Selfish — my selfish attitudes

My selfish attitudes were...?

Example: *No one interferes with my life or tells me how to behave.* — #1 Mr. Brown

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

What Is Selfish

Selfish is the **attitude layer** — what I was thinking while I was doing the self-seeking actions. It is the mindset, the stance, the internal posture that made those actions feel reasonable at the time. *(ref. p.67-¶2, p.62-¶1 "self pity [my attitude]")*

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 Big Book Dictionary defines selfish as *"concerned primarily or only with oneself"* — the internal state, the motive. Where self-seeking asks *"What did I do?"*, selfish asks *"What did I want?"* Self-seeking is the action; selfish is the attitude that generated it. They are motive and behavior — inseparable, but distinct.

Dr. Bob captured the essence in his own story: *"Being an only child engendered the selfishness which played such an important part in bringing on my alcoholism." (◆ BB p.172, "Dr. Bob's Nightmare")* The selfish attitude — the raw, internal possessiveness, the "mine!" of a child — precedes every self-seeking action. It is the wanting that drives the doing.

"Self-pity" in the Big Book passage above does not mean simply feeling sorry for myself (though it can include that). It means the self-centered way I was looking at the situation — the attitude that made my perspective feel like the only one that mattered.

Attitudes are harder to see than actions because they feel like *truth*. When I was living in the attitude, it didn't feel like an attitude — it felt like common sense. *Of course* no one should interfere with my life. *Of course* he got what he deserved. The inventory makes the attitude visible for the first time.

How to Identify Selfish Attitudes

Ask yourself:

- **What was I thinking while I was doing the self-seeking actions?**
- **What felt "justified" at the time?** The word *justified* is almost always the fingerprint of a selfish attitude.
- **What did I believe I was entitled to?**
- **What was my internal stance toward the other person?** Contempt? Indifference? Desperation?
- **What felt like common sense that I can now see was self-centered?**

The attitude sits between the delusion and the action. It is how the delusion shows up in day-to-day thinking.

How to Write It

Question: *My selfish attitudes were…?*

Write the mindset — what you were thinking, how you were positioned. Not what you did (that's Self-Seeking) and not the underlying lie (that's Dishonest).

Template:

- My selfish attitudes were _____.
- My selfish attitudes were _____.

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

- *"I wanted..."*
- *"What I was thinking was..."*

Tips:

- Write what felt like common sense at the time — the "of course" thinking
- Look for entitlement, justified anger, indifference, or desperate need
- If you find yourself writing "I felt..." try restating it as what you *believed* or *demanded*
- One or two sentences is often enough — the attitude is usually simpler than the actions it produces
- The attitude often sounds like a rule or a demand: "No one should..." "I can do whatever..." "He got what he deserved"

Examples from the Inventory

Every one of the twelve worked examples includes a Selfish entry. Notice how attitudes compress complex emotional states into simple, rigid positions.

Person-Based Resentments (#1–8)

- *"No one interferes with my life or tells me how to behave."* — #1 Mr. Brown
- *"I only care about myself, my drinking and what I want."* — #2 Mrs. Jones
- *"My private life is none of their business. Work owes me."* — #3 My Employer
- *"I can do whatever I want and she shouldn't bother me or get in my way."* — #4 My Wife
- *"If I say 'no,' she'll be angry and hate me."* — #5 Susie
- *"He got what he deserved. I felt justified in my anger and gossip."* — #6 Mr. Brown Alternate
- *"My pain is the most important thing in the world and he owes me."* — #7 My Father
- *"If she can't talk to me like a normal human being, I will treat her as a lesser person — a stranger. She has no right to interfere with my life."* — #8 My Sister

Principle-Based Resentments (#9–12)

- *"Keep a closed mind. I am the most important person here. Do whatever is necessary to keep you out. No one has my back except me."* — #9 God Does Not Care About Me
- *"If I get my needs met first, then I'll be able to care about you. They should know what I want and need without having to say it!"* — #10 Not Fulfilled Without a Relationship
- *"My needs are more important than your needs. Boundaries don't exist for me."* — #11 I Am Unloveable
- *"Sacrifice anyone and anything to get to the next level. Look down on those with 'Less', Look up to those with 'More'. Everyone cheats to get ahead, it is not a big deal."* — #12 Not OK Without Money

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Attitude Patterns

Looking across all twelve examples, selfish attitudes fall into five recognizable categories.

Entitlement — "No One Interferes"

The belief that I have a right to do as I please and no one can say otherwise:

- *"No one interferes with my life or tells me how to behave."* (#1)
- *"My private life is none of their business. Work owes me."* (#3)
- *"I can do whatever I want and she shouldn't get in my way."* (#4)
- *"She has no right to interfere with my life."* (#8)

Entitlement is the attitude form of the control delusion. It sounds like boundaries but is actually the refusal to be accountable. Real boundaries protect; entitlement isolates.

Justified Anger — "He Got What He Deserved"

The belief that my anger is righteous and my retaliation is earned:

- *"He got what he deserved. I felt justified in my anger and gossip."* (#6)
- *"My pain is the most important thing in the world and he owes me."* (#7)

- *"If she can't talk to me like a normal human being, I will treat her as lesser."* (#8)

The word "justified" is the clearest fingerprint of a delusion underneath. When I feel justified, I am almost always standing on a lie I've told myself.

Self-Centeredness — "I Only Care About Myself"

Raw, honest self-absorption — sometimes the simplest and most revealing attitude:

- *"I only care about myself, my drinking and what I want."* (#2)
- *"Sacrifice anyone and anything to get to the next level."* (#12)
- *"Everyone cheats to get ahead, it is not a big deal."* (#12)

This pattern strips away all pretense. It is the attitude at its most naked — and the most useful to name honestly.

Boundary-less Need — "If I Say No, She'll Hate Me"

The attitude of desperate need — the opposite of entitlement, but driven by the same engine (fear):

- *"If I say 'no,' she'll be angry and hate me."* (#5)
- *"If I get my needs met first, then I'll be able to care about you."* (#10)
- *"My needs are more important than your needs. Boundaries don't exist for me."* (#11)

Notice that #5 and #11 look opposite — one caves in, the other overrides — but both are the same attitude: *my needs come first*, just expressed differently. In #5, the need is to avoid rejection. In #11, the need is to be loved at any cost.

Fortress Mentality — "No One Has My Back"

The attitude of radical self-protection — closed, walled off, trusting no one:

- *"Keep a closed mind. I am the most important person here. No one has my back except me."* (#9)
- *"They should know what I want and need without having to say it!"* (#10)

The fortress attitude is the most isolating because it preemptively cuts off the possibility of help. It is the attitude form of the radical self-sufficiency delusion.

Connection to The Chain

Selfish attitudes are the **reinforcement of delusions** — the delusion converted into a daily way of thinking that feels like common sense.

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

Delusions are unstable — they need to be maintained. Attitudes are the maintenance. The delusion *"I had to protect myself from Brown"* becomes the attitude *"No one interferes with my life."* The delusion *"it wasn't okay for me to be honest"* becomes the attitude *"if I say no, she'll hate me."*

Attitudes feel more stable than delusions because they've been practiced longer. They feel like values, like principles, like the way I was raised. But trace any attitude back through its delusion to its fear, and the "principle" reveals itself as a fear-driven reflex.

Deeper Understanding

Attitudes Feel Like Values

The most dangerous thing about selfish attitudes is that they feel *right*. "No one should interfere with my life" sounds like a healthy boundary. "My pain is the most important thing" sounds like self-care. "Everyone cheats to get ahead" sounds like worldly wisdom.

The inventory exposes them for what they are: fear dressed up as philosophy. The attitude *"I can do whatever I want"* is not freedom — it is the fear of being seen as incapable (#4), converted into a stance that keeps everyone at arm's length.

Attitudes as Autopilot

By the time someone writes a Fourth Step, most of these attitudes have been operating for years — sometimes decades. They run automatically. The person at #1 doesn't decide "no one interferes with my life" each morning — the attitude is simply *on*, driving behavior without conscious thought.

This is why the inventory is written: to make the automatic visible. You can't change what you can't see. The moment the attitude is on paper, the autopilot is exposed, and a choice becomes possible.

The Spectrum from Submission to Domination

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

The twelve examples reveal that selfish attitudes exist on a spectrum:

Submission	Domination
"If I say no, she'll hate me" (#5)	"No one interferes with my life" (#1)
"My needs are more important — boundaries don't exist for me" (#11)	"I can do whatever I want" (#4)
"If I get my needs met first, then I'll care about you" (#10)	"Sacrifice anyone to get ahead" (#12)

Both ends of the spectrum are selfish. Submission isn't humble — it's fear-driven compliance that prioritizes my need to be liked over honesty. Domination isn't strong — it's fear-driven control that prioritizes my need to feel safe over everyone else's wellbeing.

The middle ground — where I can be honest about what I need without demanding it, and considerate of others without erasing myself — is exactly where the spiritual solution lives.

What Attitudes Reveal About the Delusion

Every attitude has a delusion underneath it. You can almost always find the delusion by asking: *What lie would I have to believe for this attitude to make sense?*

- "No one interferes" → I must believe I'm under threat
- "He got what he deserved" → I must believe I'm the judge

- "If I say no, she'll hate me" → I must believe honesty is unsafe
- "No one has my back" → I must believe I'm fundamentally alone

The attitude is the delusion's public face. The delusion is the attitude's hidden foundation. Pull out the delusion, and the attitude collapses.

This list is not exhaustive — your inventory will reveal attitudes unique to you. Use this as a starting point to help identify what you were thinking in each resentment, and to trace those attitudes back to the delusions that produced them.

Sources & Attribution

Direct Big Book text:

- p.62-¶1: "self pity" — the BB language for this link of the chain
- p.62-¶2: "Selfishness — self-centeredness! That, we think, is the root of our troubles"
- p.67-¶2: "Where had we been selfish…?" — the diagnostic question
- p.172: Dr. Bob quote on selfishness ("Dr. Bob's Nightmare")

BBA workshop methodology:

- The mapping of "selfish" (p.67) to attitudes specifically (as distinct from actions)
- The mapping of "self pity" (p.62) to "my attitude"
- The sentence starters and template format

Other sources:

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

Analytical work:

- The Submission-to-Domination spectrum — pattern analysis across the twelve examples

- Attitudes-as-autopilot framework — interpretive reasoning about how attitudes operate

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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 selfish.md