

## Arizona Sponsorship Workshop

Thursday, September 5, 2019

**Segment One – The purpose of having a Sponsor / 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?
- Making a commitment to myself
- Being 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.*

*Reprinted with permission of Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc., Virginia Beach, VA.*

### **Shelley:**

I’m really glad to be here tonight to share with you about my sponsor and that relationship we’ve had. I came to Al-Anon because I knew something had to change. Things with my alcoholic weren’t going the way I wanted and all my attempts to change him were failing. I knew I needed something to change so I came to Al-Anon and jumped right in. I remember my

very first night. A gentleman welcomed me and shared with me the 3 c's (you did not cause it; you cannot control it and you cannot cure it) like many of us do to our newcomers. Those were three really concrete things that I was able to take with me that night and cling to them.

I was fairly regular. I did some service work right away, greeting or doing whatever needed to be done because I just knew I needed a change...my outside life was spinning so anything I could do in Al-Anon seemed to be something that was comforting, secure and steady in my life. I did that for about a year. Although I was very regular and willing to do all the things- study and reading, things weren't changing the way I wanted them to. Things with my alcoholic kept spiraling and I kept trying to control. I was not successful.

When I look back now, I think that I just needed that year to figure out that I was powerless and the changes that needed to come about were something that I could not do on my own. At about a year, I asked someone to be my sponsor. I will always be thankful that she said YES. My ego was so huge because who knows how long it would have been before I found the courage to ask someone else if she had said no; but that's not my story.

We jumped right in working on the Steps. She made the expectations very clear in the beginning. We started working with the Steps and I was willing- I was pretty willing all along.

I came from a place of faith and so I "KNEW" all about Steps One through Three. When I read Steps One, Two, and Three I was like "I got this." Somewhere in the beginning we were talking about how long the Steps would take. I'm pretty sure I asked in my need to try and control, figure this out and get things to happen I'm sure I probably asked her, and she was like "Oh I don't know maybe approximately a year but everybody's different." Secretly, inside I knew I was going to be like this Super Al-Anon and I was not going to take a whole year.

We worked through Steps One, Two, and Three as best as I was capable at that time. I knew I was powerless and knew that there was something greater than myself. God was a part of my life and I surrendered as best as I could.

When I got to Step Four, I did notice the changes in my life. That's when I really started to understand things and begin to see what my part was. I was able to see my part not only with my alcoholic but in my relationships with my children, at work, and lots of different arenas.

My sponsor and I worked through Blueprint for Progress and we spent months on it. My sponsor had to ask hard, probing questions. A lot of times she even had to ask them multiple times to begin to uncover what was going on inside of me and be able to break through. If you don't remember me saying this before, my ego was very, very, very big. But as we slowly worked through Step Four, I was able to see a lot of me and for the first time I was able to see that it wasn't just my alcoholic that was causing all the problems in my life. I was able to start taking some ownership and work through some things. It was then, too, that I could see how gentle my sponsor was. There were times I didn't want to hear what we were uncovering. I

didn't want to see it. I didn't want to know it, but we kept probing and pushing. I know she was always gentle to be there and to walk through all the things that I had to uncover.

We kept working through the Steps. When we got to 10, 11, and 12, that for me was some major times working through that with my sponsor. There were times she had to be tough on me. There were other things that I needed to learn about myself. Finding the consistent patterns of my life was challenging, but my sponsor was gentle and loving to me.

Working through Step 12, I made a couple of really important discoveries. One of the first ones was that I had an ego. I'm a little embarrassed and yet I can laugh at it now – but I didn't know that I had an ego. I know it sounds really absurd but that whole first year and a half, I was clueless that I had an ego. As I started working through my Tenth Step, I did a written Tenth step and reviewed it regularly with my sponsor and it was then I discovered this ego. I didn't know- I didn't know until I was at that point in my life. That was a powerful lesson for me. Through all of that- there was something huge in my life that I needed to uncover and my sponsor still loved me no matter what. I know that God used her. My Higher Power was working in my life to teach me and show me his unconditional love for me and that was through her gentleness.

I continued to serve in some larger commitments. My sponsor is very much service oriented. Her enthusiasm, devotion and leadership in service has always been something that I wanted in my life. I love service and that's something that I've learned through sponsorship and the gift of "Get in the Car". I didn't even know what I was getting myself into, but I loved it. I try to involve others. The last thing that I'm continuing to learn (even this week) is that I had some tough lessons about accountability. A written Tenth step seems to be what works for me. It seems to keep my relationship with God and my ego in check. It's a way to examine myself.

My sponsor was asking me about some things that we had agreed upon and mostly I did what we said and almost always I completed all the tasks and did all the things I had agreed to do. Finally, at one point those "almosts" and those "mostlys" started to catch up with me. I could see that I wasn't accountable. I was not being a woman of my word and I want to be a woman of my word.

Through my relationship with my sponsor, I've been able to learn to say what I mean, mean what I say, to follow through and be a woman of my word. Sometimes those "almosts" and "mostlys" didn't take into account what other people thought, their feelings or the effect that it would have on others.

There have been some changes in the way I see and understand myself. I've been striving to become much more a woman of my word and somebody that is accountable for what she says and does.

As a result of that, I'm learning not only that I want to be accountable to my sponsor and the relationships that I build in my life, but I also want to make commitments to myself. It's one

thing to have my homework done and to make lists of what I'm to do before we meet again. Those are all valuable and that accountability is fabulous, but I'm really needed to make commitments to myself.

It's important to know that I need three meetings a week to keep myself sane. I need Fellowship and time in the literature. I need a written Tenth step. If I don't write that Tenth step out, I am not able to view myself as clearly as when I pause to write the words out. I'm learning in my relationship with my sponsor that not only do I have to be accountable to her, but I need to be accountable to me. That commitment has to happen whether she's around or not- whether she leaves the country, whether she leaves the state, whatever it is. That commitment isn't just to her, that commitment is to me. It keeps me in the best relationship I can be with God as I'm pursuing serenity. I am striving now to share what I learned and the love of the program that I have,

The speaker then read the reminder from One Day at a Time in Al-anon page 249.

I think that really sums up what a lot of my work with my sponsor has really been. Yes, we've uncovered a lot of icky stuff, but we've also uncovered a lot of beautiful things about myself and my ability to love her, to love other people in the program, and the ability to love myself.

### **Kathleen:**

I have had a number of sponsors and it took me a long time to get my first sponsor.

The purpose of having a Sponsor / Why do I need a Sponsor? Well, I had no clue. I really didn't. There were so many things that I could say, "Oh, my first mistake was" and "My second mistake was", but really I didn't know what I was getting into when I joined Al-Anon. I went to my very first meeting and then it took me another 13 months to get back to my second meeting- for whatever reason 13 is a lucky number for me- to find a sponsor -and then I stayed.

Part of the reason for this was the first group that I joined -I was going through a divorce 20 years ago and that was taking a lot of emotional energy for me. It was something that I wasn't expecting, didn't want and it wasn't related to alcohol. It didn't make sense. In the meantime, I reconnected with an old friend who both parents had become sober in AA and one of his parents was my childhood violin teacher and I had known her as a sober AA member. My friend was a binge drinker and I didn't really understand what that was or what it meant. As my divorce was finalized and things are moving on, we were spending more time together and I was subjected to "in my face" alcoholism. It was he who suggested that I go to Al-Anon in the first place- he said you know if you are going to spend time with me, you need some skills and you need some tools so go to Al-Anon and I did. The first time I went I thought "I really don't have time for this because I'm going through a divorce." The second time I went, I understood exactly why I needed to be there in terms of having support in this friendship/relationship that I had with this other person, this drinker. At first, I had no clue that it was a lifestyle change. I just

figured it was sort of an educational opportunity and there's literature and that's what sort of sustained me at first. I didn't really connect with people. They were nice enough, but I just didn't see- I didn't have the skills- I honestly didn't have the skills.

I used the literature to kind of understand myself and the program. The other situation that was going on was that for probably the first 3 years I only went to one meeting a week. It was the same meeting. It's not what I would call a healthy meeting now, and it doesn't exist in the form it existed then.

Another reason why I didn't quite identify was because I was going to an adult child meeting. I felt very comfortable there, but I didn't understand why. I didn't identify my parents as alcoholics. It took quite a while for me to understand that alcoholism can skip generations and then I realized that probably three of my four grandparents had had some issue with alcohol at some point in their life. My parents were both adult children that had no program.

So why do I need a sponsor? Because I can't do this alone- I can't- I worked hard all my life to do it differently than my family of origin- just to live

I was feeling like it wasn't working for me anymore- I was miserable. I was chronically lonely and I was miserable. My very first sponsor well the first person I wanted to ask- I had showed up at the meeting and I had gotten my courage up I was all excited and she announced that she was moving to California. I went "Ohhhh no!"

It took me a week or two to put my sights on the next person and what I liked about my first sponsor was that she was very spontaneous and happy and joyful. So, I asked her, and she said that she would, but only through Step 5 because she had only worked the first five steps. And I said Okay because what else do I know? I hadn't read *Sponsorship What It's All About* or any of that kind of stuff. I just needed a sponsor. After a good three long years it was time to start. I understood right away that we were going to work the Steps. And that was good- I hadn't even really tried to do that for myself.

I did not have a faith system coming in. In fact, I was adamant that I was atheist and I didn't depend on anything besides pull up your bootstraps and get going, this is your gig- let's get a move on.

She worked very gently with me. I understood I was powerless. I understood my life was unmanageable. The First Step wasn't a big hurdle for me, but the second and third were. We identified ways for me to develop a relationship or a concept of a Higher Power, which still is a nonhuman- an energy, it's a spiritual connection and that's really all it is for me- but I do depend on that connection and I do have a relationship and she developed that.

One of the other big problems I had was a lot of self-pity and anger. I didn't realize I had anger until a later sponsor, but I did have that self-pity and she had me creating gratitude lists on a regular basis. We would go through my gratitude lists. We met frequently- once a week- for

quite a while and when we did my 4<sup>th</sup> step we worked it through the Blueprint for Progress- the first one- the small book- and I didn't find that scary or difficult. I kind of enjoyed having somebody to share myself with for the very first time on that kind of level.

It really felt good to have somebody I could trust. I did trust her, and I loved her. At one point, this friend of mine who I ended up coming to Al-Anon for (and then finding it's for me) broke into my house and he passed out. Usually he hid when he passed out and it was this, "Ok. He's gone, I don't know where he is, I don't know when he'll show up again." It was that kind of worry, and his dog was in my house. I didn't want to stay there. I took the dog, and I went to my sponsor's house, and she let me stay the night. During the evening we walked through what my choices were in that relationship. We worked on the very specific problem that was in my face and I didn't have the skills to deal with. She was generous in that way, allowing me to stay. The next day I took the dog back and I made sure he had a ride home and I got him out of the house. That was the beginning of a commitment to myself- that I mattered, that what I cared about mattered and that I deserved to have a life free of somebody else's stress- because I create enough stress for myself- I don't need to take on others stress.

As far as accountability- when she made suggestions that sounded weird, I did them because I trusted her. It was uncomfortable to do new behaviors and most of the time it worked out beautifully and gave me confidence that I could do new things and be a beginner – that being afraid of making mistakes was a big hurdle for me. I also had a big fear around lack, so she taught me about abundance. She had me do an additional Fourth Step -besides the money page in Blueprint for Progress. We worked awhile on money because I needed to move past that hurdle in my life.

My second sponsor took me through all 12 steps. My third sponsor said, "Oh you've done the Steps- let's do the Traditions." We started working on the Traditions. I recently found out she never worked the Steps. She and I got through Tradition 5, and then I kept working on my Traditions. She kept canceling our commitments. When we did meet, she wasn't talking Al-Anon and I wasn't seeing her at meetings. I finally just asked, "Are you going to Al-Anon?" and she said No, and I said "Oh. This isn't going to work for me." She said I could call anytime and I said, "Thank you for that." We had a nice relationship, so I sort of missed that, but I knew I needed to move on. She left the program- she's back and she's very involved in Southern Arizona and we have a great relationship now- again.

My next sponsor we worked specifically on shame and guilt because I was going through a period of time in my family and I was having a specific problem with being a stepparent and there was a lot of anger, shame, and guilt involved in that. She worked with me on some of my childhood stuff, and my present parenting style. We got through that.

My current sponsor is somebody that I really love. She is a lot like my first sponsor- she is spontaneous, strong in her program- she is very strong in her program, she's strong in service.

I'm going to go back to the sponsor that wanted me to work the Traditions because I'd already worked the Steps even if she hadn't. She introduced me to service work. That was huge. That's when I first became a GR. I volunteered at the Literature Distribution Center, I've gone to the jail, and taken meetings there, I've been a sponsor, I'm a DR. That's when the journey of service began for me.

My current sponsor is big on service, she's big on going to meetings. Like Shelley said, she had certain expectations that other sponsors hadn't articulated. At first, I thought "Ok, RULES!" But then I realized she's very loving, she's a tough love sponsor- she's gentle with me but she also doesn't let me squirm out of things. She'll just needle me until I either cry because I needed the breakthrough or until I'll admit "OK I'm being stubborn! Stop it!!"

She just loves me, and we help each other. I know I have the commitment to myself that if that relationship ends, I will immediately find another sponsor. I sponsor differently because I've been sponsored well.

#### **Hannah:**

Thank you for inviting me to share. One of the tips that I read for presenting on this workshop is to not talk with your hands. I thought "I don't know if I can do that! But we'll see. God's going to have to do for me what I cannot do for myself."

Before a sponsor can help me, I have to be willing to let a sponsor help me. When I came in, I had to put myself aside and allow a more experienced person guide me through the Steps. Before Program, I would not allow myself to admit powerlessness. I lived by self-will. I sponsored myself. That and my best thinking got me here to Al-Anon because my life was so unmanageable.

I didn't know what a sponsor did or really was. I just knew I had to get one. I asked someone who I did not know at the time and had not sponsored before. She said yes to me and I believed that a sponsor was supposed to be the mother I never had, and so of course that never got off the ground.

Then I did ask another person and she responded to me by saying "Let me pray about it for a month." I was like "A MONTH!! Oh my Gosh!!" Yet I couldn't ask anyone else because she might say yes after a month. It was in this like Purgatory place. I waited the month. She did get back in touch with me after a month and she said "I prayed about it. I am willing to sponsor you, but I want to speak with you Monday through Friday for a half hour. That's how I'm sponsored and that's how I want to sponsor." I was like "This just gets worse!" I thought I don't want to talk to anyone for half an hour a day! That's just so scary because my fear is if I talk to you every day, you're going to get to know me, and then you're not gonna like me, and then you will reject me.

But then of course the people pleasing: “Well she prayed about it for a WHOLE month. I can’t back out now.” I went forward with it because my desperation trumped the fear. I was more desperate than I was fearful of her not liking me and being rejected. I was willing to do it and we talked five days a week and you know, that’s what I needed. My recovery really catapulted. I was able to reveal everything to her. I was SO scared. I thought she was this awesome person and I was this piece of crap. I was going to tell her all these horrible things I had done in my past and I was so worried she was going to judge me.

But I told her some very shameful things that I had done in my past. Her response was “Of course, you did those things. You were desperate for love. How else would you have behaved?” That was such an amazing thing to hear. I felt accepted, I felt heard- I could actually forgive myself. That gave me permission to forgive myself. As we went on, I could look back and really say that that relationship with that sponsor was the first real honest healthy intimate relationship I’ve ever had in my life.

I underestimated just how healing it would be because of trust. We were together for 6 ½ years. We got through Step Nine together. One thing that happened is I was so afraid to sponsor, and she would say to me, “Well, when you sponsor someone... and I would say, “NO, NO, NO don’t say that. I don’t want to do that!” People started to ask me to sponsor them and I was so fearful that I kind of made up this story of ‘No, I don’t want to until I finish all 12 Steps and I’m not done with 12 Steps so I can’t do that.’ And that was fear. A person asked me to be her sponsor and I did my spiel, no not until I’ve done all 12 steps and I went and told my sponsor that this individual asked me to be her sponsor. She said “I know. I told her to ask you.” I was like “OH NO.” My sponsor said “I think you’re ready. I went and made amends and I agreed to take on my first sponsee. As a result of that, I actually went back to all the people that had asked me and made amends to each one of them, and admitted that I was fearful to say yes. That was all part of my learning.

I learned from my sponsor that when I take on a sponsee, we always study the sponsorship pamphlet first together. That way there is no ambiguity about what a sponsor does and what a sponsor does not do. I also learned that I can say “Let’s give this a trial basis of six weeks and then have a conversation again- how do you feel about this arrangement?”

Those have been some good things that came from my first sponsor. Also, when I am sponsored and when I am sponsoring, we focus on the AI-Anon program. We don’t study outside programs or outside literature- everything else is an outside issue. Our primary purpose is to study the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts.

My first sponsor was actively devoted to her own religion. I was not keen on religion at all- or a Higher Power when I came in. The healthy thing she did was she even realized that was an outside issue in our meetings. She used AI-Anon verbiage, she used “Higher Power.” She did not use terms from her religion. That helped me a lot. I think if the religion part would have been brought in, I would have shut down. That was my response to that.



In regard to what a sponsor does or does not do; I have learned from people more experienced than me is that my job as a sponsor is to carry the message- not the person. I don't pay a sponsee's bills consistently, chauffeur them or feed them. That is not what a sponsor does. There were many times I over-relied on my sponsor. I would only call HER to talk or reason things out. There have been multiple times when she had said to me this is not a good day, I'm not feeling well- you're going to need to call someone else. I would say to her "Okay" but inside I was like "NO, NO, NO, NOOOO! I don't want to call anyone else. *You* know all the characters of my soap operas. You know all the back story. I can't go to anyone else. You know all the details of all the characters in my dramatic life!" What that did was it forced me to call other people and therefore, she was not the only one for the Higher Power. Actually, without knowing it, I went out and created a support system for myself with a lot of people. I am very grateful for that. I also encouraged it with sponsees to practice reaching out to other people, as well as myself.

Sponsorship is a commitment to myself. I have always been very successful with structure even as a kid. In the disease of alcoholism, there's chaos, but I really like structure; so, we always had a schedule- a day and time. With my sponsor now, a day and time. With my sponsees, a day and time. Of course, there's things that happen and we can reschedule, but for the most part there is a day and time. I find that works the best for me.

Like I said, I was with my first sponsor for six plus years and I felt that my recovery was a little stagnant and I separated with that sponsor. I was given some guidance on how to do that and I was able to say that I would like to change our sponsor/sponsee relationship to just friends. That was gentle. It was healthy, and we are still friends today and we still talk. I went looking for another sponsor. I went around and said "Hey would you like to be my sponsor? I'd like to start on Step Ten because I just finished Step 9 with my last sponsor." I got No, No, No, No.

Then I asked my current sponsor, "Would you be my sponsor?" I told her I'd like to start on Step Ten. And she said Yep, I'll be your sponsor, but we'll go back to Step One. And what I learned from that experience is that I was controlling. I wanted it done on my terms. I want a sponsor to start at this part. When I was a newcomer, I was willing- I was powerless. I was ready to take the guidance, so I had to learn that again and really take her lead and we went back to Step One and started over. That really challenged one of my biggest character defects, which is impatience (imagine that!). What I joke about is that not only did she start me at Step One, but we used *How Al-Anon Works* and if you know that book, there's like eight chapters before you get to Step One. So that was two years right there- just before getting to Step One- God has a sense of humor.

So, how does sponsorship keep me accountable? My first sponsor did tell me that it would be my responsibility to call her when it was time to meet because this was my program, and this was my part of the footwork for recovery. I also believe that it is my responsibility to go and ask someone to be my sponsor - that's part of my footwork, too. It is also my responsibility to be honest because I can sabotage my own recovery in the midst of my fears by telling myself "I don't want to bother her, she's probably really busy, I'm afraid of what she'll think of me,

I want to look good to my sponsor.” That is not going to help my recovery. When something happens, if I have a slip, I am thinking, I have to tell her, I just have to tell her. Plus, I think she has psychic powers and she’ll find out anyway! So, I better tell her.

One example of accountability just happened recently. I kind of need to practice what I preach. This is how sponsees help me, because I can reason something out with them. I can guide them through the Steps. But do I do it myself? Do I walk the talk? Recently a sponsee was telling me about a situation. And I was asking questions like “Is that any of your business? Do you have to take the bait just because someone throws it out there?” And you know the very next day, someone threw bait. It was on social media, and it was their opinion and my reaction was- “Oh my God, I have to tell them that they’re wrong!! I have to tell them that they’re wrong! But I’m like: But I just told my sponsee yesterday! And you don’t have to do that.” It’s my accountability for myself! Can I practice what I preach? Can I walk the talk? Can I do what I suggest to others? And it was hard! I thought, there should be a new slogan. We have One Day at a Time, we have let Go and let God, and there should be a new slogan for me. “Don’t argue with strangers online” and I will keep my serenity intact.

I will close with a very powerful quote I had heard long ago. It goes like this: “Most people choose to live in the world and visit their Al-Anon program. I am a much happier, sane person because I live in the Al-Anon program and visit the world.”

With that I pass. Thank you everyone!

**Question:** What was it like to transition between sponsors. Did you end any of the relationships?

**Panelist response (Kathleen):** The first sponsor left the program, and as far as I know she’s left the country. I did find her on social media, but we haven’t truly connected. As far as I could tell she’s not in the program anymore. The sponsor who introduced me to service went out and came back in and we’re friends now. The sponsor that worked all 12 steps with me is still in the program, we’re not that close but we are cordial. The sponsor that worked the Steps on my parenting skills- that relationship ended because she was very specific about what time I could call her. If I was a little bit early or a little bit late, she kind of let me have it and I just don’t do well with that, so I got what I needed and then I left that relationship. It felt awkward initially, but now we’re friends. My current sponsor and I do things outside of Al-Anon on occasion so there was little down time but I rarely let much time go because I was working a much better program when I had someone I could relate to on a regular basis.

**Question:** What were you afraid of exactly when you thought of sponsoring others?

**Panelist response (Hannah):** My disease is distorted thinking so what I was thinking was “Oh my gosh I don’t want to be responsible for someone’s life, I might ruin it. I might not be perfect; I might not give the right answers and I might not help them.” There was a lot of fear

around that. There was also some fear around “Could I really detach?” One of my real close relationships before program ended badly because I got in the middle of her relationship and I could not detach. I thought I would not be able to detach enough to be of help. I was scared to “mess things up” mess someone’s life up or mess up their situation. I just really didn’t have confidence.

**Question:** You said you had faith coming to Al-Anon. Have your beliefs changed?

**Panelist response (Shelley):** I think the biggest change that I would say is not about who God is in my life, but how God relates to me in my life. He is constantly with me. I think I’ve come to believe that my Higher Power is constantly with me and that his unconditional love for me is always there. It’s gentle and loving. Not vindictive and out to get me, but rather there to support me and love me through the things I’ve uncovered about myself.

**Question:** How did your sponsor help you create a support system?

**Member Response:** One of the first things my sponsor did was ask me to get 5 phone numbers in my phone. Then from there I was to reach out to other people in the program before we met again. And that really was a cool thing for me because it helped me get outside my own little bubble and my own little world.

**Member Response:** Mostly my sponsors encouraged additional meetings if I was struggling with someone and I needed additional support. My current sponsor travels more so when she’s out of town we’ve skyped but sometimes she’s not available. That’s when I started reaching out on my own and creating a list of people that I felt comfortable calling.

**Member Response:** Besides what I shared earlier about reaching out to other people and not just her, she also introduced me to service as the treasure of our home group and then, because I just wanted to be with her all the time (I was a needy, clingy, person) I went with her to a Convention and roomed with her. It was getting me out there in other areas of program so that helped me to meet new people, hear new people share, and get into service and that sport of thing.

**Question:** What’s the worst mistake you’ve ever made as a sponsor? How did it come out?

**Panelist response (Kathleen):** I don’t recall anything right off. Nothing’s coming to mind. I guess the biggest mistake I’ve made is beating myself up when people would disappear, and I have had a number of sponsees who had worked though the first three Steps. We’d start on the Fourth Step and they’d disappear.... radio silence. I wouldn’t even see them at meetings anymore and I’d think omg did I scare them away? I realized. I’m not that powerful. One way or another it will all work out.

## **Additional Shares:**

**Member share:** I need a sponsor for a lot of reasons. There are things that happen in my life that I hope to have and I'm lucky- blessed to have a community in Al-Anon that I can reach out to even when I am between sponsors. We all go through things and we need those touch points where we can have someone who knows us- and knows all of us. I want someone who knows all of me and knows the characters in my life drama that I can connect with. I need a sponsor that can help me stay connected to service work.

Boy there have been times when my sponsor has made me work the steps in 15 minutes and it's one of the most excruciating painful things, but also one of the most healing things for me so that when I have a great sponsor relationship that's really working it keeps me moving forward in my program.

**Member share:** I particularly appreciated the different processes that sponsors had used to get started. I really appreciated the idea of going through the sponsorship pamphlet and covering it between the sponsee and the sponsor to make sure they're all on the same page and using the same ground rules. I've had a couple people who asked me to sponsor them and none of it has really gotten off the ground. There's a little bit of "Where do we start?" so those tips are very helpful. I could identify with the speaker who was afraid. I made excuses a couple of times. Having some idea of the process is helpful and otherwise it really is about being open and nonjudgmental and going from there.

**Member share:** I actually want to tell you how thankful I am that you are doing this- there is such a need that I see in the meetings that I go to. I see a lot of fear, they are afraid to step up to become sponsors, that they are taking on a lifelong challenge or they are not sure that they are going to do it right. I have five sponsees right now and I can't take anymore. It breaks my heart to turn someone away. We're going to lose people! It's important that we teach and that we help people to understand that we are all here for each other. Sponsorship is something we're going through together. We are just sharing our experience, strength, and hope. We don't have to be perfect to be a sponsor. Ask my sponsees- they'll tell you that!

**Member share:** I don't function well without a sponsor. My first year in program, the only thing I had was a group of three newcomers and the literature and program tapes. It was long enough ago that it was really tapes, not CDs. I didn't do well. When we moved to Flagstaff, I was finally able to contact people who really knew what Al-Anon was and start going to real meetings.

The first Step I did myself, pretty much. But then I was able to do Steps Two and Three and start working on Four. It's only been through the assistance of sponsorship that I've been able to complete my steps several times.

I sponsor now. I'm currently working with one person in town that I work with weekly, another person who is back and forth between Canada and here...when she is in Canada we talk on the phone for about two hours every week and I've got a third one who has reached out to me to work on Traditions. We'll see if she calls me back. I need a sponsor to help keep myself accountable to me for my own behavior. When I go nuts it's not pretty and I have to have a sponsor available so I can turn myself in and get talked back to sanity and reality.

It doesn't work for me without it. I need that accountability and I need somebody else to remind me. I'm on my fifth sponsor, and we work by phone because I'm currently being sponsored out of town. I killed one off, fired one, one fired me, and my first sponsor and I talk to each other about once a month which has been a real blessing. She's on the East Coast now. She's the only way who knows how bad I was when I first came in. When I moved here, I had almost five years in program and I was starting to be socially acceptable. Nobody believes how bad I was except for my first sponsor. It's nice to be back in touch with her and it's a blessing in my life.

**Member share:** When I first came into program, I had such trust issues that it took me a long time to finally be willing to have a sponsor and then a really sweet lady offered to be my sponsor. I was too terrified to ask anybody. We worked together for a few years and then I changed jobs and started going to meetings much closer to home. I really liked the sponsor sponsee relationship, so I got another sponsor right away and she's in California – I moved to Tucson. She's still my backup sponsor- she knows my history for the last 20 years, and I have a sponsor here in Tucson who I adore, and I know she doesn't like to talk on the phone, so I text her. She'll call me if she wants to talk on the phone but she's just not a phone person. She helps me get right down to it. I was having a fit about a silly thing. My husband and I have an agreement that whoever does dinner doesn't have to do dishes and I'd made dinner for three nights and the dishes were piling up. I was really upset that he wasn't doing the dishes and I called my sponsor and she says "Well, who wants them done more?" and I said I do of course. She said, "Then do the damn dishes!" You know that solution did not occur to me- I needed my sponsor's objective input. I really enjoy sponsoring other people and seeing the light come on when they understand what a Step means for them personally and how to apply it to their lives.

**Member share:** The speakers have already shared about what a sponsor is and why I need a sponsor. What I got out of it was I can't do this alone. I tried- it doesn't work. I need someone that can know me- intimately- call me on my stuff, basically. I need to be accountable. I also need somebody I can run things by before I do stupid things. There are always opportunities for growth. Having a commitment of sponsorship- whether I'm being sponsored or sponsoring- that commitment of keeping in touch and getting together on a regular basis allows me to deal with those opportunities for growth. I can remember the first person I called when my ex-husband committed suicide was my sponsor.

My first sponsor was somebody I ran into at my second meeting and I was scared to death, but she ended up being my first sponsor four months later. She moved, then I got a self-appointed sponsor-basically someone who just took me around to do different things.

**Member share:** What is going through my mind and I feel kind of odd about it but I would like to sponsor and nobody asks me. I've sponsored already two people. The first person just didn't work out and the second person divorced her husband and I kind of took responsibility for this. She decided she didn't need a sponsor anymore but both relationships really helped me grow tremendously. They were a huge blessing. I really miss it! I also don't want to be needy by asking, "Can I sponsor you?" There is all this talk about people needing to come to you because I understand that's part of their recovery. I spoke to my sponsor about that and she said there was a workshop and it was speed dating. Unfortunately, I wasn't at that workshop. If anybody has any ideas about that I'd appreciate it.

**Member share:** I'll speak to that very quickly. I used to think that you had to wait until somebody asked you because asking was a big part of recovery. I still think that's true, but somebody mentioned attraction not promotion and a speaker said "Hey, that's our Public Relations policy!" I just know that the longest 5000 miles for any newcomer is that distance to somebody who's been around for a while. Yet, when it's from us to them, it's only a foot or two. There's nothing wrong with talking to somebody, giving them your number, encouraging them, asking how they're doing.