

Arizona Sponsorship Workshop

Thursday, November 7, 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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Marty:

Thank you so much for the invitation. When I was asked to speak, I was not sure I would be a very good part of the program because my sponsorship story is pretty non-traditional. What I found out was that I think all our sponsorships are non-traditional. I consulted my Higher Power and finally said, "Let's do it."

I came to Al-Anon in 2009. I had been living with a man for about two or three years who turned out to be just a raging alcoholic. I have no idea why I made the call. I have no idea how I got a number, but I ended up speaking with a woman who was the GR of the beginner group that met that evening. Within two hours of that phone call, I was at a meeting. I was late because none of us can find our first meeting and I cried through the whole meeting, but that was the beginning of this journey that I've been on for about ten years.

It was a great meeting for me because we studied the first three Steps and we went over and discussed them. There were old-timers and newcomers. It was just a nice, small, cozy group where I could listen and learn; however, there was no talk of sponsorship there. I almost felt like a baby chick and these people were like momma hens, bustling around to help, talking to me, being role models for me, telling me their stories. I felt that I did the first three Steps with this group.

I was afraid of sponsorship. I had heard stories about AA (Alcoholics Anonymous), about people hitting rock bottom. I had heard about rigid programs where you had to call your sponsor every night and confess a bunch of sins, and I felt happy that there was no talk of sponsorship. That meeting allowed me to accept my powerlessness, it allowed me to accept and to turn things over to my Higher Power. And while I was going to that meeting and meeting people who were very much like me, they led me to a Wednesday morning group. We used to meet at 10:30, and at 11:30, a group of us would peel off and go to lunch. I would get to continue to hear their stories about what they had done, and they provided role models for me.

As I approached my Fourth and Fifth Step, I realized the importance of getting a sponsor. One of the things about that was that I had realized during the meetings that when I kept my truth in my head, it was really safe. I could stay in denial, I could stay with my delusions, I could tell

myself I was doing okay. But when I started speaking the truth out loud and started listening my myself, I thought, "Oh, my gosh. What are you saying and what are you doing?"

I knew I needed to find someone because the value of that Fifth Step was going to be to actually say it out loud to someone.... someone I trusted; someone I could be honest with. I asked one of the women there that I didn't know very well, but when she spoke in meetings, she spoke my language. If she spoke ahead of me in the group, she often said what I was getting ready to say. I thought that we had a lot in common and asked her to be my sponsor. She agreed.

Our process was to go to lunch with the crowd and when they left at about 1:00, we would stick around for an hour or two and that was our sponsor meeting. That was our time together and we did that every week for months and talked and talked. She got to know me, and I got to know her. She was really good for me because she didn't push me. She didn't expect me to do anything, she just let me work at my own pace. While we were going through all this, I was working on my Fourth Step inventory. I'm a pretty private person, and I didn't want to be talking about all of that while I was doing it because I was actually working things out in my head as I went along. In fact, I couldn't even write it in the *Blueprint for Progress* book because there wasn't enough room for me. When I wrote something, I would want to go back, change it, fix it and amend it based on what I was learning about myself further into the book.

I ended up doing it on the computer. I would write the question out and type my answer for as long as it took. Then I could go back and forth and fine-tune everything because I would find out later that I had said something pretty delusional in the beginning. I wanted to go back and make sure I got things right so that my truth was there.

She encouraged me to do that and we would talk about the things I would bring to her every week, but at some point, I thought it was time to talk it all out. I had highlighted everything in red everything that I thought was important in the Fourth Step and I had this big printout of all my "stuff". I could thumb through it and pick out all the things I felt were important to talk about with her. She again was good for me because she made no judgments and gave no advice, except to give me some experience that she had, which is what I needed.

We worked along well ... we were friends, we met every week and talked for a couple of hours. Everything was going fine until I got a call one afternoon from a nice police officer who had my boyfriend in the back of his car out on the interstate. He had picked him up for a DUI, the first he had ever had, and he was allowing me to come out and pick up the car and the loaded gun that was in it. I was appalled. I had never experienced anything like this. This was not me, this was not the kind of men I had chosen, and my first call was to my sponsor.

This nice, kind-hearted, soft-spoken woman that I had been talking with for months turned into a ninja warrior. You see cartoons where someone reaches through a phone and grabs somebody by the neck.... she figuratively did that with me. She gave me, up one side and down the other.... "You will not go bail him out, you will not do this, you will not do that, you will not pay this money, you will leave him in jail overnight," and so on. And I thought about what she said, but the police officer was waiting for me, so I decided to be partially compliant.

I went out and picked up the car. It was a good experience for me because I saw him in the back of the police cruiser. That was just a slap upside the head. I carried the gun home. We were not a gun family, so that is something I had not experienced before. I left him in jail overnight. He called me at about two in the morning. I had been speaking with my sponsor throughout the night, and I also spoke with a friend who was an attorney. I said, "I don't want you to help or do anything, but just tell me what I need to know."

I had a pretty good night's sleep that night. When he called me at two in the morning and said, "They're willing to let me out right now if you'll come." I said, "I'm not coming to get you." I don't even know how the words came out of my mouth except the work with my sponsor had given me an awful lot of help. So I had a good night's sleep, woke up in the morning, took a nice long shower, got some breakfast, and then visited the bank. I decided to at least bail him out of jail.

I like to think that I take baby steps. That was a baby step for me because when we got home, I was able to say to him (with my sponsor's help), "Okay, the rest of this is on you. You're a grown man, intelligent, you've made it this far in life, you figure out how to get a lawyer, what you want to do, how you want to plead. This is all yours. I've done my part. I got you out of jail and got you home. The rest of this is on you."

By golly, he stepped up to the plate. He really did start to work. He had not been in AA, not been in any program at all, but he felt he had a lot of control over things. My sponsor and I then kind of upped the game because she said, "Don't think this is going to be the last time you're going to have to deal with something like this." It wasn't too long before the second DUI occurred. He didn't come home one day.... very unusual.... didn't come home through the night. I went to bed. I went to sleep, I got up in the morning, I had my shower and my breakfast. At about noon, he walked in and I said, "Where have you been?" He said, "I got picked up again." And I said, "But you didn't call?" And he said, "I knew you wouldn't pick up." That was a huge step for me. That was the point at which I knew that I could do the rest of the program. The part of me that would have wanted to mother him and manage the situation was gone. I felt the detachment that I had been hearing about in meetings.

At that point, I knew that I had to ask him to leave. Again, with my sponsor, we talked about a script of what I would say to him and how I would say it. We wrote some stuff out and I felt like I had a good handle on it. So one day I just sat down and asked him to leave and he said he would.

I made my plans to move on, but we continued to be in touch. It was like needing to get close to the fire every once in a while. My sponsor would warn me about not going to the movie with him even if we were each paying our own way or not taking his calls, but I felt I kind of knew what I was doing-again partially compliant. Little by little, I realized how he was beginning to manage and manipulate me now that he was going to AA. Since he was going to AA, he felt that we could get back together again. Those were some long discussions I had with her about that.

While my experience was really non-traditional in that I worked the first three Steps with a group of people rather than a sponsor, it was what led me to really know what kind of sponsor I wanted, to not choose someone quickly, and to really feel in my heart what was going to work. There was a time when I felt she had become very punitive with him, that she was expecting me to be very punitive with him. At that point, while we remained friends continuing to speak every week, I did gravitate toward another woman who was a friend who gave me a second opinion on some issues. That was good for me too because by now, I had a bank of knowledge about how I felt things should be and what I should be doing.

There were quite a few things that I realized after I went through that time with my sponsor. By this time, I'm headed into my Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Steps, and now I'm getting ready to leave the area and move across country. She and I prepared me for the time between when I left that state and found new meetings, new people, because I was going to a place where I knew no one. She even helped me move my cats across country. I think it's interesting how sponsors start out sitting down and chatting about Al-Anon and end up with lives that intersect. Her son was out in Arizona, her addicted son, and I was moving to Arizona. We boarded a plane one morning and brought the cats out to Phoenix.

We continue to stay in touch, but I don't use her as a sponsor the way that I use to. We don't have the long chats that we use to but remain friends. I'm a person who thinks that people come together for a reason and move to another situation for a reason....I just feel that I had been so, so lucky to have, first of all, all those people in the beginning group to help me out, land on a sponsor that was so helpful to me, and make the transition away from her coming across country.

I learned so much. I realized that I wasn't in any lock-step program. I was able to take the Steps and walk through them as I could. When I was ready, I moved on to the next one. When I was stuck a little bit, I wallowed for a little while. The work with my sponsor really didn't mirror anything I had heard from anyone else.

I also had an interesting experience in a meeting where the topic was what Step we were on. I got to hear from the thirty or so people that were in the group where they were in the Steps. All these people that I thought had done the Steps two times over had barely even gotten to their Fourth Step. There were people sitting on the Fifth Step, not done. It wasn't a judgmental situation, but a humbling situation to know where people were, where they were comfortable sitting, how they were working their program, and how everyone was so different. I thought I had needed to be like them, where what I really needed was to do my program. My program turned out to be a pretty unique journey for me.

I went to a sponsorship meeting, and I did not realize how often people change sponsors. I was listening to people talk about having two, three, four sponsors and the reasons why they parted. Sometimes for logistical reasons like me, I moved, and sometimes their philosophies didn't mesh, sometimes there was a problem...

I became a sponsor myself for other sponsees, I took my journey and used it for that purpose. I am a pretty laid-back sponsor. I know that I can't take a phone call every night, I can't sit for

hours three or four times a week in crisis situations, but I can be a good sounding board and a good role model for someone. The other day I was laughing with one of my sponsees and I said, "I don't even remember how we came together," and she said, "Oh, I absolutely remember. I was sitting at a meeting and you spoke, and I thought, that is the person for me." It was interesting that she came to me in the same way that I had come to a sponsor. I needed to wait until I felt I had found the person who was right for me. It took me a little longer than most, but it was a good experience for me.

In closing, I would like to say that I've had a wonderful journey and I don't speak often to groups, so it doesn't just roll off my tongue like it does with some people. I had to prepare what I wanted to say, and that's a good process for me too because it helps me get my stuff in order.

I would like to read for you a paragraph out of *Courage to Change* because the very first meeting I went to scared the heck out of me. I was crying, I was unsure, I wanted to argue with everything they talked about. Two of the women in the group who had husbands who were very, very sick in their alcoholism....I guess they decided to just scare the crap out of me in order to get me to come back, but the opposite was true. I was getting ready to say good-bye to all of them, but someone who turned out to be a very good friend read these words from April 26th in *Courage to Change*.

The speaker read from page 117 in *Courage to Change*.

Those words were gold to me. Because she read that, I came back. We never know what it is we're going to say that is going to touch someone. I try to keep that in mind as I sponsor people because something I consider really important might not hit home with them, but something that just comes out of a conversation can sometimes be the most important thing that goes on. Truly, those words were my salvation. I want to thank you for allowing me to be here tonight and to speak with you.

Kathy:

Hi, everybody, I'm Kathy. Thank you very much for asking me to speak tonight. Our instructions were to answer some questions, and I think that in the course of telling my sponsorship story, I will pretty much answer all of them, starting with how do I choose a sponsor? What qualities am I looking for and what are the minimum requirements?

I thought finding a sponsor would be easy. I looked for one right away. I had a list. It wasn't a very long list and it wasn't a very hard list; I didn't think. The things that were on it were: I wanted them to have worked all the Steps, I wanted to feel like they were working a strong program, and I wanted them to be in the program because of a son or a daughter, because I was in the program because of my daughter.

It didn't work out very well. The people who seemed to have worked all the Steps weren't there because of their children, and the people who were there because of their children didn't

seem to have worked all the Steps. What I didn't realize then was that people who were working a good program didn't necessarily talk about the people who got them there. They talked about themselves. I also didn't realize that the principles are not specific to any certain relationship – they are universal applying to all of them.

At any rate, what I realized was that my method of choosing a sponsor wasn't working. I threw out my list and prayed for God to lead me to the person God have me choose. The very next meeting, something someone said rang a little bell in my heart and found out after the meeting that something I said rang a little bell in hers. After the meeting, I said, "This may sound weird, but I think God wants you to be my sponsor." I asked her if she would sponsor me and she said that she would be honored to. She was willing to devote her time and energy to my recovery, if I was willing to do the same.

She had certain expectations of me. One of them was that I attend meetings, and she suggested two to three meetings a week, one of them being an open AA meeting. She said we would set up a weekly call time together, and that we would work the Steps together. If I was doing those things, then she would be my sponsor, so that is what we did.

What didn't occur to me at the time was that I might have expectations, or even know which questions to ask. One of the questions I never thought to ask is, how many people do you sponsor? It turns out that I wasn't the only person who wanted what my sponsor had. At the time I asked her to sponsor me, her program started attracting lots of other members. At the peak, she had 18 sponsees. She worked, had a family, and a generally busy life. As she added sponsees, she said she had to shorten our call time to make time for the new girls, and I thought, "Well what about the ones you already have?" I thought, "Why can't you say no?" - because, of course, it was all about me.

When I finally worked up the nerve to ask those questions, she said she believed that when somebody asked her to sponsor them, God was involved, and she didn't believe in saying no to God. I didn't really get that at the time. I do now, although I also think that there's a limit to how many people one can effectively sponsor.

That kind of rolls into, what if my needs are not being met? Not too long after that, to put it in her own words, my sponsor fell off the beam. One of the qualities I most admire about her is her honesty, and she shared openly about that in meetings. But I really got the feeling that she didn't have time for me. I wasn't sure if she wanted to sponsor me anymore, and I wasn't sure what to do about it. My sponsor was the person I came to when I had questions about relationships with other people, but I didn't know who to talk to when the problems I had were with my sponsor.

I did talk to a couple of long-time members who didn't know my sponsor or didn't know that she was my sponsor. I didn't get a lot of clarity, but I did keep praying about it. About the same time, I started getting messages, the same message from a variety of different sources, and that was "Let it begin with me." If I went to a meeting and pulled a slogan out of a basket, that was

the slogan. I opened my daily reader and there it would be. I found it coming out of my own mouth when talking to one of the women that I sponsor and, at that moment I realized that that was for me. “Let it begin with me” was the answer to my prayer about what to do about my sponsor.

I started asking myself, what kind of sponsee was I? Was I there for my sponsor the way that she had been there for me? And I had to answer, no, I really wasn't. I made a decision to start showing up and be supportive of my sponsor in whatever way I could. When I did our relationship got better.

At the end of that year, when she was sharing during her Al-Anon anniversary, one of the things that she shared was that it was a very difficult year and she almost left the program. The reason she didn't leave the program was because of her sponsees. Every week, they kept calling. I realized I had, in that way, been able to be of service to my sponsor, and give back a little bit of what she had given to me. To me, that's the mystery and the miracle of sponsorship. It really does work both ways. I believe I made the right decisions sticking it out. She eventually did get back on the beam, and we've had a better relationship than we ever had before going through that.

For some people, leaving would have been a spiritual exercise. For me, the way my disease shows up is that when things don't go my way, I leave. I leave relationships, jobs, cities. I move on to other things and other people. For me, the spiritual exercise was sticking it out, and I'm really glad that I did.

Considering long-distance sponsorship, several years ago, I moved a couple of hours north of my sponsor. She has since moved a little farther south from me. It didn't start out that way, but it really has become a long-distance sponsorship. The transition has been interesting because of the way that she works Steps with me. We do work Steps every year, so she has had me work Steps by doing a reading assignment and a writing assignment and then we get together. Some Steps, like the Fourth Step, are fairly long.

As we've been farther apart, and both our lives have changed, it's been harder to do. We're still trying to figure that out. Meanwhile, I got involved in the kind of service that my sponsor didn't have any experience with, and it became increasingly obvious to me that I needed a service sponsor. I didn't bother making a list, I just prayed about it. I knew that when I found the right person, I would know. The only kind of vague idea that I had was that I wanted the person to still be involved in service. I really don't know what God has in store for me or how much farther down this road that God might take me, but I wanted to be sure that my sponsor was far enough ahead that I wasn't going to outgrow that person.

When I finally got the nudge to ask someone to sponsor me, it felt like an ambitious ask. I thought, really God. This is who you want me to ask? But that feeling didn't go away. So I did ask her and she said, well, that was up to God, but she was willing to have a conversation about

it. We had several conversations and we began working through the Concepts together. It's really been an amazing experience.

My service sponsor has a whole different approach from my personal sponsor. Where my personal sponsor was very structured in how we worked together, my service sponsor is very flexible. What literature we use, the order we study the Legacies and how often we talk is up to me. It's my recovery, she told me, and it's my responsibility. We live even farther away, but it's a different method. Instead of reading and writing on my own and then getting together, we're reading the literature together and then discussing it as we go, which works very well by phone. That is really fortunate because, if you think about the service structure in Al-Anon as an upside down pyramid with the groups at the top, as you get deeper into it, the pool of people who have experience in those positions gets smaller. I'm just grateful to be able to have a sponsor.

I'm fortunate that my home group studies the Steps, Traditions, and the Concepts. I have found that studying them with a sponsor has really taken it to a whole different level and given my personal recovery an unexpected boost. I have a new appreciation of the importance of that three-legged stool of our Legacies, Steps, the Traditions, and the Concepts. As my service sponsor has said, relying solely on the Steps is like trying to balance on one leg.

Having a structure in the beginning with my personal sponsor was important because it helped me to develop good habits that aided my recovery. I think it's also important to have this balance with my service sponsor, who reminds me that flexibility is a spiritual principle, which keeps me from getting rigid. I feel like I have had a more balanced and well-rounded program as a result.

The only question I think that I haven't answered is, what if the answer is "no"? That so far has not happened to me. I've been very fortunate., but believe, like both of my sponsors, that God is involved. I have a friend in the program who asked several people before somebody said yes. She believes today that the people she asked were not the right person for her. Those "Nos" were really God directing her toward the person she believes is the right person. She is very happy today that everything worked out the way that it did.

Thanks for letting me share.

Steve:

Thank you for inviting me to do this. It's a new experience for me. I'll start with a little bit of background.

I came to my first Al-Anon meeting in 1998, and it was by mistake. I ended up walking in the wrong door of the courtyard that evening, and they circled the wagons and told me to keep coming back, so I did. I went for a long-time attending meetings off and on. I never had a sponsor, I wasn't really reading the literature, I was just going to meetings as needed, basically. That went on up until about four years ago. There were periods where I would go dark, I

wouldn't attend meetings at all, and then I'd get active again. There was one meeting, a men's group called Mind Your Own Business, that I attended every week for probably three or four years.

About four years ago, things started to progress in the area of my life that was giving me a bigger nudge to come back to Al-Anon. I finally got to a place...my home group, Serenity at 5:30 meets once a week on Tuesday evenings in east Mesa, and I was going to that meeting back when it met in the back of a little recovery store years ago. Looking back at it, I know God was really trying for me. I got a call when that meeting moved out of the recovery store from a member to see if I wanted to start attending again and to make sure I knew where the new meeting location was, so I did, and started attending regularly. After a period of time, I asked one of the members if they would sponsor me and I was ready to.....I knew if I asked someone to sponsor me, I was probably going to have to do something, and I wasn't really sure I wanted to make that next level of commitment, but I did.

This person indicated to me that, because of the friendship that we had established between us, it just didn't seem like a good fit and recommended that I reach out and talk to somebody else, which I did. We met and I asked him to be my sponsor, and he's been sponsoring me since. I think it's important to recognize that he has a sponsor, and I'm to the point now where I've gotten the gift of being able to sponsor some men. I think it's important to have a sponsor and a sponsor that has a sponsor because I'm not a guy that has all the answers. I'm glad that I recognize that. I need a network, when needed, to be able to get outside help.

We started working the Steps. I haven't completed the Steps yet, I'm still making some amends, but I have a pretty good understanding now of the process. I want to make a disclaimer. I don't speak for Al-Anon, and I'm only going to share my own experience. When it says, one of the bullet points here, what are the minimum requirements for a sponsor? I would want to have someone (I hope when someone asks me that they feel this way) that has a good understanding of the Steps. My opinion of that is that the Steps are a road map to get me to a place where I develop a spiritual awakening that I can bring into all my life's problems. I didn't know then when I first had the opportunity to ask someone to sponsor me, but I think that it is quickly unveiled. I wanted a guy that was going to keep me accountable, that was going to keep me between the rails. As we worked the Steps, some of the self-examination unfolds and I start learning more about myself. Control, entitlement, those things that started to show up within me...I wanted to make sure that with the person I chose we were honest and transparent and held me accountable on those things.

Considering long distance sponsorship, it's about 50 miles between where he and I live. I wish I could see him more and spend more face time, but we do meet. Whenever I have completed the Step work assignment, we always make time for one another to meet and go through it.

One of the things that this group does, and I love this, we meet once a month, the whole sponsorship tree, there are about 25 guys total. All the guys that I sponsor I ask to come. My sponsor is there, the other men that he sponsors and their sponsees, and we all meet for dinner once a month and have an informal meeting where we share from Al-Anon literature and talk

about what's going on in our lives. We encourage crosstalk. It's an opportunity to be asked questions that may not be comfortable but that help us further in that self-examination process.

How do I ask someone to sponsor me? Well, I think that's a moving target. I don't know that there is a cookie-cutter answer for that. I just went off the recommendation of someone I really respected and I just trusted God in that. I had no idea where that was going to go. I had never seen this man before. I'd never sat in a meeting with him. I just called him, told him who I was, and that it was recommended that I call him, and could we get together. We did, and that's how that unfolded.

What are my responsibilities in the relationship? One of the lines I really like and ask my guys that I sponsor, "What is willing to go to any length mean to you?" "I don't hire them, and I don't fire them. I'm as interested in their recovery as they are. That's the bottom line. I'm willing to do anything that has been asked of me. If I'm willing to give my time, that's one of the greatest gifts I have to offer.

Service is a big deal in our sponsorship line. We're all asked to have some type of service commitment in our home group. I think that's important to invest in your recovery, be a part of and give back. Those basic little ideas, if you practice them, start to create change within.

As far as expressing my needs, expectations, and boundaries, I don't really like any of that. I don't have any expectations, I don't want to set boundaries in this relationship, and my needs are just to grow as a better husband, father, friend, grandfather-just to be able to uncover and discover so I can have better relationships and just align myself with God. I'm willing to do pretty much anything I've been asked to do. I trust that what I've been asked to do is nothing he wouldn't do. If there's no good reason why I should not do it, I just say "yes." I just get in the car and I say "yes." I expect that of the guys I work with. If they don't want to do that, I don't fire them, I didn't hire them, but sooner or later, if you keep nudging them, they either grow or they go.

All the guys in the sponsorship line and some other guys, we all get together every year around Memorial Day. We all go up to these cabins in Greer and we just have a three-night, four-day weekend. We have one meeting each night around the bonfire and we have one sponsorship line meeting during the weekend. Other than that, it's just fun and fellowship.

I think it's important to recognize having fun. If I'm just checking days on the calendar, it's hard to really appreciate and stay in this thing and do all the things that we're asked to do. The bottom line is to have a God of my understanding that will help solve all my problems and have a quality of life that I wasn't able to have before. I really appreciate that these guys take the time to organize that and all I have to do is show up. We break bread together every day during that weekend, and it's a great way of getting closer with one another.

Some of the mechanics, call times and going to an open AA meeting once a week and all those other things, I don't know that there's anywhere in the literature that says to do all those things specifically. Most of them are good ideas and accountability is a big plus in the growth that I

get to have working through the Steps. There's a good friend of mine that passed away not too long ago, and one of the things he shared that always stuck with me.... he says that you can't fake showing up.

Questions:

Question: Were you able to talk with your sponsor about the things you disagreed with about her punitive attitude about your boyfriend?

Panelist response (Marty): Actually, we didn't talk about it. It's something that kind of evolved and I thought at the time that it had more to do with her relationship with her son. I just felt it was something I needed to let go. I felt like I was being judgmental about it and I needed to let it play itself out. It did, and things were fine after that, but it was a good thing for me to speak to another person, honestly. It was good for me to get a second opinion. I didn't feel like I was betraying her trust at all. We were all mutual friends and I was honest about why I was going to this second person. It worked out fine. Sometimes those situations work out because you approach them the right way or by luck. I feel that I need to move in the direction that I'm being pushed. God was moving me in a different direction at that time, and that's where I went, and it worked out well for me.

Question: When talking or meeting with your sponsor, did you ever feel like she was not totally present since she had so much going on in her life?

Panelist response (Kathy): I don't know that I didn't feel that she wasn't present. I felt like she didn't want to be there, like she didn't want to answer the phone is how it felt to me. I guess maybe her responses to me were more short, quick or less thoughtful, but I also realized that your sponsor is not always available. Sometimes things will come up and I'll need to talk to somebody, and she just isn't available because she's busy or she's in a meeting or working, and so what I've learned is that she's just not supposed to be. I have other people that I can call and so during this time in my life I was able to get my needs met in another way while I was trying to figure out what to do.

One of the things that we're taught is when in doubt, don't. While I was waiting for guidance from my Higher Power, that's what I did. I kept calling but I didn't really have the expectation of much from her and I just got those needs met elsewhere.

Question: What's the most important thing each of you can tell us about choosing the right sponsor?

Panelist response (Kathy): For me, the most important thing was just to involve my Higher Power. With both of my sponsors, it was just a matter of praying and feeling that little intuition inside that said this is the right person. For me, that's really everything.

Panelist response (Marty): The important part for me was to be patient, and I think that follows along with what Kathy just said. I am a person who jumps into things full throttle. It was unusual for me not to buy every piece of Al-Anon literature, get a sponsor, and then devote my life to getting better. I took it slow and I let things unfold. I felt that worked well for me

because I needed to learn an awful lot before I could choose a good sponsor. One example of me jumping into it was that when I bought *Courage to Change*, I didn't bother reading daily readings. I started right at the beginning and went through. I wanted to just grab everything I could. At the same time, going to my beginner's meeting and going to this Wednesday morning meeting (and by the way, that meeting had about 40 people in it every day, and every single person spoke at every meeting), and that's where I found my sponsor. I got to hear everyone, and I got to choose who I felt was speaking my language.

Panelist response (Steve): For me- I didn't know this when I made that decision and got that opportunity to make that choice- so much is just a rear-view mirror, it just turned out. I think this in another area where God just shows up if we are just willing and participate. His story was so similar to mine-a lot of the things that I had struggled to do, to let go of, to get out of the way to let this person I loved so much find their bottom. It was very helpful to be told by someone based on their experience to do things that I was not comfortable doing. It helped me trust the process a lot more knowing that he walked through so many similar situations and stories before he was asking me to do it.

Question: One of the questions on the list is how do I ask someone to sponsor me and what if the answer is no? Have any of you experienced asking someone to be your sponsor and they said no?

Panelist response (Steve): Well, I told you the person I asked said no and referred me to the man that is my current sponsor and has been since the day I asked him. I think it's God showing up. I'm forever grateful that it worked out the way that it did. If there's a part of it that feels that I'm taking it personal, I need to look at what's going on there. Is that my own pride and ego? My feelings are hurt, is it because I had an expectation? Why is it that I'm not comfortable with somebody else's right to have the decision they need to make?

Panelist response (Marty): I have not had the experience of being told no, but I've had the experience of having to say no. That's another thing to accept, that I can't be everything to everyone. I can't always fill the void that they need filled. I do sit down with them and talk. We talk about expectations and about time commitment. Generally, I don't really have to say no. It's that I can help people for a little while - give me a call anytime, and do you have questions about anything? Usually, it's just a gradual movement away because obviously we're not right for each other at the time. I think being able to accept no is one thing and being able to say it is also important.

Panelist response (Kathy): I have not had the experience of somebody saying no to me, and I have never said no to anybody who's asked me to sponsor them. As Marty said, what I do is I have a conversation about what sponsorship looks like for me, how I sponsor people, because I think that having the right sponsor is important. The way I do it is not going to be right for everybody. I am changing a little bit now with my service sponsor. Her emphasis on flexibility is changing the way that I sponsor people. My sponsor has always felt that you don't say no, and that's what she passed along to me. I am clear about how I sponsor because I want to make sure that there's a good fit. I ask people to pray about it for a week. I pray about it for a week,

and then we come back together and have a conversation and see if this is for them- sometimes it is, and sometimes it's not.

Member share: I came to Al-Anon eleven years ago and at that time, we had no sponsors yet, but there was one lady that I liked a lot and I wanted what she had. One meeting she said that she is going to have a sponsor and then she was going to be available. Immediately after the meeting, I asked her if she could be my sponsor. She said yes, but I had to wait, and I was ready to wait. After a year, she called me on a sunny winter day and told me she could start to do the Steps. I was very excited. I was ready to do everything, and I did. I remember a couple of times when I didn't call her because I was sick or something, but I was very dedicated. When I did the Steps, I started to look for a sponsee. I was being open, but I couldn't do it well. I don't know why. Then some time ago this year, I was praying to God. I was really, really asking for a sponsee. In one meeting, I was sitting in my home group and there was a girl who was looking for a sponsor, and I was sitting in a meeting and praying to my Higher Power and saying, "I want this girl to be my sponsor." The same evening, she asked me to be her sponsor and it was just like, Wow! My Higher Power worked fast and I'm very grateful for that because it helps me a lot. I'm looking for answers in literature and asking my friends in Al-Anon how to do it, and of course my sponsor. I really love it.

Question: Steve, you said, "I am as interested as my sponsee." How does that look? How do you match that?

Panelist response (Steve): I think what I said was that I'm as interested in your recovery as you are. I don't mean to be condescending in saying that. What I mean is that if we agree to go to so many meetings together a month or what a call time looks like and if that participation diminishes, I'm not going to fire somebody or tell them I can't sponsor them anymore. However, I'm not going to chase them and let them know that he's not holding up his part either. I'll go to the meetings that I go to because I love going. If he says he's going to be there and isn't, then that's a choice he's making. I don't mean it in an "I don't care" way. I'm just as interested as you are and hopefully, you're very interested, because I'd like to go on this journey together.

Question: Would anyone like to share on their sponsorship relationship?

Member share: I had only been in a few months, but I decided that I wanted to find out about sponsorship because I felt I really needed the support of another person. The first person I asked to sponsor me said no, but she explained to me why. She had a suggestion for me. She said that she has not finished all the Steps, and she felt it was the recommendation of Al-Anon that sponsors have the experience of going through all the Steps at least once. We talked and this person had a recommendation of someone that she planned to ask to be her sponsor. I did ask this person to be my sponsor and she sounded like she was willing, but she explained that I had a responsibility being a sponsee to work hard. She made suggestions that helped me along. She went with me to an AA meeting. She suggested that I read the big book section so that we could understand the alcoholic characteristics a little bit more before I began my sponsee experience, and I am very happy with my sponsor. She also said that if I didn't feel like as we

continued that this was working, that she would have other suggestions for me to move to a different sponsor. I'm working hard and I'm on Step Three. I thought I was done with Step Three and then she contacted me today and said no, that we have some other things to do in Step Three before we move on. I feel comfortable and she's made me feel comfortable. I haven't moved as fast as I thought I would which is okay because my understanding of a Higher Power has been forming a little deeper.

Member share: I met my sponsor when she lived here in Tucson where I live and asked her to be my sponsor. A couple of years later, she called me up one night and said that she was moving to California with her job. The first thought that popped into my head was that I was going to leave Al-Anon. Where did that thought come from? It turned out to be a good thing for me because I realized that I had done with her what I do with other people. I used her as my connection to the program, to my group of friends that I had, and she was my ticket in. I didn't know how to step into the circle by myself. She left it up to me as to whether I wanted to continue working with her or find another sponsor. There was no way I was going to tell another person my Fourth Step, I'd already done that, and I chose to keep working with her. I did learn how to step into the circle on my own which is a very good experience. It's been a long time. We've kept up that relationship. I call her faithfully every Tuesday night. When I do Step work, I'll write it out and mail the copy to her so she can read it along with me. I make sure that we see each other twice a year. I go over there and do book study with her, but I find that I really do have to work at maintaining the relationship since there is that distance and we don't see each other at meetings. I've got to make that call and keep it going. That's not something that I'm used to doing in my life, not used to keeping up relationships. I learned to do that through my relationship with her and it's worked for me.

Member share: My story is going to be a little different from some that you've heard tonight. I was in a program for several months. I was in search of a sponsor. I had been taught that a guy should have a guy sponsor and a woman should have a woman sponsor, and I was trying to accept that. As I went to meetings, I was looking at the men who were present I didn't know about any of them. We'd kill each other. The fun part was I had a service sponsor who suggested that I go to a different meeting and she thought that there was a gentleman there and we could connect. So I did, and it turned out to be a good connection. It turned out to be an opportunity. After about three or four weeks of listening to him talk in the meetings, I finally got brave enough to ask him to be my sponsor.

Life went along very well. We started working the Steps. He had this thing where if we're going to work the Steps, we're going to work them my way and I said, I can do this. As we were going along, some people were trying to get me to step up to be a chair for a convention. First, I had attended a convention, but I had never worked a convention. To be a chair, I thought, was pushing the envelope. But my sponsor stepped up to be the chair, and then he told me in one of the meetings that he volunteered to be a chair if I would be a co-chair with him. My thinking is, what better way to do service and work side-by-side with your sponsor, so I bit. We went to several meetings and about six months later, he decided that he got religion, was going to go be a minister and didn't need Al-Anon anymore. He sent a blast email out to everybody that we knew and said that I had problems and a friend of mine had problems. The email was

devastating, and the fact that it went out, but I started thinking and I thought, that's his perception. As I overcame that, I learned from the others that they saw him for what he was. When you're in this program for a while people get a feel for you, they get to understand you, they get to know you. This is a very forgiving program which is also great.

When the chair is not available, the co-chair becomes the chair. Guess who became the chair? I survived it. I got through it. It was a very good convention. I think our head count was like 343 people at the convention at one time. We were full, and we got snow. We were in Myrtle Beach and we got snow on Saturday night, so it was a pretty exciting time. When my sponsor went AWOL, my service sponsor stepped up and he encouraged me. It took a long time before I was ready to be a sponsor. It was tough. I'm a sponsor now, and I agree with several of the others. My message is I'll put into it as much as you put into it. I'm going to encourage it, but I've got one right now that was doing awesome. We had gone through to Step Four. I work the Steps horizontally with my sponsees. I do Step One, Tradition One, and Concept One. Then I go to 2, and then to 3. We were at Step Four and he's been missing now for a couple of months. I sent him a text, and he responded, "yeah, we need to get back together." Apparently, his life is busier than his recovery is. That's his doing, but I'm not going to lose sleep over it. I'm not going to grovel and try to get him there. That's not what a sponsor is. A sponsor is being honest. If you do the *Blueprint for Progress*, the first thing is honesty. That's probably the key to this program either as a sponsee or as a sponsor, being honest with ourselves and being honest with people we're sponsoring. I carry these lessons with me, and I swore that if the shoe was ever on my foot, I wouldn't do it the same way. I can say that I lived up to that.

Member share: I just wanted to share that my first sponsor was of no help, my second sponsor exhibited behavior similar to the person for whom I came into the program, so I stopped that. I asked maybe three or four people and they all said no. Then there was someone who was in a meeting I was in, and who offered to be my temporary sponsor. It was no one I would ever have asked to be my sponsor. We are as different as night and day, and it has been a wonderful relationship. The message that I would want to put out there to anyone who is listening that does not have a sponsor yet is that you just never know who can come in-be open to it.