

THE FOURTH STEP AND HOW TO DO IT

We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

This is the first of the cleansing steps. This is a wonderful opportunity to get out of the mind and onto paper, all of those guilty, resentments, fears, unthinkable thoughts (that are thought of continually), angers, feelings and thoughts about sex, your opinions of yourself, as well as an inventory of your assets. In short, this is a written work-picture of the status of your internal state.

This step is most prone to procrastination. Probably this is due to the anticipation of having to confront all of that accumulated emotional garbage. This is especially so if you have made a lifestyle out of consciously denying its existence and avoiding that confrontation.

If you find you are putting off doing this step, you might find that doing it a little bit at a time will lessen the fearful massiveness of it. It is a lot easier to knock down a brick wall, one brick at a time, than by throwing one's body at it.

I am about to present a rather complete guide to doing this inventory. It is in the form of questions to be answered. The easy way to do this is to decide to answer just the first part of the first question, the first time you sit down to do it. Let that be the equivalent of the first brick. The most important thing is to get from stop to go. Just start writing. You might be pleasantly surprised to find that you end up answering more questions than you set out to do. That's fine.

Here are some basic guidelines and suggestions to keep in mind when doing this kind of writing:

1. Get yourself a notebook to write in. I find that what works best for me is a 9 ½" X 6" college-ruled spiral notebook. I usually pick one that has dividers for three subjects and start my writing in the second section, leaving the first section blank. If I forget to put the notebook away and someone happens to see it, the chances are that after flipping through a number of blank pages in the front they will conclude that it is an unused notebook and put it down. For me this size spiral is really convenient to carry around, put in a briefcase, and have next to my place setting when I am eating, which, I find, is a good time for me to write (actually while waiting for and after my meal).
2. If you do use a spiral notebook, I would suggest using only the right-hand page. This way, if you should later think of any additional things about some previous writing, there is room to add it. Also, if you should think about some information that is extraneous to the question you are currently answering, but important to a future question, it too can be jotted down on the left side. That will free it from your mind so you can get back to answering the current question.
3. This kind of writing is train-of-thought-writing. It is also called automatic writing. What your mind thinks, your hand records. Your conscious, critical mind ought to be an idle, non-participating spectator. The most important thing is to get the thoughts on paper. Spelling is not important. Grammar is not important. You can use outline form, incomplete sentences, run-on sentences (my favorite), shorthand, hieroglyphics (as long as you know what they mean), whatever it takes to capture your thoughts on paper. If you feel that what you just wrote is inaccurate or incorrect and you just must change it, put a single line through the old version, do not erase or obliterate it, and write the corrected version next to it or above it. I suggest doing it this way because much of the time the first version was quite accurate, with the newly edited version emotionally more palatable. Reading it later, it will be the original version that will have the greater impact.

4. Even though you know that in the next, the fifth, step, you will be reading this inventory to another human being, for right now make-believe that you don't know that. Write it as if you are only writing it for yourself, which is the truth, anyway. You want to be writing your thoughts and feelings as they are, rather than as You think You would like to have others hear them. This is very important. If you write this step as truthfully as possible, there will be portions of it that won't be very pretty. If you pretty them up, you will be robbing yourself of the opportunity to grow, which is presumably why you are doing this. Remember, the cheater cheats him/herself!
5. Some of the questions for this step will start off with "Write about each incident in your past that...." When answering this kind of question, you do not need to spend weeks gathering information to make the answer as completely as possible. What pops into your mind as you are answering the question is sufficient. If later you think of more information, jot it down on the left-hand page next to the original answer. (The left-hand page will be blank if you followed my previous suggestion.)
6. To help the person who will listen to your inventory in the next step, either put the question number in front of each answer or start off each answer by restating the question. For example: Question - What do you like least -about sex? Answer - What I like least about sex, is
7. Feelings are not rational. There are no right or wrong feelings, there are just your feelings. When a question asks for you to write your feelings on a particular subject, just write it the way You feel it.
8. There are two categories of feelings and mental information; active and historical. Active feelings are those that are either on or just below the surface in your mind. They are the ones that you keep thinking about or which quickly surface when a similar incident occurs. Historical feelings are those that have been resolved in your mind and are now in the memory banks of completed events. For example, let's suppose that you were having an argument with someone on the phone and that person restated his opinion and then before you could state your opinion, your phone went dead. Because you didn't get to express your opinion, what you would have said will continue to replay in your mind until you get to say it. That is active information. When you re-establish the call and get your message out and end the conversation, the whole event will be filed in the completed action (or historical) memory banks. When answering the questions in the following guide, only active feelings or information need be recorded. Note that if you have never dealt with something that happened to you at age five, it is probably active information.

THE FOURTH STEP GUIDE

RESENTMENTS

In this first section, you have the opportunity to examine and record your resentments. Resentments are caused by happenings in your past that did not turn out to your liking, especially where you felt an injustice was done. The resentment is directed at the person, place, or thing that caused or was responsible for the injustice. The resentments that are important to this section are those that are still unresolved in your mind, where you still harbor ill feelings towards that which you perceive to be the cause of the situation. In other words, active resentments. One last thought, don't forget to include resentments you have for yourself.

Many times, the parts we play in our resentments are due to tolerations. Tolerations arise when we allow irritating things in our lives to continue without out doing anything to end, moderate, or in some way make peace with them. If we tolerate (put up with) those people, places, things, or situations for any length of time, they will eventually become smoldering or quite active resentments.

1. Write about unresolved incidents in your life that have resulted in your having a resentment for the cause (persons, including yourself, places, or things) of the unpleasantness or injustice. If you periodically replay the incident in your mind, or similar incidents in the present trigger a replay of the incident, you can bet it is still active and is unresolved and needs to be written down.

1. For each one of these incidents that you are recording include the following:
 1. Assuming that you had the ability to change the outcome of past events, would this one be important enough to change?
 2. Did this incident have a profound influence on the future course of your life? Write how it affected you and how it changed your life.
 3. What part did you play in this incident?
 1. If your part involved a toleration, describe what you did or didn't do and, in hindsight, how you might better have handled it.
2. Now that you have written about and explored your resentments, it is time to look at the tolerations in your current life. The tolerations of today, if left unresolved and smoldering, will become tomorrow's resentments. There are three kinds of tolerations, A. the little annoyances that we put up with as part of the give and take in relationships that we choose to put up with to promote harmony, B. the more major ones that have become huge annoyances that action on our part could change, though we keep putting off doing anything, and finally, C. those situations and indignancies that due to circumstances beyond our control, we just have to grin and bear it, such as working for an onerous commander with two years left on a military commitment. Recognizing that these tolerations exist allows us to formulate plans of action to address them and prevent them from becoming full blown resentments.
 1. Look critically at your current life's situation and list the people, places, and things that you are putting up with/ tolerating. For each one of them:
 1. Rate them as an A, B, or C type of toleration.
 2. How is each one of them affecting your serenity, well-being,, and life?

Other than that you are currently putting up with it, what was/is your part in the situation that created or is driving the toleration?

GUILT

There is an old saying, "Guilt Kills!" It is true. Guilt is self-induced bad feelings. It is the feeling of having done something that is wrong. Guilt has a direct effect on behavior. The two primary ways it shows up in behavior is through avoidance and through over-compensation. For example, if a person felt responsible for the collapse of the last relationship, he/she might avoid getting into another one. If that same person thought that the relationship's collapse was due to his/her not being there enough for the partner, he/she might over-compensate in the next relationship by paying so much attention to the partner that the partner gets smothered.

I have found that until people are willing to deal with and resolve the feelings of guilt and resentment,, they will stay stuck in their loser behaviors.

1. Write about each of those events, omissions (things you neglected to do) that have resulted in your having unresolved guilt. Include:
 1. How each of these affected your life?
 2. If you could do it over again, what would you have done differently?
 3. What part did you play in the event?

ANGER

Anger is a legitimate feeling and as such, it ought to be responsibly expressed. Anger, like all other negative feelings, will stew and fester like a cancer if not resolved. When angry feelings are pushed aside or rationalized

away, (“Oh, it's not important enough to get upset over.”), it doesn't go very far away. It just sits right below the surface. Each time a similarly caused bit of anger is dealt with in the same manner it adds to that which is already accumulated. Eventually, it causes resentments and the ability to keep them unsaid and unimpressed diminishes. People who are said to have a “short fuse” are people with lots of unexpressed anger. This also accounts for “the straw that broke the camels back” phenomenon - that one little comment that got the full blast of a thousand accumulated mini-angers that were left unexpressed from a thousand previous such little comments. As with all other feelings, if you do not deal with them regularly, they will deal with You.

The following is a partial list of things that people react to with anger. Reading over it might jog your memory:

1.
 - being talked down to
 - being the target of jokes
 - being the target of ridicule
 - being publicly embarrassed
 - not getting your way
 - being called demeaning things
 - people with more power, money, fame, etc., than you
 - letting yourself down
 - the police
 - the government
 - your procrastination
 - your computer
2.
 1. For each person, place, or thing that gets you angry or irritable, describe what happens.
 1. What actions, key statements, situations lead up to your getting angry and “setting you off”?
 2. Which one of your “buttons” or “triggers” gets pushed?.
 3. What part do you play in it?

FEAR AND ANXIETY

Fear is living in the past. Anxiety is living (worrying about) the future. If we have had a bad experience in the past, reliving it in the mind produces fear and worrying about if it is going to happen again in the future produces anxiety.

The following are a list of fears or fear causing situations. It is all right if some of them do not apply to you. They are examples of what other people have experienced and are listed here to assist you to remember your fears:

1.
 - Success
 - failure
 - relationships
 - Heights
 - animals
 - insects
 - Crowds
 - being alone

- meeting new people
- Parents
- bosses
- people of the opposite sex
- Sex
- rejection
- people of the same sex
- Religion
- drowning
- flying
- Sickness
- phobias
- pain
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1. Write about each of your fears. Write enough about each one so that it adequately describes it. For each one:
 1. Name the fear, i.e. “fear of _____”
 2. Describe the fear;
 3. If you can remember the situation that started it or the first time it occurred - describe it;
 4. What does it prevent you from doing?
 5. What part do you play in it?

SEX

This is a subject that had given most people problems. In this section, you will have the opportunity to explore the feelings and emotions that are generated by and associated with, the conflicts between your attitudes and beliefs towards sex and the actual ways you have sex. When the ways that you have sex, or fantasize having sex, is different from the ways you were brought up to believe sex should be practiced, the chances of acquiring unrealistic guilt and shame are great.

Remember when answering the following questions that there are no right and wrong answer. There are only your answers honestly written down from your experience. As the famous television detective, Jack Webb used to say, “Just the facts!” Temporarily suspend your judgments - just record the feelings and the facts.

1. When you dream about your “ideal” relationship, what is it? After you have described it, write how close your real-life relationships have come to your “ideal” ones.

2. Describe your sexual fantasies. Write about both the ones you have actually done and the ones that are only played out in your imagination. What is preventing them from becoming realities?

3. The following is a list of ways that people have sex. Most likely you can relate to some of them because you have done them, fantasize about them, are threatened by them, or just have strong feelings about them. For the ones that you are attracted to but they make you feel uncomfortable, are threatening to you, are afraid of, or feel are unnatural, abnormal, or amoral write about your attraction to them and what prevents you from following through on your feelings and making them a reality. If you actively engage in them, what gives you bad or guilty feelings of doing them? The list is not a complete one, so if there are other acts or things that you do or fantasize and feel negatively about them, include them in this writing.

prostitution	indecent exposure	hustling
unsafe sex	sex with animals	heterosexuality
bisexuality	rape	voyeurism
homosexuality	sadism	anal sex
masochism	oral sex	safe sex
barebacking	sex with children	fetishes
Pornography	kinky sex	slaves
abortion	Masters	venereal diseases
public sex	AIDS as it affects your sex	incest
sexual infatuations	inter-racial sex	phone sex
adultery	buying sex	monogamy
three-way (or group) sex	sexual massage	Phone sex
video sex chat		

4. Are there things you have not yet written about that you have either done or fantasized about doing that you felt sorrow, shame, and/or guilt later on.
5. What sexual situations have caused you to be upset, frustrated, anxious or sad? For each one describe what was your part in it and what part was caused by your sex partner(s). Did you have a problem accepting the way your partner(s) acted? How did you feel about situations you couldn't control?
6. Have you pursued sex in a compulsive, addictive or obsessive manner? What effect has that had on you and the people around you?

ASSETS

Most of this inventory had been concerned with the negatives in your life. To get an accurate picture of yourself you need to also include the positives about you.

1. List, with as much description as you feel necessary, your physical assets, such as your appearance, singing voice, strength, smile, etc.
2. List and write about your abilities such as being a good actor/actress, good business sense, a great mother/father, a good salesperson, great conversationalist, intelligent, etc.
3. List and write about the positive parts of your character such as; honesty, sense of humor open-minded, generous, loving, as well as, trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, true and reverent (where did I hear these before?)
4. List and write about anything else about you that is positive.

MISCELLANEOUS

Write as much as you need to on the following questions:

1. How do you think other people see you? Is that the same as you see you? If not how do you see yourself?
2. Are you working? If so, what kind of work do you do? What do you like the most about your work? The least? If you could make a negative free change of professions today, would you? If yes, to what?
3. Besides work, what else would you like to do with your life?
4. If you used to use drugs and /or alcohol, are there things that you could do better than now? What about things that you can do better now than when you were under the influence?
5. To boost the image of oneself to others (as well as to oneself), people sometimes develop a set of lies about events from the past that are said so often they begin to seem like they actually happened.. Have you included any of these pseudo-experiences in this inventory? If you don't know for sure, do you suspect any of your answers? Which ones?

6. Another way people enhance their image to themselves and others is by conveniently forgetting to include unpleasant or ugly details of the past. Are there things you have conveniently forgotten to include or purposefully left out of this inventory. Remember. You are doing this inventory solely for your growth, so the person who gets cheated by such omissions is you.

7. has not been covered. in your answers so far, that you think is important to include to get a full picture of yourself?

8. For a lot of people, writing an inventory like this can be a scary process. What kinds of feelings and/or problems did you experience during your writing?

SHORTCOMINGS AND CHARACTER DEFECTS

Now that you have written most of your fourth step it might have occurred to you that in some areas your life has not measured up to what and where, by your own definitions, it ought to be. This area between where you feel you ought to be and where you actually are, is your shortcomings and character defects.

I like to separate them into tangible and intangible ones or real-world ones and ethical ones. The real world (tangible) ones are ones like not handling finances very well, procrastination, oversleeping, being too trusting of strangers or not trusting enough of friends, and the like. Ethical (intangible) ones include honesty and spirituality (trusting your higher power).

To jog your thinking, the following is a list of some other shortcomings or character defects:

Tangible - Real World ones: Low self-confidence; self-centeredness; self-hate; poor business achievement; lack of Patience; gluttony; greed; people-pleasing; striking out physically or verbally when you feel threatened or scared (i.e. The best defense is a good offense.)

Intangible - ethical ones: intolerance; false pride; not trusting your Higher Power to take care of the results.

Remember that these are only problems if they are problems for you. The judgment as to what is the optimum in any of these areas needs to be yours, not your mothers, your ministers, or your friends or associates. If you feel that where you are or what you are doing is what is right and you can't buy other people's ideas on the subject, then this is not a shortcoming for you and therefore not a subject that needs to be written about in this step.

1. List your shortcomings and character defects and for each one, describe what would be optimum (if you were operating at this level it wouldn't be a defect) and where you are presently in comparison to where you would like to be.

Congratulations on having just completed your first inventory! To get the full benefit out of doing this inventory, you need to complete the process by doing a fifth Step (reading what you have written to your sponsor or another trusted person.)

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