

Appendix C

AN EDA MEMBER WORKS THE STEPS

A brief note on what follows: Please take what you can use and leave the rest. My experience working the Twelve Steps of EDA may not align well with what you have experienced or hope to experience. What I am offering is only a point of reference, not a tutorial or form of instruction. Do not be discouraged. I have always been—and probably always will be—a flawed person. I hope that you will not struggle as I did with what has been correctly described as a “simple program of action.” If, however, you *are* struggling with the Steps, perhaps you will find something of your own experience in the following pages. My hope is that you will find courage to keep going, for if I can work the Twelve Steps successfully, surely anyone can do it!

Step One: *We admitted we were powerless over our eating disorders—that our lives had become unmanageable.*

At first, I found the word “powerless” difficult to reconcile with my experience, so getting past semantics was critical for me. So here’s how I had to think about it: If my car gets stuck in the sand, it is not without power, and I am not without power, but my power and my car’s power are clearly insufficient to get out of the trap. I cannot fool myself; however much power I may have, I need help (people, resources, or both). I live in Arizona, where getting stuck miles from anywhere in the desert means you stick with your car (it provides shade and shelter and is easy to spot from the air). You also hope you were smart enough to have

brought a LOT of water with you, and to have told people where you were going and when you would return. If you *are* stuck, you will need help getting out alive, even if you have what my son calls “mad survival skills.”

Having an eating disorder is a lot like getting stuck in the desert miles from anywhere; it is an emergency, and you can die. Even if you don't die, you are bound to be scared, lonely, and miserable. Life doesn't have to be like that. I have learned that the quicker I am to recognize when I am stuck, the faster I can get unstuck by taking Step One.

I also had a major problem with the word “unmanageable.” It seems that no matter how bad things get, my life never “feels” completely unmanageable. When I first started working the Steps, I had recently graduated from college and was in a stable relationship. That doesn't sound completely unmanageable, does it? But I was doing a lot of behaviors to prevent myself from feeling much of anything at all, my boss had just eliminated my job position (because he was so “done” with me and my defiant attitude), and I was so weak I could barely walk. I was having panic attacks and felt like I was about to pass out a lot of the time. In that condition, trying to find another job was almost impossible. I felt defeated and humiliated and lived in terror that I would pass out behind the wheel of my car and end up killing people. But did my life *feel* unmanageable? No, it did not.

I had to think of it this way: Rational people do not—except perhaps in war and childbearing—knowingly choose to jeopardize their own lives or the lives of others. But I was doing exactly that, every single day, without fail. No matter how many times I made a decision to cease and desist, I was simply unable to stop doing behaviors that were putting me and other people in harm's way. Not

one rational person I could think of would knowingly do what I was doing. Even though I did not feel insane, I had to admit my behavior was insane. My life, as I was living it, *was* unmanageable.

These days, I am conscious of when I pick up old patterns, but I am constantly amazed at the new and different ways I can get myself stuck. I don't get stuck all that often, but when I do, I break out my whole Twelve-Step toolkit and start with Step One. Even though my life has never again become as unmanageable as it was before my first Step One, I know that when resentment, fear, or self-pity start to cloud my vision, unmanageability is just around the corner. I am grateful I now recognize that when these emotions start to rise up in me, I have lost my perspective and balance. I need to be still, feel deeply how miserable I have let myself become, and admit defeat. Step One is an admission of defeat, of powerlessness. And it is not as hard for me as it used to be, because now I am confident that a solution lies ahead in the rest of the Steps.

Step Two: *Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.*

In Step One, I admitted that what I was doing wasn't sane, even if I didn't feel crazy. That was humbling—a good first step—but I still had enormous difficulty with the idea that any external force could “restore” me to “sanity.” I struggled mightily until I realized that the same forces that enable life to exist on Earth also allow me to wake up and want to live each day. I found it helpful to think of my “Higher Power” as the creative and life-engendering forces of the natural world. I could trust these without fully understanding them, and there was no question that these

forces were more powerful than I was, spanning the universe throughout time.

I got and stayed sober in AA and was initially freed from my eating disorder on the basis of exactly this conception of a Higher Power. Then, after four years of peace and freedom, I turned back to bulimic behaviors to deal with an insanely trivial but persistent emotional provocation. This did not happen overnight. I could see it coming and feverishly worked the Steps to prevent that outcome, but by the time I understood the danger I was in, it was too late. I was caught in a deep and growing resentment that I could not and would not shake.

Soon after the return of my eating disorder, I decided that the idea that I could be freed from my pernicious insanity by “forces of nature” (forces that clearly coexisted with my wretched condition) had been ill-conceived. Nature, after all, permits innocent young creatures to die horrible deaths all the time. Others may argue the point, but there does not seem to be any individual caring presence involved when a lioness slaughters a gazelle to feed herself and her cubs.

In any case, I determined I must try what was working for others who seemed to be more successful in their recoveries. I attempted religious practices: I prayed, I read the Bible, I went to Bible study, I talked to one pastor, and then others. When, after a few years of earnest effort, nothing seemed to take hold, I took a different tack: I attended sweat lodge ceremonies, I started a drumming group, and I took up yoga. Throughout all of this, I prayed daily, asking only for God’s will and the power to carry it out. I spent a *decade* working the Steps of AA, mentoring newcomers, trying another Twelve-Step program, and working with a sponsor (through the Steps of that program) to try

and achieve abstinence. When that failed, I tried still other programs and self-help groups, different sponsors, different meditations, medication, a treatment center, and different therapists. I am sorry to have to tell you I miserably worked my Step One most days of those ten-plus years, but lasting relief eluded me.

Cut to the chase: I was obviously still quite insane despite my continuous efforts to get well. At the heart of it, I had lost all perspective. When I picked up my eating disorder after four years of peace and freedom, I had broken trust with myself and lost faith in the power of my Higher Power to restore me to sanity. After a decade of trying to badger myself into surrendering to various alternative Higher Powers, I had to admit a new and different kind of defeat. I knew there wasn't anything fundamentally wrong with Twelve-Step programs, though my eating disorder was still present, and I felt hopeless about it. I was still happily sober in AA, and for the most part I had a wonderful life: a husband whom I loved and who loved me, and two healthy, amazing, and delightful children. I had friends and good relationships with my family of origin. How could I still be engaged in an eating disorder when I so desperately needed to be sane, if not for myself, then for the other people in my life?

What was my problem? I was looking in the wrong direction: searching for something "out there" that I could trust to restore me to sanity. But for me, as I think for everyone, *sanity requires taking care of basics first*. Once I discovered this, I felt so stupid, but it is true. Throughout most of those difficult years, except when pregnant and nursing, I did not truly understand what it was to put "first things first." Most of my basic needs were covered, but *I had not really accepted the responsibility for meeting my*

basic needs was mine and mine alone. Every person needs water, sleep, food, shelter, clothes, and primary relationships. Every person needs to feel safe. Well, I wasn't exactly creating a safe environment for myself. As long as I was not taking full responsibility for getting my needs met, I was doomed in working Step Two because I was unable to trust. Once I realized this and took action to deliberately address the gaps, things began to turn around. I began to make real progress in my ED recovery. When EDA members say recovery is a process, not an event, they are not joking! It took the better part of a year for me to say goodbye to my eating-disordered behaviors, and for several years there were regular reminders when I failed to pay sufficient attention to basics or to working my Steps.

So, what about Step Two? What about “came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity?” My Higher Power has to be a force I can believe in for all time and it has to be a power that can restore me to sanity. For most people in EDA, perspective and balance come directly from their connection to God—a God of their own understanding. As someone honestly lacking any innate concept of God, this approach just did not work for me. To this day, I have not been able to achieve anything like the spiritual connection to a personal God that others in recovery enjoy. I had to find a different way and I discovered it wasn't that hard.

I had been sober in AA all along and was limping along in my eating disorder recovery, because I was (mostly) already living in surrender to a higher purpose: *service to the greater good*. When I realized this concept of a “higher purpose” was actually working for me and could serve as a solid foundation for my recovery, I felt indescribable relief and hope. *My truth set me free.*

I no longer struggle with the old behaviors as long as I continue to make a daily commitment to, and practice of, working to serve the greater good. This work brings me both peace and perspective. I still believe in the power of a life-engendering creative force that pervades the universe, that enables me to wake up and want to live each day, that brought me into early recovery thirty years ago. But the power that gives me perspective to “keep calm and carry on” is the power of surrender to the principles of truth, equality, justice, and love, and to the process of equipping myself to be of useful service to the greater good: a higher purpose.

Step Three: *Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.*

I was scared of Step Three at first, because it seemed to require me to somehow give myself up, abandon myself, and become less than I was—or thought I was. In any case I wasn’t really sure I understood what it meant. What was “my will?” What was “my life?” What was “the care of God?” And what did it mean to “turn over?” When I asked these questions in meetings, I learned that “our will” meant our thoughts and “our lives” meant our actions. I also heard that “G.O.D.” could mean “Good Orderly Direction.” I learned that “to turn over” meant something like “to hand over” and “to let go.”

Back in Step Two, I trusted in a fundamental healing power and a higher purpose that had the capacity to restore me to sanity. In Step Three, I decided to let God (reliance on a higher purpose) guide my thoughts and actions. I realized I wasn’t fundamentally “giving myself up” to anything I didn’t believe in or fully trust. *I was giving up on what hadn’t worked, and giving in to sound principles,*

logic, and reason I could trust. In Twelve-Step programs, one often hears the first three steps interpreted as “I can’t, God can, and I think I’ll let Him.” I struggled mightily with that slogan, but the basic idea—that my old ways didn’t work and other ways did, and that I’d better trust the ideas that work *for me*—well, that really *did* and *does* work.

When I first took Step Three, I barely understood it, but working the rest of the Steps illuminated it for me. By letting go of “my way,” I was opening myself up to a happy and purposeful life of love and service that “my way” had not previously permitted. I have never regretted that decision! Today, I turn back to Step Three whenever I realize I am struggling to impose “my way” on others or even on myself; I know how that story turns out, and it isn’t pretty. These days I want a new story—one with a less predictable ending. When I am doing my best to take care of myself and serve others, I can be happy regardless of my current circumstances. Today, I am joyous and free in my recovery. I am fully and gratefully surrendered to the ideal of serving a higher purpose. I can maintain recovery easily, without struggle, because I am here to serve something greater than myself. This puts my life into perspective and makes it possible for me to care for myself, which I must do to be as aware and effective as possible.

Step Four: *Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves* (and)

Step Five: *Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.*

My first 4th Step was a simple list of everything I had done wrong up to that point: the things I stole, the lies I

told, and the miserable way I had treated people. As soon as I understood that I needed to tell someone all this in order to stay sober, I confided in a friend from my AA meetings. I was unhesitating and as thorough as I could possibly be. These were perfectly effective 4th and 5th Steps that kept me sane and sober for a long time, even though my inventory took only minutes to compile and not much longer to tell. I left my first 5th Step feeling accomplished, connected to the program and to the person I had talked with, and at peace with myself. After a few more months in AA, I started to wonder if I had done my 4th and 5th Steps “correctly,” as I had not followed the prescription laid out in the “Big Book.”⁶ I vowed to “do it right” the next time.

My second 4th Step, however, was done under duress. I had developed resentment against a co-worker whom I felt was getting attention that should have gone to me. I was plunging headfirst into that toxic combination of resentment and self-pity that seemed to presage every slide back into my old behaviors. I filled three journals, trying again and again to “get it right,” because I knew my sanity, sobriety, and peace with food were all at stake. First, I followed an “official” 4th Step Guide, and then I tried to follow the format set out in the “Big Book”⁷ where I listed (for each resentment) whom I was upset with, the cause, what was threatened in each situation, and where I had been selfish, dishonest, self-seeking, and/or frightened. I listed my fears and why I had them. I created a guilt and sex inventory where I listed (for each person) where I had been selfish, dishonest, and/or inconsiderate; who had been hurt; where I had unjustifiably aroused jealousy, suspicion, and/or bit-

⁶ *Alcoholics Anonymous*. (2001) New York, NY: AA World Services, Inc., 64-70.

⁷ *Ibid.*

terness; and what I should have done instead if I had been at fault in any way.

When I reached the point where I had written all I could and was “ready” to take the 5th Step, I was so filled with emotional pain that I was completely unable to hear the gist of what my sponsor (upon suffering through my interminable 5th Step) was telling me. I thought admitting the exact nature of my wrongs would set everything right again. But my expectations were out of line. *A 5th Step only “works” if we take responsibility for our thoughts and actions.* It does no good to admit what we did, only to blame something or someone else for our actions.

After that second 5th Step, I felt indescribably horrible, as though the program had failed me, and I had failed the program. *What the heck was wrong with me?* Was I one of those people who are “constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves”⁸ and thus incapable of benefiting from the Twelve-Step process? Overwhelmed by anger, shame, and fear, it wasn’t long before I returned to bingeing and purging.

In those long years before EDA, I continued attending AA meetings and eventually got honest with people about what I was doing. I was directed to other programs that were available at the time. I dutifully went to A LOT of Twelve-Step meetings, trying every version of abstinence I could in an attempt to arrest a return to full-blown bulimia. Finally, after three more failed attempts at Steps Four and Five, the person hearing my 5th Step grabbed my shoulders and practically yelled at me, “Stop playing the victim!” *Why had I not heard that before?* Others, earlier, had surely said something like this to me, but somehow I did not fully

⁸ Ibid., 58.

understand what they were talking about. I certainly never *thought* of myself as a victim! But on closer inspection, I could see I was dramatically affected by what other people said and did. I did, in fact, feel victimized.

I left that 5th Step meeting feeling stupid and hopelessly stuck. Although angry that “the program” had left me in the dark for so long, I also saw that the issue was with me, not with the program or the people in the program. *There was hope.* Once again, reluctantly and miserably, I started over with Step One. But now I was on more solid footing. My next 4th Step looked at why so many of my waking hours were spent reacting to life, what was wrong about my reactions, and why I was avoiding taking deliberate action when I could. I was finally starting to ask myself—sometimes hourly—why I felt like a victim and what I was going to do about it. I had long understood that everything I *did* was my free choice, whether I knew it or not, but I hadn’t really considered that *what I chose to think was my free choice*, as well. When I gave my next 5th Step, I again found that incredibly powerful feeling of being one with all humanity, finding deep joy and delight in the knowledge that everything was going to be all right—whatever happened.

Step Six: *Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.*

With my very first Step One, I began to accept myself for who I really was. At that point I was an alcoholic and a bulimic with a riot of uncontrolled emotions. With Steps Two and Three, I committed myself to follow a program of action I trusted, having faith this could change everything so long as I was taking care of getting my basic needs met. With Steps Four and Five, I began to recognize my

responsibility for my actions and understand the damage I had caused. Fear, pride, selfishness, stubbornness, and anger always crop up in my 4th and 5th Steps, as do self-pity and resentment. Step Six reminds me that I cannot “fix” my character defects directly; that would be like performing brain surgery on myself.

By the time I am done with my 5th Step, I am usually quite ready to be done with my defects and the damage I do as a result of hanging onto them. Step Six is about being entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character. For me, this just means I am entirely ready to recognize that *my shortcomings get in the way of service to a higher purpose*. I cannot serve the greater good or those around me very well if I am all caught up in my own self-centered ideas about how things ought to be. My efforts to understand and contribute to the flow of life will be crippled if I am wallowing in anger or self-pity. I have to get rid of these, and I cannot do it by focusing on anger or self-pity: I have to take care of basics, and focus on service to the greater good. This is when I find relief from my defects!

The Twelve-Step approach provides a way to live a wonderfully useful life. I trust that as long as I work my program, completely and without reservation, there is no need to engage in any of my defects of character. When I do engage in them, my daily practice of Step Ten helps me set right the wrongs. As a result, they gradually become smaller and fewer, at least until something new comes up that reminds me how very, very human I am. When this happens, I am grateful to know that right feelings will eventually follow right action. I am grateful that I have the opportunity to choose to think, and then act, differently in each situation that formerly caused pain and suffering. Step Six lets me move ahead with remedial

action while eliminating unnecessary and harmful hand-wringing and self-judgment.

Step Seven: *Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.*

When I first started working the Steps and got to this point, I was overcome with relief at being sober and happy, and amazed to be completely free of any bulimic behavior. I was so grateful that the Twelve-Step process (my idea of Higher Power at that point) had restored me to sanity. I followed directions. I humbly thanked AA for enabling me to live, asked for continued help and strength to stay sober and sane with food, and launched into Step Eight. That approach worked marvelously for my first four years. The gratitude and humility I felt were sincere, and I was healthy.

My next several times through the Steps, worked while I was intermittently active in my eating disorder, were almost comical. I went through the motions, trying hard to be humble and grateful, but believing little and feeling almost nothing—except a deep longing for the peace I had once enjoyed and frustration at not being able to find it. Knowing I needed to work the remaining Steps, I did my best and moved on. This was a mistake.

In Step Two, I agreed that my Higher Power had the ability to relieve my insanity, but in Step Seven, I found I could not find faith that my Higher Power would remove my shortcomings so long as I was active in my eating disorder. Turns out, my real issue was way back in Step Two, but it was on Step Seven that I regularly got stuck.

Eventually, I learned I couldn't be humble or grateful until I achieved a basic level of safety, trust, and security. Today, I am willing to do the hard work of taking care of

myself as best I can, even when miserable, disappointed, frustrated, and hopeless. *If I do the work to keep myself safe regardless of how I feel, I regain humility and gratitude and can turn my attention to what really matters.* It is that simple. I take care of basics⁹ as doing so makes taking care of everything else possible. I do it so I can be of service to others. I do not have a relationship with a God or Higher Power that can remove my shortcomings, but when I focus on humble service to the greater good, my defects based on selfish desires get very little play. It is not that I do not *have* deficiencies; it is that I do not have to exercise them. And when I do not exercise them, I am free: it is as if they are removed, at least for a while. I find that the longer I can live without my defects, the more unappealing they are, and the more grateful I am that they are gone.

Frankly, I try not to worry too much about my shortcomings or those of others; such concerns lead me right back to self-pity and resentment. Today, I have faith that if I take care of my own basic needs and do my level best every day to make myself cheerfully useful to family, friends, work, and community, I need not worry about my shortcomings. Today, I am in awe of how much my life has changed. Nothing miraculous has eliminated my fears and angers. I still experience them, but today I am convinced I have everything I need to live in peace and freedom. And, as I focus more on what we are all doing right, instead of belaboring what is wrong, the more correct and hopeful everything seems to be.

⁹ Reference Appendix B: "A Perspective on Balance" in this volume.

Step Eight: *Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.*

My first 8th Step list was very short. It included the owner of a car I had sideswiped, the owners of a store from which I had (repeatedly) stolen, three former roommates, my parents, and all of my former boyfriends. I didn't even *think* of my current boyfriend, my sister, employers, or any of my friends. My next 8th Step list—one that came out of a 4th Step where I had tried to “do it right” and failed—included over 120 people, most of whom I felt, at best, ambivalent about. In no way did I want to make amends to all these people! As things turned out, I really did not have to: my sponsor reminded me that I was to focus on the top ten first: the co-worker with whom I'd had that resentment, my ex-husband, my current husband, a former employer, a former friend, a client, a former sponsor, and two former roommates to whom I had never made amends. I did not have to become willing all at once, as I had done (easily) the first time through. This time, I had to take each situation and person independently. This approach to Step Eight really worked for me.

In recent years when I work Step Eight, I focus on just one person at a time from the current top ten on my list. When quiet and alone, I think long and hard about their situation and challenges. I try to imagine their pains and fears and how my own attitudes and actions have contributed to their burden. I earnestly wish them happiness, peace, and freedom with all the heart I can muster. I try to think of things I can do that would be kind or helpful if done anonymously. I must admit, I find this step hardest to do with those closest to me: it can be really hard to wish someone profound and abundant joy when I am hurt and disappointed. Nevertheless, I try to imagine that what-

ever they urgently need is being supplied, and that they are able to move forward with a clear mind and an untroubled heart, knowing they are much loved and needed. When I feel at peace with my willingness to set right my wrongs, I move immediately to Step Nine.

Step Nine: *Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.*

My first 9th Step really scared me. I didn't have any idea how to make amends. I had barely ever apologized to anyone about anything in my life. I also knew that some of the amends would be really big, expensive, and humiliating. Finding the person who owned the parked car I'd sideswiped proved impossible. I thought I knew when and where the incident had occurred and what type of car I had hit, but my search of police records revealed nothing. I talked with my sponsor about the situation, and she suggested determining the amount of money the repair would have cost and donating the money to M.A.D.D. (Mothers Against Drunk Drivers). After talking the situation over with my husband (since he would be affected by the loss of income), I did exactly that.

The store from which I had stolen had been bought out by another chain. Again, I was unsure how to proceed. My sponsor suggested figuring the monetary value of what I had taken, contacting the current store managers (who might be the same people), and asking them for guidance on how to repay the debt. This was embarrassing and difficult. I would much rather have just sent a money order to a corporate office somewhere, but I did as my sponsor suggested. I spoke with a store manager, who thoughtfully suggested I donate to a charity he thought the former owners

would have cared about. I gratefully did so. For the roommates, I made an effort to see each in person, but they had scattered. I wrote short, sincere letters of apology and sent one to the last known address that I was able to find. I never found addresses for the rest. I was only able to find one former boyfriend. I met him over coffee and apologized for putting him and his interests in jeopardy, for creating chaos in his life, and for failing to be the trustworthy friend and partner he deserved. This was one of my hardest amends, since I no longer had a relationship with this fellow and really did not want one. I did not think I owed him any money, but I certainly did owe him an apology: I had been awful. I suspected my apology was not likely to be accepted gracefully, and in truth it was not. I felt even sadder about my behavior than before we sat down, but I also felt cleaner and more accomplished for having undertaken this difficult encounter.

Apologizing to my parents was also hard, but less difficult than I thought it would be. Before talking with my sponsor, I had thought I was going to have to atone for each time I had disappointed and hurt my parents, but this was not the case. A detailed litany could only have hurt them more. I was to stick to those activities they knew about or suspected, and focus primarily on how I intended to straighten things out with them. My main hope was to be as humble as possible and to accept anything they had to say graciously, without judgment or defensiveness. I sat down with my folks at the next opportunity and explained what I was about to do. My father did not want to hear me out. He told me to talk to my mother and left us sitting at the table. That hurt, but I went ahead with my Mom. She was understanding and far more gracious than I could have imagined possible. After that talk, I resolved never to

lie to or evade contact with my parents ever again. I was really lucky I still had them, and for perhaps the first time I *felt* lucky, too. In time, I tried again with my father, who stopped me at the second sentence and said, “Apology accepted. I don’t want to hear any more about it.” I won’t lie: it still hurt, but I was grateful.

Since my first 9th Step, I have had to make amends (and am still making amends) that were far harder and more complex, but in each case I have learned to review my plan with someone before acting, to keep apologies short and simple, to define a plan for restitution I am confident I can keep, and to expect nothing in return. A great burden is lifted when I am able to admit my wrongs sincerely without blaming anyone, and I feel hopeful and happy to be free of self-pity and resentment, for that is exactly what happens! Accountability has set me free.

Step Ten: *Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.*

It is often said that Steps Ten through Twelve are the “maintenance” Steps. That makes them sound easy, and they do almost seem effortless after working Steps One through Nine. But when Steps Ten, Eleven, and Twelve become drudgery and a chore, it is time for me to formally work *all* the Steps again.

In EDA, working all the Steps is essential in establishing balance. That said, Steps Ten through Twelve are the most critical in *maintaining* balance. With Step Ten, I spend about twenty to thirty minutes each day reviewing the prior day and planning the day ahead. For me, writing things down in the morning works best, though I know many people complete their Step Ten work at night.

I start by outlining the major events of the past twenty-four hours. Then, I list both the issues that came up over the past day and any that I anticipate in the course of the day ahead. If I have determined what to do about an issue, I write that down, too. This is similar to the part of the 4th Step where we ask ourselves what we should think and do instead of reacting out of fear, pride, selfishness, and anger. If I have hurt someone and haven't properly apologized, I make a plan to right the wrong. When I have been wrong in other correctable ways, I make a plan to correct the deficiencies. When really upset, I find it helpful to list out all the columns from the 4th Step Inventory: the source, the reason, what is affected or threatened, my part, and my resolution. Otherwise I let the issues go, knowing that I will soon focus on making the most of the day.

I do not dwell on things. Reflection is an excellent practice, but rumination is not. I gave up my character defects in Step Seven; my job each day is to recognize how my issues reflect my character defects and let them go, so I can focus on character-building activities instead.

Next, I write down what I am grateful for that day. By the time I am done, I am often overwhelmed by love. I am so grateful for my family, for EDA, for recovery, for my friends, and for my co-workers. Sometimes I cry, which would have seemed weird to me a few years ago, but I am not ashamed. I am sincerely grateful to be able to think and feel clearly. I have so much for which to be grateful that I will never run out of things to write! Finally, I list out my goals for the day—whatever comes to mind. I have a separate process for managing daily tasks, so the goal-writing is not intended to be task-oriented (although sometimes tasks creep in edgewise). I try to be specific: committing to say something kind to a person who is often ill tempered, stay-

ing out of the fray of some particular office maneuverings, or connecting with someone who may be feeling lonely. Often, my goals include quick and easy slogans one hears in Twelve-Step programs: “First Things First,” “One Thing at A Time,” “Easy Does It,” “Act, Don’t React.”

My Step Ten practice has evolved over the years, but is in no way “perfect.” Although my reflection on my issues is never complete and my Step Ten never really feels “thorough,” I am happy and comfortable with my approach. It is good enough. My best advice for those starting out on Step Ten is to do what feels right, do the best you can, and be open to change. You will change over the years, and your Step Ten process will likely change, too.

Alas, so far we have covered only the first part of Step Ten: there is more to go! The heart of this Step is about addressing hot emotions and missteps we take in the course of daily life.

When I am really agitated about something in the course of the day, I desperately need perspective. Journaling is a good option, but is usually not convenient when things feel like they are breaking all around me. I require a clearer head for journaling than I am likely to have under challenging circumstances. If I am at home, I try to get outside and do something that calms me down, or I try to nap. It is amazing what a good nap will do! If at work, I make the rounds, looking for ways to help and encourage people. I set aside whatever hurt or fear I am feeling and focus on what I can do that is useful. I know I will address my emotional upset when in a setting where I can be safe, because it is dangerous to avoid dealing with hot emotions for very long. However, if I have done something wrong, I find it is best to address the error as soon as possible to prevent making a bad situation worse. Sometimes, I really do make things worse, but I

don't worry too much about it. I just keep trying to do the next right thing and hope I learn from my mistakes.

Whenever things go sideways, I usually find that my expectations have been thwarted in some way and I have to examine why I have these expectations. I find I often think other people should want the same things I do, but they do not. Sometimes I don't even realize I have unspoken expectations—until they aren't met. At other times I know I have them, but don't think I should have to express them, which is silly. Or I am embarrassed to express them, which frequently points to unreasonableness on my part. Sometimes, my expectations are rational and clearly expressed, but I don't always get what I want. I can even get more upset when the very person who has just disappointed me has the temerity to be disrespectful as well! When that happens, I usually discover that I became judgmental and critical as a result of some disappointment; I can behave badly without even recognizing it. Even now, at thirty years sober and with many years of solid recovery from my eating disorder, I catch myself trying to “direct the show,” which can be exasperating. But at least I know what is the matter and what to do about it.

Much of the time, however, my expectations and disappointments are entirely internal. Maybe I was not amusing enough, inquisitive enough, or polite enough in conversation with others. Often, I don't accomplish all the goals and tasks I set for myself in any given twenty-four hour period. Maybe I evaded something important or took offense when I should have laughed. In each case, I have to ask myself, *What am I willing to do?* Sometimes the answers are obvious, and I need to take action promptly. Sometimes just acknowledging my feelings and moving on is best.

When I am making the daily effort to “name it, claim it, and dump it,” and something comes up repeatedly, Step

Ten gives me the option to make a plan to do things differently. I can then see how each alternative works out, or I can keep doing the same thing. I know resentment and self-pity are waiting patiently for such an opportunity, so I usually make an effort to change my thinking and behavior.

Part of Step Ten is to continue to take personal inventory, *not only of what is wrong, but also what is right*. I do this for myself throughout the day, which is a wonderful boon to gratitude and to my recovery. It is really quite a useful practice! The more comfortable I become with what is going right with me, the more compassion I find I have for others. When I focus and comment on what others are doing well, the happier and more purposeful everyone seems to be.

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

While Step Ten is like taking a daily dose of Steps Four through Nine, Step Eleven builds on Steps Three, Six, and Seven. I surrender to the principles in which I have faith, knowing that my commitment to serve a higher purpose means I need to clean up my act without any hand-wringing about my defects of character. I renew my commitment to serve as best I can for the current day. I do this every day—or nearly every day—after my 10th Step journaling.

Step Eleven reminds me daily that my life is not all about me—which is a good thing! This perspective helps me move past my ups and downs to why I am here at all. The “Big Book” of AA, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, states on page 77 that, “Our primary purpose is to fit ourselves to

be of maximum service to God and our fellows.” I believe that everything I experience in life helps prepare me to be of better and more useful service, provided I let go of my expectations and allow myself to be shaped and molded into something better than I was before. I surrender to this process every day, looking for what is good and right about the people I live and work with, and what is good and right about how I choose to respond to whatever comes up. I am often somewhat (and sometimes very) disappointed in myself and others, but this does not diminish my faith in the process or my commitment to serving a greater purpose.

In my search for truth and meaning, I have found much that is good and right, delightful and awe-inspiring. My conscious contact with my Higher Power/higher purpose is my daily commitment to do my best to be of useful service to others, and to seek truth, justice, fairness, and equality for all. I am profoundly grateful for the opportunity, even when it frightens me. I know I am safe from the ravages of the hideous “four horsemen” described on page 151 of *Alcoholics Anonymous (4th edition)*—Terror, Bewilderment, Frustration and Despair—so long as I maintain this daily commitment.

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.*

I have never been a spiritual person, and my awakening has not been of a spiritual nature. As one of my sponsors in another Twelve-Step program, Tessie, was fond of saying about herself, “My spiritual awakening is that I am not a spiritual person.” You can see why I asked her to sponsor me! All the same, as a result of working the Steps of EDA,

my life has been transformed. I am genuinely happy. I am solid in my recovery from my eating disorder and I am solid in my recovery, period. I have had an awakening to a truth, happiness, and freedom I never knew existed.

I get a daily reprieve from my eating disorder, contingent on my daily practice of reliance on my higher purpose to provide peace and perspective. Perspective, developed through working the Steps, makes dealing with my issues much more rewarding than running from them. When I turn my will and my life over to serving the greater good, I can more readily see my day-to-day issues for what they really are:

- *impediments* to fully serving others in the here and now
- *reminders* of my humanity
- *signals* that I am neglecting something that needs to be dealt with first
- *challenges* to my commitment to place service to the greater good ahead of my self-generated emotional states
- *opportunities* to build bridges of empathy and understanding with others who suffer the same issues
- *means* through which I grow more resilient, strong, and flexible in my recovery

I know from experience that I am perfectly capable of “falling asleep at the wheel” when I do not work the Steps on a daily basis. I am also still capable of lapses into self-pity, resentment, and fear whenever I fail to remind myself of who

I am, where I came from, and what I am here to do. *Step Twelve provides me an easy way to be reminded: I can share my experience, strength, and hope with others.* Perhaps they will be able to take something useful from my story and insights, perhaps not. But in any case, I do my level best to turn my most awful experiences to good purpose. In working with sponsees, I get deep satisfaction from establishing authentic bonds with other human beings based on the truths of our lives. Often these bonds turn into durable connections with people who inspire me with their warmth, compassion, energy, and determination to “do the next right thing,” no matter what. I am humbled and awed by what simple reliance on a higher purpose can do, and I am intensely grateful to feel connected to so many amazing people.

Although I am far from perfect and sometimes doubt that I am a great role model for working the Steps, I am amazed at the difference between how I felt about my life before recovery and how I feel about it now. Today, practicing the principles of the program in everything I do—however imperfectly—makes it possible for me to be in recovery and continue to carry a message of hope for others like me. If I can make service to the greater good more important than my personal desires—one day at a time—anyone can.

Thanks to the honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness of AA and EDA members, and to the simplicity of these programs, I am free at last. I am happy and grateful to have the opportunity to help carry the message of recovery to those who still suffer and to practice the principles of the Twelve Steps of EDA in all my affairs.

I sincerely hope that everyone who wants to recover from an eating disorder has the opportunity I have had. May you find peace, freedom, and joy!