

Steps Four and Five in the CEA-HOW Program

As a Compulsive Eaters Anonymous (CEA)-HOW sponsor, you have the unique privilege of taking your sponsees through Steps Four and Five—the taking and reading of a personal inventory.

When approaching the process of taking Steps four and five, we CEA-HOW members are blessed with an abundance of guidance and direction in our literature. The *Sponsor's Guidelines* book gives us four and a half pages of general directions to consider before beginning Step Four, and we can also refer to both the Big Book and *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* ("12 & 12") of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) to provide us with additional insight into the process and goals of Steps four and five.

Along with those resources, here is an overview that gives you additional information that you can use to enhance your sponsee's experience with Steps Four and Five.

Step Four: Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

The tool of literature and writing is one of our greatest assets in our striving to achieve and maintain abstinence in CEA-HOW. As described in *The Seven Tools*, we use them as "tools of examination and release." Our first effort at this starts with our first 30-day questions and then accelerates in earnest with our Step Four inventory.

As described on page 43 of the 12 & 12, if we fail to take this step a "faith which really works in daily living is still out of reach." An inventory is a process of understanding without judgment, guilt or remorse what we've actually brought to this stage of our lives and to determine what things in ourselves need to be released to our Higher Power.

Your sponsees might be intimidated at the thought of writing an inventory, but you can remind them that an inventory is a fact-finding mission meant to uncover those character flaws or defects that hold us back from the meaningful lives that we crave. It is not an exercise in beating ourselves up; we are just taking a clear assessment of our lives.

The Big Book uses words like *strenuous* and *vigorous* to describe the attitude and effort that we want to bring to the process of writing Step Four. We want to encourage our sponsees to be fearless and thorough when they embark on this

journey.

The first direction that the *Sponsor's Guidelines* points out is that “writing” is the key component to an inventory process. Sitting around and thinking about ourselves isn't likely to provide much insight or relief from the obsessions or compulsions of compulsive eating. We need to put pen to paper.

We're blessed with a set of inventory questions that take us through each “phase” of our lives and allow us to take a thorough look at the “causes and conditions” of our compulsive eating. It may be helpful to keep the momentum that we established in the first 30 days to write a question each day, but as our *Sponsor's Guidelines* say, what matter most is that we launch into the process as soon as we can. If we delay we risk losing our abstinence and for us that's a matter of grave importance.

As we look at the substance of Step Four, what exactly are we looking at in a “fearless and moral inventory”? As the 12 & 12 states, our natural, God-given desires get misdirected and these natural assets turn into physical and mental liabilities. Identifying when and where those began to ruin our lives is the key. By taking an objective look at ourselves, we begin the habit of accurate self-appraisal and relieve ourselves of the self-justifications and rationalizations which destroyed our lives.

As sponsors, we can share our own experience with the practice of taking inventory and walk our sponsees through any questions they may have about the process. The key phrase in Step Four is this: “Just do it!”

Step Five: Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being, the exact nature of our wrongs.

It's probably no coincidence that Chapter 6 of *The Big Book* is titled “Into Action” and begins with Step Five. Our inventory in Step Four was our first effort in identifying our character defects and broken relations and putting them on paper.

Now we're asked to take the next step in gaining true humility and sharing this inventory with another person and God. Your sponsees may ask themselves: Is this really necessary? The answer is yes. Our literature tells us in numerous ways that Step Five opens the door to new relationships with our Higher Powers and with those around us. It's a vital effort meant to lay bare and shine light on those

dark places in our soul that have propelled our compulsive eating to devastating ends.

Willingness and honesty are important keys to the taking of Step Five. A sponsor can be an invaluable aid in helping the newcomer in this Step of their recovery by listening attentively and sharing his or her own experiences when appropriate.

Nobody wants to expose one's flaws to another, but in doing so, many of us get our first opportunity to experience humility, the sense of being one among many, neither better than or less than those around us.

Our literature is clear in pointing out that it's difficult if not impossible to remain abstinent without taking this step, so as Sponsors that have taken Step Five, we have a unique and valuable perspective to share. We can share our own experiences and assure our sponsees that the time and effort we exert in Step Five is a transformative experience.

Page 75 of The Big Book even offers us a set of promises that follow Step Five:

Once we have taken this step, withholding nothing, we are delighted. We can look the world in the eye. We can be alone at perfect peace and ease. Our fears fall from us. We begin to feel the nearness of our Creator. We may have had certain spiritual beliefs, but now we begin to have a spiritual experience. The feeling that the "food" problem has disappeared will often come strongly. We feel we are on the Broad Highway, walking hand in hand with the Spirit of the Universe.

After having completed Step Five, many of realize for the first time that we're not alone, and our relationship with our Higher Power and the fellowship takes on a whole new meaning.

Helpful Suggestions

Taking Steps Four and Five requires a lot of time and effort and can be a bit unsettling when uncovering old hurts and broken relations. Encourage your sponsees to attend additional meetings, make more phone calls and be of service as much as they can when going through this process. And, most importantly, always be willing to share your own experience, strength, hope and recovery with Steps Four and Five in the CEA-HOW program.