*Addiction isn't a choice.*That statement may not seem groundbreaking today, but the idea of alcoholism as an illness was a new concept in 1939 when the book Alcoholics Anonymous: The Story of How More Than One Hundred Men Have Recovered from Alcoholism was published.

Known as the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, the publication changed the conversation about alcoholism and catapulted the Twelve Step model of recovery into the public's eye. The original AA model was later used to form other recovery programs to help people with different addictions and compulsive behaviors. The Twelve Steps were adopted nearly word-for-word by Al-Anon/Alateen, a program of recovery for the families and friends affected by a loved one's drinking (whether or not the alcoholic recognizes they have a drinking problem).

**How Did the Twelve Steps Start?**

Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith, the two men who founded AA in 1935, drew their inspiration for the Twelve Steps from the Oxford Group. They believed that all problems rooted in fear and selfishness could be changed through the power of God by following the "Four Absolutes"—a moral inventory of "absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love"—and through public sharing/confession. The Twelve Steps and the fellowship of AA were founded and designed around those principles.

**What's the Purpose of the Twelve Steps?**

The purpose is to recover from compulsive, out-of-control behaviors and restore manageability and order to your life. It's a way of seeing that your behavior is only a symptom, a sort of "check engine" light to investigate what's really going on under the hood.

**How and Why Do the Twelve Steps Work?**

According to the American Society of Addiction Medicine, "Twelve Step facilitation therapy is a tried-and-true proven approach." (There's a reason, after all, why people still "work the Steps" more than 80 years later.) How does it work? People are encouraged to take an honest look at themselves, then deconstruct their egos and rebuild, little by little. Why does it work? The Steps encourage the practice of honesty, humility, acceptance, courage, compassion, forgiveness and self-discipline—pathways to positive behavioral change, emotional well-being and spiritual growth.

**What Are the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous?**

The Twelve Steps are a set of guiding principles in addiction treatment that outline a course of action for tackling problems related to alcoholism, drug addiction and behavioral compulsion.

Step 1: We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.

Step 2: Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

Step 3: Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

Step 4: Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

Step 5: Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs

Step 6: Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

Step 7: Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

Step 8: Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

Step 9: Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

Step 10: Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

Step 11: Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

Step 12: Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.