

What to Expect



from
Working the Steps

C. Riven Wood

What to Expect from Working the Steps

by
C. Riven Wood

A Riven Wood Book
10277 Utahna Rd., Boise ID 83714

Copyright © 2024 by C. Riven Wood

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

ISBN 978-0-9815180-3-9

This book is available as a free download and may not be sold in whole or in part. You may print it for personal use or to give away at your own expense. You may quote extensively with appropriate attribution.

What to Expect from Working the Steps

Contents

What to Expect from Working the Steps	2
What to Expect from Working the Steps	3
About this book.....	7
<i>Eagle-eye view</i>	8
How recovery works	8
Are the steps for you?	8
The Changes that constitute a transformed life	9
<i>Robin-eye view: Structure and flow of the recovery process</i>	11
The three phases of the process	11
Phases of the recovery Process	11
My assumption that unmet needs drive problem behavior	13
The Miracle: How the impossible becomes possible in steps 4-7	14
The God problem	16
<i>Fox-eye view: Description of the Changes</i>	17
Step 0. Decide what behavior needs to change.	17
Identify resources to help you change.	17
Become able to ask for help.....	18
Develop access to the power to stop or avoid craving.	18
Learn what to do with big feelings.	18
Step 1. Stop trying to control the behavior by means that don't work.	19
Step 2. Decide to look for a solution that works.	19
Step 3. Choosing your guiding principles.	19
Step 4. List the obstacles between you and the life you want.....	20
Step 5. Get outside perspective on the list.....	20
Step 6. Work through all the obstacles.	21
Step 7. Find solutions that work.	21
Step 8. Integrate those solutions into your social thinking.	21

Step 9. Integrate those solutions into your relationships.....	22
Step 10. Turn the solutions into habits.	22
Step 11. Extend the solutions into other areas of your life	22
Step 12. Build the solutions into your future plans and relationships.....	22
<i>Mouse-eye view: Details of the changes.....</i>	<i>23</i>
Step 0 Define what behavior needs to change.....	23
Identify resources to help you change.	24
Develop access to the power to stop or avoid craving.	24
Become able to ask for help.....	25
Learn what to do with big feelings.	25
Steps 1-3.....	26
Step 1 Be willing to stop using methods that have already failed.	26
Step 2 Be willing to seek a solution that works.	27
Step 3. Choose the guiding principles that will inform decisions.....	27
Steps 4-6 Analyze the process that ends in addictive/compulsive behavior ..	29
Step 4 Identify the obstacles to adopting a new way of life.....	30
Step 5 Get outside perspective on the list of obstacles.....	32
Step 6 Identify unmet needs driving compulsive behavior.	33
Step 7 Seek new solutions.	35
Consolidation	36
Step 8 Integrate the new answers into social thinking.	36
Step 9 Integrate the new answers into relationships.....	36
Step 10 Integrate the new answers into daily habits.	37
Step 11 Broaden application of the new answers.....	38
Step 12 Apply the new answers to the future you are building.....	38
All 13 steps.....	39
<i>Example.....</i>	<i>39</i>
<i>Appendix A: Finding the underlying need.....</i>	<i>45</i>
<i>Appendix B: How to talk to the subconscious mind</i>	<i>48</i>

Dialogue with it.....48
Do it consciously.....49
Remember your dreams49
Ask for a dream.....49
Devices49
Direct contact50
Tapping subconscious wisdom.....51

chia, when read, note consistent use of "step", "change", "result"

all links 1 color

About this book

This book is arranged in four tiers, each giving a closer, more detailed picture of the recovery process. If that organization is confusing for you, you can follow the topic you're interested in from eagle's to mouse's perspective using a word search.

Eagle-eye view

Recovery is a series of changes in a person's life that make it easy and comfortable to abstain from addictive or compulsive behavior.

How recovery works

To stop a compulsive or addictive behavior is a matter of stopping, then staying stopped by disarming the forces that might trigger a relapse. Identifying and disarming those forces is the bulk of the work. The issues and triggers exposed by stopping the behavior are of various types: habits, ideas, relationships, emotions, situations, etc. It might seem like you could take them one at a time as they arose, but this is not realistic for most of us. They come at us too fast, and most take too long to resolve. In the meantime, temptation takes hold again, we slip and have not made progress.

One tool for organizing the work is a set of steps meant to lay a groundwork; identify unmet needs; find strategies for getting needs met; then integrate the new strategies into one's thinking, behavior, relationships and future. This is the purpose of "the twelve steps." Other approaches are possible, but the steps have gained traction as the most popular method.

Are the steps for you?

Right now, somewhere in the world, someone is giving a testimonial about how the steps have changed their life. Each step is something a person can do, even after they failed repeatedly to make a big leap out of addiction. The steps are numbered, which keeps people moving through them. The fact that recovery itself is non-linear doesn't prevent the numbers from helping most people to keep going. Although the steps are written as a how-to set of instructions, the wording is broad enough to cover many implementations and the many disparate types of obstacles each person must work through. The religious language in which the steps are written can be an obstacle, but each individual can substitute wording that works for them. These are some of the strengths that have made the steps so successful.

The disadvantages include the Judeo-Christian assumptions implicit in the way the steps are conceptualized, and the linear presentation that leaves global thinkers feeling confused or alienated. All but one (Step 6) give instructions—how to achieve the goals—rather than the goals themselves (the changes that constitute a transformation). This book talks about the goals; with it, you can surmount that

difficulty. The picture below illustrates the difference between instructions and goals. The goal of the work is to produce a series of changes in one's life. The steps are meant to produce those changes:



The problem, of course, is that the steps often fail to produce the needed change. In that case, some other method or an alternative version of the step is needed.

But most of the steps' disadvantages result more from their practitioners than the steps themselves. Many people insist that God is an essential element in their success. The personalities of the pioneers—aggressive, acquisitive, domineering—have been assigned to "addicts" in general, and even people with the opposite problems are urged to grill themselves for selfish, ambitious behavior. The fellowships often become dogmatic in their understanding of the steps, and this has prevented us from evolving deeper understanding.

It is a deeper understanding that I try to develop here. When freed from narrow interpretations, the steps become a very flexible, very powerful tool. If you've suffered from other people's misuse of them, perhaps that will be too much of an obstacle. But if you can claim them for your own, you may still find them useful. Let's stop wrestling with other people's mistakes and embrace what works for each of us.

The Changes that constitute a transformed life

The difference between Overeaters Anonymous and a diet club is that the diet club tries to help you lose weight, while OA tries to help you make your life what you want it to be. All of the 12-step fellowships try to go beyond mechanistic solutions to address the imbalances that result in addictive/compulsive behavior. Below is a list of changes a person needs to make to restore life to its natural health, balance, and ethical purpose. I am going to call these "the Changes" for easy reference.

0. Decide what behavior needs to change.
Identify resources to help you change.

Develop access to the power to stop or avoid craving.

Become able to ask for help.

Learn what to do with big feelings.

1. Stop trying to control the behavior by means that don't work.
2. Decide to look for a solution that works.
3. Make sure you're looking in the right direction by choosing the guiding principles that will inform your decisions.
4. List the obstacles between you and the life you want.
5. Get outside perspective on the list.
6. Work through all the obstacles.
7. Find solutions that work.
8. Integrate those solutions into your social thinking.
9. Integrate those solutions into your relationships.
10. Turn the solutions into habits.
11. Extend the solutions into other areas of your life beyond the original problem area.
12. Build the solutions into your future plans and relationships.

The numbered Changes are the ones the steps are meant to produce. If you "work a step" but your life doesn't change in the way shown above, then you haven't gotten what you should. There are many ways to work each step (some are listed [here](#)), so you can try another method.

From a full trip through all thirteen steps (0-12), you should get either a happy, harmonious life, or a clear understanding of what still needs to be done. A normal human life is satisfying, even in the face of difficulties. The only times it is normal to be unaccountably out of sorts are when hormones disrupt the balance, as during puberty.

You can see that these Changes are nothing special. Everyone goes through them in the course of growing up, solving problems, gaining maturity. Addicts have a task master that non-addicts lack, but they usually have more obstacles to overcome also. So recovery is just normal human growth with a task master. Because humans are built on a pattern, the Changes that constitute growth are pretty much the same for everyone. Our stories differ because we focus on different aspects,

and the ways we achieved growth differ, but the plot is basically the same for all of us.

Robin-eye view: Structure and flow of the recovery process

The three phases of the process

The numbered Changes listed above come in three phases and the unnumbered ones help throughout:

Phases of the recovery Process		
Preparation for Change	Change	Consolidate change
<p>0. Define what behavior needs to change.</p> <p>1. Stop doing what doesn't work.</p> <p>2. Seek a solution that works.</p> <p>3. Choose the guiding principles for my new life and commit to them.</p> <p>4. Identify the obstacles to adopting a new way of life.</p> <p>5. Get outside perspective on the list of obstacles (outside my own blind spots).</p> <p>6. Face the feelings brought up by change. Identify unmet needs driving compulsive behavior; distinguish essential values from strategies.</p>	<p>7. Seek new solutions for the problems identified, including effective strategies for meeting needs.</p>	<p>8. Integrate the new answers into social thinking.</p> <p>9. Integrate the new answers into relationships.</p> <p>10. Integrate the new answers into daily habits.</p> <p>11. Broaden my application of the new answers to other areas of my life. Improve impulse control through meditation.</p> <p>12. Apply the new answers to the future I'm building.</p>

Throughout

Identify resources to help you change.

Develop access to the power to stop or avoid craving.

Become able to ask for help.

Learn what to do with big feelings.

For some people, the numbers keep them going through the process. Other people like to get an overview of the whole process, then some more explanation of the whole process, then the detailed work, in numerical order or doing the easy things first, or some other order. This book is arranged in this progressively-more-detailed structure. These differences are only in thinking; recovery itself is complex and follows no simple path. Don't be surprised if you revisit old material, run in circles or get lost. Growth follows its own agenda.

The unnumbered Changes can take place any time, but the sooner the better. Some of these Changes are permanent and you won't need to make them again the next time you go through the steps.

Preparation for change

Before the preparation phase, I don't recognize answers as answers, I don't believe I can ever get my needs met because I never have, I'm unwilling to give up compulsive behaviors because I mistake them for friends, I imagine that practical changes to my way of life are too high a price to pay, and I'm convinced that I would have found the answer by now if one existed. So the work of preparation is mental, emotional, social and practical. No wonder I needed a paint-by-numbers kit to get through them all! Steps 0-6 prepare me for change.

Change

This part of the process is only one step out of thirteen, but it's the only part I focused on before I discovered the steps.

I come out of the preparation phase with a list of needs that aren't being met and the faulty strategies I've been using to meet them. One strategy often serves several needs, so I list both strategies and needs. I also have a list of things those strategies are doing *for* me, things that will no longer be addressed when I trade in my faulty strategies for good ones.

For example, if I was eating when my back hurt (true example), my back is not

getting what it needs. If the reason I ignore back pain is to avoid a confrontation with self-doubt, then the list I bring to step 7 includes:

I need to trade eating in response to back pain for a strategy that will protect my back from whatever is hurting it.

I will also need an appropriate response to self-doubt, since I'll no longer be avoiding it.

To give up eating compulsively, I'll need to find effective, loving, ethical ways to meet every need on the list. The people who work step 7 by having a short talk with God and going on to other things risk being triggered into old behavior before God gets around to fixing them.

Consolidation

Before I came to 12-step recovery, I sought answers to my problems, and sometimes I got them. When I did, I thought I was done. But usually, I failed to use the answer when I next needed it. I would fail to recognize the need until it was too late; I would forget what I was supposed to do; or I would forget the problem altogether, since my intellect was no longer engaged by it.

Steps 8-12 address these pitfalls. They walk me through a process of applying my new answers to situations in the past, to current relationships, to each day's events, to areas of my life beyond the original problem area, and to the future. All this helps prevent relapse.

My assumption that unmet needs drive problem behavior

Where the AA big book sees instincts gone awry, I see unmet needs. My parents were too narcissistic to love and cherish their children, but I needed love. I particularly needed protection from their violence. I left home with several dysfunctional strategies for getting love and protection: perfectionism would make me worthy of love, impressing people would protect me from their hostility, saving them would make them dependent, unable to reject me. None of this worked, so I became an adult who still craved love and did screwed up things to get it. These strategies didn't meet my need for love, but they did give me hope. In order to stop, I would need a healthy way to bring love into my life. I would also have to deal with the loss of hope. And I would have to heal the past pain of rejection. Healing of past hurt can be a current need.

Rather than dismissing my manipulative behavior as a symptom of willfulness and submitting myself to divine authority, I find that learning to meet my needs leads to

a happier outcome. Once this is accomplished, I can change my old behavior like I would change any habit. The habit might be there, but the *compulsion* is gone.

The AA big book recognizes 5 needs: sex, self-esteem, security, personal relationships, and pride. Marshal Rosenberg (author of *Nonviolent Communication*) recognizes 63: [Appendix A](#).

The Miracle: How the impossible becomes possible in steps 4-7

Many of us arrive at our first meeting convinced that we will never get what we need, never get free of emotional pain, never be able to relax. That is an obstacle to making it happen; so it's important to understand how something that has been impossible up to now can become possible. Below are some ways.

Putting up the roof of a house is impossible until you build the walls

Much of the first seven steps build a cognitive structure for new understanding. You can't collect data on the mechanics of the problem until you've defined the problem. You can't seek solutions until you know the mechanics.

Divide and conquer

When I listed the triggers and unmet needs behind my compulsive eating, there were about a dozen. I had been looking for "the answer," unprepared for a dozen answers. But when I read my list of triggers, I knew that dismantling all of them would give me choice over what to eat (instead of compulsion).

"I can't do it" becomes "I can't do it without feeling some big feelings," or "I can't do it without crying."

When my father told me to "stop crying or I'll give you something to cry about," I suppressed the feelings that crying relieved. That cut off the learning process we use spontaneously when unpleasant things happen. Instead of integrating these experiences, I isolated them from other thoughts and did not learn from them. In recovery, I've had to resume the learning process suspended years before. This is called healing.

In general, I can't heal without crying. I can't recover without facing old feelings. I can't find answers without embracing the pain that boxes me in.

"There is no answer" becomes "I couldn't think of an answer without help."

If I can't think of an answer, there must not be one. Right? No, it's always worth asking other people. Make it the topic of a meeting. Amazing what ideas crawl out of hiding!

I may have stated the problem in a way that it can't be solved. But the underlying need can be met.

If I decide the only way for me to be happy is for my loved one to get sober, I box myself into a happiness over which I have no control. But if I decide to protect myself from the effects of my loved-one's addiction, happiness becomes possible. Suppose I need more predictability than I have living with my alcoholic spouse. Getting that person sober might be one strategy for making life more predictable, but there are many others. Maybe I can get my own car or my own room, a baby sitter or day care so I have time for my own activities, etc. The [appendix](#) can help identify the need so that I can find other strategies. Any time I say, "I need you to _____," I commit the fallacy of mistaking a strategy for a need.

I may not like the choices I have, but I still have to choose

It's ok to hate the way someone else's behavior limits the choices I have. But after venting my anger, I need to take the best action available to me. Otherwise, the person keeps me pinned down with resentment.

Let go of destructive ideas when I see why I adopted them

Why doesn't the scathing self-criticism stop when I see that it lies to me? I decided long ago that I had the power to change other people. This was not a belief. It was not a conclusion based on observation. It was a *decision* to believe something that was not true. And it was a good idea. The alternative was to face the truth that my parents could not meet my needs and never would. I could not change them into the parents I needed because I didn't have that power. That truth would have killed me at 3 and 6 and 10 years old. The lie was better. It was brilliant. It saved my life.

And it no longer serves me. To give it up, I need to recognize it as a decision, not a belief. I can stop criticizing myself for failing to change other people when I *decide* to stop claiming a power I don't have.

Riddikulus

It was 7:30 at night and I'd just looked in the mirror and seen that my eye was in a state of emergency—or, it *seemed* to be in a state of emergency. To me. Should I call the emergency eye doctor? Or should I wait for morning? More comfortable socially, but it meant hours of worrying and lost sleep. I called one of my support network.

"What is the reason not to call?", she asked.

"Maybe I'm completely wrong, and I don't want to disturb him at home. I need him

to be on my side."

"And what happens if you're not wrong?"

"Then I could lose the vision in my eye."

"Oh, right, so it's worth going blind in one eye to avoid being a pain in the ass?"

We both laughed. And as Harry Potter learned, laughing is to fear what crying is to grief: a way through it.

The God problem

In the forty years I've been going to meetings of one 12-step program or another, I have never heard anyone say, "I worked step X and then checked my results." I have heard, "Do the footwork, then leave the results to God." The implication is that step work and its results are only loosely coupled. I disagree. I don't think these same people pour their coffee without looking at the cup and leave the results to God. Do they drive a car without looking at the road?

Negotiations with other people might be loosely coupled. Teaching a chicken to dance might or might not give you the results you want. But the tasks of recovery are all things I can work at until I succeed. This doesn't mean I control recovery any more than I control the growth of veggies in my garden. It means that when the green beans don't sprout, I plant peas. I don't stand over the failed beans and scold them, nor do I conclude that God is punishing me. I conclude that there is something about green beans I don't know. There is much about my own growth I don't know, so I respect the natural process and cooperate with the forces that nurture it.

When I look back at my first trip through the steps, I see that my results were best when I did *not* follow the instructions as written: The first two Changes happened spontaneously, the third was the result of trying to work step three, discovering that it didn't fit me and modifying it. After that I tried harder to obey instructions, with hit and miss results. And yet, my life changed dramatically. I think it was the second change—the discovery of a way of life hitherto unknown to me—that launched a healing process that has never stopped. Psychological healing is like physical healing in that it propels itself, follows its own agenda, starts when it starts and ends when it ends, all with little help from me. Mainly what I can do is make living with it easier on myself by cooperating with this bigger-than-I force. For many years I gave credit to the steps for changing my life, but now I think the credit goes mainly to that drive for healing that I couldn't deny, even if I wanted to. But

the steps definitely help me remove obstacles, reactivate a stalled process, and get the most leverage from the work I do.

We can't blame the authors of the big book for presenting a mysterious picture of what worked for them. The pioneers of any field can only offer the ideas they have. It is up to those who come later to develop more understanding. It is we who come later who have treated the big book as the word of God rather than the best efforts of a bunch of drunks. Let's continue the work they started, pinning down what works and what doesn't, understanding why, and developing methods for better success.

My part has been to find the common ground in my own results and Bill Wilson's. Our concepts are different, our methods are different, but the Changes resulting from our work are essentially the same. I have listed those Changes [here](#).

Fox-eye view: Description of the Changes

This section describes the Changes that constitute transformation. It should help you see how they keep a person moving from the first recognition of a problem to the final sigh of satisfaction.

Step 0. Decide what behavior needs to change.

If you get a DUI, you might consider not-drinking, or you might choose not-driving. If overeating is a problem, you might go to OA or CODA. The steps are a tool for changing behavior, including thinking, but not emotion. And it is for changing one's own behavior, not someone else's.

If you get stuck on changing something you don't have the power to change, you might find help from [Appendix A](#). It may seem like outside events determine your quality of life, but your response to outside events has far more impact. Try to understand what human need is going unmet and see what you can do about it.

Identify resources to help you change.

The 12-step fellowships are the first resource many of us turn to because they in turn point us to other resources: people, ideas, books, professionals... Most of us need help to change our lives because we are the thing being changed. We can't do it alone any more than a horseshoe could pound itself into a new shape.

Become able to ask for help.

If we need other people, we better be able to ask them for help. Some people have no trouble with this while others struggle with the "500 pound phone."

Develop access to the power to stop or avoid craving.

We all have this power. Consider a friend who told me about trying to stop smoking: He had been stopped a short time when the craving for a cigarette hit him while driving. He resisted, and it got worse. To show me his physical need for nicotine, he said, "My teeth were itching." Finally, he decided to stop at a convenience store. As he pulled into a parking space, he realized that the craving was gone. His teeth felt normal. What he assumed was a physical need had been met by the *decision* to smoke, before he had even bought tobacco. So we all have this power, but some of us can't access it with the word, "God." We have to find what works for us.

There is nothing mystical about this. The mind can stop pain with the help of a placebo. It can flood the body with endorphins, serotonin, dopamine, adrenalin, vasodilators or vasoconstrictors. I can't do any of that on command, but my subconscious mind can do it if I figure out how to ask it to.

Learn what to do with big feelings.

The steps, and often the fellowship, don't offer much in the way of facing intense fear, grief, rage or horror. But these are often the driving force behind relapse. The feelings don't make someone dependent on drugs or gambling, but they can make abstinence precarious.

The two options are coping with feelings or healing them. I chose healing, although I still have to cope with anything I have not yet healed. Healing involves facing the feelings squarely, recognizing their source, and allowing my natural drive toward harmony to straighten out the kinks in my psyche.

The subconscious will yard out big issues, so that we don't try to swallow too much at once. And the best way to build tolerance for the feelings (so that I don't have to run from them) is to face each lesser emotion that arises. Therapy, talking to recovery buddies, journaling, and digging down for one's own motives are all ways to progress.

For more detail on using your feelings for healing, try *Spiritually Assisted Emotional Healing*. (Don't let the title scare you; that's "spiritual" in the sense of

"inspiration," not spirits in the sky.)

Step 1. Stop trying to control the behavior by means that don't work.

As long as I'm invested in trying harder, or dieting, or beer instead of Scotch, I won't invest in something more difficult. When the easy methods have failed, I'm ready to abandon what doesn't work and go look for something that does. If I want recovery but am not willing to give up on the strategies that have failed, how can I become willing? Any method that makes me willing is step 1.

Step 2. Decide to look for a solution that works.

Ok, I'll stop what I've been doing, but I don't have any idea what to do. That's why I kept doing the things that don't work. I can now give up and abandon myself to addiction, or I can assume there is an answer and go look for it. For those of us who believe we've thought of everything, this can be a challenge. What will it take to convince me try? Anything that allows me to go forward on the assumption that there is a real answer, is step 2.

Step 3. Choosing your guiding principles.

Make sure you're looking in the right direction by choosing the guiding principles that will inform your decisions.

Ok, I'll go looking for an answer. Now I need to ensure that I look in the right direction. I want a better life. I don't want to trade compulsive eating for speed addiction, even if that would help me lose weight. I don't even want to trade one addiction for a less destructive one. That is sometimes an acceptable stop-gap, but it's not what I call recovery. What are the qualities you want in the life you will work hard to achieve?

For people who think of God as representing these qualities, the third step as the pioneers wrote it can work well.

It has the added advantage of leveraging our inherent social tendencies. But that can be a problem as well. Adopting a punitive god as one's guiding light may not lead in a good direction. So the atheist must decide on the qualities to serve, and the monotheist would do well to decide on the qualities that make God worthy of serving.

I don't know if it's true for everyone, but for me, the source of guidance also supplies the power to carry it out. If a value for healthy relationships tells me to

stand up to verbal abuse, it will also supply the courage to do so and the satisfaction afterward. If integrity tells me to apologize for the thoughtless thing I just said, integrity will also uphold me through the embarrassment of doing so. And it will motivate others to help me, provided I've chosen pro-social guiding principles.

Any source of guidance I adopt that makes both my heart and my head say, "YES!", is step 3.

Step 4. List the obstacles between you and the life you want.

Ok, I've decided to look for real answers, and I'm pointed in the right direction. It will be a trip, so I make a list of tasks I'll need to do before getting on the plane. Step 4 is the first of 3 steps that provide me the list. It involves looking more closely at the process that results in compulsive/addictive behavior. I collect a lot of data about my thoughts and feelings when I'm tempted to indulge. The data points toward the unmet needs that drive addiction. That is the list I will take into step 7.

Unmet needs don't always cause addiction, but they threaten abstinence. Where the normal drinker can afford to use a glass of wine to relax, the alcoholic needs to find some other way. Frustrations don't cause alcoholism, but they can threaten sobriety. By learning to meet my needs in healthy ways, I dismantle the triggers that could get me into trouble.

The original how-to for this step was to call for a "fearless and thorough moral inventory." If you have an unmet need for moral behavior, such an inventory could be helpful. If your problems veer more toward poor self-care, a traditional inventory could be irrelevant, even harmful.

Any process that exposes flawed thinking and the unmet needs that give rise to it, is step 4.

Step 5. Get outside perspective on the list.

I get outside perspective on the list, because my own thinking has failed. This indicates blind spots that, like the driver of a car, I need someone else's perspective to see into.

I can have blind spots because I came to some conclusion in the past that I haven't updated for the present. And I can have blind spots that once saved my life and to which I cling fiercely. I might not like hearing what's in those, but I need to anyway. Whether I correct readily or with great difficulty, I need to correct. I try

to choose a listener who is willing to say what they see and not play into my denial. I should come away with new understanding of how I keep stepping in the same potholes.

Step 6. Work through all the obstacles.

Step 6 in its original form contains the next change in the recovery process: "become entirely ready" to find healthy ways to meet my needs. But the discussion in the big book treats this formula as though it said, "entirely willing." I can be entirely willing to sail around the world, but I'm not ready until the food is packed and the mast in place.

The obstacles to sustained abstinence are all the triggers that make me want, the unmet needs that fuel addiction, the wrong ideas that pull me off course, the big feelings I don't want to face, the friends of my using days, the expectations of those who acclimated to my bad behavior, the place I live, my job, and any other forces pushing me toward relapse. When I've worked through all of that and have no more investment in the old life, I'm entirely ready to build the new one.

Step 7. Find solutions that work.

With the obstacles removed, I'm ready to go looking for ways to meet the needs on my list in ways that are loving, effective and ethical. Steps 6 and 7 often run together because I find the answer at the moment I'm entirely ready to find it. This is particularly likely if the way I've been becoming ready is to walk through the emotions that have held me back. I might push forward, crying away my grief or laughing away my fears and then, all of a sudden, I'm through.

When I have an effective, ethical, loving strategy for meeting every need on my step-6 list, I am ready to put them into action.

Step 8. Integrate those solutions into your social thinking.

This is the first of the consolidation steps. I look back in time to consider how my new strategies for getting what I need might have made a difference in the past. I'm trying to change the thinking that leads to old behavior by imagining myself acting differently.

It's not realistic to simply vow to change my social behavior. Looking backward gives me real situations to work through in my mind: what would I do differently now? How would I use my new strategies? How would I recognize the need for

the new strategy?

Step 9. Integrate those solutions into your relationships.

If step 8 yielded anything I wish I could do over, I might be able to do over by making amends to someone I mistreated. I need to change that relationship, and the sooner the better, even if I have to create an opportunity for my new behavior. If that's awkward, my discomfort actually increases the chance I will behave better in the future.

In addition, I need to change my relationships even with those I have not mistreated. I make the people around me into allies by behaving differently, by telling them the changes I'm making, letting them know what to expect and how to help. People are the most powerful triggers, drawing us back into old behavior or growing into new. Everything you do to make your relationships support your recovery is step 9.

Step 10. Turn the solutions into habits.

In step 7, my new strategies were novel ideas. They need to morph from ideas into habits. If you review the list of new answers you got in step 7, some may already be part of your life by the time you get to step 10. The others will benefit from regular reminders: did I use my new behaviors today when they were called for, or did I miss some opportunities?

Step 11. Extend the solutions into other areas of your life beyond the original problem area.

As my new ways of thinking take root, they can also grow beyond the original area of trouble. Can I use them at work, at the gym, in my philosophy or family life? Do my guiding principles offer new light on what makes life satisfying or what interests I should pursue? Am I guided by those principles when I'm not thinking about them? Should I set aside time to reflect on them every day? Would a meditation practice help me remember where I'm going and why?

Where steps 8 - 10 deepen our use of new answers, step 11 broadens it in whatever ways speak to us.

Step 12. Build the solutions into your future plans and relationships.

How do my goals reflect my guiding principles? How will I start new relationships

on a sound footing? What has become possible for me as a result of the work I've done? What form will recovery work take as my new habits take hold?

Mouse-eye view: Details of the changes

This section discusses in detail each of the Changes that constitute recovery and provides some examples, suggestions, and popular methods for achieving each change.

Step 0 Define what behavior needs to change.

Recovery is simply a normal human process of growth and maturation applied to a particular problem behavior. It can be applied to thinking, as in "I want to stop believing I'm worthless." It does not work well with emotion. For example, fear will continue to arise when you think you are threatened. But if you think you're threatened when you're not, changing the idea can change the amount of fear in your life. In English, we often say we feel things that are actually ideas, not emotions. We say, "I feel trapped." It would be more accurate to say, "I believe I'm trapped, so I feel anger, fear, or frustration." We are born with the ability to feel all the human emotions, but not with the thinking that later gives rise to them. So one test for emotion-vs-idea is whether a day-old child can feel it. You can also use [this](#) list of emotions put together by Marshall Rosenberg.

If your problem is someone else's behavior, the steps won't work. You can, however, help yourself by finding what needs of yours are going unmet because of the other person. Then the steps might be helpful in finding ways to meet those needs independent of the other. [Appendix A](#) is meant to help with this process. Parents of an addicted minor are in a particularly difficult position and self-care is essential. The support of other parents can also make a big difference.

I've inserted this step as a catch-all for the work that comes before the step-work. This includes all the living that brings me to a crisis, but it can also include making a list of specific behaviors or substances. A sex addict might decide to stop casual affairs without swearing off sex completely. Some addicts stop prescription drugs as well as illegal ones, but some don't. A food addict might identify "trigger foods" to stay away from completely, as well as the food plan they would like to follow.

Specific behaviors give the most focus to the work and the most change for the effort. But don't despair if you just have a vague discontent. Focus attention on what you can identify as problems, and greater clarity will come.

Methods:

List the behaviors you never want to do again.

Decide to go to a 12-step meeting, with the choice of meeting helping focus on the problem behavior.

Appendix A: Finding the underlying need

Consult with someone else.

Identify resources to help you change.

The decision to go to a 12-step meeting is an example of this work. Some people will talk to friends, some will look for a book about their problem. If you have a support network (friends, therapists, program buddies...) talking to them starts to build a base that can help you all the way through. Transforming one's life is tumultuous, and most of us won't attempt it before the subconscious mind decides we have enough resources to get through it.

Writing can be particularly helpful because it can break down mental compartmentalization. Writing about an insight while it's clear to you can help you remember it when your focus shifts to one with no room for that insight.

A surprising number of people cite their pets as important resources helping them through the emotional challenges.

Methods:

Read, talk, listen.

Ask your subconscious mind what you need to do to be ready for what's coming. (If you don't know how to talk to your subconscious mind, try [Appendix B.](#))

Develop access to the power to stop or avoid craving.

According to the Harvard health [web site](#), 'How placebos work is still not quite understood, but it involves a complex neurobiological reaction that includes everything from increases in feel-good neurotransmitters, like endorphins and dopamine, to greater activity in certain brain regions linked to moods, emotional reactions, and self-awareness. All of it can have therapeutic benefit. "The placebo effect is a way for your brain to tell the body what it needs to feel better," says Kaptchuk.'

Another perspective claims that "connection is the opposite of addiction." If dopamine goes with excitement and serotonin goes with satisfaction, then the idea

is that connection promotes serotonin and helps correct an imbalance of too much excitement and too little satisfaction. You may have found that talking to someone about a problem makes it easier to face, and this is a popular tool in recovery.

I, personally, find that I can get excited quickly but have to make an effort to calm down and allow small pleasures to regain their charm.

Methods:

Ask your subconscious mind how to get access to the power to stop craving or turn away from temptation.

Discuss it with your cat, dog or sponsor.

Try imbuing a talisman with this power.

Use meditation or mindfulness to down-shift the mind and allow gentler emotions room to grow.

Withdraw attention from the thoughts, focusing it elsewhere until the feelings subside.

Become able to ask for help.

The good news is that asking for help gets easier with practice.

Methods:

Start with program people.

Ask for phone numbers at a meeting.

Get a sponsor.

Set up regular check-ins with a program friend or sponsor.

Investigate what stops you from asking.

Learn what to do with big feelings.

Methods:

Develop tolerance for feelings

Investigate the feelings.

Write your feelings in a journal to slow them down and get some perspective on them.

Vent them with a willing helper.

Release them through tears, laughter or pillow-pounding.

Heal the source.

More in *Spiritually Assisted Emotional Healing*

Steps 1-3

Steps 1-3 are the mental groundwork for changing how I live. I probably need new options that I don't currently see. So my thinking needs to change to allow for new possibilities.

Recovery usually starts with a single problem behavior, rather than a sweeping need to overhaul one's life. With that goal, I will try the easiest solutions first, and these are usually mechanistic: is there a pill I can take to keep from getting drunk? Is there one food I can give up to lose extra weight? It is the failure of physical-realm solutions that make me willing to look at the emotions that fuel my addictive behavior, the goals that prevent my life from settling into a satisfying pattern, the wrong ideas that cause war between my heart and my head.

The first three steps broaden my view of potential solutions, particularly if I start listening to other people talk about how they solved the problem I am tackling.

Step 1 Be willing to stop using methods that have already failed.

Be willing to stop trying to manage and control the problem behavior using methods that have already failed.

Recovery is hard. It takes time and energy. It involves pain and loss. Why do it if there are easier solutions? So we try the easier answers first. And some of us keep trying even after we've proved that the easy methods don't work. If you're not yet convinced that recovery is the easiest way that will work, you're not likely to invest the required effort in it.

Are you willing to stop using strategies that don't work? If not, what are your doubts? How might you resolve them? These questions might point to a method of working the first step other than those listed below.

Methods:

List the strategies you have used to try to control the problem behavior.

Honestly assess the results you've gotten with them. Are you willing to stop the ones that haven't worked?

Write how you know your old way won't work.

Write out your story, with the price you paid for failing.

Accept you have a problem that trying harder won't solve

Admit you're powerless.

Listen at meetings. Stay late and talk to old-timers.

What are the pros and cons of changing?

Stop *trying* to change and *allow* change to happen.

Step 2 Be willing to seek a solution that works.

If I give up the last idea I thought might work, I can now give up completely, or I can assume there is a solution I don't know about. Are you willing to assume that? If not, what would you need to be willing?

For the pioneers of 12 steps, this was a huge obstacle: no one had an answer when will power failed. Today, you can hear testimonials for just about any recovery. If this is too much like the revival tent for you, you might consider talking in depth to just one person you can relate to. You can read the stories of an array of people in your fellowship's literature. Some of the claims might seem like fantasy, but some are liable to ring true.

This book is not meant to convince you of anything, but the fact that you are reading it might mean that you want to go forward even if you don't believe what you hear. Perhaps it's worth pursuing because there is nothing better to do.

Methods:

What do you see in meetings to suggest a solution exists?

If your own judgement is batting 0, perhaps it's worth the risk to trust someone else's.

Assume that there is something you're not seeing.

Listen to others' wisdom and see what you think. Talk to someone after a meeting.

Turn the question around: "Why do I think I can't stop?" Identify the reasons. Write why your inability to think of a solution is not proof that none exists.

Step 3. Choose the guiding principles that will inform decisions.

Choose the guiding principles that will inform decisions and shape the new life. Commit to serve those principles.

What shapes your decisions now? Does this do justice to your values? Does it meet your needs? Is there a discrepancy between your values and your behavior? Change comes at a price; how will you know the cost is worth it?

Suppose your guidance is to be honest with the friend who brings a bottle of wine saying they know you've stopped drinking but just one is ok. You don't want to hurt your friend's feelings but you don't want the wine either. Perhaps you've always tried to spare other people's feelings and would still like to do so. If you are

guided by whatever social forces happen to impinge on you, you'll probably take the bottle. But if you've committed to healthy relationships, you can decide to make this one healthier by being honest. The price will be your friend's hurt feelings, but the reward will be an honest connection. You might also have more respect for your friend once you stop "handling" them. And more self-respect. Making a conscious decision what to be guided by can provide this sort of clarity and the power to act on it.

When I consider my past behavior, I see that I've often been guided fear, desire, social pressure and discomfort. But I don't value those things enough to turn my will over to them. I do value love, wisdom, integrity and harmony enough to serve them. Making this conscious allows me to sort through confusing situations.

For example, I decided to set some boundaries with my mother. I wrote down four boundaries I would ask her to respect when I stayed at her house. We sat down, I with the paper in my hands. As I went through the list, big tears started to roll down my mother's face. It got harder and harder for me to go on, and the things I had written seemed more and more harsh. (I only remember two of them: Knock before entering the room in which I was staying, and take my 'no' as an answer without trying to argue me out of my decisions.) I forced my way through, because I had promised myself I would. At the end, she said, "But I already do all these things." Wow, could have fooled me.

After that visit, I saw that my mother was a sort of force field that bent my perceptions to a very mother-centric perspective. I had hated hurting her feelings. I couldn't even promise her what she wanted: that if she honored my requests, all would be well and I would set no more boundaries with her. That's how we did things in my family: we bargained, we accused, we said, "If you loved me you would..." And I had committed myself to cleaning up all my relationships, making them honest. But my family did not value honesty.

Eventually I decided it would be gentler for them if I put distance between us. That hurt their feelings, but less, I think, than trying to go on when our terms for relating were mutually exclusive. It was making my guiding principles explicit that allowed me to sort through these internal and external forces pulling me in different directions. My decision allowed me to stop resenting my parents and have some compassion for them.

Methods:

Make a list of the intangible qualities that you value and want in your life and decide to serve those values.

If you use the idea of God, list the qualities that make God worthy of your allegiance.

List the powers that can help you stop problem behavior.

Adopt a new guiding principle.

If you aren't willing to "go to any lengths," what *are* you willing to do? You can go forward as far as you are willing and then see where things stand.

Steps 4-6 Analyze the process that ends in addictive/compulsive behavior

Recently an amateur archeologist decoded 23,000-year-old messages in European cave paintings. He says he, "amassed as much data as possible and began looking for repeating patterns."

For some of us, our own behavior needs to be decoded, and the above process is a good approach. For example, I can collect examples of not living the life I want and answer some questions about those incidents. This is my raw data, and I have an immediate sense that these things are problems. I then look for patterns in the data and get an outside perspective on it. From all this I distill a shorter list of things I do repeatedly that produce my unsatisfactory life.

In this way I map out the linkage from my problems to their underlying causes. I will need this short path in order to remember why I'm working to change these causes, and to recognize new examples of the same pattern in the future. This is why I can't just write my step 6 list off the top of my head: the problems I can list off the top of my head tend to be abstract and out of reach. Generalized resolutions to do better won't be enough to stay the course; I need immediate access to the understanding why the new choice is the better one.

While many events, people, or situations can ignite the old urge to indulge my problem behavior, the fuel is unmet needs. That's been my experience, anyway. So I look at the patterns of thought-feeling-behavior and ask what need I'm trying to meet. I adopted strategies for getting what I needed while I was growing up in a dysfunctional home. Instead of abandoning them the day I turned 18, I carried them forward into a world very different from my parents'. Some of them don't get me what I need, some are unloving, and some are unethical. I need to trade these in for better strategies in this adult world. My "piece of the action" in creating difficulties is always that I'm operating from an outdated world view; it's never that I'm defective.

I also ask what this behavior does for me. (I know what it does *to* me, but what does it do *for* me?) When I replace the strategy, it will no longer perform its current

service. So I need to recognize that issue as well. For example, I used to drink alcohol in order to feel better about myself and my life. But when I heard what I'd done the night before, I felt worse about myself. So drinking failed to meet my needs for optimism or self-esteem. But it *did* allow me to interact with people in ways I was too afraid to do without a crutch, and I felt lonely when I stopped. Fortunately, the AA fellowship became a way for me to get my social needs met.

In recovery work, the trick is to accurately identify my needs and find better strategies for meeting them. So it's essential that my statement of need be as fundamental as I can make it. This frees my thinking from the conviction that there is, at most, one option available. I like to use [Rosenberg's list](#) to help me identify basic human needs, not intermediate goals.

One common misuse of step 4 is blaming the victim. If I step in front of a freight train and then blame it for not stopping, I need to recognize my responsibility for getting hurt. If I'm assaulted because someone doesn't like my color, I have zero responsibility for getting hurt. No child has the power to turn their parents into abusers. Nothing I do can make a rapist out of an honest man. If you find this confusing, try trading roles: would you blame a white man for getting shot by a black cop? a straight person for being bashed by gays? a rich man for getting mugged?

Step 4 Identify the obstacles to adopting a new way of life.

This is the data-collection phase. What's between you and the life you want to be living? What are the ways you're not currently following your guiding principle? What are the needs that aren't getting met? Who are the people who trigger old behavior? What are the situations you'll need to handle differently? Since so much of a human being's thought, feeling and behavior is governed by the unconscious, the fourth change is to bring unconscious processes into the light of consciousness. New behavior comes later; now it's enough to take note of what goes on inside.

The pioneers of 12 steps made the step-4 inventory a sweeping and ethically-based one. There is a time for such a process; is that time now, for you? For me, my first trip through the steps used this broad approach but subsequent ones have focused more narrowly on the specific issue defined in step 0. The advantage is that my efforts yield the biggest bang for the buck. The disadvantage is that I can miss trouble spots whose connection to the current issue I don't immediately recognize.

Regardless of scope, I try to collect my thoughts and feelings for each item I put on the list. If I can sense the underlying need, I put that also. When the list becomes

repetitious, I stop collecting and look for patterns, with an eye to what need I'm trying to meet.

Methods:

Stop the behavior and see what happens.

Write the thoughts and feelings when you are tempted toward old behavior.

Why do I do this problem behavior? When do I do it? What are the triggers for the behavior?

Make a list of things that bother you.

Make a list of things that bother you, then add columns to help connect these to unmet needs. Possible column headers: what happened? what was I feeling? what was I thinking? what did I need? what strategy did I use to get what I need? what price did I pay for going about it this way?

Answer questions in a workbook (e.g., Al-Anon's *Blueprint for Progress* or OA's 12x12 workbook).

Use the method in the AA big book, pages 64-71.

What changes need to happen to be free of the problem behavior?

Here is one example that I will use again in step 6. I fill in the first three columns of this chart as I collect my data:

what happened (trigger)	what was I feeling?	what was I thinking?	what did I need?	what strategy did I use to get what I need?	what price did I pay for going about it this way?
-------------------------	---------------------	----------------------	------------------	---	---

When I have enough items, I fill in as much as I can of the last three columns. For example:

what happened (trigger)	what was I feeling?	what was I thinking?	what did I need?	what strategy did I use to get what I need?	what price did I pay for going about it this way?
I wrote a letter to a friend telling her what was wrong in our relationship	frustrated angry	You don't even know me. You have some character in your mind you call by my name, and she eclipses me.	to be seen	explained what was wrong	failure to be seen; I alienated my friend

When I share the chart with someone in step 5, I will ask them to help with the empty boxes that I couldn't see how to fill.

Step 5 Get outside perspective on the list of obstacles.

I get outside perspective on the list because there are things I'm not seeing. It doesn't matter how many times I've done this before, or how much I want to change; I have blind spots in my thinking. I present my step 4 table to another person and invite them to point out anything I've missed, particularly any empty boxes.

By this time I might have noticed that the same thoughts occur in many places in the thoughts column or the same strategies in their column. I also invite my listener to point up any patterns they notice. They might also suggest new items for the list.

When I get this feedback, I write it down. Too many times I've understood what someone was trying to tell me, only to forget it as soon as they leave. This is natural: if it's in my blind spot, I'll have trouble seeing it on my own. So I write while I'm with the person, read back what I've written, and correct it until they say I've got it right.

Most of my friends aren't willing to do this for me. They want to be nice and not tell me things I don't want to hear. And they certainly don't want me mad at them. So I need someone who is willing to say what they see, whether I want to hear it or not. But I also need someone who *can* see. I've done 5th steps with listeners who were completely taken in by my specious logic, and that doesn't help. When I find someone who can, and will, tell me what I need to know, I thank them. I don't

argue. I go home and think about what they've said, and if I reject their comments, I do it privately. I need to hear everything, even things I later reject. So I protect this valuable relationship.

Methods:

Pick one or more people and try sharing the 4th-step list.

Bring up an item from the list as a meeting topic.

Read one item at a time to people who have given you their phone number.

Step 6 Identify unmet needs driving compulsive behavior.

To become entirely ready to trade in faulty strategies (for meeting needs) for effective, loving, ethical strategies, I need to know what the strategies are, what the needs are that aren't getting met or will not get met when I stop the faulty strategy, and work through any investment I have in the current strategies. Investment can be practical, mental or emotional. For example, if my step 0 is to stop living with an active alcoholic, I might have a practical investment in our living arrangements, a mental investment in a relationship that actually disappeared long ago, and an emotional investment in rescuing a loved-one in need. I'm not free to decide my future until I can face moving house, admitting the old relationship is already gone, and admit failure as a rescuer.

Although the AA big book gives this step short shrift, I consider it the workhorse of the steps. Certainly most of the emotional work comes under its auspices and psychotherapy can be a tool here. I'll treat step 6 as two tasks: identifying the faulty strategies and unmet needs, and divesting in the faulty strategies.

Listing strategies and needs

It's common to hear things like, "I need \$20 to fill the gas tank." That formula limits the speaker to a single strategy for getting what they "need." Suppose the speaker wants gas to get to work in the morning. If \$20 is unlikely to materialize, it helps to state the need in its most fundamental form: "I need financial security, which I get by keeping my job, but I'll be in trouble if I run out of gas on the way tomorrow." That formula allows many more strategies: get a ride with a co-worker, take the bus, drain gas from the lawn mower... In order to list my needs and the strategies I'm using to meet them, I need to be able to distinguish the two. That opens the door to more strategies for getting what I need. This [list of needs](#) provides fundamental statements of human needs. You can compare it to your own way of thinking in order to make the most fundamental statement of need, thus allowing for as many strategies as possible.

Likewise, if any of your needs are for other people to behave differently, you put your welfare in their hands. To reclaim power, consider how your life will change if you get what you want from the other: what need will be met that is not met now? Are there other ways to get that need met? For example, many couples wish their spouse would take an interest in something important to them. And sometimes they can get the spouse interested. But when that fails, there are always other people to share that interest with; it doesn't *have* to be the spouse.

Methods:

Write about the blind spots exposed in step 5.

Group the items in your step 4 list by strategy: what were you trying to accomplish with this behavior, and what did it actually accomplish—what will you lose by changing problem behavior?

Write about the history of your unmet needs.

Look at your problem-thinking instead of identifying with it.

Make a table like this and fill it in from your 4th- and 5th-step notes:

Strategy	Cost	Benefit	Need I'm trying to meet	Why did I adopt this strategy?	How am I invested in this strategy?

To continue the example started in step 4 using the chart above:

Strategy	Cost	Benefit	Need I'm trying to meet	Why did I adopt this strategy?	How am I invested in this strategy?
criticism	back-fired	I can explain myself	connec-tion	I don't know a more effective way	I'm not. I'm ready to learn a more effective way.

Divesting

I adopted the flawed strategies I'm currently using for good reason. It might be feelings that once overwhelmed me or truths I don't care to face. I may balk at clearing the way for relationship changes I hope to avoid. When I understand what these strategies are doing for me and why I adopted them, I can see what I need to face. I can also see the difference between situations that were overwhelming when I adopted the strategy and the situation I face today. Current events can trigger old

feelings and memories, including the memory of being overwhelmed, but there is not much an adult can't face. We need support to heal past wounds, and getting that support might be a prerequisite to tackling tough issues. But this, too, is do-able.

I may face some of the same doubts here that I had in step 2: is any other strategy possible? Can I really accept or love myself in ways no one else has ever loved or accepted me? The last column in the table above shows whether I'm ready to take the risk.

Methods:

- Set aside time to pay attention to difficult emotions instead of avoiding them.
- Develop listening relationships where each of you can vent.
- Write your feelings, particularly when tempted toward old behavior.
- Write pro-con analyses of your choices.
- Where you lack the power to solve a problem, adopt a course of action you can live with.
- Ask, 'why did I adopt this strategy?'

Step 7 Seek new solutions.

Seek new solutions for the problems identified, including effective strategies for meeting needs.

Finally! This is where I get the answers. Liberation. Choices. Adulthood.

I like to take each line in the step 6 table and focus on it until I have an answer. I remind myself each morning that today I'm looking for a new strategy to meet ____ need or for ____ situation. I do this so that I'm primed to recognize answers when I see them. After all, the answers have existed all along, but I wasn't asking the questions. To get answers I need to look for them and then test them. Only when they work do I consider them real answers.

I might seek answers by asking other people what they do, watching how they handle things, reading, bringing it up at meetings. Even google might be part of step 7. When I find something that works, I write it down, because my work is not yet done.

Methods:

- Ask other people, read, make it a topic at a meeting, try what you see other people do.
- Remind yourself each morning what answers you're watching for today.

Stop the old behavior and see what happens.

Ask your subconscious mind for answers. (See [Appendix B](#) for help with this.)

Write pretty reminder cards and read them frequently.

Consolidation

Steps 8-12 are consolidation. Epiphanies are not enough; I need new habits, changed relationships, maybe even significant changes in lifestyle. This phase of transformation gets neglected in many approaches to life-change, resulting in relapse. Some growth methods emphasize understanding, some philosophy, some behavior, but the steps combine all those and keep the ball rolling through disparate tasks.

Step 8 Integrate the new answers into social thinking.

Consolidation starts in the mind: where in the past might my new strategies have come in useful? By thinking of actual situations and how I might have used my new answers to good effect, I avoid the pitfalls of changing behavior: forgetting, thinking too slowly for the new situation, not recognizing the need for new behavior when it arises, being triggered into an old mindset.

Methods:

Make a list of things that could have gone better than they did. How would you handle each situation now?

What amends do you owe yourself?

For each new strategy in your step-7 list, think of the last time you needed it.

Imagine using it in that situation. How would you have recognized the need? Will you be prepared in the future? What will be the challenge—courage? calm? creativity? How will you access those resources? Practice in your mind.

Review incidents from step 4.

Review events leading up to step 0.

Step 9 Integrate the new answers into relationships.

The next task is to proactively change your relationships. Instead of waiting for situations to come up, you create them. This means you'll use your new behavior (because you've planned in advance) and not forget or get caught off guard.

Doing this with all my existing relationships changes the people who used to tempt

me to old behavior into people who expect the new me and call it forth. They become allies in my recovery.

Remodeling the social landscape in this way is my best protection against relapse: I pay the price of being guided by my values now, burn bridges to addiction, and go forward into the easier work of continuing what I already set in motion.

Methods:

Mend anything you broke in the grip of old behavior: return what you stole, lift up anyone you put down, consider those you took for granted.

Tell your associates the changes you're making and ask their cooperation.

Let people know what to expect if you've decided to change your behavior (e.g. "I'm off sugar, so please don't offer me dessert.").

Commit to a recovery buddy in advance the new behavior you will practice in an upcoming situation.

Step 10 Integrate the new answers into daily habits.

Did you use your new behaviors today when they were called for, or did you miss some opportunities? This check goes a long way to keeping your new strategies forefront in your mind and available when needed. Even doing it daily for a week is helpful. For those who hate the discipline, a few days a month can be worthwhile.

Methods:

Start each day with a reminder of the situations to watch for and new answers to use.

Nightly inventory of new strategies you used and forgot.

Daily check in with an ally.

Schedule quiet time for yourself.

Post-it notes with the things you're trying to remember.

Review your list of new strategies from step 7 to identify which have become habits and which need attention.

Make amends as soon as you notice you owe them.

Decide on flags that should alert you to use new strategies.

Step 11 Broaden application of the new answers.

Broaden my application of the new answers to other areas of my life. Improve impulse control through meditation.

As new ways of getting what I need become woven into daily life, I am liable to notice other arenas where I can use them. This broadening is the function of step 11. I might generalize from the new strategy to the principle that makes it work. I might use meditation to step back from minutia to see the big picture. I can also use it to practice skills such as pausing between impulse and action, bringing compassion to pain, or keeping attention focused on one task.

Meditation can help you develop access to the state of harmony or peace that is the opposite of addictive craving. And the ritual of meditation can become an anchor, helping you return to a state of harmony when temptation raises its ugly head

Methods:

Think about the changes in your life and where else they might apply.

Try meditation.

Where else can you replace compulsive behavior with sober behavior?

How do your new attitudes and strategies go with your philosophy, your goals, your self-image?

Do you use your guiding principles in all areas of your life or just some?

Step 12 Apply the new answers to the future you are building.

What will you build on the foundation you've laid? How to start new relationships on a sound footing? What inspires you and makes the new life one from which you don't want to escape into The Problem?

Methods:

Share with others.

Sponsor people.

Do service to the fellowship.

Do service to people in your life.

Treat yourself as well as you treat others.

Set boundaries early, let people see who you are.

Use all your new strategies from the beginning of new relationships.

All 13 steps

Are you free of the problem behavior? Do you have the life you want?

Methods:

Find an alternate 12-steps you like and use them, checking your results here as you go. *Staying Sober Without God* by Jeffrey Munn seems to be particularly popular.

Ask at meetings how people have done the step you're on.

Change the word "God" to "good" and use the approved literature.

Example

When my retinas started bleeding, I was concerned. I listed possible causes and contributors. I addressed myself to each, doing as much as I could to reduce the forces impinging on my eyes. Well, almost as much as I could; my blood sugars were too high. I could do better. I'd done better in the past. This was my step 0: I wanted to get my blood sugars down.

For a Type 1 diabetic, that's not easy. But I'd been doing it many years until recently. Recently I went on a diet meant to cure heart disease and wound up with no cure and a huge backlog of self-deprivation. Now when I ate foods I had abstained from through three years of dieting, I couldn't stop. I'd used up all my will power.

That became clear when I tried harder and harder to control my eating and got a defiant response from the voice of desire. It had the whip hand: if will power and desire got into a power struggle, desire would win. The penny dropped when I realized that trying harder made my eating *worse*, not better. I became willing to stop trying harder.

I knew I needed help. I had tried the 8-fold path of Buddhism and the 12 steps. I'd gotten insight, but not the power to put down the spoon. I decided to go to Overeaters Anonymous. This was my step 2: became willing to look for a different solution, one that would work.

It took several meetings to find resources within OA that could help me. In addition to the people, there was literature that helped me feel at home and a book of stories that I devoured. I asked someone to sponsor me, which was not so difficult as it had been in my first recovery program, several decades prior. Some of the unnumbered Changes needed for recovery carry over and don't need to be

repeated once mastered. Asking for help and facing big feelings are examples. When I got to food, after 35 years wrestling other compulsions, it was mostly *small* feelings that were pushing me around!

Up until now, the Changes I needed had happened spontaneously, brought about by forces greater than myself, such as fear of going blind and the failure of will power. Now I needed a way to stop the internal power struggles, and I went looking.

My higher power is the state of harmony that I call inner peace when I'm feeling philosophical, love when I'm with someone else, gratitude when I think of my good fortune, respect when I need to honor someone else's way without understanding it, fun when my intellect is happily engaged, contentment when I snuggle under warm blankets... One state of grace, many names.

Those intangible qualities guide me and reward me when I serve them. Other people value them and often help in my efforts. A lot of power.

But those intangible qualities weren't telling me what to eat. Integrity is a great guide for social behavior, but with food I couldn't make it work. How to get guidance at breakfast? How to stop the war between desire and self-discipline? Asking that question was an appeal to my subconscious mind, which is where the wisdom and power reside. I've been cultivating a good rapport with my subconscious mind for a long time now, so I got my answer without much trouble. When a monotheist prays for deliverance from craving, they are doing the same thing and getting the same result; only the concepts we use differ.

The device I came up with was the image of a mother I had known and her willful son. When he wanted a cookie before dinner she didn't get into a power struggle with him; she simply helped him grow up and learn to tolerate a small disappointment. I could imagine the two of them discussing my desires and feelings, with the mother lovingly delving to the source of each urge and allowing desire to want what it wants. I called the two characters in my mind Loving Mother and Rebellious Eater. Without realizing it, I had chosen love as the guiding principle for my recovery from compulsive eating. Love replaced will power. I hadn't realized until then that it was will power, not desire, that caused the power struggles.

I decided on some guidelines for what I would eat, a refinement of Step 0. When I was tempted to eat something outside the guidelines, I wrote my thoughts and feelings. Pencil and paper lived in the kitchen until the list became repetitious.

Then I read through, looking for repeated patterns of thoughts and feelings. These

indicate some strategy I use to try to meet my needs. What need am I trying to meet and what strategy am I using? For example, I had written that I ate food when I was actually thirsty, when I was cold, when I was tired, and when my back hurt. I consolidated these into a strategy of distracting myself from physical discomfort. I also noticed a pattern of using food when I was bored, restless, frustrated and anxious.

There were ideas and habits on the list also: the idea that I had to eat food to keep from wasting it, the habit of munching about 4pm, and a variety of "trigger foods" that I kept eating and eating once I started.

These aren't the reasons I lost control of my eating; they are the triggers that can derail me from sticking to my food plan. I'll need to find better ways to meet my needs in order to eat as I choose.

When I read the list to my sponsor, she pointed out that eating food I don't need is wasting it as much as if I'd thrown it away. This allowed me to become willing to stop (a mini step 1). She isn't so much smarter than I am, but she's outside my head and able to see my blind spots. Also willing to tell me what I'm not seeing. I needed her, so I tried to keep her happy by doing what she wanted me to, even when it wasn't recovery. The result was that I did every step twice: her way and my way. That worked. I didn't need to argue over how to do the steps, and I didn't do anything I really objected to.

The most important thing she told me was to relax. She told me this the first time we spoke, and repeated it often. If I'd taken her advice the first time, she wouldn't have needed to repeat it, but relaxing wasn't so easy for me. If I stopped cutting firewood because my back hurt, a voice would start berating me as soon as I sat down: "What are you doing? You're wasting time. You aren't that tired; you could do more..." So I avoided sitting down. I'd go to the kitchen, munch until I'd forgotten my back, and then return to work. My back didn't get what it needed, and neither did that voice. It needed attention. I'd indulged it by rushing off to do its bidding, but that's not paying attention. The voice was pointing me to the unmet need driving my compulsive eating.

While the need to rest when tired instead of eat was pretty obvious, the problem of the voice only came to light when I asked myself, "What does eating instead of resting do *for* me?" I knew what it did *to* me, but honest, I don't do stupid things for no reason!

The reason was to be found long in the past. My parents did not know how to meet their own needs nor their children's. I was of little interest to them: wrong gender,

the novelty of kids was gone, not glamorous in any way. So my needs were a burden. Children need even more than adults—social interaction to learn social skills, encouragement to develop their abilities, opportunities to discover their interests, discussion to develop their reasoning and judgement, etc. I got too little of that and did not develop into a normal, competent adult. The writing was on the wall the day I was born, but I could not afford to face the truth that I wasn't going to get what I needed or become who I wanted to be. I needed hope more than I needed truth, because hopelessness kills. So I decided to become a child my parents could love, treasure and care for. The voice that would later drive me to unhealthy overachievement was a lifesaver when I adopted it.

I needed to heal the old fear—that I was unlovable and had to work hard to earn the air I breathed. I didn't believe it intellectually, so arguing with myself did nothing. Avoiding the pain and fear had become unworkable, and that was the thorny issue at the heart of my problem.

There were easier issues, such as my back's unmet need for me to stop lifting logs in ways that hurt it. My body needed rest it wasn't getting, and I neglected it often in smaller ways. These issues resulted from my inability to relax, but I listed them along with that harder psychological source in my list of unmet needs.

As I adopted habits to take care of my body, those became a task master for the emotional work. Every new approach brought me face to face with the urge to prove my worth. I was becoming entirely ready to find new strategies to meet my needs at the same time I was finding them. Steps 6 and 7 often run together in this way.

Below are some of the faulty strategies I had to replace and the needs going unmet as a result. I took them one at a time, starting each day with a reminder to myself what I was looking for that day.

STRATEGY	NEED	MORNING REMINDER
Eat because I'll feel deprived if I don't	Acceptance, compassion	Loving Mother, Please take care of the deprived child.
Thinking desire doesn't matter, can be ignored, is immature or wrong	Acceptance, ease	Loving Mother, Thank you for showing me desire is a voice for truth.

Goading myself when I stop short of what I hoped to accomplish	Stop proving my worth	Wise mother, Please help me rest when I need it. Please support me through fear, frustration, and disappointment.
Eat when I hurt or am tired or stressed	Take care of my body	Loving Mother, Please uphold me through stress and restlessness. Help me relax.
Eat because I'm bored	Peace, relaxation	Loving Mother, Please care for me through boredom.

And I didn't stop working on these until I had a new strategy for every need. When I got ideas, I tested them to make sure the new way worked. Only then did I go on to the next need in the list. Here are some of the new answers I came up with:

OLD STRATEGY	NEED	NEW STRATEGY
Eat because I'll feel deprived if I don't	Acceptance, compassion	Love the deprived child inside.
Thinking desire doesn't matter, can be ignored, is immature or wrong	Acceptance, ease	Use desire, instead of goading, to propel actions.
Goading myself when I stop short of what I hoped to accomplish	Stop proving my worth	Face the fear that I'm worthless.
Eat for replacement satisfaction	Satisfaction	Go slower. Do tedious tasks as meditations. Stop joyful work when it's no longer satisfying.
Eat because I'm bored	Peace, relaxation	It's ok to be bored. Let the mind settle down.

My first attempts to relax and mellow out involved wondering whether I could become a Type B personality. The answer turned out to be 'no,' but it was in these terms that I looked at the past to see where my new understanding might have aided me or others. Well, I had driven myself all my life, but only for a few years had I driven someone else. And to think, I could have gone fishing with my ex instead of staying home to nurse my resentment!

My type A approach to work had gotten me jobs and promotions, but it also made me invested in management decisions I did not control. I often left jobs for the same reason I was good at them. A bit of detachment might have smoothed the rocky path.

And only yesterday I tried to rush through daily chores so I could work on an exciting project, only to find myself wired and frustrated before I even started.

Not only did I write to my ex, I told the people around me I had joined OA. I wanted to feel free to eat differently from what they expected me to, so I deliberately changed their expectations. Members of my support system got to hear all about my attempts to become a Type B personality, then my efforts to find balance between doing and chilling, then success with doing more slowly—the whole soap opera until I discovered what worked. Some of them had good suggestions, since most of my friends are also Type As, some with the same need to moderate as I.

I was very fortunate to have a sponsor who suggested I get an accountability partner. Another of her sponsees was in the market, so we started calling each other in the evenings to check in. I kept my list of new strategies beside the phone and went over them during these calls, reporting where I had used them and where I had missed opportunities to use them. Then she took her turn, using it as she saw fit, since we didn't need to use the time in the same way. This relationship kept me on track during the time when early success might have made me complacent and vulnerable to relapse.

My struggles with overachievement required constant reminders, so I adopted the idea of mindfulness, shaping it to my purpose rather than worrying how it was "supposed" to be done. Paying bills became a practice of slowly gathering materials, down-shifting my energy level, pulling attention away from more enchanting pursuits, and writing checks. I was surprised at how this annoying task became not-annoying at all.

I still work at this slower approach to projects I both like and dislike. The excitement that used to draw me into unrealistic expectations and the resulting

frustrations now seems suspect to me. Can I enjoy making a bamboo flute without getting so revved up I forget to check my blood sugar? It's the same quest I started with, but instead of converting from Type A to B, I'm just tweaking the balance of excitement vs. contentment.

I wanted to offer what I'd learned to other sufferers, but I was terribly afraid of sponsoring people. My region offered an all-day workshop on sponsorship, so I went. There I was reminded that it's not the sponsor's job to get the sponsee abstinent; the job is to offer what we have, not only experience but encouragement, and trust the sponsee to their own healing process. I started sponsoring other compulsive eaters and found it easy and natural.

At the same time, my thinking about the nature of recovery was evolving, and the more it evolved, the more success my sponsees had. I was ecstatic. Watching someone else find what they need and change their life is the most satisfying work I can imagine. Eventually, one of these people suggested I write a book about the steps, so I did. It was well received, so I started giving workshops on the same material. The more dialogue I had with people on these issues, the clearer it became to me. I decided to write this book, to put it all as simply and clearly as possible.

And this, dear reader, is the true answer to my fear of being cosmically unworthy: my worth is not in what I do, but in who I am. I couldn't get another person abstinent with any force on earth. But I can play mid-wife to a process in which someone else gives birth to herself, grows into who she wants to be. The power that draws me to be fully myself can strike a chord in her, and she can do the same.

Appendix A: Finding the underlying need

When your goal depends on other people, you can help yourself by digging below that goal to something under your control. For example, suppose I want my spouse to stop drinking. I might or might not be able to achieve that. But why do I want them to stop? Maybe my life is too chaotic or unpredictable. Maybe they do destructive things when drunk. So the underlying need might be peace, predictability or safety. Those things are all attainable. They are also more to the point, since a spouse can get sober and still be unreliable.

This worksheet uses Marshal Rosenberg's list of universal human needs to help you state a goal that is attainable and to the point. The questions below are meant to

direct attention to the motive behind the goal.

There is no need to answer them all; stop when you see what the fundamental need is and use that for step 0.

First look over this list and see if you can simply spot the need that your current step-0 statement is trying to address:

CONNECTION

acceptance
affection
appreciation
belonging
cooperation
communication
closeness
community
companionship
compassion
consideration
consistency
empathy
inclusion
intimacy
love
mutuality
nurturing
respect/self-respect

CONNECTION

continued
safety
security
stability
support
to know and be known
to see and be seen
to understand and
be understood
trust
warmth

**PHYSICAL WELL-
BEING**

air
food
movement/exercise
rest/sleep
sexual expression
safety
shelter
touch
water

HONESTY

authenticity
integrity
presence

PLAY

joy
humor

PEACE

beauty
communion
ease
equality
harmony
inspiration
order

AUTONOMY

choice
freedom
independence
space
spontaneity

MEANING

awareness
celebration of
life
challenge
clarity
competence
consciousness
contribution
creativity
discovery
efficacy
effectiveness
growth
hope
learning
mourning
participation
purpose
self-
expression
stimulation
to matter
understanding

(c) 2005 by Center for Nonviolent Communication

Website: www.cnvc.org Email: cnvc@cnvc.org

Phone: +1.505-244-4041

If you don't see your unmet need in the list above, write down what will change if

you achieve your goal:

What need will be met that is not being met now?

How will you feel?

How will you feel if you fail?

What will change if you decide your current goal is unattainable?

If you still aren't able to state an attainable goal, you can probably get help from someone else. Because they don't think the same way you do, they won't go down the same rabbit holes.

Appendix B: How to talk to the subconscious mind

If my suggestions to ask your subconscious mind for answer sounds like woo-woo to you, this appendix should help.

The subconscious gives us direction, ideas and answers all the time. If you ask yourself what 3 times 4 is, the subconscious supplies the answer. If it were up to the conscious mind, you'd have to *figure out* what 3 times 4 is. When you wonder where you left your car keys, this is a request to the subconscious to scan its memory banks for the most recent memory of car keys. These are examples of dialogue with the subconscious. Nothing paranormal here.

Since the subconscious is the seat of wisdom, it's nice to have a good rapport with it. Some people can ask themselves, "What's the best thing to do here," and immediately get an answer. Others struggle. Some basic principles are:

- A narrow focus of the conscious mind makes it less receptive to what the subconscious has to say. Conversely, allowing the mind to wander lets the subconscious direct it.
- Trying to pull an answer from the subconscious makes it *less* available. To improve access, clarify what you want to know, then stop trying. Take a break and think of other things.
- The subconscious has the whip hand and can withhold answers. Respect its power.
- If you ask for guidance and then ignore it, you damage your rapport with that internal source of guidance. Likewise, if you make promises to yourself and then break them, you damage your rapport with the subconscious.

Below are some methods for cultivating rapport with your subconscious mind.

Dialogue with it

Writers refer to their inspiration as their Muse, from the Greek goddesses of literature and art. And the rest of us receive inspiration in our own fields. You can consult your muse deliberately, by considering ideas and then waiting to make a decision. "Sleep on it." Give your unconscious a chance to put in its two cents. The form of that two cents might simply be a certainty about which path to follow, but it might also be new ideas.

You can do the same with decisions. Make a decision tentatively and live with it for a few days. Listen to your intuition.

Do it consciously

What do you do unconsciously that needs the light of attention? Try doing it deliberately. For example, if you currently worry unnecessarily and then try not to worry, turn it around. Decide, "Ok, I'll worry for the next 15 minutes." What do you notice? Does it help you understand the reasons you worry? Does it bring forward feelings that are boiling over on the back burner? Whenever you find yourself in a power struggle with your unconscious, try following its lead in a spirit of inquiry instead.

Remember your dreams

The unconscious mind seems to think in symbolic images, and we can watch the show by remembering our dreams. To start, put a pen and paper beside your bed. Each morning, as soon as you wake up (before visiting the bathroom), write what you remember of last night's dreams. Over time you'll remember more.

If a dream intrigues you and you want to know what it means, you can try this:

- For each character or force, name its three main characteristics. E.g., the bus is a vehicle, it's out of control, but it seems beneficent.
- What part of you fits that description? Or, in what sense, or at what times, do you fit the description?
- Using these players by their descriptions, briefly summarize the action. E.g., the friendly vehicle with a mind of its own takes me deep down into a dim but beautiful place. Sound like anything going on in your life?

Ask for a dream

Once you're remembering your dreams, you can ask for information or inspiration through them. For example, you could ask why you feel anxious when the roses bloom or how to help your son. Simply make this request right before going to sleep.

Devices

Devices are of two kinds: amplifiers and condensers. Amplifiers hear the quiet voice of the subconscious and turn into something hard to miss, usually through tiny muscle movements. A familiar example is the Ouija board. Condensers apply some amorphous criteria to a question and distill an answer. Examples include flipping a coin, reading tea leaves, or praying for a sign.

An amplifier

Start by orienting yourself in your values, intending that this exercise will be for harmony or health or whatever basic value applies. Let a pendulum (a necklace works well) hang from your hand, then ask your subconscious to move it in a direction that will mean "yes," another direction for "no," and a third for "don't know." Then just start asking questions. Make them precise, like your math teacher used to do, because the subconscious takes things literally. For example, if you ask, "Is there some reason I don't remember Grandma," the answer will be yes. Of course there's a reason. But if you ask, "Do I have enough support to integrate a memory of Grandma," the answer might be more to the point.

To get familiar with the pendulum, try some easy questions first, like, "Did I put the sprinkler in the garage last fall?" or "Are there two N's in "Tennessee"?"

Sometimes when I've done this, I've become sure of the answer without the pendulum giving it to me. This is fine. It means I've opened the lines of communication and am getting the answer directly.

A condenser

Formulate a question in your mind. Summon your intention that the answer you are about to get be in harmony with your basic values. Take a book of fiction or non-fiction that's not too technical, close your eyes, open the book to any page and put your finger on the page. Open your eyes and read what's under your finger.

How does this answer your question? Spin a connection if one isn't immediately obvious. Your subconscious mind will supply the appropriate spin, because your intention is to do justice to your values.

For example, I open *Winnie the Pooh* with the question, "Should I drink an extra cup of caffeine?" My finger lands on, "If this is flying, I shall never really take to it." I interpret that to mean that caffeine is part of my over-achieving headset, and what I really want is to slow down and savor each task. So no, I'll pass on the extra cuppa. If my inner wisdom wanted me to drink the extra cup, it might interpret the passage to mean that I can fly in my own way, any time I want. Neat, huh?

Direct contact

Hypnosis is a direct conversation with the subconscious. The filters normally used to screen information are suspended, which makes the subject "suggestible." Self-hypnosis gives you the chance to watch the subconscious more easily than in dreams, although what it says won't be so spontaneous. You can also query it. It's

important to make your values salient before directly contacting the subconscious, because you are about to bypass the filters that normally check the ethics of an idea. So let your subconscious mind know that you're relying on it to work for harmony.

Get comfortable and close your eyes. Relax your muscles by thinking of each part of your body and deliberately relaxing those muscles. You can coordinate this with your breathing if you like: one muscle group per breath. Break up areas with a lot of muscle tension, like the face, into small pieces. You can repeat an area to get it fully relaxed. It usually takes me three tries to relax my jaw all the way.

Now descend. You can count down from 10 to 0. You can imagine walking down a stair case or hill. You can picture the floor indicator in an elevator slowly taking you to the basement. You can feel yourself going deeper into trance. You can imagine a voice slowly dropping, lulling you into blissful relaxation.

Now ask your question or watch the show.

When you're finished, come back up the same way you went down. Expect to return rested and with a sense of well-being. Open your eyes and slowly move your body.

Tapping subconscious wisdom

I use characters to think about my own subconscious: the dream maker, the censor, the muse. If you're open to the method, here are instructions for getting a guide. Some people will see images while others hear sounds or feel things. Some people will just know. So I've included cues for all these modes, but you only need to use the ones that work for you.

Get comfortable and close your eyes. Relax your muscles by thinking of each part of your body and deliberately relaxing those muscles. You can coordinate this with your breathing if you like: one muscle group per breath. Break up areas with a lot of muscle tension, like the face, into small pieces. You can repeat an area to get it fully relaxed.

Now descend. You can count down from 10 to 0. You can imagine walking down a stair case or hill. You can picture the floor indicator in an elevator slowly taking you to the basement. You can feel yourself going deeper into trance. You can imagine a voice slowly dropping, lulling you into blissful relaxation.

You're now in a place of peace and harmony. Truth, inspiration, health and well-being hold sway here. Check it out. Notice the details, the colors and sounds, the balmy breeze or pervading sense of security. Are you outdoors or in? Are there

plants? Animals?

You are about to meet your guide. Your guide has access to all the wisdom you need. This guide will be honest and kind, working for your well-being and honoring your values. The guide won't advise you to do any harm.

Step through the portal you are now approaching and meet your guide. Ask any question you like.

When you're finished, come back up the same way you went down. Expect to return rested and with a sense of well-being. Open your eyes and slowly move your body.

Next time you want to meet your guide, you'll already know what she looks like.