

The First Step Inventory

The First Step Inventory is our sexual inventory; it consists of writing out our sexual history and then giving it to the group. Its purpose is threefold: to see, confess, and send away.

In the written review of our past we face ourselves as we really are. The words, "I am a sexaholic" come out of this insight. Bringing what we are to the light keeps us from hiding what we are and becomes the act of putting it all behind us and sending it away.

The essence of doing a written and spoken First Step is that we want to be done with our sexual wrongs and are sending them away. Mere catharsis or honest self-disclosure miss the mark if that's all they are. The aim is to bring our misdeeds to the light so we can be done with them. In a very real sense, we send them away by bringing them into the light. When done from such an attitude, the First Step becomes a decisive spiritual experience, an entrance into the new way of life.

The idea is to look fearlessly at the whole of our lust/fantasy/sex/relationship history from the very beginning to face who and what we really are, detect the destructive patterns of thinking and behavior, and see the powerlessness and unmanageability of our lives. Indeed, by means of such an effort, some may conclude they are either not sexaholics or have no compelling need or desire to work the program.

There are certain implied prerequisites before one sets about first writing and then giving his First Step to his or her SA group. First, the person should be a regular participant in the SA fellowship over a long enough period of time to ensure his or her own commitment to sexual sobriety. Secondly, the person should do it with the guidance and support of an SA sponsor or friend who has already been through it. And thirdly, the person should have established a friendly connection with at least a few other SA members in the group for additional support.

Some prefer to make notes; others write their First Step in narrative fashion, as though telling a story. Whatever the format, we suggest that you simply jot down each key incident bearing upon your sexual history from first to last. Where applicable, you may also want to describe how you felt at the time and ask what it tells you about yourself. This might even be done in chart form.

Rather than suggesting that the inventory be cast in a certain format, however, we encourage the individual to use the technique that works best for him or her. Preferably, one will have witnessed at least one other First Step given before the group before he gives his own so he knows what to expect.

We start at the very beginning, as far back as we can remember any incidents bearing on our sexual thinking or experience. We avoid explicit sexual descriptions that may provide triggers for us or others. Rather than trying to do a perfect job, which we can never do, we just sit down and have at it. The idea is to get the sweep of the whole history down on

paper so we can see it emerge before our very eyes and have it in a form we can give orally to the group. A First Step well prepared has the value of a good final exam; it pulls the details together into an integrated picture; we see and learn as we write. And what a relief to get the "final" over with at the beginning of the course!

We describe our inner sexual thought life as well as our sexual acting out, use of the media, dependency relationships, use of the tease and eliciting lust in others, etc. We don't psychoanalyze; we simply state the facts -- what we thought and did. Trying to figure out why we did it never gave us power over it.

If you find you are blocked on the past, there's no sense trying to force it; willingness to face and surrender it should come with continued sobriety. If you find you cannot do it without erotic arousal, something is wrong. Better to shelve it and look forward to the time when you are free to do it in a different spirit. In such a case, the aborted attempt has already told you something about your attitude that needs more surrender.

With some of us, the First Step inventory came out gradually in the course of time as we became more aware of what we were and what we had done and were increasingly willing to give it up. Nevertheless, a First Step experience before the group can have great value.

Giving The First Step

We will want to discuss our First Step with our sponsor before giving it to the group. When we are finally ready, we let the group secretary know in advance so it can be scheduled and announced.

We try to avoid letting the person descend into erotic detail in relating sexual experiences. If the person is where he or she should be, he is turning away from and releasing, rather than merely reliving those experiences.

A First Step may run the better part of an entire meeting, depending on its length and amount of group feedback afterward. Some groups elect to have it given in two installments so time can be allowed for regular group participation. It is suggested that the one giving his or her First Step be allowed to do so without interruption, yet under the guidance of the leader. He is thus free to "tell his story" however he may, even if it comes out haltingly or doesn't meet the expectations of others. It takes time for some to warm up to their story. In some groups listening members indicate by a quiet raising of the hand if the subject matter becomes too provocative or gets too far off track.

Group Feedback

The purpose of feedback from listening members is to help the individual see patterns of thinking and acting-out he may have missed, question him on various points, challenge his desire for sobriety or honesty, "play back" his attitude toward his own illness and readiness to work the program, and help him avoid such pitfalls as rationalization, self-pity, blaming others, and getting too analytical. The objective of feedback is for the group to assess the basic question of whether the person is a sexaholic and whether he or she really wants sobriety.

Members should listen to see how pertinent questions are answered, which they or the leader can raise during the evaluation period which follows. The one overriding criterion by which the First Step should be judged by the group is, Does it feel like the person is putting this way of thinking and acting behind him?

1. What does your First Step tell you about yourself?
2. Do you think you are addicted? To what? How do you know?
3. Are you powerless over your thinking and acting-out?
4. Have you shown us how your thoughts and activity are affected? Is your life unmanageable? In what way?
5. Do you want to stop? What?
6. What does all this tell you about what must happen if you are to recover?
7. Will you turn to God now?

When done from identification and love, such feedback can be very helpful to the person in revealing blind spots and unhealthy attitudes and tendencies. It is like holding up advance warning signals from the road ahead and can accelerate recovery. If done from any other motives, feedback can be destructive. This is another reason why the individual should have some time under his belt in the group and should have established close ties with at least a few other members.

If writing out the First Step is of great value to the individual, giving it to the group can benefit the group as well. We always see ourselves more clearly when the perspective is broadened by hearing another's story, especially the full account, even if that person's habit is different than ours. Also, just being there and listening is a gift to the other person.

Every time we tell our story in meetings thereafter, we will be putting the pieces together better. This voluntary and spontaneous self-appraisal, one of the hallmarks of the Twelve Step program, becomes an ongoing process.

Every group should have the benefit of hearing the full First Step of each of its members. However, we're still in the learning process in all of this.

The First Step inventory can be the beginning of a lifelong ability to increasingly face ourselves, know ourselves, walk in the light, take responsibility for our own recovery, and give of ourselves to others. It can help prepare us for doing our Fourth and Fifth Step moral inventory on the other aspects of our lives. Until we can write it out fully, we apparently cannot see or face our past; until we give it away to others, we aren't fully willing to give it up and be free.