Fear Example: Not Good Enough

Appears in #1, #3, #5, #6, #7, #8 | Areas: Self-Esteem, Security, Personal Relations

References: Common Fears | Fear Inventory – Drill-Down | Fear Inventory – 4-Column | 4-Column Expanded

This fear sits behind almost every resentment in the inventory. It is the belief that who I am – at my core – is insufficient. Not that I did something wrong, but that I *am* something wrong.

From Column 3: *"I am a great guy to have around."* – the inflated self-esteem statement that reveals the fear underneath: if I'm not great, I'm not good enough.

Drill-Down: Why Do I Have This Fear?

(a) I Fear being…	(b) Why?	(c) Why?	(d) Why?	(e) Why?	(f) Why?
not good enough	unwanted	alone	emotional pain	using	dying
not good enough	unliked	~~alone~~			
not good enough	failure	worthless	~~unwanted~~		
not good enough	rejected	~~alone~~			
not good enough	replaced	dispensable	~~worthless~~		

> ***not good enough -> unwanted/unliked/failure -> alone -> emotional pain -> using -> dying -> unknown -> no God -> self-reliance fails me***

The trail: I'm not good enough, so I'll be unwanted. If I'm unwanted, I'll be alone. If I'm alone, I'll be in emotional pain. If I'm in pain long enough, I'll use. If I use, I'll die.

4-Column – Brief

1. Fear of: Not being good enough – as an employee, friend, partner, son, father, person.

2. Why: Pride, insecurity, self-centeredness, perfectionism, dishonesty. My self-worth is tied to performance and approval. I believe I should be better than I am, and that falling short means I have no value.

3. Self-Reliance: I overachieve to prove my worth or underachieve to avoid the risk of failing. I seek constant reassurance. I compare myself to everyone and always come up short. I people-please to earn approval I don't think I deserve.

4. Better Way: "We are not saints. The point is, that we are willing to grow along spiritual lines." (◆ BB p.60). God doesn't require perfection – He requires willingness. My worth comes from Him, not from performance. Do the next right thing and leave the evaluation to God.

4-Column – Medium

1. Fear of: Not Being Good Enough

Not being good enough as an employee (#3 My Employer: "I'm the best employee they can have"), as a friend (#5 Susie: "I am the perfect friend"), as a husband (#1 Mr. Brown: "I am a great guy to have around"), as a daughter (#7 My Father: "I am the good daughter"), as a brother (#8 My Sister: "I'm a perfect brother"), as a person (#6 Mr. Brown Alternate: "I am a good person, a good husband and a good worker"). The inflated Column 3 statement is always the same move: I declare myself great to avoid facing the fear that I'm not.

2. Why

Character defects: Insecurity, pride, perfectionism, self-centeredness, dishonesty (hiding inadequacy), self-pity, comparison/envy, people-pleasing, self-condemnation, vanity.

SDSF breakdown:

- **Selfish:** I am consumed with self-evaluation. I can't see your needs because I'm too busy measuring my own worth. Every interaction becomes a test: did they approve of me? Did I perform well enough? The self-obsession disguises itself as humility – "I'm not good enough" sounds modest, but it's still all about me.
- **Dishonest:** I lie about who I am in both directions. I inflate my accomplishments to look good, or I deflate them to fish for reassurance. I pretend I don't care about things I desperately want. I present a false self – "I am a great guy to have around" – because the real self feels unacceptable.
- **Self-seeking:** I seek validation like an addict seeks a fix – the relief is temporary, and I always need more. Compliments don't land. Reassurance doesn't stick. I am chasing a feeling of "enough" that no external source can provide.
- **Fearful:** I am afraid that if I stop performing, I'll be exposed as empty. That the gap between who I pretend to be and who I actually am will become visible. That you'll see through the act and leave.

Areas of self affected:

- **Self-esteem** (the central battleground): I define myself by performance. Every Column 3 entry starts with an inflated "I am..." statement because the deflated version – "I am not enough" – is unbearable.
- **Security:** I need external validation to feel OK. #6 Mr. Brown Alternate: "I need a raise in pay and acknowledgement to be okay." Without proof that I'm valued, I feel unsafe.
- **Personal relations:** I assume others see my flaws as clearly as I do. #7 My Father: "Fathers love their daughters unconditionally" – the deep-seated belief that love should not depend on performance, combined with the fear that it does.
- **Pride:** The gap between how I need others to see me and how I fear they actually see me drives resentment. I resent people who threaten the image.
- **Ambitions:** Paralyzed between overachieving and giving up. I either chase success compulsively or I don't try at all.

Self-Fulfilling Cycle

I need to be good enough, so I perform. The performance is exhausting, so it slips. When it slips, I get evidence that I'm not good enough. The evidence feeds the fear, which demands more performance. Meanwhile, I resent the people I'm performing for – my employer, my

wife, my father, my sister – because they "make" me feel inadequate. But they didn't create the inadequacy. I brought it with me. I walked into every relationship already convinced I wasn't enough, and then I arranged the relationship to prove myself right.

Behavioral Patterns

- Overachieving to prove worth, then crashing when the effort isn't recognized
- Underachieving to avoid the risk of trying and failing
- Seeking constant reassurance but dismissing every compliment ("they're just being nice")
- Comparing insides to outsides – measuring my worst against your best
- People-pleasing to earn approval I don't think I deserve
- Tearing myself down before anyone else can – a preemptive strike against rejection
- Criticizing others to feel temporarily superior
- Replaying past mistakes on a loop, building the prosecution's case against myself

Better Way

> *"We are not saints. The point is, that we are willing to grow along spiritual lines. We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection."* (◆ BB p.60)

> *"Most of us find that we were neither as terrible, nor as wonderful, as we supposed. We are surprised to find that we have good points in our inventory." (NA, Step Four)*

> *"None of us is perfectly good or perfectly bad. We are people who have assets and liabilities. Most importantly, we are human." (NA, Step Seven)*

God's standard is not perfection. It is willingness. The Big Book does not say "we are saints who have arrived." It says we are willing to grow. That means the measuring stick changes. It is no longer "Am I good enough?" It is "Am I willing?" And willingness is always within reach, regardless of performance.

Prayer: "God, remove my obsession with being good enough. Help me see that 'good enough' was never Your standard – willingness was. Free me from the tyranny of

comparison and the prison of self-evaluation. Teach me that my worth comes from You and not from what I produce. When the voice says I'm not enough, remind me that You don't make junk. Let me do the next right thing and leave the measuring to You."

Cross-references: This fear appears as the Self-Esteem entry in six of twelve resentment examples. In each case, the Column 3 statement is an inflated version of "I am great" – because the uninflated version ("I might not be good enough") is the fear the entire resentment is built on. See #1 Mr. Brown, #3 My Employer, #5 Susie, #6 Mr. Brown Alternate, #7 My Father, #8 My Sister.

4-Column – Expanded

Why – Expanded

Character defects: Insecurity, pride (disguised as humility), perfectionism, self-centeredness (obsessed with self-evaluation), dishonesty (hiding inadequacy, presenting a false self), self-pity, comparison/envy, people-pleasing, self-condemnation, vanity (need to appear competent), diffidence, guilt, negative thinking, criticism.

- **Insecurity:** The foundation. I do not believe I am OK as I am. Every action, every relationship, every conversation is filtered through the question: "Was that good enough?"
- **Pride (disguised as humility):** "I'm not good enough" sounds humble. It isn't. It is still all about me. It is pride turned inside out – instead of "I am the greatest," it is "I am the worst," and both are self-obsession. Real humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less.
- **Perfectionism:** The belief that if I can just do everything right, I'll finally feel adequate. But the standard keeps moving. Nothing is ever enough because "enough" was never the real goal. Control was.
- **Self-centeredness:** I cannot see your needs, your pain, your humanity because I am too busy evaluating my own performance. Every room I walk into, I am asking: "How am I doing?" instead of "How can I help?"

- **Dishonesty:** I hide who I really am. I present the version I think you'll accept: "I am a great guy to have around" (#1), "I'm the best employee they can have" (#3), "I am the perfect friend" (#5). These are lies – not because I'm terrible, but because the real person underneath is complicated, flawed, and scared. And I don't trust you with that person.
- **Self-pity:** "Why can't I be like them? Why is it so easy for everyone else? Why do I always come up short?" The self-pity keeps me focused on the unfairness of my situation instead of the action I could take.
- **Comparison/envy:** I compare my insides to your outsides. I see your confidence and assume it is real. I see your success and assume it came easily. I measure myself against a version of you that doesn't exist.
- **People-pleasing:** I contort myself into whatever shape I think you want. I say yes when I mean no. I agree when I disagree. I perform and perform and perform – and then I resent you for not seeing the "real me," even though I never showed you.
- **Self-condemnation:** I am my own harshest critic. No one could say anything worse about me than what I say to myself in the quiet moments. I replay every mistake, every failure, every embarrassment on a loop, building an airtight case that I am, in fact, not good enough.
- **Vanity:** I need to *appear* competent even when I'm not. I would rather look good and fail silently than admit I need help and succeed honestly.

Cognitive distortions at work:

- **Filtering out the positive:** Dismissing every compliment, every success, every piece of evidence that contradicts the belief. Ten people say something kind; one person criticizes – I remember the one. I filter reality to match the story I've already decided is true.
- **Mislabelling:** "I made a mistake, therefore I am a mistake." Confusing behavior with identity. A failed project becomes "I am a failure." A bad day becomes "I am a bad person." The leap from *doing* to *being* happens instantly and without examination.
- **Catastrophising:** "If I'm not the best, I'm the worst. If this doesn't work out perfectly, everything is ruined. If they see my flaws, it's over." No middle ground. No room for imperfection.

- **Splitting:** “People are either winners or losers. I’m a loser.” “Either I’m the best or I’m worthless.” Black-and-white thinking that eliminates the vast middle territory where most of life actually happens.
- **Personalisation:** “Everything that goes wrong is because I’m not good enough.” Taking responsibility for things that have nothing to do with me. Someone else’s bad mood becomes proof of my inadequacy.
- **Presumption of rightness:** “I already know I’m not good enough – I just need to find the evidence.” Then cherry-picking proof. This is the most insidious distortion: the conclusion comes first, and reality is arranged to support it.

Areas of self affected:

- **Self-esteem** (the central battleground): Every resentment example begins with an inflated self-esteem statement: “I am a great guy” (#1), “I’m the best employee” (#3), “I am the perfect friend” (#5), “I am a good person” (#6), “I am the good daughter” (#7), “I’m a perfect brother” (#8). The inflation reveals the deflation underneath. I write “I am great” because I’m terrified the truth is “I am not enough.”
- **Security:** I need external proof of my value to feel OK. Without a raise, a compliment, a promotion, a “thank you,” I feel unsafe. My okayness depends on other people’s assessments, which means it is never stable. #6 Mr. Brown Alternate: “I need a raise in pay and acknowledgement to be okay” – the security need makes the fear explicit.
- **Personal relations:** I assume others see my flaws as clearly as I do. I enter relationships already braced for the moment you’ll figure out I’m not enough. #7 My Father: “Fathers love their daughters unconditionally” – the personal relations belief reveals the fear that love *is* conditional, that it depends on being good enough to earn it.
- **Pride:** I need others to see me as competent, valuable, irreplaceable. #3 My Employer: “Others should see how irreplaceable I am.” The pride statement is a demand that others confirm what I cannot confirm for myself.
- **Ambitions:** Paralyzed between overachieving (to prove worth) and giving up (because why bother). I either chase success compulsively or I refuse to try, and both are driven by the same fear.

Psychology:

Imposter syndrome describes people who, despite evidence of competence, believe they are frauds – successful only through luck, never through ability. Research shows it is not limited to women or minorities; it affects people across all demographics and achievement levels. The core experience is a persistent gap between external evidence and internal belief: "They think I'm good, but I know the truth." This maps directly to the Column 3 pattern: the self-esteem statement ("I am the best employee") is the external presentation; the fear in parentheses ("not good enough") is the internal belief. The person lives in the gap between the two.

Brene Brown's research distinguishes guilt from shame. Guilt says "I did something bad." Shame says "I am bad." The fear of not being good enough is shame. It is not about a specific failure or mistake – it is about identity. Brown writes: "Shame is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging." She found that shame thrives in secrecy, silence, and judgment – the exact conditions of active addiction and isolation. The antidote is what Brown calls "shame resilience": speaking the shame aloud to someone who responds with empathy. This is why the Fifth Step works. This is why sharing honestly at meetings works. Shame cannot survive being spoken.

Martin Seligman's learned helplessness research shows that repeated exposure to situations perceived as uncontrollable trains the brain to stop trying – even when circumstances change and effort would make a difference. Applied to "not good enough": when a child grows up in an environment where love and approval are conditional on performance (get the grades, behave perfectly, don't make mistakes), and when the standard is impossible to meet consistently, the child learns: "Nothing I do is enough." That lesson generalizes. The adult carries it into every job, every friendship, every relationship. The belief "I'm not good enough" stops feeling like a thought and starts feeling like a fact. But it was learned – which means it can be unlearned.

Self-Reliance – Expanded

The self-fulfilling cycle: I oscillate between overachieving and giving up. When I overachieve, I exhaust myself trying to hit a standard that keeps moving. When I get recognition, it doesn't land – I dismiss it or immediately raise the bar. When I don't get recognition, I take it as proof that I was right all along. Eventually the effort collapses and I

swing to the other extreme: why bother? If I can't be the best, I won't try at all. The giving-up phase generates self-pity and self-condemnation, which builds pressure to prove myself again, and the cycle starts over.

Meanwhile, I seek validation from everyone – my employer, my friends, my family, strangers – but I dismiss every compliment the moment I receive it. "They're just being nice." "They don't really know me." "If they saw the real me, they'd change their mind." I am asking the world to fill a hole that the world didn't create and cannot fill. I compare my insides to everyone else's outsides: their confidence looks effortless, their success looks easy, their lives look put together. I never consider that they might be doing the same thing – performing, comparing, afraid.

The cruelest part is the preemptive strike. I tear myself down before anyone else can. I announce my inadequacy first – as humor, as self-deprecation, as "just being honest" – so that when the rejection comes, I can say I saw it coming. But the rejection I'm bracing for rarely arrives from others. It arrives from me, every morning, before anyone else has said a word.

SDSF breakdown:

- **Selfish:** I am consumed with self-evaluation. I cannot see your needs because I am too busy measuring my own worth. In the resentment examples, each person's self-esteem statement is about *their* role – "I am a great guy," "I am the perfect friend," "I am the good daughter." The other person barely exists. Brown, Susie, my employer, my father, my sister – they are props in a play about whether I am good enough. That is selfishness wearing the mask of insecurity.
- **Dishonest:** I lie about who I am. I present an inflated version: "best employee," "perfect friend," "great guy." Or I present a deflated version: "I'm terrible, I'm hopeless, I can't do anything right" – which is also dishonest, because it denies the good. Both versions are performances. Neither is the truth. The truth is that I am a complicated, imperfect human being who has both strengths and weaknesses – and I don't trust anyone with that.
- **Self-seeking:** I seek validation like an addict seeks a fix. The compliment lands. I feel good for ten seconds. Then the doubt returns, and I need another hit. I manipulate

conversations toward reassurance. I fish for compliments. I tell self-deprecating stories hoping you'll contradict them. And when you do contradict them, I don't believe you.

- **Fearful:** I am afraid that if I stop performing, I'll be exposed as empty. That the gap between who I pretend to be and who I actually am will become visible. That you'll see through the act and leave. And underneath that: I'm afraid that the voice in my head is right – that I really am not good enough, and that no amount of effort, achievement, or approval will ever change that.

Better Way – Expanded

> *"Most of us find that we were neither as terrible, nor as wonderful, as we supposed. We are surprised to find that we have good points in our inventory." (NA, Step Four)*

> *"We are not saints. The point is, that we are willing to grow along spiritual lines. We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection." (◆ BB p.60)*

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> *"The growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs." (George Eliot, quoted in Step 04 21)*

The actor analogy connection: The Big Book's actor analogy (◆ BB p.61-62) describes us as actors who have mistaken ourselves for the characters we play. When I believe I *am* the employee, the friend, the husband, the daughter, the brother – then the character's performance becomes my identity. A bad day at work means I am a bad person. A failed friendship means I am a failed human being. The character's reviews become my reviews.

But if I am the actor – a spirit playing a role that God assigned – then identity comes from God, not from the role's performance. The actor who plays Hamlet doesn't succeed or fail based on whether Hamlet lives or dies. He succeeds by playing his part faithfully. "Good enough" stops being the question. The question becomes: "Am I willing to play the role God

gave me, to the best of my ability, and leave the results to Him?" That question has an answer I can live with. "Am I good enough?" never did.

> *"We are in the world to play the role He assigns. Just to the extent that we do as we think He would have us, and humbly rely on Him, does He enable us to match calamity with serenity." (◆ BB p.68)*

Prayer: "God, remove my obsession with measuring my worth. Help me see myself as You see me – not as a collection of accomplishments and failures, but as Your child. Teach me that 'good enough' was never the standard – willingness was. Free me from the tyranny of comparison. When the voice says I am not enough, remind me that You made me as I am, on purpose, for a purpose. Let me rest in that. Let me do the next right thing and leave the evaluation to You. Amen."

Practical actions:

1. **Interrupt the voice.** When the "not good enough" thought starts, stop it with one fact: "God didn't make junk." You don't have to believe it yet. You just have to say it. Repeat until the voice quiets.
2. **Do one act of service today.** Nothing cures self-obsession faster than helping someone else. Get out of your own head and into someone else's need. Service is the fastest way out of self.
3. **Stop comparing.** When you catch yourself measuring against someone else, pray: "God, bless them and bless me. We're both exactly where You need us." Comparison is rigged – you are comparing your insides to their outsides.
4. **Write a list of 10 things you're good at.** Ask your sponsor or a trusted friend to add to it. Let yourself be surprised. If you can't write 10, write 5. If you can't write 5, write 1. Start somewhere.
5. **Practice saying "I don't know" without shame.** Being a beginner is not a deficiency – it is courage. The willingness to be bad at something is the first step toward being good at it. And the willingness itself is enough.

Sources: Alcoholics Anonymous ("Big Book") pp.60-68; Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, Steps 4 & 7; Narcotics Anonymous Basic Text, Chapters 3-5; Step 04 Fear Solution guide (Step 04 21); Sponsorship Workshop Packet 2024; Brene Brown, Daring Greatly (shame and vulnerability research); Martin Seligman, Learned Helplessness; Imposter Syndrome research; George Eliot, Middlemarch; CBT cognitive distortions research

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From the Big Book Awakening Step Four guide at bigbook.it/step-4/ · a page of the guide, not the workbook itself: the workbook's own pages are linked from "Originals & sources." · source examples/fear-not-good-enough.md