Modern 12 Step Recovery
Step 4 Process Guide

Introduction

This guide is a suggested process for completing your Step 4 issues list. The role of Step 4 is to accomplish two important goals:

- Get all of the issues in your life "out-on-the-table", and

- Take an objective look at each issue and gain insight into what your role was in contributing to it.

The information from Step 4 is used as the basis for determining changes in your thinking and behavior in Steps 5, 6, and 7.

This suggested Step 4 process is very straightforward. The key to it is being thorough and honest. Read this short process guide entirely, studying the examples along the way, before you start developing your list of issues.

Part I - Identification of the Issues in Your Life

The first part of the process is to "brainstorm" a list of the issues that you presently have in your life. This can be anything that comes to mind, past, present, or future, that impacts you today. The goal is to "not get into the weeds" with details. Just get these down on paper.

Use the following table to help you recall and describe your issues. For each issue, write a short, one or two-sentence, description. In that description, make sure to specifically identify **How** you feel, **Who** your feeling is directed toward, and **How** you are impacted. Three examples follow the tables.

Table I - HOW do you feel?			
Resentful	Fearful	Betrayed	Controlled
Deceived	Guilty	Insecure	Jealous
Lonely	Manipulated	Powerless	Sad

Table II - WHO is the feeling about?			
Individuals	Parent	Partner	Ex-Partner
Sibling	Relative	Friend	Co-Worker
Teacher	Stranger	Clergyman	Yourself

Institutions	Government	Legal System	Education
Employer	Business	Religion	Health System
Races/Cultures	Politics	Marriage	Jails/Prisons

Table III - WHAT is the impact on you?			
Physical	Sexual	Emotional	Money
Material Items	Appearance	Career	Social Status
Partner Status	Freedom	Self-image	Confidence

Examples of Issues

1. **Issue:** I **resent** my **sister and her husband**. I loaned them $1,000 ten years ago from **savings**. They never paid me back.

2. **Issue:** I am **lonely**. My last two **girlfriends** left me. My **self-confidence** is shot. I am a great guy, with a nice car, apartment, and a good job. The guys they are dating now are real losers. I don't get it.

3. **Issue:** I am living with a lot of **fear** of the **legal system.** If I get another DUI (Driving Under the Influence citation) I am going to lose my **freedom** and go to jail.

Part II - Identification of Your Role in the Issues

After completing your list of issues, the next step in the process is to take an objective, honest look at how you might have contributed to creating each issue and/or perpetuating it. You will find this self-discovery very interesting and informative, as it provides perspective on each issue that you might have not considered.

There are two activities in Part II. First, you will take a look at a list of character traits (personality characteristics) that you could have brought to the issue. Second, you will be reviewing a list of potential cognitive distortions ("thinking errors") that may have been involved in your decision making.

For each issue on your list, complete the following:

1. **Character Traits** – Carefully review the negative character traits on page 5. Identify one or more of these traits from the list that you may have brought to the issue.

2. **Cognitive Distortions ("Thinking Errors")** – Carefully exam the list of cognitive distortions on page 6. Determine if you might have one or more of these "thinking errors" involved in this issue.

Following are the example issues from earlier, updated for character traits and cognitive distortions that the person brought to each issue.

Issue Examples – Updated for Self-Discovery

1. **Issue: I resent my sister and her husband**. I loaned them $1,000 ten years ago from my **savings**. They never paid me back. **Self-discovery:** Perhaps I was being impractical. My sister and her husband were unemployed when I loaned them the money and they have not worked for most of the past ten years. There was a good chance they were not going to pay me back **(trait – unrealistic)**. Also, I am looking at this from the worst possible perspective **(distortion – catastrophizing)**. We have a great relationship otherwise. If they never pay me back, I am OK financially.

2. **Issue:** I am **lonely**. My last two **girlfriends** left me. My **self-confidence** is shot. I am a great guy, with a nice car, apartment, and a good job. The guys they are dating now are real losers. I don't get it. **Self-discovery:** Their new boyfriends do not have any of the nice things I have. Perhaps my ex-girlfriends are not impressed by what I own **(trait – materialistic).** Further, it is not rational for me to think that I am going to be alone forever **(distortion – all-or-nothing thinking).** Perhaps, I need to be more kind and loving.

3. **Issue:** I am living with a lot of **fear** of the **legal system.** If I get another DUI, I am going to lose my **freedom** and go to jail. **Self-discovery:** I am not active in a program of addiction recovery like they recommended **(traits – procrastinating and undisciplined)**. I am not a loser in general **(distortion – overgeneralization)**. I am an alcoholic.

You can write all of this information down in any format you choose. What is important is that you have an accurate description (Part I) and that you have documented any of your character traits and cognitive distortions (Part II). After you have completed Part I and II for each issue, meet with your sponsor to have your Step 5 discussion.

Character Traits

Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive
Aggressive	Gentle	Judgmental	Accepting
Angry	Content	Lazy	Industrious
Apathetic	Interested	Manipulative	Collaborative
Arrogant	Humble	Materialistic	Spiritual
Boastful	Modest	Emotional	Level-headed
Conceited	Humble	Perfectionist	Realistic
Controlling	Sharing	Possessive	Generous
Cowardly	Brave	Prejudiced	Open-minded
Critical	Non-judging	Procrastinating	Action-based
Cynical	Optimistic	Resist change	Flexible
Defensive	Open	Rude	Courteous
Dishonest	Honest	Self-important	Humble
Disrespectful	Reverent	Self-centered	Caring
Envying	Confident	Self-pitying	Grateful
Exaggerating	Modest	Shy	Outgoing
Greedy	Generous	Spiteful	Loving
Hateful	Forgiving	Superior	Humble
Hypersensitive	Tolerant	Suspicious	Trusting
Ill-tempered	Good-natured	Undisciplined	Organized
Impatient	Tolerant	Unrealistic	Practical
Impulsive	Disciplined	Untrustworthy	Reliable
Inconsiderate	Thoughtful	Vain	Modest
Indecisive	Resolute	Vindictive	Forgiving
Inflexible	Open-minded	Violent	Gentle
Insecure	Self-confident	Vulgar	Polite
Intolerant	Patient	Wasteful	Thrifty
Irresponsible	Reliable	Verbose	Succinct

Cognitive Distortions *
("Thinking Errors")

1. **All-Or-Nothing Thinking** – Thinking in extremes; no room for grey areas.

2. **Overgeneralization** – Based on a single occurrence you conclude that it will continue to repeat.

3. **Mental Filtering** – Focusing only on the negative aspects of things and ignoring the positive.

4. **Disqualifying the Positive** – Discounting positive experiences. They do not count for one reason or another.

5. **Mind Reading / Fortune Telling** – Jumping to the conclusion that the outcome will be negative without supporting facts.

6. **Catastrophizing (Magnification)** – Dwelling on the worst-or best-case scenario occurring due to a single event.

7. **Emotional Reasoning** – Believing that if I feel this way, it must be true.

8. **Shoulds** – Self-defeating ways we attempt to motivate ourselves and others with unrealistic expectations; only to ultimately feel a failure when these are not met.

9. **Labeling** – Extreme generalization. I am a loser versus I made a mistake.

10. **Personalization and Blame** – Blaming yourself or others for situations that were not directly under your control.

* These are ten "errors" in thinking that contribute to problems that people have in their lives. These were identified by Dr. Aaron T. Beck, and expanded on by Dr. David D. Burns, in their groundbreaking work in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT).

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