

theJournal

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Character Assets

Characteristics of Sex and Love Addiction

1. Having few healthy boundaries, we become sexually involved with and/or emotionally attached to people without knowing them.
2. Fearing abandonment and loneliness, we stay in and return to painful, destructive relationships, concealing our dependency needs from ourselves and others, growing more isolated and alienated from friends and loved ones, ourselves, and God.
3. Fearing emotional and/or sexual deprivation, we compulsively pursue and involve ourselves in one relationship after another, sometimes having more than one sexual or emotional liaison at a time.
4. We confuse love with neediness, physical and sexual attraction, pity and/or the need to rescue or be rescued.
5. We feel empty and incomplete when we are alone. Even though we fear intimacy and commitment, we continually search for relationships and sexual contacts.
6. We sexualize stress, guilt, loneliness, anger, shame, fear and envy. We use sex or emotional dependence as substitutes for nurturing care, and support.
7. We use sex and emotional involvement to manipulate and control others.
8. We become immobilized or seriously distracted by romantic or sexual obsessions or fantasies.
9. We avoid responsibility for ourselves by attaching ourselves to people who are emotionally unavailable.
10. We stay enslaved to emotional dependency, romantic intrigue, or compulsive sexual activities.
11. To avoid feeling vulnerable, we may retreat from all intimate involvement, mistaking sexual and emotional anorexia for recovery.
12. We assign magical qualities to others. We idealize and pursue them, then blame them for not fulfilling our fantasies and expectations.

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S.L.A.A. Signs of Recovery

1. We seek to develop a daily relationship with a Higher Power, knowing that we are not alone in our efforts to heal ourselves from our addiction.
2. We are willing to be vulnerable because the capacity to trust has been restored to us by our faith in a Higher Power.
3. We surrender, one day at a time, our whole life strategy of, and our obsession with the pursuit of romantic and sexual intrigue and emotional dependency.
4. We learn to avoid situations that may put us at risk physically, morally, psychologically or spiritually.
5. We learn to accept and love ourselves, to take responsibility for our own lives, and to take care of our own needs before involving ourselves with others.
6. We become willing to ask for help, allowing ourselves to be vulnerable and learning to trust and accept others.
7. We allow ourselves to work through the pain of our low self-esteem and our fears of abandonment and responsibility. We learn to feel comfortable in solitude.
8. We begin to accept our imperfections and mistakes as part of being human, healing our shame and perfectionism while working on our character defects.
9. We begin to substitute honesty for self-destructive ways of expressing emotions and feelings.
10. We become honest in expressing who we are, developing true intimacy in our relationships with ourselves and others.
11. We learn to value sex as a by-product of sharing, commitment, trust and cooperation in a partnership.
12. We are restored to sanity, on a daily basis, by participating in the process of recovery.

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Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous Preamble

Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous is a Twelve Step, Twelve Tradition-oriented fellowship based on the model pioneered by Alcoholics Anonymous.

The only qualification for S.L.A.A. membership is a desire to stop living out a pattern of sex and love addiction. S.L.A.A. is supported entirely through contributions of its membership, and is free to all who need it.

To counter the destructive consequences of sex and love addiction we draw on five major resources:

1. **Sobriety.** Our willingness to stop acting out in our own personal bottom-line addictive behavior on a daily basis.
2. **Sponsorship/Meetings.** Our capacity to reach out for the supportive fellowship within S.L.A.A.
3. **Steps.** Our practice of the Twelve Step program of recovery to achieve sexual and emotional sobriety.
4. **Service.** Our giving back to the S.L.A.A. community what we continue to freely receive.
5. **Spirituality.** Our developing a relationship with a Power greater than ourselves, which can guide and sustain us in recovery.

As a fellowship S.L.A.A. has no opinion on outside issues and seeks no controversy. S.L.A.A. is not affiliated with any other organizations, movements, or causes, either religious or secular.

We are, however, united in a common focus: dealing with our addictive sexual and emotional behavior. We find a common denominator in our obsessive/compulsive patterns, which transcends any personal differences of sexual orientation or gender identity.

We need protect with special care the anonymity of every S.L.A.A. member. Additionally we try to avoid drawing undue attention to S.L.A.A. as a whole from the public media.

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The Twelve Steps of S.L.A.A.*

1. We admitted we were powerless over sex and love addiction - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with a Power greater than ourselves, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to sex and love addicts, and to practice these principles in all areas of our lives.

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Letter From the Editor

Dear Reader:

In the A.A. Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions book, Step 10, it says, "Learning daily to spot, admit, and correct these flaws [defects of character] is the essence of character building and good living. An honest regret for harms done, a genuine gratitude for blessings received, and a willingness to try for better things tomorrow will be the permanent assets we shall seek."

Before my S.L.A.A. sobriety, a therapist told me to write down all the good things about myself and read it into a recorder with soothing music playing in the background. I was supposed to record this and listen to it each night before I went to sleep. I could not think of one single thing to put on that recording! My therapist said to write down all the bad things I thought of myself and turn them into good things. It felt like I was lying when I did that. Today, with the help of S.L.A.A., I can say that I am not lying. Program taught me how to take all the bad things about me and turn them into assets. Sometimes it takes hard work and patience, but it can be done. The stories included in this issue of the Journal help us on that road to good living and character building. I hope you enjoy them as much as I did!

Lisa C., Managing Editor, *the Journal*

The Conference Journal Committee, a service body within Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous, publishes *the Journal* for the good of the international S.L.A.A. membership. Oversight and policy is provided in accordance with the Ninth Tradition.

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Question of the Day

& Answers from Yesterday

DESCRIBE YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH CHARACTER ASSETS. ARE THERE PROGRAM TOOLS THAT YOU USE TO HELP YOU DISCOVER/DEVELOP YOUR CHARACTER ASSETS?"

Sharing in meetings develops honesty.
7th Tradition = generosity. 12th Step-service.
— Alan B., Toronto

I am only recently in a place where I am realizing my character assets. Addiction clouds the healthy, positive qualities I have and recovery friends help as a tool to see my growth.
— Anonymous

Listening to others share is a meditation that builds my ability to contain reactivity.
— Nancy G., San Diego

It took me a long time before I was able to identify my character assets. My inventories changed as I changed. But it took time and deep healing.
— Denise, China

“Slogans!” (How important is it?
TTP— Trust the Process. Let go, let God.)
— Danette, Seminole, Fla.

If we are not careful when we are doing our 4th Step, we can feel like we have no character assets. We might start to feel shame and deep regret. Sponsors can be invaluable in helping us to see that the Steps can set us free from the past, heal our shame, give us an opportunity to right our wrongs, and restore our dignity as human beings, with the help of a Power greater than ourselves.
— Anonymous

The Question of the Day from the last issue was, “Describe your experience with character assets. Are there program tools that you use to help you discover/develop your character assets?” Here are some wonderful responses for your enjoyment. They are not presented in any particular order. The next two questions are: Issue #157 — Moving from Victim into Responsibility — “How were you able to discover and move from victimhood into responsibility? — The deadline for submissions is 9/15/15. Issue #158 — Anorexia and Dating — Is the plan of dating different when an S.L.A.A. member is acting in instead of acting out? — The deadline for submissions is 11/15/15. Please send answers to www.slaafws.org.

Unfortunately, character defects are a bigger topic in the S.L.A.A. culture. However, as you get outside of yourself – and simultaneously discover yourself – through step work, you grow a deeper self-appreciation, and let go of shame.

— **Madeline S., Los Angeles**

My assets are also liabilities. Luckily, in my recovery, I can see the fine line that divides the two.

— **Melissa K., Philadelphia**

I found that working with a sponsee and when in conversations with fellows, I have discovered my character assets. Knowing my assets has improved my self-esteem. It gave me courage to sponsor.

— **SuzAnne, Los Angeles**

Yes. Once a month I work the Steps at a 3-hour-long workshop.

— **Roberto, Frankfurt**

Sponsorship has been my greatest tool with experiencing my own character assets. Being sponsored has also helped me to see character assets.

— **Tommy M., Dallas**

The Tenth Step has been helpful, taking risks and letting go, sponsor input.

— **Duane T., Oakland, CA**

Service helps me to focus on what I am able to give to my recovery community, helps me to connect to my fellows in recovery and increases my self-esteem – which heightens all my character assets!

— **Anonymous, Seattle**

Character Building Values

When I first came into S.L.A.A. I was not ready for my Higher Power to build my character.

I was ready to have a possible acting-out situation with any member of the fellowship and that was only my first meeting!

God used any thought I had of acting out to get me in the door. I did not act out that first meeting with anyone, but I did receive a hug after I shared. And it was a hug that kept me coming back for the good.

I was able to share and cry at the second meeting I went to. The members were like me and they knew how to listen and be empathetic. I wanted what they had.

It took me a year and a half to finally get abstinent from my bottom line. I just soaked up the

words and feelings that were expressed at the meetings.

I had to set up bottom lines that I could be successful at. I was able to not break my bottom line for a long time. However, instead of acting out, I began to act in. I am a hard core sex addict and a hard core love avoidant.

My bottom line is no pornography and no masturbation. My topline is to have a loving committed relationship and no sex outside of that relationship.

These are ideals that I strive for. I have not acted out on my bottom line in over 13 years. That's right, I have not had sex for more than 13 years. I turned into a monk or priest or so it seems. I am now wanting to date

women more and talk to them.

First, I have to have a life. I was able to get a career out of not breaking my bottom line and now I am starting to get a life and expand my horizons. I have a need to have sex with a woman that I love.

My path has been slow. But slow means it really sticks with me. I have a sponsor and I have worked the steps.

I have my path and you have yours. Work the program and don't leave before the miracle happens.

I don't know if God has a sexy loving partner for me, but I do know that my Higher Power is taking care of me and I am eternally grateful.

— Anonymous

The S.L.A.A. Basic Text eBook
IS HERE!



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[click here for link](#)

Character Assets: Your Toolbox for Recovery



To build anything requires having the right tools and a toolbox where you can easily find them.

What we are building in Steps 6 and 7 is a new personality structure. We lay its foundation through our character assets. Our list of character assets is our toolbox. Our individual assets are our unique tools for the work we most need to undertake: to correct the defects that have grown up around our addictions.

In our Step 4 inventories, we naturally tended to focus on how we hurt others (and ourselves). Our sponsors expected that we would name and begin to examine the character defects that underlay our histories of bad conduct. But to only focus on our defects in our Step 4 inventories is misguided.

We cannot continue recovering and becoming the people we want to be without a thorough knowledge of the assets that we have been putting to work since coming into the program.

We are going to need those assets to be as strong as possible to continue to do the work of the coming steps. We are going to need those assets in order to become the people we are beginning to glimpse that we can indeed be.

Character assets are not simply an add-on to a Step 4 inventory, but an integral part of it.

To begin with, a person who has done such an inventory had the openness, willingness and courage to look fearlessly into their past conduct.

That person has shown commitment, honesty and follow-through in working with a sponsor. That person is moving into self-acceptance for the past and has developed hope for the future, rooted in his or her trust in a Higher Power. These and many other assets we could name

are the very qualities that we need to go forward in our work.

As the last part of our Step 4-5 work, I ask sponsees to present a comprehensive list of their character defects. Then I ask them to whittle down that list to the top ten – for many are closely related, such as anger, irritability and stubbornness, to name a few from my own Step 4 list.

With these ten agreed upon, I ask the sponsee to think of a character asset that can best counteract the negative effects of each defect. For instance, humility might be a particular person's antithesis to pride.

A different person might choose self-acceptance as the opposing asset. The discernment of what attribute can best counteract what defect is the moment when we move into the work of Step 6, "becoming entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character."

I suggest that the sponsee write each pair of words – the asset and the defect - on the two sides of a 3 x 5 card, something that can fit easily in one's pocket. I then ask the sponsee to commit to work on one of these asset-defect pairs at a time and to stick with it for at least a week.

What this involves is writing down on the card a brief notation of when and how the defect showed up in their conduct and when the asset showed up. These become the fodder for our daily phone conversations.

As the sponsee becomes confident that he is manifesting more self-acceptance, for instance, and less grandiosity rooted in insecurity, I encourage him to move on to the next pair.

At a minimum, this work on the sixth step takes ten weeks, but it can certainly take longer, as many of these defects are deeply

ingrained and the spiritual muscles that move one's character assets may still be a bit flabby. And one can certainly keep adding pairs of defects and assets to the list.

As I see it, coming to know and to put one's character assets to work is a major part of what is called for in Step 6. How do we become entirely ready to have the God of our understanding remove all our defects of character? The process of becoming ready, I submit, involves becoming convinced that we can let go, with the help of the God of our understanding, of the defects that have grown up at the core of our personalities along with our addictions.

And we cannot become convinced that we can let go until we witness that we are indeed capable of manifesting our character assets in our key relationships. From my experience and that of my sponsees, I know that we will then see those relationships change and blossom.

Perhaps there are some who might question whether our taking such an active role in removing our defects cuts out the Higher Power's role. I would answer to the contrary.

I don't think it's fair to ask the God of my understanding to do God's part, unless I am willing to do my part. I take that mutuality to represent the essence of the partnership theology underlying step work, which is so beautifully expressed in our basic text. "It was enough that we be willing to do the legwork, and be open-minded about what the result would be. God's grace would give us freedom from the burden of our old self (S.L.A.A. Basic Text, p. 87)."

— Herb L.

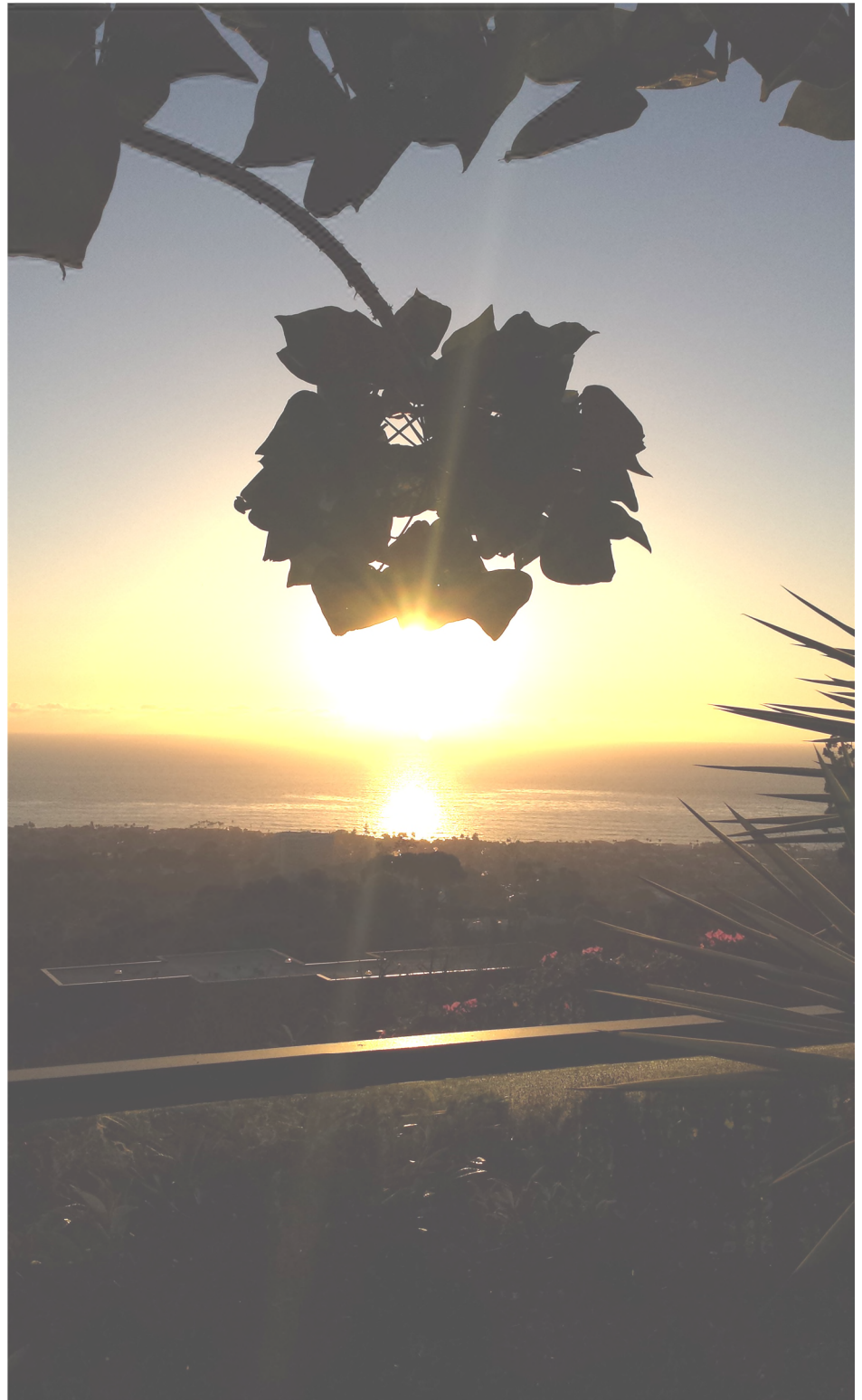
Seeking Serenity and Sanity

I am not sure what is meant by character assets. All I know is I seek serenity and sanity in my life these days. The one “asset” if that can be called that is that I try (this takes effort for me) to just keep my damn mouth shut in meetings and truly listen to the words that are said. This goes hand-in-hand with another task I am working on — to live in the present. Again, this is easier said than done.

It is by listening that you pick up the small baby steps that teach you the way to intimacy. Slowing down my mind to figure out what I am going to say helps me too. I try to bring paper and pen to write down the scraps of knowledge I get. Quickly (so I can keep listening) I write one word or two of things I want to comment on. It seems simple but it is not.

The latest results of listening was that I got a major clue as to why I was attracted to that last crazy, insane relationship. Information like this is a gem to prevent me from falling for the stupid lines again. Also, I believe in staying present, giving others my full attention. The result is that I am receiving back an encouraging atmosphere that is allowing my authentic self to start to bloom and shine through. The one place this seems to be happening most right now is at work which is the one place I thought I would never, ever show my true self since that is the place you show your “game” face.

— Lois T., Cincinnati, Ohio



Character Assets in Step 6



I first encountered the term character assets when working my Step 6. The A.A. Big Book says a complete inventory requires a look at both the good and bad sides of our personality. However, in Steps 4 and 5 there was only mentioned character defects.

My sponsor had me start Step 6 by going through the long list I had made of my character defects, and describe the corresponding character assets. Was my personality only comprised of defects, or were

there also positive sides that I could strengthen in my recovery?

One important thing my sponsor taught me was that many character defects are only exaggerated character assets. For instance, fear could be viewed as exaggerated caution. Caution is an asset, preventing me from doing careless and possibly stupid things.

Working on strengthening my positive personality traits, and “modulating the volume” of my character defects made my

recovery so much easier. I have tried working on extinguishing character defects before. If it did not in fact make the defects stronger, the efforts proved useless.

I do not take away defects, or dysfunctional ways of thinking and acting, in my recovery. Instead, with the help of my character assets I add new ways of thinking and acting. This gives me a choice of how to respond in different situations.

— **Fredrik L, Sweden**

Writing to Entrap Morphs into Writing to Inspire

One of my positive character assets is my love for writing.

I have journaled for 33 years. I was also an active sex addict during those years so, obviously, I was journaling about the wrong things.

What I journaled about is what you would expect an addict to focus upon. I essentially wrote an “ode to myself” about how great “I” am that I’m doing all these things and going to all these places.

I wrote about being a great adventurer, first in my outdoor recreational escapes, then I switched to writing about my adventures of power and intensity into the world of sex. My writing had all the hallmarks of addiction – detachment, self-centeredness, grandiosity, and absolutely nothing expressed about my true inner feelings. So much for writing helping one to process feelings.

As my addiction escalated, I wrote about my acting out experiences in even greater detail. This served to make my addict even more focused and obsessed.

What I texted on the hook-up apps was exactly what my sick addict was thinking in his delusional mind.

My addiction was escalating

and I was using my talent for writing as one of my addict’s many tools to reel them in. In my case, it was certainly not helpful to put into words the insane pornographic thoughts my addict’s brain was continuously soaking in.

My writing was adding fuel to the fire. I’m convinced that if I hadn’t found recovery I would have been blogging and writing very graphic erotica. Who says an addict can’t be creative. In my case, for all the wrong reasons.

When I started in the program, I began to use my love for writing in a healthy way. I wrote about my struggles and my new feelings. For the first time ever, my writing was useful.

By expressing myself honestly through writing, I was breaking through the years of delusion. I find it so exciting to write about my life in recovery. As I shared my written story, my struggles and my insights in the rooms, I was vulnerable with my innermost feelings and was unconditionally accepted.

Others encouraged my writing and self-exploration. Some saw my talent for writing and introduced me to the incredible group of volunteers writing our

new S.L.A.A. literature.

During one of the most challenging times in my recovery, I wrote the narrative for one of the steps in our new 12 and 12. I felt so empowered when I was writing it.

I was struggling mightily with that step and writing helped me work through all my feelings on that step. Not only did I share my anguish at being forced to take this step, I also shared my newfound strength and hope.

I have been supported so much by this fellowship. Finally one of my strengths is doing something constructive.

No longer am I a calculating addict reeling them in with my words for my own selfish sick use. I am using my words to tell of the great life all of us can have in recovery if we just live this program and work these steps.

I am truly inspired by the steps and this program. It is changing my life. I want my words to light the way to the incredible life of freedom and serenity we all can have if we just work this program.

I have truly been blessed. We all have been blessed.

— Craig G., Massachusetts

Strong Commitment to Sobriety



I have a strong commitment to my sobriety, which I consider a character asset. As part of this commitment, I've turned possible character defects into other assets.

For example, I tend to need vivid or extreme ideas to help me understand something.

Otherwise, the message does not get through and I stay stuck in negative patterns of thinking and behavior. Fortunately, the S.L.A.A. recovery program contains strong tools and slogans that have been very helpful to me.

An initial exercise I used in the beginning of my recovery, while I prepared to work on Step 1, was to write an exhaustive list of all the negative consequences of acting out on my addiction— I mean exhaustive – no minor detail was left out. My addiction hurt me in the area of physical safety, mental and physical health, finances, career development, friendships, and family relations.

I was engaged in sexual behaviors with others that put my life in real danger, and I wanted to make sure I remembered this point if I even considered breaking my bottom lines.

Before I made the list, I could

so easily forget how close to death I potentially was on numerous occasions. So far, this tool has worked. When I find myself fighting the urge to act out on these behaviors, I pull out the list of consequences and read them over. As a result, I've been sober on my two highest risk bottom line behaviors for two years – and I am alive.

Strong slogans have also helped me shift from obsessive thinking to what I call “reasonable thinking,” another character asset. For instance, I tend to obsess about what someone else might be thinking about me or why a person behaved to me in a certain way, either positive or negative.

The obsession then leads to fear and paralysis. To help me deal with it, I remember one S.L.A.A. member shared that “it’s none of my business.” At first, I thought the words very harsh. But I have since learned that if a person does not come to me and volunteer in a straightforward manner to provide me with the information I’m obsessing about, then it’s not helpful for me to try

to guess what they mean or their motivations. In most cases, it’s a waste of precious time.

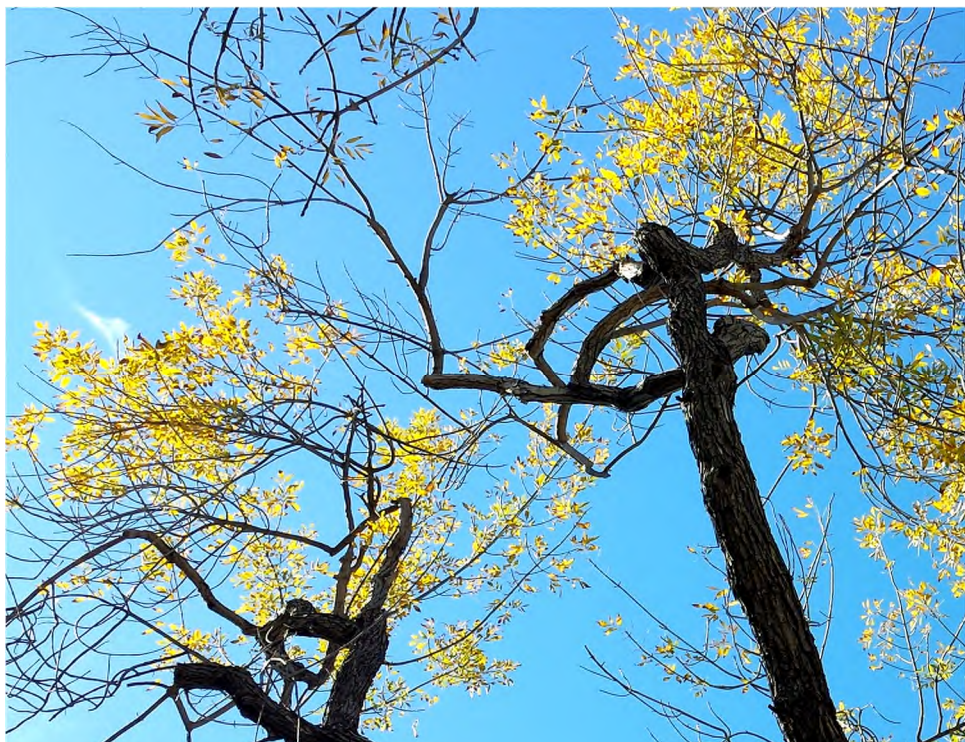
To deal with the uncertainty of other people’s thoughts and behaviors, I have drawn on another tool, praying to my Higher Power. As a result, I have developed another character asset – faith. For many years, I have had what I consider a strong spiritual practice, and yet it wasn’t until I joined S.L.A.A. that I feel I’ve truly learned how to pray.

At first, my sponsor encouraged me to pray for “willingness to pray” about my addiction. I was that resistant. When S.L.A.A. members encouraged me to pray to know “the next right thing to do,” I initially thought that was a pathetic idea because I’ve always relied on my intellect to figure out my actions.

I soon became painfully aware that my intellect had failed me in regard to my addiction. My experience is that when I pray for wisdom and guidance, I often realize what I need to do. Sometimes I need to ask the person directly about their behavior, and sometimes I need to just “let it go.”

Sometimes I gain awareness of something I may have done to hurt someone, and sometimes I recognize that the other person may be problematic to have in my life. The faith I have developed in the power of my prayer to elicit a response from my Higher Power to help me in my addiction recovery is a priceless gift. The last character asset I’ll talk about that S.L.A.A. has helped me develop is becoming a relational person.

My addiction works in extremes – I either act out or act in, rarely have I been in between. By “acting in,” I mean I suffer from social and emotional anorexia. My sense of shame and



low self-esteem has led me to live a very isolated, lonely life.

In the past I have shared few personal details about myself and rarely gone to social events. I have tended to think I am unique, that my sufferings are much greater than other people's and that no one could understand them. I have tended to believe that I am unlovable and that no one includes me in activities because they think I am socially inadequate.

Much of these thought patterns and behaviors stem from childhood trauma. Only when I finally found the right therapist, who actually led me to S.L.A.A., did I begin to address these issues.

Today I am learning how to stay relational in a variety of situations even when I feel insecurity, fear, and uncertainty. For example: in the midst of conflict, when I express needs and get a negative response, when I feel uncomfortable with how someone else expresses a need or desire, when the conversation starts to break

down because of how we're talking to each other, or when I start to imagine the other person wants to leave the conversation because I've said something wrong.

The biggest tool I use in S.L.A.A. to support my work to become a relational person is outreach calls. First, making the calls has been tough. Until recently, and even now plenty of times, it has seemed to me that no one calls me first, that I have to make the initial calls to other recovery partners.

When I complained about this situation to my sponsor, I was told that I need to focus on what I need to do, not on what others are doing. This helped take away the sense that there was something wrong with me and that's why no one was calling me.

Interestingly, when I do reach someone, the person is invariably grateful that I called. Over time, it has sunk in that making calls is hard for other people, too.

I have talked to a wide variety

of people and have had diverse conversations. I have laughed a lot and been able to give experience, strength, and hope to others – and to receive other people's experience, strength, and hope. I have had to set healthy boundaries when someone has pushed mine, to de-escalate misunderstandings, and to discontinue being someone's recovery partner because they were acting out in their addiction and thus triggering mine.

And I have done these things with more graciousness and equanimity than I have ever done before.

I have such gratitude for being in S.L.A.A. and having the opportunity to develop character assets.

As I continue to stay focused on sobriety, I look forward to continuing the process of recovery and cultivating heretofore unknown treasures inside.

— Anonymous, Arizona

Making a List of My Character Assets

The one assignment that my sponsor gave me that I almost refused to do was when he asked me to write a list of good things about myself. I had little problem recounting my failures, poor decisions, and selfish acts. But what I liked about myself? Is this Oprah or something?

It was the sense of "less than" that drove my addiction. No successful "top percentile" person in their right mind would want a relationship with

me, let alone sex. My only option was to sneak around the system (the rules don't apply to me) to get what I wanted and needed. This added to my already significant sense of shame.

I could heartily relate to the Romans quote, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." I had no argument and could provide all of the supporting documentation to validate this Bible verse.

But what is good about me?

Now that is just ridiculous! Or maybe it's not ridiculous and I'm just scared of the prospect that I might be a good and worthy person.

I didn't have an epiphany by making just one list of character assets. Rather, by observations and encouragement from my sponsor, I had to admit the hard truth that I actually had some good. I never had a bad review at my job. People actually respected me, gave me responsibility, and believed my

contribution mattered.

I worked a program of strong recovery over a long period of time – how many others never get out of denial and work on their life? Many people have, unsolicited, praised my writing and speaking skills. I haven't spoken in a certain religious context for years but I still get the comment, "I always enjoyed it when you shared! I wish you would do it again!"

Over time, I realized that I became a reconciler at work – pulling together meetings when inter-departmental confusion

arose and initiating conversation towards positive solutions. I've lost a lot of my black-and-white judgmental attitudes having come to understand from personal experience what it is like to not be able to lower my personal moral standards fast enough to keep up with my ever-degenerating behavior. As a result, I've become a better listener and am less prone to give easy fix-it bromides, but only advice born out of my experience, strength and hope.

I still cringe at graduation

"You are awesome because you're you! You can be anything!" speeches. They still feel a bit over-the-top with prideful naiveté. On the other hand, I'm not a useless worm with no contribution to the dirt pile either. God has given me gifts, skills, good character qualities, with a humble gratitude and desire to serve others. Recovery helped me see it, unearth these treasures, and cultivate it to use it effectively in life.

— Anonymous, Boone, NC

Share space

Wake Up Shame

I was an overwhelmed child. One of the first actions of my day, as an adult in recovery celebrating 17 years in S.L.A.A., is to check the laundry. I've been meditating on this for several weeks now, wondering why this activity makes me feel accomplished.

Over the course of my life, I've struggled with getting out of bed in the morning. Not waking up, mind you, but actually getting out of bed. I typically



wake up around 4 a.m. and then again at 6 a.m. In the first few minutes of being awake, I'm flooded with shame and fear, and then the "shoulds" begin. I should "do" this, I "should" do that. And if I did these activities (work out, start work early, vacuum) then I could consider myself a "good" person.

Funny how I'm absolutely convinced that I can't possibly ever consider myself a good person without taking those actions. And this negative self-concept follows me throughout my day, even though my house is clean, so clean in fact that I can host 15 family members to brunch without hours of cleaning before or after.

My bills are paid. My car is gassed up and my dog is fed and cared for. My life is in order. But this feeling remains that since I didn't get up at 6 a.m. and submit my taxes, or respond to emails or complete a project for work, that I'm a bad person.

But I do like checking the laundry. And then typically, I go to the kitchen, where I wash

various dishes, make breakfast, and feed the dog. Then, this morning, it came to me during my prayer and meditation that as a child, growing up in a household with an active addict, I became responsible for tasks that weren't my job.

Funny how I see with clarity now that I tend to do the same thing in my professional life, since I work with a team of people who, day in and day out, can't seem to grasp with understanding that actions need to take place for projects to get completed. But I digress.

As the "responsible" child, I grew up second oldest, but my older sibling was not to be trusted. So when a parent was "working" and the other out of the home, I made dinner. To deconstruct it further and as a professional learner and trainer, I can tell you that I wasn't "trained" the way my brain prefers to learn.

These domestic tasks were thrust upon me and it's a testament to my creative problem-solving brain that I learned to cook meals, do

laundry and take care of other domestic chores that were above the natural skillset of a 7-year-old.

In the mornings, when us four kids would need to be dressed, fed, and gotten to school, my parents were not present, often having sex. I fed my two younger brothers, packed their lunches, made sure they were dressed warmly and once I reached a certain age, drove them to school. In my junior year, I attended detention after detention; having arrived late at school day in and day out because one of my younger brothers didn't want to go to his school.

He was being bullied. When I found out who the bully was, I had a brief and yet successful conversation with her. Imagine, I was driving before I was legal. I was cooking, cleaning, and raising two boys; this is why for many years when I looked at my brothers who are 7 and 11 years younger than I, I saw them as my sons.

But let me get back to that agony of waking up. What has worked for me today is a few things: first, I pray at night to my angels to protect me and return me to a state of wholeness in the morning. This has really been helping. I have mala prayer beads next to my bed and I pray in the mornings with them. I also keep literature and a highlighter next to my bed, and over the past week or so, the wake up shame has been shifting. It's been getting better.

Once I'm standing, I can typically start my routine. Prayer. Meditation. Stretching. Calisthenics. Like the 500-pound phone, my problem is the moments from being awake to standing up and it seems to be shifting and getting better.

— Tessa B, NY



Shadow Selves

There is a Shadow Self that resides deep within
A sleeping self ever watchful for its time to come again
A partial self that thinks itself all of who and what I am
Less than human
More than a thought.
A crippled being craving to control
yet under another's control yet again

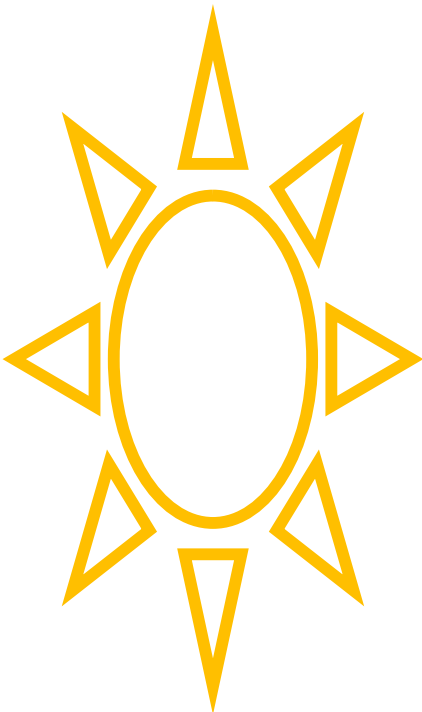
Controlled by others themselves shadow selves
Yet seeming to reside outside
Shadows of my own shadow
Claiming to be more than me
Impossible creatures that do not and can not exist
Outside imagination
Masters and Mistresses of those that refuse to control themselves
Controlled by their own fear of being controlled
Victims as much as those they victimize

These shadow selves rise together each night
Craving the dark: electronically they try to overpower
My own neural circuitry eclipsing my light - casting their shadows
Over my life
Yet how they do fear the light. Insubstantial shadow shades they be.
They hate the light. Fear it. Flee it.
At first light, retreat back into their back room cavern to wait for yet another night
Always waiting
Yet never finding the ultimate darkness they seek
In me
The unconscious consciousness they crave
For it like them does not exist
Can not will not
Except in fantasy
Fantastic imaginings
That dominate and control the night
The light is love, laughter, friendship, peace, wisdom, joy,
It is natural to seek the light - as natural for the light to seek to brighten
As it is for darkness to fade from light.

On my better nights I whistle into the dark with my true self
Opening a gap where a spark of light can enter.
On a prayer. A joke. A simple poem such as this.

Let there be light. I say over and over and over and over again.
And let it begin within me.

One day. One night.
One light at a time.
One poem at a time.
Like this.



Don Anon Is Dead!

You don't know Don Anon but I just received word today that Don Anon is gone. He was a created secret of my highly intelligent and insightful addictive thinking.

When I use hook up sites or place ads in sexual classifieds, I could easily use my personal e-mail account. This, of course, leads to a few problems. My personal e-mail has my name and my picture. So let's say I respond to an ad and the person on the other end says, "Well, what do you know? I know David. He is a great guy. I know his family. I've even heard him speak in church – he has quite a gift. I wonder why he is asking for an erotic massage."

This won't do of course. Not to mention that when my family happens to look into my e-mail account, they would probably be confused by the "Let's-hook-up-Monday-night-when-they-think-I'm-at-a-meeting" talk. I wouldn't want to confuse them.

So my addict, who is very wise

and insightful, decided to create a fake e-mail account. The last name was Anon, short for Anonymous – get it? Then we decided to give it the first name Don – a kind of switch-a-roo because my name really isn't Don. My addict is so smart! In the e-mail name itself, I put my zip code. This way they would know that I really lived in town increasing my chances for a response.

The problem, of course, is when I used Don Anon to hook up. Once again, as much as I wanted it to work, it was emotionally unsustainable. I thought it would be fun. I thought it met all my standards of being the perfect way of acting out without really acting out. Though technically I was kind of acting out. Though this was different and not like the other times I acted out when it didn't work because this time would be really great.

But in the end, it was emotionally unsustainable.

Afterwards, I had secrets. I had withholds. I had fears. I had shame. I had self-loathing. After a week, I told my sponsor.

After the failed hook-up experiment, I deleted my fake e-mail.

I do believe that internet providers understand sex and love addicts. They know we will be back eventually. They keep the e-mail account around so that if I decide later to log back in when I have had a change of heart, Don Anon will be waiting for me. He will be reenacted and reinvigorated as if I never left. I can try it all over again but this time it will be better.

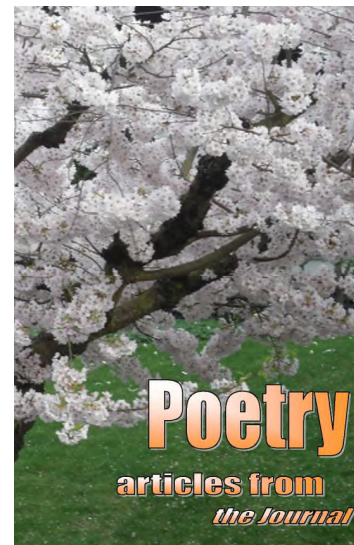
But I didn't go back. I went to the meetings and over time I got my chips. Yesterday, I got an e-mail from Microsoft to my personal e-mail telling me that they finally deleted the Don Anon account. Don Anon is dead. I don't have to go back.

-- Anonymous, Boone, NC

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No Longer Living a Life Steeped in Shame



I knew that my life was steeped in shame. I was under a doctor's care for Hepatitis B, injecting myself with interferon every day, which left me feeling perpetually achy and sick.

I developed an eye infection, and was under the care of a retinologist, who could not figure out what was wrong. I was deeply ashamed and couldn't tell

anybody what was going on.

This shame made my physical suffering even worse. Finally the retinologist ordered extensive blood work to determine what was causing the deteriorating vision.

The wait for test results seemed interminable. Finally, everything came back negative except for one test – syphilis. My heart and self-esteem sank even

farther than before. The next day I got the dreaded call – from the health department demanding that I come in for further testing.

I took off early from work to keep my mandated appointment at the health department. I was in a complete fog, so demoralized and despondent that I could barely walk or drive. As I entered the health department, the receptionist asked where I was

going. Could things get any worse?

Now, as I mentioned the STD Clinic, even the receptionist knew how filthy and contaminated I felt. Checking in at the clinic, I was given a number and told to wait. I no longer even had my name. Not only did the wait *seem* interminable, it was. I had an hour to study the faces of the other people there. Most of them seemed rather unconcerned with being there, like they had been there many times before. I was dressed in business casual clothes since I had come straight from work. My clothes and my race made me stand out so that others were looking at me too. Finally my number was called.

I first saw a nurse who took a blood sample and told me to see the social worker down the hall while they ran tests on my blood. The social worker was not new to this scene, but the questions were new to me and I was mortified. She asked about sexual partners, and I could not name most of them since we never exchanged names. When I had learned names, they were only first names and often pseudonyms.

The only name of a sexual partner that I knew was the name of the man I was dating, who lived out of town. I gave his name and immediately regretted having done so, knowing that this man would be contacted by the local health department. Finally I was summoned back to see the nurse, who confirmed the positive results for syphilis. In fact, she said, it was one of the worst cases she had ever seen. She immediately started me on penicillin shots. I would have to return weekly for at least eight weeks for additional shots and blood work.

In some ways, this was the beginning of an extended cycle of shame. Each week I would be reduced to a number and have to wait in that dreadful waiting room.

However, in other ways, redemption had begun. Now the secret was out of the bag. Once it had been aired and discussed in clinical terms, it could no longer be contained – at least not at the health center. One form of shame – secrecy – had lost its power.

I began slowly to understand that my actions had led to my infection. I had reached a

bottom and was able to recognize the resurrection that I felt as the readings got better.

With a decrease in shame, I was able to begin to rebuild a shadow of self-esteem through prayer and meditation.

Slowly I was able to feel God's hands cradling me and freeing me from the self-abasement that had wracked my entire being. This led me to a new appreciation of the power of God's grace and healing.

There was still much work to do in my efforts to rebuild my life, but I now knew that my Higher Power was walking the road with me.

Although it still took me awhile to come to grips with my addiction and join S.L.A.A., this experience initiated my sense of renewal and care has remained with me since this period of healing.

Note: I was encouraged to submit this document to you by my sponsor. I wrote it for a reflection on shame.

The writing and sharing of this story has helped defuse the shame that I have carried about this incident for years.

— Anonymous

The Most Dangerous Addiction of All: Love Addiction

Step 1. Hitting rock bottom. Each box was packed, my child went into hiding for the last few weeks. The U-Haul was loaded. I'm moving to

another state filled with strangers, packing my whole life into boxes.

My child looks at me and she is so sad to be leaving California.

How can one relationship turn my world upside down? How did it happen? In a perfect world, I would like to believe that I left him because of the abuse. I left

because the abuse showed me he didn't love me.

In other words, the fact that he did not love me was the reason I left. Abuse is about power and control, not love. The abuse resulted in physical harm. I was terrorized and beaten. For months, I lived in fear. For months, I wondered when I was going to be killed.

That truth speaks volumes to my lack of self-respect, self-esteem and self-love. I left because the last incident shed light on the reality that this is not love. I disappeared from society to ensure my child's safety. Love addiction is dangerous because of the addict's willingness to go to any lengths to achieve that euphoric high.

The amazing high becomes so intoxicating that the drunken lust can put me into some seriously dangerous situations. The only reason that I am still alive is because I love my daughter more

than my addiction.

My doctor explains the connection to abuse and affection. The recycled movies of my childhood are recreated in my adult life. The system for punishment and reward was taught to me by my biological father. My psychologist, the responsible person that he is, explains the road map to recovery and the hardships that lie ahead for me.

My sponsor checks in with me daily, reminding me to go to meetings and of my bottom lines for recovery. The S.L.A.A. Basic Text has been my bible. Being a sex and love addict sucks because it is a socially acceptable addiction. It is not an addiction that is easy to recognize, or test for. The hardest withdrawal is when we stop chasing after love. Another battle is staying out of sexual encounters outside of a committed relationship.

My obsession isn't sexual

encounters but the idea of love. There are reasons from my childhood that I am drawn to certain men. I look at the scars on my body, and the bags under my eyes from the night terrors that were a result of my former partner's stalking and abuse. I know I have to stop giving into my addiction in order to keep my life sane – that means no masturbation and no porn. Those activities are gateways for me. After the sexual release I feel floods of guilt and then immeasurable emptiness.

That catapults me into dating again or revisiting a previously failed relationship. So I take it one day at a time. My mantra is: "There is no recovery without honesty at all costs." So I learned to tell the truth fast. So I am a sex and love addict and I am powerless to my addiction. Thank you for letting me share.

— Erica

One Example of a Plan of Dating

Note from the contributor of this article: This is just an example and NOT S.L.A.A.-approved literature but the experiences of some S.L.A.A. members in Denmark.

After Withdrawal, a plan of dating is intended as a tool to carefully meet a new person who you want to investigate as a possible future loving partner.

A plan of dating is usually used after prolonged abstinence from substance (e.g. former partner).

The plan of dating and the time it takes vary from person to person depending on the type of addiction and duration but may look like this plan below.

After each date share with your sponsor, another person or in a meeting, before moving on to the next level – and only if you still want to move forward. Remember the very importance of taking care of yourself both during and after each date.

Rigid yes, but usable. It is also difficult to learn to ride a bike

and why not avoid too many bruises?

Avoid any alcohol or other substances and don't be H.A.L.T. but be sure to be sated, clear headed, healthy and otherwise comfortable and in balance - otherwise cancel and make a new appointment for another day. Also be aware of taking care of you, rest in you and feel your boundaries and set them.

Be honest. Pray for courage. Be you! If you are not, the date is on false terms.

- Eye Contact (Varies – look at one another several times – if it is intended that you’ll be seeing one another again, it eventually happens)
- Conversations by phone (At least once before moving to the next level)
- Go for a coffee and nothing more. Make a time limit - never go private at this level (At least 1 time)
- Go to the cinema, exhibition or something else of mutual interest (At least 1-2 times)
- Go on a dinner (For example 2 times) - maybe a short kiss on the cheek afterwards? (Is it okay for you or is it breaking your boundaries?)

Feel inside - what’s right for you?)

- Invite each other home for dinner and nothing else! (Make clear that this is just about dinner and call your sponsor if it starts to go out of hand - avoid stimulants like alcohol)
- Consider more kisses and holding hands. (Get to have a lot of conversations going a bit deeper in topics and show honestly who you are. Have fun.)
- After all this, and if you like the person and it is feeling safe and comfortable then consider deeper kisses, being affectionate, cuddle and

hugging - otherwise exit at the latest here!

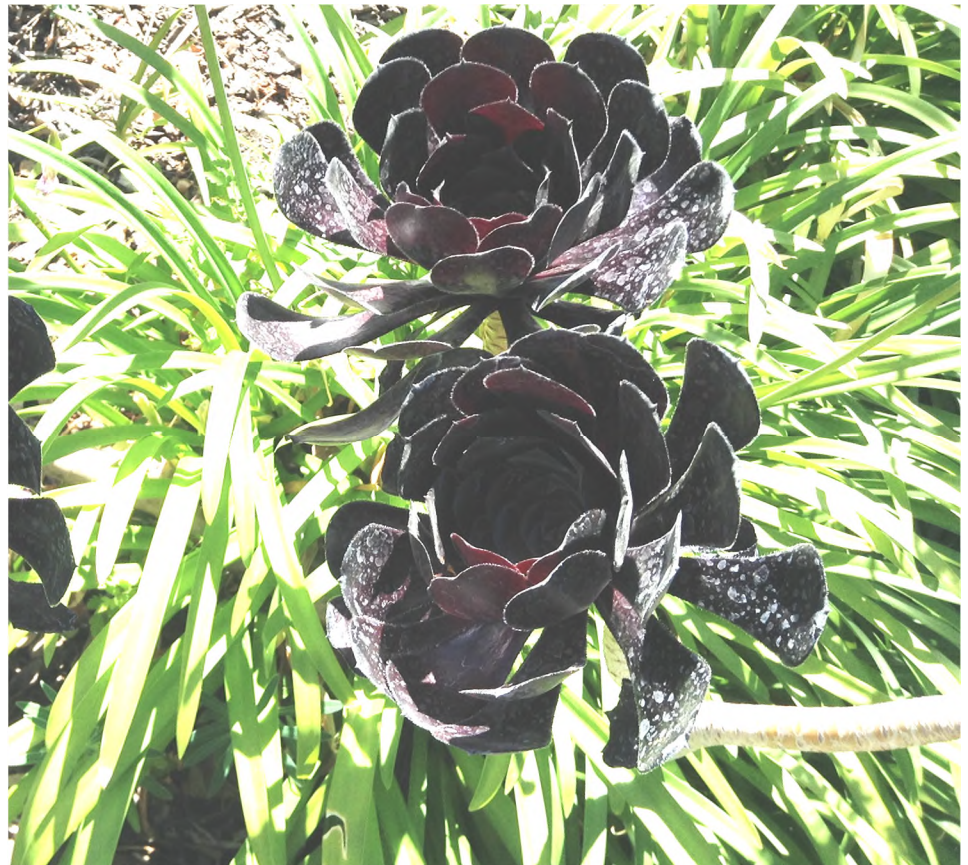
- After a minimum of at least 1 – 3 months then maybe go to bed with this person (Move forward slowly and still without any stimulants. Stop if it gets too scary and talk instead. Remember protection – if the person is against it, then stop going through with it). Minimum 6 and preferably 12 months before moving in together (and that’s even early)
- Minimum 2 - 3 years before possible marriage, children, house etc.

—Anonymous

S.L.A.A. Gave Me Clarity

I am blessed with several addictions. It was during fellowship with other members that a woman overheard me having a conversation with someone. She tapped me on my shoulder and said, “You are a perfect candidate for S.L.A.A.” I asked her what that was, and why she said that. She replied, “Because I couldn’t help noticing that you keep talking about the awful man you are seeing, and we still don’t know ‘You’”.

I went to my first Anorexia/S.L.A.A. meeting on June 2010. I sat and listened, telling myself that this was the core of all my problems. This is why I drank, chain-smoked, and overate. I was in shock! Later, I heard members say they would love me until I loved myself. I wrote a huge question mark in my notebook and the question,



“How will I ever learn to love myself?”

In July I asked a woman to be my sponsor. I didn't want to wait too long to start working the steps, or delay the miracle, because I have experienced it and I just wanted to find the answers.

Step 1 opened my eyes to a harsh reality. The unmanageability was such that I'd rather stay in a horrible relationship, acting like a detective following, spying, catching my qualifiers cheating, lying, only to forgive the unforgivable.

I understood in Step 1, that I am powerless over everything. I'm powerless over people's feelings, attitudes, actions, etc.

Step 2 renewed my relationship with my Higher Power. It made me realize that credit doesn't transfer from program to program, and that yesterday's prayer will not help me today. I have to hit my knees every day and pray.

In Step 3, I made the decision to have God restore me to Sanity, but action had to follow. Solely making a decision does not help. Just like the 3 frogs on the log, one made the decision to jump. How many are left on the log? Still 3. It made the decision, but stayed on the log.

Step 4 is by far my favorite step. I've heard of a lot of people who have gone out and relapsed because they are afraid of Step 4. But this is the step that showed me I was never a victim!

I manipulated, I gave my all, my love, my attention, my time, my money always with an ulterior motive. I wanted my qualifier to love me, to respect me, and to cherish me, but it never worked.

Step 5 was where I got really honest with my sponsor, God and me. My sponsor and I laughed, cried, and compared notes. It was no big deal.

Step 6: My defects of character

were so many that I really couldn't believe it. I was very dishonest. One of the biggest lies was agreeing with one of my qualifiers, telling him I wanted to marry him and have more kids, when I never wanted that for me, and was just going along with what society wanted.

Step 7 taught me the difference between humiliation and humility. It taught me not to give orders to God, but to humbly ask for his help. Step 8: The list of people I harmed was long, but my sponsor helped me see why and how I had caused pain to certain people.

Step 9 helped me clean house. It wasn't about getting forgiveness or renewing relationships or friendships. It was all about saying, “I hurt you and I'm sorry.”

Step 10: This is the maintenance step, analyzing my day every night -- was I resentful, selfish, or dishonest? Was I kind to everyone? Do I owe an apology? I do a mini 4th step to stay current and connected.

Step 11 is my direct line of communication with my Higher Power. Praying is talking to God. Meditating is listening to God. My intuition is God talking to me. I no longer quiet that voice that warns me I'm on the wrong path. I silenced it for too long, and I can no longer afford that.

Step 12: Service is love made visible. I have commitments, I've sponsored newcomers, and now I'm writing this article. We have to give freely of what we've got, so we can keep our sobriety and sanity.

S.L.A.A. has taken my crutches away. I no longer use men to stuff my feelings or to numb my pain.

I forgave my mother for not being there emotionally, for her abandonment, for all the learned behaviors I now have to unlearn. S.L.A.A. brought structure to my

life.

I no longer stay in toxic relationships or friendships. I love my solitude and no longer call it loneliness.

I have my bottom lines which are there to protect me, not to punish me. My top lines are very specific to me, to love me, to pamper me.

My dating plan is amazing, because it lists the assets I'm looking for, as well as the red flags I will not tolerate or negotiate, because I understand that when I want to negotiate something, it really is my addiction speaking. I love S.L.A.A. and all 12-step programs, because by working with others we build strong chains that break cycles of abuse.

— V., Los Angeles



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The Seventh Step

“QUOTE: *“Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.” — S.L.A.A. Core Documents, “The Twelve Steps of S.L.A.A.”*

SHARE: My ego doesn't want to admit that I have shortcomings. That's part of what kept my disease alive and active for so many years. Through working the steps and the S.L.A.A. program, I've experienced the gift of sobriety. In sobriety I've learned to love myself enough to admit that I have shortcomings. I don't have to judge or shame myself for them. I can accept them and surrender them to God to remove. I just have to show up every day for sobriety and surrender my shortcomings to my Higher Power.

AFFIRMATION: *I love myself enough to let go and let God remove my shortcomings.*

—A.A.

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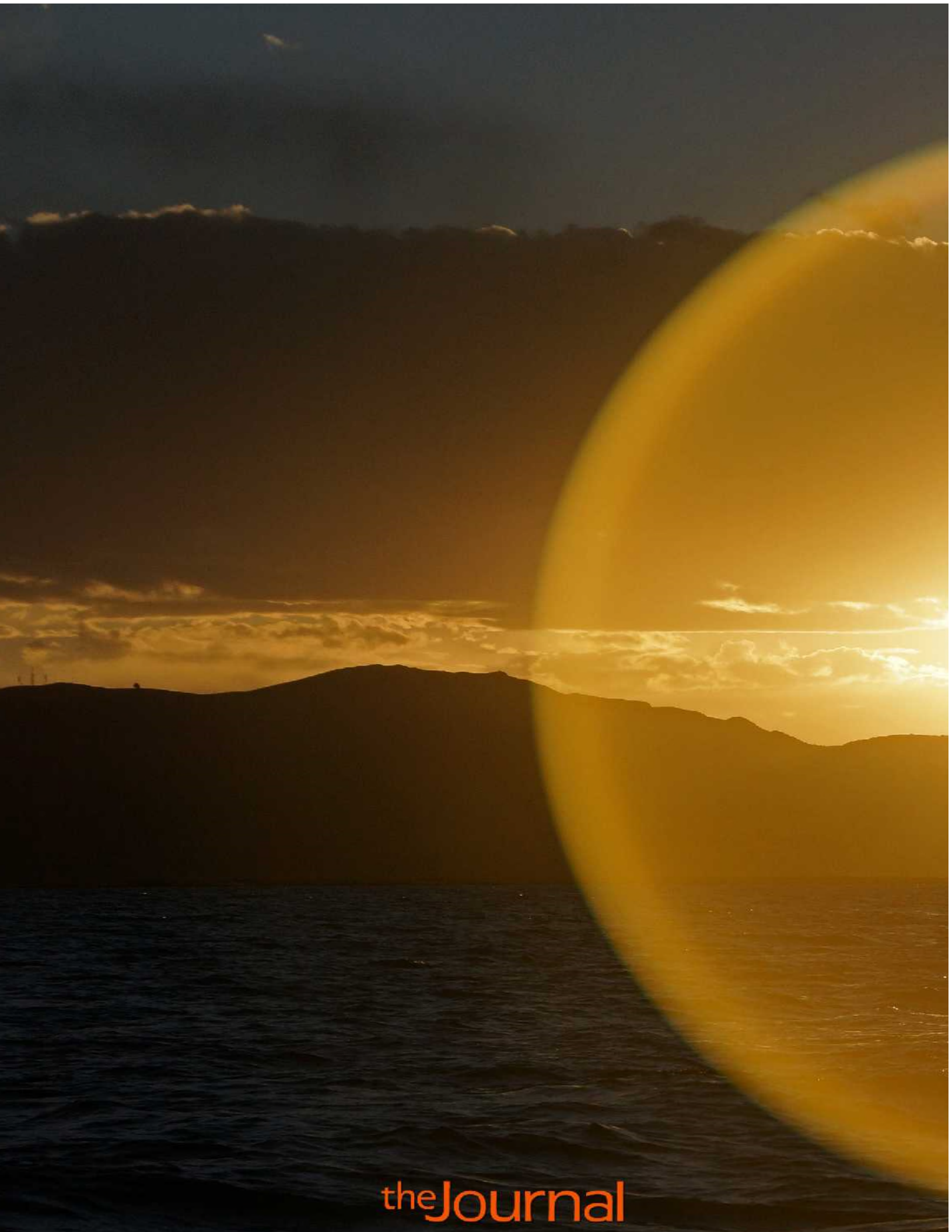
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