How does one best make amends for engaging in destructive, selfish conduct? If you're Tiger Woods or John Edwards or Eliot Spitzer or any number of the growing legions of high profiles who have fallen from their perch, you do it in the most destructive, selfish way possible, by coming clean in a one-and-done press conference on your way to getting on with your life as if nothing ever happened.

On Friday, Woods had a fireside chat of sorts with what his agent dubbed a "small group of friends, colleagues and close associates" and a worldwide audience seemingly hanging on each and every scripted word.

The purpose of this public airing was to allow Woods to begin the process of making amends and apologizing for his reprehensible conduct. If I remember my Seinfeld trivia, it's step 6. But before I get all George Kostanza about the fact that Woods never personally apologized to me, I'll exercise patience and heed the words of Woods' wife Elin and that's to judge him ultimately by his deeds not his words. That seems eminently fair.

But it's more than just that. It's also the fact that he did this all in the face of one of the bigger tournaments on his tour's schedule sponsored by one of his former sponsors. Instantly that tournament becomes a footnote while everyone begins the debate about the ramifications of Woods' public mea culpa.

You could call the timing of his speech a coincidence, what with Accenture being the first sponsor to dump Woods, but that would be a mistake. Woods does nothing by accident or coincidence. If nothing else, in this little action Woods has reinforced the notion that he's still as cold and calculating as his transgressions make him out to be.

Maybe he is returning directly to therapy, maybe he's in a group session right now listening and offering support to Debbie from Ottumwa as she explains her own particular brand of sexual deviance, but yet there seems like plenty of other times he could have taken his public flogging without taking the focus of his colleagues or a former sponsor. But that would have run counter to the clichéd rule book of how these things are to be handled as well as the fabled Woods competitiveness.

This is the way athletes like Woods operate. They take every perceived slight and use it as motivation to stick it back in the ear of the offending party. Michael Jordan used this technique often. Woods does the same thing, whether it's a perceived criticism leveled at him by Vijay Singh's caddie, or from a sponsor with the temerity to drop him simply because Woods represents nearly every value they're against.

If Woods really wanted to do something more than express remorse, as in actually demonstrating some, he wouldn't have turned the golf world's focus away from the Match Play Championships being placed ¾ of a continent away just to say pre-scripted words of remorse. He would have picked a random Monday, the winter is full of them, and put himself in front of every reporter with a question until they ran out of ways to ask him how many different women he was sleeping with while married. Leave no question unanswered and eventually there will be no questions to answer.

It also would have helped if Woods speech, as heartfelt as it sounded, didn't come across as the best speech his money could buy. It had all the requisite elements. There was the apology to his family, her family, his friends, her friends. There was the expected lack of excuses for the inexcusable and, of course, the apology to all the sponsors that used to support him. And the kids, we can't forget about letting them know how sorry we are. These were ticked off like boxes being checked on a list.

But then there was the rather oddly timed commercial for his own foundation as well as the Earl Woods scholars program in the Washington, D.C. area, thrown in to remind everyone that even the flawed can have do good deeds occasionally. And by the way, this body? Woods let us

know emphatically that he achieved all on his own, without the help of performance enhancing drugs. Calling out that issue at this moment seemed particularly strange and, yes, a tad selfish.

That's the problem really, with the speech. In truth I rather doubt that it was Woods' intention to pump up his accomplishments even as he was taking the beating he so well deserved over his misdeeds, but who really knows? The pervasive (and perverse, apparently) nature of his previous actions will make everyone question his sincerity on any topic until he gives everyone a reason to think otherwise.

If Woods is ever going to escape that kind of scrutiny, and that seems unlikely, then speeches and appearances on Oprah aren't going to do it. He's going to have to start living a more purpose-driven life. It isn't going to be easy for a person who readily admitted that to this point and by his own admission he did whatever he wanted to do whenever he wanted to do it without a thought to the collateral damage that may have been occurring all around him.

Woods has clearly outlined for himself the profile of a man dominated by his own selfishness. Whether he is able to change that picture can't be judged, let alone known, by listening to a 13-minute speech he probably didn't write It's something that will reveal itself only over time and if there's one thing the public has no patience for it's time. They want to know right now how sorry Woods might be. They want to know right now if Woods has really changed or merely pushed the bimbos into the shadows for the time being. That is, of course, impossible to know at the moment.

What isn't impossible to know, though, is that Woods still has some hard lessons to learn. Whatever demons and addictions may be possessing him it's pretty clear that Woods intends on mostly fighting them with the old weapons that mostly served him well until they didn't. He admitted he needs help but then offered only the same old excuses for why he won't talk about any of it. By continuing to give short shrift to the forces that often are far more powerful, Woods has never looked weaker.

Woods noted that his public unraveling has given him a chance to really consider the wreckage that lies in his previous wake. How could it not? He says that he's been returning to the Buddhism that he used to practice in order to make sense of all the turmoil. That will probably help.

But ultimately what no one could know at the moment, not even Woods, is whether or not these statements will ultimately just be words on a piece of paper to be later auctioned off on EBay or stakes in the ground of a remarkable turnaround.

There's a saying that "seasons change but people don't." If Woods is to defy those odds, he must as he said adhere to the core values that he was taught, presumably as a child. Left unanswered though was whether or not he ever embraced these core values in the first place. Either Woods was once a stand-up guy who always did the right thing but then found himself corrupted by the usual culprits or he was never that stand-up guy in the first place.

If it was the former, then there is certainly hope for him. If it's the latter, then he risks becoming just someone who has temporarily cleaned up his act, no different really than John Daly.

Anyone who says he knows the real Woods at the moment is delusional. Woods himself has no clue. But maybe there is something we can all finally start agreeing on. No matter when Woods ultimately returns, whether it be with a vengeance or a smile and certainly no matter how many more major tournaments he wins, he's forever given up any right to be considered the greatest golfer ever. He's simply too flawed.