious, you know, reason for me to drink when I'm feeling down and I'm feeling like beaten up a little bit with whatever. Oh, just drink and you're gonna feel better. Like, that's you know, if I'm going to the liquor store that's like you're going to feel better. Okay. You may fuck up your marriage but for an hour or two hours you're going to feel better.

Alex Libre: Do you have. So okay, great. Like I think of a hierarchy of coping mechanisms such that there are some coping mechanisms that might be like harder to do but they give you better relief or satisfaction or endorphins or whatever for many exercises like harder activation energy but then they feel better. Low CO mechanism, something like that's like not that good but it's definitely better than drinking like anything that you might do that basically distraction, watch tv, like go do whatever. As long as not drinking. How many like intermediate kind of cocoa mechanisms do you feel you have such that if you are feeling shitty, feeling down about your self worth, you have an alternative thing to do besides alcohol or sort of feel like alcohol or I just have to feel shitty.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, that's a really good. I, I think it's limited, you know, I'm, you know, work remotely some sometimes to go to the office. But I think not being alone. Yeah, it's a big one.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: Because I think if I'm with my wife I'm not going to be drinking. Right, right. So going out and doing things, going to movies, like being active outside the house. The house is, you know, where I am right now, my little office. This is, this is the den of destruction. Like this is where, you know, I come. So not being alone is a big thing. It's not really answering your question, but it's a good question. Yes, good, good question.

Alex Libre: Because I think there's like this category of coping mechanisms that people often list that are like planned activities where you would need to like have it planned in advance to some extent. I think those are important especially in the context of like, like recurring ones. Like you're exercising every day. But more important than that are the on demand CO mechanisms that you do virtually anytime, anywhere, no matter what or with very short like, like ramp up time. And I think that's why, I don't know medications can be so useful for people with addiction. I think in part because people with addiction histories tend to, for probably very complex reasons generally want like a quick fix or like an external fix.

Michael Montgomery: Right.

Alex Libre: And I think there are just many better external fixes. Like for me, anxiety is primarily what made me smoke weed. Even though I didn't realize was not anxiety, it was fears about what might happen. And like I started taking gabapentin, which is a very mild and anti anxiety medication and they also use often an addiction because especially for people who use or drink from anxiety

related reasons, it's just super useful and I feel like as soon as I got the gabapentin prescription, I had one other thing besides weed that was like if I really just want in an hour to know I'm gonna feel good, I take that. And it's just, it's not nearly like, you know, totally opiate, you know, you'll feel so good. It's amazing. Just kind of like really reduces the intensity.

Michael Montgomery: You would take it, take it when needed.

Alex Libre: It wasn't every day. It wasn't every single. Yeah, it wasn't, it was just, I.

Michael Montgomery: Mean I have not, I have not ever in part because I've never really seen a psychiatrist or a doctor about this. I've never really explored Gabapentin is like the default. I, I, I think I would explore the other options first. I, I, I mean something motivates me to, to, to drink and it's not just like my life or pressures or whatever. There's something else going on. Yeah, you know, I'm you know, genetically vulnerable or whatever. There's, it makes sense what you're saying, Alex.

Alex Libre: Yeah, I, I think naltrexone will be the most or the most high value, you know, return for your investment of seeing a doctor. But it's good to know that there are other options too that can be like as needed, momentary things that I don't know, maybe there's even like kava is like a, you know, thing people sometimes because it's also a drink and it's sort of a drug but it's very mild and it just makes you feel less anxious and you know.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, I think I tried that at some point I will say it's like.

Alex Libre: It has some negative health effects. You do it if you fully replace it and you just like use it all the time. It might be bad for people's livers and it's not well studied but it's not alcohol. It's not as bad. And yeah, anyways, I just say that, yeah, I think like even non pharmacological, non chemical co mechanisms and anything you can interject in the path from like I'm doing really well to like I just need drinking, like maybe anything that can get you off that path halfway down that feels reliable. Maybe it's like one thing I've been recommending lately is just like that people have like a playlist on their phone, like three songs or something and it's like, you just will listen to that and you have to listen to all three songs and not do anything else. And then you will feel differently when it's over. You might still kind of want it, but you know.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, that won't work for me. But I have to say, being for some reason I Wasn't on the WhatsApp. Oh yeah, and that's a really good, like, that's a, you know, that's a good thing. I do get these reminders from the, the app that I downloaded and I'll, and I'll look at the other ones you recommended. I

mean, I think anything to break up as you're saying. The, the, the, the, the, the, the relentless, like, predictability of like, oh, it's four o', clock, five o'. Clock. I'm starting to think about alcohol and fuck it, you know, it's like, who's gonna know? Or yeah, whatever. What, what are the real consequences? Kids are out of the house. Like, you know what, what does it really matter?

Alex Libre: That's okay. That's good for me to think about too because like, I think if for many years your, you know, relationship with alcohol was probably somewhat kept in check by having kids in the house all the time and like, you know, when your son lives with you, but there were some of these external forces modulating and then when those are known as forceful, you know, if that was the main reason you didn't drink as much, you know that you're likely to drink more when they are taken away. And I just think anytime you have the thought that's like, I, this feels like a good opportunity to drink for any reason that is like, other people won't find out. I think you just want to. I mean, it's sort of really any reason you think there's like a special unique good opportunity that's like a time like, just know it's probably, it's not.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And, and I mean, and, and, and you know, setting up my wife is this external person who's going to keep me in check. I mean, that's, that's not healthy. I mean, I thought a lot about your desert island question as well. Like, you know, and I don't know. I don't have an answer to that. If I had unlimited amounts of vodka on a desert island, what would stop me from drinking?

Alex Libre: I think I should revise that desert island thing because it's really the better thought experiment is if you had access to unlimited, private, secret, invisible vodka. But you are still in your life and there's no way anyone could ever find out, but you would be still going by day, whatever, you know, But.

Michael Montgomery: But that's not realistic because of all the things we've been talking about. It impacts your life, it impacts your relationships. It impacts.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: You know, your. Your. Your work. I mean, that's. It's definitely caught up with me. It took many, many, many years to catch up with work. I mean, I have. Nothing bad has happened, but, you know, missing deadlines and blah, blah, blah, think. I mean, you know, again, I thank God I haven't had a DUI or certainly an accident, but had something really serious happened a while ago, I don't know, maybe I wouldn't. We wouldn't be having this conversation.

Alex Libre: But, I mean, I think it's actually perfect that you just said, like, but that.

That's not realistic. That wouldn't work. Because when you. And then list the reasons you listed were all reasons, you know, impact on work, impact on your marriage. These are things that, like, are not just because your wife is keeping you in check. Like, you would feel those negative effects. And I think those are the ones you want to focus on more than enforcement externally or accountability with anyone else, you know?

Michael Montgomery: Yeah. Yeah. I'm just saying I'm lucky that.

Alex Libre: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: In. In all the years. I mean, I just remember some of those AA meetings.

Alex Libre: People have crazy stories.

Michael Montgomery: Crazy stories. I mean, they were like. Like, whoa. I used to go up these meetings up on Fulton street, up on the other end of Alamo, and, man, you got some stories. These guys coming in, they'd been through everything. I mean, it was amazing.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: You know, the resilience and all that, but it was intense stuff.

Alex Libre: Do you ever feel like you having been a reporter in. A journalist in war zones, like, I'm sure you've encountered this before where, like, there are a lot of people who have those previous jobs, and then they come back to regular world and feel like they're missing some level of excitement or fun or some intensity that's lacking. Do you ever feel that in some way?

Michael Montgomery: I've thought a lot about that. I mean, it's also true with soldiers, you know, I mean, it's coming back. It's like they don't feel the same bonds and they don't feel. It's hard, I mean, really for soldiers. And I think, you know, reporters have a similar experience, slightly different. I. It's a long time ago for me, like, Bosnian war and all that. And I think that. I think that one thing is that I drank a lot, like in Sarajevo. Like, I Drank a lot. Like, at night, you drink to just get totally lost. And I think my wife identified that at the time, was like, Michael, you know, this is not a good drinking pattern. You're. I mean, she wasn't there, but we. We were. We were going out at the time. So. So I think the pattern of, like, drinking to get lost, to get completely lost, to forget, was a bad one for me, and that definitely set in motion. I don't think I had ptsd. I mean, I have friends who did. I don't think I did. That would be a whole different level.

Alex Libre: I wouldn't view it as a whole different level, as, like, some categorical binary change. I do think ptsd, there's, like, a cutoff for, like, you know, diagnoses.

But trauma is a spectrum and a slider. Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: I think for me, interestingly, I think the fact that I was reporting and it was able to communicate these things counteracted this idea that. Because, like, promised part, like, you can't do anything. And so I think being able to report helped me a lot.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: So, I don't know. I think that, you know, compartmentalize so, like, evil people doing horrible things, like, it's. It drives my wife crazy because, you know, I compartmentalize the world we're living in now. And I'm like, sometimes it feels like I'm not sensitive to what's happening. So I don't know, but it's a good question. I think it definitely drove my drinking. I think probably my drinking was transformed in those periods of really, really getting drunk just to, like. But I don't know beyond that.

Alex Libre: I mean, it's an interesting data point that, like, when you were in a war zone, you drank a lot more than you had been previously. That, you know, is potentially suggestive that, you know, intense sort of external stress, things going on that are terrible, that you have to be sort of bear witness to in some form. Like, that has a negative impact. Makes me want to drink more. Like, I don't know. You know, it's worth maybe reflecting on. Like, are there analogous things, maybe totally lesser, just a different category right now that are your.

Michael Montgomery: Well, it's also. The thing about. Is you can't change anything, right? Yeah. Whatever the. You think or feel like these forces are out of your control. And so, I mean, I think maybe in that sense, like, there's a connection with my son's behavior, which we can't seem to control, um, and frustration and anger and possible that that connects with these earlier feelings of, like, of. Of I don't know what the emotion is. It's more than frustration of desperation.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: And I think, I think there's lots of connections there. I do, I've been able, you know, on the good side, I've been able to go back to those areas and do different kind of works that's more like remediating, like, like helping other reporters and that. You know, I, I have a long history in the Balkans and I studied, you know, I don't have family, I don't have family connections there, but I mean, I studied it in high school. Like, like it goes back a long ways. And in fact, I was, I was at my 40th college reunion in June and I met this woman who taught me Serbo creation, which was language of Yugoslavia. And we hadn't seen each other in 40 years. And it was such a, like, great, like, like it, it just, the whole. I had

never been to a college reunion and it was like, like understanding like who I was back then and this adventure I put myself on and feeling really good about all that. So, you know, that's been hard. I mean, you know, I, I, I knew a place that got completely destroyed and like friends died and all that stuff. But I think I've been able to deal with, but specifically to your point of like this, this, this desire to get lost and, and, and dealing with something you can't seem to control or change. I think that's totally relevant to some issues. You know, some, some things I'm trying to deal with today, and it does.

Alex Libre: Sound like the way you frame that was that like certain things are just outside of your control. Which I think is the common therapy talk is that like, you know, some things are within your troll, some things are without control. I think that there's more like grayscale view that basically takes a view like something that are very far away from you in some space, time, impact, whatever dimension, like, are more out of your control. But they also have, they only have an impact on you when they basically connect back to you in some way, whether it's hearing about it, reading about it, whatever. But there has to still be this layer in between where you on some level let it impact you. And I wonder if there's a way to view, you know, your, you have the kind of final say over how these things play out in your mind. That's the ultimate like, you know, control. And you do have that control to a large extent. Even if your son is acting up and you feel like you can't change the behavior, you can process it slightly differently, maybe such that you frame it differently in line or. Or whatever. Such that it doesn't have to have that impact on how you feel.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, I mean. I mean, our son's history is a.

Alex Libre: Whole, like, what kind of special needs?

Michael Montgomery: Well, we adopted him at a young age, internationally, and he just. I mean, he was born preterm. He had all sorts of issues before we adopted him, and then he just had a range of behavioral issues growing up. We had to send him to a residential treatment, you know, facility for a couple years when he was in early teens, which is really rough. So there's a whole legacy of his, you know, behavioral issues. And, you know, he's 23 now and. And pretty abusive towards us verbally. It's. It's a hard situation. We're trying to get him through a program at City College to get him out of the house. It's just. It's just like. But it's, you know, it's 20. 20, 22 years of just constant challenges and. And, you know, understanding. Of course, you know, he's. He's had his challenges too, of course. So it's. It's kind of an ongoing thing, so I don't know how much that connects to my experience as a



reporter. It's. It's kind of. It's its own thing, but it.

Alex Libre: But it seems significant. I mean.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. So, yeah, there's lots of things. And if we. We can get out of the house, if he can get employees. He's doing the fire academy program at City College, which is a great program, and we're just praying he can get through it and get a job.

Alex Libre: Yeah, it sounds like it'd be huge, but I mean, it does sound like that would be an incredible source of stress for anybody or pressure.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And as I said, you know. Yeah, yeah. And my wife's grappling with a lot of stuff, so there's a lot of things floating around. Yes, but the. But. But I just. To finish on that thing, I have been able to go back to the Balkans and kind of feel good about the work I did back in the day and train young journalists and took my daughter to Bosnia, which she had been there as a young kid. So I feel like I've tried to work through that, but the drinking patterns. The drinking patterns were significant. Those. Those were really like. Like, I don't think before that I. I had this idea, well, maybe I did drinking to get drunk, but drinking to get lost, like, just to get just lost and that was your way to cope. Like, that was something, I think a pattern that developed then and, and again, my wife, who wasn't even my wife at the time, was very aware of that. Like, you know, and that's a pattern that is definitely still with me when I drink. It's like just not one drink, not true drinks, but a pint of vodka and maybe more.

Alex Libre: And just like, just check out there's something interesting. Last thing I'll say, I know we're up on time, is just that, like, I think when people use the same sorts of words to describe something, there's often more depth underneath that might consciously or unconsciously be being like covered over by that one word. And it seems like you frequently articulate, like the reason you drink is to get lost.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, I know.

Alex Libre: And there's got to be some sort of like, derivatives of that that are worth exploring more.

Michael Montgomery: I agree, I agree. I mean, Chet Baker, you know, the trumpeter, was it Chet Baker? I think it was Tim or Art Pepper, one of these jazz guys. I'm really into jazz. His, his biography was called let's Get Lost. And, and so I come back to that and you're right, that is like definitely worth exploring because I say that and I've said it in meetings because I'm trying to articulate like what I do when I drink. That's what comes to mind. But I agree, it's like that's let's sort of mystery. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Alex Libre: And by giving it a word, you sort of don't need to define it further or think about it further and like it's like a safeguard in some ways sometimes.

Michael Montgomery: Exactly, exactly. Yeah.

Alex Libre: Well, we can definitely discuss that.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: Okay.

Alex Libre: What other day? I mean, so I would like to meet again this week, keep momentum going. I'm going to a wedding, but I'm realizing actually I'm leaving Friday morning, so I could do a Thursday evening or. I mean, you said mostly like end of day five. You could do.

Michael Montgomery: I mean, can you do Thursday evening? That would be fine for me, but if, if that doesn't work, maybe Thursday, middle of the day or something.

Alex Libre: Let me see, this Thursday I have a one off. I could do 7, 8, 30.

Michael Montgomery: You sure?

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, yeah.

Michael Montgomery: Okay. You sure?

Alex Libre: We could do, I mean, 45 minute session. I guess we could do again, it's up to you. We could do a second, one hour and a half if you want to do like another extended one.

Michael Montgomery: But normally, yeah, either way, I, I think we could cover it in 45 minutes and just.

Alex Libre: Cool, you know, let's do that. So we don't.

Michael Montgomery: 7 to 8:15 on Thursday.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Alex Libre: Yeah, yeah, let's do that. I'll send you an invite and then I will send you the scheduling link. I'll send you the agreement, I'll send you transcript from our call today and maybe some things to think about. Check in with that Ash app every day somewhere. Yeah, I'll do that. I'll do that. In whatever way feels like authentic to you, such that you don't compartmentalize it. Whatever feels like it would integrate with the version of yourself that wants to go drink. Yes. Use it that way, if that makes sense.

Michael Montgomery: And payment info, right?

Alex Libre: Yeah, I'll send that to you as well. It's going to be like a PayPal link and I think that's it. We'll choose like future schedules, maybe after Thursday or we can coordinate email or via. You can just use the link each time. Drag time. That also

will work.

Michael Montgomery: But yeah, it'd be good to have, you know, consistent times. Yeah, yeah, yeah. You're, you're a young, you've got a young kid. So.

Alex Libre: Yeah, yeah, I think like, honestly, my, my son goes to sleep at 7 so doing like 7:30 or, or sleep.

Michael Montgomery: Consistently at 7, that's pretty.

Alex Libre: Consistently. Yeah, he's pretty easy, baby. I feel like, like.

Michael Montgomery: Like, oh my gosh, if you have a second kid, that kid won't sleep well.

Alex Libre: The problem is that he sleeps with my wife and she nurses him back to sleep if he does wake up at all. So I just don't deal with it.

Michael Montgomery: But I know that's very common. How old is he now?

Alex Libre: He's nine months.

Michael Montgomery: Oh my God, that's so great. Well, listen, I, I just want to, it's. This has been great and I just, again, I know I've said it, but like, thank you for leading these groups. I mean like you have a lot of people because you do a really good job and it's, it's got a vibe that I haven't experienced in other groups before. So.

Alex Libre: Thank you.

Michael Montgomery: You know that it's just a really, really good group. And hey, one question. There was a young guy who was on the group six 12 months ago. He had a, he had a kid. He had a young kid and maybe he had like some kind of cancer. He. I don't remember him. I don't know.

Alex Libre: Was it, was it, was it James, like usually wore a baseball cap or something?

Michael Montgomery: Maybe. But he like, I don't know. He had a young baby and he had like. I forget his Addictions.

Alex Libre: But anyway, I think you're talking.

Michael Montgomery: Yes.

Michael Montgomery: Okay.

Alex Libre: Yeah, he is. Well, actually, it would be good for you to reach out to him. I, I can give his, you his phone number because you and he are sort of both having periods away from the meeting and then recently returned. He hasn't come back to me because he's doing an MBA program that.

Michael Montgomery: Oh, yes, that's right. He's doing an MBA.

Alex Libre: Group, like, three weeks ago or something that I forgot to reply to too.

That was like, basically saying he's been having a bunch of relapses with credit and he wants more accountability. Particular would feel comfortable sort of partnering up in some sort of.

Michael Montgomery: I'll reach out to him. I really like him. And we had some, we had some text that we were doing.

Alex Libre: Oh, so you have his number?

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: Is he. Well, I, I, I, I'll send it.

Alex Libre: To you just in case, but I'll check with him first just to make sure.

Michael Montgomery: But check with him.

Alex Libre: Yeah, I think this could be a good, like, little, you know.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah. He's like a young father, and I felt like, oh, my God, I know what you're going through.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Alex Libre: Yeah, I was pretty close with Jason. I met up with him in person twice. Um, and so he's.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, he's a good guy.

Alex Libre: I think we would appreciate you reaching out to.

Michael Montgomery: Okay, cool. Okay. Thanks, Ben.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Alex Libre: All right, we'll talk to you later. By the way, for emails, do you prefer the email that you sent me originally or T4 Monk?

Michael Montgomery: I think they're the same email. I know.

Alex Libre: Okay.

Michael Montgomery: T4 Monk is at Gmail.

Alex Libre: Okay, great.

Michael Montgomery: You can email me at AOL from my 19.

Alex Libre: Oh, no, it is, it is T4 Monk.

Michael Montgomery: I see now.

Alex Libre: All right, cool. All right. Talk to you later, Michael.

Michael Montgomery: Have a good wedding.

Alex Libre: Thanks.

## Session 2

Meeting Title: Recovery session

Date: Aug 18

Meeting participants: Michael Montgomery

Transcript:

Me: Hey, Michael.

Them: Hey, man. Sorry. I'm just finishing dinner. So hold on just a sec here.

Me: No worries.

Them: Turn off the sound.

Me: Yeah. No worries at all. Do you wanna just start in, like, five minutes? Would that be easier?

Them: No. We're good.

Me: Cool. Alright. Sweet.

Them: Good.

Me: How are doing? I was

Them: Good. How about you? How was your weekend?

Me: pretty good. Went down to Santa Barbara for a wedding, and it's kind of chaotic, but also pretty good. Yeah. So not bad.

Them: K. What what do you

Me: Just like yeah. It was it was my in laws came down with us, and they were like so we're staying in the same Airbnb with them, and they were, like, taking care of our son when we were at the wedding events. And I I mean, I guess it was pretty smooth. It was just it felt chaotic Just a lot of, like, to and from events, you know, kids crying. You you

Them: Yeah.

Me: you gotta trust them with the in laws. And so, yeah, honestly, it wasn't too bad.

Them: Yeah. That's a little complicated. How old is your son again?

Me: Nine months.

Them: Oh, yeah. That's that's that's a little hard. That's a little hard at that age. I mean, you know, kids that age are, you know, And you hadn't done anything like that before. Right?

Me: Not not really. I mean, my mother-in-law watches him once a week at our house, but this was like it just felt like out of the routine and kinda like if different plates were in different yeah.

Them: That's pretty ambitious. That's pretty

Me: Yeah. So we'll see. We're we have another wedding coming up in, like, a month that we just found out, like, twenty minutes ago. They are they they are not gonna have childcare. They had previously planned to give childcare to the you know, for everyone who had kids. Now we need to figure out something with that. I think probably my wife's just gonna stay back, but not too bad.

Them: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And it would but you're so it was the in laws that went with you, you said?

Me: Yep. Yep. My my wife's parents. Yeah.

Them: And how so they're how old like, they're young. I mean, they're relatively young. Right?

Me: Yeah. I mean, they're they're 65 both probably. And, yeah, they're, like, able-bodied, and with the program, it's just they my wife especially has very specific I don't know how your wife was with your kids, but, like, know, she has very specific ideas of how she wants her kids cared for. And

Them: Yeah.

Me: you know, even her parents won't perfectly follow that.

Them: That can be really hard. That can be really, really, really hard. Don't think Jean, my wife, was that whatever specific, but yeah. I mean, there's been movies made about that. So

Me: Yeah. Exactly. Yeah. Cool. How was your weekend?

Them: My weekend was good. I was up with my wife. I think I mentioned we have a place up at Sea Ranch.

Me: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Them: You know, up north. Or

Me: You haven't mentioned it, but I know where Sea Ranch is. Yeah.

Them: I didn't mention that, but yeah, we have a place up there, and so my wife's going through, like, this knee issue and I drove her up there She's up there. Because she loves it and also just to be away from our son.

Me: Mhmm.

Them: So I drove her up. And spent the weekend there. Then I drove back because I had to be back for work, and my son started classes restarted classes at City College in their fire program. So

Me: He restarted as in, like, it didn't work out the first

Them: firefight. Sorry. Not restarted, but he he it's not his first semester. So

Me: Resumed. I see.

Them: he had classes starting. At City College. And so I needed to be back back here for that. So the weekend was fine. I mean, it's beautiful up there. I feel tiny bit isolated, but it's you know, it's beautiful. And so my wife's got these knee issues. She's on crutches. Doctors will not, for whatever reason, agree to surgery and it's weird. And you know, so she's 70 and she's been or almost 70 and she's been on crutches and it's really fucking with her and

Me: Are there some risks associated with surgery,

Them: it's really hard. And

Me: or something? Or

Them: no. Not that we're aware of. I I I we can't figure it out. We I mean, it's good to be conservative in these areas, but is it some weird, like, saving money, or is it we we can't quite figure it out.

Me: I mean, either way, even if there is a good reason, the fact that you guys are in the dark sort of confused about it means the communication at the very least about it was poor, you know.

Them: Yeah. Yeah. And she's in

Me: Oh, yeah.

Them: a lot of pain and the and the crutches made it worse because her arms are just like So I don't know what's going on. Anyway,

Me: So how is it for you in a week when so and your wife is staying up at Sea Ranch. Is that correct? Yeah.

Them: Right. And I'm back in San Francisco with my son.

Me: Is that like a risky arrangement for recovery purposes? Like, you know, temptation to drink since she's separate?

Them: Yeah. Yeah. It's and it's not quite your desert island thing, but you know, the the big thing is that it's just a fucking downer, man. Like, she's on crutches. She's got arthritis. You know, she's not happy with me. We've got a son who's really rude to her. It's just not a great scenario, man. It's just like there's no way to I mean I mean, you know, yeah, first world problems, but it's pretty a lot of unhappiness floating around.

Me: Yeah.

Them: And so you know, one of the things about my drinking, and I think I mentioned this already, is, like, when you feel bad, like, you fucked up and you've you've hurt other people. You you really are in this cycle where it's like, well, you know, things are bad, so they're never to get better. So I'll just drink. Right?

Me: Yeah.

Them: I think that's a big thing for me.

Me: Yeah.

Them: It's it's not like it's so it's a little bit of, like, yeah, getting lost, and and you talked about how that's kind of vague. But it's also about like, this despondency where you just don't feel like you can ever get out of it once you're in it.

Me: Is that the primary reason? Because I could see a couple of different reasons why you would want to, like, sort of double down on, like, it's already shit, you know, might as well, like, keep drinking and just, like, you know, go all the way in this sort of downward direction. Like, I think for some people who are success prone I don't know if that's the right way to say it, but throughout their, you know, lives, they've they've generally been successful at the things they wanna be successful at. And when they are not successful at something, it can feel like, you know what? Fuck it. I don't even wanna do that thing. It's maybe it's not even my goal. Maybe what I wanna do is, like, actually to tank

Them: Yeah. Yep.



Me: my life in this regard or something, even though it doesn't really make sense. Is there an element of that?

Them: Yeah. I think there is. I mean, that came up back in my AA days. That idea. And I don't know. I've been really trying to analyze it. Like,

Me: Yeah.

Them: you know, what does it mean when I say, oh, I just wanna get lost. I just wanna, like, evade, avoid responsibility. And and your smart question about what does that really mean? And I I do think maybe there is an undercurrent of, like,

Me: Mhmm.

Them: fatalism, despondency, whatever it is, it's it's never gonna fucking work overall. Like, yeah, I could be so for a while, but ultimately, it's just gonna come back, which it doesn't align with my life. Like, my dad you know, was a big drinker, fucked up his our family. And then went hardcore AA and never drank again. You know? And that was a really important model for us. Although, I think my brothers and I didn't really take it in at least right away, but

Me: Were you raised religiously?

Them: like, yeah, there was the bad side of

Me: Were you raised religious?

Them: it. What's that? You episcopal? Then kinda new agey. So I grew up in Oregon. I think I told you that. You know, Episcopal my dad was at Episcopal. Definitely, like, went to church for a certain period of time as a kid. And then, like, in the seventies, growing up in Portland,

Me: Yep.

Them: there were various like slightly new age culty things My mom got into like

Me: Oh,

Them: some new age stuff. Not not super crazy, but then my brother was like a Scientologist and and then my family I think there's a connection, but some of my siblings are kinda really conspiracy theorists. People and I alternative health,

Me: Yep.

Them: you know, and I think there's all a lot of connections there if you especially if you grew up in the Pacific Northwest.

Me: Totally.

Them: So but no, like, you know, not not hardcore Christian either to embrace or to rebel against. Nothing

Me: Yeah.

Them: like, you know, really serious there. I think we stopped going to church when it was, like, nine. So

Me: So sort of a a neutral, like, non non factor probably in terms of

Them: Well and that was the issue for me in AA. I just couldn't It just didn't fucking compute. It, like, didn't work.

Me: Yeah.

Them: And, you know, my sponsor at the time was a really good guy. Was also, you know, agnostic. So he was just like, you know, Just whatever your higher power is, but I think that's so built into AA that

Me: Yeah.

Them: it's really hard to just say, well, okay. You know, my higher power is whatever. Like, it just don't know. It didn't work for me. But that's a side that was a sideshow with AA. That wasn't like

Me: I mean, I think the higher power thing is interesting because, like,

Them: my main issues. You know?

Me: a lot of people who are not religious and like AA or have gotten a lot out of AA will say like, oh, know, higher power doesn't mean God. Your higher power can be the ocean. Can be whatever. But like, my problem is not that the higher power is God, although I also find that problematic. But I I find it that, like, there's anything outside of yourself that needs to be beyond what you are. You know?

Them: What? And that that was actually one of the initial attractions of smart. Like, I really like how they write about that in in the in the book. And I I don't I was trying to remember how I got connected to SMART, and I actually couldn't remember that. But that was a big deal.

Me: Yeah.

Them: Big deal. Was it was like, you didn't have to have some phony higher power. Like,

Me: Yeah.

Them: you know, shit or the wind. It's like, no. And so that that made a lot of sense, and and and it's it's been good for me. But but the but the not drinking thing hasn't stuck. And that's and it's and it's caused you know, a lot of harm in my relationship, and I I can't seem to get

Me: Have you considered

Them: consistent on it.

Me: I mean, this is a a out there suggestion given what we're just talking about. But have you considered, like, trying to find an AA fellowship that you could, like, have the the the main reason that people, like, from my smart community have enjoyed those is just that it's usually an in person group that, like, meets somewhere near you since there's they're everywhere. And they're, like people are really in it together and kind of in the way of the WhatsApp group, but, like, more people and more in person

Them: Yeah. It's a good it's a good question. So there was a meeting that I liked. I'm sure it's still there over on like, Arguello at that church. I think it's, like,

Me: Oh, yeah.

Them: that's a pretty good meeting or that was a pretty good meeting. It was like not as down and out. Sorry. That sounds rude. And I mean, it's not a bad idea because it's true, the in person thing. I went to an in person smart meeting in the Castro, and it was totally not

Me: Yeah.

Them: it just was not right. It just I I didn't I wasn't connected to the guys. There was a lot of

Me: That I that meet in person meeting tends to be very kinda

Them: it just I wasn't connected. I did I didn't feel connected.

Me: queer focused, queer emphasized, and I just think it's

Them: Yeah.

Me: I I that was the meeting I went to in 2019 that first got me into smart, but I never

Them: Yeah.

Me: fully got enmeshed in the community. It didn't quite feel right. So I get

Them: I mean, I wish I wish there was a way that your meeting that you had more per week, but that it was in person. But I I realized that's just not you know, possible. It's not a bad idea. I could I think that's a

Me: Yeah.

Them: Sunday night meeting maybe. Not a bad idea. You know, they're very welcoming. It's a very diverse group. It's not, you know, I I mean, I have to say there was a there's a meeting up on Alamo. So we're, you know, we're near Alamo Square. So I'm in

Me: Yeah.

Them: Jorge. There's a meeting there on one of those big mansions. Have you ever been to that one?

Me: Oh, really? No.

Them: Oh, I think they have I think they have rooms there as well. It's there's a a rehab facility on Fell Street, Fell And Steiner, that's I I've I've noticed in it. And then when I was looking at rehab, it it but this is different. This is like I think maybe people live there. But man, I've I've had this wild meetings there. These guys, like, really I mean, they're they're actually very moving, these

Me: Yeah.

Them: hardcore guys, like, in prison and, like, you know, maybe not murdered, but really intense guys and you see it in their faces. And those are like very compelling but it's not I I don't I don't I I feel like an outsider there a bit.

Me: And that can be, like, sort of a I don't know. I think, like, you get the, like,

Them: You know?

Me: the compelling aspect of hearing like an intense story is very different from the compel the kind of compulsion that can come from, like like, just really feeling like you see yourself in the other people that are telling you stories.

Them: Yeah.

Me: So

Them: Yeah. No. I mean, most of the people who went to that meeting were you know, in some kind of legal

Me: Yeah.

Them: thing. Like, they were

Me: Yeah.

Them: court ordered. And and I know that's the case in your meetings sometimes, and that's great. But it was a pretty like like, you know, you talk about bottoming out. Like, that's, like, really

Me: Yeah. Yeah.

Them: serious like hardcore shit. My sponsor my sponsor used to talk to me in that way, like, you know, I've never had a DUI or anything like that. And he used to he had some word for me of

Me: Yeah.

Them: what kind of drunk I was. I mean, not not in a bad way, but, like, I've been lucky. Like, you know, no DUIs, but it doesn't you know, that's partially because I've always been, like or for many years, a solo drinker, like, just

Me: Yep.

Them: drink at home you know, keep it secret, and yeah. I mean, I'm sure there's and I know there's been times of drinking and driving, but it's not been

Me: Yeah.

Them: you know, no so, you know, social drinking stopped a long time ago. So so yeah. Anyway, it's a good idea. I I like that idea and I and I think I will

Me: And I would even I I would even suggest, like, rather than just sort of, like, trying the meeting that you liked, I would try to, like, go to three meetings or something, three different meetings just to see because you never know. Maybe you discover a new group that, you know, just is a little bit better vibe. And, really, what you're joining is for the people, not for the meeting even itself. I think it's it's mostly that by going to the meeting, you have this group of people that you can kinda lean on. You'll end meet up one on one with some people you really get along with. Like, that's what I've seen work well for people is, like, feeling like suddenly they're part of a a real recovery sort of group. Like, I guess they

Them: Yeah.

Me: call them fellowships, and it just seems like that could be useful. But I don't know. I I I also feel like there's an element here of, like, there's gotta be some work just for just in you that I think is is the core moving pieces right now, I think, is that there's some, like, mysteries around, you know, what is getting lost feel like, you know, what is the, like or or what is that really kind of about? Like, you know, thinking about, like, the sort of true intrinsic motivations that you have and whether those would persist, you know, if you're, you know, everyone you knew passed away or something like that.

Them: Yeah. Like, the desert island model. Like, what would stop

Me: Yeah. Yeah.

Them: drinking drinking on the desert island?

Me: So I don't know. I I I think it's worthwhile, to maybe check out three meetings and, three meetings over the course of, like, three weeks or something. It doesn't have to be a short term.

Them: Does the meeting, Yeah. I think I went there once. There's a there's a church. There's a

Me: Yeah.

Them: a church here on Church Street by the Safeway. You know where that is? Like, market and safe there's a there's definitely I think I went to a meeting there once. I did not feel connected It felt very clicky and I didn't and and maybe

Me: Yeah.

Them: more gay, which isn't a bad thing, but I just you know, 62 year old guy.

Me: Can feel insular. Yeah.

Them: Yeah. No. The the one in Castro definitely did.

Me: Yeah.

Them: Definitely. And it was fine. I mean, they were they were in their, you know, thing. But yeah, I'll I'll I'll work on that. I mean, the one on on Arguello, that that definitely always felt good. Like, like, that felt like was a variety of people No one ever the one thing about those meetings, no one ever like, I never met people. Like, people would not you'd think, but I always felt like I'm I'm kind of an outsider

and like, no one I try to introduce myself to people and no one wants to talk to me. It was

Me: Maybe, I mean, maybe you need to try a different meeting. There's

Them: I don't know what that was about. Yeah.

Me: there might be a different vibe around, you know, like, connection striking and stuff. But I just I think there's, like there you're bound to hit some meetings that people are not as genuinely friendly or not as inclined to, like, meet up outside. And then I know of some meetings where people seem to become, like, quite good friends with a, you know, a small handful of people from that meeting. And then, you know, it just it can become such a like, a strengthening of your whole recovery outlook to have that kind of group behind you. I mean, I think also that you could also just treat our our smart meeting group and the WhatsApp community as, you know, some something that we put more intentional effort into

Them: Yeah.

Me: like, each week connecting with one other person that you haven't connected with that much that you could just, you know, have a phone call with or something. You could even send a message to the group saying, hey, I'm looking to, like, have a phone call with one person each each week or something. You know, if you if anyone's interested, let me know. And I don't know. That just, like, talking out loud here. But I think that that that group, if you do feel like a connection to

Them: I I

Me: the style of the meeting and therefore the other people that tend to gravitate to it, maybe that would be a better source of connecting. Oh, yeah.

Them: Yeah. I did I did talk to Doug. That was good. I I I we can keep talking and I'll reach out to Jason even though he's not, I guess, in the group anymore.

Me: Yeah. Did you get my his phone number? I think I included in the email. Yeah.

Them: Or not right now. But but I did. I did. I haven't I haven't had a chance to reach out, but I will do that

Me: Cool.

Them: this week. But I I I do think there in thinking back of those AA meetings, there there was a real value in being in person. I mean, they got very formulaic. There was this meeting down near Gulf Street. I can't remember, but it just got

very formulaic. And then, you know, you have the people like, I've been sober for forty two years, and they would talk for a long

Me: Yeah. Yeah.

Them: time. I'm like, okay. Why are you here? You know, I understand why you're here.

Me: Yeah. Alright. Let's let's change

Them: But it's a really good idea.

Me: gears, change topics. Like, what, has happened since last Tuesday? What what was it? In terms of, like, any of the do you use the ash app or listen to any of those audio clips? Oh, okay. Nice.

Them: I didn't. I used the reframe app. I've been using that. Reframe. I haven't you told me to. I said I was gonna do it that night, and I

Me: It's it's alright. Forget about that for now. What would you say

Them: I have not looked at Ash. I haven't downloaded it.

Me: have been any like thoughts that you've been mulling over maybe post we got we got into a lot of different topics, like, what, what what stuck with you from last week?

Them: What stuck with me was

Me: Or anything you wanted to, like, dive into more. Yeah.

Them: yeah. Should grab my notes, but

Me: Yeah.

Them: I think they're downstairs.

Me: Also have, like, some topics that I was thinking of, like, floating. So let me just, like, read you the topics, and you can remember you feel free to eat your dinner for a minute while I just, like, go through some of the top things. Okay. Great. So

Them: No. It's done. Now it's done.

Me: you know, kind of unpacking what the getting lost really means. Exploring the feeling of, like, inadequacy or self worth or fears of being, you know, low, inadequate. The compartmentalization stuff. So, like, maybe how revisiting how it developed when you were a kid and then how it manifests now. The potential for,



like, I don't know, the war correspondent experience seems like probably mostly in a side, but could be some element of, like, I don't know. You know, I think there it was interesting that you did drink more when you were there. In a way that

Them: That that I mean, I drink more than I'd ever drunk

Me: yeah.

Them: before. I mean, that was really mean, you know, maybe that's like that was the original, like, let's get lost. Like, I mean, that you had some, like, reason. I mean, again, I was not, like, seeing dead bodies every day. Just

Me: Right.

Them: to be clear. I'm not sure I'm not convinced that I really have PTSD But

Me: I mean, I do think you can pick up on a certain energy of being in a war zone even if you're not seeing the dead bodies other people that are seeing the dead bodies, they're there's transitive stress that gets

Them: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. No. No. In the sense

Me: mixed right to you. Yeah. Yeah.

Them: the sense of helplessness, the sense that you could be bombed, that was really

Me: Yeah.

Them: I'm just saying I have colleagues who literally were at these massacre sites or or bombing sites where, you know, you had to make a decision. Are you gonna, like, help save someone or be a journalist? Like, I don't I don't think I ever faced but the the the the risks of, like, getting shot or whatever, you know, those those were real. But I do think I think it's true, and I and I and I mentioned this before that my my wife she was my girlfriend at the time, Like, she was aware that I like, my drinking changed. My relationship to drinking, I think, changed there and and and elevated. And so I mean, the thing that I'm still interested in exploring is this idea of, like,

Me: Yeah.

Them: getting lost. Okay. So that's like a Chet Baker thing. Let's get lost. And he was like a heroin addict or whatever. But like does that mean for me? I think diving

in deeper on that because it's a line I say, I've said it in meetings. But what does that really mean? You know?

Me: Yeah. Okay. Perfect. So when I think one way of maybe getting into this is, like,

Them: And what are the triggers for that?

Me: often if when they're, like, go to phrases that we use, I feel like there are some sort of visualization, mental imagery that accompanies that that the use of that word or maybe it's specific memories or maybe it's just like, I don't know, something you sort of almost see. Is there anything that you envision when you think of getting lost? Like, is there any image mental imagery that comes to mind?

Them: Yeah. I mean, it's almost your desert island thing. It's it's being alone. It's being it's it's being here where I am right now or

Me: Mhmm.

Them: being in a in a in a solo space And yeah, it's it's totally about being alone. And about having no one to account for you know, no no worries nothing to think about.

Me: Yep.

Them: Other than, like, whatever you're doing, like listening to music or whatever. But, like,

Me: Yep.

Them: like, blank slate. Right? Like, like like like, nothing nothing to think about, I mean, in terms of everyday life, everyday responsibilities. Sure. You can be thinking about

Me: Yeah.

Them: supposedly, like, big ideas or reading something, but it's all disconnected

Me: Okay. Good. Good.

Them: from your life.

Me: Do you think there's an element of, like, I don't know. I think sometimes when people when we were, like, when I most want to, like, retreat into being alone or I just feel like a yeah. I guess a desire to sort of isolate and and almost protect my

own mental space. I find that it's sometimes because I there are things that I don't I really don't feel comfortable sort of sharing with other actual people or, like,

Them: Yeah.

Me: telling other actual people or, like, something I've done that I really regret and I'm like, alright, I'm gonna just never tell anybody that this happened. Or, like, like, basically, these these secrets that are become so corrosive when we hold them inside. Is there anything that comes to mind now that and I assume, you know, no one your son can't hear you or whatever in here. But, like, is there anything that comes to mind that, like, is a secret that you've been carrying for, like, a long time? Or maybe it's not a classically secret, but it's just, like, something that you don't feel like other people would, welcome you for sharing.

Them: Yeah. I mean, there's there's abusive behavior when I was drinking. When I was

Me: Yeah.

Them: ill that affected my family. So emotional explosions, whatever that I don't think my family is I don't think they associate all of those things. With my drinking because my son was always a factor in that. So I think that there's my own behavior, I don't feel that like, I don't I don't feel comfortable talking with my family about how I feel drinking was directly related. I mean, they're they're aware of all that. But

Me: Yeah.

Them: there's a lot of shit I think that went down because of my drinking that yeah, my son blah blah blah, but

Me: Yeah.

Them: like, that my drinking may have been the trigger for that. There's there's there's I mean, I've talked about this with a therapist. There's there's things I did to my son when he was little that were abusive. When he was really little that I feel bad about. And

Me: Yeah.

Them: know, shouting or some physical stuff not intense, but like that's that's kinda probably hangs over our relationship a little bit.

Me: Yeah.

Them: And it's probably you know, he's adopted. I think I told you that. And he had had, you know, emotional issues. There's no other deep secrets. I I used to have this dream

Me: I mean, that No. Go ahead. Go ahead. Keep going. Yeah.

Them: Hold on. Wait a No. I I and maybe this is all related. I used to have a dream that like, I would wake up. It was a dream where I had done something really bad. Like like,

Me: Yeah.

Them: it killed someone, you know, like like, run someone over and then and then, you know, hit and run. And Years later, the police are looking into me. Right? And that's a dream I used to have And I used to have to wake up and think, fuck. Hold on. Wait. Like,

Me: Did I do anything?

Them: and they would would fuck with my head. I don't think I've had that dream for a long time, but but maybe, you know, ten years if

Me: That seems relevant. Like, that doesn't seem like a just a random dream. It's

Them: fifteen years ago. You know,

Me: recurring like, it seems to me like that could be indicative of just the feeling like you're fraudulent in some way or or getting away with something

Them: Oh, totally. No. Totally. I I still feel that. Not just impostor syndrome, like, professionally, like, oh, who am I? But no. No. No. Definitely. Definitely. The the lying really leaves a legacy and and I don't I haven't come fully clean with my wife about degree to which I think my drinking has has impacted our relationship, her emotions, relationship with my children. I mean, she understands it at a certain level. Because, I mean, you know, you know, I'm I'm an alcoholic or that's you know, when you go to AA and all that, And I did go through the steps but not completely through the steps. So there's a lot of guilt and shame there and and still this sense of hiding stuff. Yeah. And that's that really does eat at you.

Me: Do you think your wife would be receptive to I mean, cause to me, when I hear that you you haven't ever fully, like, fully explicitly sort of made clear the way which you feel like you're drinking has affected them and and played a role. Like,

do you think she are you afraid to do that, or does it just seem sort of like a giant hassle, like a big emotional hurdle? Yeah.

Them: No. I'm I'm afraid. I think that she's I mean, we did group therapy, but I wasn't being completely honest at the time. I mean, I I think

Me: Yeah.

Them: I mean, she's going through a lot right now with her own stuff with her family, and with her knee, and but I I I think she would welcome anything that she felt was authentic and was moving towards some kind of healing. You know? And I know, like, all these treatment centers, we talked about this,

Me: Yeah.

Them: They do couple stuff and they do And mean, I think it would be really helpful. I'm I'm afraid of it, really deeply afraid of it.

Me: What are you afraid of if, like, if you think she on

Them: But it's in

Me: level, basically already knows these things? Is it some specifics that you think she would be

Them: No. No. Like, I I know that she's worried

Me: Oh,

Them: because I've lied about my drinking that I've lied about affairs, and I've never had any affair. You know, So you know, no. I I I think if it was done in the right way, it would be good. It would

Me: Yeah. Yeah.

Them: it would help us move on, but it's it's scary for me.

Me: This seems important. I mean, I think, like, this to me as an external party feels like a pretty clear cut good thing to do. And I think that maybe my role in this recovery coaching relationship is to push you a little bit towards thinking about how you could articulate some of those things because I mean, even if it's just that you decide to take a, you know, a walk with her and oh, well, maybe a walk would be difficult with her knee, but maybe you say, like, let's go for a drive, and you drive somewhere, and and you just say you wanna talk to her about, you know, get some things off your chest. I think it could go so far because there's probably this

feeling like like you said, that she she's worried you're you're lying about other things.

Them: Yeah.

Me: She I you know, the lack of full ability to just trust your partner can just be so corrosive, and I think the best way to gain back trust is without being asked sharing unflattering truths.

Them: Well, that's that's what she commented on was that she feels like in periods when she thinks I've been drinking is when I'm not sharing things like you know, talking to you or having my meetings or whatever. I've, like, kept those. I mean, not lately. I mean, I've been trying to be really transparent about, like, hey. I'm talking to Alex tonight. But in the past, it's true. Like, kept that, like, kinda secret so that I can control it however I want.

Me: Is there an element of, like, you you're trying to sort of downplay just as a whole your the impact and severity of drinking to your to your wife. Like, do you feel like you're trying to okay. So I feel like I fully I didn't quite grasp that.

Them: Yeah.

Me: In our first session that I thought it was just sort of all on the table, like, she understands this is a huge fucking deal and, you know, that understands that you understand it's a huge fucking deal, but maybe not.

Them: No. I mean,

Me: Yeah.

Them: I mean, we we both understand it's a big deal, but I think that one of the things that and this is probably being kinda unfair to her. That she said a long time ago is if I lie to her, she's gonna leave me. Right? She's just gonna leave. And and she has a a really traumatic experience with that a long time ago in her life. And so I've always tried to mitigate the lying. Like, well,

Me: Right. Right.

Them: okay. And so that's come up so many times. Like, well, wait. Were you drinking? And I'm like, yes. And okay. You lied to me because you said at the time you weren't drinking. And so that dynamic just got kind of built in

Me: Yeah.

Them: so that I mean I mean, again, she she knows I have a drinking problem. She knows I've been really struggling to completely stop drinking. She knows that that's my goal. Like, it's not at this stage I have to stop drinking. I can't not I can't drink a little or whatever. So that's a big deal. Yeah. And so for me, getting caught, you know, getting caught, getting caught, there was always this fear that

Me: Yeah.

Them: it would be the end of the relationship. And I and I did I think I mentioned this. I did move out about a month back in 2019. And that's when I started the AA route, and then it it lasted for a while, and then I was drinking and then not drinking. So I I think you're right, Alex. I think that that's a

Me: I also think it's important to, like,

Them: a really important element.

Me: give yourself a little bit of not not I don't know. Not to it's not an excuse, but I do think it's very relevant that you felt like the risk associated with coming clean about any sort of lie you might have told or partial truth was significantly it was a huge risk for you because she has said that she would leave you. I think that's a really relevant piece of information and maybe when you have this conversation with her, or these conversations, and I I just think it's it's an important framing upfront is that you need to share, like, your own feeling of vulnerability that drove much of the withholding and and lying was never that you wanted to hurt her. But that it was you were genuinely afraid of losing her. And I think that might set the stage for a little more amnesty when you then wanna I don't know. Just just kind of more freely discuss things. I think maybe I don't know. I mean, do you still feel like her her sort of threat to potentially leave you if you lied to her is still sort of an active you know, that that that's an active clause in the binding relationship. You know?

Them: No. I mean, if if if she's if she's convinced that I've embraced sobriety, and is confident that I won't have relapses. If I do, relapses, that I'll be honest about it. You know, I I believe that our relationship would remain intact. You know? It's it's you know, we're so entwined with my son right now. It's like, think she feels trapped. Like, she said it many times. She she's trapped being in San Francisco because she doesn't wanna be around our son. She doesn't really want to be around me if I'm drinking. So but but I think I I think that would be a very positive step. And and in some ways, she's probably waiting for that from me knowing that

she knows I'm working with you and that I'm kind of reenergizing my commitment to smart meetings and maybe going to AA meetings. So I think she's gonna expect she would expect that. It would make sense.

Me: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I just

Them: Right?

Me: I I guess I I really think it's important. I I think that you you might be surprised by how much this unlocks. When you can really have that conversation with her and don't know. I also think it would be beneficial for me to have one session with her just forty five minutes something, just so I can kind of so she gets a sense of what I am discussing with you. And then I think she'll just feel like, okay. This is kind of like a legitimate, you know, effort that he's putting in here. If you think she would be open to that, I I would be happy to do that. Yeah.

Them: Yeah. Yeah. I I mentioned it to her, and I think she would be open. I'd wanna get a few things squared away first, you know, before you do that. But

Me: Totally.

Them: hold on. Screen's doing weird things. Sorry. Just a sec. Don't usually use Google here. Okay. Yeah. No. I think that makes a lot of sense. Sorry. So

Me: No. It doesn't look too dark. It it's like a little grainy because it's probably dark

Them: dark here. I

Me: and then compensating with the software light, but I can actually see you very well. So

Them: not gonna okay. There we go. Maybe that's a little better.

Me: Yeah. It's a little better. Nice. Yeah. Okay. Okay. Cool. Mean, because another thing that you might wanna do given that this is a very sensitive conversation you would be having you want it to kind of go well, you wanna articulate it well. I would recommend whether you ever show it to her or not, first writing like a letter, like a written version of what you wanted to talk about.

Them: Yeah.

Me: So you can get your thoughts out. Think you know, you don't wanna put your foot in your mouth in the middle of the actual conversation. It might be good to just write her a letter, and then you could give her the letter or you could, you know,



hand it to her as you have this conversation or you could not give it to her at all. It could just be totally, like, rehearsal notes for you. I think it would be, beneficial to make sure it goes smoothly.

Them: Yeah. I think that's a great idea. Probably, if I could, I I think it's something she would appreciate if I give to her because she's a a very great writer and writer of letters and

Me: Oh, that definitely seems good then. Yeah.

Them: yeah. So yeah. Yeah. Something to know I think I mentioned this last time was, like, one of these patterns of lying is way back when we first got married, I lied to her about going into debt.

Me: Mhmm.

Them: And this is, like, right when our daughter was born and I then, you know, took off. No. With her consent and went out to the back to the Balkans and did this project. And kinda left her with our daughter. I mean, they joined me for a period of time. But but in order to, like, pay back my debts and stuff, And and it did I mean, it did get me back on a career track because I moved back from Europe to San Francisco. Anyway, there's a lot of still pain associated with that. That she felt that I lied to her about my finances. It it it it you know, I left her with our daughter for a period of time. I mean, we've worked through a lot of that, I think. That's, like, kinda late this idea of, like, you lied to me You lied to me back then. You lied to me about your drinking. And she just doesn't like this lying shit. She's just a very honest person. So so, you know, that's like thirty some years ago. Right? So there's just a lot there's some wounds there that

Me: Have you ever read the book Lying by Sam Harris?

Them: are hard. I haven't. I know about it.

Me: It's really good. It's like literally like 60 pages or something. It's like a a brochure about why he thinks, you know, lying is almost always bad. And I just think that reframed it for me so much that especially for people with whom you're going to continue to have a relationship long periods of time, the more that you are trying to, like, withhold information or dilute information or, you know, change things, is usually covering up some way in which that system is already out of you know, needs to be regulated genuinely rather than just being sort of masked. And by telling the truth, it can be the hand forcing mechanism to get you to actually

align things the way they they probably would be much more stable to be aligned. Yeah.

Them: Yeah. Maybe that came up on one of our meetings. I mean, it's what we try to do in journalism. Right? Like, expose lying or untruths and, you know, shed light on something for a real conversation. So yeah, that has definitely been on my list of things to read.

Me: Yeah. Yeah. I'm sure I think the entire thing is on his blog, I wanna say.

Them: It's probably online. Right? Right.

Me: But I I'm sure you could also just find a PDF. But it's worth reading because it really, like, changed my perception of lying to my partner especially. And it might I think there might be an element here of you feel like you really believe on some level that lying is is you know, not what you wanna be doing. But I still sense that there's, like, a little bit of, like, mostly fear driven hesitation to be fully honest 100% of the time. And I don't know. I just think even being honest with your wife about that meta level you know, reflection that you're you're somewhat afraid be totally honest even though you really do believe you want to be more transparent. I think that even that can unlock a a channel of communication between you. You know?

Them: I mean I mean, we've definitely she and I have definitely talked about that issue.

Me: Yeah.

Them: Not like we never talked about that.

Me: Yeah.

Them: But I don't think we've tackled it fully. And I think it's a great suggestion, and I think the AA meetings are a really good suggestion. I will download that app and, you know, you mentioned Medicare

Me: Yeah.

Them: as well, which I will hopefully look into.

Me: I was gonna ask. Yeah. I think that would be sooner rather than later while your motivation is high. Is the time to get an naltrexone prescription because when if you start at some point in the future feeling a little bit less motivated, and you that's when you're like, oh, the last thing I wanna do is

Them: Yeah.

Me: get something that prevents me from enjoying drinking. You know?

Them: I don't I don't think that's okay. Be really surprised if that's where it land. You know, Okay. Cool. I I mean, I I do wish there was a real version of meetings. I mean, I know that you you've gathered people at some point in Golden Gate Park, but I also understand it just would be impractical. Like, you

Me: Yeah.

Them: just can't you'd need a space and blah blah blah. And and people dial in from all sorts of places. I mean, Doug is down in, I think, San Diego So

Me: Yeah. Yeah. It's tough.

Them: So it's good. I mean, your meeting's great, man. It's a great like, you do a really good job and and keep doing those one like, breakout rooms. Those are really good.

Me: Oh, yeah. Good. Good. I'm glad you you were in one with Doug last time, right, or something? Or yeah.

Them: That's how I got talking to him. And honestly, I wish you would do those every meeting because you know, I don't know. The check ins do go along, but you you need people to be able to talk. And

Me: Yeah.

Them: But those were really, really valuable, and it was only a few minutes. So

Me: Yeah. Good. Okay. That's good feedback. I I always am a little hesitant to do them because I feel like it's like a big, like, you know, ask to get people to, like, come out of their comfort zone, but then everyone likes it. So No.

Them: Everyone. I mean, I I've noticed also, I think I mentioned this before, like, a lot more people don't show their faces. Like, a lot more people are not you know, I I don't know why that is, but, like, that was a big shift from you know, like, a

Me: Yeah. I've noticed that too. I'm not sure. Maybe I'll just say something about it because I've noticed it too.

Them: five or six months ago.

Me: Yeah. I don't know. And yeah.

Them: It, to me, makes a difference. I mean, if people don't wanna because it used to be if people were only listening in or whatever, but now it's like most people aren't.

Me: Yeah. Yeah. I think I'm gonna say something about it this week.

Them: Using their cameras.

Me: Because I was thinking the same thing two weeks ago. And, yeah, I think it may it adds a lot. More people feel more comfortable sharing if they see other people's faces, and it just helps everything. So I know we're up on time. I

Them: Yep. Yeah. Sorry, man. So listen. I I got your PayPal. I don't sure I I saw that before. So I will get this to you

Me: Thank you.

Them: tonight.

Me: Yeah. I sent an email that oh, you you replied to the email. In the email, I'm pretty sure the PayPal link was there, but I put it in the calendar link.

Them: I'm sorry if I missed that. I was I I didn't

Me: No worries. No worries at all. Do you mean you might have

Them: Okay. I I think I missed or I didn't pay attention to it. So I will get that to you.

Me: missed the the email as a whole? Yeah. You should go back

Them: Well, if I responded, I didn't. But I

Me: and take a look because it it was

Them: I was gonna

Me: let's see, I guess, last Tuesday, and it

Them: Because you sent me the did you send me the

Me: yep. That's in there.

Them: you know, the contract or whatever the document is?

Me: It's on the same thread as you had previously reached out to me, the relapse advice thread. And

Them: Okay.

Me: yeah, you did say thank you, but you might have just, like, seen it really quickly and then moved on. Would take a look because in there is, like, the link for the e agreement, the esign agreement, the PayPal link for last time and today. It's I mean, it'll be the same link all the time. And then two audio clips from Waking Up app and Jason phone number is actually I I texted that to you. But then there's also, like, sort of consolidated, like, some of the things we talked about and other things you can think about that I think might be useful, if you are just, you know I don't know. Well, just sitting, listening to something you wanna just read. It might be a good time to reflect a good way to reflect. Yeah. No. No worries. No worries at all.

Them: Yeah. Okay. Great. Sorry. Missed that. Okay.

Me: Cool. When do you wanna have the next session? Do you wanna do, like I mean, I could do

Them: Cool. Cool. Thanks, Alex.

Me: potentially Thursday.

Them: Let's do third Thursday would be good.

Me: Okay. Do you wanna do, let's say, 07:30 again?

Them: That would it's a good time for me.

Me: Awesome. Okay. Great. I'll, I'll send that invite over, and then, we'll we'll chat then.

Them: Okay. And again, sorry I didn't get back to those earlier emails.

Me: Not a problem. Not a problem at all. Alright. Talk to later, Michael. Bye.

Them: K. Alright.

## Session 3

Meeting Title: Recovery session

Date: Aug 21

Meeting participants: Michael Montgomery

Transcript:

Me: Yeah. Hey, Michael. Sorry for the delayed start here. Was just sort of lost track of time in my computer here.

Them: Hey. How's it going?

Me: Hey. How's it going? Good. How are you?

Them: I'm good. I'm good.

Me: Yeah? What's what's the latest? What's the any updates or yeah.

Them: Well, I finally got into the Ash app. I'm sorry. It took me so long. It's

Me: Right. Oh, wow.

Them: I've been I've been talking to it for the last hour.

Me: Good.

Them: Trying to correct it. Reminding it that it's a machine and not a human. But it's interesting. I mean, I I did a larger look at the app, and it's it's cool. And I appreciate you for pushing it because I can totally see how this this idea of breaking the compartmentalizing that I do buy, these structures of, like, okay. You know, you're gonna be with Ash. And I'm actually carving out I'm carving out like, I don't exactly know what, but I think it's gonna be, like, a half hour in morning and a half hour in the afternoon just to deal with

Me: Nice.

Them: or do these things. And that and that other app, Reframe, is actually quite it's good. I mean, it's it's kinda like reading and

Me: It's like like resources sort of?

Them: but it's yeah, yeah, but it throws stuff at you that's, like, you would have to, like, track down or know, it's it's good. It brings it to you.

Me: Nice.

Them: Yeah.

Me: Nice. Cool. So what came up in your hour of talking to Ash?

Them: Well, nothing that's I mean, nothing that you you know, you're your outline that you emailed to me was quite

Me: No.

Them: thorough, actually, or quite good. We were just stuck on one point just a second ago. I'm not quite sure what it was, but

Me: Well, so I guess let's mean, how are you feeling about the current state of your recovery? You're, like, two weeks into this new push. What's your level of, like, optimism? Is your motivation changing in any way?

Them: It's good. It's feeling good. I, I I feel like I have a rapport with you that I I never had with my, sponsor at AA who was a great guy, but that just the whole structure of that

Me: Yeah.

Them: was just really hard. And, like, I thought last night's meeting was great. It was really and I'm I'm trying to be a little bit more engaged in the, WhatsApp.

Me: Yeah. I've noticed that. Yeah.

Them: I mean so I think for me, Alex is, like, being a little bit more busy with, like, not letting because work is always the excuse. Oh, I'm so busy. I can't I can't make the meeting or whatever. But that and and that's sometimes true. But then it does lead to

Me: Yeah.

Them: well, let's just have a drink. So I like I like all the things you outlined. I do want you to talk to my wife. I I don't know when that's gonna happen. Probably not for a couple weeks just because she's away and

Me: If we had seen

Them: but

Me: for for a while,

Them: yeah. She's I mean, it's kinda like she she just can't be around her son. I just need to make sure the door is closed. It's really, really hard because he's very know, as I told you, he's in the Manif'sphere. And he's very abusive. I mean, verbally, he's also maybe slowly getting engaged. You know, he's with the fire program at at at at City College. And maybe his brain is you know, developing. So I feel like I need I mean, she can't be around him because he is really, really, really especially abusive to her, but he can't be alone either. So, anyway, she's up there. And, and I'm here. I'm we're going up this weekend to do some things. So I'm excited about that. And then and then she'll be up there next week. And then and then we're renting it out for a few months. So she'll be back here

Me: Nice. Okay. Cool. Well, we can plan to pencil something in

Them: after Labor Day.

Me: after Labor Day. That would be

Them: Yeah. I think that's right. I think that makes a lot of sense.

Me: yeah. Cool. Okay. So what, I don't know if you were I don't know when you read over that email outline, but when you you read over over that, is there anything that, like, came up that you want to dive into more? Or,

Them: Well, yeah. I mean, it was really a good did a really good job summarizing and analyzing it. I mean, I think the we talked about last time that the idea of just getting lost and, like, what is

Me: Yeah.

Them: mean to wanna disassociate or whatever the word is? And I think I think that really that that really develop I mean, I really developed a a a behavioral pattern with that. Right? So that it wasn't just like when things were really bad, but it was just, like, when I had these issues or these challenges at work, like, just have a drink, and then you can forget about it. So it it wasn't like always about abandoning all responsibility for something. It was just about, like, coping and turning off for a few hours.

Me: Yeah.

Them: But and and I think that was true initially. And then what happened and and, again, we talked about this. Is that it became much more volatile, and I would be reactive to the in the situations, it wasn't just escape. Like, I was with people or with my family, and I would I would be reactive and angry. So I I I think just, you know, sharpening tools to avoid that because I can so quickly flip into the compartmentalizing, and I'm like, okay. I'm not with anyone right now. I'm just me, and I'm in my office. And you know, blah blah blah blah blah. And I and I and I know know that there's still the potential that I could slip back into that for a period of time. Right?

Me: Yeah. I mean, so what do you think your trying to, like, turn off from or, like, defend yourself from or give yourself some relief from when you want to turn off or get lost. Or, like, I guess I'm thinking about it almost as like a release valve. Like, there's something that

Them: Yeah.



Me: you're sure that you need to kind of relieve in some form.

Them: Well, I I also wonder whether it's a push pull where it's like,

Me: Yeah.

Them: I just wanna feel good. Yeah. I mean, sounds like I just wanna get high. Right? I wanna get, like,

Me: Yeah.

Them: just wanna elevate my so maybe it's maybe it's not always a deliberate idea that I want to escape. But that, like, oh, I can have a couple drinks and it's just gonna, like, give me this extra But there's definitely like I I think it's true though that my drinking in the last few years definitely descended into don't need just a little elevation I need I wanna drink as much as I can. I don't know, man. I I mean, I I sometimes I just think it's the the I mean, based on what I understand from you know, my AA years, like, takes its like, it it gets its own rhythm and it it takes you down. And it has its own desire. Right? And I I I wonder about that. I mean, look, My situation is is hard with my son It's created my drinking and other things has created its own thing with my wife, which is really hard. But it's not like you know, it's not like I'm in Bosnia.

Me: Yeah.

Them: Right? It's like, it's not like, all these really, really well, that's not true. Like, my marriage has been, I think, at stake. But, anyway, I think it's a push pull thing.

Me: Yeah. I also think there's I guess I I'm not sure if I'll articulate this well, but I'm thinking about it sort of through the framework of there being different reasons why you might drink at the, let's say, the beginning of a relapse or the the first sort of couple of times that you dip your toes back in, from the reasons why you continue to drink or drink it more heavily once you're well in well into

Them: I think

Me: a period of that. And I it's most important I know. Guess I haven't thought about this through this framework really much before, but I intuitively, I feel like it's most important to identify what the triggers are for the initial phase because that's what you're really trying to mostly avoid. Yeah.

Them: Right. I'm just writing this down.

Me: And I guess, I mean, in while you're writing that down, I mean, just think, like, there's probably just some hints in what you just said in terms of you you know, it's starting off as just wanting to feel good. And then it can, as it escalates, you know, be different from that.

Them: Right. Angry.

Me: Being more of you know, yeah.

Them: Unlimited, resentment, all that.

Me: Yeah. Yeah.

Them: Right?

Me: Yeah. So I don't know. I mean, let's focus a little bit on the, like, the first part, like, the early the the first dipping your toes into a relapse, you know, I think fundamentally for almost all addictions, it could be sort of abstracted back to the print fundamental principle of, like, wanting to feel different from you currently the way you currently feel or the way you tend to feel. And usually that means you wanna feel better in some way, but sometimes it it just means you wanna feel, like, less intensely.

Them: Yeah. So was thinking about one thing. We talked about this, like, when the more intensive patterns of drinking really started, which was with the idea of escape or whatever, which which was in Sarajevo. And I was thinking about that and thinking about how you know, it's like, oh, yeah. The war is awful and you're just escaping. But but in fact, I mean, I think there was some truth to that and feeling power powerlessness. Powerless. But one of the things for me, and this been reinforced throughout my whole life, was this feeling of inadequacy. I was this young guy Like, I I wasn't a fucking seasoned war correspondent. And so here I am at the Holiday Inn At Soraya with all these, like, you know, journalists who were who were very nice to me. But, like, I I felt so beneath them. Right? And I and I and I and I really think that alcohol played a role in helping me feel elevated or better. And and and and I'm saying that because that has been that has been a really big thing about alcohol. It's like, oh, like, why do I wanna get lost? Well, I'm feeling shitty because I'm not good enough to do this thing or I'm feeling inadequate. Or I'm feeling, like, neglected. And so, like, that's been a really big thing about my drinking. And so when I drink, I'm all, like, you know, confident and it you know, feeling like you know, I I've got it figured out or whatever. Although

then it does eventually escalate to anger. But but I I think that I I think that some of my drinking or some of my relapses come from that. It's not like yeah, boo. My son is really rough, but it's often like this feeling of inadequacy. And so I was thinking about that when you wanted to drill down more deeply about, like, what's about getting lost? No. It's not about, like, PTSD shit. I don't I don't think I have PTSD. It's about these weird feelings of inadequacy. And I'm like, I didn't do the best story that someone did and I whatever.

Me: And

Them: And and that's

Me: like,

Them: no. And and and and it's something that I think

Me: sorry. Go ahead. Go ahead.

Them: my mom carried of this feeling of inadequacy I I think there's something that she passed down to some of us about that. And maybe having an alcoholic father or whatever. But I've I've just been trying to explore that a little bit more like, what is it? Like, what state am I seeking? Like, where do I want to put myself?

Me: Mean, I think if you think about the the feeling of inadequacy is is could be sort of reframed as being basically or rearticulated as being, like, a feeling of you know, wishing you were better than you perceive yourself to be. And I think that often develops at a young age And then even when we are on fairly objective metrics, you know, succeeding in the ways we wanna succeed. That underlying mechanism is just there's there's some psychological and to it, and it just is difficult to slow that train down once it's been going through our whole childhood and adolescence. I wonder, like, do you feel like there's much, validity to the current let's say, reflexive, like, feelings of inadequacy that might come up in the last, I don't know, five years or something relative to the validity of, like, let's say, when you were a journalist in Sarajevo and, you know, when you were 30.

Them: You mean that might help explain the the

Me: Well, mostly, I guess, what I'm getting at is, like, maybe

Them: change in drinking habits and stuff?

Me: identifying the ways in which that pattern of feeling inadequate developed from a time when maybe you were sort of inadequate in various ways at that time

relative to what you would later go on to become. But now you it's sort of no longer serving you, that mechanism of trying to drive you to do better and try drive you to, I mean, that's the underlying force behind any desire to be better than you think you are or feel inadequate is it's psychologically motivating to then be better. And do better and accomplish more. And I think that that might have served you well in in previous chapters of life. And maybe now it's it's no longer as useful.

Them: Mhmm.

Me: That resonates.

Them: Well, that's a big that's a big idea.

Me: Yeah.

Them: Hold on a sec. Let me think about that. That's a that's a so, basically, what I hear you saying is that I mean, I'm gonna use the word ambition, but it's not really the word you were using. But this drive, to be something even though I I feel like I never became that, but in in some ways I did. Is now disturbing me because I'm at a different phase of my life. And I'm not 30 or 40 or 50, trying to prove myself I mean, that's that's been you know I went out to get a slice of pizza last night, on hate, and there were these guys. Like, these guys my age, they were gay, they were like, kinda hitting me up, like, which never ever ever happens in my life. And they're like, oh, you're so much younger. I mean, they were like, funny guys. I don't know what their story was, but they were like, they were wasted and and it got me thinking, like, I'm like, they were they were I don't know what they were doing, but they were trying to convince me that I look a lot younger than I am. Whatever. That was flattering. But it got me thinking, you know, I'm 62. Shit. Man. I'm 62. And and I and I understand. I mean, when you're 62, you do you're not 40 or 50. And if you don't understand that, it's a problem. And I understand that with my young all of my colleagues, almost all who are younger. But and and so I've been thinking a lot about that because, you know, retirement my wife's retired. And what do you do when you retire? But what I haven't what what and I've also been thinking about, well, where do you change your like, where do you change it up? I mean, I like the work I do. But like, should I have the same attitudes about the work or the same And so, I mean, I do think about that, and I do think I've been able to make some adjust adjustments. But I think you're right about like, how that reflects my relationship. To drinking and, like, like, almost like just relax. Like, you don't need to figure certain things out. They're not, like, they're not worries.

Me: Yeah.

Them: And and and I mean, I have been thinking about that. Like, I can I'm just I was talking to my wife yesterday. I mean, I we all do maybe, but I still have these dreams. Like, I wake up or I'm I'm I'm in a dream, and I'm in college.

Me: Yeah.

Them: And studied And I don't even know where my room is and I don't know what room number and the dorm I'm in. And I don't know my locker number. Right?

Me: Yeah.

Them: Crazy shit. I still have those dreams. I just had that dream the other day. And then you wake up,

Me: Yeah.

Them: Alex, you're way too young. You wake up and I'm like, oh, shit. I don't have to worry, like, oh, the finals are done. I graduated. And, like, wait. I didn't just graduate. I'm like, 62 years old. No.

Me: That is hilarious. Yeah. I I think that does indicate something about the longevity or the durability of these underlying psychological, like, mechanisms that that prove some use at some phase of our life. And and to, you know, to be as sort of charitable to the younger version of yourself as possible, I think, like, there is a lot of advantage to sort of having an a baseline feeling of not quite being fully adequate just so it drives you to be a little better. Because it does open up a lot more doors when you are more successful at, you know, 30 and then 40, and it o continues to open up more spaces. But I think as you get later in life and especially closer to retirement, like, the the returns on any potential, like, massive improvement in performance are gonna be not what they would have been at 30. You don't have as much time to realize them in your remaining career years. And I wonder if that could just if you could just sort of meditate on that and and let that sort of release some of the pressure from the whole system.

Them: Yeah. No. I mean, no. You're you're definitely getting in some areas that are important to me and I've been thinking about and are helpful. I mean, I've been trying to mean, it's true. I mean, it's definitely true. I mean I mean, I've been trying to you know, destress about certain things that I don't need to worry about. Or, like, things skills I've obtained, like things I can do that I don't need to like worry so

much about because I could have the confidence that I can do them. And also, you know, this idea of being like, a helpful mentor or whatever. I mean, I still I still fall into the stupid trap of, like, I'm sick 62. Thinking people will say, oh god. I can't believe that. You know? Like, we were at a thing last night, near the office. And I didn't fall into it, but I'm like, aware that, like, all my colleagues are in their thirties. But they're respectful. Like, they have relationships with

Me: Yeah.

Them: people my age. It's not like crazy. So I I I think I'm not freaked out by that. I'm not freaked out by being my age. My wife's older than I am, as you know. And but but it is true. Like, like, deescalating. Like like like, just piling back

Me: Yeah. Yeah.

Them: on the things that aren't important. Is really helpful. So that's that's some really good insight, Alex. For a young guy.

Me: It seems hard to much harder to remove things that you determine to be important than it is to tell yourself some new thing is also important

Them: Right.

Me: to care about. It's easy to add shit to your bucket, and and it's when you've had those things in your bucket for a long time, very, very hard to take them out. And, yeah, I don't know. I guess it's just I when I went to this inpatient like, you know, depression facility in Texas in 2019. They were talking about, like,

Them: Yeah.

Me: I remember one therapist was talking about how, like, some people come in to that facility at 65, and they've had some basically operating system that they've been using to go through life for five years, and it worked well for sixty five years. And then circumstances changed, and it no longer serves them well, and they need to adapt and change their whole sort of you know, heuristic for going through life. And,

Them: Yeah.

Me: I think that's there there's some truth to that, and and it doesn't always come at 65. I mean, think for me, it did happen at, like, 25. There was a a big shift in terms of what had served me before and what serve me later. And yeah, I guess I don't know if that resonates. Like, if there's if this is, like, a sort of inflection point.

Them: I I I think

Me: Potentially for you.

Them: I think that that makes a lot of sense. I mean, I think my drinking definitely started changing, you know, ten years ago. And then whatever the year was six years ago, I with with with those, you know,

Me: Yeah.

Them: the the the the point where I I I started AA, And, yes, I mean, my relationship to alcohol definitely changed as I hit middle age. I mean, that's just true. Like, that's the exact chronology there.

Me: What do you think that that's about?

Them: And

Me: Like, what do you think were the main reason what about your life changed in middle age such that drinking became a more useful, least in the short term, coping mechanism than it had been before. Or a more necessary one.

Them: I think it's complicated. I think that I got I got I got that's my son. I got laid off in 02/2008. Maybe there's some correlation to when but but I'm not sure about that. But I did get laid off and then but I I I got a new job. My daughter left the house leaving us to or son who's very volatile. Maybe my relationship with my wife shifted a little bit. In terms of intimacy. I mean, it's I think I think professionally, was in this like, this transition where I had to kind of reestablish myself. That that all happened in this period when think the drinking really started going up again. I I'm trying to think about like, I used to play a lot of squash, you know, down at US

Me: Oh, yeah.

Them: UCSF, you know, the the the Baker Campus And and maybe I slowed down on my fitness. I'm not quite sure. But those are a few factors I don't think those are all factors. But, dude, I mean, I was, you know, 50. I was 50. That's exactly when was turning 50, and I don't remember having a midlife crisis per se. But, you know, you turn 50 and you do start like, thinking about things. And I think I continue to think, well, I'm 50, but fuck. I'm 30, really. Right? Like, everyone sees me as 30. And and and I think, you know, legacy of my dad is alcoholic and legacy of family issues. I think I think I think midlife was a big

Me: Mhmm.

Them: big factor.

Me: Do you think you got to mid middle age and then felt like you wished you, at that point in your life, had achieved more or or something like that?

Them: I don't think so. I had had you know, I was really lucky I mean, I'm sure I felt like I was inadequate. Like, I'm not whatever the fuck I've done, I'm not, like, The New York Times. I'm not whatever. I'm sure there was some

Me: Yeah.

Them: there's always inadequacy there. But I had had some pretty rich experiences that I was proud of, you know, Bosnian and and I I I I like my marriage. I love my daughter. I love my son. You know? He's adopted. So it's comp it's complicated. Not so it's complicated. It's just complicated.

Me: Yeah.

Them: You know, I I I I think that even before my drinking escalated, it was a fact in our family interactions. I mean, I would I would get drunk and be at dinner table and be volatile when my son misbehaved. So that that's a factor going way back. Like, like, before, you know, before I started, you know, really drinking a lot more.

Me: Yep.

Them: And so there's the pain of that, There's the feelings of guilt. There's this feeling of hiding it. I mean, I wasn't hiding my drinking back then so much, but I was hiding its effect on me family.

Me: And it also I mean, I think hiding is a is just very corrosive and and and you know, the longer you are hiding things, the more you drift you can drift away even in relation to your own self from what you feel like

Them: Right.

Me: is, like, authentic and I I don't know. I I just I've it makes me think again about that letter that you could write to your wife. Were had you thought about that anymore?

Them: I have. I have. And I'm gonna write it. I'm just

Me: Yeah.

Them: not ready yet, but it scares the shit out of me. But I I

Me: Yeah.



Them: a great idea. It's a fantastic idea. It you know, I mean, sorry. Hold on a sec. You know, it's it's it's it's kind of

Me: Yeah. No worries.

Them: just that. It's kind you know, it's embedded in the AA process. In a way, not necessarily letter, but

Me: The amends.

Them: yeah, the amends. And

Me: Yeah.

Them: I think it's really important. I think it's important for her to know where I'm at, and it's important for me to be able to take those things

Me: Yeah.

Them: But it's also scary. You know?

Me: Definitely. Definitely. I mean, how much do you feel like you are currently still needing to, let's say, withhold like, maybe as a percentage relative to how much you were you needed to lie to cover your tracks when you were in the, like, the heat of a, you know, relapse of years ago or whatever. Or or more recently even. Like, what are you still feeling like you can't be fully transparent or truthful about?

Them: I don't think I can I don't feel like I be fully truthful about the past with my about

Me: Yeah.

Them: how much I was drinking, about, you know, I mean, I she knows but I I I feel very uncomfortable about that because it it it it is betrayal? I mean, I was I was lying to her. That that layer of lying is really is really heavy. And then beyond that, I mean, I think that you know, I don't I don't I don't share with her all of my feelings about our relationship or what my drinking has done to our relationship or what our relationship has become, which is you know, You know? We're we're not you know, we don't have a physical relationship right now. So that's hard. And so those are really hard things.

Me: Yeah.

Them: And know, she's got she's got physical issues right now with her knee, and she's just and and mental issues with feelings of rejection. She's a filmmaker who

does great work, but like, she's got all these issues that some of which are parallel to me feeling inadequate. So it's kind of hard time, you know, to at the same time, you know, she's she's really hoping that I can turn things around and that work I'm doing with you can really get me consistently on this path of sobriety. And I think, you know, like a lot of spouses, she's exhausted from like, oh, I'm doing great. To, like, well, you know, and then hiding it is, like, just further complicates that. And and and that's something I developed that that was truly corrosive as as as you would say. Like, really, really corrosive.

Me: Yeah. It's also just I mean, it's it's even corrosive internally to feel like you need to like, you can't fully come clean about the extent of your previous drinking. I can imagine that being a very heavy burden. Of I mean, you just imagine what the world would be like if your wife was completely accepting of you coming clean about, you know, exactly how much you had been drinking and the full intensity of it. And you knew that she was going to welcome that with open arms and empathy. And think about the relief you would feel in that moment. I mean, if you really try to imagine, like, how you would feel if she knew all of that and still accepted you and loved you, knowing all of that information, I think if you can if you if you can embody that experience and imagine that, and if that feels, like, very relieving, I think that's an indicator that it might be doing more work, negative work than than you might have previously realized. I don't know if fully made sense, but, mean, if

Them: It made sense. I just can't imagine that, Alex, honestly.

Me: Yeah. So

Them: I mean, I yeah.

Me: very

Them: The feeling of relief would be great, but I can't imagine that. And and that's just my own head, I'm sure. She she would she would she would she would totally appreciate honesty The the issues that's come up and it and it's deep seated in her from other relationships is that like, if I lied to her, and I'm now, like, talking about other lies. Like, where did the lies end? You know? And how can she be confident that that I wouldn't lie again? So it's it's a I mean, you're right. You're right. I mean, there needs to be a moment when I can just like, explain to her my history and but but I think that I I I think that that would be more authentic if I and she were convinced that I'm on a real road to sobriety, that I'm not like like, the

likelihood of me lapsing is much less And I think that kind of where I'm at now. Like, if I if I'm if I feel really confident that I've done the work to to understand a lot of things and be confident that whatever shit comes down, I'm not gonna you know, go drink a pint of vodka, then it would be easier.

Me: Yeah. So how confident are you right now? I mean, what's your level of confidence in the stability of your recovery, I guess? Like like, is there still in the back of your mind this worry that, like, your motivation might wane six months from now and you would

Them: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, it might I'm concerned that, you know, like, this was a really busy week of work, and I you know, I was able to get to the gym once, but it wasn't like like, all this stuff is going on, and there's people here, you know, I'm working with. I and and jeans away, and I had to deal with Beau. So short term, yeah, I mean, with you being in these meetings, but, like, I don't I don't yet see a clear confident picture that like, at some point, I would recompartmentalize and just like

Me: Yeah.

Them: whatever fucking reasons, just start drinking again. You know? I'm not confident about that.

Me: Yeah. This is sort of somewhat as an aside, but, I mean, I'm just thinking about compartmentalization and the opposite of that being basically, like,

Them: Yes.

Me: And I wonder if you can if there's any work to be done around thinking about whatever your compartmental compartmentalizing, how you can actually integrate that all into a unified psychological space that is your mental life and and your

Them: Yeah. Yeah. You you kind of talked a little bit about that in your notes and and with this app. And with a with a kind of daily ritual, mean, I I used I would resist that. Well, like, with AA, and and it was probably because I wanted, just in case, to have this outlet of it. Like, I start drinking again, I'm not gonna be, like, disrupting But I do think a more rigorous a a a more structure would be really helpful. Using these apps, having a, like, a daily routine where there's a morning check-in and a

Me: Yeah.

Them: and a noon. Like, I I think that would help a lot. I I think that, what my sorry, alcoholic mind looks for is no structure. No commitment. So, hey. You know, if opportunity presents itself, if I need to go to the store anyway, I can get you know, some vodka. So I think, like, structure is is really useful at least in the in the short and mid term.

Me: Yeah. Yeah. And I think one thing that I see I think is worth mentioning again that would just go so far towards increasing the stability of your recovery and increasing you both your confidence and your wife's confidence that it's gonna stick is

Them: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So

Me: getting a naltrexone prescription and and

Them: so I don't I don't actually have. So I've been I switched medical plans, I don't have a doctor at the moment. So I've got it yet on, you know, one medical

Me: It's a great one. Yeah.

Them: or whatever and get that yeah. I I think I'm gonna do that. And it it makes sense to me. I did a little research on it today. I'm not worried about side effects, but I agree with you. That's a good recommendation and it is I think at my age, it's totally fine.

Me: Yeah. I think it can also just feel like this safety net underneath you that, like, you you just feel more, confident and comfortable and kind of relaxed in your recovery because you know that you can't get drunk. You know? And and, especially with the injected once monthly, formulation. But even if you are just really good about taking it every day,

Them: It does it it it makes you sick or it just doesn't

Me: it just both. It it I think people get somewhat, like, nauseous and and don't feel good but also it prevents the, like, euphoric kind of giddy aspects of alcohol.

Them: It's

Me: Yeah.

Them: breaks up the you're right.

Me: Yeah. So, yeah, I mean, I think that's an important piece. I mean, we have, like, can go, you know, five minutes over saying that we joined five minutes late. I

joined five minutes late. But I I wonder, like, what do you feel like maybe we haven't talked about tonight or haven't talked about it yet or over the course of the three sessions at all? Anything that you feel like has maybe come up in your thoughts recently that we could touch on for the last few minutes?

Them: No. I I I mean, I just, again, really appreciated your notes. And reread those today, started this app I'm only at the beginning.

Me: Does the Ash app have like, the check-in notifications built in?

Them: It does. I've just said I I I'm I'm on some I don't know if I can skip ahead, but I like, it's right now, like, doing these questions with me and

Me: Maybe that's new. I I didn't go through that onboard

Them: oh, yeah. Oh, it's very rigorous. Like,

Me: What?

Them: oh, yeah. Yeah. It's like an interview, an intake.

Me: Wow.

Them: It does definitely have that daily, like, option, and I know, I'll figure a way to do that. In the morning. I'm I'm not maybe I should be. I'm not a big meditation guy, but I I do like to work out in the gym and walk and whatever. But I'm I'm again, I haven't worked out in two days now. I did join. So down where we work so we're at Southern Kearny, that far from Montgomery, Bart. It's a twenty four hour fitness right there, which I don't love. But, it's like

Me: Really?

Them: \$28 a month for me. Old guy old guy, we get benefits. And so I'm like, fuck. I mean, it's I love going to USF. But they cut you off at two in the afternoon on weekdays if you're a you're not a student. It's a great facility. Like, there's a lot of days I I like I'm busy, and then I can't get there. So I joined the twenty four Hour Fitness days when I can go there in the afternoon after work. So I I did that. Yeah. It's good. Like, the gym thing is really important to me. We talked about it, like, that's something that's in me. This this this the endorphins and this feeling of working out is really important.

Me: When you work out out of do you listen to podcasts? Do you listen to music? Do you listen to nothing? You just work out?

Them: Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. So I've got a

Me: Yeah.

Them: circuit workout. I'll send it to you. You're like, you're a big

Me: Definitely likes it.

Them: guy. Right? Oh, no. No. No. No. No. You're you're far beyond. But it's a it's a workout I found in the Wall

Me: Yeah.

Them: Street Journal. It's a circuit thing where you you do a series of of, you know, pull ups, different things, and then you jump rope

Me: Wow.

Them: on breaks. So it's like it's like a half hour workout. And for me, it's really great because I often just don't have more time than that. And it's they use it for, like, recovery, like, soccer players who come back from injuries or whatever. But it's a good workout for me. The jump roping is great because I I'm not able to run right now, my knees and whatever. But you gotta get your heart rate going. And

Me: Yeah.

Them: you know, if I'm just jumping around, it feels weird. But if I'm, like, jumping rope, it's fantastic.

Me: Yeah. That's a great tip. I haven't jumped rope since, like, elementary school. Feel

Them: Yeah. No. It's good. It because there's a little coordination

Me: Yeah.

Them: a little risk work involved. I'll I'll send you the workout, but I think

Me: Yeah. Yeah.

Them: beyond it you know,

Me: Nice. Nice. Cool. Well, so what are you, what what do you wanna do next week? Do you wanna do again Tuesday, Thursday? Or what did we have? Monday, Thursday? I think it was Tuesday, Thursday. Right? No. We did Monday, Thursday. Monday, Thursday again?

Them: Yeah. Let me just think about that. Yeah. Let's do that. I mean, this time works really well for me because, you know, the work hours are long past. So let's let's keep going, and let's see where I'm at.

Me: Yep.

Them: Let's see if I can get back into the exercise routine. And then and then let's talk about maybe after the holiday of, you know, talking to my wife. And and and she really

Me: Nice.

Them: look forward to it.

Me: Great. That'd be great. Also, can, well, maybe the easiest would just be to let me know what what time would work for her and and what email

Them: Yeah.

Me: address and yeah.

Them: Yeah.

Me: Yeah. Kinda cool. Through you.

Them: Yeah.

Me: Cool. Okay. Is there anything else that you wanna I mean, I I wanna make sure we're at least giving you, like, four extra minutes here. But, is there

Them: It's good. Just

Me: Yeah.

Them: you know, lot going on at work, but it's not nothing bad. We had a nice we had a reporter I'm working with who's based in Europe who was in town, we you know, a bunch of us, including my editor in chief and CEO, we went out. So behind us is this there's like an alley. It's like you know what it's like down there. They're like Irish bank. I know if you've ever been there. Anyway, it's a bar. And it was warm yesterday. And so because this guy was in I organized, you know, just an after drinks thing after after office. And it was really nice. And I had a, you know, nonalcoholic beer and he actually had a nonalcoholic beer and I'd there was none of this weird pressure of, like, getting sloshed. You know? It felt really good. And it was just a nice nice gathering. It felt really good.

Me: Nice. Nice. That's that's don't know. That's that's just like a it's something to note and be grateful for that that that

Them: Well, that's

Me: can be possible now.

Them: And this idea I mean, it's really true. I mean, I I don't go to I've never really gone to bars. But this acceptance of nonalcoholic beer or mocktails or whatever, it's like at least when I'm ever out, it's, like, so widespread that it's it's nice. You know?

Me: Yeah. I think just for a variety of reasons, not just addiction,

Them: Right.

Me: lots of people don't drink alcohol. And much higher number than I think people who drink alcohol think it is.

Them: No. No. No. It's true. It's like a problem.

Me: Yeah.

Them: The industry, it's like they could have to come up with

Me: Yeah.

Them: with some marketing thing. Okay. So we'll on Monday then.

Me: Yeah. I'll send you invites. I'll just set them to recur every week, but you can let me know, you know, as long as it's, like, couple days in advance if you wanna switch one of those days anytime. But let's plan on Monday, Thursday, 07:30 to 08:15, and, I'll I'll see you on Monday. Oh,

Them: How do you get that light effect? Like, what kind of light do you have there? Because I'm all green mirrors that, like, have one of these these

Me: No. It's completely just my computer screen light.

Them: doughnut light things?

Me: And the background light that that's coming in at an angle is just the image in the background.

Them: I gotta figure that out because my my lighting is not working here.

Me: No. It looks it looks good. Look. You look pretty clear. Yeah.



Them: Yeah. Okay. Alright. Talk to you later. Thanks.

Me: Alright. Thanks, Michael. Bye.

## Session 4

Alex Libre: All right. Jeez.

Michael Montgomery: So weird.

Alex Libre: All right. Hey, Michael.

Michael Montgomery: Hey man, how you doing?

Alex Libre: Good. Sorry. I have no idea. That was like something on my end my computer or something with Google Meet. But I ended up trying to solve both angles and now solve. So here we, here we are. But delay.

Michael Montgomery: Oh, no problem at all. No problem.

Alex Libre: Can. Can you. Can you go till 5:30, like, like, or like pushing back 15 minutes?

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, it could be hard, but maybe we can just, you know, we can.

Alex Libre: Just next time or whatever. Yeah, we can just short today and either charge you less or whatever you.

Michael Montgomery: Could we do that? Cool. Cool.

Alex Libre: Okay. Okay. Great. Great. All right. Sweet. Sweet. So just take a second and kind of assess where you're at. What would you say is the current status of recovery and. Yeah. How's it been since we last talked?

Michael Montgomery: It's been. It's been good. I mean, no drinking. You know, definitely sometimes when I would have liked to how the same damn feelings of, you know, the damage I've caused can be recovered or re healed and so what the right. You know, especially with my wife, you know, I just feel like, I mean you know, not neither of us had given up, but I just, I just get down about thinking about the past and, and, and I, and I, and I. And I really think that, that. I mean, I know we've talked about it, but, and, and, and, and this may just be a, an umbrella idea for something, but this idea of, of really just feeling really shitty and really wanting to drink because, you know, just feeling down on myself or, or just feeling like there's no going back. Yeah, I'm not articulating.

Alex Libre: No, no, I am picking up sounds like you feel like sort of, sort of overwhelmed, hopeless by how much negative effects have. Have you've caused in the past from your drinking. It sort of feels like stopping drinking now barely

move the needle in the like grand scheme. How much damage.

Michael Montgomery: Well, I know, I know that. I mean I, I know and I feel the effects of stopping drinking. But somehow what has happened, you know, now and then over the last few years is I just slipped back into that way of thinking and I, I think, you know, one of the things that I said at the outset is I need to be consistently sober. I can't do, you know, I can't. I can't go back and forth and, and so, you know, I generally feel good and I, and I do feel excited and I do feel like my wife and I are healing. But you know, my drinking went on a long, long time. You know, it's, you know, it covered many years and I, I've been reflecting. I mean, I, I have, I, I've. Ash has been on hold, but this other reframe. Yeah, it, it, you know, it sends you a lot of readings, and maybe ash does that too, but it's been really helpful. But it's just gotten me to think about, you know, how long my drinking went and, and different impacts that had on my kids. So, I mean, obviously I need. I need to do some more direct recovery work with my wife. You know, we. We do talk about things, but, you know, is it. Do. I don't know. I mean, do, you know, do I need. Anyway, I'm just saying that that is in my head a lot.

Alex Libre: Do you think, like, there's a value rationally exploring, like, the sort of idea of, like, it because, you know, there's so much damage, like, I might as well drink now?

Michael Montgomery: Like.

Alex Libre: Do you think that on some level you really, really do sort of believe that it is sort of like, Like a might as well, you know, you know, might as well drink now? Or do you think when you think about it, like, there are significant positive things that will come from this inconsistent sobriety moving forward, and it's sort of like it's really not a fuck it situation? I don't know if I articulate that well. Do you think that your initial sort of reflexive desire to just drink in response to the magnitude of, you know, your past, let's say, do you think when you really think about it rationally and try to be as logical as possible, do you think that there actually is sort of a case we made for the idea that, like, too much damage has been caused and it really is like a wash now you might as well just drink? Or do you feel like that's not rational and there's more of an irrational emotional response coming in?

Michael Montgomery: Oh, no, I agree with that. It's not rational. I mean, I think part of it is also. I mean, I suppose there's probably a correlation between the times I'm feeling, that is the times I'm feeling frustrations with whatever in my present. And so there's a connection between feeling down about something or feeling frustrated with something or, you know, feeling that my son's never going to

change or improve or that my relationship with my wife will never recover. And then I flip into that thinking. I mean, it may also just be that I'm in a down moment and whatever multiple triggers they are. I want to drink enough. I want. I have. I desire a drink so much that you know, I'm gonna do it. I mean, you know, I think, you know, I think the other factor, you know, which is huge and huge in, in the way I drank and was just being secret about it, you know, that's not healthy. And I was talking to, in our breakout group with Mike Christian.

Alex Libre: Oh yeah, yeah.

Michael Montgomery: You know, he was talking about. He's, he, he hit a hard bump there. That was, that was. But that he's always been able to be open with his wife about the drinking and so when he does relapse, it's not a shock, you know that. So this break, those breakouts are great, man. I, I really, I really support you doing those. It's. Yeah, I, you know, I've talked to this before. It's different to be talking to the group than just be talking to one person.

Alex Libre: Totally, totally. And, and everyone can be having this one experience at the same time. Yeah, Yeah. I, I think I'm going to do it like almost every week, maybe somewhere and I think it'll be a little bit longer for people to really have the time to do it. Do you feel, I, I assume you feel like even now you couldn't change your transparency with your wife to be more like Mike is with his wife because it's just, it's not the relationship you have welcomed.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, I mean, it's, it's a really good and obvious question. I mean, she and I talked about this. We've talked about it many times. And I mean, you know, there was this dynamic a long time ago. If you lie to me, I'm gonna, I'm gonna leave. I can't. And she, and she has this whole history of horrible childhood history of being, you know, abused by men who lied and cheated. And so, you know, if I think it's true that, that definitely my lying about my drinking obviously meant that I wasn't talking where they're about my drinking. And that's a huge problem. It's shifting, it's shifted, but I mean that's definitely shifted, but it's not completely shifted, right?

Alex Libre: Yeah, yeah, yeah, that makes sense. So what do you think is like the most likely scenario? Not scenario. What do you think the most likely sequence of events that would potentially play out in the future that would result in like sort of full blown relapse for you? Like would it be just like some negative stacking of things with your son? Things, working things, and then you just feel overwhelmed and retreat and start sort of thinking about drinking for a few days and then you just go drink and can pick up a bottle or something like a plausible sort of change.

How realistically can make this in terms of what is like a threat to your recovery in the future?

Michael Montgomery: Right.

Alex Libre: And I know this is sort of a vivid.

Michael Montgomery: No, no, no, I'm thinking about that. I, I think my emotional life and my life in general means, needs, needs more stability and consistency. Um, you know, I think, I think getting into a much, much more consistent routine. You know, I've been trying to, for example, I'm, I'm trying to find a way to devote like at least a half hour every morning or every day to these apps that I'm looking at, you know, like really devoting very specific time to like my recovery time. And I haven't been consistent about that at all. You know, I think that you're being really helpful. Like you know, like the obvious thing of being busy in the afternoons and evenings, having things planned so that I, you know, that you know, whether there are other meetings or other, other smart recovery meetings or an AA meeting here or there or doing things with my wife, that. The thing that's. So to kind of answer your question, the thing that's most dangerous is when I'm idle and alone.

Alex Libre: Okay, okay, okay.

Michael Montgomery: Those are the two, those are the two things.

Alex Libre: Because there's an element where you've repeatedly talked about wanting consistency, specifically regarding your consistency, which is routines and good habits. Habits. And that is related to this idea of not being idle in terms of having things scheduled. But it's not exactly the same because you could have like a, or it could be scheduled every week, different things that occupy your time and you'd be not idle also not in routine. That makes sense.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Alex Libre: And I think like there's element here, like what I'm hearing from you is that you really, really feel like you should be dedicating like the 30 minute day to day and you should be working out more regularly. You should be doing all these things and like you have, you have this like pressure that you're putting on yourself that I don't know if it's like really the most helpful mindset, I guess, or framing. Because there might be a world in which you tell yourself, you know what? I'm going to stick to non drink drinking, but I'm just going to be as easy going as possible about what that looks like. Besides not drinking, whatever else feels right. I'm gonna do that. If I wanna work out and do that. If I don't wanna use the ass for a whole week, I'm just gonna spend Time doing other things. Like, I wonder if that light treading more lightly would be beneficial.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Alex Libre: Or like tough love with yourself is more, you know.

Michael Montgomery: Well, I mean, working out is. I mean, look, I've. I've. You know, I mean, that's something I have in me. And I've said this before, it goes way back. I mean, I've been active in sports since. Since I was a kid. I always liked going to the gym. I find that when I can do it consistently, like when I'm not doing it consistently, then, you know, I'm getting old. It's, like, painful. It's like, hard to go in and even. Even do, oh, I meant to send you that workout.

Alex Libre: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Michael Montgomery: So. But. But when I am working out consistently, I mean, I feel better about myself in just about every way. So I don't think that's like being hardcore in myself. It's true. There is a little bit. Like, I remember when I was going to a lot of AA meetings, and it was kind of like occupying all my thinking. You know, it's like, when you're thinking about recovery all the time, you're also thinking about drinking.

Alex Libre: Very, very true. Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: And that's why, like, that was one of the things that really turned me off of AA is like, these horror stories that people tell. It's like, fuck, man, that's like such a downer. I mean, they weren't ultimate downers because the people in recovery, but you heard some crazy shit. I mean, there's a. There's a meeting up on Alamo Square. I think it's Wednesday nights. I mean, there was some wild fucking. I think I'm repeating myself.

Alex Libre: I think, no, no, you didn't go to prison.

Michael Montgomery: And so those kind of like. Whereas, like, the meeting I've mentioned before out in on Arguello is like, just has a different vibe to it.

Alex Libre: And you already went to that once.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, yeah. And it went to a different one that's out at California Pacific at the. In the.

Alex Libre: In the hospital.

Michael Montgomery: So.

Alex Libre: So how was that, the vibe? That one?

Michael Montgomery: It was good. I had. It was. What's the. It's kind of intellectual like that. That meeting. And I remember this from before, some, like, super sharp people are there and they get into, you know, a lot of discussions of psychology and philosophy. So definitely a different vibe than the Alamo Square.

Alex Libre: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: And I mean, it's really true that different AA meetings have different vibes. There's the one I used to go to down by golf. It's a big one down in a church down there. And anyway, the. The thing is, they feel very programmatic and, you know, but it. But it's. It. I'm happy to be doing that. It's good. It's good for me to be meeting people in person, you know, that's really, really helpful. So much of our lives. So much of my work life is on zoom. We do have an office now, so those don't feel. I mean, you know, I want to be working. It makes me feel better.

Alex Libre: So I think that's the key. Like. Like, shift is cliché and, you know, therapy speak, but, like, reframing from I should work out to, like, I just genuinely want to work out. Like, I think this is what is going to be the best thing for me, and therefore, I want to do it. And I. And I genuinely sort of look forward to it.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah. Well, okay. So that's another thing that I'm. You mentioned a shift, so I have been feeling a shift in talking to you, in going to the smart meetings. It's like, I used to dread those AA meetings. It just made me feel shitty. I. I didn't believe in the process, really. I didn't believe in all the steps. And so I am. So I had started feeling differently. I'm trying to lean into that. Like, hey, I'm actually looking forward to this. Like, I'm not. I don't feel. I don't need to feel guilty about it.

Alex Libre: Right.

Michael Montgomery: Maybe with my wife, I do, but with you or the other people in that group, I. I don't need to feel that. And so I won't feel that. Yeah, and that's. That's been really good to me. Like, God, this is helping me. And it's fun, right?

Alex Libre: Yeah. Yeah. Because I think, like, one of the big threats to your recovery is, like, this basically sort of could reduce down to, like, a level of shame or guilt about the past and about, you know. You know, feeling you should either in the present be doing things differently than you are, or in the past, you should have done things differently than you've done them. And I think that, like, one of the best ways to safeguard your recovery moving forward is try to reduce the amount of time that you spend thinking, I should be doing something differently now I should be doing something differently, I should be acting differently. Any sort of thing that you feel like you should be doing differently is a risk and a threat to your recovery because it could stack up and make you feel sort of hopelessly overwhelmed, and then you get into territory that's really good.

Michael Montgomery: That's A really good observation. I just wrote that down.

Alex Libre: What did you write? Like how did you articulate it or how are you thinking about what I just said? Because I felt like I sort of rambled.

Michael Montgomery: Time that you think about or say I should and I underline should be doing something as if it's an obligation.

Alex Libre: Right, right, exactly.

Michael Montgomery: I mean, it's, you know, when we were doing a lot of therapy with my son years ago, you know, the whole should thing, you know, we tried to remove that from our vocabulary. There's been a, I mean, a lot of people talk about that, you know, so I, I think really trying to lean into the positivity of, of recovery.

Alex Libre: And feel genuinely, genuinely aligned with, with the direction of your life. I think that's really important. It's like feeling like the things you're doing are the things you believe you should be doing on some level. Sort of. All things considered, this is the life you want to be living and these are the steps you want to be taking. And anytime you feel like that's out of whack or you feel like you're doing something just because you feel like you should be doing it or you're thinking yourself should be doing something, not doing both of those things are risky, I think. You know.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, I have to think hard about whether I feel like my life is in alignment or not. I mean, you know, as, you know, as, you know, I'm 62. That's a big moment. You know, my wife's older, as you know, she's retired and by the way, is that.

Alex Libre: No, no, no.

Michael Montgomery: Well, I mean, in an ideal world, I would, you know, I've been at the center for investigative reporting 16 years now. I've been working as a journalist 36 years. But I, you know, I like what I do. I'm glad we're mission driven, you know, especially with what the world is right now. But you know, in an ideal world, I would shift to a more project based work, maybe not work full time for them, but boy, that's not a. In the world of like journalism and audio and stuff, you know, that it's a, it's a shitty world out there right now in terms of work opportunities. So if I could.

Alex Libre: Well, I mean, podcasting seems like it's sort of booming. I mean, I mean, that's different though.

Michael Montgomery: I'm talking about like journalism and investigating. A lot of podcasts have folded it. Entertainment, certain kinds of podcasts, definitely.

Alex Libre: But like, like the investigative journalistic podcasts are not booming, I think.

Michael Montgomery: No, no. And anyway, so, you know, maybe that'll happen. I

could, you know, get some contracts, but it wouldn't be full time. But I would imagine I will be in this job for the next couple few years, which isn't that far away. And.

Alex Libre: Sorry, I think I kind of, for a second we were talking about, you know, and, and I think we're sort of going in about life alignment.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, well, you know, she's at a different phase of her life and, and whenever I retire, it's not that far away or I transition. And so I'm trying to. And that's scary if you don't really have anything in mind about what you want to do after that because, you know, you lose your identity as through work. And so, yeah, know, that's definitely on my mind. And, and it's going to be really important to have a super strong and healthy relationship with my wife going into this transition. But, but so to think about my life being in alignment, you know, I know I should just focus that in the present, but it's hard for me to not think about the future as well. Where I want to be. Where do I want to be in three or five years? It's not a bad question to ask. And, and so, you know, and, and, and, and I really appreciate you saying that. Getting away from what I think I should be doing in the future. So, so I don't know. But, you know, when I was 52 or 42, I. I wasn't thinking as intensively about this stuff. And it can also be a little depressing getting older, you know, so.

Alex Libre: No, I mean, you've brought on like, like, you know, your age and sort of aging, like a common theme in your thoughts these days or at this stage. And like, you know, it seems important.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah. And I, I don't think it's. I mean, I think it's pretty natural.

Alex Libre: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: I think different people respond to it differently.

Alex Libre: How are you responding to it?

Michael Montgomery: How am I. I have different responses. Sometimes I get depressed. Sometimes I'm like, okay, you know, you're not going to be working. Like, you know, I still have these dreams. I probably told you this. Maybe you have. I still have these dreams where I wake up.

Alex Libre: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Michael Montgomery: And I was like. And I'm like, oh, you know, finals. I don't have finals anymore. I'm done with college. I'm like, wait, I'm not. I'm 62. I'm like, so it just is. I can, I can. My mind can shift in different ways in terms of how I think about it, I can get really excited. I'm like, man, we.



Alex Libre: Can you do whatever you want.

Michael Montgomery: We, you know, we're financially secure, you know, unless there's some catastrophes. So we live in a beautiful city. Right. I mean, San Francisco's a beautiful city. And. Wait, you're in Marin?

Alex Libre: No, my office is in the city. Where are you in 21st stop Central. Rich mentioned.

Michael Montgomery: Oh, that's right. Yeah. Yeah. Great area.

Alex Libre: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: So, like, so. So, like, am I happy with where I live? Yes. Are we financially secure? Yes. Do I love my wife? Yes. Do I like my job? Yes. In many ways, I get a lot of satisfaction from it. So, you know, so what's the problem?

Alex Libre: I guess, you know, what still feels so bad that it outweighs those things and makes you Occasionally. Occasionally makes you want to drink?

Michael Montgomery: Because it's. Because I feel shitty about myself.

Alex Libre: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: And this is a really good way to frame it. Yes. It's very much how I feel about myself and how I feel about my past and my history of lying to my wife, especially. And I mean, it. You know, Ash, I was. They were. I was in this whole AI thing with Ash, and they were. You know, they broke it all down. I. I could look it up, but, you know, and it was like, well, do you want to. Was it talking about restitution? I forget the word it was using, but basically, the qu. It was asking whether, you know, I forget the language. You know, I'm gonna really deal with this stuff by dealing with it directly with my wife, the people I've harmed, You know, kind of the AA style, or do I want to do it by demonstrating different behavior? You know what I mean? And, I mean, my wife and I have been through therapy. I mean, we. We. We've talked about a fair amount of this in therapy going back a couple years, but I was. I was still drinking sometimes and not telling her about it, so.

Alex Libre: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: Like, was that honest therapy?

Alex Libre: I mean, like, during those therapy periods, you were drinking, I mean. You mean. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. So, I mean, what resonates. I have a guess here, which resonates everybody, or just sort of like beginning fresh, looking forward and, you know. You know, feeling a little bit about all the steps you take from here on out.

Michael Montgomery: It's more the latter. But I. I mean, you know, stabilizing. Let's say. Let's. Let's use that word. But. But when I say that is staying sober with. You

know, with. No. You mean abstinence.

Alex Libre: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: And in getting comfortable enough with that, that I can have that those conversations at least with my wife.

Alex Libre: Have you reached.

Michael Montgomery: No, I've got to set. I. We switched from Kaiser. I think I told you this. Yeah, we don't have a doctor right now. I've got a.

Alex Libre: Guys, just get one. One medical and then send a message and you'll like the next day where you can literally that quick, you know.

Michael Montgomery: Oh, really? I don't need like physical and like, probably not probably. Oh, I'm just gonna do one medical. So I'll get on that.

Alex Libre: Try to do that in the next week. I think, I just think I, I fully feel from you that you just, just really want to work. And I think that that is by far the number one likely, you know, you know, increasing chance that you stay out the rest of your life.

Michael Montgomery: You know, I mean, I mean I, I truly believe that desire is there. You know, like, you gotta want it. Yeah, you gotta want it. And I, I don't have any doubt. I mean, I remember again, I probably told you this. I remember going to an AA meeting. This was, this was a good thing. And you know, thinking about how had I gone, you know, five or 10 years earlier, I would have said I don't need to be here. But, you know, I really knew that I belonged in those meetings. Like it was the right thing at the right time and that was a positive thing. That I wasn't, you know, in denial about my drinking problems in, you know, and the impact they were having. So I'm certainly not in denial now and I do believe that my desire is sincere to stay sober. Yeah, but it's a great idea. I'll get one medical going tomorrow and see. Get that.

Alex Libre: Yeah, do that. Because it's like, like it's this layer of physiological sort of dampening down of any, any potential sort of like those thoughts that would spiral potentially into, you know, drink drinking again. It's just such a. And it can be such a nice safeguard when you just notice that it's been five days, you haven't had any slightest temptation drink. And that feels different with, with, from the past. Even, even if you were determined equally both times scenarios. Something feels different when you feel like you're protected by taking from, you know.

Michael Montgomery: Well, it's also good because it, it's, let's see, it's late August, so it's, it's a good, like I'm gonna have a, you know, we're finishing a project. It's going to be a pretty big story that we're coming out with October, so it's going to

Be an intensive work period. My wife's gonna be going to Europe. We're both going to Europe, but she's going early. So she's going to be leaving like the end of September and then I'll be here with Beau for a couple weeks and then finish the project and then I'll go over to Europe with her. And that's. Those are, those are times when things can get.

Alex Libre: Yeah, totally, totally. There's idle time, there's stress, there's alone time. That's all the factors kind of coming together. I think it's good that you identified that. How much have you spent, how much time have you spent thinking about like, oh like, like we're coming on like a two month period. That could be very recovery. How much you thought about that?

Michael Montgomery: I've been thinking about it.

Alex Libre: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: I've been thinking about the, the kind of these, these, these things coming together at the same time.

Alex Libre: Yeah, good, good.

Michael Montgomery: Not, you know, the Europe thing. I mean being over there with her, I'm not. It doesn't raise huge red flags because I'll be with her most scenes.

Alex Libre: That would be potentially risky.

Michael Montgomery: There was a conference I was maybe going to go to in Vienna of journalists and you know, you get journalists together at a conference and that can be a lot of drinking. So yeah, this, it should be really good to get it in place way, you know, well in advance. I've been, I've just got a, I've got to do the paperwork, get signed up. The one medical office is right here.

Alex Libre: Oh great.

Michael Montgomery: So.

Alex Libre: Yeah, yeah, I've been to that one. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean the other thing is that there's always, always a chance you would have some sort of side effect or something that would make specifically. And then you might want to still have enough time that you could switch to, you know, you know, anti abuse or one of the other like go to similar medications. Before this period.

Michael Montgomery: I never have. I can't remember when I've ever had a bad response to medication, taking that much medication.

Alex Libre: But I think, I think it's well tolerated so.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah. Yeah. Okay. But this is, this is really helpful. I mean, I mean that sincerely that talking to you, you know, I never like with my a sponsor,

he was a really great guy but I just never, you know.

Alex Libre: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: And there's kind of like they, they. There's this idea among some people that if you're a sponsor you have to be a hard ass.

Alex Libre: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: And maybe some people need that. But that was not what I wanted.

Alex Libre: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Michael Montgomery: That's.

Alex Libre: I can totally imagine. I've heard from other people about that sort of power dynamic structure with sponsors. But anyway, let's. Let's plan to. I mean, in terms of like things do keep, you know, definitely. I think the most important, getting things lined. But then are we good for next Monday and Thursday? Oh, right, right. Let's do. I mean, I mean I could still do it, but I'm not traveling. But let's say, would you rather like Tuesday, Thursday or Tuesday?

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, let's do that. And, and also if we don't do it on Monday, I'll. I'll try to get out to that meeting at Arguello.

Alex Libre: Oh, great. That's a Monday meeting.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, it's a Monday.

Alex Libre: Oh, we should consistently switch that Monday then. Could you do 4:30 on Tuesdays?

Michael Montgomery: Well, 4:30 is a good time in general.

Alex Libre: Oh great, great. Okay, that's perfect for me too. So let's do Next. Next Tuesday, 4:30. We don't have to like say that that's necessarily going to be always what it is. But wait, wait, wait.

Michael Montgomery: I think I messed up. That meeting's not on a Monday.

Alex Libre: I'll figure it. Okay, well, just let me. I mean, as long as you give me a little bit of heads up.

Michael Montgomery: 4:30 to 5:15 works really well. Officially, my work hours end at 4:30.

Alex Libre: Oh, no. Nice, nice. Okay, cool, cool.

Michael Montgomery: But I'm glad. I was. I was wondering about your evenings.

Alex Libre: Yeah, I thought I would swing it and you would be asleep and it was.

But there's always so much going on. He's never, never quite asleep by then. And it's just a challenge. Yeah, yeah. All right. All right, sweet, thanks. I'll send you through the notes from this as well. So look out for just like a summary.

Michael Montgomery: I was wondering, we could record these and then have.

Alex Libre: Al I. I have that. Yeah. So I'm transcribing these like in the background.

That was the main thing. I wanted you to sign that original form to get sort of transcription consent. I'll send you again the link where you can like access all the transcripts and then you can pop them into like you just copy and paste them into.

Michael Montgomery: The document you created from our first. Yeah, was really helpful.

Alex Libre: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Cool, cool.

Michael Montgomery: All right. Okay, great. Thanks.

Alex Libre: Talk to you later. Michael. Michael.

Michael Montgomery: Later. Yep. Bye. It.

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Michael Montgomery: Sa.

Alex Libre: Hey, Michael. So sorry about that.

Michael Montgomery: Hey, man, I was. I was late. Anyway, we.

Alex Libre: Great.

Michael Montgomery: We were up north and we were supposed to come back yesterday and we couldn't get back till today. It's a long story.

Alex Libre: What happened? Well, we.

Michael Montgomery: We've got a place up there on the coast up in Sonoma, and we're renting it out for the next few months in part because we're going to be in Europe, which I told you about, and the heater furnace is broken. We had to get these repairs done, which aren't done yet, but the people were cool about it, so we just needed to stay an extra day.

Alex Libre: Yeah, it's a lot of work to have additional property that you have to manage and deal with, dude.

Michael Montgomery: I mean, it's. I mean, look, we're lucky to have it. It's something that was basically handed down from Gene's family, my wife's family. You know, it's. I don't know if you ever get up there to like Sea Ranch in.

Alex Libre: That area, but I had been once, but not regular.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, people your age tend to. Well, you've got a kid now, so it's different, but, you know, it's. It's quiet up there.

Alex Libre: Yeah, yeah.

Michael Montgomery: Oh, that's great. For little kids, anyway. Yeah, the maintenance thing. And, you know, we've got an old house. I mean, it's nice, but it's old, you know, Queen Anne, you know, late 19th century. So it's. It's a lot. And

as we get older, you know, it's one of the things we think about, A, is the cost, but B, just the energy of maintaining this stuff.

Alex Libre: Yeah, it's a lot. It's draining, especially like the context switching. Like, you know, you got your work life, you have to manage and you have to separate other, like, responsibilities.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, exactly. Although, you know, in the new. In the new work world we live in, you know, working remotely is perfectly fine. I really. I mean, I love going to your office, love going downtown, but a lot of people just don't go into the office or they live somewhere where there's not an office. So, you know, that's a pretty great thing to have. In fact, having both having an office and not always having to work there. So you. Yeah, but we just got down, you know, it's a little there. You just. We just. Not only did we think we'd get back. We thought we'd get back yesterday, but even today we thought we'd get out earlier than we did, so.

Alex Libre: Well, at least you. You made it here for me, so.

Michael Montgomery: Well, barely. So anyway.

Alex Libre: So how are you doing with, you know, good.

Michael Montgomery: Had a really, just nice chill time with my wife, which was really great. We had some really nice times. We saw some friends, had a little, little adventure with them up around Point arena, and I've been feeling good and really trying to stay in that, you know, positive mindset that we talked about, you know. Yeah, I, I haven't had time yet, but it's on my to do list tomorrow to get hooked up to. To get this prescription going, so.

Alex Libre: Oh, good, good.

Michael Montgomery: I'm really excited about that actually.

Alex Libre: I think it's going to be a game changer, so.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Alex Libre: Nice. And then did you get a chance to look at the.

Michael Montgomery: PDF?

Alex Libre: Yeah. The transcript?

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, I did. They're great. I haven't put them into Ash, but I will be very curious to see what comes of that.

Alex Libre: I hope Ash can import or attach attachments. I think it can, but in the worst case scenario, you always just put that PDF into ChatGPT and say. And then discuss, you know.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, yeah, I think. Give us some prompts.

Alex Libre: Yeah, exactly. But either way, I think that would just be. I don't know, it could be really useful to explore anything that you think of after the session that you've been mulling over unconsciously or consciously. You then can give all the context and bring everyone up. Yeah, yeah. Salient or kind of like, I guess they use a term from our Wednesday meeting. Like, what kind of resonated with you? What are you taking away from the previous sessions? What do you think about these days?

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, I've been, you know, I've been doing a deeper dive on what I want or what I'm after when I drink in terms of. Not necessarily the triggers, but when I talk about, like this idea that, you know, I've been. I've been. I've been up and down for so long and hurt so many people and damaged my relationship that like, at this point it doesn't matter because, you know, but I've been trying to explore that more deeply because I think that part of that, in terms of this compartmentalizing or whatever, I'm wondering how much of it is willful. It's like, oh, yeah, I figured out a way for my mind to get myself back to drinking. Right. Like, in other words, I think it's super authentic, those feelings. But I also think there's another layer where there's part of me that sees that as a pathway back to drinking or to drink. Right. Like, oh, yeah, I feel so Shitty and, you know, so guilty and awful. And I know that, yeah, drinking temporarily will make me feel better, but there's something else going on there.

Alex Libre: Yeah. Is it really guilt or, like, what. How would you describe the maybe, like, multiple or single feelings that you, like, associated when you said shitty? You know, to describe what you feel, thinking about damage you caused, that sort of thing. Maybe we could, like, explore that a little bit more. Like, specifically, what do you think it is that you start feeling? Is it guilt? Is it a shame? Is it regret? Is it, like a desire?

Michael Montgomery: Yeah.

Speaker 3: Right.

Michael Montgomery: So. So that's good. I mean, regret definitely, like, you know, there's things I can't redo, right. Redo. Not being present emotionally or mentally, I can't re. Redo, you know, losing my temper at the table because, you know, my son's acting up, but no reason, so I can't go back in time and fix those things. And that kind of gnaws at you. So. So, you know, maybe guilt isn't the perfect word. It's one that comes to mind. But. But regret, because you, like I say, you can't redo that. Like, it's done. Like, you can't go back and, you know, give your daughter a better experience as a kid with all the other stressors that were going on. So

there's a. There's guilt there too. Shame is probably less. I mean, you know, shame feels like it puts the burden on someone. It feels like it shifts someone else right at all. But, you know, so, like, in the past, like. Like way back when I went into aa, I was looking back some old notes. I had, like. Like a big part of it for me was like, this work resentment shit, you know, like, they don't value me, and, you know, they don't like that kind of stuff. And, like, that is, like, totally not. Like, that is completely gone away, which you could say is a good thing, which I'm gonna treat as a good thing. It means I'm more confident about myself regarding my work.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Alex Libre: But it is interesting that, like, you had somewhat entirely different reason for wanting to drink. And now I guess what comes up for me here is just like, maybe there's a dynamic where you just want to drink on some level and you'll fill in the blanks of the reason, even in an authentic way. Like.

Michael Montgomery: That's what I was thinking about. Like, you know, we've talked about this compartmentalizing, and that's like, something I've done my whole life, and there's been useful reasons for that growing up, you know, in an alcoholic household or whatever. But, but I think somehow you probably like my alcoholic brain or somewhere in me is like, oh yeah, compartmentalize or feel like you need to compartmentalize that feeling and then you can do something else like drink. But our sessions have been really helpful because it's made it really clear to me that that like, that is driving my drinking. It's like, and, and there's not, you know, I mean, it's a trigger, but it's not like something triggers me and I'm like, oh yeah, no, I want to, I want to get drunk. I mean, occasionally, like, yeah, my son.

Alex Libre: Sometimes it's not really a moment to moment flare up. It's like there are causes, I think, behind your driving factors, behind your desired drink, but they seem to be more accumulative long term rather than. Or sort of like stage based almost. Rather than stage based. Yeah, like your life stage, maybe different reasons and different life stages you had for drinking, but they tend to be on the scale of like, let's say a decade rather than 10 seconds, you know.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, yeah. And I mean, and you know, and it's been going on a long time, you know, really, really long time. And in fact, when I think about that, that also gets very depressing. It's like, oh my. You know, so I mean, in a way it's, it's helpful because I really feel like getting better understanding of that. Really getting an understanding of that. Those pathways, those things that bring. Keep. Whatever things, whatever we're going to call them, that, that, that bring me back to drinking. I really feel confident that because as we talked last time, like, in



general, a lot of avenues, a lot of aspects of my life are really in good shape that it's like I should be able to master this.

Alex Libre: What would it be?

Michael Montgomery: Good, man.

Alex Libre: I know, I was thinking about that, but it was sort of a slightly different use. I don't know. Yeah, I mean, so what I'm thinking here is that like, I think you're. I don't know if this resonates particular phrasing, but I feel like you're struggling to forgive yourself for a lot of what has happened in the past and accumulation of a kind of debt, maybe like a moral debt you might feel or something like that. And I wonder what it would feel like. I wonder if you can even imagine what it would feel like to truly and fully forgive yourself for all of those things and reconciliation. And we're moving forward from here with complete acceptance of the past and just Neutrality towards it. Yeah, I mean, like one thing I like to do sometimes is I try to imagine what I would feel like if some other counterfactual situation were true. True. And if I can for a moment feel like, oh, I suddenly felt a lot better imagining what this was, or a lot worse, it's an indicator to me of how much that factor is impacting my current state of mind. If that makes sense.

Michael Montgomery: Wait, run through that again.

Alex Libre: Like sometimes, like to think, imagine counterfactual, like what if I had like, you know, 10 times as much money as I currently have? How good would I feel right now? And I think, oh, actually I feel a lot less stressed because I feel less. And that's like an indicator. Okay. Probably financial stress is like playing a bigger role in my state of well being than I previously noticed. And it's just like a useful gauge way of measuring what impact different stressors or factors have on your state of mind at any given time.

Michael Montgomery: Well, yeah, that's. I mean, right. I mean I, this is, you know, I think about this all the time. I mean in partly because I'm trying to work on it more consistently. But if, if what you're saying is rather than being richer, if I was just like sober all the time, like if I really successfully practiced abstinence and that led to me feeling better, physically getting in better shape, that I would, I would be very happy with that.

Alex Libre: Yeah, that's one, that's one lens.

Michael Montgomery: Oh, sorry, you know, go ahead.

Alex Libre: I was going to say that's one lens is like imagining what if you basically easily could be abstinent from alcohol. Like stress free, low effort, just you don't want to drink and you are able to, because of that, do all the things you want to

do, be the person you want to be, how that make you feel. But there's also the level of like, what if a slightly different version of you was very, very skilled at forgiveness and self forgiveness and was able to completely, let's use the word compartmentalize the past and maybe use that compartmentalization skill you have or tendency past and say that was just a different chapter. That it's. That was a different version of me. Now we're moving forward and I wonder how you would feel when you imagine how you would feel if you were truly forgiven by yourself or by the world for everything you've done.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, no, I think that's very interesting. I mean, can you just hold us? I've got two. I'm out of the fog. Hold on a second.

Alex Libre: No worries.

Michael Montgomery: Definitely been through a bunch of different climate zones here today. It was totally. The Golden Gate was totally fogged in.

Alex Libre: Even when you were just coming back.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah. You're not out in Sausalito.

Alex Libre: Yeah, I am in Sausalito today. It was not that foggy this morning when I went out.

Michael Montgomery: No, totally. When we were coming down 101, we saw the, the fog bank and. But you know what? It's like, it's sunny in San Francisco.

Alex Libre: Crazy.

Michael Montgomery: It's foggy. And then you just get through the tunnel and it's sunny again. So that's what it is. I mean, I think that's a really interesting idea. And I think that it's true that my ability or my tendency to compartmentalize. Well, let me go back. You know, my dad is who I've talked about. You know, my dad drank for many years, and then my mom left him over the drinking. He had stopped drinking. They, they, they, they separated when we were kids for a year, and he stopped drinking for quite a number of years.

Alex Libre: And they separated in part because of his drinking, I assume.

Michael Montgomery: No, in whole. We were all really young. I was like. I would have been about six. And then they got back. I think he stopped drinking. He got back and he wasn't drinking for several years. And then we moved from Portland out to eastern Oregon and he started. Wait, no, he was sober out there. And then he got fired and we moved back to Portland and he started drinking again. And it got enmeshed with his mother and spending more time after work with her then coming home and anyway, they split up and when my mom left him, he. He stopped drinking and got very, very into aa. And then they got remarried some

years later and. And they, he passed away, you know, in 2014. They were still married. So like, like there was a lot of repair that happened. Pretty amazing. And so I think to some degree, I mean, that's a little bit of a model. Like he was able to kind of change his life or start a new life, whatever. And I think that, I mean, I think being aa, he didn't not talk about his drinking years, but, but there is this feeling that he was able to forgive himself as well. I mean, he went through all the steps, and I don't remember him going through the steps with me, but. Or the whatever stuff. But, but it, it is, you know, I mean, I've seen a man turn his life around.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: And repair a lot of the damage with his kids through just being a different person. Right. And that's. But you know, Making changes and not necessarily like going through therapy with everyone and re going, you know, so that's, that's like a good thing for me.

Alex Libre: And I think what's interesting about that is, like, it's not just that, even the way you phrase it, it's not just that your dad became sober and then all the problems were solved, relationships. But being sober enabled him to be like a much better version of himself that could show up for his kids, his wife, all that, such that his life, like, sort of fell back into place. And I wonder if that's a model for you that I think maybe there's an element here. Like, even if you stay sober for the rest of your life, you might feel like there's still been so much damage done, like so much ground to cover, like, how could you possibly kind of make up for all that time and whatever and pay back that. That kind of debt? And I think there's like some. Something here about how it's not just the being sober and abstinence, therefore you have some control over the speed at which you pay back the debt based on how good of a person, let's say, you know, you can be moving forward. And I think, I don't know, this is a very inarticulate way of saying basically that I think you have an opportunity here to be super mindful with all of your interactions with your wife, with your son, with the people you care about, improving relationships with, and by just doing all the things extra well, being extra engaged with them, extra empathetic, extra patient, extra loving, showing them your love more expressly, articulately, whatever, like, that can speed up their repair process exponentially. And maybe that can give you a little bit of optimism and hope and motivation because it doesn't feel as hopeless, like you're on something like set in stone, very slow repair process.

Michael Montgomery: No, and I don't. It's. I mean, I don't. I don't feel hopeless right now. I feel excited, you know, and I mean, you know, one. One good thing,

although it becomes like pep rallies. But one thing about AA is, I mean, you see, people were really talk about bottoming out. I told you about those sessions. Oh, my God. And it's. I mean, they're amazing stories. I mean, they really are. It gets a little like almost like a template thing, but I'm not there. It's just in terms of the context of the meetings. So I, I feel, I totally am confident that, that that change is possible and that, and that it, it will do what you're talking about, which is accelerating a kind of rebuilding or amending or whatever. What, what, what I'm trying to, you know, going back. Sorry. So that, that makes sense. But I am still trying to think about like if it's not some immediate trigger, what's pulling me back to the alcohol. Right. And I don't have it. You know, we've been talking a lot about that. I mean, I think part of it is. Part of me likes it. I wouldn't be doing it if I didn't like the exhilaration. I think that's changed, you know, I.

Alex Libre: Mean, but you still, even, even drinking alone in your home now, there might not be some of the same kinds of exhilaration or whatever, but you still do enjoy it, right? I mean, when you would have relapsed or whatever do.

Michael Montgomery: To a degree. Although it's a different experience than what it used to be, which is. I think you read about people who have been drinking or drinking off and on a long time. It's like the experience does change. So when I do drink, it's not. I think it turns darker, faster.

Alex Libre: Meaning like even while you're sort of drunk, you're having sort of depressive thoughts and ruminating, I think. So memory is probably not perfect from when. Anytime you've been drunk anyways. So it's probably difficult to perfectly remember how you felt.

Michael Montgomery: But yeah, I mean, when I'm. Would I. When I've drunk for, you know, longer periods. I think that's true with, you know, you just. Things start blurring together. I'm not sure that that's the case.

Alex Libre: For individual, isolated, like.

Michael Montgomery: Right.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: Right. So, you know, I do know that the, the longer I'm not drinking this, you know, the stronger I get, like, yeah, the body feels different and I'm frustrated that I have been pulled back to drinking, you know, or when I am pulled back to drinking, it's frustrating because it's like. And then, you know, and I'm. It's the same old, like not, not being straight about it with my wife. And so I'm just trying to end that loop, you know.

Alex Libre: And I think to end that loop you're gonna need to. Or we're gonna need

to like discover what is the real driving force, let's call it, behind your desire to drink that sort of supersedes the more superficial decade level descriptions that you currently sort of can identify. Because if those are changing over the course of several years or whatever, but they are changing in terms of what you consciously can identify as a Reason. There's probably a more base, bedrock, fundamental reason that might be identifiable and might go. I would suspect it goes deeper into your maybe childhood or at least it's just deeper into, like, fundamental processes. You have heuristics for acting in the world, ways you view things that. I don't know, maybe we can explore more what comes to mind for you in terms of, like, maybe it would be helpful first, just recap. For various decades, let's say, in your previous, you know, in your life so far, what have been the primary reasons? Like, you know, to some extent, like the war stress and that sort of thing. Was that accurate?

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, but also. Yes, I mean, without a doubt. I mean, it was in a very much a drinking environment. But also, I mean, this feeling of inadequacy, like, right, this young dude, you know, and I didn't, you know, and these other people were like, amazing. And I mean, a lot of them were like, way more advanced than I was. And because they had more experience or they had, you know, more just whatever. So this feeling of inadequacy pressure of, you know, delivering stories to my newspaper, you know, there's. There's pressure there. And I remember, I mean, I can remember back then, you know, just rather than kind of putting in the work to come up with a really good idea, something different in terms of doing a story, just getting drunk and not having to deal with it. Right. You know, and doing good enough work that I, you know, that it was okay. I mean, sometimes they did really good work, but. And. And I don't think I'm being too hard on myself. I think, you know, the drinking definitely undermine my ability to do more ambitious things like write a book or, you know, So I think that it was kind of like in school, like I, I did, you know, I was a good student. I could have been a better student. And I think I found a level where I was able to do well enough, you know, without like pushing myself for any real excellence. And I'm not saying I haven't excelled in certain areas in my life. I'm just saying, you know, and so was that lack of confidence. I don't know. I mean, we talked about this. My mom, you know, had a. I think, passed on, you know, some issues for some of us, like. Like lacking confidence. So. So anyway, so what about the decade.

Alex Libre: Like, after the years after that, or what was the next phase? Might have been a distinct reason for drinking separate from the inadequacy feeling.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah. So after we got married, you know, there were stressors of Being a parent, I wasn't drinking heavily. Heavily back then. I mean, I would have, you know, a couple glasses of wine. Sometimes I'd have a bottle of wine, but it wasn't drinking, like, heavily every day. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, I was drinking consistently. I mean, maybe not every day.

Alex Libre: Was it secretive?

Michael Montgomery: No, no, no, no, no. And then kind of like, that would be the. The 90s, early 2000s. And then I remember, like, mid 2000s. Yeah, mid 2000s, I remember, like, I had an office at KQED and I would. Hold on. I just want to get this right. Maybe mid, late 2000s, I would go out. You know, we'd go out after work and have a couple martinis with friends. You know, big martinis. Like, that was the switch to harder stuff. And I don't know if I was always telling Gene that I was going out with friends or I was at work. Like, maybe it started shifting there a little bit.

Alex Libre: Meaning a little more secretive, maybe more hiding. Emerging at that phase a little bit.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah. And then. Yeah, so that was switched to more hard stuff. And then, like, in the. In the. So then that's when. Hold on. Yeah. We had adopted our son in 2002. So, you know, he. There's more stress around him that would align with, like, family stress.

Alex Libre: And you have another kid to a daughter, right?

Speaker 3: Yeah, yeah.

Michael Montgomery: She's older. She was. She would have been in middle school then. So, you know, a lot of family. Maybe feeling disconnected from my wife a little bit. I never had any affairs, but maybe there was some desires. I mean, there was women I was getting to know that, like, oh, nothing ever happened, and I. And I backed off, but temptation was sort of there.

Alex Libre: Like, the thoughts popped up, at least.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah. And then. And then when we get into the. To the teens, I distinctly remember, like, that's when I would, like, deliberately get home from work so I could. Bottle of wine, drink a bottle of champagne. Like, I was working in the East Bay, and I would. You know, I was driving too, so that was not, like, good. And I was definitely not talking about that. So somewhere in there, that's where the shift starts happening. And then. And I'm still drinking officially, so, you know, I'm not. Not drinking in the eyes of my wife. So it's like, I'm not hiding drinking. I'm hiding the excessive drinking. Right. And then I think we get

into, you know, 2015, 2016, 27. Somewhere in there, I'm really starting to drink more vodka and really hiding it. And she's finding bottles, and, you know, that's just like. Well, I don't know, maybe she's not. She found it like whenever 2019 was when she found bottles of vodka and she's just like, that's it. And I. And I left the house, lived, I think my daughter was out of the house and maybe our son was in residential treatment for a while, so maybe he was out as well. I should look at the timeline. And so I lived and we at a friend's house for about a month in Berkeley, got a therapist, got into aa. And that was the beginning of my, you know, sobriety, slash semi sobriety period. So that's been going on quite a while now. Right.

Alex Libre: And in that period, like, could you identify? So like, let's say like late 2000 and tens. What feels like the driving force behind that increase in drinking and secretive excess.

Michael Montgomery: Drinking, driving factor, superficial fact. What's drive. Yeah. Home life.

Alex Libre: Okay.

Michael Montgomery: Resentment at work.

Alex Libre: Got it.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Alex Libre: Resentment. Is that distinct and different from this feeling of inadequacy that you felt?

Michael Montgomery: No, no, no, no, different resentment. I mean, this is towards. Towards my bosses that they didn't really appreciate my work or, you know, that was a. That when I started aa, I just said that was like a big number one. I mean, their family life definitely was an issue, but that was my number one thing.

Alex Libre: And then that has that kind of boiled over and is now like, not really factor.

Michael Montgomery: It's not a factor. I mean, partly I learned, you know, you know, don't personalize everything. Right. You know, learn some lessons of, you know, my work shifted a little bit. I mean, I've been with this organization since 2009, but we've, you know, the center for Investigative Reporting, we've had different iterations and we, we pivoted. We've pivoted more fully into radio, which was something I had. One of my resentments was that I was at the center for Investigative Reporting. We were still kind of print orientated, you know, like we were distributing stories to California newspapers. But obviously that whole world was shifting. So I started our first little audio unit with like KQED and npr. And without telling me, the other people at CIR started this radio show. I'm like, what

the fuck? You didn't even bring me in to like help figure it out. So that was my first big resentment. And so what happened is like, those people eventually left, right? They just kind of went on to other things or whatever, and I stayed. And so it got to a point where all the people I felt most resentful for were gone. They weren't around anymore. So that allowed me to feel better about myself. I felt confident. I'm, you know, you know, I, I could feel proud of my work. I won some awards, you know, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. I. I think I also just, just got a better sense of what I was good at so that I could really build on that. So I got. The other thing that really helped me is I've always been really uptight about public speaking. Going back to childhood, we talk about that, but just very uptight and like. Oh, yeah, yeah. Nervous. Worried that I would up, which is what happened when I was like in grade school. And my wife's given me some good tips about preparation and stuff. But back in like 2016, I was still like, had an office at KQD and I started sitting in on that forum show, you know, hosting forum, which is like live radio. That's like fucking scary if you, if you have stage fright. And I. And I did it and it was, I was good. And so that like, experiences like that help boost my confidence. And so I guess, I guess I was still resentful when I went into AA. That was 2019, so. But those things have. I've really, like, when I'm. It is something I think I've finally gotten a grip on is when I'm starting to feel resentful, I back off my head, you know, get in my head and like, it's not about you. And if it is about you, it's something that can be fixed or whatever. Right. No one's out to get you, you know. And, you know, it got tricky, you know, after George Floyd and all the DEI stuff, there was. There was some very difficult things to navigate in the office that's also calmed down. So. Yeah, whatever the reasons, I'm not saying I never feel it. I definitely get anxious about work. Like this thing on Thursday night, I'm going to be interviewing this author. I'm going to be anxious about it, but I know I just need to prepare, have good questions lined up, you know, go over in advance with her. I've done enough like forum moderating and panel moderating that, that like when I start to get anxious, I just go back to, you know, this is the way you've. This is the way you've prepped in the past. That's worked. This is no different. You know, I can, I can kind of go about it rationally. Right? Yeah, so. So, you know, and that kind of.

Alex Libre: Anxiety for like interviewing this author on Thursday, it doesn't seem like that is really like a significant at all factor in wanting to drink? It seems like that. Or does it make you. Well, it could be.

Michael Montgomery: I mean, something. I mean, it's a good question. So some



channel. I mean, I can, I'm just thinking in my head, like, yeah, I mean, some challenge I have. Rather than deal with it. Forget about it. Put it out of your head. Don't need to think about it now. You'll deal with it in the morning. You always do. And drink. Right. And drinking. In part because I'm anxious and so drinking helps me put it out in my mind. I don't know. I'm not explaining this very well.

Alex Libre: No, you are.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, that could definitely be. It has been in the past a reason to. So maybe I say I'm so good at compartmentalizing, but maybe I'm not that good and I use drinking to compartmentalize. Right.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: That's a really interesting. I mean, I, I do compartmentalize, but like, that's not compartmentalizing. That's like ignoring. Or that's like I. Because you've always been, you've always been questioning that term. Meet the way I use that.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: Thing. But. And so it's not compartmentalizing. It's just. What's another word? Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Because. Right. Because I mean, I am able to compartmentalize things, but I think this is something different. And like I'm able to compartmentalize the trump. Right, right. Anyway, I, I think that's. Right. It's just, it's just like I'm not compartmentalizing. I'm just obliterating it out of the moment.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: And not dealing with it.

Alex Libre: And I wonder like if there is. I don't know if this counts as like a common thread among all these various factors that, you know, we just kind of touched on. But. And it's like super general the state display. But it seems like it's fear and a discomfort with fear itself where when you feel fearful, it might be more abstract. You're afraid that you are inadequate on a universal scale, on the scale of life. Or fear that, you know, you've caused too much irreparable damage, or fear that this is a particular Thursday, you're gonna have a scary interview, like anxiety inducing interview. And I wonder if, like when you start feeling fear, I don't know exactly what might come up for you. Maybe it's. I'm not sure, but it seems like you don't like that and you want to retreat from the fear.

Michael Montgomery: Well, okay. Okay. The first Thing that came to mind. I don't know if this is fear of being exposed. Like, who the fuck are you? You're not some author, you're not some literary person. So fear of being exposed. And you know,

don't forget I wanted to remind you that when you're drinking in secret, you live in constant fear of being exposed.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: Constant fear of like, oh, I left the bottle, you know, like the whole thing. I mean, there's, I've been to a million meetings and I'm sure it's come up in your meetings where, you know, you're drinking so much that like your, your biggest battle is keeping track of, to wherever you leave all your bottles. Right.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Alex Libre: And the layers of lies you have to tell to cover your tracks. You know, it's like.

Michael Montgomery: Right, so. But yeah, fear of being exposed in different ways. Right?

Alex Libre: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, that's a pretty good one.

Alex Libre: That feels pretty on point to me.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah. Because it operates in different levels.

Alex Libre: Exactly.

Michael Montgomery: In my life.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: And you know, so, you know, with, with, with the drinking, you know, I mean, I, I've been through the Smart Workbook book a couple times and I, I know the idea is to give you these kind of baseline things that you can come back to or draw on when you're feeling certain ways. You know, like, I'm getting anxious about this panel. Well, I've done this many times. I know the author, I've read the book. Like, I have a command of the subject matter, the decent command. Like, you know, I have the things it takes and I know that I'll prepare and so I don't need to worry. And, and once I do that, then I'll go into this gathering and I'll be pretty confident. And I believe that because I've been there before. So if I had the same tools, if I was, I mean, that's my hope, you know, is that like when I'm going down some road or wanting to whatever, escape, get away, whatever the thing is, like I can just come back to. I mean, it's in the Smart Workbook. It's like, here are the fundamentals.

Alex Libre: I will say I'm somewhat skeptical of this tool based approach that Smart pushes. I feel two minds about it for sure. Because to some extent I think using tools in these, like moment to moment, let me pull out the ABCs or the cost is kind

of playing whack a mole with a much more deep problem. And I think like, often it can just almost support or enable this system of your life that is out of balance. And it can keep it in that out of balance state because you're using the ACS every time. But really what you need to do is rearrange the system itself. And I wonder, like, I don't know, what comes to mind is this like short term analogy that my therapist often uses, which is like, if a little kid is afraid there's a monster in the closet, the worst thing you could do is every night like open up the closet, show there's nothing in there, or like put a chain over the door or whatever. Like, because then you're validating that the fear is valid. But what you really need to do is just basically do nothing about the door to the closet and just show that there's no reason to have that fear. I don't know if that resonates anything.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, I mean, I mean, honestly, the tools haven't really stuck with me much. I mean, I was talking about like, I do think I have these tools about like public speaking.

Alex Libre: Right. There are strategies you can employ.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, but that's different than, you know, drinking stuff. So I mean, I appreciate that because I have always, like AA stuff is like, I mean, some of that stuff's really important. Right. But, but the way it's, it's, it's routinized.

Speaker 3: Yes.

Michael Montgomery: You know, or. And it's a little bit with smart. Although I really appreciate smart's approach. But it's true. It's not like when I want to drink, I go to my val. What do we call the values hierarchy?

Alex Libre: Values.

Michael Montgomery: Hierarchic values. Okay. Yeah, I feel that way. Okay, I'm gonna go. Yeah, like, it doesn't really. I mean, I think, I think they're helpful in discussions. Like I, I do think that when people are talking about. Does sometimes push things in a direction where you get it, like deeper stuff. So it's, it's good. Like access point.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: So. But I fully agree with you, like, mastering the ABCs is not necessarily going to mean I won't anymore.

Alex Libre: I usually view it as a psychotomy between two sort of therapeutic approaches. One is whack. Whack, that's the tool based approach. And the other is like not untangling. K N O T untangling. Where you have this like complex mess of your brain, your life, and it's much slower and less gratifying. Little by little, untangle that knot and then there is no mole to whack. You just, you know, I mean,

I.

Michael Montgomery: I think that, I think that makes sense. You know, like I said before, it's sometimes overwhelming when I start thinking about how long the drinking has gone on, how many times I've cycled in and out. You know, it can be pretty overwhelming. But I don't feel trapped. I mean, I, I, I, I do still believe that I can get out of that cycle completely. Right. You know, and I'm, I'm definitely feeling.

Alex Libre: It'S not like you feel hopeless by.

Michael Montgomery: No, no, I do not feel hopeless. And I mean, and you know, I mean that's, I mean, one of the things that, one of the communication things that's I think off common in a couple, especially male, female, is like, rather than really exploring the feelings or what's going on that the husband, maybe sometimes the wife, it' just looking at solutions.

Alex Libre: Right.

Michael Montgomery: It's like, oh, yeah, well, here's how we can. And that's been a dynamic something in my life for a long time, which is just like, rather than necessarily dealing with what's going on, think about how things could be different or better or fixed. And so with part of that is good in the sense that when I'm in a shitty situation, like during the war or whatever, I'm, I don't, I'm, I, you know, I say it's compartmentalizing, but I'm not sure it's compartmentalizing. It's just like trying to focus on something more positive.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: Or pragmatic while not ignoring what's going on.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: And so I think in that sense I'm, I've usually been a pretty positive person.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: And so I think that's a good thing. Hold on, I got to plug in my computer here. Yeah, I think that can be a helpful thing.

Alex Libre: And I wonder if, like that desire to, or tendency to solve problems and have problem solving be your response to stress, let's say, or adversity or various forms of like, fear even. My dad is someone who outwardly does not seem anxious at all. But when I did a little bit of family therapy with him and my therapist, I remember my therapist later saying, your dad is like such an anxious person, is trying to control everything in his life so that he doesn't have his, his fears come true. And I was like, I never even thought about it that way. And yeah, I think I am.

Michael Montgomery: I mean, I still bite my nails, for example. I'm anxious.

Alex Libre: But you don't like exuding anxiety, which is interesting.

Michael Montgomery: You call, you in a meeting, you talked about how calm I was. I'm like, whoa, dude, I don't include that. Well, I do sometimes. I Mean when I'm anxious.

Alex Libre: Right.

Michael Montgomery: I do think that really being mindful of, of being calm in my interactions, say in the family, you know, deep breaths, being calm and being positive, it mean, it definitely just comes back to me where I'm like, hey, I'm not just projecting this. I'm like. So I, I think that really, you know, and when I'm exercising and all that, it helps me be calmer. I didn't, I didn't exercise today. I was able to swim. Not that I'm a great swimmer. I wish I were a better swimmer, but I swam every day when we were up north and did some stretching. There's not much of a gym up there, but I'll be back in the gym tomorrow. But anyway, yeah, I, I, I, I, I, that's the other thing that I've recognized is that, you know, alcohol, like, it think it calms me, but I can think of so many times when I'm, you know, in this room drinking and I'm anxious. Yeah, anxious. It's not calming me down.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: And I think maybe that's something that's changed. You know, I said I get darker angry or whatever that's, that's shifted the drink and, and I think that it's, it's made me more anxious as I've gotten older.

Alex Libre: Often I've also for myself found anxiety to be this sort of transient intermediate state feeling between feeling fine or normal and then basically what outwardly appears to be depression or anger. And really there was this intermediate emotional step of anxiety that I get so uncomfortable with feeling anxious that I would rather feel depressed or angry and move on from an anxious state to a more sort of stable, low energy version. You know, I don't know if that resonates for you, but like when you drink and your thoughts turn sort of dark, I wonder if some of that is a response to certain fears becoming salient to you as well.

Michael Montgomery: Well, I know that. I, I know, I know that at least in the past when I've drunk, there has been anxiety that has then moved towards like anger and resentment. Right. And, and you know, come to think of it, there's definitely been periods when I've been resentful towards work. Like, like, I'm not saying it drove me to drink, but like I'm drinking and then I'm like, oh yeah, man, I'm gonna tell them this and this and this. Unfortunately, I'm, even when I'm, even when I'm

drinking, I don't do the late night like that. But, but Anger, maybe it's so. So I think the work resentment has definitely receded. But this desire, not desire, whatever the word is, to be angry or this way in which drinking leads me to be angry, which is a more grounded emotions. No, I see that. That actually makes some sense. I don't like, I don't want to be there.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: But it is where the alcohol takes.

Alex Libre: It's sort of a more stable state. Stable equilibrium than an anxious, fearful state.

Michael Montgomery: Right.

Alex Libre: For most people probably, I think.

Michael Montgomery: Right, Right. So we're almost out of time here because we're going an hour because. Okay. Yeah. So couple things. So I am going to get signed up for this, for this Amazon of healthcare.

Alex Libre: Great.

Michael Montgomery: And. And see if I can get like a prescription as soon as possible. It may take. I mean, I'm older. I don't know what I'm gonna have to go through. Maybe, you know, you can also consider.

Alex Libre: Since you're like a free agent healthcare wise right now, maybe you look up just a search for like, you know, obviously startup said do like specializing like Adderall prescriptions.

Michael Montgomery: Mail them to you. Right.

Alex Libre: But I think they, they definitely have those for naltrexone to some extent. And that might even be a more. Just a streamlined way of getting, you.

Michael Montgomery: Know, they'll come from Sri Lanka.

Alex Libre: Exactly.

Michael Montgomery: How's your pot? Did you have you continue with that podcast?

Alex Libre: No, No, I haven't.

Michael Montgomery: But it's too bad because you're really good. It's one reason your meeting is so popular. It's just you're very engaging and you're good at what you do. Have you. Did you. Have you done or are you planning to do training and like, you know, a degree and. Or get a. Whatever the degree would be to become a therapist. Is that something you're working on?

Alex Libre: I was like, I dropped out of being in. Admitted to a therapy program a few years ago and was thinking I was not going to do that. But honestly, I'm fairly

dissatisfied with my current career and I mean, I'm sort of doing two different things, like running a recruiting agency, running a startup for software, both of which feel very unsatisfying relative to stuff like this. I just feel so much more engaged. And I also think like relative to other people, I have a more unique skill in this domain than I do in any of those other domains.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah. So the woman who has been my therapist and is my wife's therapist, Eve, I'll give you her name. She. Hold on a sec. Yeah, Eve. Eve. Why am I not seeing you searching Your email? Yeah, hold on. Eve Livingston, she's out in the East Bay. And I'm, I'm thinking. I was thinking of you because she is not technically a licensed therapist. She's more in this. I mean, she's a brilliant therapist, but she's more in this therapy, life coach kind of sphere. And she would never call herself a life coach. I mean, I forget what her. She was in like, marketing and then went back. I forget what she was doing. She's amazing and she's been really successful because she's very practical in addition to exploring therapy. Like, you know. You know, the therapist I went to with when I started AA was a really nice guy, but it was like hours of listening and listening and listening and he would engage and I really, you know, it's, you know, psychotherapy, psychotherapy, whatever.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: And Eve is not. I mean, Eve listens, but she gives a lot of feedback.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: Also gives practical ideas like, like, you know, you were at least like immediately. You know, I, I doubt you say this for everyone, but, you know, for me, Maltraxon, like.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: So I, I think that's interesting, Alex, because you do have a, A demeanor that. You're good at it. You're. You're good at, like. I'm not saying you're faking it, but you're good at, you know, making connections and feeling engaged. So I think it's something that would be interesting for you to explore. I mean, I could, if, if you ever would be interested. I, I could in, in. In. In connecting with Eve or website. She's a very interesting woman, very much into. I mean, she's very deeply read in the literature of. I mean, I think she got a degree, advanced degree in something and she's, she's not a licensed therapy, but I think she went back and got like a licensed degree, advanced degree in.

Alex Libre: She might have a degree in one of those things. But then the licensure

is also. Is an additional thing. Yeah, but when I was.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah, when I say life coach again, I don't think she would use that term. I don't like. But I say it in a sense, like there's a practical aspect which is missing in some other forms of therapy, which can be really helpful. And you're trying to get, you know, you're. We're trying to dig deeper and so that's what other forms of therapy would do. But anyway, it just struck me as like that. Especially for men.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Michael Montgomery: Young men. Younger. How old are you?

Alex Libre: I'm 30. 31 now. 31.

Michael Montgomery: Anyway, that's neither here nor there.

Alex Libre: No, I really appreciate that because like, I, I currently am really like just at a phase where I would be open to like a pretty significant shift, you know, focusing more of my energy on recovery, coaching, sort of therapy space. And any people you connect me to or any thoughts you have are really appreciated because I feel so much more engaged and I think it's probably a better path.

Michael Montgomery: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Well, I'll. Let's pick that up again. I haven't been in touch with her for a while, but she's just an amazing person and was really helpful for me. I mean. Yeah. So. Okay, so we're, we're up on Thursday at noon, right?

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Alex Libre: Double check that. I have that on my calendar, but I'm pretty sure. Yep. At noon. And then for the following week, are we just keeping the. It looks like Tuesday, Thursday, Tuesday, 5:45. Maybe we need to move the Thursday on the 11th because it's currently at 7:30. We can talk about that.

Michael Montgomery: Let's talk about the 4:30. For me, it tends to be a good slot.

Alex Libre: Great.

Michael Montgomery: But let's just do it week by week because our schedules are both kind of complicated.

Alex Libre: I also like the 4:30 slot, but we can just play ad hoc, so.

Michael Montgomery: Okay, great. Cool.

Alex Libre: All right, I'm going to send you after this the updated PDF with today's transcript added appended to the other ones. And then we'll see what happens.

Michael Montgomery: See what I can do with that. Okay, thanks man. I really appreciate it.



Alex Libre: Thanks Michael. Really enjoyed it. Take care.  
Michael Montgomery: It.