

Under the Hood

Reflections on Steps 6 & 7

Rick W.

A Clear & Adequate Presentation 

Under The Hood

Reflections on
Steps 6 & 7

Rick W.

“We have emphasized willingness as being indispensable. Are we now ready to let God remove from us all the things which we have admitted are objectionable?” — *Alcoholics Anonymous*

“I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character, which stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do your bidding.”
— *Alcoholics Anonymous*

Light and blessings to each one of you and may you find the depth and weight of peace and love I've found being a member of this wonderful Fellowship. — *Rick W.*



© 2022 by Rick W.

The thoughts found in this ebook are nothing more than the experience of one alcoholic - a single member of Alcoholics Anonymous and do not represent the thoughts of or speak for the entire A.A. Fellowship.

Rick's sponsor taught him that the primary responsibility he has to Rick was to teach him how to take the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous so he can teach others (*effectively to make new sponsors*), and to continually point out patterns of spiritual disobedience as he sees them in Rick's life because it is those patterns of disobedience to spiritual principles that block him from the grace of God.

To contact Rick W., visit <https://www.takethe12.org/contact/>

First Edition Published: July 2022

While this ebook is primarily a reflection on the writings found in the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* (lovingly referred to as the, "Big Book" by A.A. members) - and the book, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, the author acknowledges it is not affiliated with or endorsed by A.A.'s General Service Conference, the General Service Board of Trustees of Alcoholics Anonymous, or any of its subsidiary corporations.

From *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, Copyright© 1952, 1953, 1981, by A.A. World Services Inc., New York, N.Y., 2001

From *Alcoholics Anonymous*, Copyright© 1939, 1955, 1976, 2001§ by A.A. World Services Inc., New York, N.Y., 59-60

From *The Language of the Heart* Copyright© 1988 by AA Grapevine, Inc., 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115

From *As Bill Sees It*, Copyright © 1967 by Alcoholics Anonymous ® World Services, Inc., 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115



Foreword

For many years I used my character defects to not only define me, but also ultimately create the actions that led to what was to be my ultimate failure in life prior to coming to the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous – *being a useful and productive part of society*.

Character: the aggregate of features and traits that form the individual nature of some person or thing.

Defects: shortcomings, faults, or imperfections

With these definitions in mind, the ***aggregate shortcomings, faults, and imperfections that formed my nature*** were my best friends for a large part of my life. I lived deep inside the delusion that if I could only get better at this or that, acquire this or that, or become this or that based solely upon my own willpower, I'd be happy.

I had no idea until I came to the rooms that these very things I held so dear (often times without even knowing it) would lead to my eventual downfall - or “emotional bottom” as we sometimes call it in the Fellowship. I wish I could say that just having the information placed before me in the form of Step 6 on the wall when I first came in was enough. Thirty years later, I've finally begun to understand that just *knowing* about them (my defects) is not NEARLY enough.

For the first twelve years or so after getting sober, I muddled along mostly happy. I went to my fair share of meetings; I did a little service, sponsored a few people, and “studied” our Big Book with a few different sponsors thinking I had done a good job in taking the Steps. At about year twenty, I came face to face with my most glaring defects manifesting in ways that should have sent me to the nearest barroom. Instead,

something worse happened – something much worse. I stayed sober and realized a misery like I'd never known prior to coming to the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous.

I decided to write this ebook and share my experience, strength, and hope on Steps 6 & 7 because in my 34th year of sobriety, I continue to see member after member in the Fellowship of A.A. continue to miss (or unintentionally side-step as I did) this most important piece of clear cut direction given to us on how we can *“grow in the image and likeness of his own creator.”* I have sponsees who come to me time and time again saying things like, *“I’m struggling with ____,”* or *“I’m afraid of ____,”* and I’m finding my general response these days is one of two things – *“Ok, open your book,”* or *“Cool, now read me some inventory.”*

Why? While I’m feeling confident in my program these days, the one thing I’m crystal clear on is that this alcoholic does not need to have an opinion on their problems, but I certainly can guide them to the solution found within the first 164 pages of our *basic text* as it was shown to me throughout the years.

I often say that my favorite A.A. speakers are the ones who are not afraid to tell the truth and talk openly about what it looks and feels like to be hopeless IN the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous (especially with long term sobriety). Because of how my own shortcomings manifested at year 20 (and beyond), I find such a sense of relief when these speakers get up to the podium and tell the truth about feeling hopeless and helpless with a few years under their belt. Of course, the key word here is *“feeling.”* I’ve learned that just because I feel it, doesn’t necessarily mean it’s real.

I’m so grateful I continue to be given the opportunity to do service and speak at A.A. meetings, conferences, and conventions to share my experience, strength, and hope on how I *“have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body.”* Each time I get up and tell the truth about some

horribly embarrassing experience I had as a result of my defects in action (especially in long-term sobriety), or how I realized once again that **insanity doesn't have an expiration date**; inevitably, I have someone come up to me afterward and thank me for telling the truth. They thank me for my honesty that allowed them the identification they needed to remind them that there IS hope. There IS help. There IS recovery.

My hope and prayer is that in putting pen to paper to share my thoughts about these unbelievably important Steps (that only received a paragraph each in the first 164), this ebook will encourage and inspire others to join me on the journey of exploration to uncover those things, that if not tended to, can continue to cause our failures. This is not an academic approach to these Steps, but rather an examination of my pilgrimage through them. My sponsor has told me, "Experience is not opinion – therefore not open to debate. You can debate my opinion all you want to, but you can't debate my experience because it happened to me." What I will share with you in the proceeding pages is my experience with these Steps only.

While I believe that every one of the Twelve Steps is important in saving my life, in year thirty-four, I've come to the realization that for me, Steps 6 & 7 are the **meat and substance** that can and will daily carry me through life's trials and tribulations. Being willing to admit that I am *perfectly flawed* and that those imperfections when looked at, can lead me in the direction of asking God to remove them, has been one of the greatest gifts I've been given. I'm so incredibly grateful that today, I find myself at a place where *"my brain no longer races compulsively in either elation, grandiosity, or depression. I have been given a quiet place in bright sunshine"* for so long as I do the work.

- God bless! Rick W.



Index

Foreword

Chapter 1 **STEP 6:** Were Entirely Ready

Chapter 2 STEP 6: Coming Face to Face

Chapter 3 STEP 6: Call to Perfection

Chapter 4 STEP 6: Clear & Adequate Presentation

Chapter 5 STEP 6: Without My Defects – Who Am I?

Chapter 6 **STEP 7:** Humbly Asked

Chapter 7 STEP 7: Definition of Humility

Chapter 8 STEP 7: Way Above My Pay Grade

Chapter 9 STEP 7: Practice, Practice, Practice

Chapter 10 STEP 7: A Whole New Outlook

Conclusion

About the Author

Chapter 1

Were Entirely Ready

Step 6: “Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.”

So, let me start by asking you a question... have you ever been...

- driving a car and saw a light come on your dashboard...
- have the car start spitting and sputtering...
- then it dies...
- then you coast over to the side of the road...
- put the car in park...
- get out and walk to the front of the car...
- pop open the hood...
- and realize you have absolutely **no friggin’ idea** (*I really wanted to cuss there*) what to do with what you see in front of you?

That was much the experience I had when I wrote my first official 5th Step and realized just exactly the hot mess that had been laid before me (ok, uncovered) that I had built my whole entire life upon. Up to the point that I’d walked through that exercise, I thought I’d lived a successful life. Never mind the fact that I married a woman I shouldn’t have, whored around the city of Dallas, TX like a cheap tramp (and a whole bunch of other cities too), lied, cheated, and stole from those who cared about me. Never mind the fact that I’d spent many a morning hung over promising myself I’d never do THAT again (whatever THAT was THAT night). I’d convinced myself life was pretty good.

In walking through the inventory process, I uncovered a plethora of shortcomings, faults, and imperfections that I

finally had to begin looking at that for years, had created the outline to my thoughts, feelings, emotions, and finally - my actions. Little did I know that a good hard look at, and a future letting go of those things, were going to eventually give me a life beyond my wildest dreams.

I was so ill-prepared and highly untrained to not only see, but understand how my **p**ride, **a**nger, **g**reed, **g**luttony, **l**ust, **e**nvoy, and **s**loth (my P.A.G.G.L.E.S.), all founded in fear (fear of not getting something I wanted or fear of losing something I demanded); were the components that kept leading me to the only solution that seemingly worked every time - alcohol.

I remember when I did my last official 6th Step with my current sponsor, he asked me point blank, **“Are you entirely ready to have all your defects removed?”** Because I try and be 100% honest with my sponsor today, I said, *“Yes, all but one.”* Because he’d just listened to my 5th Step, he knew EXACTLY which one I was talking about. Thank God my sponsor knows how to handle me. He said, *“Ok that’s fine. Here’s what I want you to do. I want you to pray for the willingness to be willing to let it go.”* Unfortunately, my response wasn’t very spiritual. I immediately said, *“Well - that’s not gonna work”* to which he replied, *“Why not?”* I said, *“because I don’t WANT to let it go.”* In the most loving tone of voice he could muster, he said, *“That’s ok, do it anyway.”* And I did, begrudgingly. For thirty days, I prayed that prayer. In the beginning, those prayers were snarky, rebellious, and anything but earnest. They went something like, *“OK GOD... my sponsor is making me pray this prayer. Please give me the willingness to be willing to have this defect removed,”* even though in my mind, I simply didn’t want to let it go. WHY? Because I had allowed this defect of character to become so much a part of my life that I let it help create the outline to my existence and came to believe that it defined who I was. If I let God remove it from me, the only question I kept coming up with is, *“Who then will I be?”* (More on this later). I simply didn’t know how to live a life without it because it had been such a huge part of my life.

For thirty days I prayed that prayer. Each day the prayers got a little softer, and little kinder, and over time, became much more earnest. At about day thirty (I'm not 100% sure on the math there), I was living in NYC and was at home in my little studio apartment and went walking from the kitchen to the living room (maybe 6 feet in total), and about halfway across the room, I stopped dead in my tracks. It all of a sudden hit me that not only was I willing to have that defect removed, it had already been removed about two weeks earlier and I didn't even know it.

That is how out of touch I can be at times. I was doing the work, slowly letting God change my heart, and in complete and total cluelessness, God did for me what I could not do for myself. I'm grateful I know today what while that is true - what's also true is that God will NOT do for me what I CAN do for myself. My life today is a partnership between God and I. I do my part - and God does God's part.

It's been my experience that when I become entirely ready to have that which is objectionable to me removed (either on my own or at the nudging of my sponsor), great events will come to pass. They may be slow to come, or they may be in the nature of sudden and spectacular upheavals. Regardless of how and when they show up - I've seen it work when I work it.

Becoming entirely ready to have my defects removed was truly a process for me. It took time for me to acquire the willingness to surrender the those things that continued to bring me nothing but pain and misery. I'm reminded of something I heard a speaker say once that certainly applies here, *"Alcoholics Anonymous may not have opened the gates of Heaven to let me in, but it absolutely opened the gates of Hell to let me out."*



Chapter 2

Coming Face to Face

When I was twenty-three years old and nowhere near sobriety, I found myself highly uncomfortable in my own skin. It was 1983 and I lived in what I perceived to be incredibly conservative surroundings, yet I had a fairly liberal point of view. I didn't like anything about where I lived, who I was, or the direction my life seemed to be taking. The only thing that seemed clear to me was that I wanted to be a father. I'd been out of high school for five years at this point and back in those days, it's what you did. Men found a woman to marry, got a 9-5 job that could pay the bills, and started a family. There was one big problem with that little equation though – I didn't want to be with a woman. I wasn't even sure that I wanted to be with a man, but I did know I didn't want to have to marry a woman to realize my dream of becoming a father.

I was adopted before I was born and my parents did a pretty good job of making me feel that even though I was adopted, I was special – wanted. Because of that, from as early as I can remember, I set the intention that I was going to give the same opportunity to a child I was given. Back in those days in very conservative North Texas, the only way I could do that (it seemed) was to take some woman hostage (a term I only learned after coming into the rooms) and make a family. Without going into all the gory details, it was a hot mess from start to finish. I convinced her (and myself) that this was what we both wanted. She believed me when I told her that I would devote my life to making her happy and being the very best husband, I could be. Honestly, I believed me too.

In short order, I came face to face with the truth that this was to become the first in a very long string of character defects that

would alter the course of my life (even though I wasn't willing to look at them or admit them at the time).

Pride (Ego): My belief that I deserved this, and it was okay to wreck this woman's life in doing so.

Anger: I was angry because I lived in a world where I had to be something other than who I really was to become a father.

Greed: There was never enough of anything I wanted. If we bought a car, it wasn't new enough. If we went on a vacation, it wasn't nice enough.

Gluttony: I began to use alcohol to escape my wife. She would be sitting on the other end of the sofa and all I could think about was getting as much alcohol in me as possible so she wouldn't *be* there (not her fault).

Lust: Even though I was married, I couldn't stop thinking there was another way for me.

Envy: I was incredibly envious of all those men around me who appeared to be happy and at peace with their lot in life.

Sloth: I was a terrible husband. I let my wife do everything. I did nothing to help make that farce of a marriage a success.

"We were having trouble with personal relationships, we couldn't control our emotional natures, we were a prey to misery and depression, we couldn't make a living, we had a feeling of uselessness, we were full of fear, we were unhappy, we couldn't seem to be of real help to other people." YEP!!!

This is exactly what I felt at that moment in my life. The real problem came when I realized I didn't know how to get off the

roller coaster. I didn't know how to face the reality that was my life at that time. So I drank. THAT was my solution. Even then, I knew what the real problem was – my thinking, but we'll get back to that in a moment.

My wife and I ended up divorcing after three years and I started, or in the interest of total honesty, continued filling that hole in my soul with whatever I could fill it with to make me feel better about myself, mostly alcohol. Allowing myself to be consumed by inappropriate sexual situations with inappropriate people (lower companions), lying to my friends and family about the life I was living, cheating every chance I could, stealing from employers (which finally did come back to bite me in the butt), but mostly just spending so many mornings hung over from the night before; led me to the place where I realized I could no longer live the way I was living.

I've always found it interesting that in Step Four, Bill did not ask us to take an inventory of all the alcohol we drank. He did not ask us to become intimately familiar with what we drank, how much we drank, who we drank with, where we drank, or how often we drank, etc. He asked us to become intimately familiar with our grosser character handicaps that continually led us to failure.

After writing my first Fourth Step and letting my then sponsor listen to my Fifth Step, I now had a list of those things that, with as much searching and fearlessness as I could muster at the time, represented the truth of my downfall. I've heard from the very beginning that we came for our drinking and stayed for our thinking. Our Big Book tell us in *Chapter Five, How it Works* in discussion of the need to take inventory that *"Our liquor was but a symptom. So, we had to get down to causes and conditions."* OMG! It WAS my thinking all along. It was my complete inability to process life on life's terms that brought me to my knees. I had thought that Jack Daniels, Crown Royal, and Miller Lite were my problem. Even though I'm smart, I still didn't understand that in the beginning. I had to be willing to begin

to embrace the idea that maybe, just maybe, I needed to step out of my own way and let something else start guiding the direction my life was taking.

I read once in the book *Drop the Rock* that “*we make friends with our defects and know how they have served us. This results in knowing how they no longer serve us.*” I found that statement to be incredibly comforting because it suddenly made them (my defects) non-adversaries. On some level, it made them seem not near as scary and unmanageable. Of course, I had turned trying to manage my defects into a fine art until I realized I simply didn’t have the skill to “manage” them. It was only when I came face to face with them that I realized they were way above my pay grade.

So, what did I do with them after I truly saw them for the first time after I opened up, looked under the hood, and saw them staring me in the face? I wish I could tell you I became entirely ready to have them all removed and went about living the life I’d always wanted. NOT! It was to be years down the line before I truly looked at them again (Note to Newcomers: I highly don’t recommend this!)

Coming face to face with the causes and conditions of my failure in life was not fun, but it has certainly provided an experience of depth and weight that has made me a different man today from the man I was when I walked into the rooms. Looking at each and every shortcoming I have has taught me that there is hope I may become the man that God put me on this Earth to be and that I need not be afraid of the experience.

For me, this is what I call, “black belt A.A.” It’s the hard stuff to be sure, but it’s also where the biggest blessings can be found.



Chapter 3

Call To Perfection

I've read that the sixth step is a call to perfection. It tends to separate those folks who are working a good program from those who are just coasting. Boy, was THAT my experience.

"If we would gain any real advantage in the use of this Step on problems other than alcohol, we shall need to make a brand new venture into open-mindedness. We shall need to raise our eyes toward perfection, and be ready to walk in that direction."

If you are anything like me, you've spent most of your life "half-measuring," cutting corners, looking for the easier softer way. What a great event that Bill W. gave us a phrase that allows use to cut ourselves a little slack here and there...

"The principles we have set down are guides to progress. We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection."

Whew! Thank God it's a process and that I don't ever have to become perfect. I just need to aspire toward it and keep my eyes focused on trying to attain it. THAT, I can do.

My perfectionism caused all kinds of adverse reactions in my life. Not only does my spiritual illness need for me to believe I'm perfect, it also places a high premium on you seeing how perfect I am too so you can pat me on the back and tell me just how wonderful you think I am.

I'm one of those guys that when given the chance to qualify and share my experience, strength, and hope from the podium – I try and spend as little time as possible on how the problem manifested in my life so that I can spend the majority of my time focusing on the solution. I don't believe war stories of my drinking days have as much power for the newcomer for identification as does how my insanity during active alcoholism does. Generally, I will share this one specific experience I remember from childhood about the messaging I believed I received of how alcohol was going to be more important in my family than I was. It's one of the best examples of how my perfectionism (*and my need for recognition*) resulted in immense pain and suffering. So, here it goes:

When I was in elementary school, we had this thing called "Show & Tell." It was where kids brought things to school they thought were cool and shared them with their classmates. Maybe it was something they made, maybe it was a book they had read, maybe it was even their very cool father who was an FBI agent, etc. Generally, it was always something the kids were very proud of.

I was never that boy who had much interest in the things that other little boys my age had an interest in, with one exception. Back in those days (circa 1972), all the boys in my school were into building model cars. So, to fit in, I wanted to build one too. One Saturday morning after I had saved up my allowance, I walked down to the dime store (that reference shows just how old I really am) to buy my first (and last) model car to build. I remember it being a 1956 Chevy Bel Air. It was smokin' hot.

I brought it home, took it into my bedroom and started working on it. I spent all day long working on that model car. I used a whole tube of model glue to put it together. I sat at my little desk and worked diligently getting each piece meticulously put together. I had never done anything like that before and I was intent on doing it by myself without any help. I was going to do this by myself.

Back in those days, my parents had a group of friends they hung out with, other couples with kids, where they had what were called, "House Parties" each weekend. The party would rotate to a different couples house each time and on this particular weekend, it was my parent's turn to host the party. It took me all day to get that model put together and by the time I was finished, that night's house party was in full swing.

I remember walking out of my bedroom and going into the living room and my mother was the first parent I saw. So I walked up to her, tugged on her dress and said, "*Mom, come here I wanna to show you something.*" She shooed me away and said, "*Not right now.*" I was a persistent little devil and I kept at it. Multiple times I kept tugging on her dress until she finally gave in (likely to just shut me up) and came with me.

I walked her back to my bedroom and over to my desk and pointed at the model car and said, "*Look! Look what I did!*" I don't remember a moment where I was more proud of myself than that moment. She looked at me, and I will NEVER forget the look of disgust and disdain on that woman's face when she raised her hand up over her head, clinched her fist, and SMASHED that model into a million pieces. I couldn't believe what she had just done. I was

devastated. She looked at me with evil in her eyes and said, “*Don’t EVER take me away from my party again!*”

I’m sure I felt a million things in that moment, but the only thing that I could think was the feeling that, “**I will never be like her!**” Unfortunately, I grew up to be just like her—not because she or I were bad people, but because we both suffered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body.

It wasn’t until I came into the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous that I began to understand, or even desire, anything close to perfection in my life. It wasn’t until I started on my journey through the Steps that I began to understand that it’s a process — a lifetime process. I’m grateful today for the concept of “*spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection,*” and for the people who allow me the space to learn and grow in my own time.

Many people showed me through their own example and by their own experience that the idea of striving for perfection doesn’t have to be a painful one. One of the best things I’ve done for myself when I misstep (and I do it often), is to...

First, I recognize the misstep

Second, I ask God for forgiveness and direction

Next, I determine if there is an amends to be made

Lastly (*and most importantly for my sanity*), I don’t spend one minute beating myself up for the misstep



Chapter 4

Clear & Adequate Presentation

While I don't ever want to get into the habit of re-writing Bill W.'s words, from time to time, I may add something to them for myself to add an exclamation mark to its meaning. A good example of that was something Bill W. said in an excerpt from a letter he penned found on page 105 in the book *"As Bill Sees It"* where he said..

"Our chief responsibility to the newcomer is an adequate presentation of the program. If he does nothing or argues we do nothing but maintain our own sobriety. If he starts to move ahead, even a little, with an open mind, we then break our necks to help in every way we can."

My grand sponsor, Johnnie H., does a 12-Step weekend annually where a group of between 75-100 members assemble every September in Southern California to spend time taking the Twelve Steps. In 2013 I attended it and will forever be grateful for what was uncovered for me about our program, our Fellowship, and our Twelve Steps.

While there were many things I learned that weekend, one of the things that impacted me the most was when Johnnie looked at us and said, *"Bill W. stated that our chief responsibility to the newcomer is to present a **clear** and adequate presentation of the program of Alcoholics Anonymous."* He went on to share his thoughts on how our Fellowship has changed over the years and how there have been many things that have allowed us to water down our message of recovery.

I love the addition of the word *clear* to that sentence. For whatever reason, the word clear made that sentence more

intentional for me and not only did it stick, I continue to use it to this day.

One of the most important things I've learned over the years about Step 6 is that when providing a clear and adequate presentation of it to a sponsee is that willingness is the key. The purpose of Step 6 is to become fully prepared to rid ourselves of the things we find objectionable in our lives that we listed in Step 4; to become willing to let our Higher Power remove our defects; and to stop pursuing whatever our idea of perfection is. Ensuring that a newcomer has a clear idea of exactly what is meant about Step 6 in our literature is part of our primary purpose in carrying the message to them.

I don't know about you, but I hear a lot of things in A.A. meetings that are not found in our literature. One of the things I hear a lot (and I've said myself) is that we can "work on" our character defects. I used to believe I can work on becoming less prideful, angry, greedy, gluttonous, envious, and slothful. The only problem with statements like that is that "working on them" is WAY above my pay grade. I do not have the skill set to become less of those things by working on them. Sure, I can look at their opposites and become open to being more of those things, but in and of myself, I do not have the skill to do it. I MUST look to a Power greater than myself for that strength. I must ask for God's help for me to show up in that way.

A clear and adequate presentation of our program is found in our Big Book (with assistance from the essays found in the Twelves Steps and Twelve Traditions). It cannot be from whatever my addled brain comes up with. For so long as I try and take the 12 Steps as outlined in our basic text, and for so long as THAT is the message I am carrying to the still suffering alcoholic - for that long can I be assured that the very clear message that was divinely inspired through Bill W. will be accessed and applied in my life and in the lives of others.



Chapter 5

Without My Defects - Who Am I?

In 2013 when I changed sponsors (after working with the same sponsor for 16 years), I asked my new sponsor to take me back through the Steps and teach me how to take them the way he was taught. He gladly obliged. We did Steps 1-5, and I learned a lot about looking at those Steps in all new ways through his lens of experience. It wasn't until I got to Step 6 that I realized the impact of his approach to the Steps and how that was going to really begin to change my life.

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, after I did all the reading on this Step in both the Big Book and the 12&12, and after we had looked at what I was going to be called to surrender in this Step, he asked me one question...

"Are you entirely ready to have God remove all your defects of character?"

Because I had committed to both myself and my new sponsor that I would be always rigorously honest with him, the very first words out of my mouth in answer to that question were...
"Yes. All but one."

Because he had just listened to my 5th Step, he knew EXACTLY which one I was talking about. Instead of scolding me for not being willing to let it go, he took me back to the literature.

"Even then the best of us will discover to our dismay that there is always a sticking point, a point at which we say, 'No, I can't give this up yet.' And we shall often tread on even more dangerous ground when we cry, 'This I will never give up!' Such is the power of our instincts to overreach themselves. No matter how far we have progressed, desires will always be found which

oppose the grace of God.” - Page 66, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions

“If we would gain any real advantage in the use of this Step on problems other than alcohol, we shall need to make a brand-new venture into open-mindedness. We shall need to raise our eyes toward perfection and be ready to walk in that direction. It will seldom matter how haltingly we walk. The only question will be “Are we ready?”

“Looking again at those defects we are still unwilling to give up, we ought to erase the hard-and-fast lines that we have drawn. Perhaps we shall be obliged in some cases still to say, “This I cannot give up yet...,” but we should not say to ourselves, “This I will never give up!” - Page 68, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions

As I've already said, he suggested that I start praying for the “willingness to be willing to have it removed.” I became rebellious in that moment and said, *“Well, THAT won't work?”* He asked me why I thought that, and I said, *“Because I don't wanna let it go.”* My sponsor is a loving and kind man but has a firm hold on spiritual principles and he replied, *“That's okay – do it anyway.”* UGH!

I'm willing to accept the clear-cut direction of my sponsor today, so I did it. I started praying for the willingness to be willing every day for 30 days straight. In the beginning, the prayers were snotty and snarky. They were filled with rebellion. They went something like, *“Ok God, my sponsor is making say this prayer even though I know it won't work. Give me the willingness to be willing to be ready to have this defect removed. Thanks dude!”* It was ugly, mean-spirited, and with not one iota of sincerity or humility.

I need to stop for a moment here and let you know WHY I didn't want to surrender it. For much of my adult life, I had allowed this defect of character to define who I was (or who I

THOUGHT I was). I had let it create the outline for my life in both my thoughts and my actions. I had let it become the defining factor on how I showed up to my life. One of the reasons I wasn't willing to let it go (outside the fact that I thought it was fun... HA!), was an overriding belief that *"if I don't have this in my life.... THEN WHO AM I?"*

I'd allowed it to become so much a part of my life that I simply could not picture my life without it. Because I was willing to go to any lengths for victory over the causes and conditions of my failure, the work provided the results God intended for me.

The cunning, baffling, and powerful part of my spiritual sickness is so massive that I believed I needed to hold onto that defect because I simply didn't know how to live my life without it. But once I did the work my sponsor directed me to do, I found a relief like I've never known.

In the interest of transparency and total honesty, has it come back? Of course, it has. But today, I have the tools to deal with it. In that moment, I acknowledge my willingness to have it removed and humbly ask God to remove it (even though that's Step 7 and we're getting a little ahead of ourselves here).

My experience has simply been that, "For so long as I'm *breathin'*, the possibility exists of me *defectin'*." I can judge where I am today in my recovery by how long I choose to stay in the insanity.

Because I'm human, the possibility of my defects popping back up like a Whack-a-Mole is very much a reality. If I'm breathing, I'm thinking. If I'm thinking, the possibility exists for me to step away from my spiritual program and start taking back control of my life again. Thank God I have a solution today!



Chapter 6

Humbly Asked

Step 7: “Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.”

One of the first and most important things I needed to learn about my defects is that I can't be relieved of them without some level of humility. Alcoholics are victims of pride and selfishness. In the past when I felt pain and suffering (generally because of said pride & selfishness), I masked it with alcohol. Before coming to A.A., I used self-reliance to deal with it. Today, I can acknowledge the limits of human power in addressing these character defects. I cannot do it on my own. I cannot do it by sheer willpower. I cannot do it by my own intellect and reasoning.

Going to God and asking to have my defects removed is a true sign of humility because it is a clear recognition that I'm aware I cannot remove them myself.

Although Steps 6 & 7 are the shortest Steps in terms of wording in our Big Book and are perhaps the least discussed in meetings these days, they are probably the most potent of all twelve. As I mentioned in Step 6, for me, they ARE the meat & substance of my program of recovery. They embody the miracle of transformation as I turn over my broken, defective personality for God to transform it into a healthy, effective instrument of God's will.

Bill wrote this in Step 7 in the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*...

"For just so long as we were convinced that we could live exclusively by our own individual strength and intelligence, for just that long was a working faith in a Higher Power impossible."

At 13 years sober, I was living in Nashville, TN and I came face to face with one of my most glaring defects that almost took me down. I'd allowed myself to get involved in a very dysfunctional relationship (in the Fellowship) and I made that person my higher power. It was so unhealthy that it got in the way of everything in my life at that time. There were times that I found myself laying in the middle of my living room floor, huddled up in a fetal position, hysterically crying because I wasn't getting what it was I thought I'd wanted.

My poor home group at the time had to put up with that hot mess because it was all I could talk about in my shares. I'm certain my home group members got tired of hearing me moan on about this, but they loved me right where I was and told me to keep coming back. That was everyone except one member in particular, Barry S.

One Friday night at the very end of this insanity, I'd gone to my home group. I walked in the door of the church we met at and went into the kitchen to get a cup of coffee. As I was standing at the coffee pot, I heard a voice behind me say, *"Hey Rick, how's it going?"* It was my sponsor. The moment I heard his voice, I LOST IT! Because he was intimately familiar with my current insanity, he said to me, *"Ok, at tonight's meeting, you are going to go into the 12&12 meeting. They're on Step 7."* He knew exactly what he was doing and at that moment, was a true messenger from God.

I went into that meeting. The format was we sat in a circle, and used the 12&12 to read Step 7 aloud. We would go around the circle and each person would read a paragraph or two until we were done. As we were going around the circle, a woman read a paragraph from page 72...

"Then, in A.A., we looked and listened. Everywhere we saw failure and misery transformed by humility into priceless assets. We heard story after story of how humility had brought strength out of weakness. In every case, pain had been the price of admission into a new life. But this admission price had purchased more than we expected. It brought a measure of humility, which we soon discovered to be a healer of pain..."

Before she could finish that paragraph, I sat up in my chair and loudly said, **"WHAT?!?!?! What did you just say?!?!?!"** As I mentioned, my home had been putting up with my crap around this relationship for so long, that she stopped, lowered her head, tilted down her reading glasses, and with a sly grin on her face said very slowly, *"Let me read that again."*

When I heard the words *healer of pain*, I woke up as I had not really been paying much attention to the reading up to that point (just sitting there in SELF). In that moment, all I heard was that we were apparently reading something that could heal my pain. When the meeting was over, we were walking out of the room and myself and Barry were the last two people to walk out. He was walking behind me and I heard him call my name. So, I turned around only to find his hands on my chest pinning me up against a wall at which point he looked me straight in the eye and said, *"How Free Do You Wanna Be?!?!?!?"*

Let me stop here to tell you that Barry and I did not get along very well. He didn't like me and I didn't like him all that much either. But, in that moment, I knew that he was sent by God to help me. The moment he asked me that question, I started crying again and said something to effect of, *"I Do!"*

He grabbed me by the arm, marched me upstairs out of that church basement to the parking lot where he led to me to his truck and opened the passenger side door. He rifled through a bunch of papers and pulled out one sheet that was titled, *"7th Step Exercise."* He handed it to me and said very sternly, *"Get in*

your car, go home, walk in your door, do not turn on your TV, sit down at your dining table with a pen, highlighter, and your 12&12, and follow the "f'ing" instructions!!!!!"

Again, I didn't like him very much, but I remember learning somewhere along the line that there may come a point in my recovery that I will be willing to take the suggestions of those that have gone before me. I was willing to listen to what this man said as only the dying can be willing. I did exactly what he said. And while I won't get into the details of that exercise (found at <https://take-the-12.org/s7>), I can tell you that when I did what I was told to do, the moment I was done approximately 15 minutes later.... THE PAIN WAS GONE... and it NEVER came back. I experienced a transformation in that moment because I'd been willing to take the suggestions of another member which helped me learn I cannot do this on my own and I cannot remove my own defects of character.

One of the things I make sure and share with anyone I am taking through the Steps is what I am called to surrender in that Step. It is my belief (and may just be MY belief only) for me to be able to obtain the benefits of Step 6, I need to be willing to let go of those beliefs that have blocked me from God's grace, the sunlight of the Spirit, and my peace and happiness. In Step 7, there is one thing I need to be ready to surrender and let go of, and that is the...

Belief that I can become less of my character defects on my own or remove them myself.



Chapter 7

Definition of Humility

One dictionary defines humility as: *“the quality or condition of being humble; modest opinion or estimate of one’s own importance, rank, etc.”* While that’s a perfectly good definition, on page 72 of the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, Bill W. gave us the basic ingredient of all humility which is *“a desire to seek and do God’s will.”* He also said in the same book on page 58 in Step 5 that humility is *“a clear recognition of what and who we really are, followed by a sincere attempt to become what we could be.”*

After walking through the I insanity mentioned in the previous chapter, I came to know that getting clarity on who I really am along with additional clarity on what I can and cannot do in my journey of recovery was massive progress for me. Over the years, I’ve heard a lot of things in the rooms of A.A. and some of it is nowhere to be found in our literature. One of the myths I’ve heard about Step 7 is that humility isn’t necessary for recovery. Nothing could be farther from the truth. I can’t see my shortcomings without stripping myself of my pride and ego. This unfiltered look into myself allows me to develop a humble attitude by asking God to remove my moral defects from me.

Another myth I’ve heard is that we have the ability to remove our defects ourselves. This sort of thing is WAY above my pay grade. I simply don’t have the built-in skill sets to become less prideful, angry, greedy, gluttonous, lustful, envious, slothful or fearful on my own. My lack of humility, or my belief that I have more power than does my

Higher Power, gets me in trouble every time. When I have a clear sense of who I am and follow it up with the action to become who I can be, it never fails that God will provide me with the knowledge I need to allow the transformation to occur.

Nowhere in Step 7 does it say that our defects are gone forever once God removes them. Self-centered fear will still trigger my defects. The difference is that I now have a choice to follow my lust, for example, or not. I will be given a divine nudge at the onset of my defects to pray that God change me, and God will; whereas before Steps 6 & 7, I had no choice over my defects and was obsessed by them.

Understanding exactly what humility is and how it plays a role in my life today is as important as is my willingness to take inventory - that, with humility, leads me to a far better life and the one God had always planned for me. Taking a Step displays a willingness to write inventory and allow it to surrender something within us. I ask sponsees to write inventory on their most serious shortcomings around the practical application of this step in their life today (“How am I applying the principle found in this Step (humility) to every moment of my life?”).

Looking at the patterns of disobedience to spiritual principles through the writing inventory in my life; for this Step, I get to answer seven questions...

1. **Am I ready** to give up self-reliance for reliance on a Higher Power—whatever that may be to me?
2. **Am I ready** to learn to practice humility and put character-building ahead of comfort?
3. **Am I ready** to make “honesty, tolerance, and true love of man and God the daily basis of living?”

4. **Am I ready** to change my perspective from a self-centered one to a humble, selfless one?
5. **Am I ready** to accept that humility is necessary to achieve a sober and fulfilled life?
6. **Am I ready** to appreciate the enormity of God's power to transform lives?
7. **Have I offered** this prayer to God: "My Creator, I am now willing that You should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that You now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to You and my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do Your bidding. Amen?"

If I can answer yes to each of these questions, then I'm well on my way to a life that was designed for me with love. With a desire to seek and do God's will and a clear recognition of what and who I really am, followed by a sincere attempt to become what I could be, I'm setup to implement real humility in my life today - just as God planned.

I heard once that inventory helps me identify not who I am, but who I no longer wanna be. Humility helps me see me as others do and helps me to set aside whatever thoughts and beliefs no longer serve me so that I may better be of maximum service to God and the people about me.



Chapter 8

Way Above My Pay Grade

Long, long, ago...

In a land far, far away... (let's call it *Delusion*)...

...I picked up the phone and called my sponsor because my hair was on fire about... oh, I don't really remember what it was about... but at that moment, it was earth shattering. You know what I'm talking about - those things that get in our heads and start creating all kinds of stories about this or that which takes us down the rabbit hole. "She said...", or "He did...", or "They simply don't understand..." or whatever it was - and the list goes on ad infinitum.

Whatever it was, it was enough for me to be psycho, batshit crazy at that moment. After trying to figure it out on my own for way too long (Note to Newcomers: I don't recommend that), I finally thought, "*Maybe I should call my sponsor about this.*" So, I did. I shared with him what it was about and toward what I'm sure was about to be the end of that phone call, in frustration, I said to him in a very loud and sarcastic tone, "*OK FINE! I'll just work on that!!!*"

He started laughing hysterically and I said, "*What are you laughing at?*", to which he replied, "*I'm laughing at your belief that you have the ability to WORK on that! That, my friend is WAY above your pay grade.*" And then I asked the magic question that no sponsee should ever ask of their sponsor unless they're prepared to hear something they don't wanna hear, "*Ok then, what am I supposed to be doing right now?*"

He said, *“It’s simple. First, you need to remember that you don’t have the skill set to remove your own defects. That is, in fact, way above your pay grade. Your job is to become ready to let it go and then ask God to remove it. You don’t have the ability to remove it on your own. Strengthen your faith, be willing to let it go, and ask God to remove it.”*

Recognizing that all I have to do is ask God to remove it was a simple reminder by my sponsor but one that, in the moment, I just didn’t remember. How is it that when I’m all caught up in the noise that lives between my left ear and right ear that I can’t remember the simplest of instructions (either from our literature or from my sponsor)? The answer to that question is easy - because at any given moment, I can STILL be a selfish, self-centered alcoholic (regardless of how long I’ve been sober).

I continue to be blown away how at times I forget what I am capable of and what God is capable of. I have a job and God has a job and while we work in concert on my recovery, I need never forget the difference. My “job description” and God’s “job description” are clearly laid out for me in our literature and I need never forget what they are.

All I need to do is become willing to have my defects removed, go to God and ask that they be removed, and then let the magic happen. With that said, I need to say out loud, that a one-off prayer to have them removed isn’t all that humble. I may need to do it over and over with the faith that they will be removed. That’s my story, and I’m sticking to it!



Chapter 9

Practice, Practice, Practice

“They had told of a simple religious idea and a practical program of action.” - Big Book, Bill's Story

“Then they outlined the spiritual answer and program of action which a hundred of them had followed successfully.”
- Big Book, More About Alcoholism

“Next we launched on a course of vigorous action, the first step of which is a personal housecleaning, which many of us had never attempted.” - Big Book, How It Works

“This requires action on our part, which, when completed, will mean that we have admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being, the exact nature of our defects.” - Big Book, Into Action

When I start working with a newcomer, from the very beginning, I share with them this silly little thing I created called, “The 12 Steps to Crafting a Sponsor/Sponsee Relationship.” It basically outlines a set of expectations I have when I’m working with a new sponsee. It will help them better understand what I expect from my sponsees and what they can expect from me. I share it with them and ask them if everything in that document makes sense to them and if they think they can use it moving forward. That way, if they begin to get lazy in doing their work (which many newcomers do), I have something to fall back on to hold them accountable.

Number nine on that list of twelve things is, “*Action, Action, Action... Practice, Practice, Practice.*” By the time I got to Step 7, I thought two things - I thought to myself (my first mistake), “Oh, this is easy,” and “I got this!” I need to remember that at the moment that I’m all parked up in the middle of my defects, often times, I can’t see them as evidenced by my story back in Chapter 6 of when I had acted out at my home group in Nashville.

It takes practice of the actions outlined in our book for them to sink in for me. Practicing humility (a desire to seek and do God’s will) for this alcoholic is tough. Why? Because as my sponsor has told me, “*As it says in Step 5, the exact nature of your wrongs Rick is that, in this moment, you are still trying to play God.*” While that may sting a bit when he says it, it’s absolutely correct. At any given moment, I can take my will back and start trying to run the show again.

I just went through a challenging situation at my home group where I had to ask God over, and over, and over, and over to remove my shortcomings so I could be at peace around that situation. In this case, my shortcomings were around the idea that while I am one of three co-founders of the group, I still stuck my nose in where it didn’t belong time after time after time. I didn’t let our groups trusted servants do their jobs. It all blew up in my face and it was very painful at the time. I’m grateful beyond measure for the teachable moment that situation gave me. It reminded me that I too (at 34 years sober), need to practice, practice, practice the spiritual principals laid down for me so that I may experience the *personality change* sufficient to bring about recovery from alcoholism.



Chapter 10

A Whole New Outlook

“Quite often friends of the newcomer are aware of the difference long before he is himself. He finally realizes that he has undergone a profound alteration in his reaction to life; that such a change could hardly have been brought about by himself alone.” - Big Book, Appendices, II Spiritual Experience

When I first came into the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous in 1986, I had no idea of the change that was going to occur in me. I didn't even come to A.A. because I thought I had a drinking problem. If you've ever heard me tell my story, you'd know that I came because a friend of mine had been “invited” by the Dallas court system to go to A.A. and he didn't want to go by himself - so he asked me if I would go with him.

Because I was so oblivious at that time of my own drinking problem, I said, *“Oh sure, I'll be happy to go with you. I'm not an alcoholic, but I'll be happy to go with you.”* (Note to Newcomers: For the record, that's what denial looks like). Even though deep down inside I may have had the thought from time to time that there may be an issue there, it was so deep that I simply didn't have enough honesty in my life to acknowledge the truth.

I heard a speaker at the 2022 TX State A.A. Convention say from the podium that, *“I caught alcoholism when I came to A.A.”* That was my experience completely. I didn't know I really had a drinking problem until I got to A.A. and you

showed me what alcoholism was. You taught me about the two-fold malady (physical and mental) and the spiritual solution for it. You talked about how my life would change if I did twelve simple things.

I will forever be grateful to each and every person in the Fellowship who showed me that in...

Step 1: Alcohol isn't my real problem...

Step 2: The solution to my problem isn't me...

Step 3: Real action starts with a decision...

Step 4: My downfall is about causes and conditions...

Step 5: Others see me better than I do...

Step 6: Willingness is the key...

Step 7: Humility heals pain...

Step 8: Cleaning up the past is just part of it...

Step 9: The action continues...

Step 10: I'm shown what a sober day looks like...

Step 11: Talking and listening to God is the key...

Step 12: I need to go give it away...

A profound alteration is still occurring in my life as it's not a one and done thing. As long as I continue to be willing to take the 12 Steps and actively apply them in my life, that alteration continues to occur over and over. It says in our 9th Step promises (page 84, 4th Edition), "*Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change*," but I need never forget that each of our promises is conditional - if I do *this*, I will get *that*. I'm grateful that God has given me the willingness to continue to trudge (to walk with purpose) that Road of Happy Destiny. **May God do the same for you.**



Conclusion

I hope this little book has opened your eyes to the transformative power of Step 6 & 7. The things I've shared here are only my experience and may not represent the many ways members of A.A. have taken the spiritual principles found within these Steps and applied them in their own lives.

This book does not represent the truly comprehensive means by which transformation can take place through Steps 6 & 7, but they do represent the ways in which I've been transformed by them.

Step 7 is my favorite Step to date and has been since 2013 as a result of the experience I described in Chapter 6 when Barry S. shared with me the Step 7 exercise his sponsor had given to him. As a result of my willingness to set aside my self-centered motives, I continue to experience a release that not only blows my mind - but has changed my life.

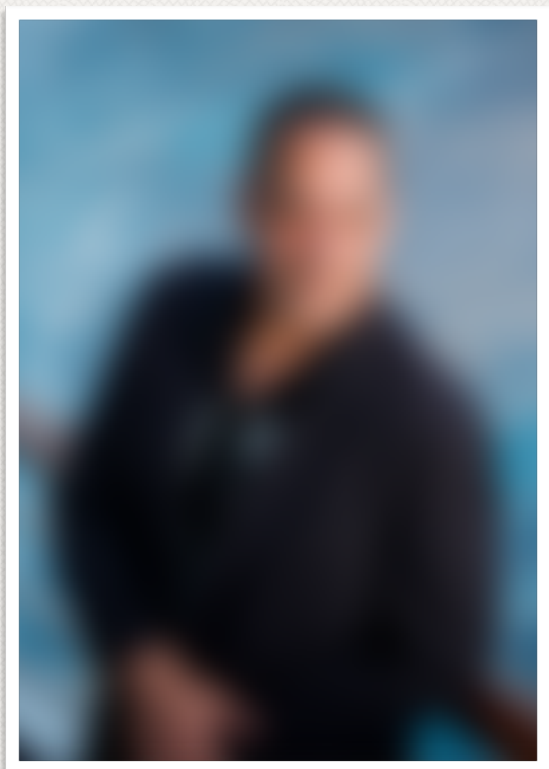
I've found that when I open myself up to teachable moments and allow the literature and God's love to cover me, dreams can come true and life can take on new meaning. It is my hope that you can find the same.

Thank God they wrote it down!

God bless you on your journey...

Rick W.

About the Author



Rick W. walked into the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous in July 1986 and had no idea how his life was about to change. After experiencing some of the "*100 forms of self-delusion*" talked about in the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* while in the rooms, he was able to get rigorously honest with himself, God, and his fellows. As a result, his sobriety date is November 17, 1987 and since that time, he has devoted himself to providing a clear and adequate presentation of Alcoholics Anonymous - our program of recovery for the still suffering alcoholic.