

## **Discipline #7 – Statement of Accountability**

### **Injunction [What to do]:**

Think over the choices that you have made in your life and select one that was harmful to others that you regret. While there may have been several things that you have done, start with the one that you most regret that was the most harmful to another. [If you cannot think of any choice you have made that was harmful to others, or can only think of things that while harmful, you don't regret the choice, then you will not be able to do this discipline. See rationale below.]

1. Clarify the choice. Get very clear about exactly what it was that you chose that you regret.
2. Identify the consequences to others. How did this choice that you made affect others and your relationships to others?
3. Name the patterns that permitted this choice. Since this is something that you regret, there were things going on with you at the time that allowed you to do something that you would ordinarily not do. What were all of things that were true for you at the time of the choice that gave you permission to act in this way?
4. Identify the strategies that you have now for addressing these patterns. In order to ensure that we won't again do the thing that we regret that was harmful to others, we have to have strategies for addressing the ways that we permitted ourselves to make the poor choice in the first place.

### **Why do it [Rationale]:**

We all make choices that are harmful to others. Unfortunately, not everyone is able to identify these choices or to feel regret for having done them. If you are able to identify the choice and to know that you have done harm and to feel guilt for the choice, then you are able to address the choice in a way that will help you avoid such behavior in the future.

Oftentimes we will simply assure ourselves that we know better now and will never do that again. This is not a safe strategy. For one thing, if someone had asked you before you had made that choice if that were something you were likely to do, you would no doubt have said you would not. "Knowing better" was something you had in place before you did it. Still, you did it.

Further, there are those things that come up for you from time to time that give you permission to do the things that you don't want to do. Ignoring them won't make them go away. Addressing them holds out the promise for improving other areas of your life as well.

### **What it will get you [Promises]:**

While this is a fairly straightforward discipline, it is very hard to do for emotional reasons. It is hard to admit, even to ourselves, much less to others, that we have made choices that seriously harmed others and our relationships with others. Nevertheless, this discipline is well worth the

effort. There is a lot that we can learn about ourselves by looking at what we have done when we were at our worst.

These most regretted choices tend to be a sort of “perfect storm” in which several sets of influences come together around a single event. For example if I have too much to drink and have a fight with my wife when I am scared about losing my job shortly after my mother dies, the fear and anger and grief may be released by the inebriation in ways that permit me to make some very bad choices. Each of these issues demands my attention, but I may not see the need to attend to them without the consequences of my regrettable choices to focus my mind. I have not fully grieved the loss of my mother. I have not attended to problems at work. I don’t have good ways of addressing conflicts in my marriage. And I have a tendency to drink too much when I am anxious. All of these are problems worthy of my attention. Thus the central promise of the Statement of Accountability is that by using the energy in the guilt that I feel I can transform my behavior into constructive action.

### **Suggestions:**

The key to this discipline is to pick the thing that we really regret, rather than what we think we ought to regret or what others believe we did wrong. The energy for transformation comes from the shame that we feel about who we are when we behave badly. The process is to take the energy from the shame, turn it into guilt about what we did [thus getting very clear about the choice that we made] and then fully addressing the aspects of our behavior that allow for us to behave that way so that we can really be confident that we have fully addressed the issues that allowed for the harmful action.

For this to work we have to be careful to:

- Be very specific about the choice. A general description of what happened won’t do.
- Be clear about all of the consequences to the other and to the relationships with others. While it is helpful for other reasons to note the consequences to you, for the purposes of the Statement of Accountability, those aren’t really relevant.
- Identify all of the patterns, even the most subtle. Squeeze all of the benefit out of this process that you can. See if you can name at least half a dozen patterns that you can see coming up in other areas of your life as well.
- Be very clear about the strategies. These should be observable behaviors. “Being careful that I don’t drink too much” is not as good as “attend my AA meeting every week and talk to my sponsor every other day.”