



STEP ONE

I admit that I am powerless over my addictions and dysfunctions—that my life has become unmanageable.

Admitting powerlessness runs contrary to many of our cultural messages that say, "Be strong! Be the master of your own destiny!" The admission of powerlessness also conflicts with the addictive message, because the addiction itself will tell us, "You have a high tolerance! Use more of me! You can handle it!"

Nevertheless, the central paradox of Step 1 is that the admission of complete defeat permits a life-transforming victory through recovery. The admission of powerlessness over an addiction actually becomes the foundation for the strength to eventually overcome the dependency.

Admitting powerlessness is absolutely essential to breaking the addiction cycle, which is made up of five points:

1. Pain
2. Reaching out to an addictive agent, such as work, food, sex, alcohol, or dependent relationships to salve our pain
3. Temporary anesthesia
4. Negative consequences
5. Shame and guilt, which result in more pain or low self-esteem

For example, the workaholic who has low self-esteem (pain) begins to overwork (addictive agent), which results in praise, success, and achievement (relief). However, as a rule, family relationships and his personal relationship with God suffer terribly because of preoccupation with work (negative consequences). The result is an even greater sense of shame and guilt because of inadequacies, both real and imagined, which bring him back to point one in the addiction cycle. Now the workaholic feels compelled to work even harder to overcome his guilt.

Understanding the addiction cycle is important because it helps explain why for both the Oxford Group and for Bill Wilson (see *Steps to Serenity: an Introduction*), the admission of powerlessness is the first step to recovery. Otherwise we remain caught. If we rely on willpower alone, then the only thing we know to do is to escalate our addiction to get out of the pain. Step 1, however, calls us to yield, to surrender, and to let go.

Two factors that keep the addiction cycle spinning are: (1) the fear of withdrawal and (2) denial.

First, in order to take Step 1, we have to move beyond the fear of stepping off the addiction cycle. We may fear withdrawal and the pain that goes with it. Doctors historically thought that withdrawal in drug addiction was mainly biochemical and physical. It is true that when the heroin addict stops taking heroin, for example, the mind and body literally rebel as they struggle to restore balance. However, addictionologists now believe that the emotional and spiritual components of withdrawal from any addiction are of far greater significance than the physiological dimensions. The workaholic, for example, goes through withdrawal when he tries to scale back work activities. The real fear in this case is probably the emotional fear of losing control. The paradox of Step 1 is that the act of surrendering addictive control will actually bring us back into a state of healthy control.

Second, we have to break out of denial about our addictions. Denial is a cloak of self-deception that blinds us and shields us from an honest assessment of our own dependencies. Some of the common denial messages with which we may delude ourselves are:

- "I can stop any time I want to."
- "Things aren't that bad."
- "I only practice my addiction because I want to."
- "When things get better (or worse), I'll stop my addiction."
- "We may even project blame onto someone else, saying, "You make me do what I do!"

All of these messages deny the force the addictions impose on our lives.

Breaking out of denial often requires a painful encounter with the consequences of our addictions, called "hitting bottom." "Hitting bottom" forces us to admit our powerlessness over our addictive lifestyles. The three major "bottoms" we may hit are:

1. a physical bottom
2. an emotional bottom
3. a spiritual bottom

Common specific examples of "bottoms" that precipitate recovery include:

- a marital crisis
- a physical health crisis (as in the case of the workaholic who suffers a heart attack)
- confrontation by a family member or loved one
- vocational or life-purpose crisis (a pink slip that forces one to look at one's addiction)
- a financial crisis



- a spiritual crisis, a feeling of alienation from god

The addiction cycle, as a rule, cannot be broken without yielding to a Power outside ourselves. We may have to surrender again and again, as we admit our powerlessness over, not only the primary addiction, but over various other aspects of our lives. We must recognize when we are powerless over people, places, and situations and learn to let those things go. For example, when we are caught in freeway traffic, instead of allowing anxiety and anger to build, we need to admit that we cannot alter our situation. In even the most trivial issues we face, we must learn to become flexible. We may also find ourselves switching addictions or transferring obsessions, and we will need to apply the first step to these new dependencies as well.

For co-dependents, control or the lack of it, is central to every aspect of life. As we admit our powerlessness, we embark upon the antidote for our control addiction, an addiction characterized by extremes of both over control and under control. For example, the workaholic may over control efforts to achieve and accomplish. The quality of spiritual life and the investment of time and emotional intimacy with family members is what tends to be under controlled. By admitting powerlessness, he opens the door to allow God to create a healthy, new balance in which he can lessen the compulsive control exercised in the work arena. He can then begin to experience greater positive control over his contribution to family relationships and his creation of quality private time.

We should not be fearful that powerlessness will result in passivity. On the contrary, to admit powerlessness is to subordinate our human wills to God's will, so that we can become the most effective and potent instruments we were created to be.

FIRST-STEP WORKSHEETS

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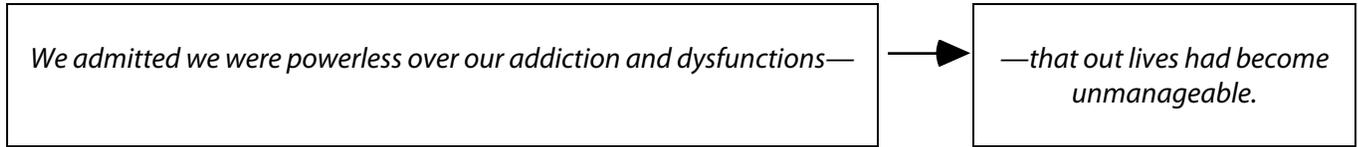
You **do not** have to share these worksheets in the group or show them to anyone—they are to help **you** understand your personal experience with addiction. However, you will probably want to discuss some of the incidents on these worksheets with your sponsor. Don't be surprised if you get **angry** while working through these worksheets (again, see previous statement about your sponsor).

Here is an opportunity in the program to be fearless and honest. You don't have to fill in every blank or write well (in recovery you get no points for grace and style), but work hard to find plenty of examples. Make sure your notes are clear so that you can understand them later in your recovery, when you may want to review these sheets. People often review their First Step worksheets on their one-year anniversary and notice how far they have come in their understanding of the disease of addiction.

In many questions these worksheets refer to drugs/alcohol as the addiction, but any addiction may be substituted such as pornography, smoking, gambling, etc.



STEP 1



CONCEPT 1

CONCEPT 2

CONCEPT 3

Powerless over AMOUNT of alcohol I drank

Once I started drinking, sooner or later I couldn't **control** or **limit** the **amount** I drank, and ...

Powerless over the bad RESULTS of my drinking

When I drank too much I couldn't **control** or **limit the bad effects** which flowed from my drinking, and ...

Those results were UNACCEPTABLE

As a result of my drinking, some aspect of my life became **unacceptable** to me.

If I could be a control drinker and drink moderately ...

there wouldn't be any bad effects of my drinking ...

no problem.

But I have tried over and over to control the amount I drink, and I have been **unsuccessful** ...

but if I could avoid the **bad results** which come when I drink ...

no problem.

But I have tried over and over to control the **bad results** which come when I drink, and I have been **unsuccessful** ...

as a result my life is: **unmanageable** or unacceptable to me or unbearable.

On the way to a slip, I rationalize:

"I can have just one (a few) drinks."
(WRONG)

OR

"I am smart enough that I can now avoid the harmful results which used to come with my drinking."
(WRONG)

OR

"My life wasn't that bad."
(WRONG)

**Concept 1: POWERLESSNESS over AMOUNT
of any mood altering chemical consumed**

NOTE: These will not be discussed in the group.

1.1 Have you ever tried to **stop your addiction** completely? Give examples: What was the result?

a. _____

b. _____

a. _____

b. _____

1.2 Have you ever tried to **limit** or **control** the **amount** of alcohol or drugs you used by **limiting dosage** (for instance, promising yourself or someone else you would have only 2 drinks at a party)? Give examples: What was the result?

a. _____

b. _____

a. _____

b. _____

1.3 Give examples of **how** you tried to **limit** or **control** the **amount** of alcohol or drugs you used by **switching drinks** (for instance, switched from straight liquor to a mixed drink or beer, or switched to a drink you do not like): What was the result?

a. _____

b. _____

a. _____

b. _____

1.4 Give examples of **how** you tried to **limit** or **control** the **amount** of alcohol or drugs you used by **limiting the time** for drinking/drugging (for instance, decided not to drink before a certain hour in the day): What was the result?

a. _____

b. _____

a. _____

b. _____

1.5 Have you ever awakened in the morning after drinking/drugging and found that you could not remember some part of the evening? Give examples:



Concept 2: POWERLESSNESS over BAD RESULTS from my addiction

2.1 What have you done to try to drink/drug without bad results (for example, to drink/drug only at home, or not to leave the house after starting to drink/drug)?

What was the result?

- a. _____
b. _____

- a. _____
b. _____

2.2 What have you done to try to limit or avoid the bad effects of your addiction on your health (for example, take medication for alcohol-related high blood pressure or stomach problems)?

What was the result?

- a. _____
b. _____

- a. _____
b. _____

2.3 How else did you try to control the results of your addiction, and were you successful?

What was the result?

- a. _____
b. _____

- a. _____
b. _____

**Concept 3: UNMANAGEABILITY:
THE UNACCEPTABLE RESULTS OF MY DRINKING/DRUGGING**

3.1 What was it in your life that was **unacceptable to you** and brought you to seek recovery?

3.2 What **crisis** other than the one that finally brought you into recovery would eventually have occurred?

3.3 How has addiction affected your **self-esteem, self-image or self-respect**?

- a.

- b.

- c.

3.4 Have you ever gotten into **physical fights** as a result of your addiction?

3.5 Have you ever **lost a job or a promotion** as a result of your addiction?

3.6 Have you ever **lost a spouse or significant friend** as a result of your addiction?

3.7 Have you been **hospitalized** (regular or psychiatric) as a result of your addiction?

3.8 Have you been very **depressed** and/or felt life was not worth living (alcohol and other drugs often cause severe depression)? Have you attempted suicide?



3.9 How has addiction affected your **goals for your life**, and the progress you have made to achieve them?

- a. _____

- b. _____

- c. _____

3.10 How has addiction affected your **health** (heart, liver, stomach, skin, S.T.D., lungs, nervous system [peripheral neuropathy, or tingling/pain/numbness in fingers or toes], injuries)?

- a. _____

- b. _____

- c. _____

3.11 Give some examples of how your addiction put your life or the **lives of others in danger**?

- a. _____

- b. _____

- c. _____

3.12 What do your family/friends object to most with regard to your behavior while under the influence of your addiction?

3.13 Has any **physical abuse** happened to you or others as a result of your addiction?

3.14 How has your addiction adversely affected you even when you are sober?

CONCLUSIONS

4.1 What convinces you that you can no longer use alcohol or drugs safely?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

4.2 Do you believe you may be an **addict, alcoholic or chemically dependent person**? _____



Note: These are the questions we will discuss in our 12-step class.

STEP ONE

I admit that I am powerless over my addictions and dysfunctions—that my life has become unmanageable.

Describe attempts you have made in the past to control your addictive behaviors. How successful have they been? Do these attempts show the powerlessness that you have over your addictive behaviors?

What does “*admit*” mean?

What is the difference between *admitting* and accepting?



What is the meaning of “*powerless*,” and what does it mean to you?

Who has the “*power*” in your life?

What is the meaning of “*unmanageable*?”

Having been in an *unmanageable* life for so long, how will you know when you are manageable?