

Steps 4 and 5 Introduction

Many AA members have great confusion and fear about step 4 due to a misunderstanding of what this step is meant to accomplish, and how to exactly take step 4. By not following the clear directions in The Big Book, Step 4 has become a protracted and very confusing attempt at a written psycho-social analysis of a members entire life.

Step 5, once a simple conversation of the AA member's self-centered character defects and the harms caused by these defects, is now a lengthy confession and extended analysis of every negative event of the confused alcoholics life.

Steps 4 and 5 are not meant generate a major cathartic event facilitated by a sponsor. This would clearly be relying on human power. The step 4 inventory list and the step 5 review of the list with a sponsor or sharing partner is solely to identify the self-centered character defects listed in The Big Book on pages 64 to 70. Once identified these character defects can be relieved by a higher power through taking and practicing the remainder of the steps.

Most of the methods used today to "work" step 4 make this simple step much more complicated than ever intended. This has led a great number of alcoholics to become bogged down in extraneous details and never gain the insight necessary for an effective step 4.

The 12 Steps are intended to provide the spiritual solution to alcoholism. The step 4 inventory as presented in The Big Book is simply a detailed list of self-centered character defects. It is these character defects that block alcoholics from the spiritual solution and connecting to a higher power that will relieve their alcoholism.

As stated in The Big Book on page 62, first paragraph: "Selfishness – self-centeredness! That we think is the root of our troubles" as far as alcoholism is concerned. In the next paragraph The Big Book Authors write: "above EVERYTHING we alcoholics must be rid of this selfishness."

Step 4 is not intended to be an examination or analysis of deep-seated trauma or the effects of long suppressed misdeeds. On page 64, paragraph 2: "We searched out the flaws in our make-up." Examination or analysis of deep-seated emotional or psychological problems is beyond the intention and scope of a step 4 inventory and beyond the intention and scope of the 12 Steps.

Hopefully, a qualified sponsor or sharing partner will recognize this and if needed direct the sponsee to someone who is qualified to assist with these issues. Step 4 is very effective in identifying what self-centered character defects are an underlying part of any of these issues, which is precisely what step 4 is designed to do. It is not intended to be a psychological exercise or therapy of any kind. Becoming sidetracked into other issues will reduce or negate the effectiveness of step 4.

Sponsors should be clear that an inventory is not an in-depth detailed analysis of every incident of antisocial behavior. This results in complicating a simple process and will often prevent sponsees from a direct and effective way of relieving their alcoholism.

For example, for the purposes of a fourth step, it is not necessary to describe in detail physical or sexual abuse if the sponsee is reluctant. Simply using the words "abuse" or "traumatic event" is enough to then identify the underlying self-centered character defect. If harm has been done to the individual, fear may be an overriding emotion, and as fear is identified in the inventory, the individual will know that faith and love will aid in relieving the fear. If a long held resentment is present, it is instantly apparent that forgiveness is called for, with the help of a higher power.

Remember, we are not looking for justice for harms done to us or for justification for our own actions.

If the person taking step 4 has stolen property, they may be reluctant for many reasons to initially admit to something that may cause further legal issues. Of primary importance is to examine the self-centered flaws in one's character in order to achieve permanent sobriety, in this case selfishness and dishonesty.

More involved issues can and should be dealt with when the new AA member is in a stronger and more stable position and with qualified people. This is particularly important to the newcomer or any member who has been avoiding taking an inventory due to fear or embarrassment.

Again, step 4 is not concerned with details of events as much as identifying self-centered character defects. In order to progress to the point where the alcoholic is able to address these much deeper issues, they must stay sober, and by addressing the self-centered character defects immediately, the new member is in a much stronger position to achieve sobriety

Step 4 is not intended to uncover some hidden cause to our actions. Step 4 is solely used to identify self-centered patterns of behavior so that we know what to bring to our higher power in step 7. It is in taking step 7 that we seek our higher power's assistance in relieving us of our character defects, not the details of our troubles.

The details of our past are unimportant and likely distracting as far as step 4 is concerned. We cannot change our past actions. Our higher power cannot change our past actions. We can only change, with a higher power's help, our current behavior. Identifying what character defects are part of our pattern of behavior in the present time, and the harms they have caused, is the sole purpose of the 4th step.

Step 4 was never meant to be anything more than a LIST of character defects. In fact, from pages 64 to 70 in The Big Book, the word list or listed is used five times along with the phrases "we put them (our character defects) down on paper" and again "we got this all down on paper", referring to the specific character defects we are instructed to be looking for: resentment, fear, selfishness, dishonesty, pride, jealousy and bitterness (envy).

The inventory example in The Big Book has a list of names that one is resentful at, the cause, (the nature of the resentment) and what the character defect affected, (how did the character defect manifest?) with the understanding that we would do exactly the same thing with the other defects we are instructed to look for.

In Bill's Story, Bill describes taking step 4 with his sponsor, while still in a hospital; Bill states he and Ebby "**made a list of the people I had hurt or toward whom I felt resentment.**"

The Big Book also states: "we treat sex as we would any other problem". We do not add a special category for sex; we simply find where the seven character defects have impacted our sexual relationships just as they have our other relationships.

Nowhere are we instructed to use worksheets attempting to identify an almost endless list of questionable behavior, which if looked at closely, are simply manifestations of the seven already mentioned. We are also not instructed to give a written narrative of our entire drinking history or every incidence of unpleasant or anti-social behavior. These are methods used by many people today and encouraged by many treatment centers, with the misguided notion that more is better.

No wonder these complicated and distracting methods appeal to the alcoholic ego. The sorry results of using these other methods is that very few alcoholics are ever able to achieve the comfortable, contented, useful and permanent sobriety that most AA members enjoyed 75 years ago.

Many in AA do not want to believe that step 4 could be as simple as making a list of people that we have harmed or had been resentful, fearful, selfish, dishonest, prideful, jealous, or envious with,

but this is EXACTLY what The Big Book is directing us to do. Nothing more. In the checklist we use in this workshop, we have also added laziness, as laziness was included in the checklist that Dr. Bob used in taking over 5000 alcoholics through the steps. After all, weren't most of us lazy (procrastinating) when faced with taking responsibility for our actions?

As stated earlier, when AA members used the checklist method rather than a written narrative, we achieve a success rate of alcoholics maintaining their sobriety of over 50%. Many methods used today have made a once simple step very complicated. In our attempt to copy a psychological model, we have become less successful. Alcoholics, who were at one time offered a clear path to sobriety, now struggle to stay sober, and many die.

The simple and straightforward method of taking step 4 described in The Big Book and used in the Spiritual Solution Workshops is a proven and highly effective way of identifying what character defects have held us in bondage to self and to active addiction. These are precisely the character defects that hinder our recovery as they block us from a relationship with a higher power of our understanding, a higher or greater power that can relieve our alcoholism.

By identifying these specific character defects, we overcome the effects of self-centeredness leading to the alcoholic's devastating ability to remain blind to the effects of their behavior. This new-found awareness of these selfish patterns of behavior will finally provide us with the ability to identify how they manifest in our lives. With this awareness we have a clear understanding of what we ask our higher power to alleviate in prayer and meditation. We also will have a clear understanding of what to include in our daily 10th step inventories.

The fifth step asks us to admit to God, to ourselves, and to another human being, the exact NATURE of our wrongs; what specific character defect is at the root of our aberrant behavior? On page 62, paragraph 1, The Big Book authors write: "Selfishness, self-centeredness! That we think is the root of our troubles." On page 72, paragraph 1 they write "we have admitted CERTAIN defects". What certain defects? The eight previously mentioned, including laziness.

The Big Book Authors are certainly not directing us to write or talk endlessly about the minute details of our lives. The nature of our wrongs is what we have identified in step 4, our character defects, and when step 4 is taken with a sponsor or other sharing partner, we are taking step 5, admitting our wrongs to another human being at the same time. Note that we are directed to take step 5 with another human being, not necessarily our sponsor. If we do not actually take step 4 with our sponsor, it is best to review the step 4 checklist with them.

This is how early members took newcomers through steps 4 and 5. Newcomers were not directed to go off by themselves, still sick from the effects of alcoholism, and told to write their drunk-a-log or life story or every incidence of unpleasant or anti-social behavior. As sponsors we sat down with our sponsee and assisted them in completing their checklist, asking the appropriate questions as we went along. In this way, sponsors are able to keep their sponsee's focus on step 4, on uncovering their defects of character, without getting bogged down in the details of their lives.

As our co-founder Dr. Bob Smith instructed: **Keep It Simple.**

Steps 4/5 Instructions

Step 4 is about finding the aspects of our personality that *at this point in our lives* block us from a manageable life and from loving relationships with those about us. Most importantly, these “character defects” block us from a relationship to a higher power of our understanding. These “character defects” are listed on pages 65 to 71 and they are resentment, fear, dishonesty, inconsideration (false pride), jealousy, suspicion (envy), bitterness, and laziness. Step 4 is not meant to be a drunk-a-log or an exhaustive list of every incidence of unpleasant behavior over the course of our lives. It is about establishing a pattern of behavior that we as alcoholics used to enable us to live lives as active alcoholics and keep us isolated from a higher power.

The Big Book authors use as an analogy a business taking an inventory. When a business performs an inventory they are concerned with their assets and liabilities **at the present moment**. It does them no good to recollect what was on hand twenty years prior. Also, the CEO does not invite all the employees to stay late for pizza so that he can relate the entire history of the company! This would be a waste of time and effort, and ultimately, a distraction from what they are trying to accomplish: identifying their liabilities so that they can let them go, and as important, identifying their assets so that they know what they have to build their future on.

We are doing the same thing. We want to identify our liabilities so that we can give them to our higher power, and we want to discover what our assets are so that with our higher power we can use them as the foundation for our sober lives.

Identifying these defects and how they manifest in our lives is the SOLE purpose of the 4th step. It is a fearless and thorough moral INVENTORY - what is our behavior right now, who have we harmed, what are our fears, and how do these character defects manifest in our lives.

We will use the guide provided and we will each have a sharing partner to review this step with. If you are more comfortable being “generic” regarding specific people, institutions, etc. Simply use first names or initials. What is most important is to establish a pattern of behavior.

The sponsor or sharing partner does the writing, asking the appropriate questions and filling in the inventory form. A good way to start is to list all people that are most important to you and that you interact with on a daily basis including immediate family, co-workers and close friends, whether you have “resentments” or not with these people. Then ask yourself who would you not want to walk into this room and sit down next to you. Who do you avoid facing? List these people. Next list who you have strong negative feelings about and who is occupying much of your thinking. Do the same with businesses and/or institutions.

Once you have created your list of people, review the “Step 4 Definitions” included in your handouts.

Beginning with the first person on your list, the sponsor or sharing partner asks if there are any resentments in the relationship. If not, move on to fear, etc.

Notice that a resentment is a “hostile, indignant, or contemptuous attitude” that we are holding against someone. It is important to be clear that what we are harboring is in fact a resentment and not just some vague feeling of disappointment with someone. The point is that our attitude has actually affected the relationship in some negative way.

If there are resentments affecting this relationship, put a check in the appropriate box. Then the sponsor/sharing partner will ask “what is the nature of the resentment, how has the resentment manifested in this relationship and how has it affected the relationship? Has a harm been done?”

If a harm has been done, cross the check as an indication that an amends needs to be done. A harm is something that has caused someone actual suffering or loss, something that we have done that has had a negative effect on another.

Once you have looked at resentment, move on to fear, again asking what is the nature of the fear, how did it manifest in the relationship and how has it affected the relationship? Was a harm done?

Continue with the rest of the checklist putting a check as appropriate until you have completed the inventory for the first person. Do the same with the remaining people or institutions on the list. Not everyone on the list will have checks and in some cases there may be very few “liabilities”. Many people realize after an inventory has been completed that things are not as bad as we thought. We are not bad people trying to get good, we are sick people trying to get well.

Taking an extremely harsh view of ourselves, thinking that we are worse than we really are, and that our behavior has had a deep and profound effect on others can also be characteristic of self-centeredness and false pride. None of us are unique in our behavior or in our drinking.

Once the inventory is complete, you will now have a clear picture of your patterns of behavior and a clear understanding of what you will surrender to a higher power in your seventh step.

Remember that you are also making your eighth step list at this time.

The assets that are on the bottom of the list are what we are striving to incorporate into our new personalities, and when we act in this way, we are acting in accordance with God’s will for us. If we have resentments in our lives, we will strive for forgiveness. If we find we have fear in our lives, it is clear that we need to ask God for faith, if we are acting in a dishonest way, we strive for honesty, etc.

When you have completed the list and discussed the list with your sharing partner, take time to quietly review the list with your higher power and thank your higher power for your sobriety and their support in developing comfortable and contented sobriety and for fitting yourself to be of service to others with this disease.

Upon completion of your written inventory, sharing with your sponsor or sharing partner, and having reviewed your list with your higher power, you have completed Steps 4 and 5.

Once one of you have completed this, the sharing partner now takes this step with the one who has just taken the 4th/5th step doing the writing and acting as sharing partner.

Remember, that this will not be your last 4th/5th step. Hopefully taking the steps and taking others through the steps will become a regular part of your sobriety.

Step 4 Inventory Definitions - Liabilities (Self Will)

Resentment: a feeling of deep and bitter anger and ill-will, a feeling of anger or displeasure stemming from belief that others have engaged in wrongdoing or mistreatment; dismissive, contemptuous; a hostile or indignant attitude. Resentment directed at self is remorse.

Fear: anxious or apprehensive about a possible or probable situation or event, fear is an emotional response to a perceived threat, afraid of losing something we have or not getting something we want. Phobia, panic, terror, anxiety, and worry are all manifestations of fear. Fear is finding fault with the future.

Selfishness: placing one's own needs or desires above the needs or well being of others, an excessive concern for your own welfare and a disregard of others.

Dishonesty: acts of lying, cheating or stealing, being deliberately deceptive, lacking in integrity, taking what does not belong to us.

Pride/False Pride: Pride is thinking that one is superior to others in some way. Pride is presenting yourself to others (and yourself) as something you are not - a person without flaws, prejudicial, arrogant. Feeling less than others is false pride as it arises from a pre-occupation with self, as does dwelling on self pity and self doubt and maintaining a lack of self worth. Both extremes of pride/false pride are rooted in a lack of humility - knowing who you truly are.

Jealousy: negative thoughts and feelings of insecurity, fear, and anxiety over an anticipated loss of something that you value, such as a relationship, friendship, or love.

Envy: spite and resentment at seeing the success of another, Wanting another's possessions

Laziness: inactivity resulting from a dislike of work or accomplishment, procrastination is a form of laziness, not doing what is in one's best interest or what is expected of us.

Step 4 Inventory Explanation Of Terms - Assets (Gods Will)

Forgiveness: Complete acceptance of another's perceived faults or wrongdoings, being free of judgments.

Faith/Love: a sincere belief in God's will, an unselfish and benevolent concern for another's well-being, love extends oneself for the purpose of nurturing another's spiritual growth.

Unselfishness: a strong intention to serve, generous, generosity of spirit, to give freely.

Honesty: adherence to the truth.

Humility: acceptance of self as one is, modest, down to earth, equal to all others.

Trust: confidence, faith in other's intentions.

Contentment: being at peace with the people and events of one's life, a deep satisfaction with one's life as it is.

Action: doing what is needed or indicated without delay.

