

The Fourth Step Inventory Process

I Got it Right the Second Time

By Rick R.

My first attempt at doing a fourth step inventory came as I was approaching my first year of sobriety. I now realize that I was rushing into it before I understood what the objective was and after scribbling down a great number of superficial deeds that I had done during my drinking days, my project was abruptly interrupted by a flight to Asia and a four-month vacation aboard a Navy tanker in the Tonkin Gulf Yacht Club, (being in the Navy at the time.) I didn't have the opportunity to get to a single meeting during that time, but I did have a lot of quiet nights at sea where I contemplated my life before AA, and what I was going to do with the rest of my life. It was during that time that I decided, By God; I wasn't going to mess this thing up. I was going to do it by the book. I longed to be back in the safety of that very loving group that I left four months earlier. I knew that with their love and support I could get it right, I realized, as I was studying steps six it says, "We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character" and in step seven, it says "Humbly ask him to remove our shortcomings". To me that means, in Step Four, I should be trying to identify my defects of character and my Shortcomings. The example of this step in the Big Book (Alcoholics Anonymous) shows a chart which describes what we did, why we did it, (fear of something) and who we did it to. It occurred to me that if I could identify the root cause of my problems (defects/fears) that I could change the behavior that resulted from those actions. (shortcomings) To explain this in simple terms, I produced this scenario that anyone could understand, and it goes like this. I purchased a large S.U.V. off the showroom floor, drove away and, at the first signal light, I hit the brakes, and it didn't stop till I was out into the cross-traffic. I drove back to the dealer and explained what happened. They checked it out and discovered that they had put the wrong brake shoes on it by mistake, they replaced them with the correct brakes and when I came to the signal light the S.U.V. stopped, and it stopped at all the other stop lights as well. The defect (root cause) was that the brakes were the wrong size. The shortcoming (behavior) was that the vehicle did not stop properly. Once the defect was corrected, the shortcoming went away. For example, I was talking to one of my mentors, at that time, about criticizing other people and he said that the criticism of others stems from my own, low self-esteem (defect) it occurred to me that, with a little self-restraint, I could slowly refrain from that behavior. Once I identify my character defects, it seems to take all the power out of them, for instance, if I could find any value in criticizing another person, I might still be doing it but there is no value in it except to feed my ego and it shows weakness of character. (Low self-esteem)

I used that template on all the behaviors that I'm not proud of, and I feel stronger for it. Those four months at sea gave me the motivation to re-visit the fourth step and get it right the second time around and I highly recommend revisiting that step if you feel troubled by old behaviors. It did wonders for me.