

A Beginner's Guide
to the
12 Steps of Clutterers AnonymousSM

Second Edition (2020)

by
Members of the “Less Is More” Group of Clutterers Anonymous
Delray Beach, Florida

Second Edition (2020). The title of the first edition (2016) was
A Workbook for Working the 12 Steps of Clutterers Anonymous.

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We are clutterers and hoarders at the “Less Is More” face-to-face meeting of
Clutterers Anonymous in Delray Beach, FL. We gratefully acknowledge:

- Bette H. champion of CLA newcomers and mother of this *Beginner’s Guide*.
- Judy K. wordsmith, editor-in-chief, and Microsoft Word wizard.
- Cami F. word & grammar cop who helped us rethink and refine concepts.

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*This text is lovingly written for you,
the clutterer or hoarder, and your Sponsor.*

DRAFT

Introduction

Recovery is much easier if you have an unquenchable thirst for it. Without motivation to change, success may not be achievable until you become ready.

To reap the full benefits of the Steps, you must be willing to trust another person and write, perhaps at length, in response to questions and see what comes up. To use this *Beginner's Guide*, you will need a notebook to:

- **Record all answers for this round of working the Steps**
- **Write questions to discuss with your Sponsor or Co-Sponsor**
- **Save insights received when dealing with your clutter—while decluttering, writing, sharing, meditating, or praying**

We Members of Clutterers Anonymous (CLA) desire to achieve balance and harmony in our lives, homes, and interactions with others. We long for simple surroundings that reflect beauty, order, and peace. Clutter is not only in our physical surroundings, but also in our minds, speech, relationships, and schedules. We must address all these areas to solve our problem with stuff.

We in CLA believe that our problem is a true addiction, a *dis-ease*, a three-fold illness: physical, emotional, and spiritual. We achieve three-fold recovery from clutter by working the 12 Steps of Clutterers Anonymous.

The purpose of this *Beginner's Guide* is to lead you in your first journey through the Steps with a Sponsor or Co-Sponsor. The content is inspired by CLA literature and by our Members' experience, strength, and hope.

It is fundamental to obtain a Sponsor who will assist you in working the 12 Steps and dealing with any resistance. Look for a Sponsor who has the recovery you want. If there are no experienced Sponsors available, two Members can work the Steps together as Co-Sponsors. Seek a Step partner who sparks your desire for recovery and has your same commitment to working the Steps. This relationship is essential for success. As soon as you

find a workable match, swap telephone numbers, agree on times, and start working Step 1 together.

Each Step has a guiding principle. In working that Step, we integrate its guiding principle into our recovery. The first three Steps are the “Give Up Steps.” Steps 4 and 5 are the “Own Up Steps.” Steps 6 through 9 are the “Clean Up Steps.” The last three Steps are the “Grow Up Steps.”

While working the Steps, we are encouraged to use the tool of Daily Action. After consulting with our Sponsor or Co-Sponsor, we put into our daily schedule five basic actions (our *Basic 5*) that support our recovery. The typical Basic 5 is:

1. Make my bed
2. Wash my dishes
3. Declutter one item
4. Put away what I take out
5. Process the daily mail

Some other possibilities include:

1. Track my expenses/activities
2. Plan my meals
3. Check in with a recovery Buddy
4. Attend a recovery meeting

Along the journey, we may encounter some resistance. This resistance will continue to plague us until we accept all 12 Steps. Sometimes we have to return to the previous Step: we must embrace it fully before we can proceed.

It is important to remember that working the Steps is an ongoing process. After completing Step 12 for the first time, we reach a better level of functioning in daily life. This is only the beginning. If we find that new problems arise concerning clutter, we go through the Steps again. Some have completed the Steps several times, while others prefer to revisit them annually. Being willing to work the Steps again indicates a level of recovery and our desire to achieve our purpose in life.

Sponsorship is one of the 12 Tools of CLA. Once enough Members have worked the Steps with a Sponsor or Co-Sponsor, there will be a pool of people able to sponsor other Members and Newcomers. We will then not only be *talking the talk*, but also *walking the walk*. Our current Members will model recovery to future Members.

Sponsor

A Sponsor is a CLA Member I choose to trust who suffers from my affliction, has understanding and compassion for our shared challenges, does not shame or judge me, protects my anonymity, models the recovery I seek, and helps me work the 12 Steps. My Sponsor gives to me and receives from me the gift of honest relationship, which fuels recovery for both of us.

My Sponsor helps me:

- Unburden myself of my secrets, shame, and guilt about clutter
- Work the program and 12 Steps up to the level of my Sponsor's 12-Step experience
- Deal with my resistances
- Provide thorough responses by compassionately questioning me
- Determine how to do a physical inventory
- Determine what is sane, reasonable or excessive, healthy or unhealthy
- Make kind and wise decisions about amends

For further information, see the booklet *Sponsorship in CLA*.

The 12 Steps of Clutterers Anonymous

1. We admitted that we were powerless over clutter—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 God, as we understood God, 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 others, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

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Step 1

**We admitted that we were powerless over clutter—
that our lives had become unmanageable.**

The guiding principle of this Step is Honesty.

In Step 1, we start on a journey of discovery into ourselves, our clutter, and the impact of our clutter. When we work the 12 Steps of Clutterers Anonymous, we embrace the insight that our problem with cluttering is actually an addiction. The addiction makes our lives unmanageable: each of us is powerless to achieve a clutter-free life without help.

We walk through the door thinking that we know what the problem is: lack—of effort, discipline, experience, organizational skills, routine, an ideal system, a helper, time, or space. However, in Clutterers Anonymous we discover that our problem is powerlessness. Our ineffectiveness shows that we need something deeper than more and better skills or tools.

What we're powerless over is the compulsion to:

1. Bring even more objects or pets into our already over-full homes
2. Say “Yes” to requests and what is offered, even knowing they will only add to our burden
3. Accept every opportunity to bring something new home
4. Cling to items, pets, relationships, or responsibilities, or pay a price by feeling fearful or stressed
5. Retain things that do not fit, no longer work, are no longer used
6. Hide the truth about our clutter from others and ourselves
7. Protect our egos, instead of inviting anyone into our embarrassing homes
8. Juggle so many items and thoughts that our minds become chaotic
9. Control conversations and fill all silences

When cluttering, we keep excess items or pets, live in chaos, operate in over-filled schedules, cling to destructive or unrewarding relationships, monopolize conversations, and focus on low-priority activities. Some consequences of clutter include:

1. I've lost my sense of self-worth.
2. People expect me to disappoint them, be late, and require accommodations.
3. I keep up appearances. I'm always afraid to be found out.
4. I never feel comfortable in my home.
5. I can't use or find things in my home.
6. My possessions are damaged or not well maintained.
7. I am impairing my safety and physical and mental health.
8. I fear loss of relationships, housing, job, and money. I have already wasted my time, energy, and talents.
9. I have no sense of progress in what truly matters.
10. I feel beaten: in a downward spiral, never getting out, and nothing works. I give up trying.

Some of us are stuck on the hamster wheel of cluttering and decluttering. That cycle leaves us exhausted and defeated. Others feel trapped, imprisoned in their homes, minds, schedules, and/or lives. Still others feel paralyzed, watching their lives pass by, unable to achieve their life's purpose. In spite of strong emotions, we have become clutter blind and lost our ability to recognize clutter and understand its effects.

Read and reflect on *Am I a Clutterer* and *Clutterers' Traits* available on the Clutterers Anonymous website. The following questions guide you to look past denial at your clutter and its impact. Discuss your answers and thoughts with your Sponsor or Co-Sponsor.

1. How do I decide when an item, activity, or relationship is clutter?
2. When did I start cluttering?

3. When did some of my items, actions, and relationships become a burden to me? Which ones?
4. When I realize there is too much, what prevents me from releasing the excess object, obligation, activity, or relationship?
5. How have I tried to control my clutter?
 - a. How successful were these efforts?
 - b. If not, why not?
6. What is my track record with maintenance?
 - a. Does my life keep creating failure, chaos, disruption, and unpleasant consequences?
 - b. Am I reduced to crisis management and overwhelm?
 - c. If so, in what ways?
7. Have I felt defeated by my clutter?
8. Can I admit that my cluttering is unmanageable?
9. In what ways have I been powerless over my clutter?

When you see your unmanageability with clutter and admit you are powerless, then you are ready to proceed to Step 2.

Step 2

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

The guiding principle of this Step is Hope.

In Step 1, we accepted that we have a problem with cluttering, which has progressed to an addiction. Now we move forward into the domain of hope. Powerless to solve our problem with clutter alone, we turn to a Power greater than ourselves. The only solution to our challenges is to entrust them to this Power. We ask for help with thinking and acting rationally about clutter. This is the key to our recovery. It is also the permanent solution we have desired in our lives.

Our Members come to Clutterers Anonymous with a variety of beliefs about the nature of a deity. Some are atheists. Others call themselves agnostics. Some believe that GOD stands for Good Orderly Direction or Gift Of Desperation. Others have come from various 12-Step programs and already have a working relationship with a Higher Power. Still others have a firm belief in a personal God, a supreme being. No matter what our starting belief is, we all must seek and find a Higher Power that works with us.

Our Higher Power can be the universe, our group, our best selves, or any source of strength and hope that can help us with our clutter by leading to a change in our thoughts, emotions, beliefs, and actions. Most of us come to believe that our Higher Power, which many of us call *God*, accepts, heals, and loves. We must be open to our Higher Power's guidance to succeed at working the 12 Steps and thus attain a clutter-free life. Our Sponsor or Co-Sponsor can suggest prayer and meditation and model how to lean on a Higher Power.

Some of us have understandable resistances to religion and the idea of a Higher Power as a solution. We were discouraged, forced to comply, abused, or betrayed before entering a 12-Step program.

Clutterers Anonymous is a spiritual, not religious, program. We seek and find a Higher Power who will partner with us. There is no obligation, dogma, or formal structure in our quest for a Higher Power.

Keep asking for a Higher Power to become obvious to you, until it happens. This Higher Power of your understanding works for you. No one forces this belief on you.

Help from Clutterer Anonymous is not material. It is made of love, insight, sharing of experience, and the free giving of what has been freely received. The whole program is spiritual.

This Step is two-fold:

1. We become willing to ask for assistance from a Higher Power.
2. We begin to believe that our Higher Power is ready, willing, and able to remove from us the weight of clutter—giving us tools and restoring us to reason so we can achieve and maintain a clutter-free life. We have seen other clutterers recover thanks to their Higher Power and we want that experience for ourselves.

The following questions will help you find a Power greater than yourself:

1. How do I define *insanity*?
 - a. Does that include magical thinking?
 - b. Does that include relying on unlikely events to occur?
 - c. Does that include ignoring reality?
 - d. Does that include repeating a thought or action in the same manner and expecting different results?
2. In what ways am I insane with:
 - a. My possessions?
 - b. My relationships?
 - c. My pets?
 - d. My communication style?
 - e. Time management?
3. What does it mean to me to be *self-sufficient*?
 - a. Do I think that self-sufficiency is desirable?
 - b. Do I think that my clutter keeps me self-sufficient, meaning not having to rely on others?
 - c. On the other hand, does my clutter keep me asking for accommodations?
 - d. How well has self-sufficiency worked for me?
 - e. Why?

4. What is my understanding of a *Power greater than myself*?
 - a. God?
 - b. Something or someone else?
 - c. A group?
 - d. The person I was meant to be?
 - e. My clutter?
 - f. What prevents this idea from being a Higher Power that can help me with my clutter?
5. Am I willing to believe in a Power greater than myself?
If not, what would convince me to believe?
6. Do I believe that the will of my Higher Power is for me to be free from clutter?
7. Do I believe that a Power greater than myself can and will help me, if asked? If not, what would convince me that this is true?

Until you can say, "In this Higher Power, I can trust," stay on Step 2. When you begin to believe in a caring Power greater than yourself, then you are ready to proceed to Step 3.

Step 3

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

The guiding principle of this Step is Faith.

In Step 1, we admitted we are powerless over clutter. Our way doesn't work. We're done trying and failing. In Step 2, we came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity and solve our problem with cluttering. The gift of desperation makes us want to partner with that Power to achieve a better life.

The way we work *with* our Higher Power is through surrendering control. We make a firm decision to practice complete surrender, one day at a time. We stop working *against* our Higher Power with willful cluttering behaviors and instead embrace spiritually base living.

Although our Higher Power can change us, we are not forced to do anything we resist. That's why we pray and invite participation. We no longer seek satisfaction from objects, activities, and people. We find satisfaction from within...by our Higher Power touching our being. This process involves leaving our comfort zone, praying, meditating, evaluating, and adjusting. It becomes more comfortable with time and practice.

If we make a genuine decision, there are no half measures. There's no turning back. Decisions make us come to action. Our drive becomes visible.

The *first* sign of a decision is that we become willing to pray whenever unsure or before important choices. We turn to the Serenity Prayer to handle situations that still baffle us. The Serenity Prayer is:

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can,
And wisdom to know the difference.

Clutterers Anonymous has its own Serenity Prayer, to help make decisions about our clutter. It says:

God, grant me the serenity to keep the things I need to keep,
The courage to release the things I do not need,
And the wisdom to know the difference.

The *second* sign of a decision is that we become willing to pay attention to our motivations. We find out when we are willful or when we are inspired and cooperating with our Higher Power.

Before bringing something home, we ask ourselves why:

1. I desire it or want to soothe myself.
2. I am acting impulsively, not according to a rational plan or need.
3. I think I may need it some day.
4. It is available now or has a great price.
5. I am saving or rescuing it.

Before making a commitment to be away from home, we ask ourselves why:

1. Am I acting impulsively in order to escape from my clutter?
2. Am I attempting to feel good about myself?
3. Am I motivated by experience greed or a Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)?
4. Am I people-pleasing, afraid of disappointing others or of not being nice?
5. Am I avoiding higher-priority actions?

The decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God is the beginning of our new life in recovery. We start to invite inspiration and inner guidance from our Higher Power. We allow that Power to do for us what we could not do for ourselves.

We learn to surrender our clutter; monitor when we're taking back control; and entrust our obstacles, needs, and desires to our Higher Power.

Faith comes from our willingness to trust our Higher Power and the successes we see from that partnership. We need only believe and then ask for help in our lives.

The following questions will help you make this decision:

1. What does *surrender* mean to me?
 - a. Does it feel humiliating?
 - b. Why or why not?
 - c. Does it feel liberating?
 - d. Why or why not?
2. How can I tell when I am being willful or self-led?

3. What is my understanding of my Higher Power's will for me?
4. What are my difficulties in trusting my Higher Power with:
 - a. My fears?
 - b. My obsessions and compulsions?
 - c. My clutter?
 - d. My hopes and dreams?
 - e. Write about each area.
5. In order to deal with my clutter, am I willing to strengthen my spiritual life through daily prayer?
 - a. If not, why not?
 - b. Write about my willingness to turn to prayer.
6. Am I willing to trust my Higher Power with my will, my life, and my clutter? If not, what will help me make this decision?

When you make the decision to turn your will and your life over to the care of your Higher Power, then you are ready to proceed to Step 4.

Step 4

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

The guiding principle of this Step is Courage.

Step 4 is our journey into self-discovery. We look only at our own possessions, relationships, pets, activities, and speech, *not* those of others. This examination is the source of our searching and fearless moral inventory. This inventory leads us out of our denial and vagueness about clutter – out of active addiction.

Clutter has caused us pain, shame, and self-pity. It underlies our grudges against people, institutions, and principles. In this Step, we write down our thoughts and feelings. As we write our inventory, we begin to know ourselves, change, and realize that:

1. Other people have flaws that I resent.
2. I have the same or worse flaws and want compassion, understanding, and forgiveness.
3. Maybe I should cut others some slack by not taking their inventory.
4. I want to give compassion, understanding, and forgiveness to others.

We hold nothing back and stop kidding ourselves about the minor impact of clutter. It brought us into this program in the first place. The more we live in denial and avoid the pain of seeing our shortcomings, the longer our recovery will take. No longer do we operate in terminal vagueness and procrastination. We have to face all our demons, no matter how much we fear them, so we can experience beauty, order, peace, an organized life, and harmonious relationships.

In Clutterers Anonymous, Step 4 involves a dual inventory:

- We conduct a written inventory of ourselves to discover our character assets and liabilities.
- We examine our belongings, relationships, pets, schedules, and speech.

Regarding our possessions, a discussion with our Sponsor or Co-Sponsor will help us determine in what areas we:

- Count individual items
- Count boxes or bags of items
- Estimate quantities

Regarding our time, our Sponsor or Co-Sponsor helps us prioritize our goals and identify activities that support them. We avoid busywork and half measures.

Each inventory gives us the information we need to take action.

Assets

Our assets are our positive characteristics (talents, good habits we can leverage, and virtues we have practiced), objects we have in reasonable supply, healthy relationships, enriching conversations, nurtured pets, and sanely scheduled activities that support us. Our Sponsor or Co-Sponsor can help us determine what is reasonable, healthy, and sane.

Liabilities

Our liabilities are our negative characteristics (bad habits and defects of character), excessive objects, unhealthy relationships, draining conversations, unmanageable pets, and pointless activities that sabotage us and hurt our quality of life. Our Sponsor or Co-Sponsor can help us determine what is excessive and unhealthy.

Let's begin the inventory process. The CLA leaflet *Recovery from Cluttering: The 12 Steps of Clutterers Anonymous* offers most of the following questions to assist us with the two-fold inventory. Use the simple forms on the next pages to help organize your answers. If you need more room, consider photocopying the blank forms and numbering each sheet.

Self-Inventory

1. What are my assets?
2. What are my liabilities?
3. What areas in my life are cluttered? In what way?
4. How has my clutter harmed my relationships?
5. How have I tried to control my clutter?
 - a. How successful has this been?
 - b. If not, why not?

Possession Inventory

1. What do I truly treasure?
2. What things do I no longer love?
3. What clothes am I hanging onto in sizes that don't fit me?
4. What has been the true cost of maintaining my clutter?
 - a. Paying registration and insurance for unused cars?
 - b. Moving fees?
 - c. Storage space rental?
 - d. Loss of housing?
 - e. Loss of relationships?
 - f. Anxiety about inspections or eviction notices?
 - g. Emotional pain?

Step 4: Self-Inventory

#	Assets	Liabilities
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		
11.		
12.		
13.		
14.		
15.		
16.		
17.		
18.		
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20.		
21.		
22.		
23.		
24.		
25.		
26.		
27.		
28.		
29.		
30.		

Step 4: Possession Inventory

Sheet #: _____

#	Possession	Not Used for One Year ☑	Broken or Useless ☑	Wrong Size ☑	Keeping for Others ☑	No Longer Love ☑	Truly Treasure ☑
1.							
2.							
3.							
4.							
5.							
6.							
7.							
8.							
9.							
10.							
11.							
12.							
13.							
14.							
15.							
16.							
17.							
18.							
19.							
20.							

Step 4: Relationship Inventory**Sheet #:** _____

#	Relationship	Unhealthy ☑	Needs Mending ☑	Shallow ☑	Settle ☑	Convenience ☑	Mutually Valued and Enriching ☑
1.							
2.							
3.							
4.							
5.							
6.							
7.							
8.							
9.							
10.							
11.							
12.							
13.							
14.							
15.							
16.							
17.							
18.							
19.							
20.							

Step 4: Pet Inventory

Sheet #: _____

#	Pet	I Have Money to Maintain ☑	Pet Is Clean and Well-Fed ☑	Pet Has Regular Vet Visits ☑	Pet Has Adequate Space ☑	Healthy and Odor-Free Environment ☑	Pet Has Daily Quality Time with Me ☑
1.							
2.							
3.							
4.							
5.							
6.							
7.							
8.							
9.							
10.							
11.							
12.							
13.							
14.							
15.							
16.							
17.							
18.							
19.							
20.							

Step 4: Activity Inventory**Sheet #:** _____

#	Activity	Unimportant or Unproductive ☑	Escapism ☑	Unscheduled or Fear of Missing Out ☑	Always Late ☑	Self-Image Enhancing ☑	Enriching ☑
1.							
2.							
3.							
4.							
5.							
6.							
7.							
8.							
9.							
10.							
11.							
12.							
13.							
14.							
15.							
16.							
17.							
18.							
19.							
20.							

Step 4: Conversation Inventory

Sheet #: _____

[illegible]

If we are to recover from our addiction, we must work the Steps and get rid of our clutter; physically go through our belongings; consciously consider our pets; and declutter our relationships, speech, and overscheduled lives.

Once you have completed the preceding forms and started the decluttering process, you are ready to proceed to Step 5.

DRAFT

Step 5

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

The guiding principle of this Step is Integrity.

In Step 4, we created a dual inventory. First, we listed our character assets and liabilities. Second, we examined our belongings and other troublesome areas. While actively cluttering, many of us became secretive and isolated. Alone, we carried the heavy burdens of fear, guilt, shame, and regret. There is a way out of *all* the negative aspects of our lives, not just our clutter.

In Step 5, we shine a light on our problems and their sources, reveal our clutter, and finally admit the whole truth to ourselves, another person, and our Higher Power. Taking this risk pays off in insights and productivity.

Choosing honesty over deception takes bravery. Our courage comes from our desire to be healthy, joyous, and free, instead of closeted and overwhelmed.

Reading our written inventories aloud is one way to admit our wrongs to ourselves and to God.

We carefully select a person who will hear and see our Step 4 inventories. We share our inventories with someone we trust to protect our anonymity, usually a Sponsor or Co-Sponsor. We feel reassured knowing this person suffers from our affliction, has understanding and compassion for our shared challenges, and does not shame or judge us.

Alternatively, we may choose to go to Confession or talk with our pastor, rabbi, imam, pandit, or spiritual advisor. When we trust someone to hear our inventory, we can be assured that this person is able to assist us, with God's help. We are not alone. By revealing our secrets, we remove a heavy weight, gain a new perspective, and feel relief.

When necessary, the trusted person compassionately questions the details and completeness of responses. Feedback can be verbal or non-verbal: a smile or frown, a nod, a gesture of recognition, an offered touch or hug.

Feedback can help us discover misdirected behavior. Rather than continuing that behavior, we can correct the wrongs of our past. We discover the origin and nature of our wrongs where clutter is concerned. This can be misplaced blame that results in anger, rebellion, misery, shame, or guilt. We also become aware of the forms they can take: overdrawn bank accounts, dwindling savings; money spent buying items we cannot find, time wasted hunting for missing items, broken closet rods that cannot support all our clothes, warped bookshelves that cannot support all our books, etc.

We are now discovering and accepting many new things about ourselves. We can start decluttering in a more constructive way that can change our lives.

An important part of Step 5 consists of showing our Sponsor and Co-Sponsor our homes, cars, and storage areas, not just our inventory sheets. On occasion, we might ask our Sponsor or Co-Sponsor to be present also while we declutter, especially for difficult releases. We must share our secrets, if we are to recover.

The following questions assist in getting to the core of our shame and guilt:

1. Am I now willing to bring my clutter into the open with another trusted person?
 - a. If not, why not?
 - b. Write about my willingness.
2. Is my relationship with my Higher Power growing to a point that I believe my Higher Power can truly help me overcome my clutter?
 - a. If not, why not?
 - b. Write about my trust in my Higher Power.
3. Am I still fearful of trusting God and another person to hear my inventory and see my clutter?
 - a. If yes, can I willingly pray for that trust?
 - b. If no, can I set up a date and time to share my inventory?
4. Can I forgive myself?
 - a. If not, why not?
 - b. Write about forgiving myself.

When you share your inventory, then you are ready to proceed to Step 6.

Step 6

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

The guiding principle of this Step is Willingness.

Up to this time, we have looked at our clutter and defects of character and how they have governed our attitudes and behaviors – our lives. These are the reasons we have been stuck in our clutter. Many of us have sought security in quantity.

We must become entirely ready to deal with our addiction to clutter. The only way to get rid of this addiction is by becoming ready for God to remove all these defects of character. In this Step, we are asked to take a giant leap of faith and have God help us release our clutter and all our defects of character. We will need to trust in our Higher Power, if we are to work this Step thoroughly.

Common defects of character that contribute to clutter include:

anger	envy	people-pleasing
avoidance	experience	perfectionism
controlling behavior	greed	procrastination
clutter blindness	fear	rebelliousness
denial	greed	rescuing behavior
dumpster diving	hoarding behavior	resentment
entitlement	indecisiveness	
	overscheduling	

Trust in our Higher Power began by working the five previous Steps. In Step 4, we developed a willingness to let go of our clutter and began releasing our physical possessions, unhealthy relationships, and excessive commitments. We also took an honest look at our pets. In Step 5, we admitted our long-kept, deep, dark secrets. Now, we begin ridding ourselves of attitudes and behaviors that have kept us from achieving our life purpose: use our spiritual gifts to bring more beauty, order, and love into the world. This is the beginning of a clutter-free life.

The following questions will help you develop the trust that your Higher Power will remove your defects of character.

1. Are my possessions still a source of joy?
 - a. My pets?
 - b. My relationships?
 - c. My activities?
 - d. If not, why not?
 - e. Write about the disappointment they cause.
2. What changed my possessions into clutter?
 - a. My pets?
 - b. My relationships?
 - c. My activities?
3. Do I understand that to live a cluttered life is to live in active addiction?
 - a. Have I accepted my addiction?
 - b. If not, why not?
4. Why am I holding onto my clutter?
5. Write about the following fears related to my clutter:
 - a. Perfectionism.
 - b. Fear of failure.
 - c. Fear of success.
 - d. Fear of the unknown.
 - e. How does each of these factors deny me what I truly want and need today?
 - f. What does fear say about my belief in a benevolent Higher Power?
6. What will it take for me to be ready to have God remove all my defects of character?
7. What might get in the way of my being ready to change?
 - a. List obstacles, distractions, and excuses.
 - b. Write on each.
8. Am I willing to let go of everything that stands in the way of my healing?
 - a. If not, why not?
 - b. Write about my resistances.

9. Am I ready to pray for the willingness to be open to trusting my Higher Power?
 - a. If not, why not?
 - b. Write about reservations I have about believing that God can and will remove my defects of character.
10. Am I willing to live a life free from clutter and with new attitudes and behaviors, no matter how risky they may feel?
 - a. Do I fully understand that I can no longer continue to live my life the same way and expect God to change me?
 - b. Write about replacing willfulness with complete and committed partnership with God.
 - c. Am I willing to act differently?
 - d. Write about behavioral changes.

When you become willing to let your Higher Power remove all these defects of character, then you are ready to proceed to Step 7.

Step 7

Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.

The guiding principle of this Step is Humility.

Humility means being unselfish and unpretentious. It also means being humble. We are neither better nor worse than others. We are all equally precious. Being humble also means becoming and being teachable. Humility is simply a clear recognition of what and who we are. In the past, humility may have been practiced grudgingly. However, now we must fully surrender, be serious about change, *and* do something about it. Once taken, this Step becomes the nourishing ingredient that can give us serenity.

Working the previous Steps initiated an on-going relationship with God. As we realize we are not in control and grow in humility, we place more energy into developing a relationship with our Higher Power. Then our Higher Power can work within us and through us in all aspects of our lives, especially our clutter. If we willfully or habitually resort to our character defects, then God will not remove them. If we put energy into change, God will respond.

It is important that we pray for our Higher Power's help in taking this Step. We ask our Higher Power to remove *everything* that interferes with our recovery from cluttering. This includes removing our anger, resentments, fears, envy, and all dishonesty. As we pray more, we give our Higher Power full control in releasing our clutter and alleviating our character defects. We are no longer fearful. We surrender to the process, ask for help, and trust that it will be forthcoming. We may not be able to choose the form or method of help; we may not recognize it when it arrives, but it does come.

If we become stuck, a return to the previous Step will refocus us in our readiness to let God remove our defects of character. If we are unwilling to change our behavior, then why continue with the Steps? This is a question each of us needs to address before proceeding with the subsequent Steps.

“Let go, and let God” is our motto! This is the key to changing our attitudes and behaviors so that we can live a clutter-free life. After making these changes, we can discover our life purpose. The Promises are beginning to work in our lives. We are better able to deal with our clutter on an on-going basis. A pattern of recovery starts to take hold in our lives.

The following questions will help you become ready:

1. What will it take for me to humbly ask my Higher Power to remove all my defects, so that I can better deal with my clutter in all areas?
2. What lingering defects of character—such as anger, resentments, fears, envy, and dishonesty—am I still holding onto?
 - a. Why?
 - b. Write about each of these.
 - c. What is my payoff for holding onto my clutter?
 - d. What is my payoff for holding onto my defects?
 - e. Am I ready to let go of my defects completely?
 - f. If not, why not?
 - g. Write about my readiness.
3. Am I truly ready to let my Higher Power do for me what I cannot do for myself?

When you can humbly ask God to remove all your defects, then you are ready to proceed to Step 8.

Step 8

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

The guiding principle of this Step is Brotherly Love.

In the previous Steps, the focus has been on ourselves and what we needed to do to become free of our addiction to clutter. Working Step 8 removes the self-loathing we feel after we realize how our shortcomings and clutter contributed to relationship damage. In this Step, *we are now looking at our relationships with others* and become open to mending them, especially when clutter played a role. We do this by making a list of people we have harmed. We will need to review the questions below, in order to make a complete list. No amends are required for working this Step, only the willingness to make them.

We, ourselves, are the first person on our list. Family, friends, roommates, neighbors, bosses, co-workers—all are possibilities for our consideration; anyone we have harmed during our lifetime belongs on the list. Remember that the focus is on people we have harmed, *not* on how others have harmed us. This is our inventory, not theirs.

Wounding from our past creates individual resistances to being thorough. Some of us may fear the injured party's behavior, which could harm our good names and us. Some may wish to avoid the pain of vulnerability and shame. Some may balk at listing someone without the prospect of swapping amends. Some may imagine that they can offer amends while clinging to resentment and hatred in their hearts. Resentful attitudes towards others will defeat our recovery. In Step 8, we become willing to overcome these obstacles.

Forgiveness is often the key that unlocks our willingness to make amends. By offering amends, we are, in fact, asking to be forgiven. Building on our realization in Step 4 that we want to forgive and be forgiven, Step 8 asks us to become willing to ask for forgiveness, and to receive that forgiveness, if offered. First, we must become willing to forgive ourselves. Next, we become willing to forgive others for stirring up our feelings of guilt and shame about harming them.

With forgiveness, we can enjoy the present, work towards harmony, and walk the pathway to peace. Our recovery depends only on *our* willingness; it does not depend on receiving forgiveness from others or reconciling with them.

The following questions will help you develop an exhaustive Step 8 list.

1. How has clutter damaged my relationships? Review my Step 4.
2. Who has my clutter harmed? Review my Step 4.
 - a. Add these names to my list.
 - b. Did I put myself first on my list?
 - c. If not, why not?
 - d. Do I understand why I belong at the top of my list?
3. Since working Step 4, have I become aware of others I have harmed due to my clutter?
 - a. If yes, add them to my list.
 - b. How has my clutter affected them?
4. Are there any others who I truly do not want to put on the list because I feel they owe me amends too?
 - a. Write about my reluctance.
 - b. Add them to my list.
5. Are there any other reasons why I resist putting certain people on my list?
 - a. Fear of the injured party (retaliation, rejection, loss of relationship, loss of good name, gossip, negative response, etc.)
 - b. Fear of feelings (shame, guilt, vulnerability, hurt, etc.)
 - c. Rationalizations
 - d. Write about this.
6. How can I become willing to list everyone affected by my cluttering?
Write about this.
7. Am I embarrassed or afraid to face the consequences of my clutter and offer amends to each person on my list?
 - a. If yes, why?
 - b. Write about my embarrassment.

8. Have I prayed to my Higher Power for the willingness to make amends to *all* the people on my list?
 - a. If not, when will I be ready?
 - b. Write about becoming willing.

When you are willing to make amends to everyone on your list, you are ready to proceed to Step 9.

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Step 9

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

The guiding principle of this Step is Self-Discipline.

This is the Step for our restoration of relationships with others, ourselves, and our possessions. We mend, not just apologizing for, the wrongs we have inflicted on people from our list in Step 8.

Making amends is a lifelong process. We stay focused on our role, not on what others have done to us. In making amends, we behave with caring, openness, and fairness. As a result, we gain self-respect, clear conscience, peace, and lightness. We lose remorse, guilt, and shame from inflicting harm on others, especially ourselves. We make honest repairs so we can live free from our clutter.

We should never approach this Step alone. Prayer and meditation are a necessary part of this process. Ask God for the wisdom to know which amends to make and when, and the necessary courage to carry them out. The trust we have built in working the previous Steps will give us confidence, sensitivity, and poise to proceed. By having this conscious contact with God, we are better equipped to clean our side of the street and avoid harming others with selfish or impulsive amends. Working with a Sponsor or Co-Sponsor will help us develop our timing, judgment, and prudence.

When preparing to make amends, we first eliminate emotional obstacles. Resentful attitudes will defeat our recovery. We cannot hate and make amends at the same time. Hate and resentment are barriers to our recovery. We consider if the place, time, or content of our amends may harm others. We make amends proportionate to the damage our clutter inflicted. We choose the form of our amends: verbal, written, written-and-destroyed, monetary, acts-of-service, reparation-in-kind, or living amends.

With our Higher Power, Sponsor, or Co-Sponsor, we call upon courage, insight, and empathy. We select the best approach, entrust the outcome to our Higher Power, and make our amends. To gain skill and confidence in the process, we tackle the easiest remaining amends.

Remember, we are clearing out not only our clutter, but also the wreckage of our past. We should neither delay nor procrastinate. The longer we avoid making our amends, the longer we remain in active addiction, regarding our clutter, without ever achieving recovery. Nor should we jump head-on into reckless abandon. A question to ask ourselves would be: “Can I get started by making one amend this week?”

1. We make amends to ourselves for creating homes, schedules, and relationships that don’t support us, and for the stress and shame they bring. Our amends consist of moving toward a life free from all forms of clutter, by no longer overscheduling our lives, trading abusive relationships for healthy ones, and focusing on the essential. We buy what we actually need and can reasonably accommodate into our homes. In this Step, we also learn to say “No” to those things that keep us from our life purpose, even some gifts, activities, and relationships.
2. We make amends to others when it causes no harm to them or others.
3. If we owe money to a person, organization, or government, we make a plan for repayment. We cannot hold out on any amends, if we want to live a life free of clutter and in recovery.
4. When there is risk of violence, we do not make *direct* amends. We work with a Sponsor or Co-Sponsor to determine if correspondence is safe. If so, we write something like: “In the past, my behavior toward you has not been loving and supportive. I apologize for the hurt my behavior has caused you.”
5. Some people on our list may have moved and we no longer have the ability to contact them. *We must be willing to make amends to them*, if we ever become aware of their location.
6. Others will not be available for us to make our amends. Whatever the situation, *we must be willing to make the amends*.
7. Others may have died and we cannot make direct amends to them either. Some people write their heartfelt amends and then ceremoniously destroy the letter. *We must be willing to make amends*, so that we can be free to move forward in our lives.

Often, the people to whom we are making amends have not remembered the situation. As long as we aren’t trying to deceive or hide our misdeeds, it is

not important that they remember, and we do not try to help them recall the event. We simply apologize and move forward.

Sometimes, making amends re-ignites the fires of anger in others. We remain calm, avoid commenting on their anger, simply apologize, and move on. Remember, we are clearing our wreckage, not becoming angry in this situation.

As we continue making amends, we become consistent and dependable. Our fears will begin to disappear. We will no longer attempt to fill our needs by cluttering, overscheduling our time, over-burdening our minds, dominating conversations, or remaining in unhealthy relationships. We will start to live our life purpose. The Promises of Alcoholics Anonymous are working in our lives.

Step 9 Checklist

I refers to the clutterer. *We* refers to the clutterer plus Higher Power and Sponsor or Co-Sponsor.

- ☐ 1. I pray, meditate, and invite my Higher Power and Sponsor or Co-Sponsor to help me.
- ☐ 2. We look at my list from Step 8.
- ☐ 3. We focus on the harm my clutter inflicted and address procrastination and other obstacles.
- ☐ 4. We sort amends from easy to difficult and determine whether there are some amends I cannot make now.
- ☐ 5. Considering also my safety, we select the form of amends (verbal, written, written-and-destroyed, monetary, acts-of-service, reparation-in-kind, or living amends).
- ☐ 6. We choose amends that are proportionate to the damage my clutter inflicted.
- ☐ 7. We consider when, where, and how to make amends so I do no more harm.
- ☐ 8. I answer yes to the question “Can I get started by making one amend this week?”
- ☐ 9. Starting with amends to myself, I repeatedly schedule and make amends, learn from the experiences, and celebrate effort.

Ask yourself the following questions:

1. How have I included my Higher Power in this process?
Write about it.
2. How do I feel *before* making amends to people, including myself, harmed by my clutter?
Write about it.
3. How do I feel *after* making those amends?
Write about it.
4. How have I made amends to myself regarding my clutter?
Write about it.
5. How have I made amends to other people on my list from Step 8?
Write about it.
6. How would I alter my amends next time?
Write about it.
7. Is there a pattern to the amends I have needed to make?
If so, write about it.
8. How have I changed?
Write about it.

When you have completed making the amends you can make now, you are ready to proceed to Step 10.

Step 10

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

The guiding principle of this Step is Perseverance.

Step 10 is the first of the “Grow Up” Steps. It combines Steps 1 through 9. In Step 10, we maintain and increase our progress so far. We continue to get rid of our clutter until there is no more and we can start living clutter-free. A daily personal inventory helps us become more honest and be less in denial.

The best time to take the daily inventory is before going to bed. With the resulting plan of action for tomorrow, we clear any anxiety and guilt in order to have a restful sleep. We start the next day with renewed energy.

At the end of each day, we ask ourselves the following questions about the Basic 5. (Adjust for the list you agreed upon with your Sponsor or Co-Sponsor.):

1. Did I make my bed upon rising?
2. Did I wash my dishes after eating?
3. Did I declutter one item today?
4. Did I put away what I took out when I finished with it?
5. Did I process the daily mail?
6. Do I need to refocus on the Basic 5 and bring them back into my daily routine?

Then, we review our attitudes and behaviors, with others and ourselves. We also check to see if we have returned to our former cluttering behaviors. We identify the root of our problems.

The following questions offer a way to face the problems of today and plan for tomorrow.

1. Did I remember to turn my will over to my Higher Power today?
 - a. If not, why not?
 - b. Write about how I can make it a daily habit.

2. Was I angry today?
 - a. What were the causes of my anger?
 - b. Write about them.
3. Was I resentful today?
 - a. What were the causes of my resentment?
 - b. Write about them.
4. Was I lonely today?
 - a. What were the causes of my loneliness today?
 - b. Write about them.
5. Did I clutter my mind with chaotic thinking today?
 - a. What were the causes of my mind clutter?
 - b. Write about them.
6. Did I dominate a conversation today?
 - a. What were the causes of my verbal clutter?
 - b. Write about them.
7. Did I overschedule my time so that I have no time for myself and what brings me joy?
 - a. If so, what activities can I remove from my schedule for tomorrow?
 - b. If not tomorrow, when?
8. Did I harm someone today?
 - a. If I have, am I willing to make amends tomorrow?
 - b. If not, why not?
 - c. Am I willing to make amends to myself too?
 - d. If not, why not?
9. Did I ask God for help during the day?
 - a. If not, why not?
 - b. Write about my reluctance to ask for help.
10. Did I try to bring peace into my thinking by focusing on the Serenity Prayer and meditation?
 - a. If not, can I try to accomplish this now?
 - b. Write about making room for prayer and meditation in my day.

In the leaflet *Measuring Progress on Our Journey in Recovery*, CLA provides a table for measuring our progress. We examine the following areas:

1. Behaviors and habits that block my recovery.
2. Behaviors and habits that enhance my recovery.
3. Behaviors and habits that are gray areas or depend on circumstances.

This is a useful tool to help assess our recovery or relapse. All Members who return to cluttering must rework the previous nine Steps. Some Members choose to do annual reviews of the 12 Steps to detect possible regression into active addiction.

If the inventory reveals a recurring problem, we may need to refocus on our recovery and go back to the Step that addresses it. Examples would be:

- Return to Step 3 if I need to turn the problem over to my Higher Power.
- Return to Step 7 and ask God to remove my shortcomings if resentments recur.
- Return to Step 9 if I become aware of more people I have harmed and need to focus on making the necessary amends.

When you do your personal inventory on a regular basis, you are ready to proceed to Step 11.

Step 11

**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.**

The guiding principle of this Step is Awareness of God.

The first part of this Step tells us that we are seeking to improve our conscious contact with God. Conscious contact occurs when we are awake, seeking and receiving messages or feelings from our Higher Power. Conscious contact may take practice. Some Members experience inner clarity and having received something new, a sense of knowing.

This Step reminds us to put God first, *not* our clutter or busyness. We do this by praying the Serenity Prayer and learning to meditate. There are many ways to meditate. The easiest way is to proceed slowly and thoughtfully.

1. I select a special place in my home that is comfortable and relaxing.
2. I sit quietly, close my eyes, begin to focus on my breathing, and let my mind rest.
3. I pray the Serenity Prayer slowly.
4. As I feel my body relaxing, I enjoy peace within.
5. If I sense that thoughts have re-entered my mind and it is hard to quiet them, I inhale one word and exhale another until my monkey mind settles down. For example,
 - I inhale "I'm" and exhale "open."
 - I inhale "Bring" and exhale "peace."
 - I inhale "Come" and exhale "Lord."
 Then I return to #2 and #4.
6. I ask my Higher Power to replace my thoughts with love.
7. When my time is up, I continue deep breathing as I slowly open my eyes.
8. I enjoy the relaxed feeling that I am experiencing.

Start by meditating for five minutes and gradually work toward a 20-minute meditation. Some Members like to meditate in the morning, while others prefer the evenings. Some meditate twice daily or whenever they feel their peace has been disturbed. There is no one-size-fits-all formula for all Members. See what works the best for you and your schedule. “Take what you like and leave the rest.”

The second part of this Step is praying for the knowledge of God’s will for us and then for the power to carry out that guidance. Determining God’s will can be difficult, especially if we have never asked our Higher Power to show us. This is easiest when:

- I begin each day by asking God to reveal what is best to do today.
- I end each day by thanking my Higher Power for all that I have received throughout the day.

God’s will for us will always lead us to living happy, joyous, and free lives, and not feeling burdened with clutter in any form.

The following questions will assist in working this Step:

1. Have I started my day by praying to God?
 - a. If not, why not?
 - b. Write about any reluctance.
2. Do I meditate daily for 20 minutes?
 - a. If not, why not?
 - b. Write about my meditation practice.
3. Am I willing to continue increasing my conscious contact with God?
 - a. If not, why not?
 - b. Write about building my relationship with God.

When you are praying and meditating on a regular basis, you are ready to proceed to Step 12.

Step 12

**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.**

The guiding principle of this Step is Service.

Upon arriving at Step 12, we notice that our spirit is lifted from working the previous Steps. The Power greater than ourselves has become active in our lives. We might even start to call our Higher Power *God*, as is written in the Steps. We are open to all the opportunities that our Higher Power presents.

The spiritual awakening may come upon us suddenly; however, most of us experience the slowly developing type. Both types are equally effective.

A spiritual awakening is a newfound, deep, and possibly life-changing awareness: We are powerless, but not alone. A Higher Power exists who is both powerful and benevolent. Willfulness and working alone got us nowhere fast. Recovery comes from constant application of the Steps and from our relationship with our Higher Power. We nurture this relationship through prayer and meditation.

As we work through the Steps, awakening to our Higher Power's work in us means noticing:

- We have less of a struggle to complete our daily decluttering.
- We feel more relaxed in our environment.
- We have more breathing time in our schedules.
- We enjoy relationships that emotionally support us in recovery.

We are living in a more orderly home. We maintain it, knowing that this ongoing action will help us achieve the beauty and serenity of living our life purpose. This is the goal each of us has desired for many years, without knowing how to accomplish it.

Our group has a special way of acknowledging our successes. We say: "Yay, me!" after we share about accomplishing a task. Others in our group respond: "Yay, you!" We have spent years with little to no success; we recognize the importance of celebrating our victories now.

The clutter-free life that we currently enjoy also carries a responsibility. We have freely received the precious gift of recovery. We now have an obligation to preserve it, by sharing it with others, in an attitude of service. We carry the message to still-suffering clutterers in the following ways:

1. Our actions show that recovery from cluttering is possible. They are very powerful in reaching out. Others see the freedom we have achieved. It has become part of us.
2. Our positive attitude is apparent in both our actions and words. Others want to have what we are now living.
3. We share our experience, strength, and hope and introduce others to the Clutterers Anonymous program. We are mindful of Tradition 12 where we place principles before personalities and protect our anonymity whenever appropriate.
4. We are eager to help others and practice our program through various levels of service.

If you have worked the 12 Steps, you have something to give. Below are just a few examples of service you can offer to Clutterers Anonymous and its Members and Newcomers:

1. Recover from clutter and stay in recovery.
2. Be a Program Buddy and call your partner with your daily plan.
3. Bookend by talking to someone before and after a task to become more accountable.
4. Make calls to Newcomers and other Members.
5. Be a Sponsor or Co-Sponsor.
6. Share your experience, strength, and hope.
7. Serve as a speaker.
8. Hold an office in your home group.
9. Lead a meeting.
10. Order literature for the group.
11. Read *The Twelve Concepts for World Service* by Alcoholics Anonymous.
12. Start a meeting.
13. Serve as a delegate to the World Service Organization.
14. Hold an office at the World Service level.

You determine which types of service suit you best.

The following questions will assist in working this Step:

1. Have I experienced a spiritual awakening (sudden or progressive)?
 - a. Describe what happened.
 - b. What changes of behavior have I discovered within myself?
2. How do I provide service to my home group, the Fellowship, and WSO?
 - a. What recovery-enhancing skills do I hope to develop by performing this service?
 - b. Was I cautious not to over-commit before volunteering?
 - c. Before accepting this new commitment, have I released one that demands equivalent time or energy?
 - d. If not, why not?
 - e. Do I understand the principle of rotation of leadership?
 - f. Am I comfortable leaving space empty and trusting my Higher Power to fill it?
3. Have I completed my decluttering?
 - a. If not, why not?
 - b. Write about the barriers to finalizing my decluttering.
4. Write about my plan of action to achieve and maintain a clutter-free life.
 - a. Include a target date.
 - b. Does my plan include action to take if I catch myself slipping?
 - c. Commit the plan to my Sponsor or Co-Sponsor.
 - d. Give regular updates and course corrections until mission accomplished.

By working this Step, we safeguard our recovery and help maintain our program, assisting others and ourselves. When you are applying these principles in all aspects of your life, congratulations! You have completed the 12 Steps of CLA!

Summary

If you have been working the Steps in this *Beginner's Guide* with a Sponsor or Co-Sponsor—and not just reading about them—you should be noticing many life improvements, such as:

1. Knowing and liking myself better
2. Having a clearer conscience
3. Enjoying more harmonious relationships
4. Appreciating a more streamlined home that supports me
5. Finding and accessing my possessions more easily
6. Having more breathing space in my schedule
7. Thinking more clearly and focusing more easily
8. Trusting my Sponsor or Co-Sponsor
9. Relishing a closer connection to my Higher Power
10. Spending more quality time on my life purpose and less on dating my clutter
11. Becoming a Sponsor, a beacon of recovery to other still-suffering clutterers
12. Looking forward to working the Steps again

Completing the Steps means that we are practicing the principles of the Steps in all our affairs. While walking through the Steps, we have progressively integrated into our lives the 12 virtues of Honesty, Hope, Faith, Courage, Integrity, Willingness, Humility, Brotherly Love, Self-Discipline, Perseverance, Awareness of God, and Service.

In our new life, free from clutter, we enjoy the serenity and sense of purpose we have always desired. We are free to pursue life-fulfilling goals and to reach our potential, doing God's will in the service of others. We have been made anew.

It is time for us to share this gift of recovery so freely given to us. We do this by becoming a Sponsor. We give (and receive) the gift of relationship. We

leave isolation, learn from and teach each other. The experience of recovering through honest relationship is one message we can carry to others who are still suffering. It will be our gift to them and to our program.

We experience what the CLA leaflet *Finding Your Life Purpose* describes:

“As you declutter, we hope you will remember that you are not merely finding lost keys and bankbooks, not only discarding obsolete projects, not just making space for guests—you are finding yourself. You are clearing away the wreckage of your past. You are being responsible for small things, so that you can be entrusted with larger ones. You are making room for your true purpose to emerge. Go with God and know you are blessed.”

Glossary

accept	To receive willingly all of myself and the reality of my <u>addiction</u> to <u>clutter</u> . See <u>admit</u> , <u>denial</u> , <u>serenity</u> .
addict	A person who habitually or excessively <u>surrenders</u> to something other than a <u>Higher Power</u> to the point of not being able to conceive of life without it. See <u>clutterer</u> , <u>hoarder</u> .
addiction	The compulsion toward a destructive habit-forming substance or behavior, such as <u>cluttering</u> or <u>hoarding</u> .
admit	To acknowledge to myself and others that I have a problem that is beyond my control that affects others and me. To let others see my <u>clutter</u> . See <u>accept</u> , <u>denial</u> , <u>humility</u> , <u>sanity</u> , Step 1.
agnostic	A person who believes that the existence of <u>God</u> is unknown or unknowable. See <u>atheist</u> , <u>believe</u> , <u>Higher Power</u> .
amends	Willingly offered compensation for <u>harm</u> caused to others by my <u>clutter</u> and <u>defects of character</u> . Amends can be verbal, written, written-and-destroyed, monetary, acts-of-service, reparation-in-kind, or <u>living amends</u> . See Step 8, Step 9.
anonymity	The protection of CLA Members' identities and confidential information. See Step 5, Step 12.
assets	My positive characteristics (talents, good habits I can leverage, and virtues I have practiced), objects I have in reasonable supply, healthy relationships, and sanely scheduled activities that support me. My <u>Sponsor</u> or <u>Co-Sponsor</u> can help me determine what is reasonable, healthy, and sane. See <u>defects of character</u> , <u>inventory</u> .
atheist	A person who denies the existence of <u>God</u> . See <u>agnostic</u> , <u>believe</u> , <u>Higher Power</u> .

awareness	The consciousness of triggers, attitudes, behaviors, and consequences of my <u>cluttering</u> . Recognition of the presence of <u>God</u> . See Step 11.
Basic 5	Five actions to serve as the foundation to my <u>recovery</u> one day at a time. See <u>maintenance</u> .
believe	To accept as true the existence and benevolence of a <u>Higher Power</u> at work in my life as a force for <u>recovery</u> . See <u>agnostic</u> , <u>atheist</u> , <u>God</u> , Step 2, <u>trust</u> .
bookend	To talk with and be accountable to a <u>Buddy</u> before and after tackling a <u>recovery</u> -related task or project. (Source: <i>A Brief Guide</i> leaflet (blue).)
Buddy	A CLA Member who is my helpmate or accountability partner and hears my commitment to my daily plan or <u>recovery</u> project. See <u>Co-Sponsor</u> , <u>Sponsor</u> .
busywork	Unimportant or unproductive activity to avoid, escape, or improve my self-image. See <u>half measures</u> , <u>procrastination</u> .
carry the message	To show others through my actions, attitudes, <u>experience</u> , <u>strength</u> , and <u>hope</u> that <u>recovery</u> from <u>cluttering</u> is possible; to introduce others to the Clutterers Anonymous program; to practice <u>service</u> .
character defects	See <u>defects of character</u> .
clutter	“Clutter is anything we don’t need, want, or use that takes our time, energy or space, and destroys our serenity. It can be outgrown clothes, obsolete papers, broken toys, disliked gifts, meaningless activity, ancient <u>resentments</u> , or unsatisfying relationships.” (Source: <i>Recovery from Cluttering: The 12 Steps of Clutterers Anonymous</i> leaflet (yellow).) The hallmarks of clutter are excess, disorganization, and blocking. The five types of clutter are physical, time, relationship, mind, and <u>verbal clutter</u> .

clutter blindness	Living in my <u>clutter</u> to the point that I no longer see it; intellectually minimizing clutter and how it affects others and me. Due to daily exposure, the lost ability to see my clutter for what it is. See <u>denial</u> .
clutterer	“A person who struggles with having physical or nonphysical excess. Many clutterers may have difficulty with organization or have a tendency to <u>procrastinate</u> .” (Source: CLA online glossary.) A compulsive clutterer is an <u>addict</u> who has lost the power of choice in the matter of <u>clutter</u> . See <u>hoarder</u> .
cluttering	A compulsive activity of “creating or adding to physical or nonphysical <u>clutter</u> .” (Source: CLA online glossary.) It is often <u>shameful</u> , secretive, and destructive. See <u>hoarding</u> .
conscious contact	Occurs when I am awake, seeking and receiving messages or feelings from my <u>Higher Power</u> . See <u>meditation</u> , <u>prayer</u> , Step 11.
Co-Sponsor	A CLA program <u>Buddy</u> or peer with a comparable level of <u>recovery</u> . We work the Steps together and sponsor each other. See <u>Sponsor</u> .
decision	Complete commitment and action. <u>Half measures</u> avail us nothing. See Step 3.
decluttering	“Reducing or eliminating <u>clutter</u> .” (Source: CLA online glossary.) “Decluttering is not merely eliminating, but gradually transforming our space so that we surround ourselves only with things that express our purpose. It means turning something useless into something useful; creating more leisure and space; being more honest in our relationships; eliminating distractions and simplifying our lives in order to find our spiritual roots.” (Source: <i>Recovery from Cluttering: The 12 Steps of Clutterers Anonymous</i> leaflet (yellow).) See <u>bookend</u> , <u>Buddy</u> , <u>focusing</u> , <u>trust</u> .

defects of character	My bad personality traits and tendencies that keep me trapped in my cluttered home, over-stuffed schedule, and unsatisfying relationships. See <u>amends</u> , <u>assets</u> , <u>clutter blindness</u> , <u>denial</u> , <u>half measures</u> , <u>inventory</u> , <u>living amends</u> , <u>overscheduling</u> , <u>people-pleasing</u> , <u>procrastination</u> , <u>resentments</u> , <u>shortcomings</u> , Step 6, <u>verbal clutter</u> , <u>wrongs</u> .
denial	Rejection of the truth that I am a <u>clutterer</u> and rationalization about the severity of my problem with <u>cluttering</u> . Often pride, <u>fear</u> , greed, or rescuing underlie it. Probably the greatest impediment to <u>decluttering</u> . See <u>accept</u> , <u>admit</u> , <u>clutter blindness</u> , <u>humility</u> , <u>insanity</u> , <u>searching</u> .
entirely ready	Completely, 100% willing, with no reservations, exceptions, or conditions; no fingers crossed behind my back. See <u>decision</u> , <u>half measures</u> , <u>surrender</u> , <u>willingness</u> .
experience, strength, and hope (ESH)	Sharing my story, also known as <i>qualifying</i> . Tales of dysfunctional life before <u>recovery</u> and improvement during recovery, resources and lessons learned, and action plan and newfound optimism about the future. See <u>carry the message</u> .
fearlessness	Facing my demons no matter how much I am afraid; risking change. The necessary attitude to work my Step 4 successfully. Fearlessness comes from <u>trust</u> in my <u>Higher Power</u> and my Step partner. See <u>fears</u> , <u>inventory</u> , <u>searching</u> , Step 4.
fears	Concerns about danger, pain, threats, failure, success, etc. An impediment that prevents me from taking action on my <u>cluttering</u> and leads me to acquire new <u>clutter</u> , retain old clutter, create time and/or schedule pressures, and/or invest in unrewarding relationships. See <u>defects of character</u> , <u>denial</u> , <u>fearlessness</u> , <u>FOMO</u> , <u>trust</u> , <u>wrongs</u> .
focusing	Concentrating. The art of doing one thing at a time. See <u>meditation</u> .

FOMO	Fear of Missing Out. Experience greed. See <u>fear</u> , <u>overscheduling</u> .
forgive	To give up anger and <u>resentment</u> against myself, <u>God</u> , and others in order for me to move forward in my <u>recovery</u> . Receiving prior <u>amends</u> and offering reconciliation are not required. See <u>resentments</u> , Step 8, <u>willingness</u> . Step 4, Step 5, Step 8.
God	A personal supreme being or <u>Good Orderly Direction</u> . See <u>agnostic</u> , <u>atheist</u> , <u>believe</u> , <u>Higher Power</u> , Step 3, Step 5, Step 6, Step 7, Step 11, <u>trust</u> .
half measures	Incomplete commitments or actions borne of reservation, indecision, <u>denial</u> , or magical thinking. Support the excuse that I've done something. See <u>busywork</u> , <u>decision</u> , <u>entirely ready</u> , <u>procrastination</u> , <u>willingness</u> .
harm	Actual injury my <u>clutter</u> , <u>cluttering</u> behavior, and thoughtless <u>amends</u> have caused. It is righted by amends. See Step 8.
Higher Power	A Power greater than myself, such as <u>God</u> , the universe, my best self, Good Orderly Direction, Gift Of Desperation, the CLA Fellowship, or any source of strength or inspiration that can help me with my <u>clutter</u> through changing my thoughts, behaviors, emotions, beliefs, and actions. See <u>agnostic</u> , <u>atheist</u> , <u>believe</u> , <u>trust</u> .
hoarder	"A <u>clutterer</u> who excessively collects objects and/or animals, resulting in non-functional or unsafe living conditions for themselves or others." (Source: CLA online glossary.) See <u>addict</u> .

hoarding	A psychiatric disorder, defined in the <i>Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders</i> , 5th Edition (DSM 5 Manual). “Excessive collection and retention of things until they interfere with personal effectiveness.” (Source: CLA online glossary.) Feeling extreme emotional and physical pain at the thought of releasing items. Often results in piles, narrow pathways, unsanitary and dangerous homes, unmanageable number of animals, strained relationships, and isolation. See <u>cluttering</u> .
humility	Embracing my true attributes, neither shrinking nor inflating them. The antidote to <u>clutter blindness</u> and <u>denial</u> . See <u>admit</u> , <u>sanity</u> , Step 7.
insanity	Magical thinking characterized by 1) repeating a thought or action in the same manner and expecting different results, 2) relying on unlikely events to occur, or 3) ignoring reality. For example, acting as if fantasies are true regarding my finances, my time, my space, and the impact of <u>clutter</u> on me and others. See <u>awareness</u> , <u>clutter blindness</u> , <u>denial</u> , <u>sanity</u> , Step 2.
inventory	An exhaustive list used as a prerequisite to an action plan. In Step 4, I list character <u>assets</u> and defects, possessions, relationships, pets, activities, and conversations. In Step 8, I list people I have harmed. In Step 10, I take a personal inventory of my willfulness, emotions, time management, and harm inflicted. See <u>awareness</u> , <u>defects of character</u> , <u>fearlessness</u> , <u>harm</u> , <u>searching</u> , Step 4, Step 8, Step 10, <u>wrongs</u> .
living amends	The conscious and permanent overhauling of an aspect of my life or character to compensate for <u>harm</u> I caused. I replace dysfunction with honest and healthy behaviors, letting my actions speak louder than my words. See <u>amends</u> , <u>defects of character</u> , <u>humility</u> , <u>wrongs</u> .
maintenance	Ongoing healthy actions that safeguard my <u>recovery</u> and <u>clutter</u> -free areas. Results in freedom to pursue my life purpose. See <u>Basic 5</u> , <u>living amends</u> .

meditation	The practice of calming my monkey mind, relaxing, reflecting, and listening to my <u>Higher Power</u> with a heart receptive to love and guidance. Results in <u>serenity</u> , <u>acceptance</u> , and possibly a <u>spiritual awakening</u> . See <u>prayer</u> , Step 11.
overscheduling	A <u>defect of character</u> in which I have excessive commitments and activities, especially away from my home. Yielding to my Fear of Missing Out or experience greed, self-image, or <u>people-pleasing</u> . A method to distract myself from what is truly important and avoid <u>decluttering</u> , planning, resting, introspective thinking, and feeling. Results in time <u>clutter</u> . See <u>cluttering</u> , <u>FOMO</u> , <u>unmanageable</u> .
people-pleasing	Dishonest, manipulative set of behaviors (<u>defects of character</u>). Saying “Yes” when I want to say “No,” not speaking up, not asking for what I need, giving into others, or selling myself out. I rationalize that I’m being nice, not hurting or disappointing people. My actual goal is to avoid conflict and seek approval. See <u>awareness</u> , <u>fears</u> .
powerless	Inability to break my <u>addiction</u> to <u>clutter</u> alone, as the failure of all my past efforts shows. Relieved through a relationship with a <u>Higher Power</u> . See <u>admit</u> , <u>denial</u> , Step 1, <u>unmanageable</u> .
prayer	The practice of communicating with my <u>Higher Power</u> , through thoughts or words, asking for the next right action and to receive the power to do it, requesting help, giving thanks and praise. The Serenity Prayer helps me when I am baffled. See <u>God</u> , <u>meditation</u> , <u>spiritual awakening</u> , Step 11.
procrastination	A <u>defect of character</u> in which I habitually delay action that I could take now. It a form of avoidance due to anxiety, deliberate laziness, desire to punish, or lack of buy-in or urgency. Clinging to inaction. Results in stress, guilt, shame, and adrenaline highs. See <u>busywork</u> , <u>decision</u> , <u>entirely ready</u> , <u>fears</u> , <u>unmanageable</u> .

recovery	Ongoing improvement in physical, emotional, and spiritual health. Freedom from active <u>addiction</u> that lets me pursue my life's purpose. Achieved by continuously working the 12 Steps with a <u>Sponsor</u> and maintaining <u>conscious contact</u> with my <u>Higher Power</u> . See <u>carry the message</u> ; <u>experience, strength, and hope</u> ; <u>restore</u> .
remove	To completely eliminate. <i>I</i> actively remove my <u>clutter</u> in all its forms, whereas <i>my Higher Power</i> removes my <u>shortcomings</u> . See <u>decision</u> , <u>decluttering</u> , <u>defects of character</u> , Step 7.
resentment	Lasting negative emotions due to feeling that I have suffered a wrong. A <u>defect of character</u> that blocks <u>amends</u> , compassion, and <u>recovery</u> . Relieved by forgiveness. See <u>forgive</u> , <u>wrongs</u> .
restore	To return to a state of wholeness. The action of my <u>Higher Power</u> in granting me the gift of <u>sanity</u> . See <u>recovery</u> , Step 2.
sanity	Rational thought and reasonable behavior. Only my <u>Higher Power</u> can <u>restore</u> me to sanity. Examples include: bringing home only items that I actually need; enjoying self-respect in my relationships; employing strategies that address and resolve my problems. See <u>awareness</u> , <u>denial</u> , <u>insanity</u> , <u>recovery</u> , <u>willingness</u> .
searching	Thorough, aimed at uncovering the truth about myself. Not holding back and kidding myself about the impact of <u>clutter</u> . The attitude necessary for inventories to be fruitful. See <u>assets</u> , <u>defects of character</u> , <u>denial</u> , <u>inventory</u> , Step 4, Step 8, Step 10.
serenity	Calm feeling of groundedness and <u>acceptance</u> . Results in clear thoughts and good decisions. A benefit of <u>recovery</u> . Also the name of the most common 12-Step prayer. See <u>meditation</u> , <u>spiritual awakening</u> .
service	Action that helps other <u>clutterers</u> or the Fellowship of CLA while enhancing my <u>recovery</u> . When grounded in <u>humility</u> and gratitude, service is a way to <u>carry the message</u> . See <u>busywork</u> , <u>people-pleasing</u> , Step 12.

shame	Feeling intensely embarrassed, flawed, or inadequate after being harshly judged because of <u>clutter</u> . Results in isolation, secrecy, and self-loathing. See <u>defects of character</u> , <u>fears</u> .
shortcomings	A <i>shortcoming</i> is a failure to meet a standard, whereas a <i>defect of character</i> is a personal flaw. In the 12 Steps, a shortcoming is a synonym for defect of character. See Step 7.
spiritual awakening	New and life-changing <u>awareness</u> of the loving presence of a <u>Higher Power</u> influencing my life. See <u>God</u> , <u>meditation</u> , Step 12, <u>trust</u> .
Sponsor	A CLA Member I choose to <u>trust</u> who suffers from my affliction, has understanding and compassion for our shared challenges, does not <u>shame</u> or judge me, protects my <u>anonymity</u> , models the <u>recovery</u> I seek, and helps me work the 12 Steps. My Sponsor gives to me and receives from me the gift of honest relationship, which fuels recovery for both of us. See <u>Buddy</u> , <u>Co-Sponsor</u> .
surrender	To <u>admit</u> defeat and stop fighting. To turn over to my <u>Higher Power</u> my control, <u>clutter</u> , obstacles, needs, and desires. See <u>entirely ready</u> , <u>half measures</u> , Step 3, Step 7, <u>trust</u> .
trust	Confidence 1) in the power and love of my <u>Higher Power</u> , 2) in the wisdom, benevolence, and confidentiality of my <u>Sponsor</u> , and 3) that with them, I can successfully face/overcome anything. Getting rid of the idea of keeping my <u>clutter</u> “just in case.” See <u>believe</u> , <u>fearlessness</u> , <u>fears</u> , <u>surrender</u> .
unmanageable	The pre- <u>recovery</u> state of my life in which it regularly produces failure, chaos, disruption, and unpleasant consequences. My life is reduced to crisis management and overwhelm. See <u>admit</u> , <u>insanity</u> , <u>shame</u> , Step 1.

verbal clutter	One of the five types of <u>clutter</u> . It consists of compulsively controlling conversations. I want to stay in control, block questions and criticism, fill silences, receive attention, and not leave room for the other person. Talkative behaviors can take the form of unnecessary detail, repetition, inappropriate reactivity, aggressiveness, confrontation, and lack of a point. See <u>defect of character</u> .
willingness	Openness and readiness to try something new, difficult or outside of my comfort zone. It requires <u>trust</u> and overcoming <u>fears</u> . See <u>decision</u> , <u>entirely ready</u> , <u>fearlessness</u> , <u>forgive</u> , <u>half measures</u> , <u>recovery</u> , Step 6, Step 8.
wrongs	Actions that originate in <u>insanity</u> and result in injustice, <u>harm</u> , or chaos. These misdeeds require <u>amends</u> . Wrongs can be: preferring objects over people, misdirected reactions, misplaced blame, using indirectness to express my emotions, losing or damaging objects in my care, and making my living space unusable. See <u>admit</u> , <u>defects of character</u> , <u>denial</u> , <u>inventory</u> , <u>procrastination</u> , <u>resentment</u> , Step 5.

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Prayers. *Clutterers AnonymousSM- 12-Step Program for Help with Clutter*. Retrieved from <https://clutterersanonymous.org/prayers/>

Additional Resources

Alcoholics Anonymous literature available from <https://aa.org/>

Clutterers AnonymousSM- 12-Step Program for Help with Clutter. Accessible at <https://clutterersanonymous.org/>

Clutterers Anonymous literature available from <https://clutterersanonymous.org/store/>

Step-Study Phone Meeting Recordings available from <https://clutterersanonymous.org/12-step-recordings/>