

Eight steps to Covid contrition

Broad + Liberty

Thought-provoking and shareable ideas for free thinkers in greater Philadelphia and beyond



By admitting their mistakes and renewing their commitment to science, public health professionals can start to regain trust.

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It is encouraging to see leaders from several sectors announcing publicly that they are conducting a review of their response to the Covid-19 health crisis in the United States. In fairness to these leaders, it is an unprecedented national event that has affected where we live, work, play, pray, and socialize.

For example, leaders from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have initiated a [self-examination](#) of this federal agency's handling of the coronavirus outbreak. Heads of the [American Federation of Teachers](#) are asking for some type of forgiveness, realizing that the dramatic step of shuttering our schools for such a long period may have been a mistake. [Worksites](#) are facing such

dramatic change “in the way we work” since the introduction of the personal computer, *i.e.*, do we work from the worksite, at home, or can we work from away?

[Hospitals](#) and our [armed forces](#) are struggling to staff positions that protect our health and welfare, given the “letting go” of a significant number of employees who chose not to be vaccinated. Public confidence in the noble profession of medicine and many of its disciplines have plummeted, given the abject refusal to [listen to colleagues](#) who differed on the origin of the coronavirus and the subsequent prevention, protection, mitigation, and treatment actions needed.

It remains to be seen how serious the soul-searching top federal leaders — from the White House to the bureaucracy agencies — will be. After all, it’s been revealed they worked in concert with print, broadcast, and social media companies to circulate dishonest information and shoddy data. Blind obedience — combined with the threat of censorship — was the demand placed upon institutions and individuals for non-compliance with the government, ostensibly “the single source of truth.”

Since we now know scientific norms were discarded, critiques by physicians with alternative opinions were debased, and innocent citizens were abused vocationally, spiritually, and financially, it will take more than an “official” white paper to make things right. Confidence in both the public health and healthcare systems has been damaged. It will take an up-close and specific reflection from each sector to regain the trust of the people.

What seems to be a common etiologic factor from all sectors is that our leaders became [drunk on the politics of the pandemic](#) rather than relying on basic principles from common sense, keeping to the mission of their organization, and being transparent to the epistemic challenges of the coronavirus outbreak vis-à-vis what we know, what we suspect, and what we don’t know.

To be helpful, we suggest a sobering and proven process for owning the issue, confronting the aggrieved, and moving forward with integrity. It’s an adapted suggestion as applied to the Covid-19 crisis. The 12-step program approach and framework is a model of accepted wisdom. These steps of recognizing a “higher power,” accepting personal responsibility, feeling remorse, and initiating apologies to those who have been harmed is a useful strategy to regain public trust while charting a more responsible path in protecting the public’s health in the future.

Here is a eight-step adaptation to consider.

1. Admit you made yourself feel powerless to act as an objective professional by kneeling to the orthodoxy of a powerful bureaucracy.
2. Commit to the primacy of the principles of science.
3. Conduct a rigid, critical, and fearless moral inventory of your recent professional behavior.
4. Admit to a higher power, yourself, and another human being the exact nature of your wrongs.
5. Develop a list of all categories of people, as well as individuals, you've harmed, to make amends.
6. Approach the individuals and groups of people on your "make amends" list and apologize personally.
7. Recognize that, as a professional, you have an obligation to a power greater than yourself.
8. Encourage your professional peers to make the same commitments and take the same actions as you did.

Over the decades, the Alcoholics Anonymous methodology has been used by many groups to help their members admit their errors and move on with their lives in a successful manner. Perhaps this tried-and-true approach can assist America's public health, healthcare, and education leadership in digging themselves out of the negative reputational ditch they've dug for themselves.