

## Arizona Sponsorship Workshop

Saturday, September 21, 2019

### Segment One - The purpose of having a sponsor and why do I need a sponsor?

Thursday, September 5, 7-8:30 pm, and Saturday, September 21, 10-11:30 am

- How can a sponsor help?
- What does a sponsor do/not do?
- How do I make a commitment to myself?
- How can I become more accountable?

#### 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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#### **Michele:**

So how can a sponsor help? That was a big question for me. I did not think a sponsor could help me for a long time. I thought my problem was unique and that there was no way that a sponsor could help. I went to meetings pretty regularly and, over and over again, I would hear, “I did this with my sponsor,” and “I talked to my sponsor about this.” I started thinking maybe it wasn’t a bad idea to have a sponsor. I didn’t think I needed one because I didn’t think I was

the one that had a problem. The more I went to Al-Anon, the more I discovered that I had been affected by the disease and was actually living in the disease of alcoholism at the time.

Everything that was said in the meetings made sense to me very quickly. I would vow to change my attitude and my behavior when I went home. As soon as I got home, I was right back to where I was. I could see that my behaviors and my attitude weren't changing at all. I felt something missing. When the pain, the grief, and the misery get to be enough, you can share only so much in meetings. You can't get into details with just a share in your meetings. I needed somebody that I could talk to on a regular basis. That started my quest for a sponsor. I made that commitment. I had to get miserable enough to surrender to that. That was my first surrender to a power greater than myself, the sponsor. I made a commitment that what my sponsor told me to do, I would do. I looked around for a while, but it turned out my sponsor had been sitting by my side for quite a while. And she is the perfect sponsor for me.

How can a sponsor help? I can tell you how a sponsor can help which is a segue right into what does a sponsor do/not do. A sponsor helps me through a problem that I'm struggling with on a personal level but that I don't feel like I can discuss in a meeting. The problem at the time was living with active alcoholism, but life goes on. As things change, all kinds of problems come and go. To have somebody that knows, that's been with me for a long period of time, that I trust, that knows my character defects and my abilities when I share, she can help me through those things.

When I'm struggling with something, she can see the problem from a different perspective. She can see it from a *true* perspective where *my* perspective is often clouded by emotion. When there's family involved, I am very much enmeshed. I am very close to the problem. My sponsor, on the other hand, takes an overall look at what's going on. She's been with me for a long time and can see things clearly and offer me solutions. I used to think my sponsor -- well, I actually still do think my sponsor -- has a photographic memory. I would be complaining about something, and she would come up with a reading from our conference approved daily readers that fits that exact problem perfectly. I thought, *How does she do that? I'll never be able to do that*, but she taught me well. My Higher Power and her Higher Power drive us and that just happens. She'll come up with a reading that can help me or a writing assignment. She gently encourages me to find my own solutions to problems. To back up a little bit.

Why didn't I get a sponsor for a long time? If I'm being really honest with myself, I didn't want someone to tell me what to do. Imagine! Sponsors don't tell you what to do, or at least mine doesn't. That's my experience. She helps me to find my own way. She gently guides me through the Steps. She gently guides me through the Principles. She encourages me. I don't know what I did without her. She's like my GPS. I don't know how I got anywhere in my car without GPS. It usually took me two to three hours to get to a half hour place because I'm directionally challenged in all ways, apparently.

My sponsor doesn't control my recovery. That is up to me. My recovery is my responsibility, and that was clear to me from the get go. She doesn't and cannot push, pull, or drag me into

recovery. She can help me through the Steps, through the Principles, but how much I put into my own recovery, that's up to me.

She doesn't tell me what to do in any given situation. She guides me to my own solutions. She told me early on that if I tell someone what to do and they take that advice, then I own the outcome. That's pretty much the same way with sponsorship. If a sponsor tells a sponsee what to do, then they own the outcome, be it good, bad, or ugly. When I say that she guides me to a solution, she guides me through the Principles, through the Steps, and through writings, and that's how I come to my own solution. There is also prayer and meditation, which are part of the Steps. She doesn't clean my house, she doesn't walk my dogs, she doesn't pay my bills. Dang it! She does not let me wallow in misery very long. Not to say that she isn't compassionate. She is so compassionate.

For me to get stuck in misery and pain, that's not moving forward. She will offer solutions, but it is up to me to take the solution. It's my recovery. I'm totally responsible for it. I heard once in a speaker meeting that a person was struggling to find a sponsor, and she was saying, "I just need to find the best sponsor because my problem is so unique. I just need the best one." And the lady sitting next to her said, "Well, why don't you focus on being the best sponsee that you can be?" That is really true in recovery. If I focus on myself, my recovery, and being the best sponsee I can be, my sponsor will naturally be the best sponsor.

The next question is about a commitment to myself. I surrendered. I did make that commitment to myself. I got to that commitment level through being happy, joyous, and free. I got there through pain, misery, and despair. That's how I grow. I was powerless. My decisions had gotten me to where I was. I was truly open and willing to listen to someone else. That was really the beginning of my growth. One of the commitments I made to myself is I would always be honest to my sponsor. I felt like my Higher Power guided me to this person, and I would be totally honest with her. I know that if I am not, she cannot help me. Without honesty and trust, I don't give her all of the tools that she needs to help me in recovery. So that was the big thing.

What a sponsor doesn't do. She doesn't gossip. She doesn't talk about my problems to others. I know that because she sponsors other women that I know. She never talks about their problems, even though in the beginning, I tried to kind of whittle out how they were doing. I know now that if I want to talk to somebody about their problems, I should talk to them. Who knew? Based on that, I also know that my sponsor would not talk about my issues. That trust has been forged. I know she loves me unconditionally.

Being accountable? Well, when I made my first call, my sponsor had said, "Well, these are some guidelines that we need to work together so that I can help you." One of them was a weekly phone call. Now, that sounds pretty easy, right? At the same time, same day, every week, I'm supposed to call her. That just went to show me how undisciplined I truly was. That was my first commitment to myself, making that time with my sponsor a priority. In doing that, I was making my recovery a priority, which it still is to this day. I go to meetings that I've

committed to, do the work, work the Steps. She never pushes me about how fast or slow I'm going. All of the things that my sponsor and I have discussed are all obedience to the unenforceable. She does not sit beside me every step of the way to see that I do things through the Principles and go to the meetings that I'm supposed to go. What I do know is that when I go and make the commitments that I've made to myself, I get recovery. I feel better and things get better at home and in my relationships.

Despite my initial reluctance to getting a sponsor, today I don't know what I would do without one. I am learning to make a commitment to doing things in a different way and change my behavior. The only way I think I could have done it is to listen to someone else. Someone else's perspective. Just an example is that I was in a crisis. This is the first time I had ever done something different than I'd ever done before. My alcoholic loved one was in a motel and had been drinking and drugging for maybe nine or ten days. This time, I actually knew the hotel my loved one was at and I could go rescue her. I knew I had done that so many times in the past. That urge was almost overwhelming, an obsession, really. What I did instead was to call my sponsor. She very gently said, "If you do that, what will be different?" I probably had already heard those words, but I couldn't apply them in my life until that moment. I prayed at that point. I didn't go that night. And the next day, my alcoholic loved one got themselves in recovery. They're still there today. The person that got me into recovery, pushed me through the doors of Al-Anon, is sober now. I don't mean to claim that my recovery has anything to do with someone else's recovery, but I did notice as I was celebrating my anniversary that my loved one started getting recovery when I got a sponsor, even though I had been going to Al-Anon for four years prior to that. I don't know what that means, but I thought it was very interesting.

**Nina:**

Hi, I am Nina. I've been in Al-Anon for a little over three years now. My story is different and yet the same. My alcoholic drank in secret and had other addictions. When it came to the forefront, I think everything that I believed was real about my life just fell apart. When I walked in, I guess I had the gift of desperation. I'm not sure I thought it was a gift at that point. When I look back, I'm really happy that I was that desperate because it made me stay in the seat and listen. There was a part of me that believed because I didn't pour out alcohol, I didn't manage anyone's drinking, that I really wasn't that affected. But with the shares and everything, it was just too much like my life to not realize that I was affected, whether I knew it or not. My life was really unmanageable.

I started having sponsorship a month in. I'm grateful because my sponsor actually approached me. It was very gentle. It wasn't in a pushing way. She just offered if I was interested. At that point, with everything feeling like it was coming undone, I felt I had to do something to center myself. I really had no other support outside of the group because I didn't think anyone could really understand. Also, it was just difficult to talk to my family about it. It seemed like such a private issue that no one could really totally and completely understand the perspective I had, the way I had seen it in the Al-Anon meetings.

What has my sponsor helped me with? I think one of the biggest things is to be honest with myself. I appreciated when we first met that she set some ground rules. One of them was that if this doesn't work out, it's okay. You can find someone else. I think just the pressure of not having to feel this desperate need to have it work or else I was going to be an epic failure. These are things I fear in relationships. She gave me that willingness to be in it without all the pressure. I did appreciate that a lot.

The main thing she gave me was the gift to be honest with myself. A lot of that was working through the Step work, but also, when I brought up problems, the gentle way in which she questioned my perspective, what my motivations were, the real truth to what I was feeling. A lot of the times, I brought her superficial things, and then three or four layers underneath that was really the real deal about what my issue was with those problems. A lot of it stemmed from fear, lack of control, and failure. She could offer me a different perspective, a very healthy perspective, because she was three or four degrees away from my problem. She could, through the Step work, really understand and get to know me, seeing the lens at which I looked at my life, which was very limited because it was just my opinion and no one else's.

I was very untrusting. I did not share personal things with a lot of people. I could listen to their stuff, but I did not reciprocate. Everything about alcoholism and addiction taught me that it wasn't safe to. Yet I still had this need to want to feel connected to someone. So that's what she was for me. She taught me how to trust again. I really appreciate that. That really kept me open in a place where I knew I was at a fork in the road where I'd either be really bitter and angry about the things that happened to me or I can learn something from this. She can show me a healthier way when I am in a place in which I feel like I'm a victim and a martyr. I've always felt like my situation trapped me, and she could offer more choices. I may not like them, but I had a lot more choices usually than I knew I had. It's funny. I was meditating this morning, and I almost had to cry because no one knows me the way she does -- not my family, not my siblings, not my friends, not my parents. Through the work on the Steps, she really gave me a place where she could hear all the good, the bad, and the ugly, and she accepted me. When she can do that, I could learn to accept myself and love myself a lot better.

In regards to the question of what she is and what she isn't, I did appreciate she never acted like my Higher Power. That was really important. I didn't like that initially; I will be honest about that. I had to learn to take responsibility for myself, the actions, and the things in my life. She was not there to make my hard choices for me, as much as I didn't like that, because that was rolled up in my perfectionism and my fear of screwing up my life anymore. I needed someone to take that on for me, and she didn't. She really listened, gave me empathy, and walked me through it. I'm really grateful for that.

She still continues to do that for me, and I feel a lot stronger being able to make choices for myself with her guidance than I did in the beginning. I appreciate that she never gave me her opinion or advice. She always pointed me back to my Higher Power with the Step work and working through problems. Again, sometimes I didn't appreciate that because I just wanted someone to listen to me. Part of that was making me gain a relationship with my Higher

Power. I'm grateful. The gift I got in this program was being able to get enough direction to make that connection myself. That has really been a source of strength in my recovery. I know she's not a dumping ground for my problems. She is not a very willing guest in the pity parties I throw for myself. She gives me the space to hear me out, but it gets constructive pretty quickly. She will say, "Let's work the Steps on this problem." And there's always a really great reward and an epiphany with that.

I think starting the Step work was probably my first commitment to myself. I would say initially it was a rescue operation because I just needed something to center myself. I knew when I finally decided I wanted a sponsor I would tell the truth about everything, whether I wanted her to know it or not. That has really reaped a lot of rewards for me because she knows me, she sees me, she sees all of it. She can give me guidance based on that. I had to be honest with my anger, with my grief, and with my pain. She helped me to be honest with the part I played in all this because there's a lot of me that didn't want to take ownership for a lot of what happened in this relationship. I had to be honest about my motivations for my choices. At times, my motivations were very self-serving or I wanted to avoid conflict. I operated on autopilot for a really long time, making decisions and reactions based from a place of, honestly, a lot of fear. I was making decisions about what I thought would make *them* happy or what I thought would make them like or accept me.

Another commitment is to battle complacency. We had an Al-Anon meeting on that. I see it as my biggest battle. I have to make the commitment to set aside time to speak with my sponsor, do my Step work, go to meetings, do my inventory, do my prayers, do my resentment prayers, which has really walked me through a lot of recent irritability and stress in some of the situations in my life. And also, I know committing myself in and participating in service makes me stay.

And how does it keep me accountable to myself? Not more accountable to *her* but accountable really to *me*. I use her to stay accountable to myself, running through my issues, making sure if I need to make amends. Questioning that is part mine because a lot of times I can't see that as clearly without her guidance. Learning through her to know how to get my needs met because I could not reach out for help. I wanted to do this by myself, but I realized that I could find a way and find people who could help me and to ask for what I need. There were always people who would show up for me that way in this program. She did. Several people in the program did. I'm so grateful for that.

The reality is that when I first came here, I thought I didn't have time for this. I have a job, I have kids, I have this crisis, and I have this and this going on. How am I going to fit all this extra work in? What I found here, the peace, the strength, and the support I have, is so important to me. I just can't afford to lose it. It will affect my job, my kids, and my relationships with everybody else if I lose it. The only person I realized that could take it away is me if I choose not to do this work and use my sponsor as a resource or do the Step work. I'm very grateful and very grateful I was asked to do this. I love my sponsor. She's been such an amazing support; an amazing person. She's very kind and humble. She is a blessing in my life.

**Elisabeth:**

When I was new to Al-Anon, I came in knowing that I was not trustworthy. My life was full of people I couldn't trust because I couldn't be trusted to choose people. I was choosing all of these untrustworthy people. That's kind of where I was coming from. I thought sponsorship was a horrible idea. I would have to pick somebody that I could trust, and I already knew how that went. It never went well. It took me a little while to have an actual sponsor. I recognized pretty quickly though that it looks like you can do things alone, it looks like you can read the literature and figure out the Steps, but here's always a point where I would say "I don't get this."

I didn't try to do early recovery alone. I just want to say that. I did have a friend that I called. She had a sponsor and she shared with me and learned about sponsorship that way. I learned that because she would just say, "Although I had a similar problem, my sponsor suggested that I tried this." And I would say, "Did you try it?" And she would say, "Of course," and I would say "Did it work?" Sometimes she had to think about it. Did it work? Yes, it usually had worked. So I learned about the sharing that way, about having advice. With her, I learned to trust enough to be able to have a sponsor. When I got my sponsor, she was my sponsor for fourteen years. I've only just made a change to a different sponsor.

She helped me in ways that I hadn't anticipated. I had guidance telling me to get a sponsor, and so I got one. And then on our first call, she said, "What did you want to do?" and I said, "I have no idea. I have no idea, because I don't know, you know?" So, we started on Steps again. The thing that I got from her was she re-taught me how to have a normal conversation with other people. I was very isolated. I was very in my head, and all of my stories were very detailed and very long. I think they call that "Al-Anon and on and on." She would interrupt me halfway through and talk about herself, and it was just annoying. Then I realized (it took me a couple of years to realize), that that's how I learned how. I've rejoined having a conversation with another person; it's a two-way relationship. She's helping me connect the program to my everyday life. She's getting to know me; she's helping me through the Steps in a different way than I had done.

She also taught me things about living that I had forgotten while living closely with the disease of alcoholism. I'm very grateful for that. One of the things I realized early in our relationship was that I had gotten hard with my life, the knock-on-wood kind of hard because things were hard. I was in hard circumstances. I was with other hard people and I had become hard, and my sponsor was soft. She would be soft when I expected hard because that was all I had in my life at the time. She reminded me about gentle, which was something I had lost.

What does a sponsor do or not do? She was reliably there. We had regular conferences. I didn't get my first sponsor until I had about four years. She actually gave me my four-year chip. Three and a half years before she was my sponsor, I already had learned a lot that was very useful and my life was already changing. She didn't come in and tell me what I was doing

wrong. She hardly ever even suggested maybe doing it differently unless I noticed that I was not getting good results. She left those for me to notice.

I wanted to be sure to include while I'm talking, because these questions are actually easier for me to answer about a service sponsor, that I did for a time have a separate service sponsor that helped me with service work. I was a District Representative in a District that had a lot of conflict and dominance going on, and I had no idea how to handle it. I was not handling it well. My District meetings were horrible.

My service sponsor knew what I could change. She knew what I could change because what I wanted was other people to change. I didn't know I needed to change. I was at that point of willing to make changes, but I had no idea what changes to make. Usually my problem in recovery is that I know I need to change *me*, but I don't know how or what to do. I used to hear "opposite action." I don't even always know what the opposite is. Take the opposite. What is the opposite of what I want? I don't know; there is no opposite. I only see one option. So both sponsors have always given me other options. Look, there is another way to do that.

When I got into recovery, the commitment that I made to myself was to do whatever it took to heal. What that has meant in recovery is doing a lot of things that I don't understand, that I don't want to do, and that I think are stupid but are getting results. I don't judge things like the way that I did in the beginning. In the beginning, everything I heard was a dumb idea, and that was an awful thing to have to do. It was a lot of work. A lot of those things have gotten a whole lot easier. Today, what a sponsor does for me is remind me that, by the way, this little tool over here still works on that situation because, when I'm in a situation, I just don't see it clearly. I could tell five other people, "Oh, how important is it?" but am I going to think that when I'm in the middle of something? No, I'm not. I need to hear it from a sponsor or from another recovery friend.

I think that accountability has also been important, that somebody else knows what my commitment to myself is. I've agreed to do whatever it takes to heal, but I need to identify what that is. For me, that is a certain number of meetings a week, it is doing Step work, it is being of service in some way, it is doing things like this, participating when I'm asked to participate. All of those things are part of my commitment to heal; do what it takes to heal from a lifetime of alcoholism. Nothing is holding me accountable to that unless I've shared it with someone, so my sponsor always knows.

I always know when I sponsor people what the baseline thing is that I need to make sure that I'm doing. When I changed sponsors recently, all she did was ask me about my current program because she had no idea about it. She was just asking for information and, as I was answering her, I was thinking, "Oh my, I'm not doing as well as I thought I was doing, I need to... Oh, dear, I dropped that. And oh my, I dropped that." She wasn't even trying to hold me accountable. She was just asking.



I think that's the other really important thing about sponsorship in this program. We have a framework that we're working from and that we're working on. It's a common framework. I can count on her to return me to the same place every time. None of the three sponsors have given me different suggestions for the same problem, different solutions for the same problem. The solution is always recovery. The aspect of recovery might vary with whatever the problem is. My sponsors can always help me sort out which principle to apply to which problem and at what time. I'm not always really good at knowing those things. It's extremely helpful if I want to live a spiritual life and if I want to have the serenity and the happiness that I have found, the contentment and acceptance, to learn how to just be okay in a lot of different circumstances that I know.

Fifteen years ago, I would not have been okay. If I want to continue that, I just need to stay connected. I once heard a longtimer at a meeting say, "Well, you know, I forget I'm human and I forget these things." At the time, when everything I learned was so new and so startling and so big, I remember just looking at her and thinking, "How in the world do you forget these lessons? How do you forget these things?" Well, because they start working, you get used to it. It gets easier. Complacency is real. It's very easy to think, well, I think I'm doing okay. Then a new sponsor asks how many meetings are you going to? I'm like, oh, seventy-five, that was a good answer, and I know it's not a good answer. If I'm going to be honest with a sponsor, then I need to be honest. I'm only going to get as much recovery as I can be honest.

My life is only going to get better to the extent that I can own whatever is going on. Even if I'm not an active contributor to a problem, my responses and reactions to that problem, whether I apply program or not, are still all on me. In those moments when I'm not thinking sanely, I don't find the sane solution. I just have to recognize I may not be thinking sanely now. I can contact my sponsor and get suggestions, thoughts, or reminders.

I had someone tell me one time, "Well, this time of month, you usually have this problem." Oh, I hadn't even considered that as a factor. They have the big picture in the background. I'm finding that one of the challenging things about changing sponsors is that my new sponsor doesn't have all that history. It's my fourteen year sponsor who does. It's building a new relationship. It's doing it from a different perspective of not being new and not being untrusting. I'm a lot more open now than I was to begin with. It's interesting developing the relationship at a different point in recovery than from being brand new. In any case, I highly recommend having a sponsor.

**Question:** Have you ever had conflict with your sponsor?

**Panelist response (Michele):** Oh, we go at it like cats and dogs. Some of the suggestions that my sponsor would give me, I didn't know at the time why it had anything to do with any solution. It didn't make sense to me but, because of that commitment I had made to myself, I said, "Well, okay, I'll just do whatever. You know, I'll do it." It was hard. Some of the things were very difficult in the beginning. In hindsight, I understand that it did make sense. So actual conflict, I don't think we've had actual conflict. My recovery is my responsibility; she can only

share what she thinks best or suggest or guide me to a solution. She can also point out the things I can change and the things I cannot. That is sometimes a gray area for me and I don't want to hear it, but it's true. So yeah, I don't think I've had a conflict.

**Question:** Is it helpful to have a sponsor with a similar situation as you do? And if so, how do you find that person?"

**Panelist response (Michele):** From my perspective, when I did finally decide I needed a sponsor, I wanted resumes. I wanted to know how they had done things, and we don't have them. I was looking for somebody that had the exact same situation as me because I felt like they could relate to my issues better. Recovery is recovery. I asked several people and what I found was that when I was ready to hear what I needed to hear, the teacher showed up right next to me. She did have a very similar situation, but I didn't know all of it at the time. It just turned out that way. I don't think it is critical that a person has the exact same type of issue going on. I do believe that if you hear something in a meeting that resonates with you, pray about it, and you can't be led wrong. Take a leap.

**Panelist response (Elisabeth):** My fourteen year sponsor's whole entire life situation was completely different from mine. I was working at the time. I don't have children. I wasn't living with anybody. I was alone. She had four children, she had been staying at home, she still had a husband in the house who was in recovery. That's a completely different situation. There were frequently times when I felt like she just didn't even know because she would tell me something about how to get along in the corporate world. I would think that she didn't even know what she was talking about! What turned out to be the most important thing was my sponsor thinks the way that I think. She could catch me when I was about to turn left and show me which direction was right instead because she could follow that thinking. She thought like I did, and she had similar responses. In the end, that's what mattered in sponsorship for me. This was true of both my service sponsor and my current sponsor; they think the way I think. They understand when I'm about to go off a cliff with something, and they know what I can hear that will stop that because it's what *they* can hear that would stop that. They're sharing their experience with me that way. If I can relate to somebody, they're going to be more helpful and relate on an emotional, problem, solution and recovery level.

**Question:** Can you say a little bit more about wanting answers and learning to make your own choices?

**Panelist response (Nina):** I always want answers. I wanted answers and learning to make your own choices. I think that is still a work in progress. I have learned that I can't always have all the answers. That's how I am. I'm a very analytical person. I want to know three levels away about what's going to happen and what my risk is. That sends me into an obsessive and worried place. I think I have to do that day by day and be very situational and basically stay in the present. But with that being said, I can take responsibility for the things that I do in the moment. That's what I've had to do, particularly when things get challenging, because sometimes I look too far ahead. I just take responsibility for the here and now. In the situation

I'm in, it is making small little decisions and choices of owning particular things. Choosing to be happy, choosing to be kind, choosing to let my resentments go, and choosing to get help. That's where I can take more responsibility for myself.

**Question:** How did you know when it was time to change? How did you do it? And did you select a second sponsor for a specific reason?

**Panelist response (Elisabeth)** I need to share that what happened with my first sponsor was that I was hearing the word sponsorship. I was hearing it everywhere I was going, and I had a guiding voice that I was hearing. Every time it said that, that woman was in front of me. I did not know her name, I had never been in a meeting with her, and I had no idea what her story or background were. I found out what her name was, and I stalked her like the Al-Anon stalker that I am. I found her in a meeting and I asked her to be my sponsor. I had no idea about her or what I was getting into. We bumped along for a long time, and it worked out really, really well.

The service sponsor came the same way. I was at an Assembly and the heavens opened up. It was like, "Oh, service sponsor," and I was like, "Service sponsor? That's what I need, another sponsor!" But I always follow that guidance because that's definitely my commitment to myself, whatever it takes to heal. If I have guidance, it seems very, very direct. I follow it, even if it was because the one time that I questioned it, didn't follow it, I got in really big trouble. So I stopped questioning that guidance. I got that person as a service sponsor. I couldn't have a better one. She was a perfect fit for the problem I was having. Just a couple of months ago, I was in a meeting. I just kind of turned my head and I looked at the person who is sharing and I heard, "This would be a good sponsor for you." I thought, "What? I don't need a sponsor, I have two." I had to think about that for a little while and what that meant. What had kind of happened was my longtime sponsor and I weren't doing as much as we could have been doing. It had been hard to connect with her regularly by phone. There wasn't anything that I was particularly unhappy with. There was no conflict. I wasn't thinking about it at all until I heard that voice. In retrospect, that would have been a good thing to discuss with my sponsor. "Oh, I heard this voice telling me this," instead of surprising her with it later. I excel at surprising sponsors with what I have done.

My new sponsor is also active in Area service and above the Group level. The reason that I had a service sponsor was I needed more help with the service structure than my regular sponsor was able to give me. When I got this new sponsor, she was able to do all of that. I actually had to break up with two sponsors. It was like a two-for-one deal. It was kind of hard. I discussed it with the new one first. I told her my story of hearing the voice say that, and I told her I hadn't shared it with either of my sponsors yet. It occurred to me that I didn't really want to hurt anybody by suggesting that I might get a different sponsor and then have that different person not be available. So that's the reason that I took that approach.

I talked with her and she agreed. We set up our first meeting for long enough for me to be able to talk with both of my other sponsors so that they could know. It wasn't a personal

decision. It was not about personalities at all. It wasn't that I was unhappy. I realized that when you've been with someone for fourteen years, for any reason, that relationship doesn't change. We change what we call it. It's not sponsorship anymore. She still knows the last fourteen years of my life, my family history, and all of the things about me, and she might still be somebody that I want to talk to. We still have a really good friendship. Of course, with my service sponsor, it really had nothing to do with her. I miss them both, but I also know that they're still there. I can still contact both of those people. Today in recovery, I do not have to have relationships that end. Sponsorship is not a lifetime commitment. If sponsorship ends, it does not mean I will never see you again and we're never speaking. It's not that traumatic. It helps me to be even more flexible in my recovery.

**Member share:** I just want to thank everybody for their thoughts and insight because this has been a huge question for me, which is why I'm here. I've only been in the program about three months, and it's a bit overwhelming. There's a lot to learn, and there's a lot to know. I haven't gotten a lot into the book yet. I have a situation which kind of rears its ugly head only so often, so I struggle with it. What am I doing here? And what do I really need from this? And how do I need to heal? And I think that this has been extremely helpful. And it sounds like you don't need to get a sponsor right away. I think I heard someone say it was a couple years in that they found a sponsor. So that's very encouraging that I can kind of grow and work on myself first, and then get a Sponsor. Thank you all because this has been really great.

**Member share:** I've really enjoyed everyone's share. It's been very informative. I got my first sponsor when I lived in Seattle. For me, she was someone who was going through similar circumstances. She shared at the meeting how she had four little boys and how she was so grateful because today she had macaroni and cheese to feed them. She had enough gas in her car to get to the meeting. She had a one room where she was raising her four boys and she had a job as a waitress. I was just blown away by her gratitude and her courage. I chose her to be my sponsor. One of the things that I got from her, besides a soft place to lie my head, was she gave me information about what I was dealing with. The truth of the matter was, I had no idea what I was dealing with. She gave me little tidbits such as *you're not dealing with your spouse anymore. You're dealing with alcohol, and you can't win an argument with alcohol.* Those little bits of information really helped me change my relationship towards the alcoholic. She also gave me understanding and caring. Those are ways that she helped me because my attitude towards the alcoholic changed. I went from being angry to having compassion.

I made a commitment to myself. My sponsor helped me to continue to move forward by working the Steps with her and by going to meetings. Those were things that were different in my life because I was stuck. I was stuck on this pot that I couldn't get off of. She gave me a different way to look at life. It was like the sun started shining through for me. It also says being accountable. This was a big one for me with my sponsor. She asked me one question. "What part did you play in it?" And wow, that just opened everything up for me because I had never looked at my part in anything. It was always blaming someone else. She gave me just a totally different perspective on life.

I too had different sponsors. I moved from Seattle. When I came down to Arizona, I got another sponsor. One of the other reasons why I changed sponsors was that my life evolved. I've been in the program for many years. I needed different things from different sponsors. I worked the Steps with my first couple of sponsors. I then needed people who were in situations like mine so that I did have a common denominator with them. I was once told that you can actually have more than one sponsor. Today I have a sponsor that I meet in the parking lot after a meeting all the time. I love this program because there's always someone there with encouragement. A sponsor helps me with my self-esteem. They give me validation for where I'm at. It's like it's okay. You can stumble a little bit. I once heard said that we don't get chips because we stumble all over the place. A sponsor is definitely probably the biggest gift that I get from the program because it gives me knowledge and it gives me love. I'm grateful. Thank you.

**Question:** What are the words you use to encourage members to get a sponsor?"

**Panelist response (Elisabeth):** I think the thing that I tell people is that I really did learn that it's not a "me program." It is for *me*, but I cannot do it alone. I like to say that I never did any of this recovery alone, although I felt like I did. I often feel like I'm the only one doing anything. I'm not the only one doing it, and I think that that's important. I also think that the idea that there can be more than one, not at the same time, unless they are for different reasons, but more than one, that it's not forever, live or die, commitments.

**Member response :** It just depends on the person, but I just think it is sad that people go to and sit in meetings and don't work the program. I've heard that the meetings bring relief, that I feel better when I go to a meeting. But I AM better when I work the Steps. So sometimes I might be kind and gentle and I might say, "Have you gotten a sponsor yet?" Or I might say, "Have you started the Steps yet?" Sometimes I get a little obnoxious, I know, you wouldn't believe it. But in a lot of my meetings, there's something in the format that says something like, "Please keep your shares to two or three minutes. If you'd like to talk more, please see somebody after the meeting." And don't do this, but I rewrite the format. I will say, "Please keep your shares to two or three minutes. If you'd like to speak more, get a sponsor."

**Panelist response (Michele):** I just wanted to say really quick the other thing is that I know when I was wanting a sponsor, I couldn't talk to anyone else. No one else would. My family was sick of hearing about the problem. I wanted someone I could talk to and that offered me solutions. When I kept coming back in misery, sitting alone and feeling very, very dark and lonely and in a very dark place, I didn't need to sit there, that long. I guess that is what I what I wanted to say. I sat there way too long. It was fear keeping me from getting a sponsor. That's when my real growth, I believe, began.

**Member response:** When I first started, I was in Al-Anon from October to December and I thought I was rocking along practicing the program. I really wasn't. I was just manipulating everything until I felt like I was doing a good job, which is something I've learned about myself. I share about that, just about my own experience. When I hear someone talking about not

having a sponsor or wanting one, that's what I share because we really can't see our own stuff. When I got a sponsor, that's when I really felt like I started working the program. Until then, I just wasn't.

**Question:** What's the difference between a service sponsor and a regular sponsor? Can you have both at one time? Why would you get a service sponsor? Any wisdom on that?

**Member response:** When I started the program, I was blessed with the most wonderful sponsor. But the thing was, he had very little service experience outside of the group level. I needed someone that had a little more experience in the service area, doing different things in service outside of the Group level. I happened to find a very wonderful sponsor for my service sponsor, and they didn't cross paths. My service sponsor didn't get into my personal stuff, and my personal sponsor had nothing to interject for my service work because he had no experience there. That was just a great experience having both. I knew who to go to with what. I was really blessed with two wonderful sponsors for a long time. Then my Step sponsor stepped out of the program. I went almost a year without a Step sponsor. I kind of started thinking about it and who would I want for a Step sponsor. It just so happened at a Convention that I decided I needed to ask someone. My life just kept getting worse and worse. I asked my service sponsor to be my sponsor. Now, I share everything with him. My relationship with my first sponsor is still really great. I still see him on occasion but not as regularly as I did when I was working Steps with him. I feel I am doubly blessed for having both of them in my life.

**Member response:** I think I can add to the conversation on the service sponsor. When I first started, I asked somebody to be a temporary sponsor. We worked together for quite a while, and years later I came back to her and asked if she would be my real sponsor. I really had one sponsor for all these years. The reason that I went back to her was because I had been in several service positions, but she had mentioned to me that I should step up to be Group Representative. Fortunately, someone else stepped up before I did so I didn't have to do that. But lo and behold, a couple of years ago, the opportunity again arose so I did step up. I have my service sponsor because, when things arise in my meeting, I need to look at the Traditions. When I get uncomfortable in a meeting, I usually know there's a Tradition that's kind of banging its head on the wall. My service sponsor, along with a few other people, helped me to look back at the Service Manual when I need to do whatever position I am serving in, whether it's treasurer or hospitality or whatever the position is. My service sponsor is the one that has served before. I can ask her questions like, "How do I go from here? This is what arose last time in the meeting," or "Where are we now?" I'm very lucky that my temporary sponsor became my sponsor who became my service sponsor. For those that are new, just keep going to meetings, find somebody you're comfortable with, and keep working the program. It works. Thanks.

Additional Shares:

**Member share:** I just had a comment about sponsorship. I tried Al-Anon about 13 years ago, and I never stuck it out. I went to one or two meetings. Then again, about a year ago, I was in

another area in Tennessee and my therapist suggested that I need to go to Al-Anon. When I came here to Arizona, I brought someone else to Al-Anon because I really felt they needed it more than me. I am so thankful that my daughter called me and told me that there was a meeting at five o'clock that day and we both need to go. I decided, when I found out about sponsorship a month in, that if I'm going (and I love the group that I'm at), I have got to get sponsorship right away. I've only been in the program since June 1<sup>st</sup> and I'm thankful that I have a sponsor. I'm learning a lot. I don't know everything about this program and never will, but I know more now than when I started June 1st and I know I *need* a sponsor to make me accountable. My sponsor has given me so much in the short time that I am so thankful. Thanks.

**Member share:** I just wanted to say that sponsorship was the first time I have ever experienced unconditional love in my life. The greatest gift of the program.