

STEP 2 PROPOSITION EXERCISE

This exercise is for members of Alcoholics Anonymous who would like to get back on the spiritual beam.

Page 53 § 2 of the book Alcoholics Anonymous (the 'Big Book') poses the Step 2 Proposition:

When we became alcoholics, crushed by a self-imposed crisis we could not postpone or evade, we had to fearlessly face the proposition that either God is everything or else He is nothing. God either is, or He isn't. What was our choice to be?

What does God being everything mean?

Many members will concede that God has absolute power—through AA as the conduit—to keep alcoholics sober. In this regard, He is everything, and we are nothing—we could not stay sober on our own.

With regard to alcohol, we will agree to be the actor in life and let God be the director, to be the agent and let God be the principal, to be the employee and let God be the employer, and to be the child and let God be the father who provides everything we need 'if we kept close to Him and performed His work well' (p. 63 § 1).

Many of us balk at applying this with other areas in our lives, however.

We are 'victims of the delusion that we can wrest satisfaction and happiness out of this world if we only manage well' (p. 61 § 1). Manage what? Ourselves and the people and circumstances around us.

Note that this is a delusion. This means that this idea is untrue.

If we are victims of this delusion, we will make a decision about (a) what we want (b) what we have to do and be to get this (the 'job description') and (c) what everyone else has to do and be for us to get this (the 'script').

This is the 'decision based on self which later placed us in a position to be hurt'.

Why? Our alcoholic egos are over-ambitious and we cannot fulfil our own job descriptions. The rest of the world fails to follow our script, which places us 'almost always in collision with something or somebody, even though our motives are good' (p. 60 § 8). 'Driven by a hundred forms of fear, self-delusion, self-seeking, and self-pity, we step on the toes of our fellows, and they retaliate. Sometimes they hurt us, seemingly without provocation, but we invariably find that at some time in the past we have made decisions based on self which later placed us in a position to be hurt' (p. 62 § 1).

What is the result?

We were having trouble with personal relationships, we couldn't control our emotional natures, we were a prey to misery and depression, we couldn't make a living, we had a feeling of uselessness, we were full of fear, we were unhappy, we couldn't seem to be of real help to other people... (p. 52 § 2—the 'bedevilments')

So, the delusion that, if we manage well, we will make ourselves happy gives rise to the decision about what we and the world should be and do, and, once this decision is implemented, we end up in conflict with the world and ourselves and find ourselves beset by the bedevilments.

Where does this delusion come from?

Dr Harry M. Tiebout (the psychiatrist who advised and informed AA in its early years and acted as a non-alcoholic trustee of AA) wrote, in *The Ego Factors in Surrender in Alcoholism* (in 'Harry Tiebout: The Collected Writings', Hazelden):

Certain aspects of the infant's psyche may be usefully examined. There are three factors which should receive mention. The first is, as Freud observed in his priceless phrase "His Majesty the Baby," that the infant is born ruler of all he surveys. He comes from the Nirvana of the womb, where he is usually the sole occupant, and he clings to that omnipotence with an innocence, yet determination, which baffles parent after parent. The second, stemming directly from the monarch within, is that the infant tolerates frustration poorly and lets the world know it readily. The third significant aspect of the child's original psyche is its tendency to do everything in a hurry. Observe youngsters on the beach: they run rather than walk. Observe them coming on a visit: the younger ones tear from the car while their elder siblings adopt a more leisurely pace.

*Thus at the start of life the psyche (1) assumes its own omnipotence, (2) cannot accept frustrations and (3) functions at a tempo *allegretto* with a good deal of *staccato* and *vivace* thrown in.*

In the alcoholic, this infantile ego persists into adulthood.

How does this ego manifest? Additional descriptive words provided by Dr Tiebout include: *prideful, arrogant, pushing, dominating, attention-seeking, aggressive, opinionated, headstrong, stubborn, determined and impatient*

Ring any bells?

Dr Tiebout continues:

Therapy is centred on the ways and means, first, of bringing the Ego to earth, and second, keeping it there. ... namely the astonishing capacity of the Ego to pass out of the picture and then re-enter it, blithe and intact. ... Like the cat with nine lives, the Ego has a marvellous capacity to scramble back to safety—a little ruffled, perhaps, but soon operating with all its former aplomb, convinced once more that now it, the Ego, can master all events and push on ahead.

The capacity of the Ego to bypass experience is astounding and would be humorous were it not so tragic in its consequences. Cutting the individual down to size and making the results last is a task never completely accomplished. The possibility of a return of his Ego must be faced by every alcoholic. If it does return, he may refrain from drinking, but he will surely go on a "dry drunk," with all the old feelings and attitudes once more asserting themselves and making sobriety a shambles of discontent and restlessness. Not until the ego is decisively retired can peace and quiet again prevail. As one sees this struggle in process, the need for the helping hand of a Deity becomes clearer. Mere man alone all too often seems powerless to stay the force of his Ego. He needs assistance and needs it urgently.

An alcoholic rock-bottom can bring the ego to earth, enabling the alcoholic to come to AA and accept help from outside of himself.

The problem is keeping the ego there. If we do not, and it returns—'a little ruffled, perhaps, but soon operating with all its former aplomb'—we will become prideful, arrogant, pushing, dominating etc. (see the list above!)

Where does that leave us? The bedevilments.

As if that were not bad enough, we are at risk of drinking again: what once successfully treated the bedevilments? Alcohol. And our alcoholic minds will always remember this.

To get back on the beam and remain sober by reducing the ego, as Dr Tiebout says, we need God's help.

... unless the individual attains in the course of time a sense of the reality and the nearness of a Greater Power, his egocentric nature will reassert itself with undiminished intensity, and drinking will again enter into the picture. (Therapeutic Mechanisms of Alcoholics Anonymous. American Journal of Psychiatry: 468–73.)

COLUMN 1: What areas of my life have I not turned over (fully) to God?

Meditate for a few minutes, asking God, before you meditate, to direct your thinking and asking to have prejudice (= prejudging the purpose, nature, method, or outcome of this exercise) set aside.

Go through each area of your life, each relationship, asking yourself these questions:

- Am I having trouble with personal relationships?
- Am I being controlled by my emotional nature?
- Am I a prey to misery and depression?
- Am I able to make a living?
- Do I feel useless?
- Am I full of fear?
- Am I unhappy?
- Am I able to be of real help to anyone?

List and number the areas of your life where this is the case.

If I am suffering from any of these bedevilmments, it is pretty certain that I am operating out of self-will: there is something I want I am not getting or have got and am afraid to lose.

If I had given these areas to God, I would be trying to follow God's will in terms of what to be and what to do, and I would be matching even calamity with serenity:

Just to the extent that we do as we think He would have us, and humbly rely on Him, does He enable us to match calamity with serenity. (p. 68)

What I have now listed, in column 1, therefore, is the areas that I have not yet turned over (fully) to God.

COLUMN 2: What are my fears in these areas?

For each of these areas, write down your fears. Number them.

Unless we are trusting that God will look after us to the extent that we act as we think he would have us act, we will be seizing control ourselves or—perhaps worse—shivering impotently, waiting for doomsday.

COLUMN 3: What would God have me be?

We ask Him to remove our fear and direct our attention to what He would have us be. (p. 68 § 3)

Before we can decide what to do, we need to know what God would have us be. Just as we cannot set out on a trip until we know the destination, we cannot work out what actions to take until we know what the spiritual destination is—what God would have us be.

In the third column, against each numbered fear, write what you believe God would have you be.

This requires meditation.

WHAT TO DO WITH THE RESULT

Take the information you have found, and place it on a 3" x 5" card or in a notebook—anything easy to carry around with you, so that you can refer to it at all times.

It should look something like this:

What areas of my life have I not turned over (fully) to God?	Why am I afraid to turn these areas over (fully) to God? Fear of	What would God have me be?
1. Work	1. Not being good enough	1. Trusting, diligent, hard-working, accepting of myself, unselfconscious
	2. Being sacked	2. Trusting, open to change, flexible, accepting, unselfconscious
	3. Not having enough money to live	3. Grateful for what I have, trusting, accepting
2. Relationship with my partner	4. My temper	4. Patient, kind, tolerant, thinking before acting, unprejudiced, flexible
	5. Rejection	5. Accepting, trusting, selfless, self-forgetting
	6. Not getting enough sex	6. Giving, generous, accepting
3. Relationship with my sponsee	7. The sponsee not doing what I want him to do	7. Patient, non-controlling, loving, thoughtful
	8. The sponsee drinking	8. Patient, loving, accepting, trusting
	9. Me failing as a sponsor	9. Humble about my defects, open to the advice of others, accepting of myself
4. Relationship with my neighbour	10. Noise, being kept awake at night	10. Accepting, thoughtful, patient, understanding
	11. Confrontation	11. Patient, friendly, even-tempered

STEP 11 MORNING MEDITATION

On awakening let us think about the twenty-four hours ahead. We consider our plans for the day. ... In thinking about our day we may face indecision. We may not be able to determine which course to take. Here we ask God for inspiration, an intuitive thought or decision. (p. 86 § 2)

Our card gives us specific targets for meditation. When considering work, for instance, we can try to imagine how we could be trusting or accepting in particular situations we envisage. We can then ask God what actions would bring us into line with that mode of being.

STEP 10 WATCHING / "WHEN AGITATED OR DOUBTFUL"

Continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear. When these crop up, we ask God at once to remove them. (p. 84 § 2)

We now have specific fears to watch for as we go through the day.

As we go through the day we pause, when agitated or doubtful, and ask for the right thought or action. (p. 87 § 3)

Since we now have a vision of what we should become, it will be easier to divine the right thought or action, as we have a 'spiritual destination.

STEP 11 EVENING REVIEW

When we retire at night we constructively review our day. Were we resentful, selfish, dishonest or afraid? (p. 86 § 1)

We now have specific questions we can ask: "Was I patient with my sponsee?"
"Was I selfless with my spouse?"

Most of all, we have an 'instant vision' of what God's will is for us, like a North Star by which we can navigate: when we get out of whack, off beam, 'into a state', we do not have to start the inventory process from scratch—all we need to do is

(a) go to the card

(b) work out which area of our life we have stopped trusting God in

(c) identify the fear

(d) ask God to replace the fear with the qualities in the third column

(e) ask God for the right thought or action in line with those qualities (p. 87)

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