

Arizona Sponsorship Workshop

Thursday, November 16, 2019

Segment Three – Choosing a Sponsor:

- How do I choose a sponsor?
- What are the minimum requirements for a sponsor?
- Considering long distance sponsorship
- What qualities am I looking for in a sponsor?
- How do I ask someone to sponsor me? / What if the answer is no?
- What are my responsibilities in the relationship?
- Expressing my needs, expectations and boundaries
- What if my needs are not being met?
 - Conflict resolution
 - Talking things out
 - Saying goodbye

Statement of Purpose:

We asked, “How can we support members by making healthy sponsorship more accessible and less mysterious to all members and to new sponsors?”

Newcomers and other members often feel anxiety and confusion about sponsorship. Reliable, flexible sponsorship has a direct effect on regular participation, effective recovery, service, and retention of members. Sponsored members sponsor others sooner. Sponsors help us better understand the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts, and they teach us application of the Spiritual Principles ourselves. Solid sponsorship is the key to a flourishing fellowship. It conquers many challenges we face, both individually and collectively.

Suggested Preamble to The Twelve Steps:

The Al-Anon Family Groups are a fellowship of relatives and friends of alcoholics who share their experience, strength, and hope in order to solve their common problems. We believe alcoholism is a family illness and that changed attitudes can aid recovery. Al-Anon is not allied with any sect, denomination, political entity, organization, or institution; does not engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any cause. There are no dues for membership. Al-Anon is self-supporting through its own voluntary contributions.

Al-Anon has but one purpose: to help families of alcoholics. We do this by practicing the Twelve Steps, by welcoming and giving comfort to families of alcoholics, and by giving understanding and encouragement to the alcoholic.

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Kyle:

Hey, family, my name's Kyle. Thank you so much for asking me to join the workshop. It's always an honor to try to be of assistance to God and his kids through our own experiences.

I have been with you in Al-Anon for just about eight months now. I think I started with you in March, so it has been a real good journey. It was a hard first five months, and then it's been a lovely last three months. I remember screaming at the group one day, "How long is this going to take? How long till I stop being angry?" I got some good feedback and they said whenever you're ready. I think the last three months I've been entirely ready to focus on myself rather than everybody else and that's through good sponsorship.

What are the minimum requirements for a sponsor for me? It's hard when you're first coming in because we don't know what the program looks like. We don't know anything about the Twelve Steps, we don't know much about alcoholism. All we know is that we're hurt and angry -- that's about all I knew when I first walked in. I'm not a small guy and I was in the corner crying at my first Al-Anon meeting. That's alright. We do that. As far as it goes for me, the minimum requirements for a sponsor was that he also had a sponsor and it was a male. He had a sponsor and had worked the Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) through Al-Anon with his sponsor. It was evident with my sponsor that, through his story and experience, he had suffered a lot of the same things that I had gone through and now had a much better existence and quality of life because of working the Steps. Maybe the details hadn't even changed, but *he* had changed. I had been tip toeing around the program of Al-Anon for a very long time. I had been told to go to Al-Anon by many people and had come to a meeting or two and I was just having a hard time relating. The first three or four meetings I went to, there were no men in the meetings. It was lovely to talk with you ladies and you really, really helped me to kind of calm down, but I couldn't stick around because something inside me wasn't ready yet, until I was.

When I found my sponsor, he immediately invited me to an all men's Al-Anon meeting, where it was a bunch of sponsors and a bunch of sponsees. All of us got together on a Wednesday night. We would drive over to the west side of Phoenix, eat at Denny's, and check in with each other. This is what Step I'm on, this is my sponsor, and this is my home group. They could make sure that we were doing what was necessary and took an interest in my life without telling me what to do. They *showed* me what to do. It's a really cool experience, and I'm lucky to be a part of it.

Having a home group, working the Steps and having a sponsor are definitely three requirements for me. You know a lot of people say to pick somebody who has what you want. In my opinion, I don't know that's as important. I had no clue what I wanted. When I first walked in, I just wanted to calm down. I just didn't want to be angry. I didn't want to cry. I didn't want to leave my wife, but I also wanted to leave my wife. I didn't know what to do. I didn't know which way was up and which way was down. So maybe finding a sponsor who has what I want might have been something that came along a lot later. It was very crucial that I had one immediately when I first came in, so that it could start working in my life.

Considering long distance sponsorship, it has just been my experience that long-distance sponsorship is a little bit harder for me. It might be a different experience for others, but if I have moved or changed, I usually make sure that I have a sponsor in that area. I really like to be able to meet up face to face and spend good quality time, read the Steps and the literature together, talk about our daily reflections, talk about the slogans, and connect on that personal level. I think it's something a bit more special than just a phone call. This is a new way. Maybe a Zoom sponsor? I think that that might be a possibility. We are starting to move into the future and there are a lot more opportunities for us.

What qualities am I looking for in a sponsor? I think now that I'm a little bit farther along, the main quality that I absolutely need in my sponsor now is that he is a fine example of this program outside of the meetings. Even I can behave for one hour; I can do that in a meeting. I can act like I'm a good guy and a great husband and blah blah blah. I saw him be an example of the good qualities that we learn in Al-Anon, the principles of the Steps. I got to watch him do that in his everyday life. I'd call him to ask what he was doing, and he'd say he was on his way to the hospital to go visit a fellow member and bring a meeting to him. Or "I'm at home cooking dinner for my wife." If it was a small task it was always a positive thing. You know, maybe if I called him and he told me, "I'm cheating on my taxes." I don't think he would have told me, but you never know! That is what really shined with him, that he related and had a very similar experience to what was going on in my life. I got to see him be just a perfect example of what the Steps could do in his life. It made all the difference to me.

Another quality was his availability. He was always there. He's retired. He always answers the phone and, if he doesn't, I usually get a call back within fifteen or twenty minutes at the most. That was important because one thing I notice is that I usually make my Al-Anon calls when I'm in hot water. When I'm boiling! I need somebody usually at that moment. When I first started, he was the only one I would call since I didn't know anybody. I felt like I was whining, and I didn't want you guys to have to listen to my problem. I would only call him at first, and I'm so happy that he was available to be able to talk to me and calm me down. Just to tell me, "Kyle don't get on that roller coaster. You can get up and go to a meeting. You can leave. You don't have to be a part of that." I was just so happy that he was available to me to be such a good resource and help, especially in the beginning. I was pulling my hair out. It was tough. It was very tough, those first five months. He's not more interested in my Al-Anon program than I am. To have that make sense, as much as I want to work the Steps, as much as I strive to do the program, he's going to be that interested and he's not going to be more interested than I am. I

don't know if anybody's had the experience, but if I don't want to move, you can't try to force me. I really reject forceful sponsorship. It's hard especially since I was so angry when I first came in. When somebody is telling me, "You *have to* do this. You *have to* be here. You *have to* do this bookwork," it makes me kind of back off a little bit. When he looked me in the eyes and said, "I care just as much about your serenity and your program as you do," that really made a lot of sense and that helped me out a lot.

How do I ask for a sponsor and what if he says no? My sponsor was one of the people who suggested that maybe I give Al-Anon a shot. So I knew him a little bit before my journey in Al-Anon. He took me to the meeting and then he took me to the West Side men's meeting. I got to see what a neat example he was. It was easy for me to ask him to be my sponsor because I saw this working in his life. I saw the light in his eyes. I saw that he was pretty much at peace. Every time I'd be complaining to him about something, he would say, "Well, Kyle, are you asking my opinion, or would you like me just to listen?" I have no clue even how to answer that! Are you *actually thinking* before you speak? Because, I've never done that!

There were a lot of qualities in how he presented himself to me. We are a little hostile when we come in and asking if I wanted his opinion was kind of a big deal. Sometimes I just wanted to vent, and sometimes I needed his opinions, and I needed his suggestion on what to do. I loved that I had the option, and I wasn't just given free advice all the time. As soon as I asked him, he said yes right away. If he would have said no, I don't know. I was in kind of a strange spot. I think the best thing we can always do is our Al-Anon Declaration. To always be there to be of service to help in any way, and I think that if anybody is ever in the position where somebody asks them to be their sponsor, I think the correct answer is not "no". I think the correct answer is, "You know I do have a little bit on my plate right now, but I would love to introduce you to a couple of really good people that I know that work a wonderful program." I think that would be a much better answer. I don't know if anybody's ever said no just because most of the people that we should ask are working a good program and don't really say no when somebody asks for help.

What are my responsibilities? It's one thing to have a sponsor and it's a whole other thing to be sponsorable. I remember I kept getting told, "Kyle, take the cotton out of your ears and put it in your mouth," or something to that effect. It was crucial until I was beaten into a state of reasonableness enough to listen to what he had to say to me. Not much was getting through -- not much was getting in between the ears. I had to really pray and really hope to change that I was able to hear him and take suggestions even though I didn't really know if it would work or not. One suggestion was to hold my wife and give her real long hugs, like 20-30 second hugs. I was like, I'm much too angry to do that right now, I just don't know. He said, "Kyle, it's ok if you take suggestions under protest as long as you take them." That's kind of how it started with me. That's my responsibility. If I've trusted somebody in my life enough to tell them what's going on and to ask of them their time, then I need to be able to be sponsorable by that person. It's such a beautiful thing to be able to have a sponsor that really cares about you, about your life and your family and he was all of that. So, you have to be sponsorable.

The next point is expressing my needs, expectations and boundaries. I need somebody to define what a boundary is real quick. I'm still working on those and they are a little bit better. In the beginning, it's not as important. I don't think I should try to set expectations or boundaries with a program that I know nothing about. The more that I try to put it in a box, the smaller my program will be. I won't be able to get the full effect of the entire thing like it is necessary for me. I am just hoping to have a new experience.

I love the "set aside prayer," if anybody has ever worked with that. It helps to set aside the things I know. The things I think I know about God, my program, my sponsor, and everything and just to have a new experience. So, I know I've had the experience of complaining about my significant other to somebody and they say, "Well, why don't you just leave her?" And I feel like, "How dare you! You don't know me!" And I start getting all crazy and getting angry. The reality is, if you are venting to somebody and you're talking to them -- somebody who's not going to be as invested in your life as you are -- it's not going to be helpful. He's not going to tell me what to do. He's going to say, "Kyle, you know this is what I did and maybe we try to work the program before we make any decisions. How about that? Let's just do the Steps and if that helps, then that helps, and if you still feel the way you do after working some steps then you can decide." That was the best way for him to sponsor me. Let's make an educated decision; let's not jump the gun on anything. Let's just think about and work it through and then we'll figure it out.

What if my needs are not being met? If I were to fire a sponsor, if I were to say, I'm sorry I just can't work with you anymore, if he were to get mad about that then I'd know that I'd made the right choice. If I don't speak up for my own program and my own serenity, then nobody will. If I don't advocate for my own serenity, my own peace of mind, and all the beautiful things we can get from this program, nobody will. And so, it is my job, if I'm not getting it, if it's not working, to speak up about it and see if there is a solution first.

It's hard if you jump sponsors a lot, I know that's been some peoples' experience. If I had jumped around a little bit, it might have taken longer for me to recover. It might have taken longer for me to find the serenity that I have nowadays. I still had so many walls I put up, I still had so many expectations that are holding me back that are keeping me in chains. I think that sticking with him and working with him was just an experience that nobody should miss. If he's ever saying anything that hurts me or that I don't understand, or I don't get, I'm sure that he would be willing to talk to me about it. I'm very lucky to have good sponsorship. I was asked just last week if I would take another man through the Steps of Al-Anon and the program and meet him at the meeting. I came to the meeting a half hour early and he never showed up. I know that sometimes that's part of it.

This is a strange journey. It's a journey that does not make sense at first until you start to be able to see the light. Until I can chisel away at some of the armor that I've put on against everybody and everything that's been hurting me, I can't see the light. It's a good sponsor that was able to help me to start taking off some of that armor and take down some of those walls. I just really want to be able to be that for somebody. If I can, I will. All I can do is just take them

to the door and hopefully they put their hand on that doorknob and open it and come in with us and we recover together.

Thank you again everybody for letting me be here. This is really, cool and I really, really appreciate the opportunity to talk about this.

Pam:

I'm a grateful member of Al-Anon and I'm so glad to be able to participate in this sponsorship workshop. Thank you for having me.

The way I came to the rooms of Al-Anon was unconventional. I called AA first. Because of the controlling person that am, I felt like I had to talk to an alcoholic and say, "Ok, this is what I'm going through. Is my husband an alcoholic?" He said, "You know, I think you're in the right place. Why don't you talk to my wife?" I did and she suggested I go to a meeting. The next day I got that chance. I came into the room, saw the people there, saw that they were doing things that sounded good, and I thought that maybe this is for me. I wanted to be a part of that. Yet there was a part of me that was still judging. I was still questioning if this was the right thing for me because I didn't have a Higher Power in my life. I knew that was part of this program so I was a bit freaked out that it wouldn't work for me. She introduced me to someone in the program who I started calling. I don't remember how quickly that happened, but I knew that I was feeling overwhelmed and desperate. I knew I needed something myself, not just for the alcoholic, but something that was going to help me because I could see I was just dwelling in a lot of self-pity, resentment, anger, and fear. The only way I knew how to deal with all of that was if I began talking it out with someone. I didn't know what else to do. This person seemed like the right person for me, so I just started talking to her and calling her.

There were many times it was hard to pick up that phone. I kept thinking I'd just give her six or seven days and then I'd call her again because I thought that her time was so valuable. She kept reassuring me and saying, "Don't worry. I'll probably get more out of this than you do." I just never really understood that until I was in the position of working the Twelfth Step myself. There were a lot of common bonds. I could see where she understood me like no other, and it was easy to talk to her. I felt like she understood what I was going through, but I was still struggling. I would almost do interviews in the rooms after the meeting and ask people- what is your concept of a Higher Power? I was expecting that they were going to be able to define that for me, and then I would be able to grab onto it. In meetings, I was completely fighting the notion of a Higher Power, and I was very stubborn. I didn't think that this was ever really going to be something that I could rely on. So I tried to just take the principle that they were talking about in those meetings and I thought, well I'll just apply them to my own life. I'll be spiritual, and I'll be loving and understanding and tolerant and patient. That should work. Of course, it didn't work any better than me trying to use my will power on the alcoholic and trying to control him.

I finally got to the point where I was so desperate one day that I called my sponsor. I had at one point in a meeting asked her because I found out what sponsorship was. I said to her, "Oh my God, will you be my sponsor?" She said, "Oh, I think that's what we have already been doing." I was just so afraid of rejection and she was obviously there for me. So anyway, I called her, and I said I just couldn't do this anymore and I didn't know what to do. I was just so full of anger, frustration, and self-pity, and she just suggested that I come over. That is when she asked me the question: Was I willing to believe in a power greater than myself? At that point, I was saying yes, because I didn't really see that I had any other option. I was ready to move on.

What I found from her was complete open mindedness. She showed no judgment. I went through the Fourth Step with her, and I was ready to reveal everything about myself. There was a part of me that wanted to hold back, but I knew that she was the right person, that I could trust her. I saw the spiritual anonymity that we practice in the Al-Anon program, I could see that in her. I didn't have to worry that she would reveal anything about me to someone else. When I shared that Fourth Step with her, she also shared with me some of things about herself that she had done or had experienced. That made me feel even more accepted, that I wasn't alone in this, that she had had some difficulties too, and I was no different than anyone else. I was no longer seeing myself alone or unique. We were in this together. I just sort of grabbed onto a beginning of that concept of a Higher Power because I didn't really know what that looked like. I just did the best I could with that. That grew as time went on. She helped me get through the first nine steps and then moved away. At that point, I had to find another sponsor.

She suggested a friend of hers. I didn't feel like I could really relate to her. I wanted someone who was more down to earth. The person I chose to be my sponsor was experiencing a program that was more based on spiritual principles. I just really felt like that was the right person for me. She helped me by getting through trusting in my Higher Power more, not just coming to her with problems but being able to ask for my Higher Power's guidance. That was really through the Tenth and Eleventh Steps. Eventually, I came to a point where I was ready to share the message and experience that I had gone through with the Twelve Steps. That was a whole new experience for me. It was great to be able to finally put those dark secrets of my past to good use. I never thought that they would suddenly become ones that were going to be used for good.

I wanted to tell you one funny thing, too. One of the things that I had shared with her was about doing the dishes. Things that I didn't feel like were my responsibility at home. I was compulsively worrying about some of these things and controlling and wanting some things to change with my alcoholic loved one, as he wasn't responding to my nagging or controlling. She suggested that I just either leave it for him to do and be patient or I could just realize I could do it myself. And I was like, wait a minute, I don't want to do it myself! But I realized that I had other options and choices. I didn't have to be constantly nagging and controlling all the time. So that was new for me.

Eventually after some time with her, she passed away unexpectedly. That was hard but I moved on from that. The couple that I had met originally when I had first contacted Al-Anon became the people in my life that I felt were my sponsors. I think the reason why was because they had gone through caring for their grandson who was nine years old who had brain cancer. They brought him into their home. I watched them care for him, love him, and do for him before he passed away. I watched them grieve and get through that experience. I think I learned a lot from all of that. I grew from that experience because I learned about dying. I learned about loving someone through it. I learned a lot of spiritual principles through that experience and through being a part of a relationship with them during that time. We had a book study, which also helped to strengthen my relationship with my Higher Power through all of that.

I found that I needed to move on to another sponsor. That person was a little more structured in her approach. She did a lot of service. My other two sponsors did too but this one did even more on the area level. She wanted to pressure me into doing service, and I was one of those rebellious kinds of people who “you don’t tell me what to do” kind of thing. Initially when we were working the Steps, I thought we were just going to need to do the Fourth Step. She was telling me, no, we need to start with number one. I think I was surprised, but I was willing. The relationship with her was odd because every time we would have a conversation, I would think, “Oh my goodness, I’m going to have to just end the relationship. This isn’t going to work because she’s too rigid. It’s just not going to be somebody I can relate to.” As soon as I would tell her that I think this is going to have to change, this isn’t working, she would become more flexible and it would always amaze me how that would happen. I suppose that was her Higher Power working in her life. She was giving me the program the way that she thought I needed it. My way of reacting to the situation was that I wanted something more flexible or open, and she was just giving me what I needed. After that happened two or three times, I think I finally said, “Well I guess she’s my sponsor. I’m just going to work with her.” It was kind of interesting because we eventually became very good friends. I think that I took my program with her probably further than I had with the other sponsors because I began working the Traditions. After some gentle nudging from another member of the group, I began doing service. That was funny because I just wanted to do something really minor like co-chairing a picnic. Eventually, I started doing public outreach with the district. It was just a matter of being willing and watching the example of others who had gone before me and seeing how it was working in their lives. And, that’s what I wanted for me, too.

The qualities that I look for in a sponsor would probably be compassion. They would have to be loving and unconditional in their loving. I look for someone who is going to accept me for who I am and give me patience. Also, they’re willing to take me where I am in the program and go with me where I want to take it. I don’t have to feel any constraint and they are willing to work on concepts with me or wherever I want to take the program.

That is what I’m doing right now with my current sponsor. When I moved here five years ago, I didn’t jump right into a sponsor relationship. I didn’t want to continue the long-distance relationship because I felt that person had too many time constraints, raising her granddaughter and her career. I also didn’t feel like that would work for me personally. It took

me some time. I got to know the people here. I really felt like there were a lot of people who could have been my sponsor. I think God has always led me to the person who was right for me and no one's ever said no. Anyway, this person came up to me after I had spoken at an Al-Anon talk and she shared with me some things. I just looked at her and I just said, "You know, would you be my sponsor?" I think she was surprised, but I just felt that I had been led to her through my intuition. God was there for me as he's been the other times. She's been very loving and patient with me. When I've had questions about whatever's been going on in my life, she's always been there for me.

One of the people in the program early on introduced me to the Twelve Steps in 15 minutes. I wanted to get this little pitch in here. It's really been awesome working that with others as well as working that on my own. I've found that when sponsoring people, I've been getting a chance to learn more about the program and myself. They've taught me a lot. I always learn something new, but I also wanted to share quickly. I had a relationship with someone I felt wasn't really working, and I didn't think I was the right fit for them. I decided that I needed to pray about this and talk to my sponsor. I shared with her that I thought someone else might be a better fit. She struggled with that at first. Then I suggested she read the sponsorship brochure so that she could get a better understanding that this isn't a real forever relationship, and I think that helped get her through that experience.

The other thing I wanted to share was the part about saying no. I've never had to say no to anyone because I never felt that I had time constraints. I always want to feel like I'm available to anyone who wants to have a sponsor. I also felt that, for me personally, I needed to be there just like they were there for me. I wanted to have someone feel that there was someone there for them. I've had a lot of good opportunities to work with people who have been very willing to work their program and I'm happy to do that. Wherever they want to take their program, that's where I want to be with them and to help them through it. I'm grateful for this opportunity and thank you very much to all the people who are participating.

Mike:

Hi everybody. I'm Mike.

Getting into Al-Anon meetings, having some spiritual relationship with a Higher Power, having sponsorship are kind of the three real basics for me for my program to work. I think it was very important for me to have someone who could walk me through the Steps, explain and be honest and be trustworthy so that I felt like I was making progress. I had a shoulder to cry on. I had someone I could vent to. So I feel it's very important.

I think two pieces of literature, CAL (Conference Approved Literature), are very important as well. One is of course the booklet *Sponsorship: What It's All About?* is an important one to read. *How Al-Anon Works* pages 36-38 are also very good especially for the newcomer to explain sponsorship and what it's about. There are other pages, but those pages give an

overview of sponsorship. I think it's very important, especially for the newcomer, to get an idea of what it means to have a sponsor.

I want to combine the part on how do I choose a sponsor and how do I ask someone to sponsor me? I was lucky. I was in Al-Anon about three months. I listened carefully. I was sharing a bit of my story off and on and trying to get a handle on what this Al-Anon thing was, and there was somebody who was at a lot of meetings with me. There was some kind of connection there. I really attribute that to my Higher Power. It's a relationship that has lasted for over twenty five years at this point so I'm very lucky to have that relationship. I just went up after a meeting one time and asked, "Would you be my sponsor?" He said yes, and that's how I got my sponsor. Now, when I became a sponsor it was a little different. I had some people interview me. I mean literally, they had a list of questions. They went through them, and I answered them. I think it is also important for me as a sponsor to sit down with the person and tell my story and see if they can connect. If they can, then maybe it's going to work out. I also take the time to listen to their story or where they are at right now. We can see if this is a relationship that is going to work.

What if the answer is no? Well, of course I didn't experience someone saying no to me, but I have been fired as a sponsor. That was in a parking lot. It was a little bit shocking but not surprising. That was ok. I've also been able to become a sponsor to someone whose sponsor wasn't working out. I've also had the experience as a sponsor to have to tell someone I couldn't be their sponsor. I liked what Kyle had to say because that's kind of what I did. I said I need to be able to take care of myself and right now I have a lot of things on my plate. I have a lot of other people I'm working with so I don't think I would be a good fit for you right now, but here are three other people who I would talk to. One of those three did become that person's sponsor. As a sponsor, I have to be able to look and see what my limits are. I want to be able to do a good job in my program and for others as well. If I can't do that then it's very important. You know the Al-Anon declaration, of always being there. But also, I don't want to be there and feel resentful about it at the same time

What qualities am I looking for in a sponsor? What are the minimum requirements for a sponsor? I'm going to combine those two. The joke we often have is, I just have to be one Step ahead of you in order to be your sponsor. That's one way of looking at it. I feel like the qualities that I'm looking for in a sponsor and that someone should look for in a sponsor are: Are they going to meetings? Are they working a program? Do they have a connection with a Higher Power and are they available? Those are some of the things I know that were already mentioned and the fact is, at least in my case, I don't know that anyone is really ever ready to be a sponsor the first time. It's a little scary and daunting. It's both. It's like, Wow! That's kind of cool that somebody would ask me that. And it's like Oh, my God! How am I going to pull this off? So, I had to be willing to embrace that - be willing to embrace the fear. I had to lean on my sponsor a bit. I got to look at some of the techniques that he used to get me started on the program, so I was able to pull on that. I think as time has gone on, some of the qualities that I now look for as being a sponsor is to shut up, listen and let my Higher Power speak to me. Sometimes that's scary. Sometimes I think, should I really say that to this person. I must be

sure that it is not me and how I'm trying to control or manipulate or get this person to work the program. Rather, it's my Higher Power acting through me to provide some support and experience, strength, and hope for the other person. That has been important as I've moved through sponsorship as a sponsor. I know that my own sponsor, even though he has never said that to me, is very connected to his Higher Power. When he's talking to me it's for that purpose.

The next point is expressing my needs, expectations, and boundaries. That's one of the first things I do. When someone asks me to sponsor them, I let them know what my expectations are. My expectations are pretty simple. I say try to go to as many meetings as you can where we can both attend. I understand that you may not be able to go to every meeting that I go to but try and go to at least one meeting together. At the beginning I want my sponsees to be in touch with me at least once a week either in person or by phone. I also say please call me after 8:00 a.m. in the morning and before 9:00 p.m. at night unless you're in jail or you're bleeding. Everybody's been respectful of that. Like I said, I need to take care of myself and I need to be available in the way that I can be available that is best for them. Other than that, it's up to them. I don't get in touch with my sponsees a lot. I'm not calling them every day. They usually give me a call. Texting has been a new piece of my sponsorship. If I read something in one of the daily readers that kind of goes, Oh! that reminds me of a certain person, I will get on and text that person: "I really like the reading in Hope for Today. It really reminded me of some things we talked about." Boom! Something like that and then we may go back and forth on our text. We may have a phone call that ensues from that. It's up to me to express what I want to do as a sponsor for my sponsees and what my boundaries are. They in turn get to tell me what their boundaries are as well.

What if my needs are not being met? In terms of conflict resolution, the person who did fire me, we did have a little talk about it. It was all fine. It was not a problem. I haven't really had a serious conflict either with my sponsor or with a sponsee. We have talked things out maybe when I wasn't clear, or I didn't understand. I think it's very important to have communication. Once again, I go back to *How Al-Anon Works*. In Chapter 13, there is a whole section on communication. That's one of my character defects. I need to be willing to communicate and not be fearful. So as a sponsor, I need to continue to grow in my program and be willing to ask some of the tough questions or be willing to share openly and talk it out.

The next point is saying goodbye. I've had sponsees move away and that's sometimes the hardest thing when you get really close to someone. That kind of ties in with that long distance. I try and tell guys that I've sponsored, keep in touch with me. I will be your sponsor as long as you need me, and it's important that you find somebody local. You can always give me a call. I don't close the door on it. Skype, WhatsApp, Zoom, and FaceTime are all these different ways that we can stay in touch with those folks we love in this program even if they are not close by.

Another thing I wanted to mention on the topic of what if my needs are not being met is talking with others. There are some things that my sponsor just cannot relate to in my life. I have to be

willing to say there are other people in this program that can provide me with experience, strength, and hope and not feel like only my sponsor can do that. There is another guy in the program and we kind of co-sponsor each other when there are topics because we both have the same sponsor. Sometimes there's something our sponsor couldn't relate to in the way we needed. It's being able to say I'm not going to limit myself to just one sponsor. I'm going to other support people. Not that they're my sponsor but other people who I can talk to as well.

What are my responsibilities in the relationship? I think I have to continue to grow. As I have sponsored more folks, I have gone back through the Fourth Step myself. The first time I did the Fourth Step, I just did it on a piece of paper and I went back and did one in *Blueprint for Progress*. I started to work the Traditions using *Reaching for Personal Freedom*. I felt like that was good. Also, there is *Paths to Recovery*. I'm currently going through all the Concepts now because I now also have a service sponsor. My service sponsor and I are reading through the entire service manual and using *Reaching for Personal Freedom*. I feel like it really helps to personalize those concepts which can sometimes be abstract. So I need to continue to grow. My responsibility is to be available as much as I can and as needed but not be a martyr to this program or to others; to be a good listener and not be pushy. I have to allow some of my sponsees to not get in touch with me except in a crisis. And I have to allow others to be in touch with me as much as they need to. So I need to be flexible in that sense and be available to work my program as well as to help them with theirs. I also like what was said earlier about, very rarely will a sponsee wake me up at 2:00 in the morning with me thinking about them. I let them work their program and, as was mentioned, I can't be more involved in their program than they are. That usually works out well. That's detaching with love. There's that principle again. Not only do we have to do that with the alcoholic or with others in our lives, we have to do that with each other in Al-Anon. Sometimes I have to do it with myself. I have to detach from myself with love. My fears, character defects, and my issues can sometimes get in the way of me being a good sponsor or a good sponsee at the same time. Thank you.

Questions:

Question: How can we access the recordings and transcripts for these workshops?

Both the written transcripts and the recordings will be available on the Area website www.al-anon-az.org. There is a Sponsorship Workshop page on the home page menu. I've already read a couple of the transcripts and they are absolutely awesome. I highly encourage you to check them out.

Question: How do you use Zoom or Skype for sponsoring?

Panelist response (Mike): Although I haven't had the direct experience of Zoom, I have one of my sponsees who extensively uses the electronic meetings and talking with others through chats via what the World Service Office (WSO) offers. Even though it's not a direct sponsorship, he does access what WSO has to offer in terms of electronic meetings and chats online. I have

done WhatsApp with one of my sponsees who is not in town anymore, but he also has another sponsor in another state.

Member response: I have a sponsee in a completely different state. We use the phone. We met once at the Al-Anon International Conference, but we do use the phone extensively. It was a different experience listening to a Fifth Step on the phone. As a sponsor, it was an exercise in really shutting everything else out around me and even closing my eyes so I could really concentrate on what my sponsee was saying, listening and being 100% with her. I would have done that if she was there in person, but it just becomes a little bit distracting when you're at home and you're listening to it on the phone with activity going on around you. It just took that extra step of becoming very present, but it is possible.

Member response:

I have the privilege of sponsoring a woman from Singapore. Modern technology is amazing, and I often speak to her on my Thursday evening which is her Friday morning. We have 14 hours between us. We can text using WhatsApp. We now video chat using FaceTime. She just traveled to New York. We were only a couple hours apart so that was kind of unique. We have chatted when she was in Italy. We met face to face in Vancouver at the International Convention. We reunited in Baltimore at the last International Convention. She did a Fifth Step with me in Baltimore in her hotel room. So you know what? There are just no restrictions if you have the technology.

Question:

What do men's meetings offer you that you don't experience in mixed meetings?

Panelist response (Kyle): I think mostly in the beginning I was seeing so many differences and not as many similarities. The one we go to on the West side is usually about ten or fifteen guys. One of the hardships we have been going through in our relationship is fertility. We have not been able to have kids, and we have been trying for five years. There were a couple of men, not that women don't suffer from the same feelings, but there were a couple of men you know hearing what it would be like to be a dad and wanting to be a dad and all those things. There was a little bit more relatability in the beginning, but now as my program grew and my judgments shrank, I think I've been able to hear answers in any kind of meeting, in any mixed meetings. Another thing, I get a unique and beautiful woman's perspective from the mixed meetings that was also just vitally essential for me in the beginning.

Question:

How has willingness helped your program or changed your experiences with the alcoholic?

Panelist response (Pam): I have several family members that I would consider alcoholic. One of the things that I've learned from this program is how to detach with love and how to set boundaries. It's given me the opportunity to learn how to not give opinions when they are not asked for. One of the things my sponsor suggested is that I ask if my suggestion is wanted. Sometimes it is, but sometimes it's not. The other thing that this has helped me with is to be

more willing to listen, which was something I probably wasn't doing as much of. I could listen more to the members in the program than I could to my family members. I wanted to be chatting more there. I've also learned to make more time for the alcoholic in my home because I am sometimes overextending myself. I have to go back to that and when I do, I talk to my sponsor and she suggests I do more loving acts, especially if I can do them without being found out.

Question:

Have you had a sponsee set boundaries with you?

Panelist response (Mike): Not too often. Sometimes it depends on their work schedule. I have recently had a sponsee say I need to take a break. This sponsee was having a lot of trouble with the spiritual end of the program. Even though he keeps in touch and we talk, the relationship has shifted a bit. I honor that and try not to force solutions. Once again, this person has to work their program the way they need to work it. They know I'm available. If someone says by time or availability, they are setting boundaries for me, I need to honor that. Those are the kinds of boundaries that sponsees have set with me.

Question:

How has your life changed after you started working the Al-Anon program?

Panelist response (Kyle):

It's changed in a lot of ways. Pam just touched on something that makes a lot of sense for me and this question. I learned to love her. I kept getting asked the question, is it you that you are worried about or is it her that you're worried about? If we made a pie chart it was very lopsided of who I was mostly concerned about. A lot of it was just learning to love the alcoholic and not alcoholism. That was one of the most amazing things you guys taught me was to be able to separate the two. It changed everything. It really did.

Question:

What effect do you get from working the Steps and what effect from service?

Panelist response (Pam): For me the Steps have brought me joy and peace and I've learned how to love unconditionally because that is what was done for me. People loved me that way. I learned to be more compassionate and to have less judgement of others. These things still pop up as it's a program of progress not perfection. As far as service is concerned, it's opened me up to examining myself more and be more honest with myself. I realize that I can be able to be accepted for who I am. I don't have to be so worried about self. My self-esteem has grown so much. In service, I've learned how to work the Traditions and Concepts more. I'm just beginning with the Concepts now. I want to share that these things are helping me in my relationships with others in the program. Sometimes things happen where someone might have a resentment about something. I just recently had an experience where I felt that my Higher Power just insulated me, and I didn't feel that other person's anger. It didn't penetrate through like it might have in the past. I was just feeling God's love, and I didn't have to worry

about taking on that person's fears or burdens or whatever they were going through at that time.

Question:

How do we help men, newcomers especially, feel more welcome when there are only women in the group, district, area?

Panelist response (Mike): I think there are several things that can be good. One is, at least at our literature distribution center, we have a specific packet that is for newcomers for men. It's kind of being phased out but we have a couple dozen of those. So, it's good to have those on hand at a meeting if it's a mainly female meeting but you get some new men in. Another is to point out that everybody is welcome. We can all relate. If you feel like you want to try some men's meetings, have a meeting list on hand and say, "Here are where there are some men's meetings," or "I know there are a few other men in mixed meetings." Of course, if there is a man in amongst a majority female meeting maybe to have that male greet along with a female to let them know. There is also a nice pamphlet called *Do You Think She Drinks Too Much*. There's some literature and some pamphlets. You may know someone who you can recommend that they could talk to, on a phone list as well.

Moderator: I have asked Alex to share.

Member share (Alex):

Thanks so much. One of the things that was brought up in the bullet points is considering long distance sponsorship. Somebody had asked about the Zoom meetings as well. I have actually been doing the Zoom meetings with my sponsor and at least one of my sponsees, and it has been absolutely fantastic! My schedule has gotten really, really crazy so it can be difficult sometimes to find a time that works for everyone. I have at least one sponsee that our schedules just keep going like this but finding a time on Zoom is a lot easier than trying to find a time that meets up with everything with travel time and all that stuff. So it's been a really great experience. The other part of that is the phone aspect. I had sponsors in the past where I talked to them on the phone and I will say talking to somebody face to face on Zoom versus on the phone is a very different experience. Much more for the positive, too. I would highly encourage it. Before that, I wouldn't have considered a long-distance sponsor but now more and more, I think I would be very open to that idea.

The other point that I wanted to touch on too was saying goodbye and working things out -- the conflict resolution. My very first sponsor that I had to say goodbye to had their way of doing the Steps. When I came in that is exactly what I needed, and I am so grateful for that. But as I stayed in the program and went to different meetings, I started getting nudges that I wanted to try to work the program with different resources. I talked to my sponsor about that and they didn't have experience with those resources and suggested that maybe I should look somewhere else. So I started looking around and eventually I did have to say goodbye to that sponsor, to try the new resources. I remember being so terrified about that. I reached out to some of the other Al-Anon members and I was talking more about how it was affecting me, not

necessarily the other party. I discussed how I felt about the whole situation and why I was so scared. It was pointed out maybe I was really scared that somebody is going to be mad at me because one of my character defects is people pleasing. The thing is, if I was really working with a sponsor that would have gotten angry at me for that, then they weren't practicing their program very well. I had to recognize that. In the end, I had a fantastic sponsor and they were very understanding. It was just a very positive step forward for me because it taught me how to say goodbye in a healthy way.

Question:

If you do not hear from a sponsee for a week or so, do you call to check in? Also, do you try at all to ask them to call more often?

Panelist response (Mike):

In the beginning, I ask sponsees to call once a week and if I don't hear from them on a regular basis, a lot of times I stop hearing from them at all. And that's their choice. Some folks start the program, they get going for a while, and then they disappear. So in the beginning I don't call as much. As I build a relationship with a sponsee and know more about them and they know more about me, once again sometimes my Higher Power says, "Hey I wonder how Joe is doing? Maybe I should just kind of check in and send a text." Sometimes I will do that then or if I know they're having a tough time. The other part of the question is, if I do know they're having a tough time, I say I want you to call me every time something comes up. Or call me a little more often this week or let's try to get together a little more often. I think it depends on the situation.

Panelist response (Pam):

I am not the type of person to jump on somebody so I just kind of let them go where they are with their program. I do find that sometimes when I'm talking to people, I suggest that maybe calling more regularly or going to more meetings is something you might want to consider doing. That is what I found works for me when I'm having a problem. Then I let them be accountable for themselves.

Member share: Something I learned from the very first person I asked to be my sponsor was they asked me to take home that sponsorship pamphlet *Sponsorship: What's it all About?* They asked me to read it and be sure that that is what I wanted with them. I found that very helpful. I had to change sponsors a few times over the years because the people I have chosen seemed to graduate or go off on hiatus. What I will say about the sponsor I have today is that they are someone who I've known through my entire Al-Anon journey. They've probably been my sponsor for the last five years. I really was attracted to their spirituality. Our lives are very different, but I chose her because I wanted to learn more from her about how she became so spiritual.

Question: Would you be willing to talk about choosing a sponsor?

Member share (Lynn): This has been a wonderful experience this morning. I just want to speak on how I chose a sponsor. I was in the program for a few months and kept hearing the word sponsorship. It seemed like a mysterious relationship to me. I learned a little bit. It should be somebody that had some time in the program and attended meetings regularly and somebody that I felt a connection with. There was somebody in my home group that I did feel that connection with. One day I summoned up the courage after a meeting and asked her if she would agree to be my sponsor. She did. I was so relieved because I was afraid. We arranged to get together and started working the Steps.

I did my first Fourth Step inventory and Fifth Step with her. It was great. We went along for quite some time. We were quite compatible and had regular contact. She was a very kind and compassionate individual as well as a great listener. But as I heard earlier in the program today, she seemed to graduate. After a while I noticed that she wasn't coming to meetings and returning my phone calls. Eventually I had to say goodbye to that relationship because then I was moving along more. I was more attracted to service and I needed more help. It was a process of discernment, I would say. I'm very grateful to her. We still have occasional contact, but she hasn't been to meetings for quite a few years. That's sort of how it was for me. I have a sponsor now that is devoted to the program, works a good program herself, and is a great example to me. We have a strong relationship and I'm in good hands.

Question: Is it important to have a sponsor or a service sponsor or both?

Panelist response (Mike):

I think it is extremely important to have a sponsor. I think it is foundational for the newcomer in terms of meetings, relationship with a Higher Power, and having a sponsor. I didn't even know service sponsors existed until five years ago. I thought, what in the heck is that about? I didn't think it was necessary in the beginning of my program to have a service sponsor because I wasn't doing service. I was working on *me*. But now that I've been more involved in service, I wanted to have that perspective from someone who has had a lot of experience in service so that I understood how it fit into my growth in the program. Right now, I have both a sponsor and a service sponsor, but it's certainly not a requirement.

Panelist response (Pam):

I just wanted to share that I don't have a service sponsor because the sponsor that I have has done service and is involved in service. She is taking me through the Concepts using *Reaching for Personal Freedom*. I do feel like that is something I might explore in the future because I think that there is always room for growth in that area. I would be willing to look at that as something for myself through the guidance of my Higher Power.

Question: Would you take just a couple minutes on choosing a sponsor?

Member response (Anu): It's interesting that you called on me about choosing a sponsor. When I was new in the program, I had a lot of anger issues. I went to these meetings called Basic Meetings. They were going through Steps One, Two, and Three and the basic concepts of

Al-Anon such as detachment and the 3 C's (I cannot control the disease, cure the disease or cause the disease of alcoholism). A couple of experienced members were running those meetings and so I asked one of those who had a problem with anger why she seemed so peaceful now. I thought, oh my gosh, I want what you have. I asked her but things in her life were going kind of chaotic at that moment. She said I'm so sorry I have to be there for my teenage daughter. She's experiencing a lot of hard times with the relapsing alcoholic parent and I can't do that. Being new in the program I thought, Oh no, she rejected me.

I asked another person and that person said, "Well, let's pray about it for a couple weeks." I was like, I don't know what the heck this prayer business is. I didn't know and had a bad concept of God. By the way, I kept asking and she prayed about it for a couple weeks, and she became my first sponsor. What I realized is that she had had a lot of loss in her life, and she had said she didn't know if she had something to give to a newcomer. I came to understand that she was questioning *her* concept of God and whether she had anything to provide to a newcomer. I've moved on from that sponsor. And the other sponsor I selected was based on whether she had something that I wanted to have in my life. My current sponsor who has been my sponsor for ten years now is somebody who has an amazing relationship with her husband. She and her husband couldn't be more different. So given that my husband is very different from me and I want to have the kind of relationship and closeness as we grow older that she has with her husband, I found that that's the person I wanted to go to. I pick sponsors based on them having something I would love to have in my life.