

## Working the Steps: Keeping it Simple

Susan Peabody

If you have read any of my articles you know I am an addict and alcoholic. In the past I have drunk too much, eaten too much, shopped too much and loved too much. Then in 1982 I joined Alcoholics Anonymous and began to change. I have even written a book about change. Nothing I have done is more important than working the twelve steps.

Many people are confused about how the steps help you change so I have summarized each step so others can understand they do not have to be complicated as some workbooks make them seem. They are simple and to the point.

1. We admitted we were powerless over [ ]—that our lives had become unmanageable. This step is designed to help people face the truth. It is about honesty and humility. Don't be afraid of the word powerless. It simply means that you are admitting that you need help. You, by yourself, are powerless. Aligned with the group and a Higher Power, you have the power to move forward.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. Once again, you are admitting that you need help. By yourself you cannot change. With some power beyond yourself you can change. This "power greater than yourself" does not have to be a traditional deity. It can be a group, an idea, a belief system—anything that gives you the strength you need to change. This step is also about hope. Armed with help you can be restored to sanity—you can change.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him. All changes begin with a decision. In this step you are making a decision to align yourself to the will of your Higher Power. Your Higher Power may be God, or your Inner Wisdom, but either way you are making a decision to do the will of this Higher Power and not the will of your fear-driven self—your ego, your addiction, your dark side, your immaturity—whatever part of you holds you back from change. Turning your will and your life over simply means surrendering to change.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. An inventory is always a good idea. Listing what you like about yourself, and what works to help you change, is as important as listing the things about yourself that are holding you back.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs. Confession is good for the soul. It is an ancient art that has never lost its importance. It is a ceremony in which you graduate from the old into the new. It is part of the process of change.

6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character. Since willingness is so important to change, you have to wait for it before you can proceed. While you are waiting, there are some things you can do. You can keep praying or hitting bottom—whatever works.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings. If you, by yourself, could remove your own shortcomings you probably would—once you recognized them as a liability. But the truth is you need help. If you are humble enough your Higher Power will help you. This is the message of the seventh step. Swallow your pride and ask for help. Humbly, by the way, means that with gratitude and faith you are openly asking God, as you understand God, to do for you what you cannot do for yourself.

Asking for help does not mean you do not have to do your part. There is a great story about a little boy who asked God to fix his toy. Nothing happened so the little boy got impatient and said, “God, what is taking so long.” God answered, “I will fix the toy as soon as you let go.” So if God has not lifted one of your shortcomings go back to step six. Furthermore, do not expect this step to work like magic. If you pray for patience, you will not suddenly become patient; people will come into your life that drive you nuts so you can practice patience.

8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all. As with the fourth step inventory, once again you are asked to put pen to paper (or hand to keyboard) and make a list of all the people you have harmed. This step prepares you for taking action by taking action. Action is the key to everything. The eighth step is the beginning of letting go of guilt and shame which is a stumbling block to change.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others. Making amends is painful, but it is the only way to truly release yourself from the burden of guilt and shame. Once it is over you will be glad you did it. You will feel, deep inside, how this step has changed you. Remember that when making amends you only try to clean up your side of the street. The other person’s part in all this is irrelevant when it comes to the amends you are making. In the book, of Alcoholics Anonymous, there is an excellent explanation of how to avoid injuring others when you make amends and when amends are better not made at all.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it. Slacking off is a major problem when it comes to change. This step is designed to keep you honest and to help you avoid slipping back into your old ways. Some people do this step daily, others will do it when they have done something they feel badly about.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out. This step is for the spiritually inclined. It improves your relationship with your Higher Power. It relaxes you. It reminds you that you should not be relying only on your own ego to make decisions about life. If spirituality is an important part of your life this

step will keep you on the right path.

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to [other sufferers], and to practice these principles in all our affairs. This step is all about service which keeps you feeling good about yourself. It suggests you work with others who have similar problems to yours, but I think in its broader sense it suggests that we get outside of our own problems, and our own egos, and reach out to our fellow man. Part two of this step is about moving out from the safety of your support network and into the world at large. You are reminded that the changes you make are not just demonstrated at your support group or with your therapist but at home and work.

There are many books written about the 12-Steps and I recommend them all. The steps work whether you do them alone or within a 12-Step program. They can help you change more quickly than any other method I have come across.