

Working the Twelve Steps of Gamblers Anonymous

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This document has not been approved by Gamblers Anonymous and represents only the opinions of the author.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to the still suffering compulsive gamblers who have not yet found the fellowship of Gamblers Anonymous. We are holding seats open for them.

Acknowledgements

These pages contain input from a diverse and amazing group of compulsive gamblers. Much of this text is based on the collective experience and wisdom of Gamblers Anonymous members as they have expressed themselves at meetings, conferences and private conversations. Members often share things they may have read or heard outside of our program which then get repeated, modified, and shared again. Our wonderful principles of anonymity and humility allow us to not get too concerned with attribution or the precise origins of a particular phrase or idea. I am grateful to them all.

Also, were it not for all the compulsive gamblers in GA that came before me and carried the message, I would not have been given the gift that changed the trajectory of my life so dramatically. I am so grateful that someone answered the phone when I called and directed me to my first meeting.

Chris N

Welcome to Gamblers Anonymous

You are not alone. We too have suffered the consequences of gambling for too long and for too much money. Some of us played slot machines or online games, some bet on sports apps, some played poker or casino games, some bought hundreds of lottery tickets, and some of us traded on the stock market.

Whether our game of choice was bingo or day trading stock options, our inability to stop or control our gambling was the same. We couldn't stop. We tried. We swore that this time we would only gamble until we lost a certain amount of money or for some specific length of time. We pledged to ourselves that this time would be different. Yet time and time again we found ourselves losing more money and spending more time than we had planned – often times considerably more.

We came to GA for different reasons. Maybe a spouse threatened to leave or a judge sentenced you to attend meetings. Perhaps on your last gambling spree you lost more than you ever had before and it scared you. Maybe you had a moment of clear thinking and suddenly you knew that the problem was out of control and you needed help. On the other hand, possibly you simply got worn down and became “sick and tired of being sick and tired”.

Whatever the reason you came here, you are welcome. We truly don't care about your race, religious beliefs/non-beliefs, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, disability, income, socioeconomic background, level of education, criminal record, political opinions, health, psychological issues, height, weight or any of the other things that divide people outside of our rooms. The only requirement for Gamblers Anonymous membership is a desire to stop gambling. Even if you are not certain about whether you want to completely quit gambling, many of our meetings are open so anyone can attend them. There are also no dues or fees for GA membership. As we like to say “Give GA a chance. If you don't like it, we will fully refund your misery!”

We hope you relate to some of the things you read in this book and hear other members share at meetings. If there are things you question or disagree with, don't worry about it. GA is not a cult. You are welcome to believe anything you want. Our program continues to be strengthened by the diversity of our members' opinions and points of view. Through trial and error, most of us have found that following the suggestions in this book can lead to dramatic improvement in our lives, but there is no required set of beliefs.

One of the suggestions that most of us have found to be true is the importance of getting a sponsor before working the steps in this book. It is advisable to attend several different meetings and listen until you hear someone speak that has a quality of recovery that you admire. It is usually a good idea if you pick a sponsor that has a year or more clean and has already worked the Twelve Steps of Gamblers Anonymous with a sponsor. Many members find that it is better for men to sponsor men and women to sponsor women, but this is not a rule and in some places it can be difficult for women to find other women sponsors (among compulsive gamblers, men outnumber women by

about two to one). Many women find it more comfortable to locate a sponsor at virtual meetings which tend to have more women members.

Once you have identified the person you have chosen, simply reach out to them before or after a meeting and say something like, “I would like to work the steps and I was wondering if you would sponsor me”. They may say “no” for many reasons, so don’t be discouraged. Simply keep looking until someone agrees. If you have trouble finding a sponsor, it might be a good idea to ask your group secretary if they have a suggestion for a good sponsor.

This book is intended to be read like a textbook. It is best if it is read in order and studied with the help of a sponsor. We suggest that you start by reading the next chapter on “The Illness of Compulsive Gambling” and read each chapter sequentially. The Twelve Steps should be read and worked in order for reasons that may not be immediately obvious. Skipping steps or trying to start in the middle is likely to be as frustrating and fruitless as trying to learn mathematics by starting in the middle of the textbook. A suggested timetable for working the steps is shown on pages 61-62, but many members take more time to complete the steps. It is far more important that the steps are approached with honesty and a sincere desire to be as thorough as possible.

It is recommended that you underline passages that a) are especially meaningful to you, b) you don’t fully understand or c) you disagree with. It is normal for members to question some aspects of the program. It is not required that you agree or relate with everything you read here or hear at a meeting. Some members also find it helpful to make notes in the margins to remind themselves of points they wish to discuss with their sponsor.

Sadly some of us never find recovery from the disease of compulsive gambling and wind up broke, alone, miserable, incarcerated and/or victims of suicide. However, many of us in Gamblers Anonymous not only were able to quit gambling, but we found an amazing and wonderful life we never could have imagined. One member is fond of saying “Gambler’s Anonymous gave me the life I never knew I wanted”. We found that through working the Steps, “The Promises” of Alcoholics Anonymous have also become our promises of Gambler’s Anonymous.

If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half way through. We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace. No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows. Self-seeking will slip away. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change. Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us. We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us. We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Are these extravagant promises? We think not. They are being fulfilled among us—sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. They will always materialize if we work for them¹

¹ The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous – pages 83-84.

The truth is though that you should make no mistake about this life. Normal events continue to happen. We may get jobs or we may lose them. Bad people will still do bad things. People we love will disappoint us, get sick or even die. They are of course only human. What will change is our reaction to all of these events. We become the calm in the storm – instead of the storm itself.

This life might seem impossible to fathom and you might reasonably believe that this is just some kind of a utopian fantasy. The truth however is that this life is being experienced today by thousands of compulsive gamblers who have joined Gamblers Anonymous. You too can have these promises come true in your life. All you need to get started is a little bit of honesty, open-mindedness and willingness.

Rumi, the 13th-century Persian poet, famously asked, “Why do you stay in prison, when the door is so wide open?” We invite you to walk out of your cell and join us in freedom.

The Illness of Compulsive Gambling

There has been abundant scientific research on compulsive gambling, which is sometimes called “gambling disorder” or “pathological gambling”. Today this is generally considered in the professional psychiatric community to be a “non-substance related addictive disorder”.

As a practical matter, we find this description of compulsive gambling from the Mayo Clinic to be accurate and sufficient for treatment.

Compulsive gambling, also called gambling disorder, is the uncontrollable urge to keep gambling despite the toll it takes on your life. Gambling means that you're willing to risk something you value in the hope of getting something of even greater value.

Gambling can stimulate the brain's reward system much like drugs or alcohol can, leading to addiction. If you have a problem with compulsive gambling, you may continually chase bets that lead to losses, hide your behavior, deplete savings, accumulate debt, or even resort to theft or fraud to support your addiction.

Symptoms

Signs and symptoms of compulsive gambling (gambling disorder) include:

- *Being preoccupied with gambling, such as constantly planning how to get more gambling money*
- *Needing to gamble with increasing amounts of money to get the same thrill*
- *Trying to control, cut back or stop gambling, without success*
- *Feeling restless or irritable when you try to cut down on gambling*
- *Gambling to escape problems or relieve feelings of helplessness, guilt, anxiety or depression*
- *Trying to get back lost money by gambling more (chasing losses)*
- *Lying to family members or others to hide the extent of your gambling*
- *Jeopardizing or losing important relationships, a job, or school or work opportunities because of gambling*
- *Resorting to theft or fraud to get gambling money*
- *Asking others to bail you out of financial trouble because you gambled money away*

Unlike most casual gamblers who stop when losing or set a loss limit, people with a compulsive gambling problem are compelled to keep playing to recover their money — a pattern that becomes increasingly destructive over time.

Some people with a compulsive gambling problem may have remission where they gamble less or not at all for a period of time. However, without treatment, the remission usually isn't permanent.²

Another useful way to think about compulsive gambling is as both an allergy of the body and an obsession of the mind. By allergy we just mean that we have an “abnormal reaction”. If for example someone has an allergy to strawberries, their abnormal reaction is to get hives if they eat strawberries. For us, when we gamble, our abnormal reaction is the need to keep gambling – often for higher

² [mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/compulsive-gambling/home/ovc-20258391](https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/compulsive-gambling/home/ovc-20258391)

and higher stakes. For the normal gambler, when they lose their allotted \$20 in the casino on their cruise ship vacation, they typically close their wallet and head out to the pool. This is something we compulsive gamblers are almost never able to reliably do. In this way, we actually have an allergy or abnormal reaction to the gambling activity indicating that our only solution is one that results in complete abstinence.

However, in addition to this allergy of the body, we also have an obsession of the mind. This is the part of compulsive gambling that is especially baffling and insidious. For unlike our friend with the strawberry allergy who carefully avoids strawberries for his entire life, when we are not gambling we begin to obsess about gambling again without thought of the consequences. Eventually we can only remember what gambling did for us, such as the winning and the escape from boredom or stress. We completely forget about what gambling did to us, such as the losing, the wasted hours, and the damaged relationships and careers. Once we succumb to the obsession and begin gambling, the allergy takes effect and the entire cycle starts again.

An important and especially tragic feature of compulsive gambling is that it is a progressive illness. By that we mean that over time the compulsive gambler inevitably needs to gamble for greater amounts and for longer time periods. The small table stakes games he or she might have played for as a teenager, no longer provide the same rush and a much higher stakes game is required. Sadly, this progressive feature usually continues even during long periods of abstinence. GA members who have abstained from gambling for many years occasionally relapse and quickly find that in order to get the required thrill, they now have to play for much higher stakes than when they originally quit gambling.

The good news is that the benefits from our recovery program are also progressive. While initially we are likely to see our financial situation rapidly improving, over time we experience “The Promises” coming true in our life as described on page two.

One common characteristic of compulsive gambling is the tendency towards cross addiction. It is not unusual for people recovering from substance abuse or other addictions to develop the illness of compulsive gambling. It seems that they are replacing one addiction for another. Approximately one third of compulsive gamblers have also struggled with other dependencies such as substance abuse, food addictions or sex addictions. However, regardless of whether or not compulsive gamblers have battled with any other addictions, they can successfully recover in Gamblers Anonymous if they are willing to diligently work this simple program. We have found that other treatment programs (including other Twelve Step Programs) alone are usually insufficient for treating compulsive gambling and helping the compulsive gambler achieve long term abstinence from gambling.

The Treatment of Compulsive Gambling

Gamblers Anonymous was one of the first Twelve Step Programs modeled after the highly successful Alcoholics Anonymous program. Both programs (as well as the many other Twelve Step programs that have subsequently been formed) have saved millions of lives over many decades. In all cases however, individual success is normally dependent on the willingness of the participants to continue to attend meetings and work the Twelve Steps.

The illness of compulsive gambling is a powerful, seductive force. A casual approach to working the steps is not likely to be successful. It is critical that the program of Gamblers Anonymous and working the steps become the top priority in the life of the compulsive gambler. Just as diabetics can't take their insulin only when it is convenient for them, so it is with the compulsive gambler and the program of GA. Some members say that they don't have the time for these meetings because they are busy with their work or their family. What we have learned is that the compulsive gambler should be prepared to lose whatever they put ahead of their GA program. If they put their work ahead of GA, they should be prepared to lose their job. If they put their family ahead of GA, they should be prepared to lose their family. Invariably we discover that wonderful paradox that when we put our recovery program first, most everything else in our lives – especially our families, our careers and our finances - usually gets much better.

Perhaps the greatest challenge with treating addictions such as substance abuse or compulsive gambling is that one of the major symptoms is resistance to treatment. People with illnesses such as cancer or HIV are often willing to go to very great lengths to modify their lifestyles - in some cases even with a very poor likelihood of success. On the other hand, many compulsive gamblers have described an inner voice that says things to them like "I am different. GA won't work for me", "I'm too busy or tired to go to these meetings", "Maybe this next time the gambling will be different", or "What's the point? My situation is hopeless". This inner voice is really nothing more than the illness itself. As many addicts say "I have an illness that tells me I don't have an illness". This is why compulsive gamblers can't simply reason or think their way into recovery. The simple fact is that you can't fix a broken brain with a broken brain. Recovery, therefore, requires more than just thinking; it requires the positive action of working the steps.

Many newcomers to GA also find the Twelve Steps to be mysterious or religious and the Steps seem to have no apparent direct relation to solving their gambling problems. To these skeptics we say "We too were skeptical when we got here, but this program saved our lives. We encourage you to have a little faith and try to follow some simple suggestions. The value and the benefits of the Twelve Steps usually do not become fully apparent until after we work them".

We also encourage newcomers to not be put off by the use of terms such as “God”, “Higher Power” or “Spiritual”. If you have any prejudices about these terms, we encourage you to stay open-minded as you come to realize that these words are often used differently in GA than you might experience in many religious environments. Thousands of people of all faiths and non-believers alike have come to realize there is nothing in the Twelve Steps that requires them to compromise their core beliefs or non-beliefs on spiritual matters. These issues are explored more fully in future chapters.

Introduction to the Twelve Steps of Recovery

While changing our lives in Gamblers Anonymous is a “Big Deal”, the individual steps usually aren’t. In reality, they are often just “Baby Steps”. However, many of us have been reluctant to start the steps because of fear. We rationalize this fear by blaming the fact that “I am too busy” or “I am not religious” or “These steps will not work for anyone as intelligent as I am”. Of course the fact is that none of these excuses really ring true. No matter how busy we were, we always found time to gamble. Also, many of our most successful members are not religious and are highly intelligent. We encourage you to put aside these fears and prejudices and just jump in. Working the steps really won’t kill you. We joke that we never read an obituary where the cause of death is described as “Bob lost a heroic battle working the steps of Gamblers Anonymous”. You truly have nothing to lose but your hopelessness and despair.

Many of us are also inclined to try and procrastinate working the steps. Often times attending a few meetings gives us some temporary relief as we realize that we are not alone in our illness. When gambling urges subside for brief periods we began to think, “I’ve got this”. This is very dangerous thinking because invariably the urges return, we are not prepared and we usually succumb and return to gambling. Therefore, if we wait until the gambling urges come before we start working the steps, we are unlikely to ever achieve long-term clean time. There is an old saying that “the best time to fix the roof is when the sun is shining.” Similarly, the best time to start working the steps is TODAY, when the gambling urges may be less intense.

An important concept for recovery is “One Day at A Time”. While this seems like a very elementary and obvious concept, the reality is that it is extremely practical. One of the triggers to our gambling is fear of future events. “How will I pay the rent next week?” “What will happen when my spouse finds out I lost all of this money?” “How will I be able to retire now?” When we obsess on future events that may or may not actually occur, it may appear that a) the only viable solution is to gamble to win the money back immediately or b) our situation is hopeless and therefore we might as well gamble to relieve the stress. In either case the “logical response” seems to be to gamble even more.

Similarly when obsessing on the past, we tend to wallow in regret and shame. If only we hadn’t called the bet on that last hand or borrowed that money from our in-laws or quit our job to become a professional gambler. Many of us have so much shame in our past that we cannot even look closely at the lies we told and the time and money we wasted. Once again, gambling offers a temporary escape from that shame.

We can easily now see that there are two very dangerous neighborhoods for the compulsive gambler that we should never visit alone – The Future and The Past. We need to learn to live in the present. When we start feeling fear of the future or shame of the past, we simply take a breath and say to ourselves something like “Everything is OK right at this moment. Right now I have a roof over my head. Right now I have enough food to eat, water to drink and air to breathe. I will deal with these other issues when I am better able to”. Working the steps will provide

us the tools we need to calmly repair the wreckage of the past without shame and prudently prepare for the future without fear.

Some people believe that this brave philosophy won't allow us to realistically plan for the financial future. This is not true. When we work our financial inventory in Step Four and have our Pressure Relief Group Meeting, we look honestly at our finances and develop a realistic plan for our situation. The point is, however, that worrying about these issues now before we reach our Fourth Step is likely to be counterproductive. Just as we learn to live our lives "One Day at a Time" we also need to work our recovery "One Step at a Time". We say that "working a Fourth Step before working the preceding steps is like trying to paint our house while it is still on fire".

Working the steps of Gamblers Anonymous should not be seen as a one-time project. There are no diplomas or graduation ceremonies for compulsive gamblers who have finished working the steps for the first time. Some people have compared working the steps with the project of painting large bridges where a few years later, by the time they are finished, it is time to start the painting again from the beginning. Indeed it is not uncommon for a newcomer to be told after they complete each step "Congratulations! Now you only have twelve steps to go".

Some members like to formally work the steps again every year or so. Other members use the opportunity to review the steps themselves when they are working the steps with a sponsee. This type of regular "housecleaning" is helpful to ensure that we don't fall back into the same old destructive patterns of dishonesty, selfishness and other character defects that may drive us to ultimately gamble again.

It should also be noted that there is more than one way to work the steps. This guidebook represents only one approach. There is a suggested schedule on pages 61-62, but sponsors can modify this based on their experience. Also, many members like to use some of the Gamblers Anonymous literature to supplement this guidebook or in lieu of it. GA Twelve Step Literature includes:

- *Working the Steps Pamphlet*
- *Step One Recovery Workbook*
- *A Guide to Fourth Step Inventory*
- *GA Writing the Steps*
- *GA "Blue Book" – Sharing Recovery Through Gamblers Anonymous*

The point is that whatever approach is done with honesty, open-mindedness and willingness is likely to be successful. We work the steps to bring about a character change that will free us from our self-destructive, obsessive, compulsive, mental, emotional and behavioral habits.

Permanent recovery from compulsive gambling requires a permanent change in our way of thinking and living. However, by living this program one day at a time, it is really not so difficult. Most remarkably, the amazing side effects of this treatment of recovery are "The Promises" we described on page two.

Step One

We admitted we were powerless over gambling –
that our lives had become unmanageable.

Note that the first word of the first step is “We”. This is not an accident. You are no longer alone with your secret life. GA is a fellowship of people who know exactly what your remorse and emotional distress feel like. Whatever shameful thing you think you might have done, if you stick around GA long enough, chances are you will hear someone who did the same or worse.

Many of our earliest members were “low bottom gamblers” who lost everything. Often they had been incarcerated or had survived suicide attempts. Fortunately today, many of our new members are more likely to be younger and still have quite a bit of their life ahead of them. These “high bottom gamblers” may have entered GA before they lost everything or faced serious legal problems. If you feel that you have lost everything, however, there is still plenty of hope. Many of our “low bottom” members have turned their lives around with surprising speed and have achieved a wonderful “second act” of their lives. For the “high bottom gamblers”, the good news is that you can get off the elevator at any floor. You don’t have to ride all the way down to the basement. However, to come back up, the elevator is broken – you have to take “The Steps”.

Some of us may feel that we realized our powerlessness over gambling a long time ago, but we felt it was hopeless. Others just recently admitted this to ourselves and that is why we started coming to Gambler’s Anonymous. Also there are those who have come to GA at the suggestion of a family member or friend, but are still not convinced that they are completely powerless over gambling. Finally, there are some people attending GA meetings who are simply not certain if they are in fact completely powerless.

Regardless of which group you fall into, we encourage you to spend some time on this step and that you work both of the short worksheets at the end of the chapter. After completing the worksheets and discussing them with your sponsor, if you are not entirely certain that you are powerless over gambling and that your life has become unmanageable, then unfortunately you may need to do some more gambling to convince yourself. If you are in fact a compulsive gambler and truly powerless over gambling, these facts should become apparent pretty quickly after a few more gambling binges. You will then be welcomed back to our fellowship with love and without judgment. For many of us, it took several relapses before we were finally ready to stop. Hopefully, however, this won’t be necessary and you can quickly see how gambling has controlled your life and you won’t have to go further down to find your bottom.

This step really has two separate parts. Let’s look at the first part– “We admitted we were powerless over gambling...” This is difficult for many of us to admit. A common characteristic of the compulsive gambler is an arrogant belief that we are masters of our destiny and in control of our life choices. This is especially laughable for people who so willingly risked thousands of dollars we couldn’t afford on the random turn of a card or the position of a cherry on a slot machine. We may have tried to convince ourselves that because of our superior poker

skills or stock picking acumen, we were in control of our actions. The reality is that we willingly gave over a large portion of our life to events that were primarily determined by chance (and mathematically constructed to ensure our monetary losses). The notion that we have control over these life choices is a sad illusion. In all likelihood, we had been powerless over gambling for a very long time before we finally came to GA.

Knowing that we continued to gamble again and again in spite of the negative consequences should make clear the extent of our powerlessness. If someone has a peanut allergy and understands that eating peanuts can be fatal, they do not keep eating them. The fact that we have a certain amount of self-knowledge about our past behavior and yet we continue to gamble is practically the very definition of powerlessness.

This also tells us something about the nature of this self-knowledge. For many things in our life, self-knowledge is very useful. We may have observed that we had talent in some areas and so chose a career that allowed us to utilize that talent and be successful. We may have discovered that we are near-sighted so we wear corrective lenses. We may have realized that we are one of those people that are hopeless at remembering jokes, so we leave joke telling to others in our group who seem to amazingly be able to repeat every joke they ever heard with flawless timing.

Unfortunately, when it comes to compulsive gambling, self-knowledge is a necessary condition for recovery, but it is not a sufficient condition. By that we mean that understanding the nature of the illness and that we may be powerless over gambling will not help us in the mental blank spots that we will inevitably experience. It is not unusual for new members to come into a GA meeting and listen attentively. After one meeting they admit that they probably are compulsive gamblers and proclaim themselves cured. Now that they understand this, all they have to do is not gamble anymore – just like the guy with the peanut allergy who avoids peanuts. Often, it is not too much later that they come back into the rooms with a dazed expression on their face, not fully understanding what happened after another major gambling loss. The simple fact is that understanding the illness is only a beginning. Permanent recovery requires the action of working the remaining steps.

Another fairly useless and even counterproductive human attribute in dealing with compulsive gambling is “will power”. Will power may have served us well in school, at work or at the gym. However, just trying to exert our will power to not gamble is usually exhausting and unsuccessful. The problem is simply that we have an illness. Trying to use will power to deal with compulsive gambling is normally about as successful as trying to will a tumor not to grow or the tremors of Parkinson’s to stop.

Initially this admission of utter defeat and humiliation may seem like our life is over. However the reality is that this is really only the beginning of the foundation for our wonderful new life. No illness can be treated without an honest diagnosis. While it is common for newcomers to feel depressed about this first phase of recovery, this is temporary. We implore our new members not to quit before the miracle happens.

At this point, it is suggested that you complete the first worksheet (1A) at the end of this chapter and then discuss it with your sponsor.

The second part of this step is “that our lives had become unmanageable”. For some of our members, this is obvious. Lost marriages, jobs and houses may all be abundant evidence of an unmanageable life. However, some people may not have lost any of these things and think that because they still have a job and a family, their life is not really unmanageable. For these people we call those things that they still have the “Yets” – as in “I haven’t lost a job – yet” or “I haven’t lost my marriage – yet”. YET also stands for **You’re Eligible Too** – even if you haven’t lost everything...yet. Also, there are other members that started gambling very young and were never able to acquire many things. We had one member who wryly observed, “I never lost a house due to gambling. I lost the money before I ever bought the house and therefore I cleverly eliminated the middleman”.

What most of our members eventually come to understand is that our life’s manageability is not a function of “how much stuff we still have”. The reality is that the life of a compulsive gambler is typically very stressful. We usually are lying often to cover up how much we gambled and for how long. Even if we have a good income, we usually have financial pressures that are not conducive to peace of mind. We often have trouble sleeping because of our worries caused by gambling while simultaneously plotting to return to gamble more. This is simply not a life that we are “managing”. Rather, the illness of compulsive gambling is managing us and forcing us to make increasingly bad decisions.

At this time we suggest you complete the second worksheet (1B) at the end of this chapter, finish reading this chapter, and then discuss it with your sponsor.

After you have completed the worksheets, ask yourself this one simple question – “Do you admit that you are powerless over gambling and that your life has become unmanageable?” If you can honestly answer “yes” without any reservations, you are ready to move on to Step Two.

If you are still unsure, we encourage you to continue to attend meetings and look for the similarities with other members rather than the differences. Over time, you may begin to realize that you fit into our program more than you originally thought and hopefully you won’t have to do more destructive gambling to become convinced. Keep coming back.

Worksheet 1A

We admitted we were powerless over gambling

List some examples of how you were powerless over gambling. This would include instances where you tried to use will power to stop or control gambling without success. Also, write about any situations where you had decided you would only gamble for a set period of time or with a certain amount of money, but were unable to adhere to that decision.

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, typical of notebook paper. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

Worksheet 1B

- that our lives had become unmanageable

List some examples of the unmanageability of your life as a result of your gambling. This would include instances where you were not able to satisfactorily manage important elements of your life such as personal relationships, jobs, finances, legal issues, health, etc. because of your gambling.

This image shows a full page of blank handwriting practice paper. It features multiple sets of horizontal lines across the entire page. Each set consists of three lines: two solid black outer lines and a dashed blue middle line, providing a guide for letter height and placement. The lines are evenly spaced and extend from the left margin to the right edge of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings present.

Step Two

Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves
could restore us to a normal way of thinking and living.

When we begin talking about a power greater than ourselves, we often encounter great resistance based on preconceived ideas about religions and certain spiritual ideas. At the one extreme we have some people who have strong religious beliefs who don't want to have these beliefs challenged. At the other extreme are committed atheists or agnostics who want nothing at all to do with the word "God". The good news for GA members is that we don't have to engage in these debates. The even better news is that whatever your views on these spiritual issues, if you can relax and remain open-minded, you should have no difficulty with this step. Furthermore, this step is critical to moving forward with the other steps of recovery. It cannot simply be skipped.

At this point, we suggest you complete the first worksheet at the end of this chapter (2A) and then discuss it with your sponsor.

When we completed Step One, we admitted that we were powerless over gambling – that our life had become unmanageable. If we simply stopped there, we would have no hope. For if we are powerless over gambling, how are we to recover? The answer begins with Step Two. Since we are powerless, we need to find a power that is greater than ourselves who can help us. This is the beginning of a new hope. The amazing thing about this power is that it doesn't matter very much exactly how we define it! The only requirement is that it isn't us. One sponsor joked with his sponsee that was struggling with finding a higher power, "Why don't you just pick a name randomly out of the phone book to be your higher power? They could hardly do a worse job at running your life than you did."

Here are just a few of the categories of Higher Powers that people have successfully used in GA:

1) Traditional Theistic Religions

If you are already a member in any sect of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, etc., and you are comfortable in the theology of that faith, you may already be done! This can be especially good if you already have a spiritual practice of prayer and meditation.

2) Alternative Religions/Philosophies

Many of our members struggle with some of the dogma and supernatural components of the traditional theistic religions, but find comfort in many of the traditions, rituals, music etc. They sometimes find that they are more comfortable in Buddhism, Humanism, and the Unitarian Universalist Church, etc. These faiths/philosophies offer considerable flexibility in their beliefs and also may incorporate prayer and meditation into their traditions.

3) The Program of Gamblers Anonymous

It is perfectly OK to use the program (not individual people) of GA as a Higher Power. One member observed that he discovered a distinctive group of compulsive gamblers in the GA program and he therefore decided that for him GOD would stand for **G**amblers **O**f **D**istinction – meaning the program of GA. Often people who begin using GA as their higher power will later have that evolve to a different higher power as their spirituality becomes more refined.

4) An Idealized Personification

Some members have developed a mental image of an ideal father figure, mother figure, grandparent, or a caring friend that they find comforting to use as a higher power.

5) Nature

It is not uncommon for people to feel the presence of a higher power when they are observing the beauty of nature. It is not surprising then that some people use a special tree, a mountain, the ocean, or the universe as their higher power. Some of our Native American members are especially comfortable using nature images or a “Great Spirit”. For other members, GOD simply stands for **G**reat **O**ut**D**oors.

6) Others

One member explained that her higher power was nothing more than the inner voice of her conscience that told her that she should practice kindness, generosity, honesty and humility when she prayed for guidance. We have had members who couldn’t surrender until they had hit their bottom and therefore defined God simply as the “**G**ift **o**f **D**esperation”. Others found for the first time a positive and structured life and so describe their understanding of God as “**G**ood, **O**rderly **D**irection”. We have even had Star Wars fans that just used “The Force”.

The point is that it really doesn’t matter very much what you choose for your higher power. There is no requirement that this higher power is endowed with any supernatural powers or that it compels you to think differently about science or the physical world. Also, it is very normal for this higher power to evolve over time. You need not be stuck with the same higher power for your entire life.

In addition, it is not at all important that you understand how or why this power will work in your life! Truthfully, most of us don’t really understand exactly how electricity works and yet everyday we turn on and off switches for multiple electrical devices that we have become very dependent upon. For many of us, the mystery of these spiritual matters is actually an important part of our journey. One member was fond of saying “any God who is small enough for me to understand, is not big enough to do me any good”.

For those folks who think that this is all just a bunch of nonsense, we ask “So how is your life going without a higher power?” I suspect that since you have found it necessary to come to GA, the answer is probably “not all that well”. For people who have trouble doing this, we suggest that you start by simply “acting as if” you believe or as we say “fake it ‘til you make it”. One of our member’s first

prayer was “Dear God, I don’t believe in you and think that this is a big waste of time, but I promised my sponsor that I would pray anyway. Amen”. That was enough to get him started and today he is a very spiritual person with many years of clean time.

We can now also set aside any prejudice we have about the word “God”. Many of us have preconceived ideas about what this word means. In GA we just use the word “God” interchangeably with “Higher Power”. As we discovered earlier in this chapter, we allow for a very broad understanding of a power greater than ourselves and we choose one that is “a Power of our own understanding”. We came to realize that our prejudice against the word “God” was usually based on other people’s understanding of God and not our own.

One member tells his story of how he came to believe:

I had a lot of prejudice against organized religion. I considered myself an atheist and I thought that I could never believe in any God. However, I was so desperate to stop gambling that I was willing to try anything. I decided to use as my higher power things in my life that I already believed in and which had made me feel spiritual. My mother had this recording of a famous opera singer singing Ave Maria which she played at Christmas time. That song always made my spirits soar and feel that there was something bigger than me. I had a similar feeling witnessing the birth of my first son. At other times in my life I felt this feeling of wonder including one night on my vacation in Yosemite where I was lying on a blanket with my young children in a meadow watching shooting stars.

I decided that I was going to take all of those things that gave me that feeling and just call them “God”. From studying mathematics I knew that if $A=B$ and $B=C$, therefore $A=C$. I realized that if I already believed in these things that gave me this feeling and if I called these things God, therefore I believed in God! I then said aloud the four words, ‘I believe in God’ which I thought I would never be able to say. I suddenly recognized that I had been focusing on all the things that I didn’t believe in and had hardly given any thought to the things that I actually did believe in. This was enough for me to continue working the rest of the steps and now I haven’t gambled in many years.

I still don’t believe in most other people’s understanding of God, and therefore I describe myself as a “God loving atheist”. I like to watch the confusion on some people’s faces when I say this, but it works for me.

At this point, we suggest you complete the second worksheet at the end of this chapter (2B), finish reading this chapter and then discuss it with your sponsor.

Now that we have identified a power greater than ourselves that we can at least use to get started, we also have to develop the faith that this power can restore us to a normal way of thinking and living. The wording of this step here is very critical. It does not simply say “Came to believe **IN** a power greater than ourselves” it says “Came to believe **THAT** a power greater than ourselves could restore us to a normal way of thinking and living”. We have had many members who had strong religious backgrounds and had no problem believing in a higher

power, but they lacked the open-mindedness to believe that this higher power could solve their gambling problem.

So first we need to acknowledge that previously we were not thinking and living “normally”. The truth of the matter is that when it came to gambling, we were actually quite insane. Many people associate insanity with the deranged patient in the asylum banging his head on the wall. Actually one of the definitions of insane is simply “not being of sound mind”. One look back at our 1st Step worksheets should make it pretty clear that we were not of sound mind with respect to our gambling. We were in fact, quite insane.

Newcomers come into GA and see people who are happy, productive and who haven’t gambled in a long time. When someone asks us today if we are interested in purchasing a raffle ticket or buying a square in the office Super Bowl pool, we smile and simply say “No thanks”. Nothing more. We don’t agonize or feel compelled to explain ourselves. We don’t fight gambling urges. The problem has just been removed. We have now simply become like the perfectly sane fellow with the peanut allergy who politely declines the peanut sauce at the Thai restaurant. In other words, we have been restored to a “normal way of thinking and living”.

All that you need now is just a little bit of faith to acknowledge the possibility that like us, your higher power may help restore you to a normal way of thinking and living. If you can have just this small bit of open-mindedness, you are ready to move forward to Step Three.

Worksheet 2B

A Power Greater Than Ourselves

Describe the higher power in your life today that you believe might be able to restore you to a normal way of thinking and living. If you don't have a higher power, write a "job description" for one detailing the qualities you want in a higher power and give it any name. (God, Lord, HP, Father, Mother, Force, Betty, Bob, etc.) The only requirement is that it is a power that is higher than you – i.e., it is not subject to your will. With this imagined higher power, you can get started.

This image shows a full page of blank white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a template for writing or drawing. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Step Three

Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of this Power of our own understanding.

For those of us who just struggled with finding a higher power, the idea that we now need to turn our will and our lives over to this power may seem absurd.

“What does that even mean?” “Do I have to move to Kolkata like Mother Teresa and work with the dying?” “Do I have to go door to door and try to recruit other compulsive gamblers or pass out GA literature at airports?” “Should I let my higher power determine the best driving route on my next car trip?” The whole idea seems ridiculous.

Once again we encourage you just to relax and remain open-minded. One of the easiest ways to begin understanding what your higher power wants you to do is to start by being pretty sure what it doesn't want you to do. It doesn't want you to gamble anymore. It doesn't want you to be unkind, dishonest or selfish. Your higher power wants you to be happy and free. Some of us describe our higher power's will for us is simply to do the “next right thing”. This very mysterious concept really needs to be no more complicated than this.

In order to begin the process of seeking the will of our higher power, we should use the ancient practice of prayer. For those of us who are experienced in prayer, we are well aware of its remarkable benefits. For those who have never tried it or think it is silly, we encourage you to just give it a go. There really is no reason not to. It has been said that the only people who scoff at prayer are those who have never tried it. Numerous studies have confirmed that prayer improves self-control, makes people nicer, improves the capacity for forgiveness, increases trust and reduces stress.

The problem that many of us have with prayer is that to the extent that we tried it at all, we did it wrong. Instead of asking for God's will for us, we were like a greedy child asking Santa for every new toy. How many times did we ask God to help us win a bet? And how many times did we lose and blame God? It should be pretty obvious by now that our higher power has no interest in such mundane matters as our gambling success.

A good way to begin the practice of prayer is with the “Serenity Prayer” that we say at every meeting –

God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference.

* In most theologies, God is referred to with a male pronoun such as “him”. Given GA's wide latitude in identifying a higher power that works for each member, we will use the gender neutral “it”. However, each member should be free to use “him” or “her” if they prefer.

This simple prayer has been adopted by people suffering from many different addictions throughout the world. At its basic level we understand that we need to seek serenity to accept the fact that we are compulsive gamblers and we cannot change that. However, we can change our behavior and work the GA Twelve Steps of Recovery. This will allow us to abstain from gambling and build a new life that is happy and free.

Sometimes there is confusion about where exactly is the line between the things we cannot change and the things we can. Usually that line is our skin. The reality is that we can rarely fundamentally change other people or what they do or say - in other words, things outside of our skin. However, we can change our perspectives and reactions to them – that is to say, things inside of our skin. When we are bothered by something that someone does, we are asking God for the serenity to accept (not necessarily like) that person exactly as they are and the courage to change our perspective and actions towards them. With enough time and persistence, this prayer is almost always granted.

There are numerous prayers existing in many different faiths and philosophies that express a desire to seek and follow the will of a higher power. Many Christians use the Lord's Prayer and in Alcoholics Anonymous, their "3rd Step Prayer" is widely used. In addition, many of our members have written their own prayers such as this:

*Higher Power,
I have tried to control the uncontrollable for too long.
I acknowledge that my life is unmanageable.
I ask for your care and guidance.
Grant me the kindness, generosity, honesty and humility
to face that which keeps me from serving you and others.
Your will, not mine, be done.*

You are encouraged to find a prayer or create your own that a) expresses a willingness to turn your will and your life over to the higher power of your understanding and b) you feel comfortable with.

At this point we recommend that you copy this prayer down on a piece of paper and carry it with you or else put it on your phone. You should begin the practice of finding a quiet place at least three times a day and saying this prayer. Try to commit it to memory. Set an alarm on your phone if possible to remind yourself to do this. After one week of this exercise, discuss it with your sponsor.

Now that we have made a decision to turn our will and our life over to the care of our higher power, we need to pray for the willingness and strength to work the remaining steps. If we ever get stuck working any of the remaining steps and we begin to procrastinate, that is usually just because of fear. If this happens we can just quietly say this prayer and ask for the willingness to continue.

If we believe that we have made a decision to try turning our will and our lives over to our higher power, one of the best ways to put this new way of life to the test is by making a searching and fearless moral and financial inventory.

Step Four

Made a searching and fearless moral
and financial inventory of ourselves.

Steps four through nine are sometimes called the “Housecleaning Steps”. Many newcomers greatly struggle with these steps. They often want to let sleeping dogs lie. They don’t see the point in dredging up the past and rehashing old quarrels. However, learning to look at life honestly and fearlessly is the beginning of our new way of thinking and living. Just as a business can’t survive without a true inventory of its assets and liabilities, neither can we. Also, as in a business, our inventory should be done without judgment. This is not a court determining guilt or innocence. We are simply, usually for the first time, looking at events exactly as they happened.

Before we can begin to make smart and rational decisions about our life, we have to develop the courage to view the world exactly as it is, including the wreckage we created. We can neither conclude that we were entirely blameless in an unfair world nor that we were the worst people to ever inhabit this globe. The reality is that we were somewhere in the middle with most everybody else. This is the beginning of learning to feel that we belong in this world – that we are a worker among workers and a friend among friends. Only after completing these next steps can we begin to feel that we are right sized and truly comfortable in our own skin.

Typically we have been in denial about much of our past behavior and have used gambling as an escape from facing that past. To now begin to honestly face these things and to actually write them down seems impossible. This reaction is really nothing more than Fear. Some people have suggested that the word FEAR stands for Forget Everything And Run. We believe that it can also stand for Face Everything And Recover. The reason that we know that we can now do this when previously we may not have been able to is that now we have a higher power in our life! If at any point we find ourselves procrastinating on this step, we can simply close our eyes and say “God (or whatever name we have given to our higher power), please grant me the willingness and courage to continue with this step.” Usually this prayer is reliably answered fairly quickly. If you find that you are still unable to move forward with this step, it may be necessary for you to go back to Step Three and continue to practice your prayer.

You should probably plan on spending several weeks on this step. Thoroughness is important. If we try to cut corners or avoid the toughest issues, working this step is likely to be a waste of time. The method we found best to work this step is to break it up into small, bite-size pieces. That way nothing seems too difficult. Also, we have found it helpful to work this step concurrent with the 5th step (Admitted to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs) broken down in parts. In other words, after every work sheet we meet with our sponsor and discuss what we wrote. We find this helps making these critical steps not so overwhelming. After you have finished with all of the worksheets, you should retain them in a secure location, as you will be referring to them in future steps.

While there are certainly many different ways to work the Fourth Step, experience suggests that the comprehensive approach suggested here greatly simplifies steps five through eight and allows us to move through those other steps more quickly.

Note: If there is any part of this step that you feel uncomfortable discussing with your sponsor, you may instead discuss that part with another GA member, a trusted friend, a therapist, a spiritual advisor, etc. The point is that you will need to discuss it with another human being as an essential part of your Fifth Step. There are really two major parts to this step, the moral inventory and the financial inventory (Pressure Relief Group Meeting). In some cases, there is significant overlap of the two, but we find it is most effective if we try to work them separately.

Moral Inventory

Resentments

Some members have described resentments as the number one cause of or excuse for our gambling. Far more than most people, we often let even the most minor offenses cause us to seethe with rage. We can carry these petty resentments for weeks or even years. This is a major barrier to our peace of mind. Also it is, of course, a colossal waste of time. Resentments have been compared to “drinking poison and expecting the other person to die”. The other people may be blissfully unaware of or at least unconcerned with our anger as they cheerfully go about their lives. On the other hand we waste many hours reliving their actions in our mind and in many cases plotting our revenge and fantasizing about their reaction. Some members refer to this as “letting these people live rent free in our head”. If someone has done some action to harm us – well, shame on them. On the other hand, if we replay this scene over and over in our mind and feel the hurt again and again every time – well, shame on us. Of course every time we replay this in our mind, their actions become a little worse and whatever role we played that contributed to the situation is diminished a little more. After numerous replays in our mind, their transgression was one of the worst atrocities in the history of the world and we were totally innocent victims.

Frequently we discover that these resentments are based on little more than the fact that we didn’t get our way. More than most people, compulsive gamblers seem to have this notion that we should be able to run the world and other people should simply know what they are supposed to do. We get frustrated that other people have their own opinions and ideas about things. We think, “Why can’t they see how much better our way is and how stupid they are?” These unrealistic expectations inevitably result in our frustrations and resentments.

There is little denying the fact that a life filled with deep resentments can never be a happy one. We waste many hours obsessing over these things that we could have put to positive use helping our fellow human beings. For gambling addicts like us, this is especially dangerous. These resentments stand in the way of our spiritual growth and our relationship with our higher power. Carrying these grudges will often lead us back to gambling and the devastating consequences of our illness.

What we have learned about resentments is that these are often simply a defense mechanism to justify our own bad behavior. We can justify lying to our boss or our spouse about our gambling if we convince ourselves that they were the true villains in our imaginary life and we were just innocent victims that had had a run of bad luck.

Also, we may think that if we start practicing forgiveness, this will somehow allow these people to get away with their actions. This is not true. They still have to live with themselves and their actions. We are not punished for our sins; we are punished by our sins. If they have committed crimes, they still have to deal with the criminal justice system. If their behavior was boorish, they will probably have few friends and live a sad lonely life. On the other hand, we can make a simple choice with our resentments – “We can let go or be dragged”. This is about our peace of mind, not theirs.

At this time you should complete the first Fourth Step worksheet (4A). It is suggested that you try to follow the instructions as closely as possible. After you have completed the worksheet 4A and discussed it with your sponsor, you may move on to the next part of your moral inventory.

Fears

This short word somehow touches about every aspect of our lives. We find that where we thought we had made major life decisions based on rational analysis, on further investigation we discover that often these bad choices were simply based in fear. The good news is that GA offers a practical and time-tested tool for relieving these fears. When we are finished with this portion of the inventory, we no longer will have to be a slave to these fears.

One of the most useful tools in dealing with our fears is the “Three D’s” – Discover, Disclose and Discard. First we have to identify exactly what our fear is. Then we have to tell it to at least one other person. Finally, we can then ask our higher power to remove that fear.

Some of the most common types of fears that we face are the “nameless fears”. These are simply the general anxieties that we often feel in uncomfortable situations. The first thing that we need to do is to name these fears (Discover). What exactly are we afraid of? Are we actually afraid of getting fired from our job or are we just afraid that our boss will find out the truth and that will embarrass us? The first thing we need to do is just uncover the true nature of this fear. At the beginning of this chapter we learned that the letters F-E-A-R can stand for either Forget Everything And Run or Face Everything And Recover. After we complete this exercise we realize that F-E-A-R also often stands for False Evidence Appearing Real.

The second thing we need to do is to disclose the fear. For a major fear, we may only feel comfortable initially sharing this with our sponsor or some other trusted person. However, we often discover that some of these fears are really quite silly. For example, one of our members discovered that he was afraid that people would find out that he was not very handy fixing things and working with tools. He thought that this was something that all men should know how to do and he was afraid that people would discover that he was pretty helpless with these types of projects. If people discovered this he thought that he would be embarrassed and

subject to ridicule. Now after working this step, he freely volunteers this information when the subject of home repairs comes up and he jokes about it. He says things like “You don’t want me anywhere near power tools. What I do best at home repairs is writing checks to contractors”. He has discovered that people’s responses are amazing. Often they offer to help him. Sometimes they admit that they are not very good at this stuff either. Occasionally they share their own weaknesses. Almost always this confession is met with smiles and warmth and this irrational fear has now been completely removed.

Finally, after we have shared this fear with somebody else, we can quietly ask our higher power to remove this fear that stands in the way of our being helpful to others (Discard). This prayer is usually answered pretty quickly. However it is not uncommon for the same fear to return at some future time. When this happens, we just apply the Three D’s again. Over time, we find that eventually many of these fears are permanently removed.

Let us begin this process by working the second worksheet (4B) at the end of this chapter. Once again you should try to follow the instructions as closely as possible. After you have completed the worksheet 4B and discussed it with your sponsor, you may move on to the next part of your moral inventory.

Harms to Others Caused By Our Sex Conduct

This topic invites considerable discomfort among many of our members, but it is essential to our moral inventory. The good news is that this issue doesn’t apply to any honest and consensual relations. We have no concern about our members’ practices or preferences in these matters.

The moral inventory of our sexual behavior is concerned only about the hurtful or dishonest areas of our sex conduct. This is an area that many of us have shameful secrets that we need to address. In many cases our gambling took us to places where we lowered our moral standards. Oftentimes sex was just perceived as another commodity to be bought and sold. Frequently lies were told and people were hurt. In some cases sex and affection were given or withheld and used as weapons in relationships to reward or punish. There is a saying in recovery that “we are only as sick as our secrets”. Often these secrets we carry pertaining to our sex conduct are some of the most painful and shameful. If we don’t address them, we are likely to gamble again as the casino serves as our most comfortable place to escape from shame.

You shouldn’t worry at this point about having to make amends for any of this behavior. That process is something we don’t have to deal with until the Ninth Step. By that time, you will have acquired several new tools so this process won’t seem so overwhelming. It is imperative that you stay in the present and only focus on this Fourth Step and not allow yourself to develop any fears about future steps. This is why we work them one at a time and in order.

At this time you should complete the third worksheet (4C) at the end of this chapter. Once again you should try to follow the instructions as closely as possible. After you have completed the worksheet 4C and discussed it with your sponsor, you may move on to the next part of your moral inventory. Note – this is an area where frequently members prefer to share and work with a member of

their own gender. If your sponsor is a different gender and this makes you uncomfortable, it is perfectly OK to seek out another GA member, trusted friend, therapist, spiritual advisor, etc. to work this part of your inventory. Your sponsor should certainly understand this.

Financial Harms Done to Others

Although we will be getting into the details of our financial inventory in our Pressure Relief Group Meeting, this part of our finances we include in our moral inventory. These are the people or institutions that we have stolen from or lied to for financial gain. This is often a significant part of our gambling life. We covered up our lies with even more lies. Ultimately this house of cards becomes unsustainable and crashes down. Inevitably there comes a point where our broken brain concludes that the only possible solution is to gamble again – desperate for that big win that will solve all of our problems. Until we fearlessly face these financial harms we cannot move forward with our recovery.

As with the prior exercise, it is critical that you stay focused on the Fourth Step and not allow your mind to wander forward to the fear of future steps where you may have to make amends for these harms. At this time you should complete the fourth worksheet (4D) at the end of this chapter. Once again you should try to follow the instructions as closely as possible. After you have completed the worksheet 4D and discussed it with your sponsor, you may move on to the next and final part of your moral inventory.

Miscellaneous Harms Done to Others

When we were gambling we were like a tornado in many people's lives. We were typically so selfish and self centered that we often didn't even notice how we affected other people. There was usually much harm we did to other people that wasn't related to sex or money. How many times did we not come home or call, not caring that our life partner might have thought we could be lying dead on the highway? How many times did we say cruel things to people that we loved to cover up our own pain? How often were we not available to help family, friends and coworkers because we were obsessing over getting money to get back into action? Uncovering and acknowledging these harms is vital to the new reality that we must now inhabit.

At this time you should complete the fifth worksheet (4E) at the end of this chapter. Once again you should try to follow the instructions as closely as possible. After you have completed the worksheet 4E and discussed it with your sponsor, you may move on to the financial inventory.

Financial Inventory (Pressure Relief Meeting)

Our mental obsession over money was a key driver of our illness. As disclosed in our dream world, “When succeeding we gambled to dream still greater dreams; when failing we gambled in reckless desperation as our dream world came crashing down”. We were trapped in this cul-de-sac of defective logic. If we were winning we were on a roll and had to play our rush. If we lost, we felt this insane compulsion that we couldn’t leave until we won back “our money”. We couldn’t face the grim reality that this lost money was no longer ours. Even after many hours of playing when we were close to breaking even, we sometimes felt we had to stay and continue gambling to justify the time we had already spent. Money was at the heart of this mad reasoning.

The only escape from this cycle of twisted logic is a searching and fearless financial inventory. We need to calmly develop a realistic plan to not only repair our financial wreckage, but one that allows us to lead an enjoyable, comfortable life going forward. We have found that the best way to do this financial inventory is by having a Pressure Relief Group Meeting. If your sponsor is not experienced with Pressure Relief Group Meetings, it is recommended that you work with another member who has experience with this process. Ideally, you can include both your sponsor and this other member while doing your Pressure Relief Group Meeting. Also, if you are in a relationship where finances are shared, it is usually recommended to invite your partner to this meeting.

While preparing for your Pressure Relief Group Meeting, it is critical that you are “searching and fearless” as you fill out the paperwork listing your income, expenses, and debts. Attempting to hide or minimize any information is counterproductive to your recovery. The goal is to develop a personal or family budget that allows you to live an enjoyable life while methodically paying off any debts to the best of your ability. Relieving the pressure and the stress of the financial commitments that may have seemed overwhelming removes a major cause for returning to gambling.

When you have completed your Pressure Relief Group Meeting, you may move on to Step Five.

Worksheet 4A

Resentments

To whom am I resentful?	What exactly did they do to cause this resentment?	What in me did it affect?	What part of this situation was my fault or did I make worse?	What were my character defects that I displayed in this situation?

Instructions:

All five columns need to be filled out for this worksheet. We recommend that you either make copies of this page, draw five columns on a piece of paper or use a spreadsheet on your computer to create the columns. It is suggested that you do this worksheet vertically instead of horizontally, i.e., complete all of Column One before you move on to Column Two and complete that column before you start on Column Three, etc.

Column One – For this column, simply list all of the people, groups or organizations for whom you carry resentments. It can be any individual, group of people, organization or institution. It can be as painful to recall as someone who may have committed a violent crime against you or a family member or it can be as petty as a coworker who neglected to copy you on an e-mail. It doesn't matter if this is a resentment over something that happened to you as a child or something that happened yesterday. This doesn't have to be related to your gambling. You may not even know their name, in which case just describe them as "Person who told lies about me to my boss" or "Person who hit my car", etc. If you are unsure whether they should be included in your list, go ahead and include them. Your list might only have three or four names or it could be thirty or forty. There is no right number. The point is that when you are done there is no one else you can think of that makes you feel even a slight flash of anger.

Column Two – After you have finished Column One, go ahead and list next to the name in the second column exactly what they did to cause the resentment. Be brief but be specific. There should be no judgment here, only a description of the precise act that they did.

Column Three – What in you did it actually affect to cause the resentment? Did it cost you money? Did it create fear about your security? Did it affect your sex relations? Did it just hurt your feelings or your pride?

Column Four – Truthfully list anything that you did or didn't do that either contributed to the situation or made it worse after. It may be as obvious as you insulting them before they lashed out at you or simply the fact that you have continued to carry the resentment for a long period of time for no useful purpose.

Column Five – List the character defect you exhibited in Column Four. Were you dishonest, selfish, judgmental, arrogant, short-tempered, envious, greedy, lazy, lustful, etc.?

When you are finished, your worksheet might look something like this example:

To whom am I resentful?	What exactly did they do to cause this resentment?	What in me did it affect?	What part of this situation was my fault or did I make worse?	What were my character defects that I displayed in this situation?
My father.	Left when I was very young and I had no structure or discipline in my home.	My sense of security. My self-esteem. My pride.	I continued to carry this resentment and used it as an excuse for my own gambling.	Lazy Judgmental Selfish (never thought about my mother or brother)
My husband	He always complains about my gambling.	My self-esteem. My pride. My peace of mind.	I gambled. I lied. Never sought help.	Dishonest Selfish
My boss	Didn't give me a raise. Criticizes my job performance.	My financial security. My self-esteem. My pride.	Spent work time gambling online and arranging loans. Lied about why I needed more money.	Dishonest Selfish
My friend Carol.	She wouldn't loan me money. Threatened to tell my husband about my gambling.	My financial security. My self-esteem. My pride.	I gambled. I lied. Never sought help.	Dishonest Selfish

Now we should try to look at our list from a different point of view. Sometimes we discover that we had built up in our mind that some person had committed some horrible transgression. However when we actually look closely at the second column, it was often a fairly mild offense. In some cases we feel a little sheepish when we realize that we got so angry over such a stupid little thing. This is sometimes referred to as “pole vaulting over mouse turds”.

The next thing we often discover from this exercise is in Column Three how often these offenses hurt nothing except our feelings, our pride, our egos and our self-esteem. In many cases they didn’t impact our finances or our health. In other words we were not tangibly worse off except inside our own head. Therefore this hurt was really a matter of choice for us. We could choose to be angry and carry this grudge for no good purpose or we could make a decision to forgive them and move on with enjoying our lives.

Now we look at Column Four. Invariably we now see that our behavior in this matter was not exactly above reproach. Often we see that this person actually reacted quite normally to our actions that led to this resentment. At the very least, we typically realize that we had been carrying this grudge for far too long and for no good reason.

Finally we look at Column Five. Here we face squarely some of our character defects that have been inhibiting our spiritual growth and enjoyment of life. We have to honestly acknowledge that we are imperfect humans and perhaps not fully qualified to judge others too harshly. We will return to this column when we work steps six and seven.

Hopefully we can now begin the process of forgiving some of the people on this list – not for them, but for our own peace of mind. The first thing we need to realize is that most people are in some way emotionally sick themselves. They may well suffer from insecurities and pain caused by their own background and experiences. It is true that “hurt people hurt people”. Chances are we have made no effort to understand their life or what might be behind their behavior. Though we didn’t like their actions, they, like us, were sick also. We therefore must avoid retaliation or arguments. We wouldn’t treat a sick stranger that way.

Prayer is a useful tool here as well. We ask our higher power to help us show them the same tolerance, understanding and patience that we would show a friend who had dementia, schizophrenia, or some other illness. We say to our higher power “This is a sick person. How can I be helpful to them?” “Please grant me the power to forgive them so I can move on with my recovery and my life.”

If we are still struggling with some of these resentments, we should try praying for the people on our list. This can be both extremely difficult and remarkably effective. We pray that these people on our list find the peace of mind and blessings in their life that we want for ourselves. If we do this every day for a couple of weeks, invariably we start to find ourselves becoming free from these enslaving resentments.

After we have completed this exercise, we should discuss it with our sponsor and move on to the next part of the Moral Inventory – Fears.

Worksheet 4B

Fears

Who or what do I fear?	What exactly am I afraid might happen to me?	Is the cause of my fear very likely, somewhat likely or highly unlikely to occur?	What part of this fear was my fault or did I make worse?	What were my character defects that I displayed in this situation?

Instructions:

The format for this worksheet is similar to the previous one. All five columns need to be filled out for this worksheet. We recommend that you either make copies of this page, draw five columns on a piece of paper or use a spreadsheet on your computer to create the columns. It is suggested that you do this worksheet vertically instead of horizontally, i.e., complete all of Column One before you move on to Column Two and complete that column before you start on Column Three, etc.

Column One – For this column, simply list all of the people, places, activities or things for which you carry fears. It can be as major as death or as irrational as

sharks when you never swim in the ocean. It doesn't matter if this is a childhood fear that still plagues you or a fear that you developed recently. The fears don't have to be related to your gambling. If you are unsure whether they should be included in your list, go ahead and include them. To help expose your own fears, you might ask yourself "What do I habitually avoid or delay". Your list might only have three or four fears or it could be thirty or forty. There is no right number. The point is that when you are done there is nothing else you can think of that gives you that sense of dread.

Column Two – After you have finished Column One, go ahead and list next to the name in the second column exactly what it is that you are afraid will happen to you. Be brief but be specific. Do you think that you will die, lose money, suffer physical harm, become embarrassed, be lonely, etc.?

Column Three – How likely is the cause of the fear to occur? Many of our fears are simply very unlikely to occur and are therefore not really rational.

Column Four – Truthfully list anything that you did or didn't do that either contributed to the fear or made it worse after. It may be as obvious as hiding your bad behavior you are afraid will be discovered to hanging on to the fear for far too long.

Column Five – List the character defect you exhibited in Column 4. Were you dishonest, selfish, judgmental, arrogant, short-tempered, envious, greedy, lazy, lustful, etc.?

When you are finished, your worksheet might look something like this example:

Who or what do I fear?	What exactly am I afraid might happen to me?	Is the cause of my fear very likely, somewhat likely or highly unlikely to occur?	What part of this fear was my fault or did I make worse?	What were my character defects that I displayed in this situation?
Dying alone	Everyone will leave me and I will be lonely.	Highly unlikely if I continue to stay clean and work the program.	I gambled. I lied. Never sought help.	Dishonest Selfish
Flying	Plane will crash	High unlikely.	Never sought help for this irrational fear.	Lazy
My wife	She will find out how much I lost and get mad.	Very likely.	I gambled. I lied. Never sought help.	Dishonest Selfish
My boss	He will fire me when he discovers how much I gamble.	Somewhat likely.	I missed work do to gambling and lied about where I was.	Dishonest Selfish
My father	He will find out how much I gambled and be disappointed.	Somewhat likely.	I gambled. I lied. Never sought help.	Dishonest Selfish Immature

One thing we can immediately determine is which of our fears are rational and which are irrational. We can define an irrational fear as one which is either a) statistically highly unlikely to occur or b) has minimal potential consequences even if it comes true. For example while fear of flying is a very common fear, the fact is that driving to the airport is statistically much less safe than flying in a commercial airplane. While it feels real, the facts indicate that it is really not a rational fear. Similarly, a fear of someone discovering our gambling is usually more about shame and ego than serious consequences – such as death of a family member etc. Because the consequences, for example, of simply being embarrassed are not really that serious, this isn't really a rational fear either. We can now look again at our list and quickly see that at least some (if not most) of our fears cannot really be considered rational. These we can immediately start addressing using the tool of Discover, Disclose and Discard. We can first name this fear and say "I am afraid of my wife finding out how much money I lost because she will get mad". Then I may tell my sponsor about this fear. Depending on the situation, it may make sense for you to put off telling your wife until you have completed the financial inventory. In any event, after you eventually come clean with the complete truth about your losses, this fear will be gone and you won't have to carry this burden anymore. She will react however she will react. You have no control over this. This might be a good time to say the Serenity Prayer and focus on how you can respond to her reaction with love, understanding, and humility.

Working with your sponsor, you can continue working through each of the fears (focusing especially on the irrational ones) using the tool of the Three D's. When you have completed this exercise to the best of your ability, you may move on to the next part of the moral inventory – Harms to Others Caused By Our Sex Conduct.

Worksheet 4C

Harms to Others Caused by Our Sex Conduct

Who did I hurt by my sex conduct?	What exactly did I do that caused this harm?	What feelings did I likely cause in the person I harmed?	What were my character defects that I displayed in this situation?

Instructions:

The format for this worksheet is similar to the previous ones. All four columns need to be filled out for this worksheet. We recommend that you either make copies of this page, draw four columns on a piece of paper or use a spreadsheet on your computer to create the columns. It is suggested that you do this worksheet vertically instead of horizontally, i.e., complete all of Column One before you move on to Column Two and complete that column before you start on Column Three, etc.

Column One – For this column, simply list all of the other people you harmed as a result of your sex conduct. If you are unsure whether they should be included in your list, go ahead and include them. Your list might only have one or two people or it could be twenty or thirty. There is no right number. The point is that when you are done there is no one else you can think of that may have been harmed by your sex conduct.

Column Two – After you have finished Column One, go ahead and list next to the name in the second column exactly what it is that you did to cause the harm.

Column Three – While we can never truly know another person's feelings, what do you believe the other person felt? Was it betrayal, anger, jealousy?

Column Four – List the character defect you exhibited in Column Four. Were you lustful, dishonest, selfish, judgmental, arrogant, short-tempered, envious, greedy, lazy, etc.?

When you are finished, your worksheet might look something like this example:

Who did I hurt by my sex conduct?	What exactly did I do that caused this harm?	What feelings did I likely cause in the person I harmed?	What were my character defects that I displayed in this situation?
Mary – college girlfriend	Slept with her roommate.	Betrayal	Dishonest Selfish Lustful
Bill - coworker	Flirted with his wife. Disrespected his marriage.	Anger Jealousy	Selfish Arrogant Lustful
Karen – Bill's wife	Flirted with her. Disrespected her marriage.	Confusion Fear	Selfish Arrogant Lustful
My wife	Ignored her sexual needs because I was gambling.	Betrayal Loneliness Frustration Fear	Dishonest Selfish

As you can see from the examples, the sex conduct doesn't actually have to necessarily even involve a sexual act. The point is "who were we hurting and how were we dishonest through our sexual conduct?"

When you have completed this exercise to the best of your ability, you should then discuss this with your sponsor or another person of your choosing. You should explain clearly exactly what you did. You should neither attempt to minimize it nor build it up to be something more than it was. When you have completed this discussion, there is nothing more at this time that you have to do with this part of the inventory. You may move on to the next part of the moral inventory – Financial Harms Done to Others.

Worksheet 4D

Financial Harms Done to Others

Who did I financially hurt by my conduct?	What exactly did I do that caused this harm?	What feelings did I likely cause in the person I harmed?	What were my character defects that I displayed in this situation?

Instructions:

The format for this worksheet is similar to the previous ones. All four columns need to be filled out for this worksheet. We recommend that you either make copies of this page, draw four columns on a piece of paper or use a spreadsheet on your computer to create the columns. It is suggested that you do this worksheet vertically instead of horizontally, i.e., complete all of Column One before you move on to Column Two and complete that column before you start on Column Three, etc.

Column One – For this column, simply list all of the other people you financially harmed as a result of your conduct. If you are unsure whether they should be included in your list, go ahead and include them. Your list might only have one or two people or it could be twenty or thirty. There is no right number. The point is that when you are done there is no one else you can think of that may have been financially harmed by your conduct.

Column Two – After you have finished Column One, go ahead and list next to the name in the second column exactly what it is that you did to cause the harm.

Column Three – While we can never truly know another person's feelings, what do you believe the other person felt? Was it disappointment, betrayal, anger?

Column Four – List the character defect you exhibited in Column 4. Were you dishonest, selfish, arrogant, greedy, lazy, etc.?

When you are finished, your worksheet might look something like this example:

Who did I financially hurt by my conduct?	What exactly did I do that caused this harm?	What feelings did I likely cause in the person I harmed?	What were my character defects that I displayed in this situation?
Mother	Stole money from her purse	Disappointment Fear	Dishonest Selfish
Brother	Borrowed \$10,000 never paid it back	Disappointment Anger	Dishonest Selfish
Employer	Cheated on expense account	Never caught. Would feel betrayal.	Dishonest Selfish
Husband	Stole from joint account	Disappointment Betrayal	Dishonest Selfish

When you have completed this exercise to the best of your ability, you should then discuss this with your sponsor. You should explain clearly exactly what you did. You should neither attempt to minimize it nor build it up to be something more than it was. When you have completed this discussion, there is nothing more at this time that you have to do with this part of the inventory. You may move on to the next part of the moral inventory – Miscellaneous Harms Done to Others.

Worksheet 4E

Miscellaneous Harms Done to Others

Who did I hurt by my conduct other than sexual or financial?	What exactly did I do that caused this harm?	What feelings did I likely cause in the person I harmed?	What were my character defects that I displayed in this situation?

Instructions:

The format for this worksheet is similar to the previous ones. All four columns need to be filled out for this worksheet. We recommend that you either make copies of this page, draw four columns on a piece of paper or use a spreadsheet on your computer to create the columns. It is suggested that you do this worksheet vertically instead of horizontally, i.e., complete all of Column One before you move on to Column Two and complete that column before you start on Column Three, etc.

Column One – For this column, simply list all of the other people you harmed as a result of your conduct other than sexual or financial. If you are unsure whether they should be included in your list, go ahead and include them. Your list might only have three or four people or it could be thirty or forty. There is no right number. The point is that when you are done there is no one else you can think of that may have been harmed by your conduct.

Column Two – After you have finished Column One, go ahead and list next to the name in the second column exactly what it is that you did to cause the harm.

Column Three – While we can never truly know another person's feelings, what do you believe the other person felt? Was it disappointment, betrayal, anger?

Column Four – List the character defect you exhibited in Column Four. Were you, selfish, arrogant, greedy, lazy, etc.?

When you are finished, your worksheet might look something like this example:

Who did I hurt by my conduct other than sexual or financial?	What exactly did I do that caused this harm?	What feelings did I likely cause in the person I harmed?	What were my character defects that I displayed in this situation?
Mother	Didn't call or visit her.	Disappointment Sadness Loneliness	Selfish Self-centered Lazy
Girlfriend	Stayed out late and didn't call.	Worry Disappointment	Selfish Self-centered
Son	Didn't spend time with him because I was gambling.	Disappointment Sadness Insecurity	Selfish Self-centered Lazy
Employer	Lied about having the flu and other excuses.	Disappointment Betrayal Anger	Dishonest Selfish Lazy Arrogant

When you have completed this exercise to the best of your ability, you should then discuss this with your sponsor. You should explain clearly exactly what you did. You should neither attempt to minimize it nor build it up to be something more than it was. When you have completed this discussion, there is nothing more at this time that you have to do with your moral inventory. You may move on to the financial inventory (Pressure Relief Group Meeting).

Step Five

Admitted to ourselves and to another human
being the exact nature of our wrongs

If we have discussed our moral and financial inventory with our sponsor, we have already come a long way in working Step Five. In addition, chances are at meetings we may have shared some stories about our gambling history that we wouldn't share with other people – often including family and other people that we may love. Nonetheless, “we are only as sick as our secrets” and now we have to make sure that we are holding nothing back.

The practice and proven benefits of admitting one's past behavior to another person is very ancient. It is an integral part of many spiritual practices as well as being the cornerstone of psychoanalysis and counseling. Only when we can fully admit our past behavior can we begin to become completely free from it.

One of the important benefits of Step Five is the relief from that terrible sense of loneliness. Compulsive gamblers are frequently tortured by loneliness. Often we felt that we didn't quite belong. We may have been shy and couldn't form true partnerships or we may have been superficially outgoing but never felt true companionship. These secrets surrounding our gambling and other behavior kept us apart from others. Only when we can fully share our deepest secrets with another person can we begin to truly connect with all of our fellow human beings.

Perhaps when we first came to GA, we felt that for the first time other people really understood us. One member shared at a meeting that even though he promised himself that he wouldn't gamble anymore, he felt like his car was driving him against his will to the casino. Much to his surprise, instead of seeing faces looking at him like he was crazy, he saw smiling faces and nodding heads. Another member then shared, “Yeah – I used to have a car like that too” to much laughter in the room.

GA meetings can certainly help with that feeling of being alone in the social sense. However, many of us still suffer the pangs of anxious apartness. Until we can talk with complete candor to another person, we often felt that we still didn't belong. Step Five is the answer. In all likelihood our sponsor or another member will share stories similar to our own and we will finally realize that we are not so unique after all. Chances are our past behavior is more typical than we think.

Another issue that many compulsive gamblers struggle with is trust. The source of this lack of trust may be rooted in painful childhood experiences or simply the belief that everyone else is as untrustworthy as we were when we were gambling. Regardless, for us to begin to feel like we really belong in the world, we have to begin to trust. Often times we take this gradually. At first we may admit our gambling stories and lies at meetings and eventually feel comfortable enough to share some of our more painful secrets to a sponsor. Other members just “jump head first into the pool” and spill their life story during a single session to the person they decided to trust. However we approach it, we find this process liberating and that we can start trusting people more. This doesn't mean that we have to become naive and let total strangers hold our wallets, but simply that we

can't be so cynical and paranoid to believe that everyone in the world is untrustworthy and out to get us.

At this point it is critical that we look deeply into the vault for those secrets that we swore we would take to the grave. Whether we are holding onto some past situation relative to our sexual behavior, a crime, a lie, or a painful childhood memory, we must decide to become free of its power over us. We must call on our higher power again for the courage to completely trust another human being.

If we have any reservations about sharing this with our sponsor, we can certainly confide in a spiritual advisor, therapist, physician, trusted family member or friend. The point is that we can no longer allow these things to stand between us and our connection to our higher power and to our humanity. We must be ready to stand shoulder to shoulder with the other folks in this world.

Naturally however we should be prudent in choosing our confident. This is not the place to confess our infidelities to a spouse or our crimes to the police. We certainly don't want to cause pain or problems to others so that we can unburden our soul. We simply want to share those painful secrets in our past that are living "rent free in our head" with a trusted person who has no agenda other than to listen and reassure.

If we believe that we have held back admitting any situation in our past which makes us feel uncomfortable or anxious, we need to have a final meeting with our sponsor or other person to share this last secret. After we have fearlessly examined our life and determined that there are truly no other secrets about our life that we haven't discussed with another person, we can take a moment to pause and thank our higher power for the courage to take this important step. Now we are ready to move on to Step Six.

Step Six

Were entirely ready to have these defects of character removed

When many of us first came into GA, we thought that if we could just learn to stop gambling, all of our problems would be solved. Some of us, by now, are finding that the obsession to gamble has been considerably reduced or perhaps even eliminated. There is a tendency to want to rest on our laurels and wonder why we need to do anything else. The answer is that if we want to have the gambling obsession become permanently removed and achieve “The Promises” in our lives, we need to do more.

By now it should also have become obvious that the flaws associated with our gambling behavior were not our only character defects. In our 4th Step moral and financial inventory, we have undoubtedly identified several of these other defects. Now we have to begin the work of ridding ourselves of these corrosive flaws.

A literal reading of this step might lead us to believe that this is an impossible task. Most people at least occasionally enjoy some of their defects and are reluctant to have them all permanently removed. Furthermore as with most things in life, if we try to accomplish everything at once, we usually accomplish nothing. This is where we need to remind ourselves that Step 1 is the only step that we must do perfectly. The rest of the steps are aspirational and 1) we simply try to do them to the best of our ability and 2) we challenge ourselves towards daily improvement. A phrase you will often hear with Step 6 is about “progress, not perfection”.

A practical solution to working this seemingly impossible step is to begin by focusing on our most painful and troubling defects. Typically there are several of our defects that we immediately recognize as causing significant problems in our lives. These most problematic character defects we should now become ready to have removed – while fully understanding that realistically they will never be fully and permanently removed.

However, there may also be some character defects that we must admit that we actually enjoy and are not honestly entirely ready to have removed. Perhaps we are prone to anger and feel that it makes us feel strong and powerful. We see that frequently people may recoil from this and we can often bully them into letting us get our way. We may not be so anxious to let go of this power that we feel we have. Chances are that we may have also become skilled at making other people feel guilty and getting them to accept some responsibility for our behavior.

In addition, certain common human tendencies such as gluttony, lust and laziness in moderation may be normal and not especially problematic. However, taken to extremes where they result in serious negative consequences, we may now truthfully identify these as serious character defects and wish to have them removed also.

Finally, often we rationalized some of character defects as not being that bad or even having good motives. For example, we may tell ourselves that the motive behind our dishonesty was not wishing to hurt other people. “What they don’t

know can't hurt them", we cynically declared. The reality is that with our new way of thinking and living, we can no longer behave with this lack of integrity. It has been said that the true sign of character is how we behave when we think no one is watching. If we honestly want to grow our self-esteem, we must begin by doing estimable acts.

Even if there are some character defects that we are not entirely ready to have removed immediately, we must not state that we can never let go of them. Instead, we should focus now on the most pressing flaws that are causing us the greatest harm. For compulsive gamblers, these are often things like dishonesty, pride, arrogance, selfishness, self-centeredness and anger. These insidious characteristics stand in the way of our being of service to others. Also we generally find them to be inconsistent with the will of our higher power.

It is important to note that we shouldn't view Step Six as similar to our New Year's resolutions. This is not the time to decide we are going to quit smoking, lose twenty pounds, quit eating candy, and go to the gym four times a week. If we do this, we are likely to have the same results as we typically do with our annual resolutions. These may all be worthy goals, but many members find that they are not ready to work on eliminating all of these less pressing character defects until they have been in the program longer.

As we stated, the guiding principle for Step Six is "progress, not perfection". None of us will ever be perfect, but that fact cannot deter us from striving to continuously improve our character. Like the child first learning to ride a bicycle, if we do not keep moving forward, we are likely to fall. The key words "entirely ready" indicate that we want to aim at the very best we can achieve. In this sense, Step Six is really just a beginning of a lifetime job. The urgency is that we must now make an honest beginning and keep trying.

At this time we should complete the Sixth Step Worksheet (6A). When we have completed this worksheet and discussed it with our sponsor, we are ready to move on to Step Seven.

Worksheet 6A

Character Defects

Character Defect	Especially troubling and I greatly want to have this defect removed as soon as possible.	Not causing major problems in my life now, but I would eventually like to have it removed.	Truthfully I enjoy this defect and I'm not now ready to have it removed.

Instructions:

We recommend that you make copies of this page, draw four columns on a piece of paper or use a spreadsheet on your computer to create the columns. This worksheet is very straightforward. You simply list all of your character defects in the left hand column and then check which of the three categories it most closely falls into. Note – it is important that there are no character defects that you state emphatically that you will never give up under any circumstances.

When it is finished it might look something like this:

Character Defect	Especially troubling and I greatly want to have this defect removed as soon as possible.	Not causing major problems in my life now, but I would eventually like to have it removed.	Truthfully I enjoy this defect and I'm not now ready to have it removed.
Selfish/ Self Centered	✓		
Ego/Arrogant	✓		
Dishonesty	✓		
Angry/Resentful		✓	
Envious		✓	
Smoke Cigarettes		✓	
Lazy			✓
Gossipy			✓
Unhealthy diet		✓	

Step Seven

Humbly asked God (of our understanding) to remove our shortcomings

The essential principle of Step Seven is humility. We are not simply asking God (of our understanding) to remove our shortcomings, but we are doing so humbly. We are now completely willing to fully trust our higher power to remove these barricades that prevent us from seeking and doing God's will.

Humility is an especially important quality for the compulsive gambler to achieve. Far more than most people, the compulsive gambler typically has a massive ego and a truly bizarre assurance of their own infallibility. Indeed, is there any greater act of arrogance than believing that we were smarter and more powerful than mathematical laws of probability? No doubt we could also defy laws of gravity and human aging if we put our mind to it.

Of course each one of the steps has a strong element of humility. In Step One we admitted that we were powerless over gambling. As we made solemn promises to ourselves and our family that we would stay away from casinos and gambling websites, again and again we went back. How humbling to admit that we were even less powerful than our urge to gamble.

In the second step we came to believe in a power greater than ourselves and in the Third Step we made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to this power. Gambling itself has humbled us to the point where we were finally willing to admit that trying to run our lives ourselves wasn't really going that well. Thus we became willing to let some other power run it – even if perhaps we didn't fully understand what that power was.

In our searching and fearless moral and financial inventory we made some often-painful discoveries about exactly what kind of a life we had been living. We perhaps realized that many of our life decisions were dictated by foolish resentments and fears. Also, we may have discovered that our selfishness, dishonesty and other character defects were more numerous and even worse than we had suspected. These, too, were humbling admissions. To then share these discoveries with another person was also very uncomfortable – even to share them with a kind and understanding sponsor.

Finally in our Sixth Step we looked closely at all of our character defects. We bravely categorized them by how problematic they were and how willing we were to have them removed. By working the prior steps, we should now have sufficient experience with gaining humility that we will be able to honestly ask God of our understanding to remove our most problematic shortcomings.

For the purpose of working Steps Six and Seven, GA essentially uses the terms "character defects" and "shortcomings" interchangeably. Therefore in order to work this step, we need only look back at our Sixth Step worksheet. To begin working this step, we should identify the top one, two or at most three defects that we strongly desire to have removed. Generally speaking, the more defects that we try work on at once, the less the likelihood for success. The good news is that with our new way of thinking and living, we really have our entire future

lifetime to work on all of our shortcomings. However, we must not use this as an excuse for procrastination. We must begin immediately.

As we did with the Third Step, we should again initiate a regimen of daily prayer. In this case, we may want to begin with the Serenity Prayer, the prayer we used in the third step, or some other prayer we like that provides us with comfort and helps to quiet our mind. Then we add this simple request at the end “God, please remove from me _____ so I can better do your will”. Fill in the blank with the shortcoming(s) (no more than three) you have identified that are causing the greatest problems or pain. You should make an effort to do this at least three times daily for two weeks. If possible set a reminder on your phone. In addition, you should begin to say this prayer immediately whenever you catch yourself starting to practice the shortcoming(s) that you are asking to have removed.

The results of this exercise are likely to be very gradual. In some cases, we find that the shortcoming is practically gone only to have it return months later seemingly out of nowhere. When this happens, we should just relax and quietly ask God to remove this once again. For some of our more stubborn character defects, it may take several years before we notice that we are completely free of their power over us. Working this step now is simply a beginning of this process. As we discovered working the prior steps, Step One is the only step we have to do perfectly. As with all of the other steps, it is important to remember that this is a program of “progress, not perfection”.

When we have finished making a good faith effort to remove these most troubling shortcoming(s), we may move on to Step Eight. We do this, however, with the understanding that we will be visiting this step again at some future time to work on our other shortcomings.

Step Eight

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

While Steps Eight and Nine are closely related, it is important that we work them each separately. Although it may be difficult, while working Step Eight we should try to avoid thinking ahead to the actual making of the amends that takes place in Step Nine. If we start having imaginary conversations in our head with the people on our list, we often become so full of fear that we become unable to focus on working this step. It should also be noted that this step is just about becoming willing to make amends. The reality is that some of these people on our list we may not actually ever have to contact! That issue will be further explored in Step Nine.

The first part of Step Eight should be pretty straightforward. We listed all of the people we had harmed because of our sex conduct, financial dishonesty and other thoughtless behavior in the Fourth Step when we completed worksheets 4C, 4D and 4E.

The second part of the step – became willing to make amends to them all, is usually the more difficult. In the first place, what exactly do we mean by the phrase “make amends”? Is this just hurriedly mumbling “I’m sorry”? Actually it is usually more than this. This really means that we are now willing to make restitution to someone for the harm we have caused. The amends is about making things right and changing our behavior so we don’t repeat the harms. In the case of a financial harm, this typically means we have to pay back the money we owe. However, with other harms this may not be so straightforward. The reality is that the exact nature of the amends usually has to be determined on a case-by-case basis and that process we will explore more fully in Step Nine.

This step is how we begin this new life of focusing on “keeping our side of the street clean”. We no longer concern ourselves with our neighbors across the street that don’t always mow their lawns or rake their leaves. Whatever harms (real or imagined) we think might have been done to us are irrelevant to working Steps Eight and Nine. A common obstacle, therefore, of our completing Step Eight is “Forgiveness”. When we think about a broken relationship with another person, often our emotions go on the defensive. To avoid admitting the harms we have done to others, we instead often focus on the wrongs that they have done to us. Indeed, sometimes the other person has behaved quite badly and we believe that fully justifies anything we might have done to retaliate.

However, this line of thinking is not compatible with our new way of looking at the world. We now have a simple choice to make – would we rather be right or be happy? This step is not about judging other people’s behavior. It is about achieving our own peace of mind. We have resigned from our position as supreme ruler of the universe and have made a decision to let our Higher Power run things including being the arbiter of other people’s behavior.

Other people are certainly going to do things that we disapprove of – including hurting us. Sometimes these harms to us are intentional and sometimes they are not. As we discovered in our Fourth Step resentments worksheet (4A), sometimes these harms to us are severe, but more often than not they are pretty trivial. Before we can become willing to make amends for our behavior, we must first learn how to forgive others for their behavior. We must remember that in many cases we are dealing with people who have also suffered in life and that often we made that suffering worse. We must treat these people the way we would treat a sick friend. Often before we can move forward we must apply the valuable tool we used in our Fourth Step inventory – praying for those for whom we carry resentments.

If we should also try to take comfort in the mistaken belief that we were the only person that we hurt with our behavior, we should again review our Fourth Step worksheets. Typically with our gambling behavior we were cyclones in the lives of others – creating havoc and destruction with whomever we met. Because we were so selfish and self-centered around our gambling obsession, we rarely noticed the wreckage we caused in the lives of others. As much as we tried to delude ourselves that we were just trying to win money to help our families and friends, the reality is that we were just feeding our own selfish addiction.

More than likely the truth was that we often dreaded having to spend time with our family and friends and we were secretly plotting how to get away so we could return to action. We can also no longer delude ourselves with the notion that no one noticed this behavior. In addition to the financial harms we did, these are the types of thoughtless acts we engaged in on a pretty regular basis. We must now become willing to make amends for these harms as well.

At this point we should again review our worksheets 4C, 4D and 4E. Then we should add any other people to this list that we have either forgotten or, after further consideration, we now realize should be added. Finally, with each name on each worksheet, we must be honestly willing to make amends. If there are any people on these worksheets to whom we are still not willing to make amends, we should pray for the willingness and discuss with our sponsor.

Once we have expressed willingness to make amends to all of these people, we are ready to move on to Step Nine.

Step Nine

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

Step Nine is absolutely essential to our long-term peace of mind and our achievement of “The Promises” described on page two. However, we realize that we are now going to actually have to “test-drive” this life in the real world with non-compulsive gamblers. Up to this point our step work has been confined primarily to ourselves, our sponsor, other members in meetings, and our higher power. Now we need to have that next level of faith to trust the process on people outside of the program. More often than not, we immediately confront our old foe – Fear. As we conduct imaginary conversations in our head with the people on our Eighth Step list, we become paralyzed with the shame, embarrassment and anxiety about their reactions and the potential consequences of these admissions. Fortunately we now have a higher power in our lives and the tool of praying for the willingness to proceed with this vital step. The best place to begin is to decide which, if any, of the amends might cause injury to people other than us. This is not a proverbial “get out of jail free card” to justify not making the most painful amends by convincing ourselves that the other person would be harmed. Rather this is an honest assessment to determine if there are any people who would suffer needlessly while we bared our soul and relieved our guilt. Examples of the exception to the amends might be admissions of sexual infidelity that are heretofore unknown or amends that could cause legal problems for any third parties that might have been involved in our crimes. The majority of the amends will not fall into this category and if there are any questions as to whether amends should be made, it can be helpful to discuss this with our sponsor.

There are no prewritten scripts for how the amends should be made. In the case of financial amends to an institution, a letter acknowledging the debt and a check for either all or part of the amount may be sufficient. In the case of a financial amend to a friend or family member, face-to-face amends are generally better if possible. It shows genuine courage and an honest conviction to change when you look someone in the eye and say something like “I am a compulsive gambler and I am trying to change my life. I lied to you about why I needed to borrow that money and for that I am very sorry. The truth is I lost it gambling. I intend to pay you back the complete amount as soon as I can, but for now I want to give you this check as an initial payment. I also know that beyond the money, I abused your trust and took advantage of your friendship and your kindness. I deeply regret this and I only want to make this right. Is there anything you would like to say?”

When making a financial amend, whether it is an institution or an individual, the amounts of the initial payment and future commitments should have been determined in the Pressure Relief Group Meeting. Also, this is not the time or place for negotiation. If more money is requested, firmly say something like “based on my current household budget, this is all that I can now afford. As my situation improves, I hope to be able to increase this at some time in the future. Unfortunately I can’t now commit to anything more than this”.

For other harms such as dishonesty around our sexual behavior or broken commitments, we need to be just as straightforward. In some cases, the only thing we can do is to admit exactly what we did and express sincere regret. One of the most powerful and effective types of amends is what is known as a “living amends”. In this case, after we admit our behavior and express our regret, we make sure that we change our behavior and begin practicing honesty and kindness with the people on our list. Our commitments to the living amends are likely to initially be met with skepticism. In all likelihood, we have made similar commitments to change in the past and have fallen short. In some cases, it may take a very long time before we can earn back trust. We need to accept this. It may have taken many years to cause all of this wreckage. We can’t expect it to all be repaired in a few weeks.

It is not uncommon for compulsive gamblers to have committed criminal acts. In many cases they were petty, but in some cases they may have been substantial. It is important for us to make amends for this behavior, but we should be prudent in our approach. It may not be the best outcome for us to serve a long prison sentence and be unable to earn income to take care of our family or make the financial amends to others. In these cases, we would recommend consulting an attorney. However, we should make it clear to them the absolute necessity for our making amends. We are not trying to get away with anything.

There are often situations where it is not possible to make direct amends, Perhaps the person has died or we can no longer find where they now live. We shouldn’t feel that this absolves us of our responsibility. In these cases, we recommend things like writing a letter and reading at their gravesite. We make the financial amends to their next of kin or make an appropriate (equal to the debt) contribution in their name to a charity you think they would like.

In all cases, we must not concern ourselves very much with their reaction to our amends. Some people believe that the amends is the time to ask the person for forgiveness. The problem with this is that this puts the burden back on the aggrieved person. This process is simply about the gambler making the amends and accepting responsibility for their past action. The reaction of the person receiving the amends is really not important. They may still be angry. They may be happy that we are trying to turn our lives around. It is not unusual that they were entirely unaware of the transgression or never thought it was a big deal. Regardless, there should be no additional burden put on them to forgive or not. That is entirely up to them.

Regardless of their reaction, we must never be defensive or argumentative. We should sit quietly and let them say whatever it is they feel that they need to say. Even if they unfairly accuse us of things we don’t believe to be true, we need to understand that this is their perception of the situation and that is all that matters. When they are finished, we ask them if there is anything else that they wish to say. If they say “no”, we thank them for giving us this time. If we had previously been avoiding them, we assure them that from now on we will be available if they wish to discuss this any further at some future time.

It is not uncommon for compulsive gamblers to procrastinate this step – but we do so at our peril. The best way to start doing something is to start doing it. Some members start their Ninth Step by choosing as their first amend someone such

as a loving parent or sibling that they are pretty confident will be pleased with this initiative. This sometimes can provide the experience and confidence for the other amends on the list. Sometimes it may make sense to delay a particular amend. If, for example, we are planning to travel near someone on the list in a few months that will allow a face-face meeting, it might be better to wait. However, it is generally advisable to just get this step completed as soon as possible.

When we have made all of the amends on our list except a) those we have determined would cause injury to others or b) we have decided to delay for a good reason, we should make some time for quiet reflection. Chances are some of these amends were quite emotional. We are undoubtedly now experiencing a lightening of the load we were carrying. We thank our higher power for the willingness we have been given to come this far.

At this point we revisit the “The Promises” that were described on page two:

If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half way through. We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace. No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows. Self-seeking will slip away. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change. Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us. We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us. We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Are these extravagant promises? We think not. They are being fulfilled among us—sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. They will always materialize if we work for them³

In all likelihood, by now we are starting to experience at least some of these Promises that seemed so unimaginable a few months prior. Also and most importantly, we may start to notice that the compulsion to gamble is beginning to be relieved.

We are now ready to move on to Step Ten.

³ The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous – pages 83-84.

Step Ten

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

Steps Ten through Twelve are sometimes called the “maintenance steps”. In Steps One through Three we “gave up”, in Steps Four through Nine we “cleaned up”, and in Steps Ten through Twelve we “keep up” the work. By this we mean that these steps represent a design for daily living that assures we maintain a life permanently free from gambling. Step Ten is now making sure that the house we cleaned stays clean every day. Step Ten is really nothing more than working abbreviated versions of Steps Four through Nine on a daily basis.

Some people have the mistaken belief that there can’t be growth in our “maintenance steps” of ten through twelve. This is absolutely untrue. Many old timers with many years of clean time speak of the wonderful spiritual growth they have achieved by practicing these steps on a daily basis over a sustained period of time. The reason they keep coming back is that their lives keep improving as a result of these steps. A helpful way to think of this apparent paradox of growth through the maintenance steps is the metaphor of riding a bicycle. In order to maintain our balance, we have to keep moving forward.

There are two fundamental ways to work Step Ten. The first is the daily inventory and this is recommended for members who are working the steps for the first time. This is typically done in the evening. We sit down with a pen and paper (or computer) and review our day. Did any old resentments resurface or have we acquired any new resentments? If we have any resentments, we run them through the “Fourth Step machine” by quickly drawing the five columns of Worksheet 4A and putting down 1) To whom are we resentful?, 2) What exactly did they do?, 3) What in us did it affect?, 4) What was our part in the situation?, and 5) What was the character defect behind our behavior?.

We can no longer blame others for our behavior. We have learned that every time we are disturbed about something, no matter what the cause, there is something wrong with us. But what about justifiable anger? If someone hurts us, aren’t we entitled to be angry? We think not. Justifiable anger is the dubious luxury of normal people. For compulsive gamblers it can be devastating and used as the basis to rationalize all sorts of self-destructive behavior including gambling. The reality is that anger usually just makes people stupid and makes them do stupid things. Prisons are full of folks who acted out of anger. Many politicians know that if they can make the electorate angry, they will vote unwisely without studying the issues very closely. If we can learn to control our temper and pause when agitated or doubtful, we can start to make smarter and better choices – including not gambling today. We learn to use restraint before speaking, texting, etc. Instead, we just say a short prayer for these people or institutions that have harmed us.

Next we look at our fears. Did any of our old fears reappear or have we acquired any new ones? If so, we may use our new tool of Discover, Disclose and Discard we learned in Step Four. If one of these fears is especially troubling, it may require a call to our sponsor to disclose this.

Now we can look quickly at our character defects and humbly ask our higher power to have the most destructive ones removed.

Finally we look at our harms to others caused this day by dishonesty and thoughtlessness in our sexual conduct, financial conduct or general behavior. Where were we wrong – regardless of the other person's actions? If possible and appropriate, we should contact the person immediately, acknowledging what we did and extending an apology. Again, it is essential that we don't mention anything the other person did or use non-apology, weasel language such as "I'm sorry if you were offended". We should not be sorry for how they reacted. We are sorry for what we did. Often if we are unsure of the wording, it may be wise to wait until the next day and review with our sponsor before making contact.

We should never fall back on the excuse that we are too busy to do this. Truthfully, with a little experience, this entire nightly inventory shouldn't typically take more than about ten minutes. Certainly our recovery from the horrific illness of compulsive gambling and obtaining a life that is happy and free is worth ten minutes a day.

After gaining experience with the daily inventory and familiarity with their most common reoccurring issues, many of our members begin to practice the second type of regular inventory. This is known as the "Spot-check inventory". In this case, instead of a formal daily inventory, members simply have achieved a heightened awareness of their resentments, fears, character defects and harms to others. Throughout the day when we catch ourselves acquiring resentments, feeling fearful, practicing one of our character defects, or causing harm to others, we stop and pause. We say a prayer and ask to have this resentment, fear or shortcoming removed. If we have harmed someone else, we admit it promptly and express sincere regret (except when to do so would injure them or others).

Unlike the proceeding steps, we really never finish doing the maintenance steps (Ten through Twelve) before moving on. After a couple of weeks or so of completing either our daily or spot check inventories, we may begin working on Step Eleven. However, we should continue working our Tenth Step on a daily basis.

Step Eleven

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

Many compulsive gamblers feel that there is something quite significant that is missing in their lives when they quit gambling. For many of us gambling had been a focal point in our lives since adolescence or earlier. In some cases it seems like there is now an unfilled void in our very soul. Remarkably, this is precisely a “God-size hole”. When we improve our conscious contact with our higher power, we usually begin to feel that this void is filled.

For those who are less familiar with the practice of prayer and meditation, we assure you that this is much less challenging and mysterious than it may first seem. Some people have described prayer as simply “talking to God” and meditation as “listening for the answer”.

Let’s discuss prayer first. We should have gained some experience with prayer while working the Third Step and the Seventh Step. By now we have hopefully used the Serenity Prayer, our chosen prayer from the Third Step, and we have humbly prayed to have some of our shortcomings removed. We may also have asked to have some fears removed and perhaps we have prayed for willingness to work an especially difficult step. In addition, many of us have learned to simply start each day when we awaken by saying “Good morning God. Please give me this day without placing a bet”. Then at night upon retiring we simply say “Good night God. Thank you for another day without gambling”. One thing that these prayers all have in common is that by now we are confident that these things we are praying for are assuredly consistent with God’s will for us. We are not asking for material things for ourselves, but rather the ability to be of service to others and to practice kindness, generosity, honesty and humility. Certainly we are incapable of practicing these spiritual principles if we are still trapped in the bondage of our gambling addiction.

With respect to prayer, Step Eleven could hardly be clearer in directing us. “Praying only for knowledge of God’s will for us and the power to carry that out”. In other words, we no longer pray for what we think we might want. We don’t pray for a new job, a new partner, a child, or even our own health. We only ask to better know God’s will for us and then the power to carry that out in every challenging situation we face. This greatly simplifies this seemingly mysterious and ancient practice. In addition, members are encouraged to incorporate any other prayers from their faith or spiritual practice into working this step.

*When GA was founded in 1957, there was little awareness of or sensitivity to the importance of gender-neutral language. When working this step with their sponsor, members should feel free to modify the wording of Step Eleven to be gender-neutral.

There are many ways to meditate and we don't claim to have the monopoly on this ancient practice. Many faiths and philosophies offer much direction in this area and we certainly encourage our members to seek out the methods that are most comfortable for them. The Internet and smart phone apps provide a myriad of wonderful and proven approaches to the practice of meditation. Many people find that guided meditations are the most beneficial for them.

One approach that has been used is to base the meditation on a famous prayer that is often somewhat mistakenly called "The Prayer of St. Francis". In actuality, the author of this prayer is unknown, but it was in fact written almost 700 years after St. Francis of Assisi died. We modify it here slightly for our use and simply label it as our Gamblers Anonymous "Eleventh Step Prayer":

**God, make me a channel of your peace.
That where there is hatred,
I may bring love.
That where there is wrong,
I may bring the spirit of forgiveness.
That where there is discord,
I may bring harmony.
That where there is error,
I may bring truth.
That where there is doubt,
I may bring faith.
That where there is despair,
I may bring hope.
That where there are shadows,
I may bring light.
That where there is sadness,
I may bring joy.
God, grant that I may seek to comfort,
rather than to be comforted.
To understand, rather
than to be understood.
To love, rather
than to be loved.
For it is by self-forgetting that one finds.
It is by forgiving that one is forgiven.**

We now reread this prayer slowly focusing on every word and phrase. We now think about the true meaning of this wonderful prayer and how it can apply in our lives. Is this not truly God's will for us? If we can strive to follow these directions in all of our relationships in all situations, won't we be truly in synch with our higher power?

This is what we mean when we talk about God's economy. We see now that the God of our understanding simply doesn't care about so many of the issues that we obsess about. God doesn't care about our income, our job title, our social status, our credit score or the kind of car we drive. God is only concerned with our behavior towards others. The reason that we find this prayer so useful is that it captures the meaning of human perfection so elegantly. If indeed we could practice these prescriptions 100% of the time in all situations, we could claim to be the first perfect humans to inhabit the planet. Once again however, we must settle for "progress, not perfection". We see this prayer as the ideal that we strive for. We now have a measure to empirically gauge our performance with respect to seeking and doing God's will.

We can now also use this prayer as a basis for meditation. For this, we find it helpful to break it down into small parts. We focus on one idea such as "God grant that I seek to understand rather than be understood". We close our eyes and steady our breathing. Many members like to picture themselves in a "happy place" such as a beach, meadow, or mountaintop. We repeat these words slowly - "God grant that I seek to understand rather than be understood". We let our mind wander. We think of times that we tried to force our will on other people and to make them understand us. Now we try to imagine ourselves trying to understand their point of view and to see the world from their perspective. What was their life like growing up? What experiences formulated their views? We keep repeating - "God grant that I seek to understand rather than be understood".

As with most things, prayer and meditation improve with practice. Making these a priority in our busy lives is essential for our continued recovery. Setting aside 10-15 minutes daily invariably yields enormous returns. Some members like to set a daily reminder on their phone. Our clarity of thinking and productivity are significantly enhanced. Just as people who make time for regular physical exercise extol the benefits in productivity, so too do people who make prayer and meditation a priority in their daily lives. In both cases it is not a zero sum game. People who exercise and pray generally have more time available for other tasks – not less. It is also advisable to discuss your experiences with the challenges and benefits of prayer and meditation with your sponsor.

After adhering to a daily regimen of prayer and meditation in whatever method works best for the member for at least a week, we may move on to Step Twelve. However we should certainly continue with this spiritual practice. It is suggested that this become a daily practice for life. This spiritual practice will likely grow, change and deepen, creating a foundation for greater resilience in meeting life's challenges.

Step Twelve

Having made an effort to practice these principles in all our affairs, we tried to carry this message to other compulsive gamblers.

The essential element of working Step Twelve is “Action”. This step is not about sitting quietly and contemplating the world and our place in it. Here we are moving beyond simply creating lists and attempting to derive insights from them. Step Twelve is a commitment to life-changing behavior.

Often Step Twelve is associated only with carrying the message to other compulsive gamblers. This is unquestionably a fundamental component of our recovery and we will have much to say about this later in this chapter. However, the more difficult part of this step is “made an effort to practice these principles in all our affairs”. This part of the step is worthy of significant discussion as well.

In prior steps we have explored spiritual principles such as kindness, generosity, honesty and humility. In our Eleventh Step Prayer we identified an ideal for human behavior that we could strive for – while fully understanding that we would regularly fall short of this ideal. Now in Step Twelve it is imperative that we make an effort to practice these principles in all of our affairs. Hypocrisy is one of the dubious luxuries of normal gamblers. We cannot be like so many of those folks that go to church on Sunday to rationalize their sinning during the rest of the week. Because of the nature of our progressive illness, we absolutely must strive to walk the walk as well as talk the talk. If we don’t change our behavior, we will likely gamble again. While we may have more bets to place in our lives, we may not have another recovery in us and the consequences of our next gambling spree could be catastrophic.

Like many of the revelations in the steps, this is not as difficult as it first appears. A simple place to start with this new behavior is with our family and friends. When we read the Eleventh Step prayer, we can ask ourselves the simple question “How can I be more helpful to the people in my life today?” Then we need to take action. This means visiting or calling people who might be lonely and asking them to tell you about how things are going with them and spending time just listening. This means offering to help people move, or cook, or clean or drive or whatever our skills or talents allow.

Often the workplace can be a very toxic environment for compulsive gamblers. The egos and stress of overwork can certainly bring out the worst in people. We have learned in GA though that “when things go wrong, we don’t have to go with them”. We can become the calm instead of the storm. When it seems that there is chaos everywhere, we just smile and say the simple words “How can I help?” The reaction is often amazing. Sometimes we inspire others to focus on the problem at hand and jointly find a solution. Regardless of the reaction of others, however, we always find improvement in our own peace of mind as we are secure in the knowledge that we did the best we could to help the situation and the outcome is now in God’s hands.

This also means that in the workplace we must conduct ourselves with the highest ethics possible. We can no longer steal time or cheat on our expense reports. We can no longer have secret, dishonest relationships with co-workers. We can no longer participate in cruel gossip about people who we really have made no sincere effort to get to know or to try to better understand their lives.

Finally we are now useful citizens of the world. We can no longer duck our heads when there is a call for volunteers to help at our kid's school, our place of worship, our local non-profit, or at our GA meeting. With all of the time we spent gambling now available, there can really be no excuse for not being as useful as we can be.

Carrying the message to the compulsive gambler is in many ways the real heart of our success – both individually and as a fellowship. The wonderful paradox of our recovery is that “we can't keep it unless we give it away”. GA is full of “old-timers” that haven't gambled in many years. What many of them have in common is a high level of service to the fellowship. These are the folks that reach out and welcome the newcomers, that serve as secretaries in our meetings and serve on our boards. These old-timers often have sponsored numerous members. Some of their sponsees have stayed clean and have made amazing, wonderful changes in their lives as they have become free from the bondage of gambling. Many of the sponsees, however, have gone back to gambling and have ended up living sad and tragic lives. Regardless however, the old-timer somehow manages to go year after year without placing a bet!

Step Twelve clearly states that “we tried to **carry** this message to other compulsive gamblers”. It doesn't say we “tried to **deliver** this message to other compulsive gamblers”. The primary lesson of this step is that the intended recipient of the message doesn't always benefit, but the carrier of the message always does! For anyone that truly wants to stop gambling, there is no better tool than working with newcomers!

A common pitfall to service is a phrase we borrowed from Country and Western dancing – “The Two-Step”. This refers to folks who come to GA, admit they are powerless and now immediately want to run out and save all the other compulsive gamblers. In other words they jump from Step One to Step Twelve. This is often based on ego rather than a sincere desire for spiritual growth and achieving a joyful life free from gambling. What happens is that they try to carry a message that they don't actually have themselves and often end up just carrying the mess instead of the message. This is not to say that newcomers can't and shouldn't be involved in service. They absolutely should be encouraged to greet other members, make coffee, and even run meetings after three or four months in the program. Oftentimes, folks at their first meeting can relate to some person who hasn't gambled in thirty days a lot more than to some old fogey that has twenty years clean. However, newcomers in the program shouldn't try to pretend to be experts on the steps and work with sponsees until they have at least worked them all with a sponsor.

The great thing about service in GA is that there are many diverse opportunities for all members regardless of their talents or skills. Some members really enjoy going through the steps and have the patience and understanding to make great sponsors. Others are perhaps more introverted and are more comfortable getting to meetings early to make sure the chairs are set up and coffee is made. There are those members who thrive in business meetings and like to work at the level of Intergroups and GA boards to represent their home group to GA. Helping to plan and organize social functions or host local GA conferences can be lots of fun and is a great way to meet people as well as perform important work in the fellowship. The point is there are opportunities for service for all members, and that is where you typically find the folks who never seem to gamble.

In Step Eleven we explored using prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with our higher power. What we find however is that all of the steps can help us to achieve what some of our members refer to as a “Spiritual Awakening.” We find that personal growth and spiritual growth are just two sides of the same coin. Our spiritual life can be compared to a calm river flowing along that suddenly becomes turbulent with dangerous rapids. It turns out that those rapids are simply caused by the “rocks” on the river bed which are things like guilt, shame, fear, resentments and character defects. We can’t achieve that calm spirituality until we remove those rocks as we do by continuously working the steps.

While this concludes the formal text on working the steps of Gamblers Anonymous, we hope that your recovery is never concluded. For many of us, working these steps has given us the profound happiness that was described in “The Promises” on page two. We now truly found this peace of mind that had eluded us for most of our lives. Before we began this journey, we could not have imagined a life without gambling. For most of us now, we can’t imagine a life without recovery.

In addition to all of the rewards we have been given from working these steps, perhaps most importantly we have received the profound gift of gratitude. Many of us now proclaim without reservation that we are “grateful compulsive gamblers”. We wouldn’t think of trading this wonderful life of recovery for the boring life of a “normal gambler” who has no tools for dealing with those resentments, fears, guilt, or character defects.

When we begin to feel that life has treated us unfairly, we have learned to sit down and begin to write a gratitude list. If we have a roof over our head, food in our cupboard, and access to clean drinking water, we think of all the people in the world that lack these basic necessities. Then we think of the fellowship of GA and our higher power who have delivered us from the pain of the insidious illness of compulsive gambling. Usually before we get too far on our list, we begin to feel a full and thankful heart and the knowledge of how blessed we truly are.

Appendix

Suggested Schedule for Working the Steps

There have been different methods developed for working the twelve steps of Gamblers Anonymous and the ideas contained in this book are only intended to be suggestions. If you or your sponsor has a different approach to the steps that works for you, we absolutely encourage you to continue with that approach. Our program continues to improve based on the trial and error of our members' different approaches to the steps.

Also there should be no set time limit for working the steps. Experience suggests that trying to rush through them too quickly results in some critical concepts being missed. More common, however, is the procrastination of the work that is often simply based in fear or laziness. As mentioned previously, if the member lacks the willingness to do these simple assignments, sadly they may not be done gambling. The greatest danger of significant delay is a gambling relapse. However, unnecessarily delaying the step work also results in unnecessarily delaying the amazing benefits of recovery and The Promises coming true in our lives. With this in mind we offer one possible schedule for working the steps here. This schedule suggests a time period to work the steps of about six months and that is pretty typical. However, it is not uncommon for this to stretch into nine months or more depending on a variety of factors.

The assumption with this schedule is that the sponsee will complete the assignments and the sponsor and sponsee will meet regularly (typically weekly) and discuss the assignments when they are completed. Note: It is not uncommon for the sponsee to try putting off completing the assignments until just prior to meeting with the sponsor. The importance of doing the assignments early in the week (preferably immediately after meeting the sponsor) should be stressed in order to give the sponsee sufficient time to contemplate the work and formulate questions and discussion points for the next meeting.

Assignments should be understood to include careful reading with underlining of parts that are especially relevant, unclear or with which the reader disagrees. In addition, extensive note taking or comments and questions written in the margins is encouraged. These should all be discussed with the sponsor.

Week 1 Assignment: Read "Welcome to Gamblers Anonymous" and "The Illness of Compulsive Gambling".

Week 2 Assignment: Read "The Treatment of Compulsive Gambling" and "Introduction to the Twelve Steps of Recovery"

Week 3 Assignment: Read "Step One" to the top of page 12 where it refers to the worksheet 1A. Complete worksheet 1A.

Week 4 Assignment: Finish reading Step One and complete Worksheet 1B.

Week 5 Assignment: Read first paragraph of Step Two and complete worksheet 2A.

Week 6 Assignment: Finish reading Step Two and complete Worksheet 2B.

Week 7 Assignment: Read Step Three. Get a GA service commitment – meeting secretary, coffee maker, greeter, Intergroup Rep etc.

Week 8 Assignment: Write down the chosen prayer and say it three times every day. Try to commit to memory if possible.

Week 9 Assignment: Read Step Four until end of Resentments section (middle of page 25) and complete worksheet 4A.

Week 10 Assignment: Read Step Four section on Fears (until middle of page 26) and complete worksheet 4B.

Week 11 Assignment: Read Step Four section on Sex Conduct (until end of first paragraph on page 27) and complete worksheet 4C.

Week 12 Assignment: Read Step Four section on Financial Harms on page 27 and complete worksheet 4D. Order *Pressure Relief Workbook* - <https://gamblersanonymous.org/product/the-pressure-group-meeting-handbook/>

Week 13 Assignment: Read Step Four section on Miscellaneous Harms on bottom of page 27 and complete worksheet 4E.

Weeks 14-16 Assignment; Read Step Four section on Financial Inventory, complete *Pressure Relief Workbook* forms and have a Pressure Relief Group Meeting.

Week 17 Assignment: Read Step Five and hold a final Step Five meeting with sponsor that includes any and all previously undisclosed issues.

Week 18 Assignment: Read Step Six and complete worksheet 6A.

Week 19 Assignment: Read Step Seven

Week 20 Assignment: Pray at least three times per day for a week to have the most critical shortcoming(s) removed.

Week 21 Assignment: Read Step Eight. Complete list as described in chapter.

Week 22 Assignment: Read Step Nine and make at least one amend.

Week 23 Assignment: If possible, make all the amends on the list except when do so would injure someone else or when there is a valid reason to delay.

Week 24 Assignment: Read Step 10.

Week 25 Assignment: Make daily inventory everyday for a week.

Week 26 Assignment: Read Step 11.

Week 27 Assignment: Practice meditation every day for at least 10 minutes for one week. Member may choose to use a phrase from the Eleventh Step Prayer as the basis for the meditation as described in the reading.

Week 28 Assignment: Read Step 12 and announce your availability to be a sponsor at a GA meeting.

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