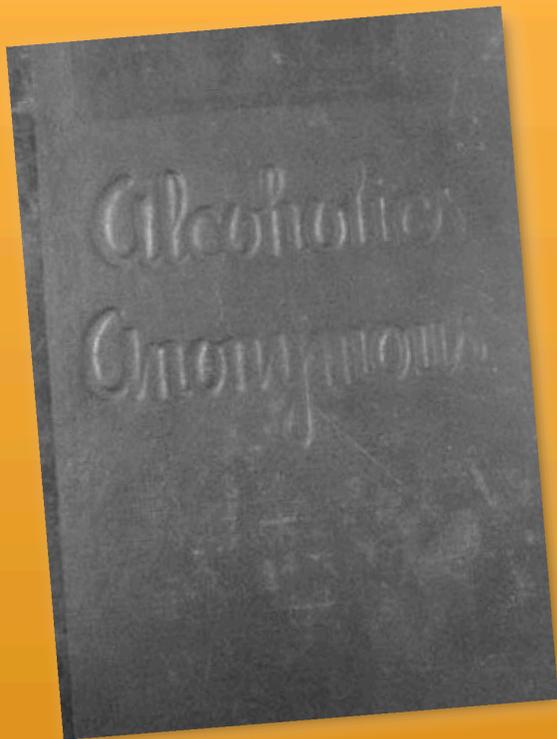


ANOTHER LOOK AT THE TWELVE STEPS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS



*A Comparison of the
Twelve Steps Approach
and Modern Psychology
Techniques in Residential
Addiction Treatment*

The Clearing
alter your life

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INTRODUCTION

For many years the mainstream industry approach to recovery from addiction has been The Twelve Steps Program of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). It originated in the late 1930s when society was desperate for a solution to out-of-control-drinking.

The Twelve Steps is an important program and has helped millions. However, many studies have shown that the Twelve Steps has not been effective for the vast majority (see appendix). The Twelve Steps is a program written when conventional psychology was in its comparative infancy and thus lacks valuable new insights on the nature of addiction and how the human brain, social structures, and other elements of our whole self impact substance or alcohol abuse.

The Purpose of this eBook

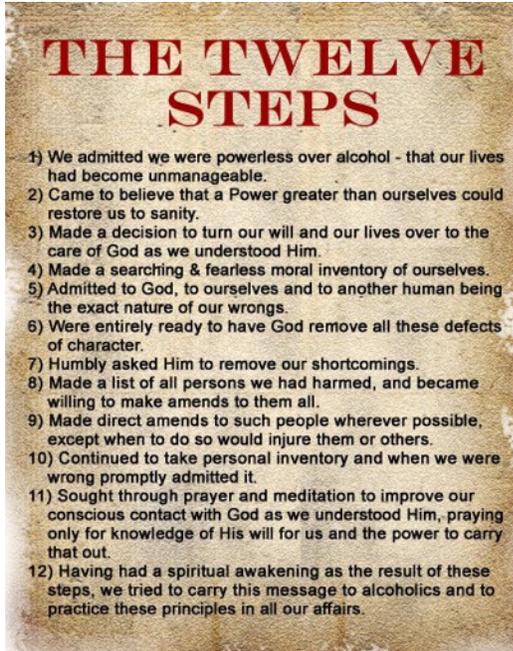
Our compare and contrast of the Twelve Steps is not for the purpose of casting judgment on any approach, especially if it is working for you. This eBook is for those for whom the Twelve Steps have not been effective. Our message to you is: “you have options, and there is hope.”

While we agree that no healing will occur until the individual is ready to do the work, there are many for whom addiction is related to deeper underlying emotional or mental issues. This is referred to as Dual Diagnosis, and the Twelve Steps program is not equipped—indeed not intended—to deal with these complex issues.

Additionally, our perspective is more in response to the Twelve Steps use in Residential Rehab than in the grass roots fellowship of people helping one another to stay sober. In the former case, we have witnessed and experienced the discouragement that results after a participant pays \$50,000 or more to attend a luxury facility with little more to offer in the way of treatment than in-house AA meetings that teach 80 year old concepts by minimally trained paraprofessionals. It's no wonder the rehab industry doesn't have the best reputation.

The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous

The Twelve Steps are not without its strengths. It is well-established and ubiquitous. Some of its specific strengths include:



- ✓ Strong social network
- ✓ International Organization
- ✓ Abundance of AA meetings
- ✓ No / Low cost

The vast majority of infrastructure for the rehab industry is built around supporting the Twelve Steps process. As a “one-size-fits-all” approach, the Twelve Steps program can be provided at relatively low cost. The instruction necessary is provided in the Alcoholics Anonymous “Big Book,” and the foundation of the program revolves around attending regular AA meetings with others in the same situation.

There are many Twelve Steps alternatives available, so it is important to understand the specific program to see if it is right for you.

In general, Twelve Steps Alternatives work with the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual issues associated with the underlying behavior that cause addictions and addictive behavior. Twelve Steps alternatives often incorporate advances in psychology, spirituality, science and healing. They should offer more one-on-one counseling time and the small group therapy is more robust and deeper in content. A good alternative program will meet the individual exactly where they are. No shame or guilt, just authenticity and honesty is expected from the client.

Some broad categories of Twelve Steps Alternatives include:

Mindfulness-based alternatives

- ✓ Instruct those struggling with substance abuse to focus on being present in the moment
- ✓ This training helps those with addictive behaviors to have the tools to take control of urges and situations rather than being reactive

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

- ✓ The practice of working with thoughts and behavior to change the way you think and feel about a specific situation
- ✓ Provide skills to change undesirable behavior



Holistic Treatment

- ✓ A broad category which can include elements of the above but also additional therapies and approaches such as Object Relations, Reality Therapy (Behavioral Therapy), Rational Emotive Therapy, Gestalt Therapy, Psychosynthesis, Person-Centered Therapy, among others.
- ✓ Can include eastern and alternative medicine techniques such as massage, acupuncture, nutrition, Reiki, meditation, and outdoor and group physical activities.
- ✓ The Spiritual Psychology Approach incorporates advances in psychology, spirituality, science and addiction research
- ✓ Addresses core issues leading to addictive behavior
- ✓ Diversified, complementary healing approach

No approach is perfect. Alternative approaches tend to cost substantially more due to the increased amount of individual care and having a more robust program. In addition, aftercare of the participant can be more challenging compared to AA's ubiquitous network of meetings.

It is important to think about which approach is right for you. We suggest you look into both Twelve Steps and Twelve Steps alternatives to see which general approach resonates with you. Next, as you look at individual programs, ask the hard questions and check out our post, [How to Choose the Right Residential Treatment Center](#).

A Deeper Look at the Twelve Steps

In this eBook, we look at each step and evaluate its central message compared to the Spiritual Psychology approach. It is almost always controversial to critique something, especially that which has helped so many people over the decades. Some will certainly say, “The Twelve Steps saved my life, who are you to criticize!” And in response we will say, “Fantastic, keep doing what you are doing!”

The main purpose of this eBook is to present an alternative perspective to those who may still be struggling. We want to make it easy for you to understand the differences as you go through your addiction treatment research.

Let's begin...

Step One

Admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable

Step One of the Twelve Steps program states:

“Admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable.”

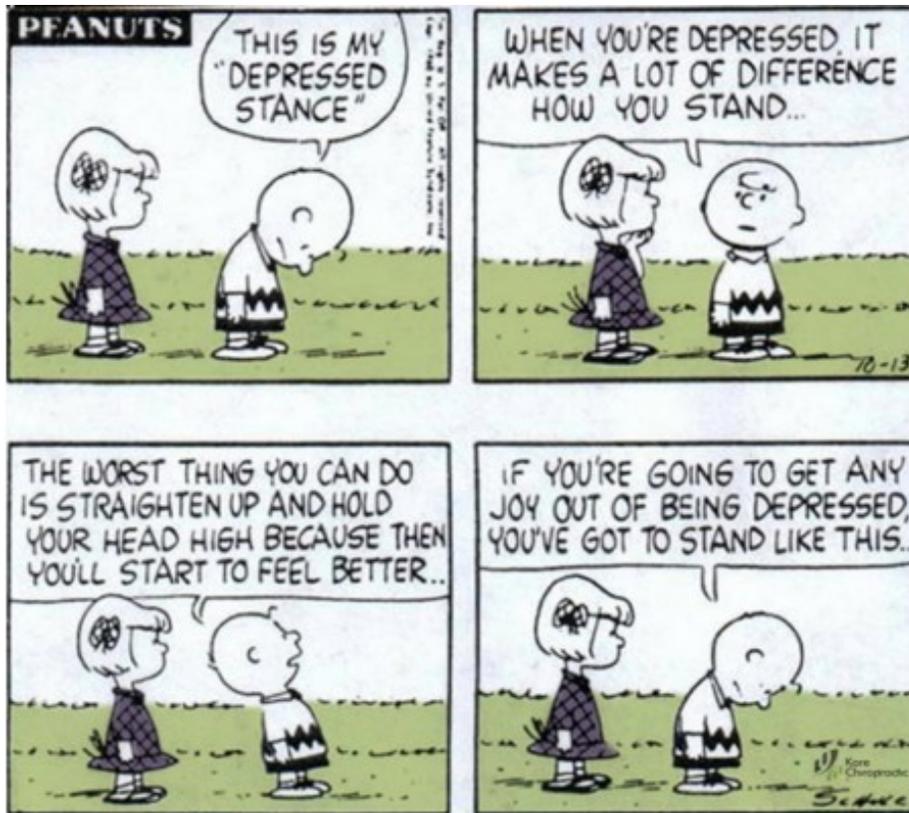
Step 1 is an affirmation. Affirmations can be both positive and negative. We now know there is extraordinary power in the spoken word. Affirming that you are powerless makes it so. Affirming that your life is unmanageable makes it so. So a big problem with Step 1 is that it can be counter-productive.

“Speech is the mirror of the soul; as a man speaks, so he is.” — Publilius Syrus

Needing Help is Not the same as Being Powerless

Do not misunderstand: We are not saying it is sufficient to simply grit your teeth and change direction. Addiction behavior has significant momentum which is usually the result of years of numbing out to painful underlying emotional issues or trauma.

Just because you cannot “will” your way into instant recovery, does not mean you are powerless. People struggling with addiction have misused their power to create the negative patterns of dependence. To heal, they need to learn use their creative power to form new, positive patterns of wellness and joy. Like so many things in life, we just need to learn these skills.



Step One is a Negative Affirmation

This is the core potential issue of Step 1 — it is a negative affirmation. Regardless of the addiction treatment program you choose, we suggest you never make a negative affirmation. A negative affirmation will always create a negative result. By affirming that "we are powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable," the subconscious and emotional tendency is to fulfill that statement and make it true. Of course, this is the opposite of the desired out- come for addiction treatment and the fundamental issue and potential problem with Step 1 of the Twelve Steps.

We Are Powerful Beings

The human spirit is quite powerful, and [Positive Affirmations](#) can lead to a better foundation for beginning the work of healing and recovery from addiction and other emotional and mental disorders.

The reality is each and every human being wields extraordinary power with the spoken word and with this can create both positive and negative experiences. This is especially true in recovery and addiction treatment.

Each of us creates — both consciously and unconsciously — in every moment of our lives. According to Psychology Today, the average person has up to 50,000 thoughts a day and most of them are negative, which causes stress, illness, poverty and addiction. Our approach, based on the Principles of Spiritual Psychology, enables the Participant to consciously create positive thoughts and manifest wellness, abundance, and joy. This is called a Positive Affirmation and can be learned and mastered with extraordinary effect on your life.

The first decision within your power is to seek the right help.

Step Two

*Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves
could restore us to sanity*

Step 2 of the Twelve Steps program states:

*“Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us
to sanity.”*

Faith is a wonderful thing. However, does dependence on a ‘greater power’ for one's sanity give the wrong message to people struggling with substance or alcohol abuse? Does it help or hinder the recovery process?

A Foundation of Dependence

Unfortunately, while the message of dependence applied to addiction may have been revolutionary in the 1930s at the inception of the Twelve Steps, in the modern, evidence-based era, it may miss the mark.

Beaten down sufferers may be all too willing to misconstrue the point and believe that a greater power will swoop in and fix everything. The language of the Twelve Steps—powerlessness and dependence—may encourage those in recovery to give up helping themselves. As we look for God, parents, or even the government to care for our needs, the meta-message we give to ourselves is that we are not capable of caring for ourselves.

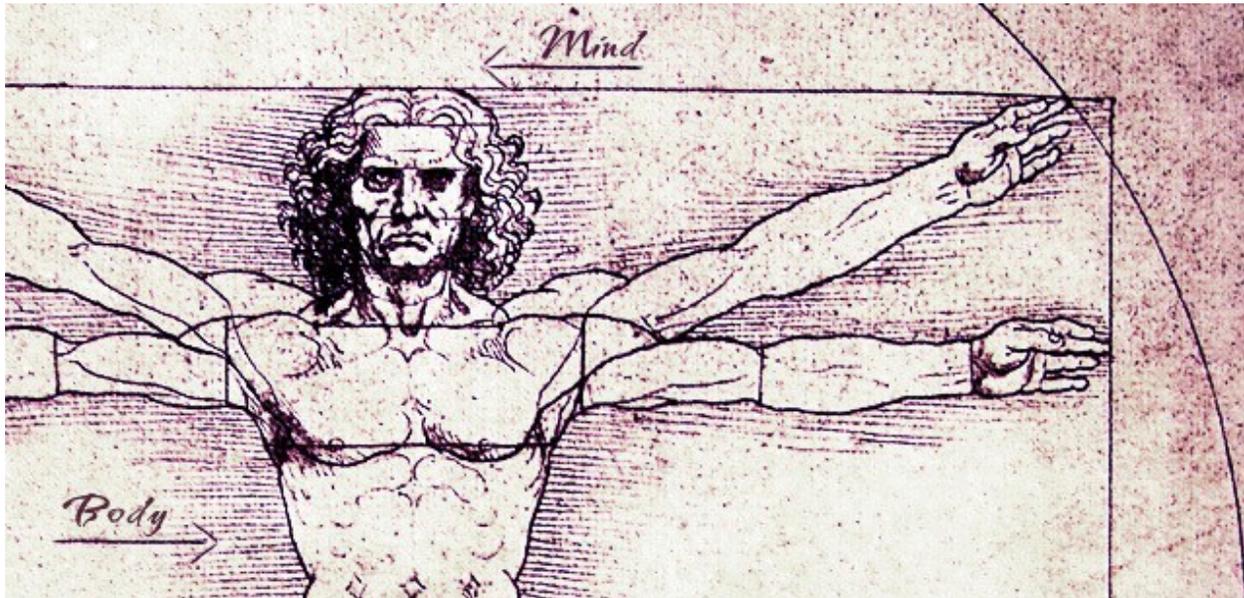
Real Recovery Comes From Within

Real recovery takes hold through our own efforts, not someone else's. All that is needed is the proper guidance—and faith can be a big part of that. When those suffering from addiction learn the proven evidence-based strategies and apply them, amazing results are not only possible, but probable.

Real recovery from alcohol or drug addiction takes place when people who are suffering are assisted in [discovering their own solutions](#). When people take on the challenge of continually finding the solutions to problems as they crop up in life, a permanent change can be achieved. This is a message of empowerment.

We are Co-Creators

The newer, non Twelve Steps addiction treatment programs are combining faith and spirituality along with psychology to treat mind, body, emotions, and spirit. Using the Spiritual Psychology



approach we work with the concept of [Co-Creation](#). Our Higher Power is included in the healing process but used in conjunction with us taking steps to help ourselves and being consciously aware of what we want to create in our lives.

We are very powerful creators in our own right and are meant to consciously create in the world. All of our past Intentions have given us our current reality. Our current Intentions can and will create our future reality.

Spirit Meets Us at Our Point of Action

If we choose to wait for an outside power to help us while we do nothing, then nothing is what tends to happen. But if we learn to focus our actions in a positive direction, a power greater than ourselves adds to the mix in a virtuous, reinforcing way.

As the saying goes, “God helps those who help themselves.”

Step Three

Made a decision to turn our wills and lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

Step 3 of the Twelve Steps program states:

“Made a decision to turn our wills and lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.”

Thus far in our discussion, we’ve highlighted some potential issues with Steps One and Two. By comparison, however, we have a lot of affinity for the Twelve Steps Step 3, which has also been expressed as “Turning our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand him.”

The Traditional Interpretation

Of course caring for the ‘God within’ wasn’t the spirit of Step 3 when it was originally written. The intent was about creating a connection with a Higher Power – a euphemism for God. By creating a communication with God, perhaps hope can be achieved.

The idea was that hope is key for a person struggling not only with alcohol abuse or substance abuse, but also with mental illness. If there is a belief that something “out there” will lend support to my situation, then the difficulties faced in confronting the addiction or mental illness may be more palatable.

A Better Decision

So while we agree that the care of God “as we understand Him” is a central part of recovery, we support the understanding of God “in us” rather than an interpretation of God as some distant force. The idea of relying on something outside of ourselves is just another way to be co-dependent. Anytime we need something “out there” to fill a hole, we are on slippery slope.

Combining spirituality with clinical psychology is showing the most promise. It is at the growing edge of residential rehab and treatment because it emphasizes working with a Higher Power and at the same time uses evidence-based psychological practices. According to Spiritual Psychology, when love is applied to hurt we heal. God is Love. When we apply Love (or God) to the parts inside that hurt, we heal.

By addressing the [underlying core issues](#) that cause alcoholism, drug abuse, depression, or other mental health disorder head on, Spiritual Psychology heals the fundamental upset and source of addiction or other undesirable behavior.

Psychology has come a long way since the 30’s. One element still rings true today – when God is included into the picture, miracles take place. This is the very enduring notion of Step 3...provided we understand that the power of God is within.

Step Four

Made a fearless and searching moral inventory of ourselves

Step 4 of the Twelve Steps program states:

“Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.”

Now that the notion of powerlessness (Step 1) and the role of God (steps 2 and 3) have been clarified, it's time to get to work. Step 4 of Alcoholics Anonymous separates the serious from the dabblers. In taking an honest look at ourselves it can, and has, opened up many deep-seated wounds. Does the Twelve Steps approach do enough to close the newly opened wounds properly? Let's take an honest look.

Many people engage in drug abuse, alcohol, or other substances to avoid dealing with sensitive issues. To “numb out” or “medicate”. While Step 4 is capable of uncovering much, many have questioned whether the Twelve Steps and its fellowship of non-professionals are equipped for dealing with deep mental and emotional issues.

Hard Questions, Little Training

The traumatic life experience issues are juicy and real for those suffering. But on a practical level, most Twelve Steps practitioners lack this type of training and are ill-equipped to help the with these conditions. Even many chemical dependency counselors have not been taught the psychological dynamics and therapeutic approaches, much less AA sponsors.

AA sponsors are instructed to simply share their experience, strength and hope. However, Step Four opens the door to much more serious issues which could be potentially damaging wounds. Many people going through Twelve Steps programs are not fortunate enough to even have a counselor. Many addiction treatment and residential rehab programs farm out their Twelve Steps -based program to local volunteers who transport participants to and from Twelve Steps meetings, become their month-long sponsor, and are asked to lead a participant through the Twelve Steps. Opening up a gaping psychological or emotional wound during this process could lead to serious damage and possibly even death if not handled properly by the practitioner or sponsor.

The Real Challenge of Step Four

How quickly we forget that individuals who go to addiction treatment are sick. Many of them have deep emotional scars. Should these people be in the care of an untrained or under- trained paraprofessional?

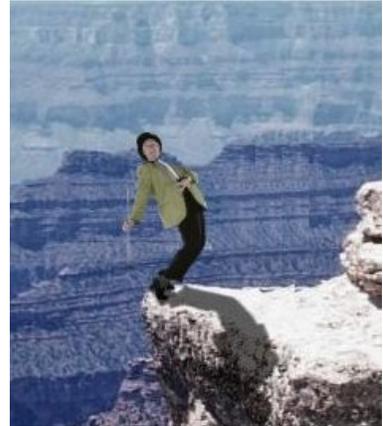
The vast majority of individuals who report difficulties with the Twelve Steps approach point to Step Four as “putting them over the edge.” Confronting and looking at their deepest darkest secrets is a vigorous and painstaking process for the average person. Add onto this the pain and shame of alcoholism or substance dependence. The person struggling with substance abuse has many extra burdens to work through.

People struggling with addiction are well aware of the damage they have caused. Should the rehab and recovery industry humiliate them further or help them learn and grow?

A Better Approach

Utilizing evidence-based psychological approaches, underlying mental and emotional issues can be identified and healed, eliminating the intense negative emotions of depression anxiety, self-loathing, and hopelessness. When we no longer feel these intense negative emotions, the need to abuse substances in order to self medicate disappears.

The process of doing a moral inventory can be helpful at the right time and for the right reasons. In recovery, especially where there is a history of trauma or emotional and mental issues, our recommendation is to work through these issues with the help of a professional.



Step Five

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

Step 5 of the Twelve Steps program states:

“Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.”

Step 5 is a bit of a mixed bag. At its core, Step 5 involves “admitting wrongdoing” that was revealed in Step 4. As with other Steps, how we interpret Step 5 can make a big difference.

Unpacking Step Five

Let's break this into pieces to get a closer look:

1. Admitting to God...

Spiritually speaking, it is always exciting to see God included in any approach. Our ego tends to “edge God out.” But when we include our Creator, healing is inevitable. God is Love, and when we apply Love to the hurt, we heal. Spiritual Psychology is founded on the principle that “the Father does the work.”

2. Admitting to ourselves...

Coming out of denial goes a long way in the healing process. We may make believe we are okay and hide from the truth, but as we take an honest look at ourselves, we can make the adjustments if we have the desire to do so.

3. Admitting to another human being...

As we discussed in Step 4, disclosure of potentially traumatic and sensitive material needs to be done with the right person and the right time. Therapists sometimes get fixated on getting the patient to “unzip” and reveal all their problems. Does this really matter? The old school approach was the belief that bringing issues up to the surface was healing in itself. But this can re-traumatize the patient, and put a halt to any gains in addiction or mental health treatment. Therapists and counselors don’t do the healing anyway – God does. All therapists can do is be supportive, provide valuable information, and teach [self-counseling skills](#)—the necessary resources to properly heal are already within.



4. Admitting the exact nature of our wrongs...

The concept of "right" and "wrong" as it applies to choices and behaviors has plagued man since before the middle ages. Have those struggling with addiction done wrong or, according to Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (REBT), “used faulty reasoning which led to faulty behaviors”?

Thomas Edison once stated: “I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work.” This is instructive, inspirational, and can be applied to addiction treatment as well.

According to Albert Ellis, the founder of REBT, all one needs to do is challenge the irrational beliefs, change them, and the resulting behaviors will be functional. Life is all about failure and learning. We fell down a lot before we finally learned how to walk. Watching children learn how to talk can be pretty entertaining. Have they wronged? Not at all – they were learning.

When someone turns to a substance for relief, they are doing the best they can with the information and life experiences they have. It was the only choice they knew to make. So, should the goal be about humiliation and assigning blame? Or should it be about encouraging better solutions and personal growth?

When someone turns to a substance for relief, they are doing the best they can with the information and life experiences they have. It was the only choice they knew to make. So, should the goal be about humiliation and assigning blame? Or should it be about encouraging better solutions and personal growth?

A Better Approach

What people in recovery need is sensitivity. The Sufi poet Rumi stated in the 13th century,

■ *“Out beyond the forest of wrongdoing and right doing, there is a field. I’ll meet you there.”*

Rumi nailed it over 700 years ago. Instead of focusing on blame, why not focus on the solution? [Right vs. wrong](#) thinking shames people. Haven’t people struggling with addiction gone through enough of that? Isn’t it time to pick them up, empower them to making better choices for themselves, and support their efforts along the way?

People in recovery need our support to move forward from where they are today.

Step Six

Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character

Step 6 of the Twelve Steps program states:

■ *“Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.”*

The general problem we have with Step 6 is its ambiguity and dated language. “Defects of Character” refers to the wrongdoing identified in Steps 4 and 5, and we have already established that [blaming and shaming](#) are counter-productive to healing.

Dissecting Step Six

Let’s break this down:

1. We were entirely ready...

To be ready to do something depicts a waiting state. “Healing” - the verb - is an action. It’s a bit of grammatical semantics, but it matters because it speaks to intent. In order for successful addiction treatment to take place at the onset, it is important to get a commitment to doing the work. If there is no commitment or intention to get better, the participant and the therapist are wasting their time.

2. To have God remove...

God doesn’t do the work for us. We do the work with God’s help.

3. Remove all these defects of character...

This lingo from the 1930s is still in use today but too vague to be really useful. What qualifies as a defect? We all know nobody's perfect. The danger we see in this language is that it is likely to be interpreted by a struggling addict as shaming: "I'm defective". "There's something wrong with me." And what happens when after a great effort, that old behavior crops up again, as is bound to happen? More shame. These are destructive, not constructive messages.

A More Actionable Approach

We prefer the following terms: "Limiting behaviors" rather than "character defects." "Apply Love to the hurt," rather than "have God remove." And, "Self Forgiveness," rather than "entirely ready."

Yoda and Empowerment

As Yoda said in *The Empire Strikes Back*, "There is no try, only do." Similarly, being "ready" to do something, and doing something are two different things. "Ready" never gets done. Also, Step 6 alludes back to this notion from Step 2 that someone else will fix us.



Empowerment is the key! Yes, we can have God there with us, but it is our efforts that are going to make an impact. Spirit meets us at our point of action. The person struggling with substance abuse needs to take the first step. People can change addictive behavior no matter how difficult it seems. When broken down into tiny incremental steps, what appears to be an overwhelming task can be handled in an easy "no brainer" fashion. As we do these steps we can be grateful for God's presence and realize that we are not alone in our efforts.

Do we want God to live our life for us or do we want to live our life for God?

Step Seven

Humbly asked Him to remove all our shortcomings

Step 7 of the Twelve Steps program states:

■ *“Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.”*

For a program that focuses on personal responsibility, Step 7 marks the signpost on how most non-Twelve Steps (like The Clearing) programs differ from the Twelve Steps. Do we want God to live our life for us or do we want to live our life for God? In our case, our non-Twelve Steps program is also spiritually-based, but works hand in hand with our “Higher Power.” Traditional Twelve Steps programs have God doing all the work.

God Doing the Work, or Us Doing The Work With God’s Help?

It is a beautiful thing to humbly ask for the Supreme Being to help. In our non-Twelve Steps program, we do this in every exercise, every tool, and every prayer. Our focus is to include God side-by-side in our efforts (Co-Creation). We are living our lives for and with God. But by asking God to “remove our shortcomings,” our role becomes passive. We stand by, we are powerless, and we live in the “hope” that things get better.

An Empowerment Approach

The culture of the Twelve Steps is one of surrender. “Let go and let God,” and “from dependence we found independence,” are just a few examples of the A.A. vernacular. In the short run it’s not surprising that “letting go” of dysfunctional coping mechanisms and even control would produce positive results. After all, we need help. But the question we pose is more for the long run. We believe that real freedom from the bonds of addiction occurs through learning self-counseling, self-care, and self-empowerment.

If you are one who is motivated by the idea of powerless over their addiction / disease / condition, ask yourself if it is because there is comfort in the notion of your healing being someone else's responsibility. If so, your recovery program may be feeding a related addiction to codependency.

For those Individuals who desire to get to the root of an issue and do their 100% to heal it out, the support network has been sparse. That is, up to now.

It is an interesting feeling doing something apart from the group consensus. It is natural to want to fit in and "be just like them." The empowerment model is far from this. The empowerment model asks people to be who they are, to follow their instincts, and to incorporate God into every action taken and get to the root of the problem.



What if your efforts healed you? Would you be able to replicate them again and again and again? Probably yes. This is what awaits you when you work to remove your shortcomings using your own efforts with God by your side.

Step Eight

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

Step 8 of the Twelve Steps program reads:

“We made a list of all the persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.”

Step 8 is certain to stir up the pot. We may have done damage to our own lives from our past actions, but when we consider the damage we may have caused to another person or persons, look out! Our addictive habits spur shame, guilt, and despair.

“Did you do that?!” This is what I used to yell at my dog with a rolled up newspaper in hand. Yes, she might have pooped on the carpet and as a result I had to clean it up. But I damaged our relationship each time I did so.

There are two ways to look at the logic behind Twelve Steps Step 8:

1. Do we find closure from our misdeeds of the past through others, or
2. Do we find closure through our own efforts?

The Spirituality of Learning Through Meditation

Here marks a departure between the spirituality of Alcoholics Anonymous and a pure spiritual healing approach. In a true spiritual healing approach (Spiritual Practice), there is no right and no wrong - only learning. The Spiritual Practice approach looks like this:

Fall down—>learn how to go about it differently through introspection, meditation and prayer—>get back up—>make forward progress.

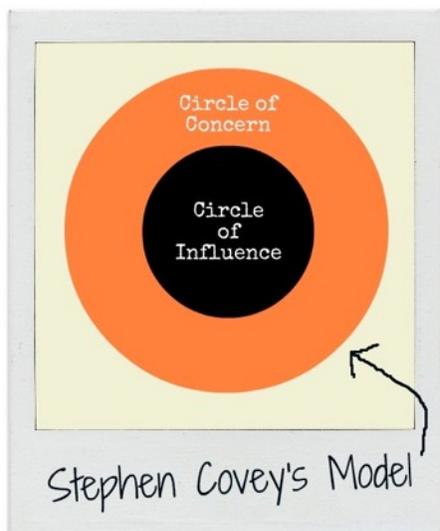
Compare this with the traditional Twelve Steps, where this scenario would be:

Fall down—>get back up with the help of a sponsor—>meet with other members of the group for support—>confess your wrongdoing—>plod forward and repeat the process.

	Twelve Steps	Spiritual Practice
Dogma	Right and Wrong	Learning
Cycle	Fall Down; Get back up with help of sponsor; Support group; Confess Failure; Repeat	Fall down; Introspection & Learning; Get back up

Self Forgiveness Instead of Others Forgiveness

Do we simply forgive and forget our past transgressions? Of course not. We look at what we've done, address the mental and emotional issues that are interwoven into each event, learn, grow, and ultimately forgive ourselves for the harm we may or may not have caused. Eventually we need to let it go to move ourselves forward.



Will people truly forgive us? Maybe yes, maybe no. But is another's forgiveness really the point? Can we really have an effect on others' actions? According to the late Steven Covey, author of 7 Habits of Highly Successful People, people external to us are in our "Circle of Concern." We are concerned about them but don't have direct impact on their actions. Our "Circle of Influence" refers to the impact we have with ourselves – period.

credit: upcyclededucation.com

Asking Jerry and George for Amends

I love the Seinfeld episode of a friend contacting Jerry and George in order to make amends. Their reactions to him are typical - "OK." It doesn't really matter to them. People are all too aware of the difficulty people struggling with substance abuse have in putting their lives back in order. They don't necessarily want to be involved in the process, nor should they be. We have all of the resources necessary to look at the wreckage from our past, do the inner work necessary to free ourselves of the issues and problems related to these events, learn and grow as a result of this introspection, forgive ourselves, and ultimately let it go.



Step Nine

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

Step 9 of the Twelve Steps program states:

“Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.”

Are we empowered or disempowered by making amends to the people in our lives we may have harmed?

Forgiveness in Recovery

Step Nine deals with the Spiritual Principle of Forgiveness. In seeking Forgiveness from others, we may be looking in the wrong direction. Is it noble to seek people out and get them to forgive you? Yes, absolutely. But what happens if they refuse to forgive? Perhaps the hurt is too deep or they are just not in a place to explicitly extend forgiveness yet. Are we still injured with no hope for recovery?



The drastic difference between a psychological approach and the Twelve Steps approach to addiction treatment comes to a head here. When we look for relief through another person, we disempower ourselves. We literally place our healing in their hands. We lose independence and control over our healing and our destiny.

Guilt or Embarrassment as a Motivator

Alcoholics Anonymous makes an interesting point here. The temptation to minimize one's substance abuse and skirt the issue can easily lead to somebody relapsing, so perhaps embarrassing them may give them a jolt of reality. We have more faith in our fellow man. When somebody makes a decision to stop using drugs, alcohol, or other substance, they are all too aware of how they have not only damaged themselves, but also how they have hurt other people.

Should the rest of us pile on and add to their guilt and uncomfortable feelings? Should we make them feel more ashamed? Or just help them fully heal?

True Forgiveness Comes from Within

Like the AA Twelve Steps, we believe forgiveness is not only important but absolutely necessary. Healing doesn't come from getting forgiveness from another. It comes from forgiving one- self. Self Forgiveness is ultimately what matters for the person to get on the road to true healing. We are the ones that have to live with us all of the time. We are the ones that need to control and "own" our behavior, our relationships, and our healing. Therefore the most important form of forgiveness must come from within.

In learning how to address the underlying mental and emotional issues and then forgive yourself, issues can be released forever. This can't be found through forgiveness from others.

Step Ten

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

Step 10 of the Twelve Steps program states:

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

Honesty & Self Assessment

The spirit of Step 10 is one of ongoing honesty: Honesty to oneself and honesty to another. There are layers to honesty as those who have completed their 10th step can attest to these layers. On the surface, honesty is rather straightforward. It is simply stating the obvious. At another level, sharing one’s “microscopic truth” is uncomfortable because it can hurt, show one’s vulnerability, and expose one’s darker side.

According to Gay and Kathleen Hendricks, the microscopic truth goes to the depth of one’s core with honesty. You risk making yourself vulnerable, sharing what you don’t want, and trusting in your counterpart matching this level of intimacy. In intimate relationships, the microscopic truth is an ultimate display of commitment two people can provide to one another; in every-day life this can lead to difficulty.

Ongoing assessment is one of the most important elements in remaining clean and sober long-term. It takes a willingness to take an honest look at oneself, and if something isn't quite right, to take swift action. It is humbling when a person realizes that they committed a wrong, and admit it to another. The ability to voice one's fault is the first step towards behavioral change.

Including another person into one's healing process is one of the key features of the Twelve Step Approach. What once took place only in intimate relationships or at a therapist's office is now enacted publicly among others. Keeping oneself comfortable with this type of disclosure can make or break recovery. Psychologically speaking, when we include another person into the recovery process, there can be pitfalls.

Who Influences Whom?

According to the author Steven Covey, we can only influence ourselves. Our actions can only impact us because we have direct influence on ourselves. Other people, according to Covey, are in our "circle of concern." We may be concerned with how people think about us, but it is their thoughts only and we can not hope to change them. All we can do is change our own.

The focus on admitting our faults to another person seems very noble. However, it is in admitting our faults to ourselves and taking the necessary action steps to fix these faults that results in solid sobriety for years to come.



Sin and Adjusting Our Aim

Sin is an old archer's term which means "missing the mark." When an archer sinned all they needed to do was adjust their aim and let their arrow fly once again. When we miss the mark in our life, admit to ourselves that we did so, make the adjustments and let our arrow fly again, it spells continued behavioral change, and success – bulls-eye!

Admitting Faults to Oneself

The personal empowerment model differs from the 12-Step model in the sense that the most important person to admit a wrong to is oneself. We are powerless over what other people do or not do, but we are powerful when it comes to ourselves.

The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous for some can blur the lines between asking for help, and promoting long-term dependency—on a sponsor and on others to forgive our wrongdoing. Starting with Step 1, AA believes that people are powerless over their substance of abuse.

Shifting the Focus to Empowerment and Issue Resolution

An empowerment viewpoint believes that people who support a drug habit costing hundreds of dollars a day are indeed very powerful – all their resources were focused to using and in this regard they succeeded day after day. By showing people how to channel this energy toward their own good, remarkable things can happen. This can lead to amazing success if you have the ultimate desire to stop missing the mark.

The term "issue resolution" may be a new concept to many in the Twelve Step recovery world. Can our issues actually resolve? According to the 12-Steps, this can only happen through an act of God. Evidence-based psychological approaches tend to focus on empowerment of the individual. Since we can't change others' impression of us, no matter how hard we try, what is possible is changing our impression of ourselves.

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.

Step 11 of the Twelve Steps program states:

“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.”

Step 11 is a breath of fresh air. In this day and age you rarely see a focus on God. Usually the focus is on money, physical appearance, what kind of car you drive. If you were to strip away the looks, the money, the car, what would you have? Here is the beauty of the 11th Step – what's left is you and your relationship with God.

Throughout the ages countries were founded on religious belief. “One nation under God” was the slogan of our own. Today it is a thing of the past in our government, schools, and in the minds of many people in so-called secular nations. The 11th Step keeps the role of Spirituality at the forefront of our recovery.

God and Psychology

Psychologically speaking, the belief in God is a healthy one. Existentialism is founded on the belief that if a person doesn't have any spiritual belief then life is a death sentence. The mere

fact that death is eminent leads to tremendous anxiety and panic. For the Existential therapist, their work is to assist the client in discovering a spiritual belief.

Other psychological approaches have tried to include God into the mix. Psychosynthesis with Roberto Assagioli was the first. As a correspondent of Sigmund Freud, he disagreed with Freud's belief that humans are motivated by sexual urges and maintained that people are motivated by spiritual ones. He believed that since man was created in the image of God, the blueprint of God is within each and every one of us. By getting in tune with this inner image, peace can be found.

Abraham Maslow piggy-backed Assagioli's theory when he proposed his famous Hierarchy of Needs model. The pinnacle of his model is referred to as "Self-Actualization." Self-actualization can be seen as similar to self-discovery, self-reflection, self-realization and self exploration. It is basically where a person reaches enlightenment.

Step 11 and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

In Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs Model" he maintains that this enlightenment is only achieved after a person's physiological, security, social, and self esteem needs are met. Once they achieve this enlightened place, a person actually feels part of everything.

Many people that adhere to a hard lined evidence-based psychological approach believe that Step 11 bypasses the elements of Dr. Maslow's model. Others are not that strict. Let's take a look at the hierarchy more closely.



Physiological Needs

These are the needs for our physical body – breathing, food, water, shelter, clothing, sleep, sex. If these basics aren't obtained, the focus is on obtaining the cherished item. For example, if you were scuba diving and your tank ran out of air, that last thirty feet you'd only focus on getting to the surface.

Safety and Security Needs

Safety and security needs refer to one's health, employment, property, family, and social stability. If a person does not have a job, the focus is on getting one.

Love and Belonging

Love and belonging needs refer to friendship, family, intimacy, and a sense of connection. With no love in one's life, a void is felt.

Self-Esteem

Self esteem refers to confidence, achievement, respect of others, and the need to be a unique individual. Self Esteem can be achieved only when the lower items of the hierarchy are met.

Self-Actualization

Self actualization is the pinnacle of the model and refers to morality, creativity, spontaneity, acceptance, experiencing purpose, meaning and inner potential. Basically a spiritual awakening.

Maslow and Spiritual Psychology

In Maslow's model, the focus on God could never be debated. But as quantum physics suggests an intelligence greater than ourselves that organizes all matter, the God Movement of the past may again be on the rise. Spiritual Psychology is a newer psychological approach that blends God with psychology principles. For years psychologists believed that bringing the subconscious to the conscious was what it took to heal. New research now suggest that this approach can re-traumatize an individual. With Spiritual Psychology, once the subconscious material is brought to the surface and love is then applied, incredible healing takes place. God is love.

Step 11 and God

Improving our conscious contact with the God of our understanding has merit. It is key in Step 11, and it's the main factor in the Spiritual Psychology approach. More and more, psychology is trending back to our ancestral roots. God has been proven scientifically and with God in the psychological setting, miracles can take place.

Step Twelve

Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to others, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Step 12 of the Twelve Steps program states:

"Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others, and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

Help Others (But Don't Expect to Fix Them)

You just had a spiritual awakening and are ready to take on the world! Unfortunately, the world may not be ready for you. It's a shame to discover that the people who need to learn what you know won't give you the time of day after you've experienced something spectacular. Don't they realize that you have "the answer"? Can't they see that you have faced all of your demons, came out on the other side and have seen the Light?





Whether it is by completing the Twelve Steps, through deep personal work, or by having a paranormal experience, sharing this with others can be a challenging and tedious process with lots of pitfalls. It is an honorable thing to carry a message of hope, a message of healing, and a message of God awakening within. It also shows the messenger's character. In the 'generation of me' the mere fact that a person is willing make the effort to lend a hand to another human being shows compassion and a yearning to help. Is this a throwback from a past era or a re- turning trend? Hopefully the latter.

People helping other people is not a new idea. From our humblest beginnings, this is how we survived and thrived. It was neighbor helping neighbor, brother helping brother, and lending a helping hand to the weary traveler. The spirit of the Step 12 carries on this tradition. It is breaking through mistrust, isolation, and apathy of somebody in need that is the real challenge in today's society.

There are people who are skilled at working past the resistance to change. It takes patience, compassion, repetition, and a firm inner foundation. These individuals know themselves, love themselves and can naturally share it with others. Alternatively, those that try to find their worth through others may have difficulties when others won't listen to their message.

Step 12 and Resistance to Change

Why do people who need to heal the most refuse to help themselves? Why do they refuse help from others? Clinically speaking, passiveness and complacency can be the result of aversion or fear of change. Even a destructive life may be comforting in some way. The resistance to change can also stem from past interactions with people who have tried to help, but did so in the wrong way. So why would they want to be harmed again? Finally, one additional reason may simply be the stigma of being labeled an alcoholic or having a mental illness and the fear of being locked away.

Helping Others Also Helps the Giver

To be true to the Step 12 process, one must be willing to step beyond their comfort zone and reach out to others. This process may have some benefits for the giver too. According to writer and educator George Leonard, stretching our comfort zone is personal mastery. In his book, "Mastery" he describes a process as "living on your growing edge." This is where people get comfortable in the uncomfortable process of change. To Leonard, this is true mastery. As the Twelve-stepper takes on the challenge of bringing the message to others, it is a learning process that can be mastered with perseverance.

Back in the day, when people were helping people more naturally, it wasn't a stretch to lend a hand, give someone a blanket, or give them a meal. My grandma gave me some great advice a few years shy of her 100th birthday. She said, "I never give people advice, but when they ask me a question I do my very best to answer as honestly as I can." Some people have the knack to instantly bond with others in need. For others it is a step-by-step process that can be mastered. The ultimate key is for a person to be comfortable with the messenger and then the message is more readily received.

CONCLUSION

We hope you have found this discussion of the Twelve Steps and Alternative approaches to addiction treatment valuable.

Key Takeaways on the Twelve Steps

One of the key benefits of the Twelve Steps is its ubiquity and accessibility. Everywhere in the world at any time there is a 12-step meeting going on. Fellowship with others who share your struggles can be helpful, especially if when just starting out.

Twelve Steps' success rates (see appendix) as reported by a variety of studies, is very low and declining. This may be a sign of a changing society, one where the Twelve Steps are not as effective as perhaps they once were.

Still, millions have learned the Twelve Steps approach and swear by it. These people are active in sharing the word. Everybody is welcomed, no matter if you are rich or poor. A cup of coffee and donut awaits you if you are willing to simply show up.

If You Are Still Struggling

As the AA saying goes, "It works if you work it". Except, that is, when it doesn't.

The primary message we wish to convey is: if the Twelve Steps hasn't been working for you, don't lose hope! There are many evidenced-based, psychological methods available to you. Other approaches, like the Spiritual Psychology model we employ at The Clearing, have evolved with advances in neuroscience and psychology research. We know much more about what causes and drives addictive behavior, and have vastly more proven tools at our disposal.

When it comes to choosing a residential treatment center or approach, pay close attention to the treatment approach and program structure. Remember, you are paying for professional help, not a luxury vacation. Ask direct questions about the amount of individual counseling and the credentials of who's providing it. And ask what evidence-based, psychological techniques are used.

We're Here to Help

If you have found this eBook helpful please drop us a message and let us know. We would love to hear from you.

Thanks for checking this out, we hope it was helpful to you. Give us a call, we're here to help. (425) 275-8600.



Joseph Koelzer – joe@theclearingnw.com
Co-founder and CEO

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph H. Koelzer, CEO". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Betsy Koelzer – betsy@theclearingnw.com
Co-founder and VP of Operations

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Betsy Koelzer". The signature is written in a cursive style.

ABOUT THE CLEARING

Have you ever experienced something so great and profound that you just had to share it with others?

Well, if you have, then you'll understand what motivated us to tell our story, do our work, and to start The Clearing, all in an effort to help others still struggling. This ebook and our work at The Clearing is a labor of love.

Speaking From Experience

Plain and simple, everything you read here is real. We have first-hand experience with detox, Malibu treatment centers, Twelve Steps, and many, many individual cases of trouble with alcohol, drugs, depression, anxiety, and other disorders. We have witnessed a spiritual approach to healing and its transformational effects in both our own lives and the lives of countless others. So if you read it here, you can rest assured that these approaches have been tried and shown to work with authentic commitment.

We teach counseling skills, strategies and concepts based on the Principles of Spiritual Psychology. Using these simple but effective tools, our participants are able to identify and heal the deep mental and emotional issues that have been driving them to their limiting behavior (drugs, alcohol, self harm, etc).

The Clearing's Story

In December 2011, the two Founders began working together to create the program that has now become The Clearing.

We were all too familiar, from personal experience, with the rehab industry and its weaknesses. We observed that the success rates were very low. More troubling, we knew of many stories of people going to rehab and not experiencing a substantive program, in some cases coming out of treatment worse than they went in. Our research showed that many programs solely provide behavior modification and coping skills as their solution, which doesn't address the core mental and emotional issues present for people struggling with their personal situation.



Betty Halger Joseph H. Koelger, M.D.

We both have backgrounds in Spiritual Psychology, and together we said with absolute clarity, "we can do better." Each of us have the experience of healing profound issues which limited our lives through the Principles of Spiritual Psychology and we have been tremendously blessed to have worked with others and watched them do the same. Without a doubt, we knew it was the time in our lives to create and manifest this Program.

In designing our Program, we started with a blank piece of paper. We didn't look at what insurance would pay for and we didn't look at what other programs were doing. We focused on creating a program that would provide the best opportunity for our Participants to heal the underlying core issues that were limiting their lives. We had all been through an excellent program at the University of Santa Monica and we drew heavily on our experience there.

The result is the Program we offer you today. Together we have spent over 18 months designing and implementing the best program we know how to create, in the best facility we could find. The result is a highly effective program, in a loving, healing and safe environment, located in a beautiful location in the San Juan Islands of Washington State. There is literally not another program like us in the country. This program was designed from the ground up to provide our participants with a set of life altering tools they will use both in their present circumstance, and also in their unfolding life going forward.

We are excited and confident that we have created an unparalleled program for those who participate honestly and authentically.

Mission Statement

When we came together to create The Clearing, one of the first things we did was form our Mission Statement. We did this so that we would have a compass, a document that reminded us each day what we were doing and why we were doing it.

We dedicate our lives to loving service.

With joined purpose, we have created a loving environment dedicated to teaching and modeling the Principles of Spiritual Psychology. Guided by Spirit, we are facilitating those entrusted to our care, as they heal their issues for the Highest Good of all concerned. In an honoring, loving, authentic and professional way, we are providing care at the highest standards of the mental health industry.

APPENDIX

Twelve Steps Effectiveness

Though the Twelve Steps is effective for some who find its structure acceptable, depending on the study its success rate is only 3-5%. Since the inception of AA over 80 years ago, there have been tremendous advances in the theory and application of psychology, spirituality and science to the issues of addiction and mental illness.

There is very little if any empirical evidence to support efficacy of the Twelve Steps approach. A recent review by the Cochrane Library, a health-care research group, of studies on alcohol treatment conducted between 1966 and 2005 states its results plainly: "No experimental studies unequivocally demonstrated the effectiveness of AA or TSF [Twelve Steps facilitation] approaches for reducing alcohol dependence or problems." Dr. Bankole Johnson cites equally dismal numbers: "In a 1990 summary of five membership surveys from 1977 through 1989, AA reported that 81% of alcoholics who began attending meetings stopped within one month. At any one time, only 5% of those still attending had been doing so for a year."

The Twelve Steps program was developed in 1930s. Think about it... before television. The program hasn't changed materially since.

Some of the advances and insights pertaining to the psychological treatment of addiction are at odds with the traditional principles of the twelve steps, and thus, a Twelve Steps alternative program is required to take advantage of these advances.

Research on Twelve Steps Approach Effectiveness

[The Cochrane Collaboration Study](#)

This study concludes: “People considering attending AA or TSF programmes should be made aware that there is a lack of experimental evidence on the effectiveness of such programmes.”

[Lance Dodes Study](#)

Lance Dodes who was with the Harvard School of Medicine did a study that concluded the AA success rate was between 5 to 8 percent.

[Atlantic Monthly](#)

A recent Atlantic Monthly Article explored some of the evidence that exists.

[The Handbook of Alcoholism Treatment Approaches](#)

This handbook ranks AA 38th out of 48 Treatment Approaches.