

## Addiction 12-STEP RECOVERY: THE STEPS (PART 1)

By Jason Pelp

The first three steps involve honesty about addiction; open-mindedness about a spiritual solution to it; and willingness to do whatever is suggested to sustain freedom from active addiction rather than rely on personal resolve and resources. This model asserts that without these, there is no stable abstinence to work on self.

### Step 1

'We admitted we were powerless over our addiction, that our lives had become unmanageable'  
(Narcotics Anonymous 1982:19).

Step 1 requires the addicted person to admit they can't continue successfully, engaging in their addiction for any of a multitude of reasons: loss of relationships; jobs; money; health; joy; fulfilment. For as long as there's any hope of managing somehow, there's no hope of freedom. 'She finally realized [*sic*] that when



she enjoyed her drinking, she couldn't control it, and when she controlled it, she couldn't enjoy it' (Alcoholics Anonymous 1939:328). According to 12-step recovery, as long as a person believes they can beat their addiction with willpower, they're guaranteed to stay using, or perpetually relapse after minimal 'clean' time [PICTURE 5].

A decisive test to determine whether someone has an addiction is offering the chance to imbibe the substance, or engage in the problem behaviour, in a moderate and controlled manner (Alcoholics Anonymous 1939:31-32). Anyone with such a problem will at best be miserable enjoying only a small quantity of that which they crave, or at worst will enter into full-blown relapse yet again. Someone else will be

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satisfied with one alcoholic drink; slice of cake; bet, etc. [PICTURE 3] [PICTURE 4] and so 12-step recovery is founded upon a life of total abstinence rather than simply 'harm minimisation', or a drinking diary or diet plan.

It may well take a while for someone to reach Step 1. If you're familiar with the Cycle of Change, Step 1 involves shifting three spaces forward from the very start. [PICTURE 1]. Addiction always starts with the idea that nothing is wrong (pre-contemplation). Denial. **Don't Even know I Am Lying**. They believe there's no problem, despite many others clearly seeing this is not so.

Next comes the idea that there is a problem but the sufferer blames rather than accepts. 'I have a problem because of...' rather than simply admitting, 'I have a problem': this is where change might start to happen (contemplation). When pain has gathered enough momentum, the addict might look to take steps to address their addiction (preparation). Finally comes action: starting to address the addiction head-on practically. For 12-step recovery, genuinely accepting personal powerlessness is the foundation for the rest of the steps that will ensure recovery.

## Step 2

'We came to believe a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity'  
(Narcotics Anonymous 1982:23).

The key idea behind Step 2 is that the sufferer is, to coin a phrase, insane. An ordinary person who is harmed by a substance or a behaviour or who is allergic to it, will simply refrain from it, and with great caution! Not so in addiction: the alcoholic somehow returns repeatedly to the alcohol of annihilation; the drug addict to the problematic pill; the compulsive overeater to the snack of sabotage; the compulsive gambler to the bet of obliteration. This is insane behaviour and with enough repetition, pain, destruction, misery, fatigue perhaps, the sufferer might see that willpower won't maintain abstinence, and certainly not happily and contentedly!

Step 2 poses the question, if the addict can't beat their addiction on their own, then what/who can solve it for/with them? The answer is two-fold. Traditionally this refers to God, a Higher Power or a god of each person's understanding; the only important thing for 12-step recovery is that the person themselves

isn't acting as God, and no single other mortal being (e.g. sponsor) is. For others it's the recovery network. For others still it's simply something that isn't them:

a **Group/gang Of Drunks/Druggies**;  
the **Great OutDoors**;  
**Good Orderly Direction**;  
**Gift Of Desperation**.  
**Gift Of Divinity**

There's a range of other higher powers people put their trust in. For some, they believe in a cosmic force, such as the universe or energy or love. For others, a dead relative or a guardian angel is believed to be looking down on them: I've heard a wide range in my time.

For agnostics and atheists, the important phrase is 'came to believe'; it can be a process to accept God's existence. For those who can perhaps believe in some form of higher power, it's important they believe not only that God can restore them to sanity, but that He wants to. This is particularly important for those who have had a religious upbringing with an angry, vengeful image of God; those who have met with the real Jesus Christ know, of course, that God is love (1 John 4:8). It's also key for those with low self-esteem: God wants to bring them hope and freedom!

## Step 3

'We turned our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*'  
(Narcotics Anonymous 1982:125, italics original).

Alcoholics Anonymous (1939:62) describes 'self-will' as the pain-driver of addiction needing relief. It may well be helpfully illustrated by a couple of stories: The 'Big Book' (1939:60-61) describes an alcoholic as the chief actor who *also* want to be the director telling others what to do and arrange the set, lighting and music exactly to *their* taste. They may do this by being domineering and bullying, or perhaps by being charming and manipulative: either method achieves the same end. When the 'show' doesn't work as *they* want, a temper tantrum ensues coupled with an inherent lack of any personal responsibility.

When I worked at a National Trust property I surveyed people regarding how a grant might improve the property. Had we implemented all their wishes, the stately home and deer park would have become a fairground because of the requested monorail to go round the park,

the desired chair-lift from the car park to the entrance, fast food in the restaurant, and all the fancy dress actors who would patrol the premises in historical costume to provide a lively, interactive experience! When people want their own way, chaos ensues; when God's will *is* sought, there's harmony (Psalm 133:1, 'How good and pleasant it is, when God's people live together in unity', Amos 3:3 'Do two walk together, unless they have agreed to do so?'). [PICTURES 6]

Step 3 is a turning-point in the steps, for even if an alcoholic is abstinent whilst still driven by self-will they're going to be living in a constant state of irritability. For many, 'God's will' is simply accepting 'what is' and finding peace in not striving to change the unalterable.

Apart from working Step 3 formally through step-work, a recommendation for members is to surrender their will and life to God afresh daily. Alcoholics Anonymous (1939:63) has a 'Step 3 prayer' which I use daily without fail:

God, I give myself to Thee – to build with me and do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of life. May I do Thy will always! [PICTURE 2]

### Application

Steps 1–3 are the foundation steps, the process whereby the sufferer realises their inability to heal their addiction, beginning the process of relying on outside sources to do so instead. Steps 1–3 are internal, processing tasks; Step 3 heralds both within it and afterwards, the 'action' steps (Alcoholics Anonymous 1939:72).



Jay felt a calling to train as a therapist whilst in rehab, struck by the effectiveness of Gestalt therapy to allow him to become honest with himself, others, and God: his passion is to embody and inspire authenticity! In his spare time Jay performs stand-up comedy and loves to cook!

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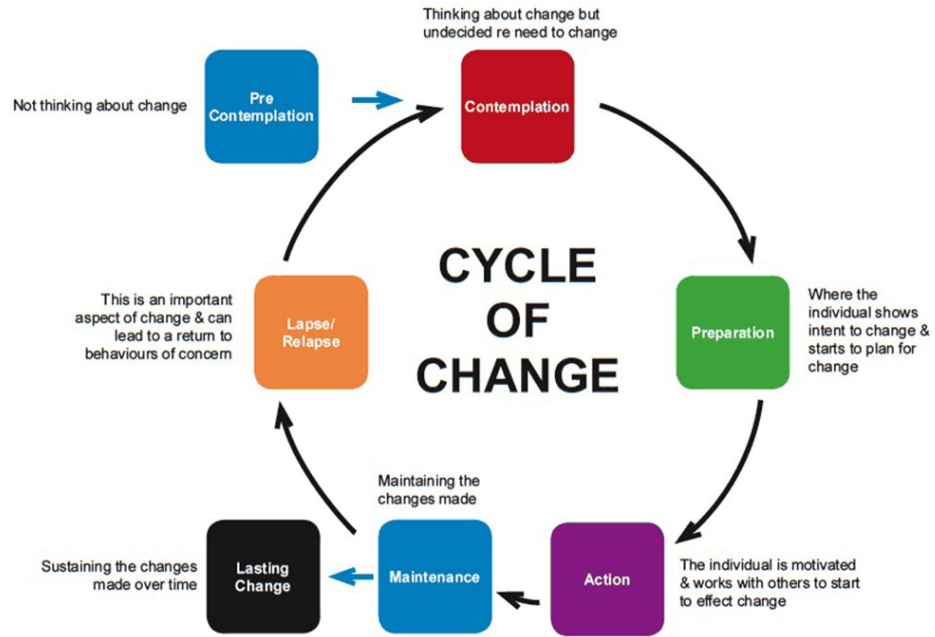
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### Resources

Alcoholics Anonymous (1939) *Alcoholics Anonymous* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.) Alcoholics Anonymous World Services Inc.  
Alcoholics Anonymous (1952) *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, General Service Board  
Brand, R. (2017) *Recovery: Freedom from Our Addictions* London: Bluebird  
Narcotics Anonymous (1982) *Narcotics Anonymous* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.) Narcotics Anonymous World Services Inc.  
Pan-Fellowships (2008) *Deep Soul Cleansing*

Picture 1



Picture 2



Picture 3





Picture 4



Picture 5



Pictures 6

