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EDITORS NOTE: If you enjoy reading the articles, please consider submitting one also! We are always in need of a good story or article that you have read and that you would like to share. We just ask that you please keep it around 500 words, or less.

Please submit your contributions to the following email addresses:

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STEP EIGHT: "Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all."

TRADITION EIGHT: "Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers."

CONCEPT EIGHT: "The trustees are the principal planners and administrators of over-all policy and finance. They have custodial oversight of the separately incorporated and constantly active services, exercising this through their ability to elect all the directors of these entities."

Getting Ready—Relationship Rebuilding

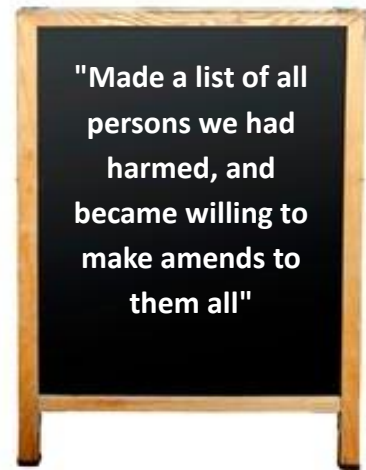
By Greg S.

The fundamental purpose of Step Eight is making a list of all persons we have harmed, and getting ourselves in the right space to be willing to make solid amends to all parties concerned. The Big Book spells out what to do very succinctly: “We have a list of all persons we have harmed. . .we made it when we took inventory. We subjected ourselves to a drastic self-appraisal” (Big Book, p. 76). Our list came out of our Fourth Step inventory. Simple. The question now becomes, basically, why are we doing what we intend to do? Just what is this “drastic self-appraisal?”

To secure real freedom from our liabilities, the Eighth Step is really a re-visitation of the Fourth Step. We have learned a lot about ourselves from the first Seven Steps, gaining “a clear recognition of what and who we really are, followed by a sincere attempt to become what we could be” (12&12, p. 58). Knowing what we now know, it is now possible to make the time to “consider how, with our newfound knowledge of ourselves, we may develop the best possible relations with every human being we know (ibid, p.77). We are now on the life-enhancing errand of learning how to live in peace, harmony, brotherhood and partnership, with everyone we encounter, indeed “a moving and fascinating adventure” (ibid, p. 77).

Rebuilding our relationship with ourselves, and learning how to get along well with our fellows is not only a lifelong errand, it is tangible evidence that we are getting better at functioning in the real world. Referring to our list, it is easy to dismiss our part in defective relationships, focusing on the wrongs done us, indeed the “perfect excuse for minimizing or forgetting our own [wrongs]” (ibid, p. 78). We also revisit the shocking way we treated others (“wretched conduct,” p. 78). There is a definite benefit to this, that our investigation provides real clarity on who, what and why we are doing our Ninth Step, which amounts to real freedom.

Although we do find that we have done ourselves considerable emotional harm, that our past behavior and “conflicts persist below the level of consciousness” (ibid, p. 80), it’s important to remember our survey should be “accurate and really exhaustive” (ibid, p.79). We need clarity on what we have done to others, and the subsequent path leading to an effective amends process. Thoroughness will pay off here, as we can begin to look at ourselves with less subjectivity, which may well aid in a clear and purposeful Ninth Step. In any case, we want to be truly free. The process of the Eighth step translates into “the beginning of the end of isolation from our fellows and from God.” (ibid, p. 82).



Made a List...

We thought we'd done nothing wrong,
Our asset list impressively strong,
But in the big scheme,
We're living a dream,
And have been for so very long.

Now we thought that we harmed only us,
And it shouldn't cause much of a fuss,
But we found as we worked,
While we spasmed and jerked,
There was certainly much to discuss.

We struggled to get it all out,
Beyond any reasonable doubt,
We searched for the truth,
Being Sherlock the sleuth,
And that's what it's really about.

When we reflect on the people we have harmed,
At first we were really alarmed,
But we fought off the fear,
Sometimes shedding a tear,
In the end we found we were unharmed.

And now for the extraordinary twist,
If we're willing enough to persist,
We can clear all the crap,
With amends in a snap,
Couldn't have started if we'd not made a list.

Dr. William Silkworth

Dr. William D. Silkworth (1873-1951) was a contributor in Alcoholics Anonymous because he authored “The Doctor’s Opinion”. He was also known as the little doctor who loved drunks, working as the medical director of the Charles B. Towns Hospital in New York City.

William Silkworth graduated from Princeton University in 1896. He got his medical degree from New York University-Bellevue Medical School in 1899. Later in 1930 he joined the staff at Towns Hospital in New York which specialized in detoxing alcoholics and drug addicts, and became Medical Superintendent. He later joined the staff at Knickerbocker Hospital, also in New York where the hospital was the first in New York to have a ward for treating alcoholism as a primary illness.

Dr. Silkworth helped Bill Wilson first get sober after three or four trips to Towns Hospital. After Bill’s last drink on December 11, 1934, he was unsuccessful in early 1935 in getting others get sober. The doctor convinced Bill the best approach with alcoholics is to talk about the problem of alcoholism not necessarily the spiritual solution Bill was trying. This is the approach Bill used when he met Dr. Bob Smith in Akron Ohio in May 1935. Bill told Dr. Bob his story of how he could not stop drinking and failed repeatedly.

The Doctor put forth the idea that alcoholism is an illness. His ideas were published in the book Alcoholics Anonymous, in 1939 as an opinion. In the first edition of the Big Book, he did not even sign his name. Later his name is used as the author. The theory, which he believed that alcoholics have an allergy to alcohol was not accepted in the 1930s. His ideas were against the general accepted medical theory that alcoholics were morally or psychologically weak. He also believed that alcoholics drink because they like the effect produced by alcohol and it is very difficult to not drink again because when dry they become “restless, irritable and discontented”, unless they drink again. He says this cycle of sprees is continued repeatedly unless the alcoholic can have what he called a “psychic change.” The only hope for the alcoholics Dr. Silkworth believed is complete and enduring abstinence.

In Dr. Silkworth’s fifty years of working in the field of alcoholism he medical treated 40,000 alcoholics at Towns and Knickerbocker Hospitals. He also published articles in the Medical Record (a medical journal) titled “Alcoholism as a Manifestation of Allergy” and “Reclamation of the Alcoholic.” In these papers he stressed the disease concept of alcoholism and the need for patients to admit their powerlessness over their alcoholism. He later described in a paper a case that was Bill Wilson, and how he had successfully recovered from alcoholism.

In the first edition of Alcoholics Anonymous the “Dr. Opinion” appeared on page one, followed by Bill’s Story. From the second edition on the Dr. Opinion has appeared as a forward in the book. This might have been done because the book is written by alcoholics and Dr. Silkworth was a non-alcoholic. He died in New York in March 22, 1951.

Sources: “SLAYING THE DRAGON The History of Addiction Treatment and Recovery in America” by William L. White,

“Alcoholics Anonymous”

paper from “The Just Do It Big Book Study Group of AA, DeBary, Florida by Mike O.

Wikipedia