

## Step Ten

***“Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.”***

Through working the first nine steps, our lives have changed dramatically – way beyond what we expected when we first came to Gamblers Anonymous. We’ve become more honest, humble and concerned about others, less fearful, selfish, and resentful. But even such profound changes aren’t guaranteed to be permanent. Because we have the disease of addiction, we can always return to what we were before. Recovery has a price – it demands our vigilance. We have to continue doing all the things we have been doing for our recovery so far. We have to continue to be honest, to have trust and faith, to pay attention to our actions and reactions, and to assess how those are working for us or against us. We also have to pay attention to how our actions affect others, and when the effects are negative or harmful, promptly step forward and take responsibility for the harm caused and for repairing it. In short, we have to continue to take personal inventory and promptly admit our wrongs.

As you can see, the Tenth Step has us repeat much of the work we did in Steps Four through Nine, though in a much-shortened format. The format suggested in this guide is one that covers in a general way the elements of a personal inventory. Some of us may find we need to add questions that focus on specific areas that are affecting our individual recovery to the questions already in this guide. We may find some additional areas upon which to focus from other programs. Our sponsor may have specific direction for us on this point. As noted before, this guide is meant to be a starting point, not the final word on any of the steps.

- Why is the Tenth Step necessary?
- What is the purpose of continuing to take personal inventory?
- How can my sponsor help me?

### Feeling versus Doing

We use Step Ten to create and maintain a continuous awareness of what we’re feeling, thinking, and, even more importantly, what we’re doing. Before we begin a regular pattern of personal inventory, it’s imperative that we understand what we are assessing. It won’t do much good to make a list of our feelings without tying them to the actions that they generate or fail to generate. We may often be feeling very badly though behaving very well, or vice versa.

For instance, a GA member walks into her home group. “How are you?” someone asks. “Terrible,” she replies. Of course, this member is referring to the way she feels. She can’t possibly be referring to what she’s doing, because she is behaving very well indeed: She’s going to a meeting, honestly expressing how she feels, and reaching out to another member who will be supportive.

On the other hand, we may be busy indulging our impulses and acting on character defects. On the surface, we may feel very good. It usually takes a while before we notice the emptiness that goes along with living this way. We’re avoiding the work that will help us stay clean. We’re indulging our impulses, and taking the easy way out. And we know where this will take us!

The Tenth Step will keep us aware of ourselves so we don’t end up going to either extreme. We don’t have to beat ourselves up because we feel badly. We can instead focus on the positive action we’re taking. It may even turn out that by shifting our focus this way, we’ll wind up feeling better too. Staying aware of what we’re doing helps us see patterns of destruction long before they become entrenched, so we don’t wind up feeling good at the cost of what’s good for us.

We as compulsive gamblers also tend to make judgments about what we are feeling. Anything that feels bad we immediately want to stop. We often don’t take into account that the way we’re feeling makes perfect sense when we consider the circumstances.

For instance, many of us have problems being angry. We don’t like the way it feels. We judge it, concluding we have no right to feel that way, and then we do our very best to suppress our angry feelings. Yet, we may be experiencing a situation that would make anyone angry. Perhaps we’re in a relationship with someone who constantly fails to treat us with respect. Perhaps we’ve been passed over for several well-deserved promotions at work. Our response to these situations is anger. We’ve been treated poorly – of course we’re angry. Now comes the moment when our recovery can propel us forward into greater self-respect or our disease can drag us down into a thick fog of depression and resentment.

It all has to do with how we respond to our anger. If we scream and curse and throw things, we’ll destroy any possibility of making our relationship or job situation better. If we do nothing and bury our feelings of anger, we’ll become depressed and resentful, and that won’t improve our situation either. But if we take positive action aimed at improving the situation, it may get better; at the very least, we’ll know when it’s time to leave and be able to do so without regrets.

Sometimes the only thing we need to do with our feelings is feel them. We don't need to react to them. For instance, if we've lost someone, we are going to feel sorrow. Our sorrow may go on for a long time. It will lift when we've grieved sufficiently. We can't afford to let our sorrow drag us down to the point where we can't go on with our lives, but we should expect to be affected. We may be easily distracted or have a hard time participating in activities that are supposed to be enjoyable. We need to strike a balance between being in denial of our feelings and letting them overwhelm us; we don't want to go to either extreme. This seems like a simple concept – almost as if it could go without saying – but many of our members share that it takes years of recovery before we're able to achieve a balance most of the time.

So the Tenth Step grants us the freedom to feel our feelings by helping us see the difference between feeling and doing.

- Are there times in my life when I am confused about the difference between my feelings and my actions? Expand on this.

## **Right and Wrong**

The Tenth Step tells us that we have to promptly admit when we're wrong. The step seems to assume that we know when we're wrong, but the fact is that most of us don't – at least not right away. It takes the consistent practice of taking a personal inventory for us to become proficient at figuring out when we're wrong.

Let's face it. When we were new in recovery, we had been at odds with the rest of the world for some time. As our literature says, our "living skills were reduced to the animal level". We didn't know how to communicate with others well. We began to learn in recovery, but in the process, we made a lot of mistakes. Many of us went through a period of time when we became very rigid about the values we had developed in recovery. We applied that rigidity not only to ourselves, but to everyone around us. We thought it was principled and correct to confront those whose behavior was "unacceptable". In truth, it was our behavior that was unacceptable. We were self-righteous and overbearing. We were wrong.

Or some of us, after years of serving as a doormat for everyone to walk across, decided our recovery required that we become assertive. But we went too far. We demanded that everyone treat us perfectly all the time. No one could have a bad day and fail to return our phone call. No one was allowed to be emotionally unavailable to us for any length of time. We angrily demanded perfect service at the places we did business. We weren't being assertive. We were being immature and belligerent. We were wrong.

We can even end up being wrong if someone hurts us. How? Say a group member says something very hurtful to us. Instead of taking it up with them, we talk to ten or twelve of our closest friends at the next three meetings we go to. Before the week is through, half our local GA community is talking about the rotten thing so-and-so said to one of his fellow members – and that's if the story stayed as it was originally! So the situation started out with us having done no wrong, but ended up with us being responsible for damaging our friend's reputation in the program – the place where he needs, as much as we do, to be allowed to make mistakes and recover at his own pace.

- Have there been some times in my recovery when I've been wrong and not been aware of it until later? What were they?
- How do my wrongs affect my own life? Others' lives?

It's hard enough to figure out when we're wrong; admitting our wrongs can be even more challenging. Just like in the Ninth Step, we have to be careful that we aren't doing more damage by making the admission.

For instance, many of us realize we've hurt someone close to us – perhaps because the person stopped speaking to us – but aren't quite sure what we said or did wrong. Rather than taking the time to reflect on what we might have done, or ask the person, we decide we'll just cover all eventualities and make a blanket admission. We approach the person and say, "Please forgive me for anything I've ever, in all the time we've known each other, done to offend you or hurt you".

The Tenth Step requires that we take the time for personal reflection for instances just like this. Chances are that if we think about when the person's attitude toward us changed, and think about our behavior immediately preceding that change, we'll know what we did wrong. It might be painful or embarrassing to think about; it definitely takes effort, but so do all the steps. Laziness is a character defect like any other, and we can't afford to act on it. Then again, if we're truly stumped, if we just can't pinpoint anything we might have said or done that was harmful, there's nothing wrong with approaching the person and saying we've noticed that he or she seems to be angry or upset with us, that we care about our relationship with that person and want to hear what he or she has to say. Most of us are afraid of what we'll hear in a situation like this, but we can't let our fear stop us from working Step Ten.

There's another way we can render our admission of wrong completely ineffective: admit we're wrong and then immediately point out what the other person did first that made us act as we did. For instance, say one of our children used poor manners, so we yelled at her and called her a name. Now when we admit we were wrong, if we tell our child that her behavior made us act the way we did, we've just delivered a message that justified our first wrong, thus making ourselves doubly wrong.

Unlike the process contained in Steps Four through Nine, when we go through events from the past, Step Ten is designed to keep us current. We don't want to let unresolved wrongs pile up. We need to try our very best to stay abreast of what we're doing. Most of our work will be done by making constant adjustments to our outlook. If we find ourselves becoming negative and complaining all the time, we might want to spend some time thinking about the things for which we are grateful. We need to pay attention to the way we react when we've done something wrong. Is it our first impulse to make an excuse? Are we claiming to be victims of someone's negative influence – or of our disease? All excuses aside, we are responsible for what we do. It may very well be that our character defects got the better of us, but that doesn't excuse our behavior. We need to accept responsibility, and continue to be willing to have our shortcomings removed.

- "When we were wrong promptly admitted it" – what does this mean to me?
- Have there been times in my recovery when I've made situations worse by talking to someone before I should have or blaming my behavior on someone else? What were they?
- How does promptly admitting my wrongs help me change my behavior?

Step Ten points out the need to continue taking personal inventory and seems to assert that we do this solely to find out when we're wrong. But how can we identify the times we're wrong unless we also have times we're right as a basis for comparison? Identifying the times we do things right and forming personal values are as much a part of personal inventory as identifying our liabilities. Most of us have a very difficult time with the concept of being right. We think of the times we vigorously defended an opinion because we just knew we were right, but in light of our recovery, we've come to understand that trampling over others in a discussion makes us wrong. Or we think of our personal values. We know they're right for us, but if we began insisting that others live them, we would no longer be right, but self-righteous. So how do we get comfortable with being right? First and foremost, by working the Sixth and Seventh Steps so that our character defects don't turn our positive acts into negative acts. Then, we have to realize that it will probably take some time, and some trial and error, before we are completely comfortable in our new lives in recovery.

- Have there been situations in my recovery in which I felt uncomfortable about acknowledging something I had done well? Describe.

### **How often Should We Take A Personal Inventory?**

While our goal is to maintain continuous awareness of ourselves throughout each day, it's very helpful to sit down at the end of each day and "work" this step. We need the consistency of doing something every day for it to become a habit and to internalize the spiritual principles of the activity. As we stay clean and our days of continuous abstinence turn into weeks and months and years, we'll find that taking a personal inventory has become second nature. We'll find that keeping track of our spiritual fitness comes naturally, without our having to think too much about it. We'll notice right away when we're headed in a direction we don't want to go or about to engage in a behavior that's sure to cause harm. We become able to correct it. So, the frequency of our formal efforts to take personal inventory may depend on our experience with recovery. In the beginning, some of us sat down at the beginning of our day, at the end of our day, or even both times and "took our spiritual temperature". The point is that we want to keep at it until it becomes a habit, until it's second nature to continuously monitor our recovery and our spiritual state, notice when we're going off course right away, and work to change it.

- Why is it important to continue to take personal inventory until it becomes second nature to me?

### **A Personal Inventory**

The following questions address the general areas we want to look at in a personal inventory. There may be times when our sponsor wants us to do an inventory on a specific area of our lives, such as romantic relationships or our patterns at work, or our sponsor may have specific questions to add to this. We should always consult our sponsor on any step work we're doing.

- Have I reaffirmed my faith in a loving, caring God today?
- Have I sought out the guidance of my Higher Power today? How?
- What have I done to be of service to God and the people around me?

- Has God given me anything to be grateful for today?
- Do I believe that my Higher Power can show me how to live and better align myself with the will of that power?
- Do I see any “old patterns” in my life today? If so, which ones?
- Have I been resentful, selfish, dishonest, or afraid?
- Have I set myself up for disappointment?
- Have I been kind and loving toward all?
- Have I been worrying about yesterday or tomorrow?
- Did I allow myself to become obsessed about anything?
- Have I allowed myself to become too hungry, angry, lonely, or tired?
- Am I taking myself too seriously in any area of my life?
- Do I suffer from any physical, mental or spiritual problems?
- Have I kept something to myself that I should have discussed with my sponsor?
- Did I have any extreme feelings today? What were they and why did I have them?
- What are the problem areas in my life today?
- Which defects played a part in my life today? How?
- Was there fear in my life today?
- What did I do today that I wish I hadn't done?
- What didn't I do today that I wish I had done?
- Am I willing to change?
- Has there been conflict in any of my relationships today? What?
- Am I maintaining personal integrity in my relations with others?
- Have I harmed myself or others, either directly or indirectly, today? How?
- Do I owe any apologies or amends?
- Where was I wrong? If I could do it over again, what would I do differently? How might I do better next time?
- Did I stay abstinent today?
- Was I good to myself today?
- What were the feelings I had today? How did I use them to choose principle-centered action?
- What did I do to be of service to others today?
- What have I done today about which I feel positive?
- What has given me satisfaction today?
- What did I do today that I want to be sure I repeat?
- Did I go to a meeting or talk to another recovering addict today?
- What do I have to be grateful for today?

## **Spiritual Principles**

In the Tenth Step, we will focus on self-discipline, honesty and integrity. Self-discipline is essential to our recovery. When we were gambling, we were self-seeking and self-absorbed. We always took the easy way out, giving in to our impulses, ignoring any opportunity for personal growth. If there was anything in our lives that required a regular commitment, chances are that we only followed through if it wasn't too hard, if it didn't get in the way of our self-indulgence, or if we happened to feel like it.

The self-discipline of recovery calls on us to do certain things regardless of how we feel. We need to go to meetings regularly even if we're tired, busy as work, having fun, or filled with despair; we need to go regularly even when – especially when – we're feeling hostile toward the demands that recovery makes on us. We go to meetings, call our sponsor, and work with others because we have decided we want recovery in GA, and those things are the actions that will help assure our continued recovery. Sometimes we're enthusiastic about these activities. Sometimes it takes every bit of willingness we possess to continue with them. Sometimes they become so woven into our daily existence, we're hardly aware that we're doing them.

- Why is the principle of self-discipline necessary in this step?
- How can practicing the principle of self-discipline in this step affect my entire recovery?

The principle of honesty originates in Step One, and is brought to fruition in Step Ten. We are usually nothing less than amazed at the range and depth of our honesty by this point in our recovery. Where before we may have had honest hindsight, able to see our true motives long after a situation was over, we are now able to be honest with ourselves, about ourselves, while the situation is still occurring.

- How does being aware of my wrongs (self-honesty) help me change my behavior?

The principle of integrity can be quite complex, but it is integrity, more than anything else, that commands our ability to practice other principles. In fact, integrity is knowing which principles we need to practice in a given situation, and in what measure. For instance, we're standing outside a meeting one night, and happen to be part of a group that begins gossiping about someone else in the program. Let's say they're discussing the affair our best friend's spouse is having, and we know it to be true because we heard it from our best friend the previous night. Knowing what to do in this situation probably takes every ounce of integrity we possess. So which spiritual principles do we need in this situation? Honesty? Tolerance? Respect? Restraint? It's probably our first impulse to rush in, condemning the gossip because we know how much it would hurt our friend to have such private matters discussed publicly. But by doing so, we may confirm the gossip's truth and so hurt our friend more, or we may end up self-righteously humiliating the people involved in the gossip. Most of the time it isn't necessary to prove we have integrity by confronting a situation we don't approve of. There are a couple of things we could do in this situation. We could either change the subject or we could excuse ourselves and walk away. Either of these choices would send a subtle message about our feelings and, at the same time, allow us to be true to our own principles and spare our friend as much as possible.

- What situations in my recovery have called on me to practice the principle of integrity? How have I responded? Which times have I felt good about my response, and which times have I not?

### **Moving On**

One of the most wonderful things about the Tenth Step is that the more we work it, the less we'll need the second half of it. In other words, we won't find ourselves in the wrong as often. When we come to recovery, most of us have never been able to have any kind of long-term relationship, certainly not any in which we resolved our conflicts in a healthy and mutually respectful way. Some of us had raging fights with people and, once they were over, never spoke of the underlying problems that caused the fights. Some of us went to another extreme, never disagreeing at all with the people who were supposed to be our closest friends and relatives. It seemed easier to keep our distance than to risk creating a conflict that we may then have had to deal with. Finally, some of us just walked away from any relationship in which conflict arose. It didn't matter how much we were hurting the other person; it seemed easier than working through a problem and building a stronger relationship.

The Tenth Step makes it possible for us to have long-term relationships – and we need to have long-term relationships, especially in GA. After all, we depend on each other for our very lives. Many of us feel deeply connected to the people who came to GA when we did and have stayed around. We've done service work with one another, shared apartments with one another, married one another, and sometimes divorced one another. We've celebrated milestones in each other's lives: births, graduations, buying homes, promotions, and recovery anniversaries. We've mourned losses together, and we've comforted one another through the painful times in life. We've touched each other's lives and formed a shared history. We are a community.

Along with learning to admit when we're wrong comes a freedom that is unlike any we've ever experienced before. It becomes so much more natural for us to admit when we're wrong that we wonder why we ever found it so terrifying. Perhaps because we felt so "less than" in so many ways, an admission of a mistake felt like we were revealing our deepest secret: our inferiority. But when we found out through working the steps that we weren't inferior at all, that we had just as much value as anyone else, it no longer seemed so crushing to admit we were wrong. We began to feel whole.

- How does the Tenth Step help me live in the present?
- What am I doing differently as a result of working Step Ten?

Working the Tenth Step makes it possible for us to achieve more balance and harmony in our lives. We find that we're happy and serene much more often than not. Feeling out of sorts becomes so rare that, when it does happen, it's a signal that something is wrong. We can readily identify the cause of our discomfort by taking a personal inventory.

The personal freedom that has been building since we began working the steps yields an increase in our choices and options. We have total freedom to create any kind of life we want for ourselves. We begin to look for the meaning and purpose in our lives. We ask ourselves if the lifestyle we have chosen helps the still-suffering compulsive gambler or makes the world a better place in some other way. What we are searching for, we'll find in the Eleventh Step.