

AMENDS

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Each and every one of the steps in the 12-Step program are essential to the success of a recovering addict. Like a puzzle, they fit together perfectly, displaying an ever-evolving picture of a work in progress. While each step is critical, perhaps one of the most important steps of all, to me, is Step 9: making amends. After all, it's because of the pain and destruction introduced into the lives of others, immeasurable in some instances, that finally convinced most of us that we had a problem with our addiction(s).

Upon coming to a full realization of the pain and suffering we inflicted on others, we often want to run straight out and try to make amends to those we'd harmed, even before completing our withdrawals. More often than not, as honorable as our intentions might have been, we found that our victims had heard this song and dance dozens, if not hundreds, of times before. As a result, this latest attempt wasn't even listened to, let alone taken seriously. In some circumstances, these attempts might have even brought about more pain and suffering, the very thing we were trying to atone for. Because of this, the first thing we need to do is exercise patience. There's a reason there are 8 other steps that come before our attempts to make amends, and it's only by working through those steps that we begin to understand the true impact of our actions, our motives behind them, and finally, how to best go about making our amends. Working through the first 8 steps also proves our level of commitment when it comes time to reach out and make things right.

While there may be an occasional exception here and there, for most of us, by the time we hit rock bottom, we'd already discovered that we'd lied, cheated and even stole in an attempt to support our addictions. For others, we've done so much more, even going so far to take someone's life. For those of us who've done something like this, we find ourselves stuck between a rock and a hard place. As sincere as our remorse and desire to make direct amends might be, we find ourselves unable to do so, because our actions have forever taken our victim from this world. Without any way to make things right, we're faced with a lifetime of guilt at the finality of our actions, and as we all know, for many of us, guilt was often one of the original triggers for leading to our desire to use in the first place. When we find ourselves facing this dilemma, we first need to accept the fact that the consequences for our actions are not only the most horrible in the world, but they're also irreversible. As such, concepts like forgiveness will forever be completely out of the question, and rightly so.

So, with this in mind, how would I go about making amends, direct or otherwise, to a victim who's no longer alive? Especially when that person's death was the direct result of my actions? And what about the family and friends of my victim, those who must suffer his loss from this world each and every day of their lives? Do I reach out to them in an effort to make amends? Or do I avoid them, for fear of causing yet even more harm to them? In such circumstances, all I can do is let them know, through a professional mediator, that I'm ready and willing to make the attempt, and that when they're ready, I'm willing to honestly answer any questions they may have, and that I'm truly remorseful for my actions. As I said earlier, forgiveness is **not** an option, not now, not ever, and is something to be avoided at all costs. Regardless of whether or not they respond, the only thing I can do is to get my own life in order, and to use my experiences to help someone else avoid making the same mistakes I've made. In this way, while I can't restore the life of my victim, I can at least make my life have some sort of positive meaning, and in so doing, I can at least honor my victim's memory in a positive manner.

As I continue to make amends to those I've harmed, I'm going to come across those who refuse to even entertain the idea of accepting my efforts to make things right. This is their choice, one they've made because of the level of harm I've inflicted upon them, and in those circumstances, I have to honor and respect their wishes. If I don't, I'm continuing to inflict pain and suffering on them, the very thing I was there to apologize and atone for.

Making amends is part of the healing process, both to the people I've harmed, and to myself. In following through on these attempts, I've provided them with some closure, answering questions and helping them understand that they were not at fault for my actions. At the same time, the questions that are asked of me often help me understand more about myself, while revealing the true impacts of the harm I've inflicted on others, all of which reinforce my desire to stay clean and sober.