

Step Four: Make a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves

In the fourth step of the twelve-step program, we learn how to write three inventories.

It is worth knowing how the dictionary defines moral and inventory when working these steps:

Moral: *of or relating to principles of right and wrong.*

Inventory: *an itemized list of current goods, stock supply.*



The purpose of step four in achieving a sober life

The ultimate purpose of the fourth step is to face up to and become rid of that which has blocked us from the power to fully own our lives. It is at this point in the Big Book that we come to understand that alcohol is but a symptom of a deeper problem and that in order to proceed, we get down to causes and conditions which drive us to drink. The writing of the three inventories is the process that allows us to uncover these causes and conditions.

My personal revelations with step four

Permanent sobriety was impossible for me to experience until I did a thorough and fearless fourth and fifth step—and I have done this many times over the years. Throughout my years of working in addiction recovery, I have found that many of the people who continually relapse have done very little work with these life changing steps.

The first time that I reached inside myself and honestly wrote my three inventories on paper, it became clear to me that I had been trying to play God in other people's lives and that I was constantly trying to arrange the show of life to my liking. I began to discover my selfishness in all relationships and how my thought-life is self-centered most of the time.

Living this way caused me to surround myself with the kind of people and create the kind of life that never reacted the way I wanted or needed. As a result of this, I had become diseased within myself. To this day I still rely on this process to keep my insides clean and free from dishonesty, resentment, fear, and self pity. If I don't, then at some point my mind will begin to whisper that I need that drink or drug to treat that disease.

Can you be brutally honest with yourself if it means saving your life?

It can be difficult to face yourself while creating your three inventories. But the more honest you are with yourself, the more liberated you will become from this disease of addiction. In the fourth step, the recovery process can become very uncomfortable, very real. The things you are afraid to find are things that other people in your life already know. They are the things that are tearing apart your relationship with yourself and others.

The fourth step is an exercise to be experienced, not merely discussed. A much deeper level of discovery happens between pen and paper than between mind and mouth. That is the purpose of the fourth step—to drive us to pick up pen and paper and begin to write our personal inventory.