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February 2, 2026

## Straight Talk

Welcome to the latest edition of the **Steered Straight Newsletter**—and to a defining moment in our mission.

As we move boldly into 2026, our purpose remains clear but more urgent than ever: to educate, inspire, and empower young people to make positive, life-changing choices. That mission hasn't changed—but it has intensified. And we have no plans of stopping.

Across the country, Michael DeLeon and the Steered Straight team continue to stand on the front lines, reaching communities, families, and young people who need truth, hope, and direction now more than ever. This year, Michael has even more reason to fight—and that fight fuels everything we do.

We are deeply grateful to have you with us on this journey. Your support makes this work possible, and in 2026, we are asking you to stand with Michael, with Steered Straight, and with every life we are committed to impacting. Together, we will continue to inform, educate, and inspire—relentlessly.



## January Is When Adults Miss the Signs

Adults miss the signs not because they aren't there, but because they're easy to explain away.

After winter break, everything looks functional again. School is back in session. Schedules are full. Teens are showing up. From the outside, it appears that whatever risk existed during the holidays has passed.

That assumption is where we get it wrong.

January risk isn't loud. It doesn't come with obvious incidents or dramatic behavior changes. Instead, it shows up as small shifts that feel familiar enough to dismiss: irritability, fatigue, pulling back, lack of motivation, emotional flatness. The kinds of changes adults label as stress, burnout, or "just being a teenager."

And sometimes that's true.

Sometimes it isn't.

The problem isn't missing red flags. It's how quickly we normalize patterns because they don't feel urgent.

In January, substance use — when it exists — has often adapted to structure. It's less visible. More planned. More compartmentalized. Teens who are using to cope aren't drawing attention to themselves. They're trying to function, not fall apart.

That's why waiting for obvious signs is such a costly mistake.

Adults often tell themselves:

- "It's just winter."
- "They're tired."
- "This is a hard time of year."
- "Let's see if it passes."

Meanwhile, patterns settle in.

January is when subtle changes either get noticed — or ignored long enough to become harder to interrupt. By the time behavior looks clearly concerning, the window for easy course correction has usually closed.

This isn't about overreacting to every mood swing or bad week. It's about paying attention to *what's consistent*, not what's dramatic. About asking whether something is changing — and staying changed.

The risk in January isn't that adults don't care. It's that we wait for clarity in a season that rarely provides it.

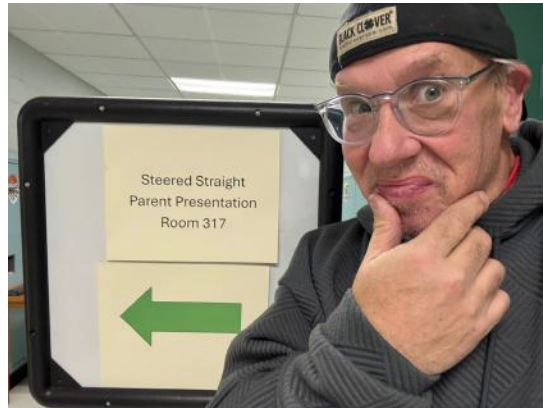
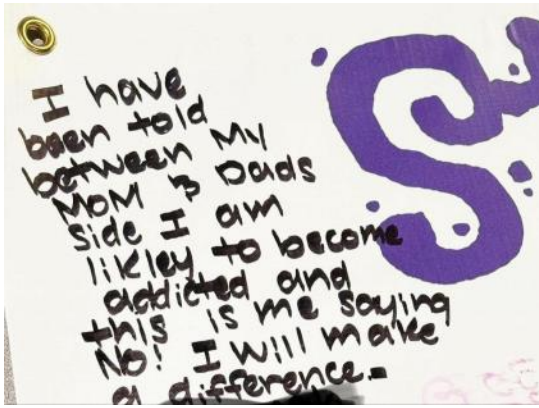
If we only take action when things feel unmistakably wrong, we miss the point when support actually makes the biggest difference.

On the blog, [The Signs Adult Miss in January and February](#) I break down the specific signs adults miss most often in January, how to tell the difference between normal stress and real risk, and what patterns matter more than one-off behavior - so you know when to watch more closely and when to act.

**- Michael DeLeon**

**Founder, Steered Straight**

## Road Warrior



## How the Miles Make a Difference

When a student has the courage to write something like this on a banner, it's indescribable. The heartache so many of our kids go through is unspeakable but his/her statement is what EMPOWERMENT looks like! Empowering kids makes every single mile worth it.

Educating parents at Oakland Catholic in Auburn Hills, MI was an amazing night. Only God can deliver a mission this big...Kingdom business!

Steered Straight

## In The News

# Kratom Danger Awareness and Petition to Support an on Kratom

I know many of my friends and family have wondered what happened to my son, Josh.

This is one of the hardest things I've ever had to share, but if telling my son's story helps even one person—or prevents another family from experiencing this unimaginable loss—then I know that Josh's life and story will make a difference.

Josh started taking something called Kratom. You can buy it almost anywhere—gas stations, vape shops, even at wellness events and Kava bars. It's marketed as “natural” or a “wellness” product, promoted as an energy booster, mood enhancer, and pain reliever. It sounds harmless, right? Josh thought so too when he bought it at the Sunoco gas station.

But Kratom is far from harmless. It can have serious side effects and is extremely addictive. A simple Google search for “Kratom deaths” or “Kratom side effects” reveals a disturbing truth—People are dying from this product! It is banned in seven states and in many cities and counties across the U.S., as well as in most European countries. It's even

illegal in parts of Southeast Asia, where it originates from a tropical tree and is classified as an opioid.

Josh had his first seizure on a Saturday night. He saw his doctor that Wednesday, but sadly, even his doctor wasn't aware of the dangers of Kratom. The following Saturday morning, my only son was found deceased by his father from Acute Mitragynine (Kratom) Toxicity.

My heart is forever shattered. No parent, no loved one, should ever have to experience this pain. Please—if you or someone you love is using or considering Kratom—don't. It's not worth the risk.

I miss my only child, my son Josh, every moment of every day. Josh was deeply loved by so many for his kindness, empathy, sharp wit, love of philosophy, and his love of every dog. Josh's beautiful soul lives on and I know he would want his story told to help others.

I've made this post public for those who would like to share it and save lives...And because I wish I knew then what I know now....

Josh's Mom - Becky Lentz

Please sign and support a Ban on Kratom:

<https://www.change.org/BanKratomforJoshLentz>

Mothers Against Herbal Abuse: [mothersagainstherbalabuse.org](https://mothersagainstherbalabuse.org)

Kratom Danger Awareness: [kratomdangerawareness.org](https://kratomdangerawareness.org)

If you are someone you know has been impacted by Kratom, please contact: MedWatch, the FDA Safety Information and Adverse Event Reporting Program.

 #kratom #kratomdanger #kratomawareness #bankratom

## On the Road to Recovery

## Steered Straight and Recovery Army sat down with Idris Rahman.

Idris started on the path to addiction simply enough. Growing up in the 70s and wanting to be accepted by the "cool group". It started with marijuana and progressed to pills, the heroine which believe it or not he tried for the first time in prison. Idris used for 25 years and every drug was his drug of choice at the moment he was using it. Drugs are what led him to prison and mostly all of his crimes were related to drugs, either selling, using, or committing crimes to get more drugs. All together he spent over 22 years of his life in prison. Then one day he decided to do something different to ensure that prison would not be a part of his future. Idris went back to school, earned three college degrees, obtained a masters in social work and when we spoke he was working on his Phd. He intends to go back to the communities he once offended in and make a positive impact.

Idris Rahman believes in change. You do not have to be who you used to be. The change starts with you. Change yourself and you can change the world.

Idris is an inspiration. To hear his inspiring story in his own words and to allow him to inspire you to change your life in whatever ways you think might not be possible, please click on his phot with the video link below.

To see more stories of hope and inspiration please visit:

[www.recoveryarmy.com](http://www.recoveryarmy.com)



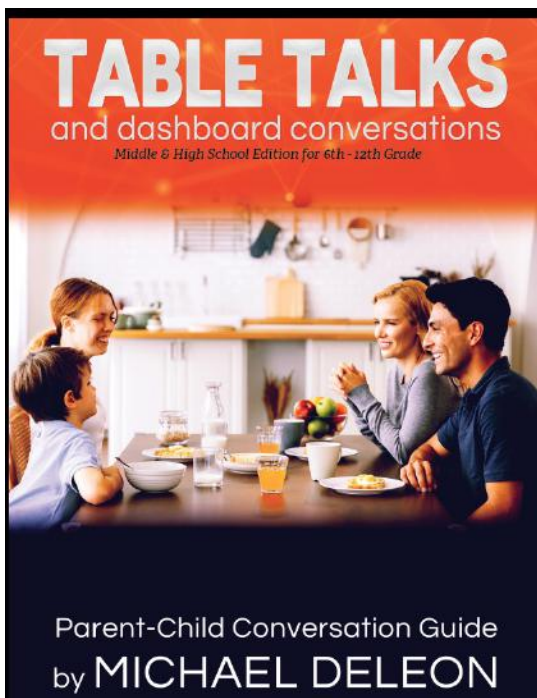
## STEERED STRAIGHT

### **TABLE TALKS**

Michael has created workbooks for parents and children that guide them in managing relationships and discussing difficult topics beyond drug and alcohol abuse. Each month, he focuses on a different subjects and offers many different topics of conversation and activities you can do with your children to help foster that deep connection and communication that is so vital.



**Table Talks and Dashboard Conversations** is an in-depth conversation guide for parents and kids. You can order through [Amazon](#) or the [Steered Straight website](#).



## **The Month of February: Marijuana**

Marijuana has become a household word, just like alcohol. It is easily accessible and in many states is legal to use for recreational purposes as well as medicinal. Again, just like alcohol, it is only legal for those 21 years of age and older but is being used by many who are younger than that. Marijuana has over 400 chemicals in it and especially when used by someone whose brain is still developing it can have devastating, permanently brain altering affects.

**Teen brains are still under construction.**

**The brain doesn't fully develop until around age 25. The parts responsible for decision-making, memory, motivation, and impulse control are some of the last to mature. That means anything that interferes with brain chemistry during adolescence can have a bigger, longer-lasting impact than most teens realize.**

**Marijuana isn't harmless to a developing brain. THC — the psychoactive ingredient in cannabis — attaches directly to receptors that regulate memory, focus, emotions, and learning. When THC repeatedly floods those systems, it disrupts how the brain builds and strengthens connections.**

**Over time, this can lead to:**

- **Poorer memory and concentration**
- **Slower processing and learning**
- **Increased anxiety or mood swings**
- **Lower motivation**
- **Greater risk of dependency**

**For teens, the effects aren't just temporary while they're "high." Regular use can actually change how the brain develops — altering wiring that's supposed to support judgment and self-control.**

**Today's marijuana is also far stronger than it used to be. Higher THC levels mean stronger effects and higher risks, especially for young users.**

**The bottom line: marijuana doesn't just affect how a teen feels in the moment — it can affect how their brain grows. And**

**when the brain is still developing, that's a gamble that isn't worth taking.**

This week, have a conversation with your child that addressed one of the risk factors for using marijuana and other substances....STRESS. Talk with them about how finding a hobby you enjoy can help manage our stress levels. If we are feeling stressed we can relax while doing something fun and take our mind off of what is bothering us as well as relax the body. Share with your child what you enjoy doing that is a healthy way to manage stress.

Please educate yourself and have these valuable conversations with your kids. It can literally change their lives!

Spend the week connecting, educating, and building your kids up! The more we open up with kids, the more they will open up to the important adults in their lives.

## Headlines We Are Following

[After Mexico bans vapes, cartels tighten their grip on a booming market](#)

[Debate heats up in Tennessee over kratom's potential ban and public implications](#)

[Tourists can face steep fines, jail time for vapes at this vacation hot spot](#)

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## Contact Steered Straight

Michael and his team of professional Steered Straight speakers are eager to meet you in person and make a profound impact on your students, staff, and community. To bring their inspiring message to your next event, contact Steered Straight to schedule.

[CONTACT STEERED STRAIGHT](#)



# Follow On Social Media

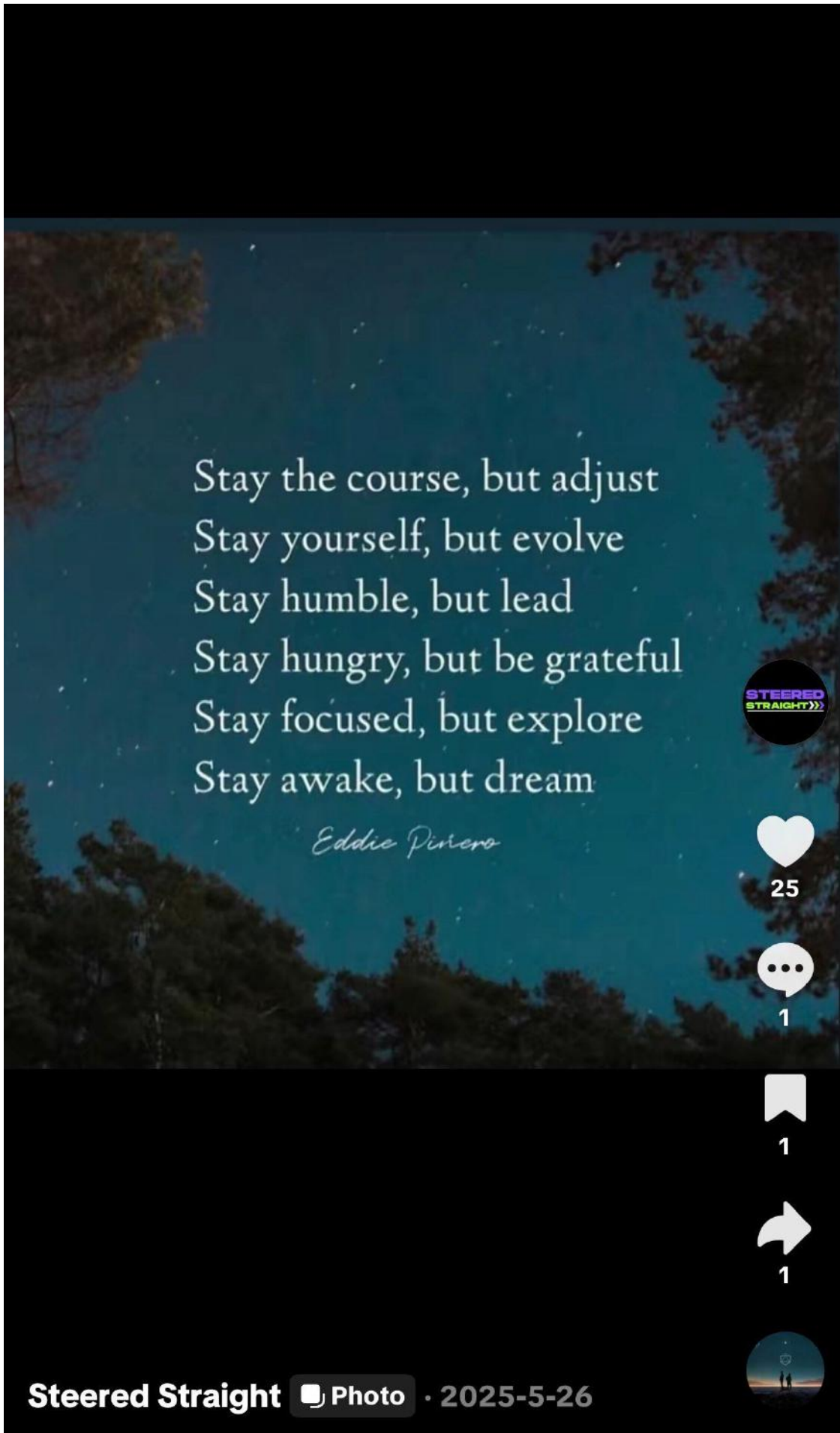


steeredstraight

18K followers







Watch now on TikTok

@steeredstraight

**Click on the photo to view the post!**

Michael reinforces his belief that Gen Z is where it's at! The most important generation and that is why we are so laser focused on educating and empowering them!

An inspirational quote on TikTok....

Michael DeLeon and the team at Steered Straight are working hard to ensure this generation gets what they need to change the world. No other program like it and no one delivers the message better. All for the kids! Follow Michael and Steered Straight on social media so you don't miss a beat!

#steeredstraight #motivator #explore #advice #drugfree #antivaping #recovery #quitvaping #stayinyourlane



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