

The Twelve Steps of Gamblers Anonymous for Step Meetings

By Chris N.

Step Meeting Guide – Step 1

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Read:

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 men and women 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.

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. Of all the twelve steps, this is the only step that we have to do perfectly.

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 symbol 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 insure 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. Similarly, we may have discovered that we are near-sighted so we wear corrective lenses.

Unfortunately when it comes to compulsive gambling, while self-knowledge is a necessary condition for recovery, 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. Step One is really nothing more than identifying the problem. The permanent solution is found in Steps Two through Twelve.

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 called compulsive gambling. 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.

The second part of this step is “that our lives had become unmanageable”. For some of our members, this is obvious. Lost marriages, jobs, houses, retirement accounts etc. 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 is managing us and forcing us to make increasingly bad decisions.

After you have completed this step, 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.

Discuss:

- 1) The meaning of GA as a “we” program.
- 2) None of us is as smart as all of us.
- 3) Examples of powerlessness in our lives.
- 4) Self-knowledge as a necessary but not sufficient condition for recovery.
- 5) The folly of trying to stop or control our gambling using will power.
- 6) Examples of unmanageability in our lives.
- 7) Doing Step 1 “perfectly” without any reservations.

Step Meeting Guide – Step 2

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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.

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 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 have."

The point is that it doesn't matter 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. Some people use the program of GA as their higher power and others use nature or the **Great OutDoors**. 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 that "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 prayers 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”. We allow for a very broad understanding of a power greater than ourselves and we choose one that works for us. 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.

Once 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 was the solution to 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 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 simply been removed. We have now 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 on to Step Three.

Discuss:

- 1) Overcoming prejudices about the concept of a higher power.
- 2) If we are powerless over gambling, we must find a higher power.
- 3) Any God who is small enough for me to understand, is not big enough to do me any good.
- 4) Your understanding of a higher power and if this has changed over time.
- 5) Achieving the faith that this higher power will actually restore you to a normal way of thinking and living.

Step Meeting Guide – Step 3

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Read:

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 as simply to do the “next right thing”. This very mysterious concept really needs to be no more complicated than this.

In fact, Step Three is remarkably practical and we have actually already started. When we first came to Gamblers Anonymous we started to become willing to turn our gambling problem over to the program of GA - even though many of the ideas and principles of this program may have seemed strange or counter intuitive. Step Three is really only the logical extension of that and the acknowledgement that we probably could also use help in other areas of our lives including our relationships with other people.

Steps One and Two only really required acceptance and some open-mindedness to successfully complete. However, like all of the remaining steps, Step Three calls for willingness and action.

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.

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. One member said that for her, acceptance was simply abandoning all hope of ever having a better past. With enough time and persistence, this prayer is almost always granted.

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.

Discuss these questions or anything else related to Step 3:

- 1) What do we believe is the will of our higher power for us?
- 2) What does it mean to do “the next right thing”?
- 3) Have we had an experience with turning over our will to our higher power?
- 4) What are the things we cannot change and need to accept?
- 5) What are the things we can change, but need courage to do?

Step Meeting Guide – Step 4

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Read:

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.

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, 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.

In a step meeting, it is not really possible to complete a comprehensive searching and fearless moral and financial inventory. In fact we have found that the best way to complete a financial inventory is by having a pressure relief meeting. This is something we strongly recommend that you complete with your sponsor, your local pressure relief chairman, or another member who has experience in this area.

One area in our moral inventory that seems to cause most of us difficulties is fear which somehow touches almost every aspect of our lives. We find that where we thought we had made major 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 practical and time-tested tools 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.

Fears usually only plague us when we are not living in the present. Just as regrets and shame live in the past, fears usually live in the future. This is why it is important to learn to live in the present and when feeling fearful say, “everything right here and right now is OK”.

Another useful tool 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? Is this a rational fear or an irrational fear? Is it really very likely to happen? Are the potential consequences severe or minor? Are we actually afraid of getting fired from our job or are we just afraid that our boss will find out the truth about something we forgot to do 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 step 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 to another person. 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. 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 “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. Almost always this confession is met with smiles and this 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.

Discuss:

- 1) Describe a fear that you have had in your life that has affected a decision or your behavior.
 - Was this a rational or irrational fear i.e. was it very likely to happen and were the potential consequences minor or severe?
 - How did you handle this fear?
- 2) How has fear hurt your recovery from compulsive gambling?
 - Afraid to ask for a sponsor?
 - Anxious about working the steps?
 - Embarrassed to come back to meetings after a relapse?
- 3) Do you have fears in your life today that are causing problems or making you unhappy?
 - Is this a fear of something in the future? Is everything OK at this moment?
 - Have you tried the “Three D’s” or are you willing to try them?

Step Meeting Guide – Step 5

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Read:

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 our past 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. Regardless, we find this process liberating and we find that we can start trusting people more. This doesn't mean that we have to become naïve 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 confidant. 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.

Discuss:

- 1) Any feelings of loneliness or feeling apart from others that may have triggered gambling episodes.
- 2) Trust issues that have kept you from connecting deeply with other people.
- 3) Situations where you have shared a painful secret with someone that has brought you some relief.
- 4) Situations where someone has shared with you a painful secret that you could relate to and brought you closer to that person.
- 5) "A problem shared is a problem halved and a joy shared is a joy doubled".

Step Meeting Guide – Step 6

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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. By now some of us 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 true happiness and peace of mind 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 Fourth 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 “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 may not be 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 our 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 esteemable 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.

Discuss:

- 1) What does “progress not perfection” mean to you?
- 2) As the result of working the prior steps, what character defects have you discovered that you didn’t know were as serious as you previously believed?
- 3) Which character defects have been significantly reduced since you stopped gambling and how has that improved your life?
- 4) Are there any character defects that you are holding onto and having trouble letting go of?

Step Meeting Guide – Step 7

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Read:

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 Step Two 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.

Taking action means work. While many of us are averse to the idea of "work," the kind of work we're talking about here has nothing to do with punching in a time card and suffering through eight hours. Our work on the steps simply means using our energy in the pursuit of our goal of long-term recovery. Catching ourselves in our shortcomings and changing our reaction takes work. The more familiar you become with your

shortcomings the more you start to notice, “this feels familiar, I’d better stop and pay attention to this!” Whenever a reaction feels uncomfortable, it’s probably something that needs attention.

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. To begin working this step, we should identify the top one, two or three defects that we strongly desire to have removed. Generally speaking, the more defects that we work at once, the less the likelihood for success. Simply looking up to the heavens and saying “God – remove all of my shortcomings immediately” is unlikely to accomplish very much at all. 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.

We should initiate a regimen of daily prayer. In this case, we may want to begin with the Serenity Prayer 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 one, two or (at most) three shortcoming(s) 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 lifetime process.

When we have finished making a good faith effort to begin removing 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.

Discuss:

- 1) The importance of humility.
- 2) Have the previous six steps prepared me for Step Seven?
- 3) How has my understanding of my higher power grown or evolved?
- 4) The spiritual principle of surrender.
- 5) Do I still struggle with prayer?
- 6) Are there any shortcomings that have already been removed from my life or at least diminished in their power over me since coming to GA?

Step Meeting Guide – Step 8

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Read:

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. In a thorough Fourth Step we should have identified all of the people we had harmed because of our dishonesty and thoughtless behavior. We should now revisit this list and add any people that we omitted.

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 much more than this. Amends means that we are now willing to make restitution to someone for the harm we have caused. The amends is about making things right. 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.

Another important type of amends we have to learn how to make is the “living amends”. The essence of a living amends is change. We have to change our behavior and begin the daily practice of not recommitting these harms. Once we can begin to truly practice the living amends, we will start to regain the trust that we had squandered. The exact nature of each amend has to be determined on a case-by-case basis and that process we will explore more fully in Step Nine.

Also, with Step Eight we begin a new life of focusing on “keeping our side of the street clean”. We can 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. Therefore, a common obstacle to 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 would we rather 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 and that includes hurting us. Sometimes these harms to us are intentional and sometimes they are not. As we discovered in looking at our resentments in Step Four, sometimes these harms to us are severe, but more often 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 use a valuable tool for dealing with resentments – praying for those for whom we carry those 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. Typically with our gambling behavior we were hurricanes 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 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 review our list of harms to others and be honestly willing to make amends – even if we don’t yet fully understand what that will entail. If there are any people on this list 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.

Discuss:

- 1) Denial of our harms to others.
- 2) What does “making amends” mean to us?
- 3) How do we begin to practice the “living amends”.
- 4) Keeping our side of the street clean.
- 5) The importance of forgiveness of others.

Step Meeting Guide – Step 9

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Read:

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 achieving our new way of life. 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 in our higher power to trust the process on people outside of the program.

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 “get out of jail free card” to justify not making the most painful amends by convincing ourselves that other person would be harmed. Rather this is an honest assessment to determine if there are any people who would suffer needlessly while we relieved our own guilt. 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. I deeply regret this. I am not asking for your forgiveness. I only want to make this right. Is there anything you would like to say?”

When making a financial amend, 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, simply 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 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. We need also to start making the living amends we discussed in Step Eight. 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.

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. In these cases, we would often 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 cannot find where they live now. 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. In many cases we will be surprised with the forgiveness and warmth that people express. Often they will be happy to learn that we are trying to turn our lives around and wish to have a broken relationship with us restored. In other cases, they may be angry and may not wish to have anything ever to do with us again. The reaction also may be somewhere in the middle where they simply are (understandably) skeptical of this new life we are describing 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. 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 quickly as possible.

When we have made all of the amends on our list except those that a) 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 some members begin to feel true peace of mind for the first time in many years. Most importantly, we may start to now notice that the compulsion to gamble has been significantly removed.

Discuss:

- 1) Living the GA program outside of the meeting rooms.
- 2) Situations where an amends would injure others.
- 3) Overcoming the fear and ego of making amends. Trusting your higher power.
- 4) Dangers of procrastinating the Ninth Step.
- 5) Willingness to accept all reactions to an amends.

Step Meeting Guide – Step 10

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Read:

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. Even though these are called the maintenance steps however, there is significant personal growth that we should expect. Some people have compared it to riding a bicycle – if you want to **maintain** your balance, you have to keep moving forward.

Now that we are in GA and have been clean for a period of time, we must practice vigilance and avoid complacency. When experiencing even modest success, far more than most people, compulsive gamblers are highly prone to “big shot-ism”. Once again our broken brain will start to tell us lies like “You haven’t had an urge to gamble in several months now. You don’t need to go to meetings or do any more work on your recovery.” Also, we start to believe that we alone deserve the credit for our clean time and we may even start to brag about our clean days. This type of thinking can have devastating consequences. The truth is that our success is largely a result of the grace of our higher power. Instead of counting our days, we should make our days count. We must continue to work these final steps on a daily basis or we are likely to return to gambling.

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 ask ourselves: “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?”. Often this is enough to realize that the resentment is petty, ego driven, or to a large extent our fault.

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. One member is fond of saying “When I have a problem, I am the problem”.

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. 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, e-mailing, 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).

Like 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.

Discuss:

- 1) The paradox of growth through maintenance.
- 2) The dangers of complacency
- 3) “Big-shot-ism” and the need for continued humility
- 4) Value of a daily inventory.
- 5) “Justifiable anger”
- 6) Developing the habit of promptly admitting when we were wrong.

Step Meeting Guide – Step 11

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Read:

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 cavity 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.

If you are still struggling with the word “God”, it is suggested that you return to Step 2. As we learned there, in GA we use the term “higher power” and the word “God” interchangeably. Prejudice against the word God is usually against other people’s understanding of God and doesn’t have to inform our own understanding. This is usually a simple case of “contempt prior to investigation”.

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 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

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

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.

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. Some people find that guided meditations are the most beneficial for them.

Meditation is a physical and mental discipline that requires you to be still and observe. Many people are uncomfortable with silence, and they will do anything to avoid it. If this describes you, then meditation may be challenging when you first begin. Rest assured, though, it will get easier each time you do it.

As we improve our conscious contact with our higher power, we begin to understand the concept of "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.

As with most things, prayer and meditation improve with practice. Making these a priority in our busy lives is essential for our continued recovery. Putting aside five-ten 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.

Discuss:

- 1) Continued resistance to the concept of "God"
- 2) Filling the "God-size hole".
- 3) "Talking to God" (prayer) vs. "Listening to God" (meditation)
- 4) Praying only for God's will for us and the power to carry that out.
- 5) Challenges with being still during meditation.
- 6) Our own experience with prayer and meditation.

Step Meeting Guide – Step 12

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Read:

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.

In prior steps we have explored spiritual principles such as kindness, generosity, honesty and humility. Now in Step Twelve it is imperative that we make an effort to practice these principles in all of our affairs. Normal gamblers may be able to enjoy occasional hypocrisy. However, we simply 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.

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. We can begin by asking 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.

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 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! This is the primary lesson of Step Twelve. The 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 – “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. 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 two or three months in the program. Oftentimes, folks at their first meeting can relate to some person who hasn’t gambled in ninety 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 Intergroup 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. The point is there are opportunities for service for all members, and that is where you typically find the folks who haven’t gambled for years.

While this concludes the formal text on working the steps of Gamblers Anonymous, we hope that your recovery is never concluded. As we like to say whenever we finish working any step, “Well now we have only twelve steps to go”. In all likelihood we have now found the 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”. 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.

Discuss:

- 1) Acting our way into positive thinking instead of thinking our way into positive action.
- 2) Can we really practice these principles in all of our affairs or should we focus on “progress rather than perfection”?
- 3) Carrying the message instead of the mess.
- 4) We can’t keep it unless we give it away.
- 5) Importance of all kinds of service in GA.
- 6) Feeling gratitude in our daily lives.