Self-Seeking — my selfish actions

My selfish actions were...?

Example: *Drank too much at the office party, over reacted, fought with Brown, punished my wife.* — #1 Mr. Brown

References: Column 4 Instructions | The Chain | Selfish | Dishonest | Afraid | Examples

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What Is Self-Seeking

Self-Seeking is the outermost, most visible link of The Chain. It is what I *did* — the actions and activities driven by fear through delusion and attitude. *(ref. p.67-¶2, p.62-¶1 "self-seeking")*

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)*

The Key Distinction: Action vs. State of Mind

Of the four Column 4 elements, **self-seeking is the only one that describes action.** Selfish (attitude), Dishonest (delusion), and Afraid (fear) are all internal states of mind — they happen inside me. Self-seeking is where the internal machinery meets the external world. It is the behavior — the thing someone could have observed, recorded, or pointed to. Not what the other person did. Not what I was thinking or feeling. Purely: *What did I do?*

The Big Book Dictionary defines self-seeking as *"the act or practice of selfishly advancing one's own desires and goals"* — the pursuit itself, the doing. Where selfish asks *"What did I want?"*, self-seeking asks *"What did I do to get what I wanted?"*

A helpful mental picture: **the only child vs. the narcissist.** The selfish person grabs — "mine!" — a raw, internal possessiveness. The self-seeking person *pursues* — strategically, outwardly, affecting others. Self-seeking has been called "a higher order of selfishness" because it can even *look generous* — performing service for praise, loaning money to manage someone's perception, doing favors to maintain an image. The question is never how the action looks from the outside. The question is always: *What was I trying to get?*

This is the easiest part of the Fourth Column to write because actions are visible. But it is also the most deceptive — because actions *look* like the problem when they are actually only the symptom. The real problem is buried beneath them in the attitude, the delusion, and the fear.

How to Identify Self-Seeking

Look around the whole resentment — before, during, and after:

- **What did I do?** Where was I to blame?
- **What did I do to hold onto the resentment?** Gossip? Complain? Shut them out? Retaliate?
- **What did I do to protect myself and how I look?** I shun, I gossip, I yell, I drink, I lie.
- Disregard the other person entirely — this is *my* inventory, not theirs. *(ref. p.67-¶2)*

If I can picture someone watching me on camera, everything they would see me do goes here.

How to Write It

Question: *My selfish actions or activities were…?*

Write specific, factual actions. Not feelings, not explanations, not justifications — just what I did.

Template:

- My selfish actions were _____.
- My selfish actions were _____.

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

- *"I acted out by..."*
- *"What I did was..."*

Tips:

- Stay factual — verbs, not adjectives. "I lied" not "I was dishonest" (that's the next section)
- Include actions before, during, *and after* the resentment event — what did I do in response?
- Look at things I did to hold onto the resentment (gossip, stewing, silent treatment)
- Look at things I did to protect myself or my image
- Include passive actions — things I failed to do that I should have done (ignored, procrastinated, didn't listen)
- Don't write the other person's actions here — only *yours*

Examples from the Inventory

Every one of the twelve worked examples includes a Self-Seeking entry. Notice the range: some actions are aggressive, some are passive, some are people-pleasing — but all are driven by the chain underneath.

Person-Based Resentments (#1–8)

- *"Drank too much at the office party, over reacted to Brown's conversation with my wife. Fought with Brown at the party and punished my wife over the situation. Not doing well at work, missed a lot of days and blame Brown for my job insecurity. Give Brown a hard time at work."* — #1 Mr. Brown

- *"Brought alcohol over to drink with her husband knowing she wants him to stop. Made fun of her for being concerned about our drinking. Didn't care her husband was struggling with his drinking. I just didn't want to drink alone."* — #2 Mrs. Jones
- *"Missed too many days from work due to my drinking. Sometimes didn't return after lunch. My work was not good after being up late partying. Took women out to dinner and drinks and charged my expense account and lied about what it was for. I go to work with a bad attitude and have caused problems for other workers."* — #3 My Employer
- *"I ignore her complaints about my drinking. I procrastinate in doing the things she needs from me. I embarrass her with my drinking around my friends. I make her jealous with my attention to other women. I get jealous of her talking to other men at parties. I cause her insecurity, she thinks we're going to lose everything."* — #4 My Wife
- *"I loaned her money so I didn't have to feel uncomfortable."* — #5 Susie
- *"I complained and gossiped to others. I was happy when he got demoted."* — #6 Mr. Brown Alternate
- *"I mutilated myself to get his attention. I acted out sexually to get his attention. I have called him names. Got drunk at his house a lot. Told him he was a bad father to my brother and made him cry."* — #7 My Father
- *"I ignore her. I shut her out. I lied to her and gossiped. I have stolen from her."* — #8 My Sister

Principle-Based Resentments (#9–12)

- *"I guard and protect myself. I am not vulnerable. I attack first. Use humor to control situations and others. I use sarcasm as my weapon of choice."* — #9 God Does Not Care About Me
- *"Put on an 'ACT' to 'Attract'. Be a Chameleon — Do and Say whatever is needed to get them. Overpower and Intimidate. Fake Listening to them. I never let go."* — #10 Not Fulfilled Without a Relationship
- *"I'll be anything and do anything to be loved. Adopt other's values, opinions & beliefs. Manipulate others to get affection and recognition. I am clingy and needy. I won't let go!"* — #11 I Am Unloveable
- *"Manipulate, lie, play favorites, use people to get ahead, take shortcuts, take undeserved credit, only hang with the rich and successful people."* — #12 Not OK Without Money

Action 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, self-seeking actions fall into four recognizable categories. Most resentments include actions from more than one category.

Aggression and Retaliation

Fighting, punishing, name-calling, intimidating — actions that strike outward:

- *Fought with Brown at the party and punished my wife* (#1)
- *Embarrassed her, made her jealous, caused her insecurity* (#4)
- *Mutilated myself, called him names, made him cry* (#7)
- *Attack first. Overpower and Intimidate* (#9, #10)

These actions come from attitudes of entitlement and justified anger. The chain: fear of losing control → delusion of self-defense → attitude of "no one interferes" → aggressive action.

Theft and Dishonesty

Stealing, lying, cheating, exploiting — actions that take what isn't mine:

- *Padded expense account, lied about what it was for* (#3)
- *Lied to her, stolen from her* (#8)
- *Manipulate, lie, play favorites, take shortcuts, take undeserved credit* (#12)

These actions come from attitudes of entitlement and ruthless pragmatism. The chain: fear of inadequacy → delusion of control → attitude of "work owes me" → theft.

People-Pleasing and Self-Erasure

Giving away what I can't afford, becoming someone else, clinging — actions that erase *me*:

- *Loaned her money so I didn't have to feel uncomfortable* (#5)

- *Put on an act, be a chameleon, fake listening, never let go* (#10)
- *Be anything and do anything to be loved, adopt others' values, clingy and needy* (#11)

These actions come from attitudes of boundary-less need. The chain: fear of rejection → delusion that honesty is unsafe → attitude of "if I say no she'll hate me" → self-erasure.

Passive Aggression and Performance

Gossip, sarcasm, silent treatment, celebrating others' failures — actions that punish indirectly:

- *Brought alcohol knowing she wants him to stop, made fun of her* (#2)
- *Complained and gossiped, was happy when he got demoted* (#6)
- *Guard myself, use humor to control situations, sarcasm as my weapon* (#9)
- *Ignored her, shut her out, gossiped* (#8)

These actions come from attitudes of justified anger and self-protection. The chain: fear of confrontation → delusion that they're a threat → attitude of "he got what he deserved" → indirect retaliation.

Connection to The Chain

Self-Seeking is the **last link** — the visible output of a machine that starts with fear:

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

The writing order puts Self-Seeking first because it's the easiest to see. But in reality, the fear was there first. The fear created the delusion. The delusion hardened into an attitude. And the attitude produced the actions.

This is why Self-Seeking is written first in the Fourth Column — you start with what you can see and dig inward. But when you *read* the chain afterward, you read from fear upward, and you ask: *Does the fear explain everything above it?*

Deeper Understanding

Actions Are Never the Real Problem

The Chain reveals that actions are the last link, not the first. The drinking, the lying, the fighting, the people-pleasing, the stealing, the manipulating — these are *symptoms*. They are the visible output of a machine that begins with fear.

This is why behavior modification alone doesn't work. You can stop the action, but if the fear still drives the delusion, and the delusion still produces the attitude, a new action will emerge to replace the old one. Stop drinking and start overeating. Stop fighting and start withdrawing. The form changes but the chain remains.

The Self-Fulfilling Nature

The deepest pattern across all twelve examples: **the actions always produce the feared outcome.**

Fear	Self-Seeking Actions	Result
Lose control (#1)	Fought, drank, punished →	Lost control of marriage and job
She'll leave me (#4)	Ignored, embarrassed, made jealous →	Pushed her away
She'll reject me (#5)	Gave away money, wasn't honest →	Lost self-respect and the friendship
Too defective to be loved (#8)	Stealing, shutting out, gossip →	Proved her right
I'll die alone (#10)	Faked, overpowered, never let go →	Drove everyone away
Never be loved (#11)	Became someone else entirely →	Lost herself
I'm a nobody (#12)	Lied, used people, took shortcuts →	Remained unhappy

This is the actor from page 61-62 in action. The more forcefully I try to arrange the lights, the ballet, the scenery, and the rest of the players, the more chaotic the production becomes.

Self-Seeking Is Not Just "Bad Behavior"

Notice that some self-seeking actions look *generous* — loaning money (#5), adopting others' values (#11), putting on an act to attract (#10). People-pleasing is self-seeking too. The question is not whether the action looks positive or negative from the outside. The question is: *What was I trying to get?*

This is what one recovery writer calls the "higher order of selfishness" *(source unidentified)* — when good acts are performed primarily for praise, ego gratification, or to maintain a self-image rather than for genuine altruism. An act of service done to be seen as helpful is self-seeking. Declining to set a boundary because I want to be perceived as easygoing is self-seeking. The action looks socially acceptable — even admirable — but the motive reveals the chain underneath.

If the action was driven by a need to manage how others see me, to avoid my own discomfort, or to get something from someone else — it is self-seeking. The most selfless-looking action can be the most self-seeking of all.

What Self-Seeking Reveals About Harm

Every self-seeking action listed above caused harm — to others, to relationships, or to the person writing the inventory. The harm is not always obvious at the time. Loaning money to avoid discomfort seems harmless — but it enabled dishonesty and damaged both people. Putting on an act seems charming — but it trampled others and sucked the life out of relationships.

The Harm section of the Fourth Column asks: *Do I see harm that I caused?* The Self-Seeking section provides the raw material for that answer.

This is not an exhaustive list of self-seeking patterns — your inventory will reveal actions unique to you. Use this as a starting point to help identify what you did in each resentment, and to trace those actions back through the chain to their root.

Sources & Attribution

Direct Big Book text:

- p.62-¶1: “self-seeking” — the BB language for this link of the chain
- p.67-¶2: “Where had we been… self-seeking…?” — the diagnostic question
- p.61-62: The actor metaphor — self-will run riot

BBA workshop methodology:

- The mapping of “self-seeking” (p.67) to actions specifically (as distinct from attitudes)
- The sentence starters and template format

Other sources:

- Joe & Charlie Big Book Study — alternative sentence starters (specific session/recording not identified)
- “Higher order of selfishness” — recovery writer, source unidentified

Analytical work:

- Action Patterns (Aggression/Retaliation, Theft/Dishonesty, People-Pleasing/Self-Erasure, Passive Aggression/Performance) — pattern analysis across the twelve examples

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 self-seeking.md