

Step Nine

The perfect journalistic story is ruled by the five sacred “W”s, What, Who, When, How and Why, these headings also provide a good framework to define step nine. The previous eight steps have been about changing our behaviour, feelings and demeanour by acceptance of concepts like fear, humility and pride. It is easy to practice the principles of the fellowship whilst we are at a meeting, but in this step, we are taking our new demeanour for a test drive and exhibiting it to people outside of our comfort zone.

Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

WHAT are we going to do?

Made direct amends...

The statement is simple, *made direct amends*. For some people the amends required will be obvious, but we can be confident that a simple mumbling of sorry is insufficient. We should be willing to do whatever is required so that we are able to look these people in the eye without feeling shame and remorse.

WHO are we going to talk to?

...to such people...

We made our list in step eight and regardless of how many people are on it, we have to decide how to work through them.

Close family and friends who will welcome what we are saying, these people are the ones who have stood by us beyond the point any human would have thought possible. They will have already witnessed a change in us and they will probably listen and readily forgive us.

Work colleagues and acquaintances, these people may prove surprisingly difficult to approach. They don't know us well, but we want to think they have a good opinion of us.

Damaged family and friends, these people, once close to us, now estranged, will be surprised and intrigued when we approach and ask to speak to them. They form the category that probably contains the highest number of the people we want to slot into the get out clause, “*except where to do so would injure them or others*”.

Virtual strangers, these are the people that we have no social relationship with. These can be senior managers through to people on the checkout at the supermarket.

WHEN are we going to do it?

The danger of getting the timing wrong

It is a mistake to leap into this activity before completing the first eight steps. We should do the steps in the correct order to fully understand and benefit from the process.

As soon as I started to get sober, I saw this step and thought that it was as an opportunity to say sorry. My soon to be ex-wife had seen and heard many Oscar winning performances and had finally gathered the strength to push me out of her life. I hoped that my “shiny new” remorse would fool her into accepting me back. She told me that although she understood what I was saying, she wanted to see action and change. I felt bitterly rejected because it had not worked out as I had expected it to. The first thought that went through my mind was “I’ll show her what she has made me do...” and I headed for a drink.

Whilst we are experiencing the pink cloud of the honeymoon period, telling people that we are complete idiots is another opportunity to become the centre of attention. It becomes much harder once we understand fully the implications of what we are doing and we have a better understanding of the effect our actions have on other

people. If we leap in too early and our “amends” are accepted, we breathe a sigh of relief and fall back into old ways. If they reject us, we may consider that going back drinking will punish them and make them feel guilty for how they have treated us.

...except when to do so would injure them or others.

We have to work through the list and we often try to use a perceived risk of harm as an excuse not to do it. By honestly evaluating the situations and people involved and by discussing our proposed actions with our sponsor, we can start to clear away the debris from our past life.

Easy to approach, it is sensible to start with this group of people and get off to a good start. Although we are sitting with a close friend, we can find ourselves surprisingly tongue-tied.

Embarrassing to approach, having worked through the easier ones we will have developed a “technique” of calming our mind and introducing the reason we are doing this.

Painful to approach, this pain might be emotional or it could be financial. It can take some time to get to the stage where we can approach these people.

Too fearful to approach, there will be people we feel unable to approach. With this group, we sometimes have to start not from being willing to make amends to them, but work on becoming *willing to be willing*. This is not avoiding the issue, it is sometimes the best we can do. If we have such people on our list and we know that amends are due, we can allow time to pass and our emotions to mature to the point where we can speak to them. The experience of most of us is that the statement *never* is too final. The program and time treat the sting and pain of past memories, with help we grow up and change our view of people.

Unable to find, if it is impossible to find the person, then they must remain on our list, with the promise that if the means becomes available to locate them we will do so and make the appropriate amends.

Dead, doesn't always mean that we have fully lost the opportunity to make amends. It can be a fulfilling experience to stand by a memorial stone and apologise. If we cannot bring ourselves to offer a prayer for the dead, then we have to live in the knowledge that we had been willing to make amends.

Should not approach, our quest for rigorous honesty does not include apologising to the partner of our last affair, such acts of bravado and cruelty have no place in the “new us”. Apologising to our lover, by saying that sickness was the basis of the “love affair” is probably a cruel and thoughtless act.

We have to be extremely careful if the situation we are going to create will risk losing our livelihood, we could be damaging our family with a grandiose gesture. Luring us into this style of thinking is one of the monkey's more subtle tricks. Financially crippled, “under the instructions of AA”, we declare with righteous indignation that we destroyed our lives and were better off when we were drinking.

We must honestly consider a fear of suffering criminal violence. It can be too easy for people who do not know the party concerned to offer unfounded encouragement resulting in us becoming crippled or killed. If these are genuine fears, we are harming them by our amends. We can remain willing to make amends should the circumstances change.

By working through these categories, we are able to cross people off the list quite quickly and work down to the ones who are difficult or impossible to contact. As we become emotionally stronger, we can then approach those who are more difficult.

It is impossible to suggest a timescale for this step. If we have reached this stage of the program, we are becoming capable of making these decisions for ourselves.

HOW do we do it?

We should always approach people with humility. We know why we are doing this and what we think is a correct amends to offer, they don't and we should not expect them to. All of the steps are about changing our own behaviour. They are not about changing other people.

We need to be aware of the impact we can have on somebody, it is almost certainly inappropriate to discuss these issues whilst standing in line in the staff canteen. It is easy for us to become offhand about declaring ourselves to be alcoholic and working the program. For most people the word alcoholic conjures up images of ragged tramps on park benches.

If we make sure that the words *humble* and *sensitive* are in our minds as we approach somebody, we should be able to approach them correctly. We must also defend against switching to retaliation and justification if the person does not react as well as we had expected them to. They could take the opportunity to reveal issues that we had not even considered.

WHY are we doing this?

When this is complete - we are free from our past. Although the monkey will remain on our shoulder for the rest of our lives, we have now removed his ability to wound us with remorse and shame.

As we talk to the people on our list, they might suggest that we have reached this point through our own will power and efforts. It could be tempting to allow such a misconception to continue, but it is better to remain humble and acknowledge that our recovery comes from working the program. If they want to argue, allow them to believe what they choose as long as we don't believe it. We need to recognise that we have reached this point through the help of the fellowship and by the guidance and protection of our higher power.

Summary Questions

- Am I progressing through my list?
- Have I avoided anybody that I could approach?

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