

How to get the most out of the Step Eleven Review

The Step Eleven review, based on the first paragraph of page 86 of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, is a useful tool in recovery. Many people perform a written review once a day and share that review with others. It is easy, however, to get side-tracked.

Let's look at what the questions are really about.

Were we resentful, selfish, dishonest or afraid? This focuses 50/50 on thought life and action.

Do we owe an apology? Have we kept something to ourselves which should be discussed with another person at once? Were we kind and loving toward all? What could we have done better?

These focus entirely on action.

Were we thinking of ourselves most of the time? Or were we thinking of what we could do for others, of what we could pack into the stream of life?

This focuses on thought life—but whether that thought life was focused on action.

After making our review we ... inquire what corrective measures should be taken.

This focuses chiefly on action.

In other words, the review is largely a review of action, with a little bit of attention paid to obstructive thought (resentment, fear, and self-centred thinking).

What happens in practice?

A bad review will focus 90% or more on resentment and fear and other mental and emotional manifestations of self-centredness. This is not constructive.

As the Book says: 'we constructively review our day... But we must be careful not to drift into worry, remorse or morbid reflection, for that would diminish our usefulness to others.'

Many reviews will do precisely that: focus on regurgitating and further embedding the negative.

The substance of the resentment and fear may need to be mentioned in passing to provide some context. However, the point of having done a Step Four is to have learned that resentment is miserable, futile, and dangerous and that fear is self-defeating. Moreover in Step Four, we have been given solutions: forgiveness and reliance on God. Step Ten furthermore gives us the tool of regaining (or gaining) control over our own thought life through the diligent observation and turning of our thoughts to God and outwards to others.

By the time we arrive at Step Eleven, we cannot honestly plead ignorance.

If the day has been a resentful, fearful one, the problem lies not in the circumstances we have been resenting or fearing but the very fact we have deliberately failed to pick up the tools to nip these afflictions in the bud the moment they arise.

It can be easy to use the review to regurgitate the symptoms of the problem without ever facing the real problem: the decision when tempted to resent or fear to meditate and ponder on the wrongs of others or future catastrophes rather than turning our thoughts to the task at hand or to higher principles of love, service, patience, tolerance, etc.

Finally, a chief purpose of the review is to establish a set of corrective measures that we use our willpower along with God's power to apply the following day.

If there is a month of identical reviews without any corrective measures or genuine effort to apply such corrective measures as there are, continuing a Step Eleven review may actually be harmful to recovery, because it gives the appearance of diligence whilst acting as a fig leaf for complacency and indolence.

I am the first to admit that I have misused the Step Eleven review, not wilfully or negligently but misguidedly, hence the desire to pass on what I have since learned.