

Step 4: “Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.”

[Step Four of AA's](#) Twelve-Step Program of recovery is infamously the “scary” one, probably because it’s a crucial step towards effective and lasting recovery. Since the overall philosophy of Alcoholics Anonymous is that alcoholism is just a symptom of a spiritual disease, the real problem is in character flaws that need to be faced and when possible, overcome. This requires a searching, bare it all revelation-inducing inventory that will become the blueprint for your success.

So Much to Gain

The benefits of completing Step Four are strengthened sobriety, spiritual growth and movement towards mending your relationships to your HP, yourself and other human beings. What’s the biggest requirement for this action step? Be honest! You and the people around you will benefit from this crucial step. In case you didn’t know, keeping secrets is threatening to our recovery, and we have all had secrets that nearly killed us. Our secrets, in and out of sobriety, keep us sick.

Almost everyone comes into recovery having trouble separating fact from fiction in our own lives. The reality is that the “drunkalogues” and war stories that accumulated over the years of using are so embroidered into the fabric of whom we think we are. However, while working on our step inventories we get a new perspective on the bigger picture, on patterns, selfishness, our responsibility in situations and in this process we are building up an accurate self-appraisal with true self-worth as the reward.

Breaking Down Step Four Of AA Alcoholics Anonymous

At this point it has probably become pretty clear to you that recovery is a process of steady personal growth and enlightenment that feels so good, you probably wish everyone you knew were doing it! Although you may be pink clouding it, and enjoying the clarity that comes from sobriety, the truth is that our past addiction crippled our ability to reflect honestly

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about our lives. Addiction created delusional thinking that limited our ability to understand the damage and havoc (the liabilities) it caused in all our relationships. So before we could safely move forward we needed a framework through which we could sort out our past honestly. The Step Four inventory provides that framework.

The inventory you will do in Step Four of AA will help you to identify negative thoughts, emotions, and actions that have ruled your life. In the past you probably justified bad behavior and blamed other people, places, or things for the problems you had created. Now you will begin to take responsibility for all your past and current actions. This may mean even acknowledging painful, embarrassing, or difficult events, thoughts, emotions, or actions. But that’s cool, it’s all good, because your thoughts, feelings, and beliefs are actually the roots of your addictive behaviors.

While writing out your inventory you will get to examine all your tendencies toward:

- Fear
- Pride
- Resentments/Anger
- Self-will and self-pity
- Guilt/shame
- Relationships
- Sex/Abuse
- Secrets
- Assets

How To Do An Inventory: Searching And Fearless

So how do you actually do a personal inventory? Most of the people you will be relying on to guide you through Step Four probably believe there is no exact right or wrong way to practice this step. I think that what is

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important, is that we follow the general ***principle of self-honesty***, and that we are willing to be “***searching and fearless***” in the ***pursuit of truth*** (By the way, when we say “fearless,” we do not mean you will have no feelings of fear; fearless means you will not let your fears stop you from being thorough in your inventory process. With Step Four, it means you ***commit to rigorous honesty*** as you focus on events in your life, including your own weaknesses, and specifically not on anyone else’s weaknesses).

Old timers will take the approach of reviewing the seven deadly sins as laid out in the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, while others will benefit from a review of sampling the more significant events from their lives as well. Using the process outlined in the Big Book is an essential guideline to reviewing the biggies: resentments, fears and sexual conduct.

Resentments, Let Them Go

In Alcoholics Anonymous we learn that resentment is a condition or state of mind whereby one relives some past event, and feels the emotion from that event as if it were happening right now. Resentment is literally to feel (sentire) again (re), and it is the fuel that feeds the fires of our addictions. In fact, the original members of AA who wrote the book Alcoholics Anonymous believed “resentment was the number one offender, and that it destroys more alcoholics than anything else.” (Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 64).

One way to do an inventory is to list memories of people; institutions or organizations; principles, ideas, or beliefs; and events, situations, or circumstances that have triggered positive and negative feelings (including sadness, regret, anger, resentment, fear, bitterness). There will be some items on your lists that may appear multiple times. That is okay. Do not try to sort or judge or analyze at this point. For now, just be as thorough as possible.

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It's important to note that some people will try to avoid writing their moral inventory, feeling embarrassed or fearful about their writing ability or even about someone else reading what they wrote. I implore you not to let these fears stop you! Until you put it in a tangible form, you still haven't done your Fourth Step. If there are things that you think are so “bad” that you just can't include them in your Step Four inventory, you are not alone. I swear to you your sponsor has heard and probably done the same things or “worse.” Rest assured that in the history of AA there has never been something in a Fourth Step inventory that was so unique, or worse than what every other human being has done that they had to create a whole new category.

Questions To Ask While Doing Your Fourth Step In AA

Answer the following questions to help guide your Step Four:

- What people, places or things do you resent and what led to those resentments?
- How did your behavior contribute to your resentments?
- How have your resentments affected your life, your relationships with others and yourself?
- Who or what do you fear and why? How do you respond destructively or negatively to your fears?
- Who or what do you feel ashamed or guilty about?
- What feelings do you have the most trouble allowing yourself to feel, and how do you act out?
- How have your fears and resentments affected your friendships, and your family, work and romantic relationships?
- ***Answer this question privately...not in this journal:*** Have you compulsively sought after sex? Have you used sex to try to fill a spiritual void or loneliness? Have any of your sexual practices hurt others or your self?
- What do healthy relationships look like to you?

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- Are there secrets that you haven’t told anyone or written about in your step work?

Completing Step Four Of AA Alcoholics Anonymous: Foundation For Freedom

If the thought of making that searching and fearless inventory of yourself feels overwhelming, know you are not alone. My heart goes out to you as I remember my struggles to find the willingness to complete this step. The key is to put pen to paper and just start.

Even though remembering the past may be painful, it can propel you into a new life of peace, as you learn how to look back without staring. Ask someone who has completed this step how it helped him or her, and how the hope of recovery can help you through the pain of remorse to the joy of forgiveness.

Make sure to check in with what spiritual principles you are practicing in your life, how your faith in a higher power has grown, and how you are showing gratitude for your recovery.

Be prepared, when finishing a Fourth Step inventory you can feel exhilarated, or uncomfortable or perhaps even both. No matter what, make sure to congratulate yourself on a major accomplishment, because you now have the foundation for your freedom. After doing Step Four you will have a blueprint for success, and a map to help you steer yourself on the course of continued, long-term sobriety! The only thing left to do is to contact your sponsor and let them know you’re ready to do Step Five.