



## **Working Steps 8 - 9**

*“Since defective relationships with other human beings have nearly always been the immediate cause of our woes, including alcoholism, no field of investigation could yield more satisfying and valuable rewards than this one.”*

Bill W.  
*AA Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*

**Triangle Area SAA**  
**Recovery Manual Steps 1 - 9**  
**Track 4**

**Introduction to Steps 8 and 9**

When Bill W. examines Steps 8 and 9 in the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous*, he speaks to their important role uncovering and nurturing our better nature. Nothing we say here can improve upon what he wrote but some points bear emphasis.

The first thing he stresses is that these are life-long activities. We commit to doing them daily and to the best of our ability.

Steps 8 and 9 target the repair of our relationships. God, self, family, friends, fellow addicts and the larger community are all candidates for an amends.

As the quote on the previous page notes, defective relationships are nearly always the cause of our sorrows, including our addiction. Defusing the “relationship-triggers” by repairing them will end the guilt and bring well-earned relief.

Step 8 insists that “harm” be given the broadest meaning possible to avoid the easy trap of rationalizing away our accountability. We can start with the people in our Step 4 inventory before digging through our memories for a more complete list.

Step 9 calls us to direct action, emphasizes the need for good judgment, and reviews the major elements of an amends.

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**What Is Step 8?**

Write Step 8 from memory:

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If you have not committed it to memory, stop now. Memorize it.

It makes no sense for you to try to work a Step if you do not know what it says.

This is no time for half-measures.

Remember what is at stake.

Find someone at the Retreat to help you memorize it. This should take all of five (5) minutes.

Write Step 8 from memory

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Continue when you have it memorized.

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**What Is Step 8 Asking?**

To be effective, this manual must be used in combination with dedicated reading of recovery literature. If you have not already done so, take a moment to read Step 8 in the *SAA Green Book*, the *AA Big Book*, and the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of AA* (usually referred to as the *Twelve and Twelve*) several times beforehand.

Write Step 8:

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Draw a circle around the words you think are the most important in Step 8. Be prepared to discuss why you select them. What in this Step will you find the most difficult or challenging? Why? Discuss this with someone at the Retreat.

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Keeping the words you circled in mind, what is the Step asking you to do? Please write this out.

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Discuss this with your facilitator.

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**What Does A Good Step 8 Look Like?**

A good Step 8 would be a true and faithful list of all the people we harmed.

To produce such a list, we need to overcome two primary obstacles.

First, we must overcome the shame, or guilt, or (insert-your-bad-feeling-here) that holds us in place. Like insects locked in ancient amber, we are fixed, suspended in old emotions. To break their hold on us, we must face them.

The second task is no less daunting. Once we summon the courage to challenge ourselves and look with an impartial eye at all the people in our lives searching for those we *might* have harmed, we must not blink.

Traditionally, we start with those names in our inventory but everyone we have ever known is a candidate for an amends.

Addicts are skilled in the art of denial, liberally using it to avoid painful memories. We must resist the temptation to engage it now.

To help ferret out denial, consider this all-too-familiar list of the more common ways we rationalize:

- **Denial of Action** –
  - I did not do it. – Lying about our responsibility.
- **Denial of Intent**
  - I did not mean to do it. – Avoiding our responsibility.
- **Denial of Impact**
  - I did not do that much harm. – Minimizing our responsibility.
- **Denial of Responsibility**
  - I did it but it was not my fault entirely because he was mean to me.  
– Deflecting our responsibility.

Some sponsors recommend the first five names on the list be the following:

- **Yourself**
- **God**
- **Your father**
- **Your mother**
- **Your spouse / significant other**

The exact order the amends are made will depend on the individual.

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Keep this in mind as you work Step 8.

- **Your list will never be complete.**
- **Move to Step 9 when your list is sufficiently fleshed out.**
- **It gets easier with time.**

The Step 8 principles are:

- **Brotherly Love**
- Courage
- Honesty
- Humility
- Willingness
- Faith

### **AA Step 8 Prayer**

Higher Power,  
I ask Your help in making my list of all those I have harmed.  
I will take responsibility for my mistakes and be forgiving to others as You are forgiving to me.  
Grant me the willingness to begin my restitution.  
This I pray.

### **Closing**

The virtuous principle we invoke in Step 8 is **brotherly love**. The addict, filled with fear at the prospect of confessing his wrongs, is inwardly focused and far from his love of brother. His addict objects saying, “I do not want to think about all the people I harmed.”

Keep in mind that all you are doing is making a list of people you owe an amends and readying ourselves to make it. You are not making the amends yet. You will be much less anxious if you do not get ahead of yourself. The work of Step 8 directly impacts how well you work Step 9 so be thorough and diligent.

When your list is sufficiently complete and your sponsor or co-sponsor approves, you will be ready for Step 9.

## Step 9

*“Three conditions are necessary for Penance:  
Contrition, which is sorrow for sin, together with a purpose of amendment;  
Confession of sins without any omission; and  
Satisfaction by means of good works.”*

*Saint Thomas Aquinas*

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**What Is Step 9?**

Write Step 9 from memory:

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If you have not committed it to memory, stop now. Memorize it.

It makes no sense for you to try to work a Step if you do not know what it says.

This is no time for half-measures.

Remember what is at stake.

Find someone at the Retreat to help you memorize it. This should take all of five (5) minutes.

Write Step 9 from memory:

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Continue when you have it memorized.

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**What Is Step 9 Asking?**

To be effective, this manual must be used in combination with dedicated reading of recovery literature. If you have not already done so, take a moment to read Step 9 in the *SAA Green Book*, the *AA Big Book*, and the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of AA* (usually referred to as the *Twelve and Twelve*) several times beforehand.

Write Step 9:

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Draw a circle around the words you think are the most important in Step 9. Be prepared to discuss why you select them. What in this Step will you find the most difficult or challenging? Why? Discuss this with your facilitator.

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Keeping the words you circled in mind, what is the Step asking you to do? Please write this out.

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Discuss this with your facilitator.

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### **What Does A Good Step 9 Look Like?**

The British philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein once wrote, “A confession has to be part of your new life.”

Wittgenstein’s theme runs through the *AA Twelve and Twelve* as well as the *SAA Green Book*. Together these books enumerate the common features and discuss the chief challenges that make for an effective 9<sup>th</sup> Step.

Bill W. noted that the people on our list fall into one of 4 classes of amends:

- Full disclosure amends – no need to limit the disclosure
- Partial disclosure amends – harm done by full disclosure
- Amends deferred – exercise caution and good judgment before proceeding.
- Amends not possible – i.e., disclosure would cause actual harm or victims now deceased.

When your list is sufficiently complete, ask your facilitator, sponsor, or co-sponsor to help you classify each person or institution on your list. You can then discuss what type of amends is indicated.

We strive always to make an amends in person.

When a direct amends is not possible, consider indirect restitution. For example, if you acted out with pornography and wish to make amends to the people harmed by that industry, you might consider a donation to a women’s shelter or similar organization.

Step 9 is about re-balancing the scales of justice. The literature emphasizes the need to be clear about our motives.

We do not make an amends to trade our shame for someone else’s pain. We should maintain an attitude of humility and sincerity. When we make an amends, we do so free of the need to justify our past behavior or to gain approval for our new one.

When we make an amends, we disclose the harm we did (as appropriate,) we demonstrate empathy by stating clearly how the harm must have made them feel, and how we compounded the hurt by denying what had happened. We then express our sincere remorse and ask for forgiveness. We also ask if there is something we can specifically (again, as appropriate) to repair the harm. As the *AA Twelve and Twelve* puts it, “We then pay, or promise to pay, whatever obligations, financial or otherwise, we owe.”

Most importantly, we must let go of the outcome. The other person’s reaction to our amends is not the issue here. The point of Step 9 is to own what we did and to make a sincere effort to repair it. It is not to win favor, be liked or even to be forgiven. The goal is to free ourselves of the shame and guilt that power our addiction.

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Keep in mind as you work Step 9.

- **Your list will never be complete.**
- **Seek out the advice of others before making any amends.**
- **This is about you making the amends, not about how the other person responds.**

The Step 9 principles are:

- **Justice**
- Courage
- Honesty
- Humility
- Willingness
- Faith
- Hope

With each amends, we strive for justice, constantly asking ourselves, “What is the next right thing to do?” Courageously, we clear away the guilt and shame that kept us bound. Feelings of uselessness and self-pity are commonly replaced with exhilaration as we own up to what we did, face our fear, and begin the long-delayed repairs.

This new freedom brings joy, and with it, a commitment to fairness in all our affairs. For some, our acting out was so egregious an amends is simple not possible. In those situations, justice will insist we live a life of amends, striving daily to stay sober and not repeat what we did.

**Discussion:**

Which do you think is correct? Why?

- Step 9 is not for the other person, it is for you; it is to clean up your side of the street.
- Step 9 is not for you, it is for the other person; it is to free them of your garbage.

A final word on working Step 9: We do not need to make amends to everyone on our list before moving on to Step 10. With the direct guidance of our sponsor, co-sponsor, and the input of our trusted fellow addicts in recovery, we can move on after we have clearly demonstrated a commitment to work Step 9.

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**EXAMPLE 1 - AMENDS LETTER**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am writing to you to apologize for some of my actions and behavior that I believe caused harm to you during our friendship. I realize that I cannot change the past nor undo any of the things I did. However, I wish to make amends for the harms I caused to the best of my ability.

First, I ask your forgiveness for engaging in the affair I had with A\_\_\_\_. I was selfish, self-centered, prideful, lustful, and envious. Following my divorce from G\_\_\_\_ I took advantage of A\_\_\_\_ sympathetic nature and your frequent business travel to inure myself with her. I was dishonest, weak of character and had no regard for how my actions might affect you, your marriage, and our friendship. I betrayed your trust in me and for that I am deeply sorry. I deeply regret my actions and am sorry for the pain and suffering I caused to you and in your marriage. There is no way that I can take back those choices I made but I have had a spiritual awakening and live my life today with integrity and honesty trying my best to do no harm to others.

Secondly, when we moved back from Virginia and I was looking for work, you so generously lent me the spare car that you had. After I found a job you offered to sell me a car for \$800.00 allowing me to pay you for it when and how I was able. As you know I never made the first payment. I was selfish, self-centered, ungrateful, and prideful. I took advantage of your generosity and friendship, betrayed your trust, and stole from you. I regret these choices I made and ask for your forgiveness. Enclosed is a check for \$1200.00 to cover the cost of the car plus 10% interest for seven years.

Lastly I ask for your forgiveness for my unwillingness to engage honestly with you as a friend. I avoided conflict at all costs and did not always support you during some tough times you experienced like when your brother died. Also I most always acted like my problems were more important than yours. I didn't know how to cope with feelings and I was fearful, dishonest, prideful, lazy and self-centered.

I hope this letter finds you well and causes you no undue distress.

Sincerely,  
Johnny Doe III

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**EXAMPLE 2 - AMENDS LETTER**

*Told by his ex-wife that he couldn't see her daughter to make his amends directly in person, this recovering alcoholic was allowed to send her an amends letter. After 3 "sponsor edits," this is how it ended up:*

Dear S. \_\_\_\_\_,

I'm writing to do what I can to set right the harms that I did during the years that I was in a relationship with your mom. I've chosen to type rather than phone for two reasons: First, my handwriting is pretty awful, and second, because I want you to have something tangible that you can look at later when life may be treating you rough. To tell you the truth, I'm tempted to let things just stay the way they are because your mom tells me that you have some good memories of the time we spent together. Part of me says why mess with that? The best answer I have is that I loved you and, I'm certain deep in my heart, whether you know it yet or not, I did you harm.

I'm sure that you were aware that during the years we were together I was an active alcoholic. LET ME BE VERY CLEAR THAT THIS ADMISSION IN NO WAY WHATSOEVER RELIEVES ME OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR MY ACTIONS. I used alcohol and drugs because they were the only things I knew that could give me the relief from the constant fear I felt. I was drawn to you and your family because I desperately wanted to love and to be loved, but I was also scared to death of the prospect of being responsible, especially to others. Emotionally I felt like I had one foot on the gas and the other on the brake. I'm sure that it was hard for you to figure out what was real - is the real Step-Dad the one who wants to loves me or the one who's pushing me away? You weren't crazy, I was. You were a wonderful, lovable child and you had every right to expect consistent love, emotional support, and parenting from me. What you got instead was fear, chaos, confusion, and abandonment. I want you to know that I didn't fail to give you those things because you were unlovable or undeserving but because I was a sick and frightened man incapable of giving.

If you feel emotionally ripped off it's because you were. If you feel abandoned you're not crazy, you were. I know at some deep emotional level it's hard not to believe that if you were really worthy and valuable that these things wouldn't have happened to you. Please believe me, this just isn't so. You are worthy and deserving of love then and now, it was I that failed you.

S. \_\_\_\_\_, I hope that you'll accept my heartfelt regret for these and the unlisted harms that I did to you. Should you ever want to talk about any of this please give me a call. If I can ever be of any service to you as a friend, I'd be honored.

Sincerely,

Source: [http://www.oanova.org/resources/BB\\_Study\\_Sample\\_Amends\\_Ltr.pdf](http://www.oanova.org/resources/BB_Study_Sample_Amends_Ltr.pdf)

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**AA Step 9 Prayer**

Higher Power,

I pray for the right attitude to make my amends, being ever mindful not to harm others in the process.

I ask for Your guidance in making indirect amends.

Most important, I will continue to make amends by staying abstinent, helping others and growing in spiritual progress.

**Closing**

Licentious and wanton in his youth, one of the pillars of Christianity, Saint Augustine, would later write, "The confession of evil works is the first beginning of good works."

Step 9 is an invitation to begin a life of good works.

Our addict personality craves affirmation at any costs and assiduously avoids conflict. To our core, we fear rejection. Step 9 instructs that to stop the engines of acting out, we must end the tyranny of rejection by letting go of the outcome. We must allow other people to think of us what they will.

Our fear of rejection is frequently exaggerated. We will not be scorned by everyone on our Step 8 list. In truth, people are moved by a sincere apology and are quick to forgive when they are given a reason to do so. A few may not but most will.

Make love a verb in your new life.

Have faith.

Forgive.

Recover.

With Step 9 we complete the Recovery phase of the Steps that began with Step 4 and mark our arrival at the beginning of the third and final phase, that of Maintenance.

Before proceeding, take a moment to look behind you. Consider how far the God of your understanding has brought you and say a prayer of thanksgiving. Then lift your eyes to the far horizon beyond which you shall seek those wonders still unseen.

You are now ready for Step 10.