

Arizona Sponsorship Workshop

January 18, 2020

Segment Two – Spiritual Principles: Thursday January 18, 7-8:30 pm and Saturday, January 18, 10-11:30 am

- What are the spiritual principles?
- How do I apply them in all my affairs, including my sponsorship relationships?
- Sharing the principles with my sponsees and setting the example.
- Encouraging service

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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Cindy

Good morning, Arizona! My name is Cindy B. I’m a grateful member of Al-Anon. I love the spiritual principles inherent in the Steps, and I’ll briefly explain what those are.

Step One is honesty. Step Two is hope. Three is faith. Four is courage. Five is integrity. Six is willingness. Seven is humility. Eight is self-discipline. Nine is love for others. Ten is perseverance. Eleven is spiritual awareness, and Twelve is service.

When I first came to Al-Anon, I was really afraid to ask someone to be my sponsor because I didn't think I was worthy. I didn't really understand what it was about, but people kept saying, "Keep coming back! Keep coming back!" and I did. Eventually I asked this wonderful woman to be my sponsor. She was my sponsor for a long time and helped me through the first three steps, but I couldn't do the Fourth Step because I was terrified.

My second sponsor encouraged me, and I was finally able to do the Fourth Step. I started over because sometimes when I work with sponsees, they say, "Well, I've already worked the first three Steps. I don't need to do those with you." I say, "Well, you know, I didn't hear those first three Steps, so I think it might be a good idea for us to just briefly go over those again." I've never had a sponsee complain about that.

How do I apply them in all my affairs, including my sponsorship relationships? When I first started coming to program, I heard people who would explain in detail what that looked like, including talking about the spiritual awareness in Step Twelve as a result of working the Twelve Steps. I thought that sounded good because I was extremely crazy when I got to program. They said it's guaranteed. I thought that there aren't many things in life that are guaranteed so I thought I'd try it. I did have that spiritual awakening.

When I work with someone who is afraid to do that scary Step Four or that scary Step Nine, I just focus on Step Twelve. If you do these to the best of your ability, there doesn't have to be perfection. You just do the best you can where you're at. I've done step work over and over, and more is revealed each time. I'm really grateful for that because I thought in the beginning that I had to do it perfectly the first time, and I'm a perfectionist. When you read the questions in the workbooks, it will prompt responses so I'm really grateful for that.

How do I share the principles with my sponsees and set the example? I do my best to practice these principles in all my affairs. When I share in a meeting about something I'm frustrated with, I say, "I don't like what my loved one is doing in this particular situation." When I get really frustrated and think I can manage my own life, I start using the tools. I read my literature. I read my daily readers. I have all of them. I'll pick one and go to the index and start reading about that particular topic, and it helps me get out of the insanity. I'll pray. Prayer is a huge part of my recovery. I'll talk to another member in recovery. My sponsor doesn't particularly like to talk on the phone, so I'll text her, or I'll call another member that does like to talk on the phone.

I find it's really important to have other people I can run things by in recovery that have either been through a similar situation or are just a good listening ear. That's another thing I learned early on in recovery. I go to a lot of meetings because I always hear what I need to hear. I always hear different perspectives which has really helped my recovery, because what I grew up with was one set of rules. This is the way things are, and this is the way you look at them,

and there is no other alternative. In program, I heard other people sharing and I thought, "Oh! I like that idea better!" So being open-minded has really helped my recovery. I set the example by saying to a sponsee who's really frustrated with something, "Well, did you open your literature? Did you pray? Did you reach out to someone? Did you go to a meeting?" In the beginning, I heard a long timer say in a meeting, "How long do I have to go these meetings?" And her sponsor said, "You get to go until you want to go." And I thought I'm glad I heard that because there are days when I don't want to go to a meeting. I'm all tucked in with my dogs on the couch, and I wonder if I really want to get in the car and drive. And that's when I really need to go because I think my Higher Power is prompting me that that's really important.

I encourage service. When someone asks me to be their sponsor, I say, "What service positions do you have?" And if they say they are not of service, I say "I'd like you to consider that as part of your recovery." I like the line about "When I got busy, I got better," which is absolutely true! When I wallow in my self-pity, I'm not doing anybody any good, particularly me. When I don't go to meetings and I think, "Oh, I have enough recovery. I can figure this out on my own," that's when I am in danger.

I like the spiritual principle of self-discipline. I used to think that was a really bad word, but when I started applying that, it's easy to get up in the morning and start my routine. I have my breakfast, feed my dogs, and do whatever. But if I don't start my day with prayer and meditation and NOT being in conscious contact with God immediately, my day can really go off the rails. For me, self-discipline is doing what I need to do even when I don't want to do it.

I had a meeting with my sponsor yesterday, and I said, "You know I've been really frustrated that my husband leaves dishes on the counter. We have a dishwasher. Why can't he just put them in there?" And she said, "Well, who wants it done more? Who wants them in the dishwasher more?" I said, "Well, I do, of course." This was a couple of months ago, and when I met with her yesterday, I said, "Well, I've had this huge awareness. I just put his dishes in the dishwasher because it's not worth arguing over." It's not a big deal. There's just two of us. We don't have a bunch of kids. I had the awareness recently that I've been filling the dishwasher and nine times out of ten, when the dishwasher's done, he unloads it. Who knew? I would not have been aware of it. I would have thought it's always me. I'm always doing everything. Well, that's so not true.

I love the principle of integrity in Step Five. Integrity is very important in sharing with God, ourselves, and another human being the exact nature of our wrongs. When I grew up, it wasn't modeled for me at all so I didn't really understand what it meant for a long time. When I got to program, my first sponsor really explained to me what integrity meant. It meant doing the right thing because it's the right thing to do. Being honest and not fudging the truth because it benefits you. I live by all these principles – honesty, hope, faith, courage – all of them.

I heard somebody share in a meeting yesterday, "I should never miss an opportunity to keep my mouth shut." I keep my mouth shut when I really want to say something that I think is really

important and beneficial to someone else, particularly a loved one. I talk to God about it, and then I let it go. That's huge growth for somebody like me who always had the final word, who always knew what was best for everybody. I knew nobody was doing it right, nobody was doing it my way. And I learned that everybody has their own way to do it. What a concept!

Willingness is in Step Six. Sometimes in the beginning, I had to pray to be willing to have the willingness to be willing to be willing. When I looked at the Steps that were on the wall at the meetings, I thought, "Okay, I get it. I understand why they're written in that order, but they're a little scary. They're a little overwhelming." I've learned that I'm still teachable. When I work with my sponsees, I tell them that the only step you can work out of order is Step Eleven – to seek through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as you understand God, and pray for the willingness and power to carry out his will. This helped me in the beginning. I really have an active prayer life. I believe prayer is a very big part of my recovery. When I share that with them, I say it's okay that I'm not going to have all of the answers for you. It's important for you to develop your spiritual relationship with the God of your understanding, whatever that looks like. It's probably not the same as mine and it doesn't need to be. If you develop that early on, it will help you with all Twelve Steps.

Someone pointed out recently, that in Step Two it says, "Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore *us* to sanity." They said maybe that applies to me and all my loved ones. Someone pointed out early on – when I came to program, my children were very young – and when they got to be teenagers, they said, "By the way, you're not your children's higher power." And I said, "Of course I am, I'm their mother!" And they said "No, you've got to let it go." And that was a really hard thing for me to do, particularly when they were doing things I didn't particularly care for.

I really practice these principles in all my affairs as frequently as I can. I don't work the program perfectly nor am I expected to. I do believe in extending grace and loving kindness to sponsees and sharing experience about something they're struggling with. Many times, I've gone through what they've gone through. I can say, "This is what I did to get through it, and it worked for me most of the time." You know, I don't have the perfect solution for every problem. I am really grateful that God doesn't expect me to. That's God's job. Thank you!

Tom

Good morning, my name is Tom, a grateful member of Al-Anon. I want to go back and talk about the journey a little bit, getting here in the first place. I think God's plan started early on for me in my life. I had some incidents happen in my late teens and early twenties that pushed me away from my Higher Power. I recognize those now as probably the reason why I was in the situation I was. You know, I was running on self-will and probably made more money than a guy should make and was spending it all on myself, living very frivolously. I think that's where God stepped in and put alcoholism in my life. That forced me to do something different with my life, and I can now actually say that I am grateful for the disease of alcoholism. Had it not been for

that, I would not have made the drastic changes that I had to make and bring my Higher Power into my life.

My first awareness of spiritual principles was probably in my fourth or fifth Al-Anon meeting which just happened to be the longtimer's event. I was so new to the program. I didn't know anybody, but a number of people in my home group actually told me to come to this event and said they would save me a seat. I didn't understand that. Walking in there was scary. There were probably two hundred people in the room and four or five people had actually saved me a seat in one of the front rows of the tables. That was my first experience of unconditional love and acceptance. That really made me feel good. It made me feel like I was in the right place. I was unaccustomed to that. I always thought love had to be bought, acceptance had to be earned, and it felt really good. I just loved it. I knew that I belonged there at that point in time.

Someone shared a newcomer's welcome with me in a meeting, and I also heard people who had far worse stories than I had and who had recovered. They were living happy and carefree lives, even living with active alcoholism in their homes. That gave me some hope that there was a better life ahead for me.

I struggled with my spirituality, but I did get a sponsor and my sponsor shared his program with me the way he was taught, which was get a home group and get a service commitment. He wanted me to reach out to three different people a day and to call him once a day. He wanted me to hit my knees and pray to my Higher Power, whatever that may look like. I thought it sounded like a lot, but I thought maybe I could do it. He also gave me another piece of literature and said he wanted me to do a daily reading. He wanted me to pick out a "Just for Today" every day and do it to the best of my ability. I thought that was kind of a tall order. I really didn't have a lot of time for this program in my life because I was really pretty busy right then trying to manage someone else's life, which went by the wayside when I really started feeling the love and acceptance in the rooms of Al-Anon.

I didn't really realize how much time I would have when I stopped managing someone else's life, which had really consumed my life for a long time. Coming into Al-Anon, I really felt that love and it helped increase my faith in my Higher Power because I saw what was going on around me. People's lives were improving whether there was alcoholism in their home or not. I had to get down and get busy with my step work. I stalled out on Step Four because I wanted it to look a certain way and I wanted to do it perfectly. I didn't realize that the more I worked my steps, the more would be revealed in my life. God was constantly working in my life and my relationship with him was constantly evolving. I really needed to just do what was asked and not overthink it.

About three years into program, my sponsor dropped out so I kind of floundered for a little while, and I eventually picked up another sponsor. I now realize that I would never ever flounder like that again. It wasn't a good thing for me; that started bringing back a lot of self-will. Basically, it just wasn't good for me, and it wasn't good for my relationships. I needed to do

what my sponsor said and that's to show up the way I need to show up regardless of what anybody else is doing.

Another spiritual principle to me is patience. I need to be patient and allow my Higher Power to work in my life, and I need to practice patience with other people, too. I had these expectations of what life should look like, and I have learned to let that go. Life is exactly how it's supposed to be for me right now. As long as I am cultivating my relationship with my Higher Power and asking him for help, I have to be patient and just let those things happen. My life will get better no matter what, but I need to work this program to the best of my ability. Do I do that? No, not always. There's times where I do become complacent. I think things are going great, and I don't have to work as hard at my program. That's absolutely silly for me because I know what that does to me. I experienced that when I lost my first sponsor. I need to do what I need to do on a daily basis. I need to practice my faith and not only in my Higher Power but in my fellow man and let go of the results of whatever anybody else shows up like.

Humility. Humility is something that's evolving in me. I did a lot of things early on that I feel were ego-based. I love the pats on the back, I love that everybody told me I was doing a great job, and I love that everybody saw what I was doing. I need to do what I'm doing to serve my fellow man and to be a better servant to my Higher Power. What I need to do in the morning when I wake up and when I hit my knees is I need to ask my Higher Power for guidance. What is your will for me today? How can I best serve my fellow man? How can I best serve you? And how do you want me to show up in people's lives?

Another thing that is really nice about being of service is that it's an opportunity to show love to our fellow Al-Anon members. One of the best things is that I love greeting newcomers! I love being there and I love sharing at newcomer meetings because it gives me a chance to show that love that I received early on in program -- from all the people that took me in and kind of stuffed me under their wing and kept me comfortable and warm and allowed me to be myself, even as flawed as I was. I know what that feels like, and it feels good. I'm not doing it because I want the recognition. I'm doing it because that is how the program was shown to me. To be there for those people, to be of service, and allow yourself to be open to whatever someone else is going through. I need to show up because I have found after sharing my experience with a lot of other people that we have a lot more in common with everybody else than we ever thought we did. I think that's one of those things that binds us together, not only with alcoholism, but all the "isms" that have affected our lives.

Another quality is integrity. My sponsor is big about this. He says that if you sign up or say you're going to do something, you need to do it. And you need to go to any length necessary to accomplish that task. Because we, in this program, are a man of our word and when we say we are going to do something, we do it.

It also brought me to a point where I know when a service commitment comes up, I need to ask questions also and determine whether this fits me, and then I need to pray on it a little bit. I

don't just jump and say yes every time someone asks me to do something. I love to be of service because that has brought me as much growth as step work. It also gives me an opportunity to kind of gauge my program and to see that growth.

Early on, I never could see growth in myself. I had to have it pointed out by my fellow members. They would say, "Oh my gosh, you're doing so good. You ran across this two years ago, and this is what you did." And I say, "Wow, you're right." I didn't even realize that I actually changed, and that my Higher Power keeps giving me opportunities to show up differently in my relationships, whether it be at work, home, or with fellow Al-Anon members. That's just a beautiful thing!

Another thing that popped up early in my program was my what you would call "spiritual sandpaper." I kept trying to seek guidance on this. People said to pray for this person right where they are at and you will come to love this person, so I intentionally sat next to that person at every meeting I went to. It was funny because early on, that person was constantly chirping my ear about how I should do this, and I should do that, and blah, blah, blah. It just irritated me. I left the meetings feeling worse than before I got there. But after walking through that and sitting next to that person, after praying for him and praying for me to have acceptance, I didn't hear that chirping in my ear anymore. I actually came to love that person right where they were at. And that was growth for me.

I think this program is constantly evolving in my life. It's constantly working. I get to grow every day that I show up. One of my biggest things is service. I love to be of service because that's giving of myself through time and effort. Without giving back, I don't know where this program would be. I'm sure this program could function just fine without me. I'm not anybody's Higher Power and I'm certainly not the Higher Power of this program, but I love being able to show up the way I need to show up on a daily basis and be that trusted servant of my Higher Power.

Another big thing for me is gratitude. That was something I started working on really early on with my sponsor and some other people in program. It was being grateful for what I *do* have and not looking at what I *don't* have. That gets me out of my head. I have to remember that there's no solution in looking at what I don't have. Happiness can be found when I know what I'm grateful for on a daily basis. I've gone as far as doing A to Z gratitude lists with people on the phone or at meetings. It makes me aware of my surroundings a lot better than focusing on what I don't have or on what somebody else is doing. That only leads to the stinking thinking that can put me back in the hole I was in before I got here.

Love and tolerance of my fellow person is important no matter what the situation. Again, it's showing up in the way I need to show up. I'm never going to get people to behave the way I want them to behave and I'm sure some people are just plain tolerant of me at times. When we practice love and tolerance of other people, that works in my head and I actually see them as more accepting of me. I don't know if it changes their behavior. It just changes how I think about that person and it gives me a chance to show up differently on a daily basis.

How do I apply these principles in my sponsorship relationship? Well, willingness to give freely of myself kind of rubs off on other people too. Anonymity, not gossiping or criticizing, but having that one-on-one relationship with my sponsees builds their confidence in their fellow man that others can be trusted. I didn't come in here with a lot of trust; I had serious trust issues. I was seriously flawed, but I am constantly working on myself. I get to show up the way I need to show up on a daily basis and keep working on my own spiritual growth.

Encouraging service is another thing that was taught to me early on in program. I was told to get a home group, get a service commitment in that home group, and none of those service commitments have been to my original strengths. My strengths coming in to this program did not apply to Al-Anon. They applied to things like outside hobbies or my job. In a service commitment, I learned more about myself, learning how to get along with other people and how to function in group settings. Every commitment that I've ever taken on has given me growth in one way or another. Sometimes day by day, sometimes minute by minute, I get to grow and just show up and learn more about myself. I learn that I actually have some value in these relationships.

Applying all these principles in my daily affairs is a matter of showing up and doing what I was asked to do initially. That is to hit my knees and pray to my Higher Power, "What is your will for me today? How do you want me show up in other people's lives?" I need to show love and tolerance.

I'm so honored that you asked me to share. I love everybody I've met in this program. Every one of you has been a part of my recovery whether you know it or not – whether it was just loving me where I was at, or some encouraging words, or sharing your own experience with me. So I'm so grateful for this program. Thank you.

Judy

Thanks for the opportunity to be here today. I think the last few years in our fellowship, there have been so many more references to spiritual principles, and yet I sometimes hear longtime members say, "What do you mean when you say spiritual principles?" I think that's why it's a good idea to get a sponsor, because a sponsor early on can help answer some of those questions.

Today I understand that a spiritual principle is really a fundamental truth or belief that serves as the foundation for my behavior. Since Al-Anon is considered a spiritual program, it's easy to say that everything in our legacies is spiritual, like Step One, the principle of powerlessness; Tradition One, the principle of common welfare or unity; and Concept One, the principle of responsibility. For all those principles that we heard Cindy identify, I think some of the principles for me are truly more spiritual than others. Some are universal, but some are really spiritual.

This was a good opportunity for me to think about what spiritual means to me, and it has to do with my inner life, my soul, that non-physical part of me, my heart. These are the principles that move me to get a different perspective, look at life with fresh eyes, and feel like life maybe was worth living after all. These principles are the ones mentioned in our welcome and our closing. I think those are two of the most spiritual pieces of CAL (Conference Approved Literature) that have ever been written, and every time I hear them at a meeting, I'm often moved to tears especially if I'm reading them myself.

These are simple principles. They are acceptance, understanding, and comfort. All of these have to do with love -- love with no strings attached. It was these three simple principles that helped me believe that maybe there was a God after all, and that God wanted what was best for me.

I think I experienced a kind of epiphany by simply attending meetings because people were kind to me. They walked the walk, as you hear people say, in recovery. I didn't have to earn my way into Al-Anon or pay my dues to be a member. I was welcomed, I was comforted, and I was loved unconditionally even when I didn't know it. And what's more spiritual than that?

The members caring for me moved me to start noticing and caring for others. I know my first sponsor said, "Once you accept what Al-Anon has to offer, hang on and be prepared for the ride of your life." I didn't understand what she meant, but today I do. I think the "aha moment" for me was realizing that I had to keep an open mind about the program and accept the love and comfort from others. I needed to also participate and not hold back as a suspicious, hesitant onlooker at meetings.

Because of my participation, I began to feel hope which is a great spiritual principle. That motivated me to reach out to others and practice these principles in all my affairs. How do these principles manifest themselves in me and others? To me, it's about embracing Tradition Five. I practice the Twelve Steps myself. I welcome and give comfort especially to newcomers who walk in the meeting, and especially people I sponsor. First, I had to get out of myself and care more about others.

The first practical step is that I wouldn't have wanted to be a sponsor until I began to exhibit better behavior. One of the first things I put into my life was courtesy. There's a page in our *ODAT (One Day at a Time)* that says, "Lay down your weapons and pick up your tools," and it refers to courtesy. So I had to stop pointing fingers, blaming, raising my voice, or even swearing. I was prone to a lot of swearing. I found that wasn't the best way to express myself so I had to clean up my verbal language, my body language as well as my tone of voice and learn to be more kind.

Today I have the opportunity to practice courtesy a lot, whether it's at the doctor's office or with a clerk at Walmart or somebody at the gym but especially with my spouse at home. I thank him often. I thank him for bringing the stepladder in from the garage so I can dust the closet shelves, I thank him for taking out the trash again, or I thank him for being really quiet in the

morning so I can sleep in. I have found courtesy a real important part of my life because sponsorship is about meaningful and productive relationships based on these principles. I practice that with my sponsor and those I sponsor.

There are four things that I think show the principles in action. One for me would be that I attend meetings regularly. That's key. That means I have a home group -- a group where, if I'm lucky, my sponsor attends. I show up every week and people get to know me. For those I sponsor, I hope to see them at meetings, but one thing I've realized with some people I sponsor is they might feel that need to check in with me or report to me when I see them at the meeting. I say to them, "Don't talk to me at the meeting. We get to meet by ourselves. Talk to other people and reach out to other members. You can chat with me when we're together." I think that also prevents us from looking like we have a clique or some special relationship. It preserves our anonymity which I feel is important because we want to look like a fellowship of equals. There's no prestige in sponsorship. I don't want to look special, especially at my home group so attending meetings regularly is one important thing.

Secondly, I keep working on my communication skills during the week. I might reach out to people I sponsor and send them a little email. If I read something I think they might like, I share that. I try to listen more when we meet. I think listening is a huge part of communication. I don't interrupt, and I speak as an encourager and try to look for the good and the positive. I am discerning but I'm not judging when I'm sitting with a person and we're in a sponsor-sponsee relationship.

Thirdly, I only use CAL (Conference Approved Literature). I bring it in my Al-Anon travel bag and I have the appropriate book or workbook with me. I encourage people to get their tools so we can spring into action. I don't expect the person I sponsor to do all the work -- I do the work myself. Once I fill a workbook, I buy another one and I start over. I think we make life manageable by being organized. CAL is our central focus. We're not just there to catch up and have coffee.

That leads to my fourth practical point. We keep a calendar. We're organized and agree on our next meeting when we leave our last one so we are committed to our recovery. We date things as well. It's nice to have a record of recovery because I kind of forget when we talked about that or when I was in a bad place at that time. Together we have it on the calendar so I that helps me and anybody I sponsor feel like we're really working the program. Because we're consistent and we're developing our relationship, it becomes intimate and interdependent in a healthy way, and we look forward to seeing each other.

So those are just practical ways, I think that the principles show up. If I looked at four spiritual principles in that relationship, I would identify these four. And you can identify them with the acronym, TEAR. Tear as in crying, not tear as in rip apart. We've shed a lot of tears.

One is trust. Tom alluded to that. That's so important. Relationships are built on trust. I came in not trusting so I understand that about others, that hesitancy to reveal who I really am or

what's really going on. That takes time which is why we commit to meeting and continuing to meet. The best thing I think I can do to contribute to building trust is to share my own weaknesses; to share the horrible stories about myself where I really failed or fell short. I know that when I heard my sponsor talk about what went wrong, or even when she cried at a meeting, I felt better because she was acting like a loser just like I was. That gave me hope. So I share myself. I am vulnerable. We don't talk about the alcoholic or other people. We just talk about ourselves, and I think that really builds trust.

The second one is equality. We hear that Al-Anon is a fellowship of equals and it would be easy in a sponsor-ponsee relationship to feel less than, but I always need to remember that we are only members. It does not matter how much time the person I'm sponsoring or I have in the program. We're simply children of God in a program, on a path. And if anybody even asks me how long I've been in Al-Anon, I avoid answering that question. I can say "awhile," but I'm not a teacher, I'm not a monitor, and I'm not a judge. I do not want to be a revered member. I simply want to be a member. It's important that I say, "I don't know. I wish I had the answer, but I don't." So we experience a loving interchange, and I think that's the equality of a sponsor-ponsee relationship.

The third is acceptance. That has to do with just simply accepting where people are. If they've forgotten their materials at home, didn't get it done, or forgot to answer an email, it's okay. We have the rest of our lifetime to work the program. Another way I can be accepting when we're sharing together is not to raise my eyebrows in shock when I hear something, not to frown or look disappointed, but just to be neutral and listen as a caring friend. I don't have the answers, but I do have the ears to listen and the arms to hug.

The last one is respect. I show respect by being on time and not forgetting that we're meeting. I even try to dress up a little and look decent because I know when I came to Al-Anon, I was far too casual. I wasn't going out much, so I combed my hair and looked respectable, put on a little make-up, and acted as if I'm happy to see the person. The truth is I am, you know! I think it's so important to feel respected because I felt cut off and disrespected, and I have to always remember in this respect that people have been hurt by alcoholism. Even if they're a little negative or directing something toward me, it's not about me. That person has been affected by alcoholism, and I'm just there as a fellow member.

I think trust, equality, acceptance and respect – those are principles that manifest themselves in our relationships.

As for encouraging service, the best encouragement I can offer is to be an active member, a good example. I know the value and the possibilities of serving and how they can take somebody on a real path to personal growth that you can't even imagine because that's happened for me. I can't put my expectations on anybody else. The best thing I can do is be enthusiastic about my service and share about it. Sharing successes and sometimes even sharing disappointments – the reality of being in a service role.

You know you've heard the saying, "If you want your character defects to come out, get involved in service." It's an opportunity to work on them and to grow. Recently I had a person I sponsor who is qualified to be the new Group Representative, and we had elections and she didn't stand – she didn't offer her name. In my heart, I felt a little disappointed, but I know it's not her idea. She didn't want to do it at this time, and I've learned you can't force people to be something they're not or to do what they don't want to do. Maybe her time isn't now, but it might be later.

I do know, though, that most people I sponsor are in service so I don't know if that means I am a good example or we're just in a really supportive home group that talks about service and is involved. Service is a part of our triangle and that would be the point that I would try to make.

The simple spiritual principles are loving, accepting, and tolerating. These things can't be underestimated. We can work, work, work, but if we're not showing love and connection to others, I think it's basically futile. It would seem false. I think our co-founder referred to this Al-Anon phenomenon in her book, *Lois Remembers*, in the closing. She talks about the great principle of love, and I think love is what we're talking about. It's really what heals. Being loved and accepted by others has connected me to a Higher Power. I didn't have the Higher Power when I came in that I do today. And I think that's what the Higher Power would do for us, love and accept us as we are.

So, being a sponsor, being sponsored – these for me, have been wonderful opportunities to experience love of other people and love within the safe and clear boundaries of this beautiful program we call Al-Anon. It's really hard to define this spiritual journey when spiritual is a matter of the heart, but I think that is what it's all about.

Thanks for asking me today to share. I really enjoyed just thinking about it and being a part of this.

Question: Cindy, can you tell us how you decided on the spiritual principles that you listed for each Step?

Panelist Response (Cindy): I actually looked them up. I didn't decide on them. I found them on an internet search.

Question: How have you had to put principles above personalities in a sponsorship relationship?

Panelist Response (Cindy): Some sponsees are very excited to work the Steps, some are not, and some just want to talk about what their alcoholic is doing and not doing. When I sit down and meet with them, I give them ten minutes to complain. And then I say, "Times up! Time to work on your Steps now." And you know, I really try to emphasize that our conversation is not about what your alcoholic is doing or not doing, it's about how this program can help you feel

better. When you take the focus off what that other person is doing, not doing, how they're driving you crazy (particularly if it's a child -- as a parent, that's very challenging) and focus on you and your recovery, you're going to feel better and that's going to take up less of your time. You're going to have a lot more time to work on your recovery when you're not busy running someone else's life.

Question: How long did you make four calls a day? People were amazed at that, and how was it helpful?

Panelist Response (Tom): I had to make those four calls a day for about a year in program. It was helpful because it got me outside of myself. It made me realize that there's people out there that have far worse problems. It helped me communicate better and listen because I wasn't just calling them to complain about what someone else was doing. I called and became more genuine and asked them how their day was going and asking them what I could do for them. Basically, the way I got out of having to do those four calls a day was, just like someone said, do it until you want to. So what I did is I took on the phone list as my second service commitment in Al-Anon. It was a sixty person phone list, and I cleaned up that phone list within three weeks, placing about 10-15 calls a day until I got in touch with everybody

Question: Can you tell us more about a comment that you said about not looking at what you don't have?

Panelist Response (Tom): Prior to coming into program, I thought I knew everything and realized that I didn't know anything. I realized that my perspective was screwed up. I was always looking over at the other side of the fence -- at what someone else had. I wanted that life that someone else had without looking at the inside. I didn't know what the insides looked like. I knew what the outside looked like. I was comparing someone else's outside with my inside.

Question: How do you love a sponsee when they seem unlovable? And what's the process you have, if any, for deciding when to call a sponsee on their stuff and when to just listen and love?

Panelist Response (Judy): Well, as far as loving anybody who's unlovable, I think we're all lovable. We're just kind of in disguise. I think the key is to focus on the program and why the person came. Sometimes, I like having real unlovable people to sponsor because it's quite a challenge to take them on the journey to get better and feel better.

Question: Can you tell us about your views on letting others know who sponsors you, and is that handled in CAL?

Panelist Response (Judy): I don't tell anyone who my sponsor is. I don't think it's any of their business. Somebody asked me one time, "Who's your sponsor?" and I said, "Why do you want to know?" She said, "Just curious." And I said, "Well that's not a good enough reason." I just laughed. It's a private relationship. I have a sponsor and I have a service sponsor. I have both. My husband will say, "How many people do you sponsor?" I say, "I don't know. I never counted.

I think that would be bad luck.” I just don’t think it’s important. It’s just curiosity factors. The important thing is just doing it.

Additional Shares:

Member share: Thank you for asking me to share. I just want to make one comment right now. I have really enjoyed the suggestions and comments from the speakers today. I just see that there are so many other suggestions and I welcome that.

I have been a grateful member of Al-Anon for only seven months, and I’m really happy that I stayed. I came to my first meeting because I felt my niece needed to go. I did not realize that I needed to go as much as she did. I care about other people, but I’ve learned that I don’t want to rule their lives. Because of that meeting, I have stayed, and I go to two meetings a week. One is a book study, and the other one is focused on the Steps. I decided when I came in that when I finally got there, after fighting it many years, I needed to find a sponsor relatively soon because I need that one-on-one in addition to loving the groups that I attend.

I also realized that I needed to commit to this program. I didn’t know what sponsorship was. I had no clue. So I inquired kind of like right away, and I got some vague answers. But I love and am committed to a sponsor and I enjoyed listening to how she articulated at our meetings. That helped me make a decision. I happen to appreciate her intellect, her sophisticated way of articulating and still making me feel important.

One of the things that I said to her in the beginning was that I had no intention of doing service right away because that just wasn’t possible because I wasn’t healed. Well, somehow I kind of fell into service and I’m happy that I did. The service involved understanding, listening to sponsorship on-line, volunteering to help in some way, volunteering to carry a sign to the meeting, and putting the sign outside. I was doing little things and using the phone lists that we have access to in our meetings and contacting people gently.

I am working the Steps. I have fought sometimes in working the Steps. I’m on Step Four, which seems to be the most difficult but the most rewarding. I really admire the comments that all three of the speakers made today. There’s so much with what they said. My idea of wanting to sponsor eventually will take a little time.

I have some concerns that I just want to share. I want to find the right Al-Anon tools to use at the best time for each of the sponsees that I might have. I admire my sponsor for bringing them up amazingly at times where I am weak. And I want to listen to more sponsors on this program because I think it will help me with that. I really want to make sure and include listening to my Higher Power. It’s getting better. I came in thinking I knew everything about spirituality. I am learning so much more. I think the word “love” that was used is so valuable because I think that the Higher Power that I relate to allows me to realize that we have the right for love, peace, and joy. I need to remind myself daily, and I fall down with this. Sometimes I don’t wake up and speak to my Higher Power, and say “Hi, I’m here today. We’re going to work this together.”

There was one reading that I will just share and leave with you that I will not forget. The selection in the daily reader was about partner dancing. When you do partner dancing, there is one leader. If you both try to lead at the same time, it just doesn't work. Your dance does not continue. I have to remember that my Higher Power is the leader. And with that, I thank you for asking me to share.

Member share: Hello everybody! Thank you so much for including me in this conference. I've been furiously taking notes and getting a lot of really good ideas. When I first came into the program, I read through the Steps and I thought to myself, "Well, how hard can this be?" And someone said it's a program that works better when you have a sponsor. I kind of resisted that in the beginning. Finally, the person who is my sponsor now asked me after a meeting one time, "Did you get a sponsor yet?" And I said, "Well, no." And she said, "Would you like me to be your temporary sponsor?" and I agreed because I was just so afraid to ask. She's still my sponsor to this day.

When we first started working together, she exhibited many of those qualities that I've heard the speakers talk about today – about being encouraging and kind and generous and loving me no matter how I came to our meetings or what kinds of things I said or didn't say.

One of the things that really stuck out with me as I progressed through my Steps was that she talked about service. She said, "You know, one day you could sponsor someone too." And I thought, "Really? Does she think I have that ability to do that at some point?" And that's all that she would say. Then we would be talking more, and she would say, "You know. There will come a day when you're ready to sponsor someone." It was like she planted the little seeds as I started to grow and go through the Steps.

Sponsoring has been one of the greatest gifts of this program because it allows me to remember many times how I felt when I talked to my sponsee. I can recall a lot of those feelings and that struggle and the difficulty. I learn something new every time that I'm with her because I revisit my program at a different level, a deeper level. I try to say, "Well, I want to be able to support her where she is." I do some more reading or I do more praying, and those are just real gifts that I would not have gotten without getting to sponsor someone. I'm very grateful for that opportunity.

Member share: Hi, I'm Shelley. First I want to thank the three speakers. I really enjoyed what you had to share. When Claudia first said, "Shelley, will you share?" I didn't think I wanted to. I just wanted to be lazy. But I think, as I listened, that humility was the spiritual principle that just kept showing up through every Step that I worked. It was the jumping off point for me to be able to start experiencing other feelings and to realize all the other spiritual principles and things in my life.

I spent a lot of time not feeling or only feeling what I thought I should be feeling. In uncovering humility and in being honest with myself and in trying to develop a relationship that is honest with my Higher Power, that is a great jumping off place for me. It enables me to uncover,

develop, and start realizing all the spiritual principles that are available to me and that can be a part of me as I keep working my program.

Member share: Good morning everybody. First of all, I want to thank whoever was responsible for putting these workshops together because I have gotten so much out of this one already. I didn't even know there was such a thing so I'm really grateful for everything that everyone has done and said today.

When I first came into the program, I got a sponsor right away and we worked the Steps and it took about a year, which was way longer than I thought it should have taken. But it was a wonderful experience for me, and I really loved it.

Once we got through the Steps, we drifted apart a little bit. I changed the meetings that I went to. I've been in the program almost four years now. For that first year and half, two years working with a sponsor was absolutely wonderful.

Then we drifted apart and here is how my Higher Power works for me. I had this thought that I really needed to find another sponsor. I sort of procrastinated about it, and I was kind of coasting in the program a little bit. I could see progress, but I wasn't really getting what I could have out of it because I wasn't putting the work in. So finally, about four months ago, I asked a wonderful woman to be my sponsor and she agreed. We started meeting, and about a month ago, after I have had this new sponsor for two or three months, someone asked me to sponsor them. This is my very first sponsee. I kept thinking to myself, "Everybody has to start somewhere," so I was very honest with this person. I said, "Look, I've never done it before but if you're willing to give me a shot, I am absolutely willing to do this with you."

We have been working together, and we're very new. We are on Step Two, but I'm already getting so much out of it. It's unbelievable, and I'm so looking forward to doing this. These workshops are helping me. I'm the kind of person who will study and learn and read, and when this thing about being a sponsor came up, I thought, "How do I know what I'm doing?" I only know the one way that I was taught. Maybe there's another way. People have just been so kind, and I've gotten so much information from so many different areas. I just appreciate this fellowship. I've gotten so much out of the Al-Anon program. I can't wait to give back and get more out of it. Thank you so much, and thanks for asking me to share!

Member share: Thank you, Claudia. I'm Melody. I appreciated the mention of humility. Working the program in general, the Steps, being of service, sponsoring others has taught me a great deal of humility. And for me, being humble is being teachable. I've been around a while. I've been sponsoring for quite a while. When I got involved in these workshops, it never occurred to me that I would have a lot to learn. But I have learned so much with each speaker these months. I have learned a great deal more about being sponsored and having a sponsor. It's been giving me things that I need to look at as far as ways I can improve how I sponsor. I'm being humbled each and every time I listen to the speakers and I'm growing in my recovery.

I just wanted to talk a little about encouraging sponsees to be of service. I would agree that being an example, being of service myself, is a great way to encourage. One of the things that really helped me when I came in was being asked to do little things. Giving words of encouragement when people expressed fear, offering support, offering to help any way, or go along to a meeting with somebody. Today I was reminded of not having those expectations, not putting my expectations on somebody else, and letting people follow their own path in service. I need to pay attention to my words, about how I talk about being of service, about making it attractive. Thank you for allowing me to share.

Question: “What is the spiritual principle that has been most important to you over your time in recovery and why?”

Panelist response (Judy): I guess what would come to mind immediately would be “letting go.” Letting go of my old ideas, letting go of others, letting go of my expectations, and keeping an open mind. Until I let go of what I clung so tightly to, I really couldn’t go forward. And that I alluded to when my sponsor said, “If you’re prepared to accept Al-Anon, hang on for the wild ride of your life.” And I think letting go has been the principle for me.

Panelist response (Cindy): I would have to say “hope.” When I first got to Al-Anon, I heard people share my fears, my guilt, my anxiety, but they kept saying, “Keep coming back. It will get better.” I held on to that hope, that sliver of hope that it would get better, and it has gotten better. It has been a wild ride, but I can say today that I’m grateful that I love alcoholics because it got me to the rooms of Al-Anon.

Panelist response (Tom): All of them are important to me. They really are. Every one of them has a specific meaning to me. But I think honesty is one I can relate with a bunch. I don’t know if you know this but DENIAL is an acronym for Don’t Even Know I Am Lying. I can lie to myself; I can lie to my sponsors. I need to be open, honest, transparent and show up! And everything else will work itself out. Thank you!