

Living Large and Living the Amended Life
The Cumulative Effect of the Steps – Focused on Steps Eight to Ten – Handout
Excerpted from *Progressive Recovery Through the Twelve Steps:*
Emotionally Sober for Life

Living the Amended Life

Step Eight

Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.

Step Nine

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

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“I did then what I knew how to do. Now that I know better, I do better.” —Maya Angelou

Maya Angelou’s perspective is a fine place to begin when thinking about amends. It acknowledges that for many of us much of what we feel guilty about manifested from nothing more than our own ignorance. Often, we do not understand ourselves and what drives us, and sometimes we do not clearly see our effect on others. Yet as our awareness and understanding grows, the way in which we see ourselves and our world is altered in extraordinary ways.

Let’s talk about our growing awareness of the consequences of our alcoholism or addiction. And let’s do so through this lens provided in the opening quote by Maya Angelou.

Most of us arrived at recovery thinking we were bad, and that if we could just become good our problems would be alleviated, or at least mitigated. So many of our earliest amends involved apologies and behavioral improvement. Of course, with the removal of alcohol and drugs, some improvements are readily attained.

Later we began to understand we have been quite sick, that addiction is a disease, not a matter of morals. This put important context around amends as we began to see our mistakes in a much different light. We still had things that needed to be made right, but increasingly the amends were through our healing. As we left more and more of the sickness of addiction behind, much of the fruit of the healing showed up in our lives, our behavior and our relationships. Very likely any number of those early “shortcomings” such as dishonesty, stealing and the like begin to fade away.

As our understanding grows still further in Progressive Recovery, as we gain awareness that the roots of our maladies are within us in the form of old ideas and decisions based on self, and as those begin to shift with our Step Seven efforts, we will certainly see still more improvement in behaviors and attitudes.

One wise woman reminds us that to amend something is for it to change. First, we see this in behavior and attitudes, but later the change is reflected in our personalities, our lives and our very being. Over time the purpose of the Twelve Steps is to reawaken us and to lead us increasingly toward our potential, to leave behind the damaged, sick and broken person we believed ourselves to be.

Let’s begin by framing the nature of Progressive Amends by considering how things are made right with others, with ourselves, with a Progressive Power, and ultimately with life itself.

Every outer behavior or attitude is a reflection of an inner state. As our inner state is repaired, or amended, through the application of the Steps, the ways we act and present ourselves necessarily change. As we progress,

many of us begin to practice living amends. For example, someone who has a history of stealing money may become very generous, consistently leaving large tips to servers, making anonymous contributions, offering their time and services free to others in the world, or becoming financially charitable. Or someone who came to understand how neglectful they were of others might become quite reliable in showing up for others, or look for ways of recognizing others. In short, the way we live our lives becomes the opposite of our failings.

Further still is the notion of living the amended life— where we live in ways that are entirely at odds with our old ideas. For example: someone who believed they were worthless becomes a successful businessman or woman, making economic contributions in their community. Or another who was an atheist becomes a minister. Or yet another who discovered they were in fact misgendered, transitioned from female to male, and then found a career helping others in similar situations.

The point is not that our behavior improves, rather that we become entirely different people, living more truly to ourselves and our souls. Often, we find that the intuition the Big Book promises as a result of the Twelve Steps begins to govern our lives in remarkable and unpredictable ways. To thine own self be true becomes the amended life, and through living that amended life, the lives of others are benefited. Service becomes the fruit of our recovery rather than an effort we make to do and be better.

Let's return to Jennifer's story from the chapter on Steps Four and Five. If you recall, she is long-time sober but has a troubling and unfulfilling history in her relationships with men, dating all the way back to the unavailable adult men in her life when she was a child. Here again is her inventory in this arena:

- Column 1—Who or what do we have a grievance against, or a problem?
 - » Jennifer: A man in particular or men in general.

- Column 2—What happened, i.e., what's the story behind it?
 - » Jennifer: The backstory as described above, i.e., unavailable men and her need to take care of them and their needs.

- Column 3—How does it affect us? What's the emotional impact?
 - » Jennifer: Frustration, discouragement, lack of fulfillment.

- Column 4—What have we brought to this situation? What old ideas or decisions based on self are involved?
 - » Jennifer:
 - › A belief that men are unavailable.
 - › An old idea that she is unlovable.
 - › A decision that she must do something for men to gain and hold their attention.

While Jennifer works in her recovery with her therapist, sponsor and spiritual advisor to improve her interactions with men, she practices a continuing Step Seven, asking her Progressive Power to address her underlying beliefs. At each encounter with a man, she seeks to remember that men can be available, that she is lovable, and that she need not earn their appreciation. At the same time, she refrains from attempts to gain their approval, their attention or their love. She is practicing behavioral amends, as well as laying down a path of living amends.

To be healed in this regard, Jennifer has engaged in some difficult healing work with her therapist. As part of that inner work, she must also return to her mother and step-fathers to learn more and to make those relationships right. As she begins to date men, she must learn to watch for all the signs she formerly ignored.

Eventually her Progressive Recovery and amends work will lead her to meet men who are available and nurturing. At this point she must battle her tendencies to try to earn their continued attentions. And she begins a continuing written inventory of all the ways the voices in her head tell her she is unworthy.

At some point, Jennifer finds a man with whom she can engage in a committed and healthy relationship. It becomes a place in which she can practice amended living, including teaching her children what she has learned, working with others in recovery who have similar needs, and even volunteering in domestic violence shelters. All of this reinforces the deep healing of old ideas and decisions based on self. She is increasingly living the amended life.

It is here we realize that in order to give things away, we must learn them for ourselves and come to embody them. Then, we can offer them to others. At this point we have been remade by the principles within the Twelve Steps.

And still our inner work is not done. There is always a new layer of healing that will be revealed with continued practice. Our recovery and the realization of our potential becomes progressive, which allows for a progressive realization of the benefits that come in recovery.

We have moved far beyond improved behavior and attitudes. We have literally been remade. Power is flowing in remarkable ways because the blockages within us have been addressed with the application of the steps.

Let's take a moment to reframe what is an all-too-common experience for many of us when we find ourselves stuck. We refer to the times when we are simply unable to live in an amended way. We can't get out from under our old habits. Remember, there are no failures, only more information to aid us in deepening our Step Four inventory, advancing our Step Seven practices, and slowly being remade by Progressive Power.

One of the revelations that will come to us as we work more deeply with living the amended life will be in learning that self-willing our way into greater recovery is not possible. Self-willed efforts will reveal that self-will is not the solution, but the problem. And the difficulties that come from that self-will become that which can teach us. Especially when the frustrations of failing take us back over and over again into Steps Four, Five, Six and Seven.

Just for a moment, let's digress to an old biblical adage—that you can't pour new wine into old wineskins. Of course, it is ironic that ancient wisdom involving alcohol can be a teaching tool for alcoholics, or anyone else for that matter.

What this adage teaches is that we cannot force new ideas or new ways of being into ourselves without making room by discarding the old ones. Trying to self-will our way into being better selves will create stress. That stress is useful for further step work to understand what still blocks us off from power. Remember, we're told that as long as we hold onto old ideas, we cannot make progress.

Here again is the secret within the Steps. We are without access to power to remake ourselves and our behaviors. Using inventory to find what blocks us off from Progressive Power, we look deeper and deeper and deeper for underlying causes and conditions. We ask Progressive Power for help. We ask others for assistance with these blockages. Through amends and amended living, we actively participate in letting go of the old and inviting in the new. Then we can use the experimentation and effort of Step Nine to fuel deeper exploration and greater release. We seek to be remade, not merely to overcome behaviors.

One closing thought is useful at this moment. As much as we speak of a different kind of amends-making, we understand there will always be wrongs that must be righted directly at the behavioral level. This can include asking for forgiveness, financial restitution, legal remedies and any number of approaches. As we'll see in Step Ten, there is a place for such actions. However, our larger and progressive desire is to prevent behavioral or attitudinal problems by addressing the root causes from which they take form.

Awareness

Step Ten

Continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.

Step Eleven

Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood God*, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.

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"We have entered the world of the Spirit. Our next function is to grow in understanding and effectiveness." —
alcoholics anonymous

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Based on the quote above, it is not surprising that a Progressive Step Ten looks beyond its more common practice. Once again, we do not intend our thoughts to in any way minimize the value of how Step Ten is practiced, for it is a powerful step. Typically, though, we have found several limitations to advancing our practice.

The first problem with our typical use of Step Ten is the tendency to see this step as merely monitoring and repairing bad behavior. It is common in many recovery rooms for people to assume the purpose of this Step is to correct our mistakes. While that is absolutely a fine place to begin, we see a much broader application.

Another problem is the tendency to consider Step Ten to be an action taken as directed by the Big Book before we retire in the evening and upon awakening in the morning. We certainly support those practices, but as the quote above proposes, there is much more practice and value in Step Ten.

Let's begin by acknowledging a potent connection between Step Ten and Step Eleven. If Step Ten is a monitoring step, Step Eleven is a breakthrough tool. Step Ten keeps clean the blockages to Progressive Power, while Step Eleven actively seeks out the flow of the Progressive Power. In tandem they are remarkably powerful.

Our experience seeks to broaden Step Ten to an awareness practice, to utilize it to "grow in understanding and effectiveness." To do that we must learn to use a Step Ten approach in an ongoing fashion, which allows us to increase our awareness of ourselves and our old ideas. With awareness we have the opportunity to avoid acting in ways that prove to cause problems.

Let's take the Big Book language and expand upon it. First, let's note that it does propose the application of Step Ten "should continue for our lifetime." And how might we do that? "Continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear. When these crop up, we ask God at once to remove them. We discuss them with someone immediately and make amends quickly if we have harmed anyone. Then we resolutely turn our thoughts to someone we can help."

Here we see a compression of the principles in Steps Four through Nine. However, we would propose that the focus be more rigorous. Indeed, we continue to watch for the old ideas and decisions based on self that we've identified in our inventory, sought relief from in Step Seven, and practiced amending in Step Nine. With this approach, we create the possibility and consistency of steady monitoring, and, when coupled with Step Eleven, we actively engage in connecting to Progressive Power, which transforms us.

Again returning to Jennifer's story, she can continue to watch for any suggestion within or outside her that men are unavailable, or that she is unlovable, or that she must do something to hold a man's attention. Each time she catches it, she can focus the wisdom of the Steps and of Progressive Power on the solution.

The beauty of this approach is that as our observational and spiritual muscles strengthen, when we are able to see the idea or the urge rise, we can address it long before it causes any action that is harmful to someone else or ourselves. Step Ten becomes a monitoring and prevention approach rather than a repair step. The closer our attention and efforts are to the causes and conditions, the greater the possibility of remedy and resolution.

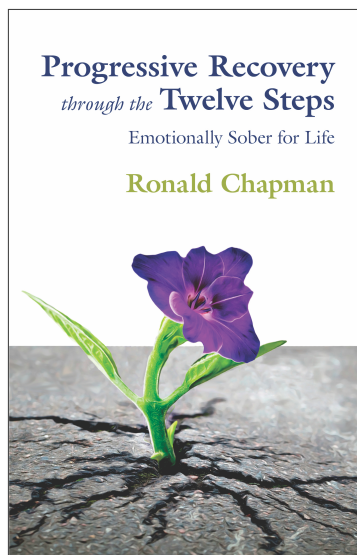
It is worth noting that initially the intensity of the approach can exhaust us. Partly this is because paying careful attention demands a great deal of energy. Furthermore, we find that our old ideas are invariably operating without our knowledge all day long, so there is a great deal of inventory material. But over time our energy grows because the channel within us stays clearer and our skills and capacity grow as we feel the flow of Progressive Power.

One result of this is that we create a positive, upward spiraling in our recovery practices. Of course! Our Step Ten work becomes progressively effective, and we grow progressively.

Now, when we experience the clarity from meditation via Step Eleven, we see there is an immense upside. We are able to construct a monitoring, channel-clearing and Progressive Power-seeking mechanism that is nothing short of miraculous.

Better still, it is our experience that there can be amazing movement in the underlying causes and conditions that are the foundation of not just our alcoholism, or addiction, but of our life challenges.

There is a notion in Step Six in the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* that applies. It is this kind of inner work, demanding though it may seem, that determines the difference between the adults and the children. It asks a lot of us to practice Step Ten at this depth, and yet it is a means to unleash a Progressive Power that pours through us.



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<https://schooloftransformation.teachable.com/p/progressive-recovery-through-the-twelve-steps>