Dishonest — the delusions I was in

I was in the delusion that...?

Example: *I had to protect myself from Brown, that he was out to get me.* — #1 Mr. Brown

References: Column 4 Instructions | The Chain | Self-Seeking | Selfish | Afraid | Examples

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What Is Dishonest

Dishonest is the **delusion layer** — the lies I told *myself* that enabled the attitudes and actions. It is self-deception, not deception of others. *(ref. p.62-¶1 "self-delusion")*

The Big Book maps it in one sentence:

> *"driven by a hundred forms of **fear**, **self-delusion**, **self-seeking** and **self pity** [my attitude]" (p.62-¶1)*

This is the most important distinction in the Fourth Column: **Dishonest does not mean "I lied to someone."** Lying to others is a self-seeking action. Dishonest means *I lied to myself* — I believed something that wasn't true, and that false belief made everything else possible.

The Big Book treats self-delusion as a pervasive condition, not just a Fourth Column category. On p.30: *"The delusion that we are like other people, or presently may be, has to be smashed."* On p.61, describing the actor who tries to run the show: *"Is he not a victim of the delusion that he can wrest satisfaction and happiness out of this world if he only manages well?"* — the belief that more effort, more control, more manipulation will produce the desired result. This is the master delusion underneath all the specific ones in Column 4.

The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions confirms the scope: as people took inventory, *"they began to suspect how much trouble self-delusion had been causing them."* The delusions had been invisible — not because they were small, but because they were everywhere.

Delusions are the bridge between fear and attitude. The fear is raw and unbearable, so the mind constructs a story to make the fear manageable. That story is the delusion. Once the delusion is in place, the attitude follows logically, and the actions follow naturally. The whole chain depends on the delusion holding.

How to Identify Delusions

Ask yourself:

- **What lies was I telling myself that resulted in my selfish thinking?**
- **What did I believe that, looking back, was clearly not true?**
- **What story was I living in that made my attitudes and actions seem reasonable?**
- **What would I have had to believe for my behavior to make sense?**

Delusions are the hardest part of the Fourth Column to see because *I believed them*. They don't feel like lies — they feel like reality. The inventory makes them visible by working backward: if the attitude is "no one interferes with my life" and the actions were fighting and punishing, what did I have to believe to get there?

How to Write It

Question: *I was in the delusion that…?*

Write the false belief — the lie you were telling yourself. Start with *"I was in the delusion that…"* or *"I'm in the delusion that…"*

Template:

- I was in the delusion that _____.
- I was in the delusion that _____.

Alternative sentence starters *(from Joe & Charlie Big Book Study)*:

- *"The lie I told myself was..."*
- *"I believed that..."*

Tips:

- The delusion is about *me* and what I believed, not about what the other person did
- Look for beliefs that protected you from having to face the fear underneath
- Delusions often sound reasonable at first — that's what makes them delusions
- If you're stuck, look at the attitude you wrote and ask: *What would I have to believe for that attitude to make sense?*
- Multiple delusions can come from a single fear — this is normal (#7 has three delusions from one fear)
- The delusion is never about what actually happened. It's about the story I told myself about what happened.

Examples from the Inventory

Every one of the twelve worked examples includes a Dishonest entry. Notice how delusions always serve the same purpose: they convert unbearable fear into a manageable story.

Person-Based Resentments (#1–8)

- *"I'm in the delusion I had to protect myself from Brown, that he was out to get me."* — #1 Mr. Brown
- *"I'm in the delusion she has no right to have an opinion on when and where I drink. I'm in the delusion that she was supposed to put up with my behavior."* — #2 Mrs. Jones
- *"I was in the delusion that I could get what I need by controlling the world around me."* — #3 My Employer
- *"I'm in the delusion that it's my life and she has no say in it. I'm in the delusion that she's unimportant to me."* — #4 My Wife
- *"I was in the delusion that it wasn't okay for me to be honest and stand up for myself."* — #5 Susie

- *"I was in the delusion that Jim was someone that I needed to defend myself from."* — #6 Mr. Brown Alternate
- *"I am in the delusion that I could get what I needed by acting out (child). I am in the delusion that he was capable of putting me first (child). I'm in the delusion that if I show him what's wrong with him, he can fix it (adult)."* — #7 My Father
- *"She is not important to me."* — #8 My Sister

Principle-Based Resentments (#9–12)

- *"I am in the delusion that I don't need anyone. I am in the delusion that God can't be trusted."* — #9 God Does Not Care About Me
- *"I am in the delusion that a relationship will Fix Me. I am in the delusion that they are the problem. I am in the delusion that relationships are about Getting not Giving."* — #10 Not Fulfilled Without a Relationship
- *"I am in the delusion that becoming whatever I need to be loved, will not have consequences. I don't tell the truth, and may not even know the truth."* — #11 I Am Unloveable
- *"I am in the delusion that I can live behind a mask and persona, without suffering consequences. I am in the delusion that I control money, rather than Money controls me."* — #12 Not OK Without Money

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Delusion Patterns

The following patterns are observed across the twelve worked examples and are presented as analytical groupings, not Big Book categories.

Looking across all twelve examples, delusions fall into six recognizable categories. These are the recurring lies the human mind tells itself to avoid facing fear.

The Self-Defense Delusion — "I Had to Protect Myself"

The world is recast as dangerous, and aggression becomes justified self-defense:

- *"I had to protect myself from Brown, that he was out to get me."* (#1)

- *"Jim was someone that I needed to defend myself from."* (#6)

The fear underneath: losing control (#1), confrontation leading to job loss (#6).

How it works: The fear of losing something creates a story where the other person is an active threat. Once they're cast as a threat, any response — fighting, gossiping, retaliation — becomes "defense."

The Control Delusion — "I Can Control Outcomes"

The belief that if I just arrange things properly, the fear won't come true:

- *"I could get what I need by controlling the world around me."* (#3)
- *"It's my life and she has no say in it."* (#4)
- *"I could get what I needed by acting out… if I show him what's wrong with him, he can fix it."* (#7)

The fear underneath: inadequacy (#3, #4), not mattering (#7).

How it works: The fear of being *not enough* is converted into the belief that enough effort, control, or force will produce the desired result. The delusion substitutes control for competence.

The Honesty-Is-Unsafe Delusion — "I Can't Be Honest"

The belief that telling the truth will destroy me:

- *"It wasn't okay for me to be honest and stand up for myself."* (#5)
- *"She is not important to me."* (#8 — a lie told to avoid the pain of her opinion)

The fear underneath: rejection (#5), being too defective to be loved (#8).

How it works: The fear of rejection or exposure creates a story where honesty itself is dangerous. Since I can't tell the truth, I either comply (#5) or dismiss (#8). Both are forms of self-deception — one hides behind niceness, the other behind indifference.

The Radical Self-Sufficiency Delusion — "I Don't Need Anyone"

The belief that needing others is weakness:

- *"I don't need anyone. God can't be trusted."* (#9)
- *"She was supposed to put up with my behavior."* (#2 — a variant: others exist to serve my needs)

The fear underneath: permanent brokenness (#9), inability to meet anyone's expectations (#2).

How it works: The fear that I am beyond help creates the story that help is unnecessary or untrustworthy. The delusion builds a fortress. Inside the fortress, I am safe — and alone.

The Fix Delusion — "Something Outside Me Will Fix Me"

The belief that the right person, relationship, or circumstance will repair what's broken:

- *"A relationship will Fix Me."* (#10)
- *"Becoming whatever I need to be loved, will not have consequences."* (#11)
- *"They are the problem."* (#10 — the flip side: when it doesn't work, it's their fault)

The fear underneath: spiritual death through loneliness (#10), permanent unlovability (#11).

How it works: The fear of something being fundamentally wrong with me creates the story that something outside me can make it right. The delusion outsources my wellbeing. When the fix doesn't work, the delusion either blames the fix (*they are the problem*) or doubles down (*I just need to try harder*).

The Mask Delusion — "The Persona Will Hold"

The belief that a constructed identity can substitute for the real self:

- *"I can live behind a mask and persona, without suffering consequences."* (#12)
- *"I control money, rather than Money controls me."* (#12)
- *"I don't tell the truth, and may not even know the truth."* (#11 — the mask has replaced the self)

The fear underneath: being a nobody (#12), being fundamentally unloveable (#11).

How it works: The fear of worthlessness creates a persona — a character designed to be impressive, successful, or loveable. The delusion is that the persona can function without consequence. But #11 reveals the deepest danger of the mask: eventually, *the person behind the mask doesn't know who they are anymore.*

Connection to The Chain

Dishonest is the **bridge** between fear and attitude:

AFRAID → drives → **DISHONEST** → produces → **SELFISH** → generates → **SELF-SEEKING**

The fear is raw and unbearable. The delusion makes it bearable by constructing a story. The story hardens into an attitude. And the attitude drives actions.

Without the delusion, the chain breaks. If I don't believe Brown is out to get me (#1), I don't develop the attitude that no one can interfere, and I don't fight him at the party. If I don't believe honesty is unsafe (#5), I don't develop the attitude that saying no will destroy the friendship, and I don't loan money I can't afford.

The delusion is the load-bearing wall. Remove it, and the structure above collapses.

Deeper Understanding

Delusions Are Invisible to the Person Holding Them

This is the fundamental challenge of the Dishonest section. A delusion that you can see is no longer a delusion — it's a recognized lie. The whole point of a delusion is that it feels true.

This is why the Fourth Column writes Self-Seeking and Selfish *before* Dishonest. You start with what you can see (actions, attitudes) and use them to work backward to what you

couldn't see (the lie underneath). The actions and attitudes are the evidence. The delusion is the verdict.

Delusions as the Spiritual Disease

The Big Book describes alcoholism as a disease of perception — the inability to see the truth about oneself. The delusions in the Fourth Column are that disease in action. Every delusion listed above is a distortion of reality that serves the self:

- Reality: Brown is just a coworker → Delusion: He's out to get me
- Reality: I'm afraid of being seen as inadequate → Delusion: She has no say in my life
- Reality: I'm terrified of being alone → Delusion: I don't need anyone

The inventory doesn't fix the delusion. It *exposes* it. And exposure is the first step toward the spiritual solution: asking God to remove the fear that creates the delusion in the first place.

The Evolution of Delusions

Example #7 (My Father) shows something unique: three delusions from different life stages — two from childhood, one from adulthood:

1. *"I could get what I needed by acting out"* (child)
2. *"He was capable of putting me first"* (child)
3. *"If I show him what's wrong with him, he can fix it"* (adult)

The fear never changed — *I don't matter*. But the delusions evolved. A child believes acting out will work. An adult believes confrontation will work. Different delusions, same fear, same result: actions that confirm the fear.

This pattern appears across many inventories. The delusions we hold at forty are often more sophisticated versions of delusions we formed at ten. The inventory traces them back to their shared root.

"I May Not Even Know the Truth"

Example #11 contains the most devastating line in any of the delusions: *"I don't tell the truth, and may not even know the truth."*

This is the mask delusion taken to its endpoint. The persona has been maintained so long that the original self is lost. The person cannot tell the truth because they genuinely don't know what the truth is anymore. Identity has been so thoroughly abandoned that there is nothing behind the mask.

This is what the Big Book means by "self-delusion" at its deepest — not just believing one wrong thing, but losing the capacity to know what is true about yourself.

Dishonesty Beyond Self-Deception

Column 4 focuses on self-deception — the delusion layer — because that is the Chain link where dishonesty operates. But dishonesty as a character defect extends beyond the lies we tell ourselves to include the lies we tell others and the ways we distort reality in our dealings with the world.

This broader spectrum matters for:

- **Step 5** — helping the sponsee see patterns of interpersonal dishonesty alongside self-deception
- **Steps 6 & 7** — addressing dishonesty as a character defect in all its forms
- **Step 10** — daily inventory of dishonesty in action

The Full Spectrum of Dishonesty

(The twelve forms below are a taxonomy created for this guide. They do not come from the Big Book. The source of this categorization is not identified — if you know the origin, please note it.)

Form	Definition
Self-deception	The lies I tell myself — Column 4's primary focus (the delusion layer)
Lying	Deliberate untruth to others
Withholding the truth	Omission — leaving out what should be said
Distortion	Bending facts to fit the story I want to tell
Manipulation	Arranging truth to produce a desired response in others
Hiding a bad motive under a good one	The most insidious form — *"I was only trying to help"*
Self-justification	Making my wrongs sound reasonable — to myself and others
Blame	Transferring responsibility to avoid facing truth
Exaggeration	Inflating facts to manage perception
Embellishment	Adding false details to enhance a story
Misrepresentation	Presenting facts in deliberately misleading context
Malingering	Fabricating or exaggerating physical or psychological symptoms for external gain (avoiding work, obtaining compensation, extracting sympathy)

Notice that self-deception (the Column 4 focus) and interpersonal dishonesty (the actions) are connected through The Chain. The delusion I tell *myself* enables the lies I tell *others*. If I believe Brown is out to get me (self-deception), I feel justified in gossiping about him (lying to others). The Chain shows how internal dishonesty produces external dishonesty.

For a comprehensive list of character defects including dishonesty in all its forms, see Faults Reference.

This list is not exhaustive — your inventory will reveal delusions unique to you. Use this as a starting point to help identify the lies you've been telling yourself, and to trace them back to the fears that created them.

Sources & Attribution

Direct Big Book text:

- p.62-¶1: “self-delusion” — the BB language for this link of the chain
- p.67-¶2: “Where had we been… dishonest…?” — the diagnostic question
- p.30: “The delusion that we are like other people, or presently may be, has to be smashed”
- p.61: “Is he not a victim of the delusion that he can wrest satisfaction and happiness out of this world if he only manages well?”

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions:

- “they began to suspect how much trouble self-delusion had been causing them” — Step 4

BBA workshop methodology:

- The mapping of “dishonest” (p.67) to delusions/self-deception specifically (as distinct from lying to others)
- The sentence starters and template format

Other sources:

- Joe & Charlie Big Book Study — alternative sentence starters (specific session/recording not identified)

Analytical work:

- Delusion Patterns (Self-Defense, Control, Normalization, Uniqueness, Withdrawal, Performing) — pattern analysis across the twelve examples
- The Full Spectrum of Dishonesty table (12 forms) — taxonomy created for this guide, source unidentified