

Step Six: "We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character."

Principle	Theme	Action	Defect	Result
Willingness	Willingness	Do something different	Stubbornness	Improved attitude

"A whole lifetime geared to self-centeredness cannot be set in reverse all at once."

"We had lacked the perspective to see that character-building and spiritual values had to come first, and that material satisfactions were not the purpose of living."

Prayer: God, help me become willing to let go of all the things to which I still cling. Help me to be ready to let you remove all of these defects, that your will and purpose may take their place. Amen.

Principle: willingness

Definition of Step:

Write down your definition of each word in the step. Then look up each word individually in the dictionary and write down what you learned about the difference between what you thought the word meant and what the dictionary says it means.

The key to step 6 is to maintain honesty, developed through all the steps, and to be patient with yourself.

Step Six consists of two stages.

1. The first stage involves a detailed look at the acquired character defects that we are aware of at this point in the program.
2. The second stage of Step Six is becoming entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

The Sixth Step directions are in the Big Book on the top of page 76 in one paragraph. They simply state:

"We have emphasized willingness as being indispensable. Are we now ready to let God remove from us all the things which we have admitted are objectionable? Can He now take them all-every one? If we still cling to something we will not let go, we ask God to help us be willing."

The 12 & 12 says that step six separates the men from the boys. The point is that by now you have done a lot of work and have faced the truth about yourself. At this point we try to strip away the old character for a new one. This is a life time process as occasionally the old character will emerge and will have to be dealt with. It is part of the process.

In doing Step Four honestly, we made a searching and fearless moral inventory of our character defects. After we completed Step Five, the exact nature of our wrongs were then brought out into the open. Using both the lists, Acquired Character Defects (Step Four), and Recognition of our Wrongs (Step Five), we are now able to begin Step Six.

Points of Focus and Reflection (Consider pages 75:3-76 in the Big Book) Try saying these Points of Focus and Reflection out loud.

1.) Awareness of Character Defects

- In what ways are my defects really basic human traits that have been distorted by my own self-centeredness?
- In what specific ways am I addicted to outside things to change my feelings?
- Can I list each defect I have and the ways I act on it?
- How do I feel when I act out on each defect? What feelings do my defects help me change or avoid? Is every defect another face of fear?
- What would my life be like without each defect?

2.) Willingness

- Willingness: How would you define willingness? How is willingness connected to Step 6?
- Am I ready to become willing?
- Do I believe that willingness is indispensable for this step?
- How am I willing to act differently?

3.) Letting Go

- How may I let go through prayer and meditation and reflect on my higher power?
- How does my surrender deepen in this step? Can I relax since I do not do it alone?
- What action can I take that shows that I am entirely ready?.

III DAILY PRACTICE OF STEP 6 PRINCIPLES

Spiritual Principles

Commitment and Perseverance:

- How may I demonstrate my commitment to persevere in my recovery today?
- Why is this quality so vital to the Sixth Step?

Faith and Trust:

The amount of willingness we have to develop in this step requires a corresponding amount of faith and trust. We have to believe that a Higher Power is going to work in our lives to the exact

degree that's necessary.

- How am I increasing my trust in the God of my understanding by working this step?
- To what degree is my fear of what I will become still present? Has it diminished since I began working this step?

Self-Acceptance:

When we act out on a defect against our will, we need to practice the principle of self-acceptance. We need to accept that while we're still capable of acting out, we're also still willing to change; with that acknowledgment, we renew our commitment to be changed. We've grown exactly as much as we were supposed to for today, and if we were perfect, we would have no further need to grow.

- How may I practice the principle of self-acceptance, even when once again I act on a defect against my will?
- Can I not do what the alcoholic in me says "I want to do" today?
- Do I understand that this is just for today, one day at a time?

Humility:

Our ability to talk to our Higher Power is an important part of Step Six. We need to communicate in a way that shows humility and invites intervention. When we say, "Dear God, I want to be more patient," we are making a demand and telling God what we want. When we say, "Dear God, I am impatient," we present the truth about ourselves. When we pray in this manner, we exhibit humility, relinquish our pride, and ask God to act on our behalf.

Are you really willing to allow for the possibility that your Higher Power can help you with your character defects? Please explain.

Do you feel that you can remove your character defects by just trying to do so? Can you do it by yourself?

How does God remove these defects of character?

Action Plan:

What we need to do in the Sixth Step is much like what we had to do in the first two steps. We have to admit that we have been defeated by an internal force that has brought nothing but pain and degradation to our lives; then we have to admit that we need help in dealing with that internal force. We must completely accept the fact that we cannot remove our own shortcomings by ourselves, and we must prepare ourselves to ask in the Seventh Step for God to remove them for us.

Steps 6 and 7 are the surrender steps. Step 6 prepares the mind, and Step 7 is a complete surrender of self [all of me, good and bad.] We saw the damage of self here in our 4th and 5th

steps. Now we let go and let God. We let go of self will and commit to living in God's will. This is deep and powerful work. (Step 7).

Action and sharing subjects:

Still mediating on the 4th and 5th steps, ask: Am I now willing to let God remove every one of these shortcomings I just admitted is objectionable?

Can I see what is objectionable about this interaction (my behavior, attitude, selfishness, etc.)?

Am I willing to turn to God for help with all that I find objectionable from now on?

Am I willing to abandon my selfish, self-centered way of life and fully adopt a life guided by God?

Can I see that, on my own power, I couldn't have behaved any differently?

Am I willing to let go of my old ideas, attitudes and actions?

Am I willing to adopt this new outlook on life?

Am I willing to forgive the people and institutions that have harmed me or towards whom I still feel resentful?

Do I understand how each of these defects hurts me and hurts others?

Am I willing to let God direct me on how to remove all my defects of character?

What do I replace my defects with?

What am I doing to learn more effective and loving ways of behaving?

If there are shortcomings that you still cling to, ask God for the willingness to let go. (Mark these shortcomings to include in 10th and 11th step work)

If I am still clinging to something I will not let go of, am I willing to ask God to help me be willing? Pray many times each day till you become willing.

Is there anything that I am clinging to that I am unwilling to let go of?

At this point, identify the assets of your true inner self and the liabilities of the acquired self. (The true inner self is God, and the false self is the acquired character defects.)

What spiritual awakening did you have as a result of this step?

If I am now willing, I can continue to step 7.

The objectives of Step Six and Seven are:

1. To become honest and humble. To willingly seek God's help without reservation.
2. To perfect ourselves in the practice of unselfish prayer.
3. To be aware of our defective character traits.
4. To desire their removal.
5. To surrender completely all defects of character.
6. To believe God can remove them.
7. To ask Him to take them all away.

The results we expect from the pursuit of these objectives are:

1. A reconciliation to God's way of doing business. We become "fed up" with our way and with further practice of trying to run the show ourselves.
2. A willingness to work out a plan for suppression of self-centeredness through faith and conscious contact with God.
3. To experience dissatisfaction as a result of our alcoholic practices and to seek a spiritual inspiration that will bring us an inner sense of peace and security.
4. Increased faith, clean hearts and minds, ability to offer unselfish prayer.
5. A spiritual courage that is fearless in its outlook on life; a desire to make restitution to those our drinking has harmed.
6. A desire to quit bluffing and honestly give God a chance to remove from our lives all that stands in the way of our usefulness to Him and others. True humility.
7. Elimination of our defective character traits, acquisition of peace of mind, and sobriety.

Step 6 Exercise: Once we are aware of our acquired character defects being part of the false self, then we must exercise self-discipline. Our self-discipline, when applied to the process of patient elimination of these defects, will deepen our awareness that we must ask for God within us. Only then can we hope to conform to God's will.

One measure of our willingness to be free of a defect is to stop reinforcing it. We don't practice it anymore. Or, more practically, we postpone its next reinforcement as long as we can. We learn from the experience of defect-relapse. What are the triggers? What, if any, are the benefits? What are some other tools for postponement/eradication that we have not tried?

Action: for the next 14 days, "Humbly ask God to remove these defects of character."

We practice the contrary action until God removes your defects – acting "as if" while waiting.

The five "A's" of Adjustment.

Awareness. Until we experience awareness of a problem or a character defect, we cannot possibly let it go. Steps 4 and 5 apply here.

Attitude. This is the willingness "A." Do we justify our thoughts or actions? Do we think we can keep doing what we are doing and get different results? We must not only be willing to let our defects go, we must stop hanging onto them. This is Step 6.

Alternatives. What are the various actions or inactions that we might employ to have our defects removed? One of these, certainly, is Step 7! We talk to trusted folks. What have they done that worked? We do some more research (not the experience of repeating the defect, but the learning variety).

Attunement. This is the first action. Because it is so vital, it has its own "A." Take Step 7, and ask God to relieve you from your defects of character, habits that are incompatible with His path for you, wrong thoughts and actions. Take Steps 2, 3, and 11 every day as often as you can. The payoffs in A.A. are wondrous, but they come in phases: (a) we are no longer drunk, and we are delighted, (b) we discover a magnificent fellowship to which we can belong in acceptance and grace, (c) we are reconciled with our families, our work, and our neighbors, and we are grateful, (d) we come to know who we are, and we become whole, and (e) we know and love the perfection of the Spirit within us, and we are awakened to the truth of the universe,

Action. In Steps 8 and 9 we make a plan for amending the past, and we do it. Implicit in this is your discontinuing reinforcing the defect by not practicing it. We privately forgive all those whom we still resent. As a result, guilt, shame, remorse and self-loathing will be removed. We select a promising alternative, and put it to work. We act it. If appropriate, we keep a notebook in our pocket to record relapses (of the character defect, not the drinking, we hope) and retries until we see real progress. We associate with persons, places and things that reinforce our growth. In Step 10 we will revisit all five "A's." Implementing the suggestions in Step 11, we follow the direction of God in our lives, and we are changed persons as we get into service to our fellows, especially suffering alcoholics.

In the Sixth Step, we will focus on commitment and perseverance, willingness, faith and trust, and self-acceptance.

As we put our willingness to change into practice, one day at a time, then according to the Big Book, and under the conditions of this day, we take Step 6.

STEP 6 OPTIONAL WRITTEN INVENTORY This is an alternative way of dealing with character defects rather than building on the work already prescribed.

We should now have a list of our character defects which were revealed by the work we did in Steps 4 and 5. These character defects “stand in the way of your usefulness to your fellow,” and which “separate you from the Grace of God.”

Make multiple copies or expand this template in your own notebook.

1. List each defect, and give a brief definition of it.
2. In what ways do I act on this defect?
3. When I act on this defect, what effect does it have on myself and others?
4. What feelings am I trying to suppress or change when I act out on the defect?
5. What would my life be like without this behavior?
6. Which spiritual principle may I apply instead?

Character Defects Worksheet

Character Defect: Describe and define	ACTION: In what ways do I act on this defect? What is the effect of acting on this character defect?	FEELINGS: What feelings do I associate with this defect? Am I trying to suppress or change certain feelings by acting on this defect instead?	VIRTUE: Alternative/Opposite Action What is the opposite of this defect? Which spiritual principle may I apply instead?	OUTCOME: What behavior would this manifest? (The opposite of the 2 nd column)

Step Six

“Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.” Reading: pages 75-76

This is a short and simple step. We made sure that there was nothing that we had knowingly left out of Step Five (see page 75, last paragraph).

We asked: am I entirely willing to have my defects removed?

In the light of what we have learned in Steps Four and Five, it is likely that we will be willing. If we are willing, then we do not hesitate and move on to Step Seven immediately.

However, for some of us there is a hesitation. Perhaps we feel that we want to hang on to some of the defects and the bad behavior driven by them. For example, some of us want to hang on to lust, because we think we will never have sex again. Our sponsors assure us that in this analysis of defects we are talking about the self-seeking part of us. From the very name we give them – defects – it indicates that we are talking about a defective desire. When we are experiencing lust, our motivation is self-centered. We are told that there is another motivation for sex. One that is good – love. Our experience is that when self-centeredness drives us, it causes problems in our relationships. So trying to do the loving thing in our relationships is the ideal we aim for.

Similar arguments can be used for any of the defects. For example, pride: acting without pride doesn't mean that we stop dressing well or washing. If we do this out of pride, it is likely to be vanity. However, it is good to dress well, if we are aiming to look becoming for others. This is not taking “pride” in our appearance (although that is how we would refer to it in everyday language) but consideration of others. Similarly, we should not be “proud” of our abilities, but we can be pleased that we have them and aim to use them to the full, because we are grateful to God for having them, and we want to use them for good.

When we made a start on the program, we had to start the process of living our lives according to spiritual principles. In trying to do the right thing we were doing our best at putting Step 12 into practice – practice these principles in all our affairs. We try to follow the principles of the steps and to “do the right thing.” Many of us are inexperienced in this, and so we need to learn the discernment that could guide us in all our affairs. This is one way that a sponsor is so helpful. A sponsor should have an objective viewpoint and can help us to see how spiritual principles apply in our daily lives. A sponsor could point out if we are being dishonest or selfish, for example, where we are blind to it ourselves.

Now that we have completed Step Five, we can more clearly identify self-centered and dishonest behavior and attitudes. This does not mean that we no longer need a sponsor, but it does mean that we have more of a sense of what it means to live a life according to spiritual principles. So in the light of this in Step Six, many see it as a resolution in the light of what we know to carry on with the program, which means completing steps Seven to Nine, and continued practice of 10, 11 and 12. We continue to trust God, clean house (which now means regular written Step 10's) and help others – we try to follow the principles of the steps and to “do

the right thing.” This commitment is the indication of the willingness we had when we took Step Six. This can apply to our conduct in all areas where a code of morality applies: for example, questions of honesty and sexual morality. A more detailed discussion of how we know what is the right thing to do is given in Step 12 in discussing practicing these principles in all our affairs.

If we are struggling to be willing, we can ask God to give us the willingness we need.

Step Seven

Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings

Reading: page 76

We said the prayer that is given in the book, p76, on our knees (that is, humbly). This need not be done with the sponsor and can be done the moment that the willingness required is there, which could be the same afternoon as finishing the Fifth Step. So the prayer is:

“ My Creator, I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do your bidding. Amen.”

The Big Book says that once we have finished saying the words of the prayer, “We have now completed step seven” {p76}. It is as simple as that!

Therefore we do not take this step daily and do not need to say the Step Seven prayer daily. An indication that Steps Six and Seven are a recommitment to go further with the program is given by the statement, on page 76, that after we have completed Step Seven, “Now we need more action, without which we find that ‘Faith without works is dead’ ” Of course, we can never finish the job of doing those “works”, but those are covered by steps 10, 11, 12. Step Seven requires an action and once we have taken it by reading the prayer we have completed the step. The perfect practice of Steps 10, 11 and 12 is an ideal which none of us has ever achieved. The best we can claim for ourselves is that we trying and we are making progress.

Note: it might have happened, but we are not aware of anyone experiencing that their defects of character are completely removed as a result of this. It’s not what the prayer requests anyway. It asks not that God remove all defects of character so that we may be comfortable. It asks that God remove our defects only insofar as our usefulness to others is improved. We have experienced, however, that provided we take regular inventory, the resentments and self-centered fears caused by the defects will go and with God’s help we find it easier to “do the right thing”.

We learn how to follow the dictates of a Higher Power rather than the dictates of our self-centered will. We note that this step requires us to acknowledge that we are good and bad. We are responsible for our actions. We cannot blame wrongdoing or resentments on alcoholism. They occur in us because of the defects of character. We are not powerless over our defects of character. But we do keep falling short of our ideals because we are not saints. We make progress, not perfection, in this area by trying to do what is right. One of the joys of the program

is to admit our wrong doing and to discover that despite this, we are forgiven and we feel loved by God. This is what happened after Step Five and happens after our daily Step 10s.

Also, we find that to judge ourselves as humble is difficult, for it is an act of pride. We find that the easiest thing is to let our sponsors decide. If our sponsors are encouraging us to go on with the program then we can take it that he or she considers us to have sufficient humility to take this step. This step does provide each of us with an ideal of humility to aim for. It is described in Bill's Story. We believe with Bill W that the attitude to aim for is one that matches his realization described on page 13 that, "of myself I am nothing, that without Him I was lost". The prayer asks God to accept us, both "good and bad". Many of us feel that an indication of the required humility is in attributing what is bad to ourselves, and what is good to God. If we take responsibility for our defective nature and the bad actions, resentments and fears that result, we will take moral inventory daily. On the other side, we attribute anything good in us to God. So, if we do something good in the day, we don't take the credit but put it down on our gratitude list in the evening and thank God for giving us the grace to do it.

References: Please forgive any omissions!

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