

HANDY GUIDE

TO THE

TWELVE STEPS

WITH MEETING FORMAT

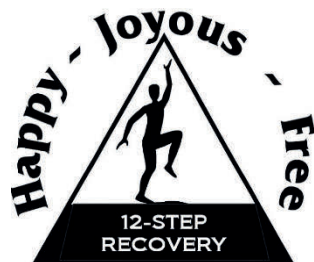
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Contact **NLA Outreach**, www.12StepsMadeClear.com

Helping Angry People: NLA's Mission

No Longer Alone (NLA) is a fellowship of former loners who have found a way to inner peace and fellowship through the 12-Steps of recovery. Some of us were homeless. Some were Ph.D.'s, trapped in our specialization. Some of us were public figures, cut off by our name and fame. All of us were angry, disappointed in the life we had created or inherited.

NLA is a program for private people. Most NLA members don't know each other; we work the Steps with old friends or with a few new contacts. We reach out to others like ourselves by offering this book at a low cost (or no cost) to prisoners, the homeless, women and youth in shelters. We believe that the recovery in this book builds many kinds of fellowship, depending on what an individual needs and can accept. AA, ACA and NA are excellent programs. We recommend them. CoDA and AI-Anon are helpful, too. Some people find support in a church; others, in family or tribal gatherings. In NLA, we trust in God to guide the progress of those who work these Steps.

About the NLA Outreach Committee

The NLA Outreach Committee welcomes grants and contributions. Those who find these materials helpful and want to help others who may feel isolated and frustrated in their present circumstances are invited to support this work. For every \$70.00 NLA receives, 10 copies of this book are provided to prison inmates, to the homeless or to those in shelters.

NLA cooperates with ministries and agencies which serve prisoners, the homeless and families in crisis or at risk. NLA offers training and support for self-help screening components in such programs. These are cost-effective, reduce case management requirements and improve success. For more information, please contact: **NLA Outreach Committee** www.12StepsMadeClear.com

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Introduction

The 12-Steps are a time-proven process. They provide a practical approach to problem-solving that is an effective form of *treatment*. Here are some commonly asked questions on use of the 12-Steps to overcome addictions and to replace codependent patterns:

- **Do I Have to Go to Meetings?**

To make good use of the 12-Step method of recovery, we need some form of fellowship. This can be one person if that individual understands our problem and is willing to work with us in applying the 12-Steps. Meetings for overcoming *specific problems* like alcoholism or addiction to drugs provide almost unlimited support to members, which a church group or therapist may not.

- **Can I Work with a Pastoral Counselor?**

Because the 12-Steps trace their roots back to early Christian principles of fellowship and mutual support, pastoral counselors are an excellent choice for help and support. Increasingly, community ministries seeking to combine practical help with evangelism are adding the 12-Steps to their outreach.

- **Do I Need Therapy or Medication?**

If you feel suicidal, call your local Mental Health Hotline or dial 911. If you are in danger of violence, suffering sexual abuse or exploitation, call the police or your local Domestic Violence/Rape Crisis Shelter. 12-Step groups and pastoral counselors who work with these spiritual principles are not a substitute for medical or professional help where it is needed. Individuals who are seen to be a danger to themselves or others must be referred to professional intervention; they are not appropriate for 12-Step treatment.

o **Can the 12-Steps Help the Homeless?**

People in crisis — the homeless, youth at risk, prisoners — can use the 12-Steps to overcome social isolation and build a sense of purpose. The 12-Steps are tools to master new skills to sustain a healthy lifestyle. Materials and checklists are included which can be used by motivated individuals who are not now members of an organized 12-Step group.

o **Can Non-Christians Use the 12-Steps?**

Yes. Church membership or religious affiliation is not required to make use of the 12-Steps to solve a life-problem.

STEP ONE

What is the Problem?

- 1. We admit we are powerless over (alcoholism) (other people) (a compulsive pattern), and our lives are unmanageable.**

Step 1 asks us to state what is out of our control and admit we can't manage our lives by our old methods.

What is remarkable about the 1st Step is that any of us ever take it. Born naked and needy, most of us take a lot for granted. Hungry for pleasure and comfort, we strive to be safe. Other people serve us or we serve them. If all goes well, we are happy.

But if we are reading this book, either we are in trouble or we are called to help those who are. In either case, our comfort zone is challenged.

For those who like a challenge, the 12-Steps are tools. To the tired, they offer a rest. For those who are confused, the 12-Steps provide direction.

We come to recovery when our coping mechanisms and defenses fail. The spur of grief and pain and perhaps the apprehension of terror, force us to admit that we cannot go on living blindly, as we have. We ask for help, willing, if only for a moment, to do anything at all to be given another chance, a flicker of renewed hope. Step 1 helps us to build on this initial flash of insight.

We rely on the principle that we can build a new life by getting more in touch with our *real identity*, the Worthy Person God created and wants us to be. To do this, we start by admitting the problems we face that are so tough and complicated they have taken over. This is called coming out of denial, giving up, surrendering.

Surrender in a 12-Step program is prompted by our own pain, not what other people say is wrong with us. The Worthy Person God made us to be screams out to get us to look at the effect of behavior choices that are causing us pain. Choices that make us sick in mind or body or cut us off from people include *things that we do*. They also include *ways we react* to circumstances or to authority.

If we come from broken or abusive families, we may have learned a lot of coping mechanisms to survive. Coping behaviors are ways we appease or manipulate others. Coping behaviors may seem kind or appear strong but they are really prompted by survival fears. These routines often become deeply rooted habits that run our lives and keep us out of touch with who God intended us to be. War, job-stress, poverty or violence can also put us in “survival mode.” Fighting a battle we cannot win takes a toll on spirit!

Most of us question what we can or cannot handle on our own. Severe pain can get us to reach for help, but, when we get a little relief, a sense of doubt usually returns. An argument begins in our head. This is called the “committee meeting” in our mind. The debate is usually about whether or not we are really powerless. Can, or can’t, we handle it alone? **Use this Issue Checklist:**

1. **I Do It.** (A behavior exists.)
2. **Is It a Problem?** (No. No need to change.)
(Yes. Go on to #3.)
3. **Can I Control it?** (Yes. OK, do it!)
(No. Go on to #4.)
4. **I Admit I Am Powerless & Out of Control.**

We cannot use 12-Step recovery on problems we don't admit exist. A definition of a Step 1 problem is ***any harmful behavior pattern we are powerless to end or to control by our own unaided efforts and will.***

Addictions include being hooked on drugs or alcohol. It is also possible to be hooked on sex, food, rage or power over people. Codependence involves loss of identity in efforts to control or caretake other people, or a need to define ourselves based on their reactions or opinions of us.¹

Even when we admit we have a problem; we may not realize how unmanageable our life has become. What have we lost or never had, for example, as a result of our addictions or codependent patterns?

Has defending or coping kept us back, prevented us from learning skills or developing talents? Is our life a house of cards? Are we afraid all the time? Do we distrust everyone? Does life seem pointless? Are we sad, lonely, angry? The truth can be sobering!

¹ See **Identifying Primary Problems**, page 74, for more information for facing and prioritizing Step 1 issues.

STEP TWO

What Can Help?

2. Come to believe that a Power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity.

In Step 2, we explore our options. We acknowledge that unmanageable living is not sane.

We may have gotten a sudden flash of our personal dilemma in Step 1. Maybe we felt panic, out of control over our life and fate. We may have wished that denial would wash over us again, wrap us in sleepy forgetfulness, but we cannot run away. In such a moment of vulnerability, we reach Step 2.

So is there something we can turn to that isn't powerless to help us? We may not feel very confident that there is such a power. We may not feel much like looking for one. A lot of us will need to start small in Step 2. In a power greater than ourselves, remember, we are just seeking a resource which is not powerless over whatever we admitted is our problem in Step 1. This power may be God or it may be something that seems more practical.

The 12-Step group, for example, or the 12-Steps themselves, can be used *experimentally*, as powers greater than us, in Step 2. Both the group and the Steps have a track record. We don't. We can allow ourselves to entertain the possibility that something can actually help us, since others have been helped. We do this experimentally, by making a few meetings, honestly trying to hear what others say.

We think about the “false gods” we have tried which have let us down. Have we been hurt by misplaced trust? We look at ways we tried to get help that either didn't work or made things worse.

We may have been super-responsible, hoping to please God. We may be angry at God, at a church or at those who represented religion to us in the past. We may feel we have already taken Step 2 and been let down.

Perhaps we made lifestyle choices that have failed and left us without refuge in the world.

We may have made gods out of other people in search of trustworthy guidance.

As a result of past experience, we may have resolved to keep up defenses, to not trust, fearing the possibility of being disappointed again. We may want to go it alone. We may be suspicious of authority. Defiance can become a full-time job, a struggle that keeps us isolated, feeds on our anger.

Step 2 does not ask us to already believe in a Higher Power or think of it as God. Step 2 just asks us to work the program and see what happens. We try what we are willing to admit may work for us. We note the results. If the experiment works, we keep at it; if it doesn't, we try something else. This is how we build faith. Our faith is founded in works, not theory. We discover what genuinely works for us and we do this as gradually or as quickly as it happens. Skeptics and rebels are not asked to deny their feelings or opinions. We are only asked to experiment with concepts of a power greater than ourselves that we are willing to give an honest chance.

Many individuals find it difficult to accept the idea that some of their behaviors or attitudes have been truly not sane. Guilt, shame and grief often make it difficult to admit our own share of a pattern. Where sanity becomes a major sticking point, confide in your group and experimentally do what is suggested.

We can also return to Step 1 and reexamine the behaviors and attitudes which we act out personally. Remember, working the 12-Steps isn't a contest. Don't feel rushed by other people's expectations or ideas.

In working Step 2, we also consider what we take for granted, our *underlying values*. Values define reality, organize our thinking about how things are supposed to go. Internalized values are "higher powers" we already have; we judge ourselves and others by these ideas. We live by our values, whether we are aware of them or not.

Values include family and group rules, whether these are spoken or not. Group rules that set up impossible goals are very damaging to everyone in the group. Examples include rules against feelings angry or rules against letting disappointment or other feelings show. In groups, approval is always based in upholding group values. What makes one family or church a source of strength to its members and another a source of destruction depends on how healthy and sane the group rules are, not just on how much they are respected by each member.

If we must keep up a front to be accepted in a group that anchors our identity, we naturally come to believe the front is who we really are. This is very confusing if the group insists that we deny some of our basic needs or only satisfy them in ways that cause us or other pain. To further complicate the situation, even if we leave, we are very likely to get into a similar kind of family or group again!

All human beings naturally seek out others who have internalized values similar to their own. This can be very limiting if the unexamined inner values we are matching up are dysfunctional ones.

If, in practice, we believe people always keep up a front, for example, then we continuously seek out people who know little about intimacy. We remain susceptible to peer pressure that tends to reproduce separation and frustration in our own lives, again and again. We do this because of the company we keep and also because of the company we are.

Our limited ideas about what is possible for us blind-side us. We are hooked to a world where our own limitations become the measure of reality.

Our values need to support a sane lifestyle. Healthy values are a higher power we simply cannot do without. If we are to be restored to sanity, we will need to replace any values that are incompatible with sane living. Dysfunctional group rules are like the walls of a prison that keeps us locked up.

Denial within the family or the group itself works constantly to keep us from seeing the walls; we just keep running into them! Love and commitment work against everyone involved in such situations. Domestic violence and even war can be seen as the acting out of flawed values and limited concepts between people who cannot see they have a choice.

But when we realize that we are not hopelessly stuck with these flawed concepts, then the walls of these prisons begin to crumble and fall away. We may not be able to alter group situations we are enmeshed in today which are difficult or sad, but we can begin to see them honestly. We are not abandoning people when we become sane. They, too, have a choice.

Questions to ponder:

What false "gods" have let me down?

What do I trust?

STEP THREE

Will I Let It?

3. Make a decision to turn our will and our life over to the care of God as we understand God.

In Step 3, we decide to stop living on self-will. We develop a concept of God we can trust with our life.

Reliance upon exclusively human forms of support is risky and confusing. People seem to have an uncanny way of going on vacation or being caught up in their own affairs when we begin to depend upon them too much. We definitely do want human support in working the 12-Steps, but this support has to “connect” with a receptive place in us, to be effective.

If we don't believe we are *spiritual beings*, with our own relationship with God, other people can only do so much for us. When we need an energy boost or encouragement to see us through a challenge, we may have meetings and fellowship but we still have to be able to take *in* this support. We have to be receptive. This is a decision only we can make.

In Step 3, we learn a discipline that makes it possible for us to take in what we need. It is a training for us. We learn to look for the connection in ourselves, the place within where we *hear* truth, *feel* goodwill, when we are offered it. This is our spiritual center. It is by our choice and our commitment that we gain increased awareness of this, our connection to our spiritual source, our Higher Power.

We tackle this big project for a practical reason: Going it alone, without the help of God as we understand God, no longer works. It got us lost.

It isn't easy to work Step 3. Our survival instincts bristle. We don't like change. We are afraid we won't get what we need or want if our instincts take a backseat. We do best to approach Step 3 concept by concept.

How do we resist this Step? First, in decision making, we encounter fear, anxiety, possibly even rage. Why? Most of us have made decisions that got us in trouble in the past. Resistance can feel justified. After all, there's always the possibility of making a mistake. Decisions can get us mixed up in a conflict, either with other people who disagree or else with lack of certainty in ourselves. Some of us have backgrounds where nobody makes decisions, but, instead, just plunge along from crisis to crisis.

We may believe that we just become targets when we make a stand. Maybe we were the responsible child, imposed upon, made to hold up under responsibilities we were tricked or pressured into "deciding" to take on? We may never have learned to reap the benefits of self-respect and self-identity to be gained by setting goals and limits. It is possible that the whole question of decision making may need work.

The next concept we run into in Step 3, involves letting go of personal control. Many of us are more than a little reluctant to lose control. We may not welcome the prospect of turning our will and our life over to anything or anyone.

If we lack a clearly defined sense of who we are, we can be especially troubled by such fears. We may see ourselves only in terms of what we do, our position in the community or our peer group. We may be so used to controlling situations and other people that we just don't know who we'd be if we were to stop!

Violence or harsh competition in our communities may have been the source of training that has taught us to never give up control. Fighting for control may be most of what we do with other people.

We may grab for control in every situation, reacting automatically whenever we sense we are losing it or fear someone else may snatch it away. We may have learned to survive by becoming master acrobats of control. We may perform elaborate interpersonal balancing acts to protect ourselves or those we love. These antics are exhausting and keep us isolated.

We need not remain passive victims to control games, ours or other peoples. We can learn to trust again, even if we aren't sure what that means. If we find that we are pretty addicted to self-reliance as a form of self-defense, learning to let go is a process we can practice.

When we find ourselves clutching up, we can begin to notice what we are doing. A simple technique, like remembering to take a deep breath is an effective useful antidote to practice. Breathing is something we do anyway. Remembering to take a deep breath and relax is easy to work into a habit, even under stress.

Another good habit is that of remembering to say the *Serenity Prayer* when insecurity comes up. These practices strengthen our connection to God. We use our willpower well when we resist old habits of fighting for control.

Finally, Step 3 asks us to develop a personal concept of God. God as we understand God (a Higher Power) is an inner spiritual connection that is ours to keep.

To develop a *personal* concept of God, we first review what we have been taught. We learned much of what to think and feel about God in childhood. Traditionally, parents and elders teach us to understand God by combining spiritual training with examples of successful living, practiced in the home.

Addiction and violence, however, are forms of spiritual disease that can and do infect family systems and impact our communities. The symptoms of this disease show up as fear, grief, rage and hopelessness, all of which attack the spiritual roots of trust, hope, security and love. We lose respect for parents we cannot trust for practical solutions to the challenges of life. Drugs, drink, pleasure-seeking and stubbornness cut us off from what we might have learned; our spiritual roots are lost. In Step 3, we begin to rebuild these roots.

Whatever our tradition, in Step 3 asks to develop a concept of God we can trust with the care of our lives and the direction of our will. It may be necessary to start fresh, considering what it means to be spiritually grounded. If we are spiritually grounded:

- **We feel God’s love. We feel valued, at home in the world.**
- **Our security includes feeling sure we have the right to support from other people, being able to receive, and to give, love and encouragement to others without being overly dependent on them.**
- **Spiritual grounding gives us a reliable source of healing power and the mercy of forgiveness in our lives.**

If we work to develop a concept of God that is *personal* to us and that brings **hope, security, and power** to our lives, we are on the right track, no matter how murky the past or confused our family background.

“The Committee” Meeting in Our Head

A lot of us have negative self-talk from the “committee” in our head that tells us we don’t deserve God’s love or the healing that comes from a Higher Power. In Step 3, we work to identify these voices in our head.

Whose messages of hopelessness or fear are running our life? We get in touch with these feelings and painful memories. In 12-Step work, we hang onto the principle that the Worthy Person God made and intends us to be has never been condemned or worthless.

Affirmations are tools we can use to defeat old condemning judges inside our head that stand against this principle.

Here is how they operate:

Affirmations are simple statements of truth grounded in what we know about God's will for Worthy People that God loves.

We can use them to replace any old failure messages that have taken root in our hearts and minds. When we do this, we actively strengthen our bond with the Worthy Person God intends us to be in the present. Examples of old tapes include judgment messages like, *"You're no good!"* or *"Give up. You'll never make it!"* or *"It will work for other people, but it won't for you!"*

We use simple positive messages to drive out these lies. *"God loves and values me today!"* or *"I am guided by God; I leave the past behind!"* or *"I win some and I lose some!"* Speak these out loud directly to the committee. Write them down until your hand gets sore and tired from the work of doing it. Shout them while the self-talk is taking place. This works to erase the old tapes. It also adds undeniable positive new messages of truth and hope that brings us closer to God's plan for us.

What is my concept of God?

STEP FOUR

What Is True About Me?

4. **Make a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.**

In Step 4, we own our strong points and our failures.
We admit what we hate and what we fear.

We think the Worthy Person God made and intends us to be *wants* to be honest. It feels good to let go of lies, justifications, defenses. Honesty isn't the same thing, however, as going to opposite extremes of self-attack or self-rejection. In Step 4, we want to put an end to extremes of denying any fault or seeing ourselves as worthless.

The dictionary tells us that *“morals are a code of behaviors based upon value judgments as to the right and wrong ways to behave or to relate to others.”*

By this definition, morals are the same as limits and boundaries. They define what we feel is personally okay or not okay for us to do. Some moral codes include value judgments on feelings. Some do not.

Most religions offer moral values as part of their teachings. The Ten Commandments is a moral code. The Seven Deadly Sins speak to us about internal attitudes that spill over in the ways we feel and act toward other people. Some moral codes are detailed and concrete. Others stick more with underlying principles, as guides to personal choice.

If you find that your ideas about morals are mixed up with a church or a religion you reject, it's good to note that philosophies which are not religious also provide workable moral systems.

In Step 4, we inventory our morals to set limits that allow us to live guilt and shame free lives today. We start by writing a list of all the moral values we can think of, whether we agree with them or not. We then go over the list and decide what feels true. Ask yourself where you really stand or would like to stand on these issues:

- **ISOLATION/INTIMACY: What is your ideal? Is marriage or partnership an important value for you? How about your needs for privacy? When do you prefer solitude, one-on-one relating or a group activity?**
- **CONTROL/STRUCTURE: What of yourself do you want to offer to others and which others? Are you willing to ask for what you want?**
- **OBSESSION/SERENITY: What are your personal standards for moderation? What are the healthy sources of joy and pleasure that you choose and celebrate in your life?**

It may take some time to tell the difference between our own true values and the standards others imposed upon us. It may well be true, too, that we find ourselves in agreement with some or many of the values we were taught.

Next, we look at how we have coped and survived so far in life. We look at how we have learned to deal with recurring threats. Has there been rejection, abandonment, violence, financial insecurity? Have we faced prejudice? We now go back over the past, seeking to view ourselves as the survivors we are. We note the ways we have reacted, including what the circumstances were that prompted us to lose our self-control. Remorse about wrongdoing is healthy, even when the pain is sharp. It is good to feel sorry for the things we have done wrong. It is okay to cry. We want to welcome whatever feelings surface. Nothing is gained by lying to ourselves or screening out reactions to the past. Self-acceptance means giving ourselves permission to feel whatever we do feel.

Although we want to get in touch with any feeling or fantasies involving figures from the past, we are cautioned not to act on these until we have completed Steps 5 through 9, which are a necessary part of the healing process. If we are troubled, talking with a trusted person helps.

We will probably find, too, that we behaved or tried to behave in ways that we see now were actually healthy responses to the pressures that we faced. If our assertive responses were attacked or discredited, we may find that we have suppressed a storehouse of rage and frustration. A sense of injustice is the root of much resentment.

In this portion of the inventory, we chart who is the object of our anger, how we were hurt, what basic human needs were impacted, and how we feel about it. Here is an example:

A Resentment Inventory

Who?	Why?	Affects:	I Feel:
Myself:	I wrote bad checks to pay for food.	Identity, Survival.	Worthless, weak, not able to provide.

Who?	Why?	Affects:	I Feel:
Stepparent:	Stole my share of family money.	Survival, Commitment.	Abandoned, ashamed.
Siblings:	Took family things for themselves; left nothing.	Identity, Gratification.	Rejected, used, hurt, emotionally battered.

Now, we go over what we have written. In the incidents we've written about, what did we fear we'd lose or fail to get? We look for patterns created by our fears.

Have survival fears dominated our lives? Where are we appeasers, losing our integrity in compliance, flattery or by presenting a false front to those we feel had power over us? How much does fear color how we act in situations involving the “basics” of family, sex-relations, money, reputation?

How does fear of losing, or of not getting, what we want affect our personality?

Shame, embarrassment and pride probably prompt us to minimize or gloss over these questions. Fears seem to have a life of their own. If we are inclined to sidestep this phase of the Inventory, we remind ourselves that buried fears usually take over our behavior in a crisis. We may be living lives largely defined by what we fear. It is by tapping “the courage to change the things we can . . .” and facing our fears that we begin to change our way of life.

We complete the Inventory in Step 4 by setting up a balance sheet of personal assets and liabilities. This balance sheet is a sketch of what works and what needs work in our personalities. We sort through what we have written, first noting any characteristics we admire in ourselves. We look for courage, kindness, willingness to try, a spirit of adventure — any and all characteristics we see in ourselves as worthy and strong. We claim these assets. We don't leave out minor or “to be expected” positive qualities when we do this.

Going back over all we have written, we try to see what our character defects really are. Do we tend to lie to ourselves rather than admit an unattractive bit of truth, for example? Do we steal, react violently to others, cheat in relationships of trust? Do we stage a crisis to avoid facing basic responsibilities?

We seek to discover what the underlying weaknesses are within us, not as an exercise in self-attack, but to find a starting place from which to rebuild our character and our life.

In conclusion, we add doing the Inventory to our list of Assets. We also give ourselves credit for having survived and coped through the difficulties and trials of our own past. We thank our Higher Power for the courage and the willingness to have done this Inventory.

Questions to ponder:

Who do I hate?

What do I fear?

What are my best qualities?

STEP FIVE

Talk It Over

5. Admit to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

In Step 5, we stop going it alone.

In Step 5, we have to confront the possibility of rejection and exposure. To the extent we have lived by rules like, “Don't talk! Don't trust! Don't feel!” Step 5 asks us to break them all. We may have successfully protected ourselves by shutting down, by shutting up or by running away for years. But these self-imposed forms of isolation no longer work for us. Our feelings — guilt, shame, loneliness — disturb our rest. We can't shut them off. We have to turn around. We do Step 5 for a practical reason: We need to get out of isolation. A need for peace of mind spurs us to this action. Honesty brings peace.

If talking to God conjures images of a condemning, punishing form of Higher Power, we review Steps 2 and 3 with someone we trust. We remind ourselves that, as a person who has been directed to a 12-Step program, we have already been given evidence of our Higher Power's goodwill. We remind ourselves that we are already in God's care. We pray about it. We share the fears we have about God *with God*. We ask for grace and courage. We ask for mercy and forgiveness, too. Telling God that we are afraid of condemnation is just another part of telling God the truth about ourselves. God can probably handle it if we can. We have to try it to find out.

Many of us discover that we are plagued by another form of isolation: We don't know who we are. Self-loss shows up as persistent mental confusion regarding some issues. We may have vague, shifty standards about sex or money matters. We may not be able to pin down how we feel on some topics or our feelings may change from minute to minute. We can't trust ourselves at all. We may get angry or fall asleep whenever a certain topic comes up. We are frustrated; it is as though one side of us is unable to accept another side of us. We feel hopelessly fragmented.

Another kind of self-loss shows up as rigidity. We can become slaves to our routine. A suspicious attitude toward new ideas can interfere with our ability to learn. We find it difficult to concentrate. Fear or rage is triggered when we confront the unfamiliar. We can be like windup toys, run by our reactions, as choice-less as a robot. We may feel like we have a monster inside us, something to lock up.

The AA *“Big Book”*² states, chillingly, “. . . *Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program, usually men and women who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves. There are such unfortunates. . . . They are naturally incapable of grasping and developing a manner of living which demands rigorous honesty. Their chances are less than average.*”

If we fear that we are among these unfortunates, so cut off from ourselves as to be incapable of self-honesty, what can we do about it? Fortunately, there are many useful new techniques available that hadn't been developed when the AA Big Book was written. These can help. It is helpful to remember that the Worthy Person God made us to be is capable of self-honesty, if we will do the work.

² *Alcoholics Anonymous*, © AA World Service, Inc., NYC, NY.

Often, our bodies give us clues. Shame and anger can be trapped directly in our bodies, showing up as chronically stiff joints or muscles. Body work, massage or movement work can be very helpful aids to self-examination, prayer and counseling.

A caution is in order: There are charlatans and opportunists among the ethical practitioners and innovators in this world. How do we protect ourselves when we experiment with the newer techniques? Wisdom counsels us to be cautious of those who promise effortless solutions for a buck. If we want to hand responsibility for running our life over to others because we don't trust ourselves, we risk being recruited by those who play upon this weakness. We are wary of the counsel of those who claim to have a special pipeline to God, who disrespect other professionals, or who say their techniques are "all the truth we need." (*Maybe it is so, but do we really want to be a guinea pig in this experiment they're running on the world? We need to think about it!*)

Perhaps we may believe we know all there is to know about the simple business of telling the truth. We may be tempted to say that exploring innovative techniques isn't for us. We may not want to change. Maybe we think that the Worthy Person God intended us to be is just a sniveler anyway. We may be inclined to tell ourselves we prefer to leave this weak crybaby within behind. But when we take the time to improve communication between our feelings and our thinking mind, just about any one of us will see his or her capacity for self-honesty increases.

When we consider talking to someone else, disclosing secrets long concealed in shame or fear, it's not unusual to experience a rush of personal defiance. Memories of incidents where our confidences have been abused may flood us with humiliation. We may be battered by lack of trust and fear of punishment. In the face of these reactions, it may seem impossible to go further. Some feel so exposed at the prospect of taking this portion of Step 5 that they think of quitting the 12-Step program entirely, either to go back to the old lifestyle or to take up an alternative that doesn't ask the follow-through of self-disclosure.

Unwillingness to trust or to confide in other people may be a familiar way of life for us. *Social isolation is a habit.* We need to realize that our defiance and fear aren't going to evaporate by themselves.

Our social isolation in 12-Step recovery is not something imposed upon us by other people. It's an inside job! Action is required, to free us from the inside out. As with most objective problems, practical solutions are necessary. Here are some strategies to overcome our resistance to going through with Step 5:

Taking Step 5 isn't like talking to a friend about our secrets. A good friend on a lunch date may be a bad bet for taking the 5th Step! The talking we do in Step 5 is a major step we take to change our life. This is very different from just complaining or trying to get someone to help with a cover up operation. One of the principles to stick with in Step 5 is to be sure that the person we share with is thoroughly familiar with the 12-Steps and won't betray a confidence.

It may be that one of our problems is a tendency to expose ourselves to abuse. Some of us may have learned to be our own worst enemy! We don't do our 5th Step with someone who will be judgmental or have power over us.

We don't recommend spilling our crimes to our probation officer, for example. We resist the impulse to jump to any conclusions about what is right until we have talked things over with a person who lives by principles we respect and who we believe has our best interests at heart. Even if we feel certain that we know what they will say, Step 5 asks us to risk checking out what at least one other person does say, when we talk to them. We take Step 5 to get out of the isolation of living in our heads.

If physical or sexual abuse is taking place in our lives today, trustworthy professionals need to be consulted. We all have the right to safety and respect in our lives. This is true even in situations where we may feel inclined to protect others or to minimize our own hurt.

We don't dump this sort of dynamite in a peer group. Untrained people may thoughtlessly misuse this information or cause further trouble by trying to interfere without the resources necessary to be effective.

We may not know how to solve a problem, but we can seek out someone who is qualified to help. If we will take the responsibility to go this far, it's the responsibility of a loving Higher Power to see us through to freedom.

We recommend these cautions for Step 5:

- **Don't share something at a meeting that would really hurt you or cause big trouble if it got out.** This is true even though all 12-Step meetings have a commitment to anonymity, to something like the pledge of, "What you hear here, let it stay here!" 12-Step programs don't usually screen their membership and violations of this pledge do occur. If in doubt, always share one-on-one with someone you respect first.
- **Don't share explicit details about sexual experiences at meetings unless you are in a fellowship which focuses on sex issues.** This information can easily be abused, especially in school, work or small community settings.
- **Don't divulge anyone's name when you are sharing Step 5.** Protect yourself from revenge or gossip! The exception to this is the name of someone who is abusing you. Share this information one-on-one with a person who is qualified to help. Get the help you need if you are in a dangerous situation, including legal and police help.

With these guidelines in mind, Step 5 becomes a pathway to support. When we share, we learn. We find that others have had similar experiences and feelings to our own. We hear what others have to say. We feel their love. We find solutions. We experience respect and rediscover hope.

STEP SIX

Let Go . . .

6. Become entirely willing to have God remove all our defects of character.

We look at the problems we face and find the behaviors in ourselves that keep them in our life.

We are probably more used to looking at life in terms of problems we face rather than character defects we have. Being in jail is a problem, for example, not a character defect. We may be sharply aware of several problems we face in life, but only dimly conscious of having character defects. Step 6 reminds us we can only solve problems by becoming willing to change something about ourselves. If we are in jail, for example, what weakness in ourselves caused us to do the crime?

The character defects we work to release in Step 6 are the behaviors and attitudes that keep us bound to our problems, whatever those problems may be. Since most of what we do that causes us big trouble we do more than once, our character defects are usually among our habitual behaviors and ingrained attitudes. Most of our problems simply cannot go away until we become willing to let go of the thinking and acting that ties us to them!

Habits are essential structures in our lives. They are our practical boundaries, the limits we really live by, whether we're aware of them or not. We are defined by our habits, both to ourselves and to those around us.

Habit accounts for how we spend most of our time. If our lives are going to change and stay changed, we are going to have to become willing to say goodbye to some habitual behaviors.

This can be a lot like saying goodbye to old friends. A present character defect often is an old coping behavior that once was a useful part of our survival kit. We usually don't become aware what old routines have become excess baggage until they cause us problems.

The statement, *"People don't change behaviors that work,"* is truer than we may realize. Manipulating people or defensive touchiness, either of which may have been lifesavers for us in a world of threats and uproar, are good examples of behaviors that can outlive their usefulness when we change our way of life. We can easily continue these habits, treat people like objects and react to them defensively, if that's been a style we've learned. In safe situations, we can fail to make friends because we don't know how to let our own guard down. If we continue to feel and act more vulnerable than is actually the case, we negate our own power in situations where we could take a more positive kind of role. We can feel pretty foolish when we realize we've been shadow boxing!

Step 6 is an action Step. The first action in Step 6 is the action of review. We try to see ourselves in terms of all of our habits, not just the ones we think are troublesome. What do we do, from the time we open our eyes in the morning until our final sleepy yawn at night? Which side of the bed do we get up on? We look at how we dress, eat, spend our money. Do we pray, meditate, exercise, do something for other people? Are we moving toward a vision for the future or just getting by?

We look to see if we are dragging our old miseries, in the form of habitual reactions, into our present lives. We review what we have written in Step 4. Are we still defending ourselves from threats that may once have been quite real, but aren't today? Realistically, are we objectively still being threatened? Do we continue to act from habitual fears, habitual suspicions or defensive patterns? On the other hand, do we continue to expose ourselves to threats that we know are unhealthy to endure?

If we are willing to become more in touch with our real identity, the Worthy Person God made within us, the action of Step 6 makes sense.

Looking at our daily routines may seem like overkill. But is it? We may be inclined to speak of our issues in general terms, as past mistakes, no longer a part of our life today. General discussion, however, doesn't impact behavior. Most of us find we are usually more willing to talk about our problem behaviors than we are to actually let them go.

Why is it that we seem to be so attached to habitual behaviors, even ones we admit are not desirable? One way to look at this is to acknowledge that we are, to an extent, addicted to wrong-doing. If we keep it simple in Step 6, we must be willing to look at the ways our pride and laziness, our lust and greed and envy impact our lives. Our needs for safety, for physical gratifications, for emotional security and a role in the community are real; every human being is driven by these needs.

We believe what separates us from other people are feelings of shame we have associated with some, or maybe all, of these strong drives. We have found that immorality seems to be rooted in behaviors that deny God's power and willingness to provide us with what we naturally all want.

Think about it. The Worthy Person God made and intends us to be has no need of pride or envy. S/he is not threatened by other people's happiness or prosperity. After all, part of being a Worthy Person includes deserving a family, friends, a job, a place to live! A Worthy Person can afford to be generous, gentle, patient, even fearless and direct.

A Worthy Person doesn't have to appease other Worthy People: They aren't a threat! Worthy People don't have to bully or manipulate each other. They are able to make commitments, work together toward goals.

If the Worthy Person within us had been free of the false beliefs and bad reaction habits that got us so crossed up in life, we wouldn't have gotten so lost. So much of our anger is directed at ourselves! We've mistakenly identified ourselves with our bad habits; we've believed we were our reactions. No wonder we are angry. Our own confused thinking and our learned behaviors have worked against us to mark our lives.

To the extent that we are blind or stubborn, weak or underhanded we are out of touch with the Worthy Person within us that God intends us each to be.

Our desires and appetites push us to act. In the absence of healthy ways to work out satisfying our needs, we impose on other people. We'd have very little to hold a grudge about toward other people if we could always live in faith that our basic appetites are normal, healthy and that satisfying them is part of God's intention for us all!

Most of us live pretty far away from this perfection. If we are honest, we find that we believe in scarcity, in lack, in competition. We've been greedy, blind. Maybe we still are. We fear we are not worthy, that the Worthy Person God made isn't who we are.

The self-honesty of Step 6 isn't a trap designed to make us feel worthless in a world of better people. We take a tip from those who live in faith: Global thinking is a luxury. A daily plan is more down to earth and, with willingness to change, it serves us well. Worthy People are not saints. Worthy People are people who accept themselves and live in the present. We are letting the Worthy Person God made and intends us to be into the present when we recognize we can't change everything at once. We can't go back in time. But we can take action and make a beginning, now.

If we are willing to be willing, we are going to experience a change in our identity. We are going to stop thinking of ourselves as identified with what we don't like and try to conceal. Instead, we're going to become willing to let the Worthy Person live through us.

To get through this identity change, it is helpful to see our attachment to old habits in terms of what we understand about the grief process as it relates to change.

Change in our lives, even the change that comes with victory and triumph, brings about a measure of feeling loss, anxiety and sadness. It isn't easy to change. Our bodies and minds are biochemically attached to old patterns, we now know. Even Olympic athletes have to learn to let themselves win. It is part of the training necessary to success.

Our bodies grieve change, even changes that are wonderfully rejuvenating. We need to see changing our lives as a training process, something we need to work at, stick with. We will need help.

Fellowship with others who are willing to let the Worthy Person God made live through them is really essential. We need to get over our fears that the grief we feel when we look back on our lives will last forever. It, too, will pass. We need the encouragement of others who are changing, too. We're on the same team!

Suppose you're carrying some very serious excess baggage from the past. Suppose, as is not all that unusual in a 12-Step program, you have actually killed or maimed someone, with a car while drunk. Or with a gun. Suppose you've acted out of rage, frustration, vengeance, hurt somebody with your fists or with a club.

Or maybe someone you love did that to you or to a family member. Maybe somebody who has gone this far now wants to join your church. What kind of a Worthy Person does that, you ask yourself. Hasn't this behavior made it impossible to ever really turn around? Can I accept this person? If it is me who has acted out, can I expect to ever earn these people's trust? Or can I trust myself?

If we are tempted to write off someone, or ourselves, aren't we just putting a limit on God's power and mercy?

We believe we are falling into a trap when we insist on second-guessing what is possible before we do our end of the job.

Step 6 asks us to become entirely willing to let go of all our defects. Preconceived ideas about what is possible for God is probably one of the most serious defects of them all.

If we find it hard to live with ourselves because of something brutal we have actually done to someone else, we need to be willing to feel remorse. The inability to feel sorry for hurt we cause to others is a serious defect, too. It cuts us off from the Worthy Person God still holds out for us to be.

Trying to outrun remorse often runs us until we drop or someone locks us up. The Worthy Person God made and intends us still to be just naturally feels a lot of pain and sorrow for the hurt he or she has caused. We've got to give that Worthy Person who is us a chance to own those feelings in the present. This is willingness to change.

Another side of this same problem is the inability to genuinely forgive another person. We have trouble letting go of the past. Are we willing to let someone who has hurt us or hurt other people change? Don't we tend to hold them off and justify doing so out of our fear, no matter how sincerely they may struggle to overcome a past mistake? How long are we justified in holding on to a suspicious attitude? What does a person have to do to win our trust? If we are troubled with these sorts of questions, we need to look to God for answers and directions.

Suspicion probably cuts us off from the Worthy Person God made us to be as much as any other defect. Other people can't make this sort of fear subside, even if they spend their lives trying to make up to us. We need to become willing to stop controlling them through guilt or shaming them to make ourselves feel superior. If we beat others with the past, we are not justified; we are getting lost ourselves. Becoming willing to be changed and restored to child-like innocence is not easy. If the fruits of willingness are attractive, we must try.

We challenge our self-imposed limits in Step 6. As we realize that we need not be bound by our habits and reactions from the past, a more positive self-image becomes possible. Limiting self-concepts such as, *"That's just the way I am,"* can always be challenged by choosing to behave differently.

We remember, too, that we are not in recovery to meet other people's standards, just our own. If we find that we aren't willing to let go of some behaviors, self-honesty remains the best policy.

We ask our Higher Power that we be given the willingness, when and if it is in keeping with God's plan. We help ourselves become more willing by actively imagining alternatives to behaviors that remain in the way. *"What would I be like if I didn't smoke? What might I do differently? How would I spend the money?"* Alternatives and the willingness to accept them will come.

There may be behaviors we choose to keep even though others object to them. Success, in life, is ultimately measured in terms of how well we can accept and live happily with ourselves.

As we accept self-responsibility, we become increasingly aware of our independence. We are responsible for the fruits of choices that we make. Sometimes willingness comes when we recognize how stubbornness is bearing fruit.

Periodic review of Step 6 is a good idea. What may be useful today may one day be excess baggage. Rather than a steep staircase we climb once, the 12-Steps are more like stepping stones that lead along a path we can travel, day by day. When we take Step 6, we have the opportunity to act, not react, as we choose to release or reaffirm behaviors. Choice is a blessing God intends for the Worthy Person who is us.

What habits no longer serve me?

STEP SEVEN

Let God

7. Humbly ask God to remove our shortcomings.

In Step 7, We strive for a realistic perspective on ourselves, our powers and abilities. We ask our Higher Power to free us from old ruts and cure our blindness.

Having come this far in the Steps, we have learned much. We've started to try new strategies in our life. Now, in Step 7, we face again the question of whether we need a spiritual boost to keep making progress. How we answer this question is an exercise in realistic thinking, the basis of humility.

The intention of Step 7 is not to rob us of self-confidence. *Humiliation* isn't the same thing as *humility*. Humiliation comes of trying to put a lie over on life and getting caught in the attempt. Humility is not like that at all. Humility is the result of facing facts and having the courage to ask for the help we really need.

Humility involves looking at things realistically. Although it may not be our idea of an exercise in humility, an engineer is actually being humble when s/he says, *"Yes, I want to build this bridge," and adds, "but I'll need this list of supplies and these skilled workers to bring it off. Here's the estimated cost."* The engineer is taking on a project while being sure to assess it realistically before jumping in.

If the support isn't there, no matter how attractive the project looks, a competent engineer wouldn't try to kid anybody about the facts. If he or she did, the fraud involved might very well show up in a half-finished project or a collapsed bridge. Either outcome would not bring credit to the engineer's sense of self worth and reputation!

Humility isn't weakness; it is a source of courage.

When we have the humility to be realistic about what we can or can't do, it saves us from failure and humiliation down the road.

Nobody wants to look like a fool. When we begin to change our old habits, we don't know exactly what to expect. There isn't a checklist of the materials necessary to rebuild or repair our damaged lives. But it isn't humble to give up. Humility isn't weakness; it is a source of courage.

When we see the struggle of an ant to bring home a big seed; the little creature's willingness to tackle a big project inspires our respect. We see her for who she is; she presents no false appearances, makes no grand claims. She is humble in her commitment and her success or failure is, in effect, in God's care.

In letting go of our old defects, we must try to see ourselves for who we are. We have our goals. We start out in a direction we hope will take us to a better life. In Step 7, we need to look at the limits of our power and our judgment. Do we, or do we not, need God's help to become the person God intends us to be?

When it comes to being our own reliable engineers in building a life, most of us admit we don't necessarily even know a good blueprint when we see one! We ask God to build our lives, using what is useful in us, discarding what is not. We ask for tasks, for helpers and for the wisdom to accept what will build our characters and give us peaceful hearts.

The kind of asking for help with our shortcomings that takes place in Step 7 is neither hysterical begging nor giving detailed instructions to God. Just as we have done our part, in taking the Steps that lead up to this one, we now trust that our Higher Power will transform us.

Just as we've become willing to *Let go*, . . . through the work in Step 6, we now take a deep breath and *Let God!* For Step 7 to be accomplished, we must actually release our shortcomings to God's care and will. The asking that occurs in Step 7 is grounded in the conviction that our Higher Power is present, available and willing to mold our lives for good.

The inner perspective necessary for success in Step 7 often can be felt as a release of tensions that is physical.

When we succeed in really letting go and letting God, inevitably a burden is lifted from us. It is a good practice for this reason to link our verbal asking that our shortcoming be removed with the practice of techniques for relaxation. As we remind ourselves to associate a physical sense of relaxation with letting God, we continue to cultivate the healthy humility we seek within our bodies, as well as within our minds. We become more peaceful and serenely confident as agitation and timidity in our body is released.

Relaxation practices do not have to be complicated. Taking in some long, slow breaths is a simple practice that always does some good. Other simple and relaxing practices include taking a warm bath, listening to music, swimming, taking a walk or having a massage. Yoga and other more disciplined approaches to relaxation are also fine ways to cultivate Step 7's release in body, mind and spirit.

Another method for cultivating humility is to train our minds to count our blessings in the present. We can also train our voices to be gentle. We can practice learning to listen, rather than fighting to be heard. We can become bringers of kind words and friendly smiles.

Instead of getting smug or holier than thou about the gains we make, it may be helpful to go back, in memory, to how we felt when we started this work. Were we in pain? Confused? Fearful? Looking back on how we've gradually let go of what has separated us from God and other people, we ask ourselves how much credit we can take for how things have improved.

Without comparing ourselves with others, we contrast how we were with how we are. We own the benefits we have already received. We give thanks for what hasn't happened to us but might have, had we continued going it alone. By noting what is good in our lives, not only do most of us report feeling gratitude, but current difficulties may also lose much of their sting.

It is humble to acknowledge the progress we have made. It is not humble, or honest, to attack ourselves or to minimize our progress. These are flawed concepts of humility, tied to a false idea that our Higher Power wants us to humiliate ourselves, which just is not true. When we rejoice in recovery, this is a form of praising the presence of God in our lives.

Thank you, God, for the blessings of this day. . .

STEP EIGHT

Who Have I Injured?

- 8. Make a list of those we have harmed and become willing to make amends to them.**

We list who we are mad at or have used. We become willing to rebuild our relationships with others.

In Step 8, we undertake the work that has the potential to heal our relationships. This may sound like a very big order — and for most of us, it is. Some relationships may have become the focus of frustration and heartbreak, maybe for a long time. Individuals entwined in our histories may have died or exited our lives. Healing change may seem quite impossible.

We undertake the work of Step 8 to restore a sense of balance to our lives. Our goal is to put ourselves back into the center of our own lives, even if our present relationships are distorted or few.

Getting other people to applaud is not the goal of Step 8. We are careful not to take on that responsibility or measure our progress by how people react. We work Step 8 to gain a more realistic view of our relationships so that healing becomes possible, *in us*.

We remind ourselves that in a spiritual universe, others, too, have the option to heal, if they are willing to accept it. But in Step 8, we keep the focus on cleaning up our act. *The beginning of health in a relationship is to see our part in it*, our expectations and reactions, as they have and do play out in what we do or fail to do.

What's Fair?

First, let's consider what people do have a right to expect from each other. If we accept ourselves as the spiritual children of a Loving Parent, we all deserve good care. As Worthy People God made we each have *a spiritual right* to have our basic needs recognized and respected, whether or not this is "the law of the land" in our community. Our needs for safety, physical satisfactions, emotional security and respect from our peers are, we believe, inborn, normal drives, common to all of us. Our core biological instincts prompt us to struggle toward these goals.

Our needs for safety, physical satisfactions, emotional security and respect from our peers are, we believe, inborn, normal drives, common to all of us.

These are a part of every person's biochemical make up, hard-wired in our brains, surely part of who God made us to be and intends our lives to include. The Worthy Person God made and intends us to become naturally accepts these drives as a baby and small child. We think it is when these baselines of a human life become distorted—by conflict with others who impose, or by our own selfishly desire to take more than our share—that our troubles begin. Confused attempts to satisfy our basic needs which run into resistance from those around us cause just about all the conflict we experience.

If we are willing to claim and affirm these basic drives as rights for ourselves, we will see other people in a new light. If we acknowledge our own needs, we must then, logically, follow up by affirming them for others—*all others*—whether we are acquainted with them or not, or even whether we like them or not. It's simple: **If we have these rights, as whole human beings, then *everyone* has them.** This outlook may be a big departure from what we've been taught, if we stop to think about it.

In working the 12-Steps, if we come to see that human beings harm each other in direct relation to how much they ignore or lose sight of this common ground we have—trying to satisfy our inborn, basic, God-given needs—most of us don't know how we can avoid these kinds of problems. If we push or grab for what we want, we hurt people. If we try to ignore our own desires, we not only hurt ourselves, but we fail to be honest with others. We become hard to reach. We either leave out of life what only we can put in or we take things away from other people! There's no denying that this is a lot of what's going on around us.

So how do we live respectfully with other people? Clearly, we don't owe the same degree of respect and care to everyone. As parents, for example, we not only feel bonded with our children, but we are responsible for them. This relationship precedes birth and gradually changes as children mature into adults and as parents age. This has been true in all kinds of societies for as long as there have been human beings.

In less intimate situations, at school, on the job, the care we extend to each other varies. We also have many brief or superficial contacts with others, store clerks, public figures, neighbors, where not much bonding is felt and what we get and give is more or less taken for granted: money in exchange for goods, acknowledgment, a friendly greeting. Different cultures have different standards, too.

Make a Chart

To see how we have harmed other people, we start with a chart. Draw a big circle and put yourself at the center it.

Our first job in Step 8 is to determine the boundaries separating different kinds of relationships we have with others, past and present. Who we put in our chart, and where, is up to us. In some cases, this is pretty obvious. In others, it is a judgment call. We don't bog down in this process. Our goal is to see how our God-given basic needs have gotten confused in our dealings with others and have functioned as character defects instead of healthy assets.

Self. We are in the center of our chart.

Intimates. Who took care of us, as kids? Closest to us, we fill in the names of those who were our primary care-givers: our parents or whoever took care of us. These people taught us, on a physical level, what our bodies feel is true about safety and affection. As adults, who do we have? As adults, we become primary caregivers, impacting our children, mates, anyone we physically take care of and provide with basic necessities they depend on to live.

Extended Family. Beyond primary family, others who are close expect mutual help and loyalty. Lifelong friendships take commitment. Although close, these people have other ties and interests that don't involve us. Expectations, limits, are negotiated and these, as well as our needs, can change.

Community. Our lives include many relationships which impact on our lives. People we know through work, activities, church. Limits of commitment in these relationships vary, depending on a range of factors such as the ethnic group we belong to. If this circle is weak, we tend to become isolated loners. If we ask too much in casual relationships, we are rejected. Our social identity is developed in this circle. Without good people skills, we tend to overcommit, impose, or withdraw from people.

Leadership Role Models. These figures are the wallpaper in the background of our life. Teachers, ministers, heroes such as athletes or figures out of history can be in this group. They tend to set the limits on what we think is possible for us. If we grew up in a community where many adults are unemployed and drug dealers are big shots, our role models may be those with hot cars or the biggest guns. How we act in our community also falls within this circle. We, too, are all role models to other people around us, for good or for ill..

So what was our situation, growing up? We look at how we were received into this life. Was it easy to be the Worthy Person God made and intended us to be or was it impossible? Were the people around us so busy or so drunk they didn't have time to give us recognition and support? We are objective. We try to notice whether we had healthy relationships in all four kinds of relationships growing up. Were there some holes? What about today?

If we grew up without good care or without friends, or lacking community support, our instincts made us try to patch these holes. Our basic needs didn't disappear. If our parents were toxic or preoccupied, it made us mad to be neglected. We did something about it. Maybe we got loud. Or maybe we became lost in television or in activities with friends. Maybe being angry at a parent has colored our whole lives: Not only can we act like two year olds when we feel frustrated but we may not find it easy to feel secure or to relax with intimates. When we have buried hurts from childhood, we may not even remember the incidents or know what we can do about them now.

We don't stop learning when we leave home. We make another chart for the lives we've built as adults. Have we tried to fill holes in our needs for family by over-depending on friends? As a result, have we been rejected, used? Are we still inclined to impose or be used today? We try to see how our confused expectations of care and responsibility have trained us to behave.

It is true that what we live with, we learn. And what we have learned, we tend to practice and carry on. As dependent children, we were involuntary trainees, learning the family rules, whatever they were. Maybe we had the mistaken idea that other people, not God, control our world. In Step 8, we try to become willing let go of the false ideas we learned about care and respect from other people. As we do this, we see how these ideas and expectations have unfairly burdened others. We may have made serious mistakes. We probably have let people down who had a right to better treatment from us. When we become willing to cease living life as victims of the past and other people, most of us have a lot of rebuilding work to do and a lot of wreckage to clear away. But our work in Step 8 gives our relationships a good foundation; we have a place to stand!

We consider those who we admit have been our victims. We look not just at violence or theft. We look at all the ways we have tried to get more than we give. We look at how we have wasted time trying to get validation from those who would not or could not give us their respect. Have we perpetuated patterns of abuse or rejection, ourselves, in a desperate attempt to keep control?

Reflecting on the fabric of our past and present ties, we ask ourselves if we are willing, now, to rebuild each of these relationships, acting as a sane and spiritually centered adult. Perhaps we will not have a clear plan for making amends, but this isn't the point.

The question we face in Step 8 is willingness. If we are willing to live from a sane perspective in our families, communities and world, then it is up to our Higher Power who we trust to provide us with the guidance and opportunity necessary for success. We've done our end, when we've had the courage and patience to look at just where we stand and how we fit—or don't fit—into the world today.

STEP NINE

Fix Our End of a Problem

9. Make direct amends wherever possible, except when to do so would injure others.

In Step 9, we change our behaviour, giving consideration to the needs and well-being of others.

Making amends means taking appropriate action. For different people, this means different things. For example, for a person who has lived as an outsider in their community, showing up regularly to do a needed job can be a way to make amends. For those who, like the rich young man in the Bible, have kept all the Commandments and done well, amends might mean cashing in some of our stored up riches or changing where we walk. In Step 9, we seek to actively put into life whatever we've been withholding, our unique gifts as well as the repairs we owe for damages and neglect.

If we have stolen something, we return it if that is within our power. If we cannot do this, we find a realistic way make up for the wrong, without implicating other people. We pay the personal as well as the financial debts we owe, using not just dollars but other resources, our time, caring attention, what we have to teach. We clear the slate. We try to do more than that; our goal now is to make a contribution to the lives we touch. We seek to become social assets, not just zeros. We realize we don't deserve medals for just ceasing to be drains on those around us!

Is This Amends Appropriate?

Here are some tests to use in Step 9 to weigh an action for amends:

- Is this action in line with our own values?**
- Can we take this action without trying to control another person or force a result?**
- Does this action show respect for other people's feelings and their situation in the present?**

These simple guidelines challenge us to think through our amends before we jump into action. It is a good idea to have a plan, in working Step 9. When we are methodical about Step 9, this Step begins to fit into our lives. Each amends is a process with a beginning and an end.

Not only will we be less inclined to approach Step 9 in a secretive, haphazard way if we have a plan for working it but we are much less likely to skip over some people on our list or to drag the process on indefinitely.

Step 9 is the natural outgrowth of the change we begin with the inventory process in Step 4. If we have worked the Steps leading up to this one, we will have an idea of what our values are. We will have a list of those we've harmed and will have developed the point of view necessary to be willing to make amends to them. Now, in Step 9, we consider what is an acceptable amends, on a case by case basis. We don't do this alone. It is a good idea to go over our entire list with someone we trust. This keeps us realistic. Who belongs on our amends list? We list:

- Family and those who are in our lives today;**

- People who have died or gone away;**

- Employers and other authority figures;**

People we still dislike or fear.

We may have already approached some people on our list in the spirit of amends. Close ties or others toward whom we felt strong remorse. In working Step 9, we are advised to review what we have already said and done. Has our amends been haphazard or manipulative? Have we honored the boundaries and feelings of others or have we been invasive or self-righteous? Is there something we need to add or change?

Going over the others on our list, we consider how we can straighten out our end of whatever sort of trouble is involved. Are feelings still raw? Would a letter be more appropriate than a visit? Is the timing right?

Where criminal activities or cheating in a relationship of trust is involved, it's especially desirable to discuss the whole matter with someone who has a first-hand understanding of Step 9.

Were others involved? Who would be implicated if the whole matter came out? What is the healthiest form of amends, the path of greatest healing?

Tempting as it is to write off some people, if we have lied or slandered someone, we need to be willing to clear this up. It is vital that we wait, however, until clarity prevails before taking any drastic action.

To get free of the accumulated burden of past errors, we have to live Step 9, not just think about it. Step 9 is a doing process. We can't change who we are without moving our feet!

Step 9 comes down to making amends to ourselves by replacing bad behaviors with better ones. Some of us see where we were very badly treated by others who, at one time, had power over us. Injuries from abuse, neglect or lack of commitment from parents or mates can feel impossible to forgive.

Maybe we have been victims of prejudice or discrimination. What can be done about these harms?

In working Step 9, we don't try to justify the injuries others have done us. That would be as unjust as trying to justify the injuries we have done to ourselves or to others. We do not go back into denial about the problems that really did exist and may still. To get free of the control of these old tyrants and their abusive judgments, we *make amends to ourselves* by learning to draw our validation directly from God. These people, we realize, didn't have the insight we have now, in recovery; they were, themselves, pretty much robots, living like wind-up toys, without a way to change.

We are kind to ourselves when we recover and no longer let ourselves be destroyed by other's bad acts or neglect. As we free ourselves, and rejoin ourselves to the way of life God intended us to enjoy, we also automatically lighten the burden of those who hurt us, if and when they are willing to find healing themselves. This form of kindness is an amends to people we have blamed or feared; when we cease treating them like evil gods, we take the burden of shame off of them as the Worthy Person God intends us to be becomes present and real, despite their mistakes or cruel errors!

Slogan to ponder:

We free the prisoners we have made with our resentment when we open the door to accepting justice and peace.

STEP TEN

Live In the Present

- 10. Continue to take personal inventory, and when we are wrong, admit it.**

We claim progress, not perfection.

No matter what we learn in life, we only keep what we practice. This is as true of the self-awareness skills we learn in recovery as it is of a tennis backstroke. Old ruts, worn by years of practice, soon begin to creep back into our lives if we don't keep an eye on what we have identified as our own problem behaviors. Stress and daily challenges bring problems. Our vision of personal freedom can quickly become blurred. Despite insight and good intentions, we often find we make some mistakes again.

In order to minimize the accumulated impact of the wreckage of the present, we need to keep an eye on our own conduct. We don't want to bog down in this. Our goal is simply to live life on life's terms and not walk off a cliff today.

To make use of Step 10, it helps to know what our goals and priorities are. When we establish a goal, whether that goal is personal change or something more tangible, say, like learning to drive a car, we need a strategy to achieve our goal.

A goal without an effective strategy for achieving it remains only a fantasy. Step 10 encourages us to evaluate our strategies.

Using the example of learning to drive, *talking about* learning to drive is not a strategy for learning to drive.

Strategies involve something definite, such as signing up to take a driver's ed course.

Step 10 also helps us to make use of feedback we get from others while we keep our priorities in line. If we are willing to make good use of the feedback we get from those around us, we will feel supported by it. Constructive criticism is a key factor in the learning process. Utilizing feedback takes us where we want to go, usually more quickly than going it alone, if we can see what is being said in the light of our own clear goals and strategies. Doing a daily inventory, in Step 10, is a practice we use to get clear about what our goals actually are, by reviewing what we've said and done through the day.

We can check out our motives, too, by reviewing how we have behaved. If we have goals but we aren't taking steps to move toward them, what is the problem?

Resistance to Step 10 often manifests as resistance to doing the inventory *now*. We may be inclined to put it off. Won't we, some ask, squelch all spontaneity if we have to watch our every move, worry about our every word? But Step 10's inventory is not intended to stifle us. Our resistance is like the force of inertia; we need to push a little, to get started.

Overcoming this sort of resistance to Step 10 is largely a matter of taking the actions we believe will serve us in recovery and trusting that our feelings will catch up later. When we discipline ourselves by regular practice of Step 10, most find that we become actually more creative, with better structure in our lives.

Use a Spot Check Inventory

When and how we take an inventory depends upon individual circumstances. Taking a spot check inventory is an option, not an obligation. When stress or hostility begins to dominate a situation, we can immediately choose to take a few deep breaths before we speak, while we examine what we are feeling. We bring the focus back to ourselves:

- *What is our goal in this situation?*
- *Do our present feelings prompt actions that are not in line with our long-term goals?*
- *Are we honestly asking for what we want, offering what we actually want to give?*
- *What are our options?*

A spot check inventory replaces *reaction* with *choice* in ongoing situations.

Turn Fantasies into Achievable Goals

If we are making major lifestyle changes, it is a good idea to give some focused attention to how we are doing every day. At day's end, take a few minutes to reflect, with a notepad, on how the day has gone. Here are questions to consider:

- 1. Communication:** Have I isolated myself today? Have I taken a communication risk?
- 2. Comfort:** Have I been obsessed with something — a person, food, drugs, power? Have I been at peace today?
- 3. Identity:** Have I felt like a victim today, weaker than or controlled by others? Have I held my own?

4. **Relationships:** Have I appeased or injured someone today? Have I acted from my inner loyalties today, kept my boundaries intact?
5. **Feelings:** Have I been dishonest? Have I lied? Have I been willing to feel all of my feelings?
6. **Spirituality:** Was I distracted today, did I lose touch with my Higher Power due to stress, anger or fear? Did I trust my Higher Power under difficult circumstances?

It is as important to give ourselves credit for the gains we make as it is for us to admit where we have fallen short. It is also helpful to do a periodic review of our progress over a longer time-frame. Many find that a few days of retreat, taking some time for reflection, is a form of self-care that is valuable and useful.

**Step 10
is an action Step.**

Step 10 is an action Step. We are what we practice, to a large extent, as personalities. When we act with honesty to admit where we have been in error, have misjudged another, or have done someone a harm, we free ourselves from these errors. Some of errors may be in the acts we haven't taken. We may have not shown a caring feeling to someone out of fear of rejection or appearing foolish. Perhaps we have selfishly held back what we might have given? We are patient with other people and with ourselves.

We don't set ourselves up for invalidation or abuse when we go to someone to admit a wrong, but we remind ourselves that recovery isn't a fairytale, either. Sometimes a well-meant risk is rejected, misunderstood. We may not be able to communicate as we had hoped we could. In step 10, we practice living life on life's terms. We do the best we can. That is what we ask of other people and what we expect of ourselves.

STEP ELEVEN

Am I Centred?

- 11. Seek through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understand God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and power to carry that out.**

We seek to grow in the power and security that comes of living our inner guidance day by day.

The 12-Steps are a spiritual journey we take to rediscover our authentic inner selves. We move from bleak landscapes where our limitations are in control toward a more fruitful way of life, filled with challenge and opportunity. However therapy, medical treatment, hard work and good sponsorship have helped us, the actual experience of healing requires connecting with a deeply spiritual core within ourselves. A fire of vitality must reawaken within us, or skilled help and care of others could accomplish little.

What makes recovery a reality in our lives is the fire of faith and vitality that we come to experience within ourselves, much as we gratefully acknowledge the support that comes our way.

This flame of spirit within needs to be fueled and fed if it is to burn with a steady light and maintain the power to warm our hearts. Working Step 11 is a way to feed the contact between our ordinary awareness and our spiritual power source within. Making regular use of prayer and meditation is a healthy habit that we cultivate to stay in touch with inspiration.

Willing as we may be to acknowledge the importance of spirituality in the recovery process, many of us still find that we have a certain amount of resistance to the idea of prayer, or to the systematic practice of it. In order to begin to integrate the practice of prayer into our daily lives, we may need to reconsider the meaning and purpose of prayer. We may have a confused concept of what it means to pray. Old ideas about God often block the way. Perhaps we have an association with the word “prayer,” attached to humiliating memories. We may have begged God or tried in vain to strike a deal with God, to stave off heartbreak or disaster. The idea of praying may feel like risking a kind of soul-rejection, not getting help. Or perhaps we grew up in household where appearances were everything. We may have come to see prayer as a pious-seeming undertaking intended only to impress others. Maybe prayer is just a mechanical repeating of words to us. We want no part of it.

If we are tormented by these or similar associations with the idea of prayer, we remind ourselves: *Resistance is an invitation to tell the truth. Fellowship is a place for sharing doubt, not only faith. We talk to someone.*

We can also help ourselves by taking action to redefine our understanding of prayer now. We can take the initiative and revise our understanding of how prayer works. The dictionary tells us that prayer is, “*communication directed toward God, including asking, praising, adoring, confessing.*” Thus prayer is the act of extending ourselves toward the God of our understanding.

If the God of our understanding is felt to be nurturing and merciful, we naturally desire to build a stronger conscious contact with God. When we pray, we exercise our personal right to communicate with the God of our understanding. Few rights rival this one, in terms of power and importance in our lives!

How and when we pray is between us and God. We may or may not feel it is necessary to get down on our knees. Rituals, including services or ceremonial dance, going to shrines or churches to indicate respect, are always matters of individual conscience in 12-Step programs.

Praying in a group, too, including saying the Serenity Prayer at the beginning of 12-Step meetings is not an obligation, but a matter of choice. In all 12-Step programs we are assured of our right to a personal relationship with the God of our understanding, along with the right to develop that relationship as we are led.

Perhaps we may have little positive association with forms of prayer learned in childhood or associated with a cultural heritage we wish to claim. In such cases, prayer may be an opportunity to explore new options, or to claim as prayer some of our activities that we may not have associated with concepts of prayer before.

Once we have come to understand prayer as a right we enjoy, rather than as a burden or an obligation, then the whole activity begins to take on a natural harmony in our lives.

Rejoicing in our blessings is a form of prayer. When we express our gratitude for the good things we see around us, the pleasures of restored health and sanity, the joy we feel in fellowship, we are doing what the dictionary defines as praising and rejoicing. When we appreciate a sunset or feel awe in the face of nature, if we are willing to acknowledge the spiritual basis of these wonders, then we are in effect adoring God.

When we begin to claim these forms of prayer and worship, we often find that we have within us a core of reverence that goes deep. As children, didn't we praise and delight in the beauty of life, even if we had no words to express these reverent feelings? We can choose to count among our prayers our appreciation for a waterfall, or for a bird's song, the sounds of children's laughter, the smells of dinner cooking.

We can choose to see the work we do as a prayer of offering we make with our bodies and our minds. We can understand prayer in loving others, as a spiritual gift, a validation of spirit that flows from heart to heart.

Once we have come to understand prayer as a right we enjoy, rather than as a burden or an obligation, then the whole activity begins to take on a natural harmony in our lives. We find building a conscious contact with the God of our understanding no longer is an activity that takes us away from life. As prayer becomes integrated in our life, it gradually comes to underlay much of what we do.

Step 11 also asks us to practice meditation. If prayer is the act of reaching out to God, then meditation can be seen as the act of letting God in. When we take time to meditate, we make a conscious decision to open ourselves to guidance and inspiration. One of the classic methods of meditating is the practice of clearing the mind of all thought. All distractions, including emotional responses to thoughts, are gradually released, dismissed. The object of classical meditation is emptiness, stillness, complete one-pointedness of being. Achieving this state of detached awareness may be the goal of years of discipline.

Meditation in Step 11 need not be so formal. We need only make space in our daily schedule to receive God's direction to make progress in Step 11. Meditation involves making a decision to set aside our projects, goals and other commitments and to use that time receptively. It is usually much easier to replace our usual preoccupations with something else than it is to clear away all thoughts. Inspirational reading or repeating a brief affirmation statement about God helps refocus our awareness, creating a quieter inner space. Music can help. Yoga, rhythmic programs of exercise, jogging, drawing, making pottery, lying in the cool grass contemplating the clouds as they sail across the sky — any of these practices can be used in meditation, so long as we make a conscious decision to release our everyday cares while we engage in them.

If we can accept that meditation need not be the rigorous practice of a demanding discipline, most of us find the idea of trying it less intimidating. We may still be inclined to forget to meditate. Most of us become sharply aware of how habitually busy and distracted we keep ourselves when we try to reserve 10-15 minutes a day for quiet reflection.

Keeping ourselves distracted, out of touch with our bodies to a greater or lesser extent, is a defense mechanism. In order to cope with physical discomfort, people who are over-stressed or chronically in pain develop ways to distract themselves, consciously or not. Escaping from the present is a habit that, once established, dies hard. If we have been more or less addicted to excitement — to our own anger, to silent rehearsals of dialogue with people who aren't present, to fantasies of conquest — these mental distractions probably will do their best to hang on.

Real crisis in our present lives may also interfere with our goal of meditation. If we (or those around us) have acted out our fears in our relationships, our lives may be infected with crisis. Meditation is a practice meant to provide an antidote to crisis-building emotions. When we meditate, we give ourselves permission to be present. Meditation may seem to threaten something near and dear to us if we have learned to use crisis and distraction to escape from painful feelings. Rather than giving up on meditation, we see these coping mechanisms for what they were. As we gradually replace distraction with prayer and meditation, our real identity, the Worthy Person God created us to be, discovers a safe path into the present and returns. God blesses our efforts. It gets easier.

Seeking to discover and live out God's will for us becomes a source of power to us. If we had lost touch with our inner identity, we find that this connection is now being restored. In the continued practice of Step 11, we seek to reduce our inner conflict, a little at a time.

We learn we can ask God anytime, *“Is this goal or impulse in keeping with my highest good?”* As we learn to listen, we find source of power and wisdom, willing to guide us. God earns our trust. Most of us do find we come to seek to do God’s will in life; we find it more rewarding than what we imagined on our own.

This, God, is my prayer:

STEP TWELVE

Am I Giving Away What I Want to Keep?

- 12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these Steps, we try to carry this message to others and to practice these principles in all of our affairs.**

In Step 12 we own the peace of mind we have. We try to walk our talk in life.

A newcomer quips, “I read this book in a couple of hours. It gave me a lift. Then I noticed I was still in jail. What kind of spiritual awakening in this? A rude one, I guess!”

Most of us prefer easy answers. If we drank to excess or let other people make our choices, wasn’t that our easy answer, for a while? But didn’t those easy answers start to go down hard? If we admit that we got tired of the easy way out, then just reading through this book may have turned on a light, showed us some new options. Even a small ray of hope is a big improvement over none at all. A lot of us don’t wake up, spiritually, in a bed with clean sheets!

If we glimpse an idea that awakens our hope, we believe we have cause to give thanks. We start where we are. We have this much to share, just for today. Admittedly, it may not seem like a lot. If we wake up today behind several locks, there may not be a quick-fix for our situation. Whether we lock ourselves up or someone else keeps the keys makes some difference, surely, but how much? Who among us is free if the spirit of God is not in our heart? If we have hope, it is a gift to treasure.

Let's take a look at some of the worst case scenarios: Suppose we have read this book on death row. Or having been diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. Suppose we have cancer or have lost someone who meant the world to us. Is there a reason to work the 12-Steps? We answer that question with a question: If our circumstances are entirely beyond our control, is it possible to still feel an inner peace? If we choose to work the 12-Steps, it is to answer that question for ourselves.

Even in circumstances that safe, abundant and serene, we still face similar questions, if we are honest: What is the purpose of our life, and how do we recognize a mistake before we lose ourselves in it? Sometimes the confusion and pressures which arise from too many options pose their own serious threats to inner peace. Those who have much may identify closely with those who struggle with practical hardships. It is not always easy to see how what we have can be put to use. Rich or in jail, in self-discovery and in wisdom to use our gifts, we find our peace of mind. We work the Steps for this peace, and in sharing it, there is joy.

When we consider how we can carry the message of 12-Step living, our best bet is to *share our experience, strength and hope*. This is what we know best.

In any circumstances, we have something to share. Even a complete shut in can pray. Most of us can do that and a little more: We can make a pot of coffee or volunteer to chair a meeting for a few months. We can visit a person who is lonely or in pain. We can do something helpful or joy-producing for others we don't know that well, preferably in secret, if that is possible. These are just a few examples of 12-Step service work.

If we are willing to become vehicles for healing, opportunities seem to blossom like wild flowers in spring. When we share the 12-Step message, we are not trying to sell something or convince others that the process works.

We let our way of life be our message. We live a day at a time. If we practice doing this, carrying the message to others often takes care of itself.

Living a day at a time implies certain principles:

- We only live today.** If something is before us that needs to be done, now is the time to do it. If we wait for a better time, we miss an opportunity.

- There is only so much we can do today.** Someone said, *“Doing a big project is like building a brick wall. Even a three story building goes up one brick at a time.”* When life is overwhelming, a day at a time (or an hour at a time) gets us back to what is manageable.

- Not much lasts forever.** No matter how troubling a situation may be, we remember, this too will pass. We are not condemned to endless struggle, pain or remorse. Neither can we depend on having it made, no matter how great a present triumph.

- We can start again.** Living today gives us the freedom to begin anew when we believe it is advisable to do so. We are not stuck with our patterns of error, however ingrained. We can start a new day right now and let this day make a difference.

In working Step 12, we come to recognize our place in life’s interdependent dance. This is a mark of maturity.

Human beings depend on each other. We start out tiny and helpless, requiring the care of others to survive. As adults, we assume the role of providers, productive members of the community. Living long, we come again to depend upon the care of others as our vitality fades.

Our lives move to a pulse of changing needs, changing goals, changing abilities. We come to see ourselves as valuable, worthy of care, when we accept ourselves as having the capacity to give. We see that we can put back, not just take.

The work that we do in Step 12 is an expression of our self respect. It is not based in a joyless sense of obligation. What we do, we give voluntarily, offering it to the next person or to the next generation.

There is always an element of self-interest in doing this work, too. We have found that spiritual insights quickly lose force unless these become the basis of action in our lives. We do the work of Step 12 in order to keep what we have, by living what we learn.

What we give away, we keep.

RESOURCE MATERIALS

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Discussion Meeting Format

Welcome. My name is _____; I am your secretary. We begin with a moment of silence and the Serenity Prayer for those who wish to join in: (Read Serenity Prayer.)

There are no fees for membership. However, by tradition, our meetings are self-supporting through member- contributions. This meeting's rent and expenses is estimated at \$___/month. Thank you for doing your part to help cover these costs. (Pass basket.)

At this meeting, we ask that everyone refrain from cross- talk, advice-giving or debating what is shared. These meetings are a safe place for each of us to explore our own hearts and minds. Even well-meant comments may interfere with this self discovery process. We ask, too, that in respect for the safety of our circle, all that is shared here be treated as confidential.

This meeting's focus is _____. It is all right to talk about whatever is going on with you, even if that isn't clearly related to our topic. This is your meeting! Please limit your sharing to 5 minutes maximum so all who wish to do so will have a chance to talk. (Move to topic and open sharing.)

Closing: Thank you for attending. For those that wish to join in, we form a s circle and close with: (Choose a brief meditation or prayer. Some groups close by passing the Spiritual Progress Checklist and letting each member pick one to read.)

The Serenity Prayer

*God, grant me serenity
to accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can,
and wisdom to know the difference.*

A Work Issues Meeting Format

CHECKLIST FOR EMPLOYABILITY

Are Work Issues making our lives unmanageable?

Being employable in today's job market starts with these "basics," reliable, well-groomed, cooperative. If we are motivated to get work or to change jobs, we can check ourselves out. No matter what job skills we have, do we meet these basic standards for getting and keeping a job (or maybe even a day's work?)

Am I reliable? Are there factors in my life that make me miss work, show up late or leave early? What is the problem? It may be something as simple as lack of an alarm clock or as complicated as untreated alcoholism or family violence.

To a therapist, I may be depressed. But to a boss, I'm just *late*.

What, if anything, keeps me from being reliable?

Would I hire me? Do I appear clean? Is my hair neat, breath fresh? Are my clothes laundered and does what I'm wearing fit and suit both the climate and the job?

I may call my grooming a lifestyle choice, but an employer says, "*If you want to work here, please dress the part.*"

Am I well-groomed and dressed for the job?

How is my attitude? Do I look interested and am I able to stay alert? Am I able to learn the job; do I ask questions to avoid false starts or wasting time, mine or other people's?

There are many *reasons* for challenging authority. The bottom line is, however, if I can't follow directions, I can't keep a job.

Can I cooperate with a boss and with co-workers?

Identifying Primary Problems

Any behavior that threatens a person's life, health, sanity or freedom is a primary problem for him or her. Any behavior pattern that has the potential for killing us, putting us in a hospital, behind bars or that repeatedly places us in unsafe situations qualifies as a primary problem.

We recommend working the 12-Steps on primary problems first. In this book, we provide a meeting format that can be adapted to focus on many different issues. Focus groups are helpful because they allow members to keep it simple. We recommend getting professional help in matters involving medicine, psychiatry, exiting religious cults, ending domestic violence or curbing a pattern of criminal behavior. 12-Step recovery tells us to get back into the mainstream of life again, not to retreat or try to solve all our problems with our friends.

Our priorities become clear if we take a practical approach:

Is something we are doing causing us trouble, loss or heartache? Even so, are we unable to stop doing it? If something is causing a persistent sore spot, then this is certainly a good place to start!

Here are some tips:

We work the 12-Steps on a substance-issue if we have one.

The easiest way to work a 12-Step program is to stop drinking or abusing a substance that our body doesn't need anyway. Meetings for support are easy to find and progress is measured by staying sober or clean. Gambling addiction also has a 12-Step program with a good fellowship.

If our primary issue turns out to be a pattern that keeps us trapped in situations that are dangerous, we try to describe our problem in terms of *behaviors that we do*. Codependence, family/parenting issues, homelessness and overcoming gang or cult membership are examples of patterns that often keep people trapped. We aren't vague and general. To make use of the Steps, we pinpoint behaviors we can track. We admit we are powerless over the behaviors we keep repeating, in Step 1. If, for example, our codependence causes us to hate ourselves for being weak, we admit it. We try to be as concrete as possible. Big complex issues go down easier if we don't try to take them in a single gulp. We look for our part in the puzzle. If we take responsibility for owning our behaviors and reactions, that will be enough to change the pattern.

For issues where acting out with sex, work (workaholic,) or other activities that are normally healthy parts of life, we are aware that the problem is the acting out, not necessarily the activity itself. Many people do not lose control of themselves in these activities. We are wary of the long-range implications of joining a 12-Step program that tends to paint one of these activities with the same brush as a drug addiction.

I Am Not My Disease

Imagine a person with the disease of pneumonia walking into a clinic and saying, "Hi, I'm Joe, and *I am a heavy cough!*"

Sounds silly doesn't it, for a person to mix up his or her identity with a symptom of a disease.

Are our problems who we are? We think not.

Clearly, a hospital staff would not believe Joe's cough is Joe's identity. To get help, Joe just has to admit he has symptoms and be willing to accept treatment. This is normal problem solving behavior.

No one has to shame Joe into identifying with his pneumonia for fear he won't follow the doctor's orders unless they do. We expect he'd rather live than die.

We believe recovery in a 12-Step fellowship also can be free of scare tactics and shame. To accomplish this, we have reflected on what we mean by the concept of disease and how this term applies to addictions and codependent patterns.

We believe the sense of helpless *isolation* that is the result of finding ourselves powerless, in the grip of forces we cannot escape or control, is a truer name for the disease we share and call by many names.

We see physical addictions and all self-loss patterns as the symptoms of this isolation we act out. The underlying disorder that kills us (or makes our lives miserable and unhappy) is the experience of intolerable personal isolation. Fellowship gets us out of isolation. This is a positive basis of power we discover in 12-Step programs and can begin to build on in our lives.

Functional Family Rules

Guidelines to build trust and security at home:

- Love is not conditional but approval usually depends on honoring our commitments.
- Each person has the right to set his/her own boundaries and is responsible for making these known to other people.
- It is OK to disagree; its not OK to bully, threaten, get revenge.
- Behaviors have consequences; these are not the fault of other people.
- Its OK for boys and men to cry, share their pain, express tenderness, sympathy or regret.
- Being angry is a feeling; its OK to express it but its not an excuse to hurt people.
- Its OK for women to express anger, have definite views and personal ambitions.
- Love makes a family; nothing more and nothing less.
- Seeking outside help is not a breach of family loyalty.
- Intimacy depends on honest direct communication, which means being available, listening and also talking.
- Leadership is shared; responsibilities are negotiated, not just taken for granted.
- People in our lives today are not valid targets for our projections or fears rooted in the past.
- Talents and short-coming are parts of the human spectrum; we are all spiritual beings.
- It is safe to admit even big mistakes and make amends, to evolve and grow in an atmosphere of love.
- No matter how they start, all on-going relationships are voluntary.

Spiritual Progress Checklist

We have the right to grow and change. Use this checklist to set goals. Add some. We don't measure ourselves by other's pain or progress!

- I am able to give and receive unconditional love.
- I accept success; I receive praise and recognition gracefully.
- I recognize and avoid abusive behavior in relationships.
- I live in the present.
- I do not blame myself for other people's choices or behavior.
- Meditation and prayer are a part of my daily life and routine.
- My sex life is enjoyable, fulfilling, free of shame or fear.
- I accept my feelings just the way they are.
- I take time to smell the roses.
- I clearly get across my point-of-view in an argument; I don't get personal or rude.
- I am financially responsible.
- My community receives my care, devotion and commitment; I give something back.
- I feel centered in my body.
- I don't have to always win or appear in control to feel good about myself.
- I don't seek out or create crisis in my life, relationships or surroundings.
- Time is my friend, not my enemy.
- I am secure; I know that what I have to contribute has value; I respect myself.
- I am a good friend to my mate and other intimates in my life.

- I remember to relax in stressful situations, even if things aren't going my way.
- I make time for fun.
- I accept life on life's terms.
- I respect, honor and give care to my own body. I eat a healthy diet and get exercise.
- My life is an expression of my personal vision.
- I do not take the blame for other's mistakes or credit for their successes.
- I take the initiative to ask for help or to learn in areas where I know little.
- I receive Inner Guidance.

Note: To Ministers & Other Professionals

Join 12-Steps to Your Mission

The Handy Guide to the Twelve Steps doesn't include scriptures or therapy exercises. It is up to you to make use of the 12-Step program template, which is a time-tested, proven tool for helping addicts and alcoholics recover from substance abuse, as a component of your healing mission. **We encourage you to add materials and introduce topics for discussion that you trust and rely upon within groups that make use of this introductory text.**

The Handy Guide isn't AA. It is a factual guide to the *principles* that AA's twelve steps develop. These *spiritual principles* already existed in 1935, when AA's founders—all admittedly hopeless alcoholics, themselves—organized them into a simple, step by step plan they could use to get sober and then stay that way, one day at a time.

The Steps are a *resource* that disorganized, confused, angry or fearful individuals can use to bring *method* into their lives, no matter how distressing their present situation. If a person *wants help*, the Steps are a *set of tools* that will definitely help them find a way through and beyond their current distress—*but not without help!*

If you work with individuals who are in jail, or who are wards of the courts, survivors or perpetrators of domestic violence, or with those who have been convicted of substance abuse-related offences such as drunk driving, your role as leader/facilitator may be key.

If your goal is to outreach a religion, incorporate the 12-Step method within follow-up groups you build into your congregation and fellowship. Sure, you can also encourage individuals to attend AA, ACA or other 12-Step fellowships to focus on specific issues, but do try to integrate these powerful tools—and those who've learned to use them—into the fabric of your communities and fellowship!