

## Arizona Sponsorship Workshop

Thursday, January 2, 2020

### Segment Two – Spiritual Principles

- 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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#### **Sue:**

My name is Sue, and I’m really glad to be here! I want to thank the people who organized this. I have to say I was a little skeptical about this format. I wasn’t quite sure about how I could share about something as personal and intimate as sponsorship using this, but I came to some of the other workshops and program is program. I appreciate them taking the risk to try it this way.

When I first came into program, it was important for me to ask someone to be my sponsor. It was the first time I had ever asked someone specifically for help for myself. I know a lot of different people come into sponsorship in a lot of different way, but my experience was that asking someone was the first time I made a commitment to myself. It was also the first time that I asked someone for help. That was important and significant for me.

Years later, I was in a workshop on sponsorship and there was a gentleman who said, "Sometimes you just need God with skin on," and I have found that to be true. Yes, I have a relationship with my Higher Power. Yes, my Higher Power is with me all the time! Yet sometimes I just need to look another human being in the eye and tell them what I need to tell them. I just need a human being to help me through those things, and I really remembered that expression "God with skin on" for a very long time because it was a short bumper sticker way to describe what sponsorship has been for me.

The first alcoholic in my life was my mom. She got sober when I was 13 and she was sponsored and sponsoring in AA when I was growing up as a teenager. She would let me sit and listen to them talk about program. I didn't really hear personal details or personal stories because I think they took care of that somewhere else, but she would just let me sit and listen to what was going on. It was healing for me because I could see my mom getting better. It also helped me later when I was desperate and needed help. I knew where to go. Also, sponsorship was not quite so intimidating and mysterious to me because I had seen a little bit of it in action when I was a kid. I always try to say something about that because, as a parent, you never know that what you do now might help later. It definitely helped me.

The biggest way the disease of alcoholism has affected me is trust. I had a very hard time trusting other people, trusting myself and my own judgement about what is and isn't acceptable or normal. Through being sponsored, I have learned to trust in a much deeper way than I would have just in meeting.. That has been a big risk for me, but it has also been incredibly healing to see that I can trust other people and that I can be trustworthy. That was something that I didn't know about myself and was something that I really needed to be able to heal.

Conference Approved Literature has always been at the center of being sponsored and sponsoring for me. It is where we start. Working a Step, a Tradition, or a Concept, we read the literature. I need to get the principles and the information about those legacies directly from the source before my sponsor can help me make sense of it and apply it to my own life. Focusing on literature and getting started with literature is something that has helped me keep principles above personalities. It's not about my sponsor. She doesn't belong on a pedestal, and it's not about anything else but the principles of the program. I really have found that literature keeps us focused on that.

In the Twelve and Twelve pamphlet, there's a statement in Step Six that talks about how God can and will do what is for our ultimate good if we are only ready and willing to receive his help.

My sponsor is the one who gives me a nudge when I'm not sure if I'm ready for something or not or when I am a little afraid. She's also the one who has that perspective to help me see my willingness or my stubbornness. Sometimes I think I'm not willing, and she says, "Oh you have been very willing." There are other times when I say, "I'm not going to do this!" and she points that out to me. Sometimes I need someone else's perspective on what my behavior is saying because I don't always know that.

Geographical solutions were my way of dealing when I first came into the program. I came into the program in Ohio, and then I moved to North Carolina, Vermont, back to North Carolina, and then eventually worked my way to Arizona. The second time I was in North Carolina, I was living in a very rural area and I had to drive an hour to get to meetings. I was all proud of myself for driving that far and being that committed to my recovery. I had a sponsor there, and one time she said something I didn't like. It had nothing to do with her; it had everything to do with me, but I left the state and moved to Arizona. I didn't tell her I was going to do that because I was mad at her. So I have to fess up to that.

During my time as a sponsor, sometimes people have moved and they've told me, sometimes people have faded away, and sometimes people have just flat out disappeared. And other times people have come to me and said, "Hey this isn't working, and I need to do something else." But I know that they are going to find their way, and I have confidence that if they disappear, maybe it's because they're not ready. I did get back to the program and I do have a sponsor and I do work the program. So if I ever run into Linda again, I'll have to make an amends for that, but I did the best that I could at the time, which was moving a couple thousand miles away.

Being a sponsor has taught me about true detachment. I know it is not my place to give someone advice about anything other than working the Steps, Traditions, Concepts, and being of service. That role is so clear in sponsorship to me, and I have learned to really practice detachment. I know how to do it. I know what it feels like and I know that I've become much better at detachment in other parts of my life because of what the program has taught me about it both as a sponsor and a sponsee. My sponsor has a life and sometimes she needs to detach because she has a life and it's perfectly fine. It's in that relationship and in the relationships with my sponsees that I've learned that.

It's also taught me some things about myself, some of it not always good. When I first started sponsoring, it just made me squirm that someone was hoping I could help them and was relying on me. I was very uncomfortable with what I saw as the responsibility of being a sponsor.

I've learned and I'm still learning that I can be reliable and that I can be relied upon, but I don't know that I could have seen that in myself in any other way other than saying yes when someone asked me to sponsor them. As a sponsor, I've seen my growth. I've seen my progress in the program and how far I've come. I get a different perspective -- to talk to each other, reason things out -- and it really helps me to understand the program better. I can see how it

affects someone else in their life even though their situation may or may not be the same as mine. I get a different perspective on how the program works, and I can get more confidence in my own program and in myself because I can see it's not just me; it's bigger than just me.

Service has been an integral part of my recovery. For me, it is not just the extra bonus pack that comes with recovery or the add-on that you get to later. It is part of *my* recovery. As a result of that, I don't have a service sponsor. I have a sponsor who does service. That has worked best for me. She knows my character defects and strengths that I bring into service, and that's because of the recovery work we've done together. She helps me with service, as well. Having grown up in alcoholism, I learned how to ask Mom for something if I thought Mom was going to help me, or I asked Dad if I thought Dad was going to help me. I'm a little more grown up now, but if I had two sponsors, I'd be really tempted to do that. So I'm very fortunate that I have one sponsor for both my service sponsor and my recovery sponsor.

The one thing I would say about is that I've noticed people saying to me, "Thank you for your service," and that makes me feel really uncomfortable. That's because I don't do service for recognition or attention. I do it because it's part of my recovery. I do it because it helps me, but I also do it because it's what makes sure this program is there for someone else. It makes me uncomfortable when people say that to me so if I need a meeting or I'm not very serene, I'm very tempted to say to them, "Well, just get out there and do your own service!" I notice it's often the people that aren't doing service that are saying that to me and it just makes me feel uncomfortable because that's not what service is about to me.

That's a little hard to separate the spiritual principles out, but it has a lot to do with talking things over and reasoning things out with my sponsor. We do that over the literature, and we do that if there is something that I'm struggling with. My sponsor is the one who helps me see the spiritual awakenings in my program and to see the spiritual principles at every step, and so I don't want to say it's a spiritual relationship but it brings me to a deeper spiritual understanding because of that relationship.

She's also the one who asks me what have I come to believe in when I'm struggling with a problem. She has me go back to, "Who is your Higher Power and what have you come to believe in?" She reminds me that there is no problem in front of me that is bigger than the power behind me. Sometimes I have to go back and think specifically about what the things are that I believe about my Higher Power.

She reminds me to do a gratitude list when I'm feeling sorry for myself or when I'm discouraged. You'd think I'd know that by now, but I still need somebody to remind me. There is something very spiritual and healing about a gratitude list no matter the situation, and so that's one of the ways my sponsor brings me to my Higher Power.

The other thing that I really hate is that she asks me to pray for those people that I'm having a difficult time with or resenting, those people that I'm having a hard time accepting, or sometimes even those people that I just flat out hate. I don't like saying that about myself, but

sometimes that's true. She'll ask me to pray for them, and I'll pray that they would find the peace and serenity that they seek. Sometimes I do it with gritted teeth because I don't want to do it, but it gets better and easier. It helps me with my serenity, and it helps me get my ego out of the way and to have some humility about what's happening in the relationship. It helps me to accept that they are doing the best that they can even if I don't like it. Most importantly it helps me to let things go.

Those are the things that I think of when I think of being sponsored, sponsoring and service, and spiritual principles. But I do go back to thinking about that idea about God with skin on because I do need that human contact, because it was so messed up in the alcoholic situation that I do need someone who can express caring and love face to face.

Thank you.

**Cindy:**

My name is Cindy M, and before I share on the topics or the questions for this segment, I thought I'd share a little bit about my sponsorship journey.

I came into Al-Anon when my husband went into rehab, and all I wanted was for him to stop drinking. I was very angry, which was nothing to do with me getting him to stop drinking, but I did push him into going to a rehab so you can tell how well that worked.

I had no spirituality, let alone principles. It was my way or the highway. At my second meeting, I ran into someone I worked with. It took me about four months of desperation basically before I asked her to be my sponsor. The reason it took so long was that I was looking for the perfect sponsor. I wanted someone that was older than me, married with kids, preferably boys, and working a good program. However, she was younger than I, she was single, she had no kids, but she did have a good program. We began to work the Steps by looking at Conference Approved Literature, reading it, studying it, and looking at principles such as awareness, acceptance, and trust. Sue mentioned trust, and that's a big one for me as well.

When I reached Step Four, she suggested I start to attend a Fourth Step meeting using the *Blueprint for Progress*. I found other principles in that book such as unconditional love, responsibility, and maturity. There are some really good material in the old *Blueprint for Progress*, especially on maturity.

Working with her, we got to about Step Eight when she moved so one of my close friends from that Fourth Step meeting became what I call my self-appointed service sponsor. She would ask me what I was doing on a Tuesday night or a Friday night, and when I'd say nothing she'd say, "Oh good. You can come with me!"

We went everywhere – women's shelters, halfway houses, even a psychiatric ward -- and of course, on the way there in the car she'd say, "Now when we get there, you just share a little

bit about yourself.” I didn’t know that I had anything to share back then. At that Fourth Step meeting, I became the Group Representative. Basically, it got me out of the house, and I got to go with that sponsor to Assemblies and District meetings.

Then I moved. When I got to Tucson, I had to ask someone else to be my sponsor. The woman I asked is someone whom I refer to her as my divorce sponsor. She had just gone through a divorce, and I was getting ready to do so. I got involved in Area Service, and I asked another woman to be my service sponsor. She said no because she said she uses her personal sponsor as her service sponsor and that the same issues that arise in her personal life come up in service as well. I heard Sue talk a little bit about that as well.

So when my new sponsor moved, I asked her again and she said yes. So, I got a two-for-one deal, and she’s been my sponsor ever since. As far as being a sponsor, I’ve had the privilege of being a personal sponsor, a service sponsor, and an Alateen sponsor. I currently work with a handful of people and a few by phone because we don’t live in the same city. If I’m asked to sponsor someone, we usually meet for coffee or have a phone conversation. We talk about our roles. We decide what piece of Conference Approved Literature we’re going to use, and we plan our first meeting. For newer members, when we move on to Step Four, we assess if the relationship is working or not for both of us before we continue.

With others, we basically do a periodic check in, usually after we finish a piece of literature we’re reading together. Some of the books I like are *Reaching for Personal Freedom*, *Paths to Recovery*, *How Al-Anon Works*, *Blueprint for Progress* and the newer one, *Opening Our Hearts*, *Transforming Our Losses* and *Intimacy in Alcoholic Relationships* and some of our pamphlets as well.

One of the questions that came up in this segment is what are the spiritual principles? That’s a great question because it’s so loaded. Some people I’ve heard share in meetings believe that the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts are the spiritual principles. But for me, the three legacies embody the spiritual principles, and I have to study each one to determine what’s in there. Each Step, Tradition, or Concept can have one or many spiritual principles embedded in it.

What I see might be different than what you see. We say there are no right or wrong answers, so I Googled spiritual principles to see what came up. The modern-day version of the dictionary said, “being spiritual is a process of ongoing daily action.” It also says “principles of spirituality are part of our approach to life -- ways of being, doing, thinking, believing, behaving, and engaging with life that can enable us to live towards our highest potential.” I like that one.

It also quotes other programs that list a single principle for each Step, but I find that too confining because I see multiple spiritual principles in some of the Steps. The first three come to mind. You look at Step One -- “Admitted we were powerless over alcoholism, that our lives had become unmanageable”. I see honesty, awareness, and acceptance all embedded in there. I need to be honestly aware that I’m powerless. I need to accept that my life has become

unmanageable. Maybe the attempts to control the drinker earlier on contributed to that unmanageability.

In Step Two, “Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity,” I see faith and hope. Once I redefine my Higher Power, which I needed to do to work this program, I could act in faith and feel the hope of being restored to sanity. I thought it might actually reveal the secret formula of getting someone to stop drinking, and that’s hope.

In Step Three, “Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*,” I see both willingness and trust. If I willingly turn over my life, I’m trusting that God’s got it. Sometimes I see the same spiritual principle in multiple steps. Like in Step One with honesty, awareness, and acceptance. I’ve also found courage. It took courage to walk into my first meeting. In Step Four it takes courage to look at myself and take my own inventory.

I also found balance in both Steps Four and Ten because they say to look at both your assets and your character defects when you review your day. For me it’s in the evening. Other spiritual principles I’ve found in the Steps include humility in Step Seven. I learned to ask my Higher Power for help. I found spiritual empowerment in Step Eleven, where I found the power to carry out God’s will through prayer and meditation. I’ve found gratitude in Step Twelve, and I’ve found love in all the Steps. The Steps help me to be a better me.

Of course, I need tools to play nicely with others in the sandbox. That’s the Traditions. Autonomy in Tradition Four taught me freedom, but with responsibility. I’m free to be me but I have to make sure I’m not harming others. I learned encouragement and understanding in Tradition Five, where it’s not always about me. I found cooperation in Tradition Six as I was asked, “Do you want to be right or do you want to be happy?” I practice shared leadership in Tradition Nine as I was told I no longer have to do anything alone. The principle of attraction in Tradition Eleven was emphasized with the saying, “You could be a good example, or you could be a good bad example.” I’ve been both. Then there’s anonymity in Traditions Eleven and Twelve. My sponsor’s favorite question is, “Why is anonymity the spiritual foundation of all our traditions?” I like to ask people that too now. I look at anonymity as a super principle, I guess. I think it incorporates other spiritual principles within it. I think it has equality, humility, patience, tolerance, and integrity all built in. I believe we all have the same spiritual potential. We’re all spiritual equals but we’re not necessarily all in the same spiritual place. It doesn’t matter though how long we’ve been here, what we do for a living, or what family we belong to. We all have access to these tools which are the spiritual principles. For me, the Traditions help me be a better we.

There are the Concepts. They have helped me to participate in the world through service and help make it a better place for us all. The principles found in the Concepts have provided me with an opportunity to practice delegation, authority, participation, flexibility, balance, personal leadership, abundance, prudence, and equality. I have to become a good leader of myself before I can be of service to others.

My favorite is Concept Four, "Participation is the key to harmony." I like to add, "but only when asked to participate." I used to participate without being asked, and that's not very good. I also love Warranty One, "An ample reserve is our prudent financial principle." I like that because there's always enough. I just need to use my time and money and talents wisely.

The second question talks about how I apply them in all my affairs, including my sponsorship relationships. The simple answer to that is practice, practice, practice. By working with my sponsors and sponsees, I can read and study Conference Approved Literature and look for the principles in each Step, Tradition, and Concept. Then I get to practice them. I practice the principles at home, I practice them in meetings, with my sponsor, with my sponsees, when I was at work, and when I was at school. The best place to practice the spiritual principles is in the car or in line at the grocery store, basically everywhere! And then we can share our experience, strength, and hope through sponsorship and in workshops like this.

The third question talks about sharing the principles with my sponsees and setting the example. By sponsoring, I get to work the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts over and over again and I get to hear other people's experience, strength, and hope. I'm even currently working with several ladies that wanted to study the Concepts. They hadn't studied the Concepts yet, so we created a series of conference calls, and we went through the Concepts using *Paths to Recovery*. We're now using *Reaching for Personal Freedom*, to go horizontally through the Legacies- Step One, Tradition One, Concept One.

One example of setting an example is being flexible about when we meet, where we meet, how long we meet for, and how often we meet for. Everyone's program is not the same so I can't treat everyone the same. That wasn't the case when I was early in program. I had somebody tell me I had to call her every day at a certain time. That lasted about two times because she was always busy.

Another example is not being over- or under-responsible but just being responsible for my side of the street. I ask the people I sponsor to call me to set up a time to get together since it's their program. We set up our next time when we do get together.

I think about balance. An airplane spends about 97% of its time in course correction. Taking care of ourselves before trying to care for others -- the old oxygen mask on the airplane -- is not scary if I take care of myself first. My favorite way of taking care of me is planning pajama days and massages. I just have to remember that I could be a good example or a good bad example.

The last thing I wanted to talk about was encouraging service. If you want plenty of practice living by spiritual principles, just take on a service commitment. I like what Sue said that it's part of our recovery. Whether it's with the group, the district, the AIS, the Area, or the WSO level, the same spiritual principles need to be practiced. Mutual respect, mutual trust, responsibility, and acceptance, those are the ones I work on constantly.



I just need to do my part and allow others to do theirs. I didn't know it at the time, but at the very first meeting I went to, I was encouraged to do service. During the announcements, someone passed around an envelope with slips of paper with three names and phone numbers on them, and she asked for volunteers to call them to remind them that they had signed up to bring something to the Hospitality Suite at Convention being held the following weekend. The lady sitting beside me poked me and said, "Honey, take one. It will be good for you." She was right. So, I encourage everyone to get into service, get a sponsor if you don't have one, and study the Steps, the Traditions, and the Concepts.

Find your spiritual principles because they might be different from mine. Use them when you take them into your next service position. Look for the opportunities to be of service. Thank you for allowing me to participate in this tonight. These have been fabulous workshops and I appreciate the time.

**Norm:**

My name is Norm W. I'm an incredibly blessed member of the worldwide fellowship of Al-Anon and Alateen. I want to thank Claudia and the Arizona Area for asking me to share on the subject. It's interesting that all of us got the same materials, and I saw things differently from the way anybody else did. I thought I was just supposed to answer the questions so I'm just going to go ahead and do that and throw in my stuff as I go along.

The first question was "What are the spiritual principles?" To me, the spiritual principles that are key for my recovery are what I call God-consciousness, faith, and trust. Recognizing that all answers are in Higher Power's hands and that I can only be truly happy when I seek to bring my actions and my thoughts in alignment with my spirit's will. Central to this is seeing that the God within me – the soul, the inner voice, that place at the core - that is the essence of love and childlike wonder and that part of each of us untouched by the disease of alcoholism. It is all that we admire and aspire to be. For me, it is that piece of my gentle spirit within me, and I call it my soul.

The second thing is self-love. I came to the program overwhelmed with self-hatred and contempt for myself. Every major action I took, every decision I made, was grounded in fear, insecurity, and false ego. That was true for the first 48 years of my life, and all too often, it's still true even after I found you. Self-love to me is the goal of recovery. For it to occur, I believe it must be grounded in faith, acceptance, and my creator's love for me just as I am. Related spiritual concepts for me are self-care and boundaries. I need to take responsibility for my actions, my attitudes, and my happiness. Victimhood was my primary religion when I came here. It was my main compensatory behavior. I spent almost all my life looking for someone else to blame for my misery, my failed relationships, and my own unacceptable behavior. An integral part of this is the spiritual concept of gratitude. Another one is honesty and communication with love. To me honesty is the absolute core of recovery. I must also learn to

look at myself and others with love and compassion, and that ties in with the concept of mutual respect.

Forgiveness has been key to me, understanding that holding onto resentments only poisons *me*. It does nothing but create soul holes and soul sickness within me. My belief is that humility is about understanding my relationship to my Higher Power and all other beings. I need to know what is mine and what is God's. I need to accept that all other beings have their own God and trying to understand that I'm not it. It includes safety, confidentiality, and respecting anonymity. There is no more important principle than the creation and safety of our rooms and relationships, particularly in sponsorship.

How do I apply them in all my affairs, including sponsorship relationships? The key to recovery, especially in sponsorship, is the commitment to continuously work the Steps and to also work the Traditions and the Concepts. I began the Steps right after I got my first sponsor. He was my first spiritual giant. That was when my true healing began. I saw patterns of my choices, of victimhood, and failure to take responsibility for my actions. I saw the pain that my anger, my self-righteousness, and my resentments had caused others, those whose only sin was to love me. I began to recognize my ongoing struggle with self-contempt.

He introduced me to a benevolent power greater than myself. I had not accepted that this God could actually love me. Then he disappeared. We made it to the Twelfth Step, but he left when we were still working it. I stopped working the Steps. I really think this was a key part of my recovery. For the next five years, I didn't have a sponsor, and I didn't work the Steps. Who I was and what I became was what you'd expect. It was service that saved me.

SWRDM is the Southwest Regional Delegate's Meeting. We were there on a Friday night, and I thought two former Delegates would come to kiss my ring and tell me what a wonderful job I was doing for humanity and the world and the New Mexico Area in particular. But that's not what they wanted to talk to me about. They wanted to talk to me about my ego and my arrogance. They wanted to talk to me about misusing the service manual. They wanted to talk to me about self-promotion and dominance. To prove just how right they were, I responded by being the victim of all victims.

I knew on a soul level that I needed to change my life. I needed to change the things I was doing, and I needed to work the Steps and get a sponsor. Since then I have been continuously sponsored and continued to work the Steps. In sponsorship, I talk to my sponsees about the necessity of continuing with the steps. Each time I have taken the Steps, something that I needed to work on was revealed. Most of the time, I had no idea where my Higher Power was going to lead me.

My faith became the essence of my recovery. I struggled with God from the outset of my time in Al-Anon. My development with a relationship with a Higher Power has been a long and slow process. The God of my childhood was an angry punishing vindictive God. I knew where I was going, and I didn't want anything to do with him.

My first sponsor, my spiritual giant, gave me glimpses of a kind and loving Higher Power. After I began working the Steps again with a new sponsor, we continued to speak of a benevolent God, but I still couldn't fully accept that this God existed. Even if he did, I didn't believe that he could ever love me -- not with what I had done in my life and what he knew about me. Then my gentle spirit brought David into my life. Our GR brought a meeting to David. David was dying of a terminal disease. He had been a vibrant, exciting man, and an athlete.

I saw him lying on a cot in his living room and he talked about his gratitude for his God's love for him -- how it had brought his daughter back into his life and the grace that he had from this. And I sat there thinking about how I would be feeling? And I knew that I would be bitter, angry, and I would feel like I was betrayed by God.

I had no sponsor at that time, and I wanted desperately to have what this man had. I thought to myself that not even I could be that selfish to ask a dying man to sponsor me. Then in my meditation, time and time again, I kept on seeing David's face. When I asked him to sponsor me, he agreed. He never asked me why I had picked him, and we never talked about it.

When I walked into his living room after work on Tuesday night, he said to me, "Norm, where are you at with your second Step?" If God wasn't directing that, I don't know what was. He gave me a loving, kind, benevolent God who only wanted what was best for me. He showed me God's presence in all 12 Steps, and he told me the story of his Tunisian grandmother who told him "Abba es tota," which is Latin for "God is everything."

Higher Power is the answer to every question, every problem, every concern -- the place we look when we feel lost, the place we look when we need an answer. He told me to listen to that inner voice. That's where I would find God. I would find peace when I was right and the discomfort of the disease when I was going against it. It was from hearing this voice that I began to be able to tell what was true and what was not true. I began to tell each of my sponsees that they are on their own journey and only by hearing their inner voice can they know where their path is taking them. I can't tell them what to do, and what may be the right answer for me may have nothing to do with them.

I share the principles with my sponsees. David showed me that mutual respect, patience, and humility were key in sponsoring. I must know my place and practice that humility. My sponsees' growth, what comes out of this walk through the Steps, how long it takes, and what we work on is in spirit's hands, not in mine and not in theirs. Each time I worked the Steps, I thought I knew where it would lead. Every once in a blue moon, I was right. Usually we would wind up working on something that I had never even thought about. I try to allow the focus of our trip through the steps to be what the sponsee tells me is going on with him or what he writes about.

I must be flexible as to where the Steps lead me and what my inner voice tells me when talking about Higher Power. It's difficult because there are so many conceptions of it. I must be patient with *their* faith. Each will develop his own concept of God in his own time. I share my concept, and we speak of what we think. It means to have a Power greater than ourselves, as it says in

Step Two. Or it means God as we understood him in Step Three. I allow them to develop their own concept, and I try to give them silly exercises like walking around with a pad and writing down every time they feel God's presence or they see a proof of God in their life.

Taking responsibility for my actions was so huge for me because I was just such a victim and I had to learn to take responsibility. I think one of the things my first sponsor gave me was the notion that it's a choice -- I actually had choices. I was choosing to be a victim. My welfare and my wellbeing were my decisions. Putting that in someone else's hands was my choice too, and I usually made the sickest person in the room my God. Bill made me understand as *Courage to Change* tells us, that ours is a disease of attitudes and our attitudes are within our control. I never understood that. I love the reading about the misery list and the gratitude list, and the Cherokee story of the two wolves where he learns to pay attention to which wolf he is feeding -- and that he gets to dictate that. My compensatory behaviors of being a victim, the things I used to cover up so that other people wouldn't see, are the things I learned to deal with in service.

I don't pressure my sponsees to become involved in service. I share with them what service has given to me and what it means to me. I suggest to them positions that they'd be good at. My inner voice has told me not to ever make them do service as a condition of us working together. Some of them have been active in service, and some of them have not. All of them have given me way more than I have given them. Thank you.

**Question:** How would you end a relationship with a sponsor?

**Panelist Response (Sue):** Well, I already told you how *not* to do it. The only thing I know is that I did it in anger, and that was the problem. When I left Ohio, I just told my sponsor I was moving and thanked her and moved on and that was fine. I think today if I needed to do that there would be a lot of prayer involved and making sure that I wasn't doing it in anger. It depends a lot on the relationship too.

**Question:** In all the different places that you have lived and experienced the program, did you experience any differences in sponsorship?

**Panelist Response (Sue):** It is interesting to go to different parts of the country because there are regional differences. I think the differences probably had more to do with where I was in my growth in the program. Some of it was differences because of the region where I was. I came into Al-Anon on the wave of all the adult children. Also, I didn't know it, but I went into a meeting where there were a lot of members of AA, and so they needed someone who could be a Group Representative. I was one of the few who could go as a Group Representative. My sponsor helped me through that decision and how to do that.

Yes, I did experience it differently but it's hard to tell if that's because of the region. A lot of it was because of where I was in my program. All of them were helpful to me in their role in the different things that I needed at those times.

**Question:** Is it important for your sponsor to have a similar situation to yours?

**Panelist Response (Cindy):** No. I didn't know what I was doing when I first got into the program. I thought that I wanted somebody that was similar to me, but she was quite the opposite. All that was required was that she was working a good program that she could share with me.

**Question:** What does a Service Sponsor do? Do we need two sponsors?

**Panelist Response (Norm):** For me, a service sponsor is a little different than a recovery sponsor. The subjects we talk about are more substantive. It's dealing with issues that I don't understand or that are beyond my experience. I've tried to get four or five people who have done the position I'm doing or have dealt with the issue that I am dealing with. I will send them all an email. None of them ever agree, but reading all the different responses helps me understand how I feel or what I know or where I think it should go. I find service sponsorship distinct for me. I will raise service issues, especially because as one service sponsor said to me, "We didn't get here because we're well." I do talk to my recovery sponsor about some of the things that come up for me personally. Service sponsorship flows on trying to understand issues that I don't have a grasp on.

**Panelist Response (Cindy):** There's no right or wrong answer here. Service sponsorship came about in the late '90s. When I first asked my current sponsor to be my service sponsor, she said no. It was a new concept back then. Service Sponsorship seems to have come about because there weren't enough people in service, and people were struggling in service. They said if your personal sponsor isn't in service, then get yourself a service sponsor so they can help you with the service positions that you are taking on. You can also get a service sponsor for one particular service position.

My personal sponsor today is also my service sponsor, but she's been in many service positions and I've followed suit in a lot of those positions. She was the perfect service sponsor as well as personal sponsor. I am a service sponsor to some people. Their sponsor is not in service at this time, so they felt they needed a service sponsor. It's a personal decision.

**Question:** How do you as a sponsor teach your sponsees how they might gain self-love?

**Panelist Response (Norm):** I let the Steps teach them how they gain self-love. It's a process of working the Steps. Each one is individual. I wish I had a template that I could use to teach people how to gain self-love. I would probably work it on myself first. But I think when you deal with each person, your Higher Power directs where the Steps take you and hopefully the end product is moving closer toward self-love.

**Question:** Can you tell us a little bit about studying the Concepts and Traditions?

**Panelist Response (Cindy):** I mentioned there's a group of us that get together and do a conference call. There's a freebie out there called No-Cost Conference that we use. We set up a time up on our calendars, and we call in. We were using *Paths to Recovery*. We'd take turns reading a paragraph. We'd complete the reading and do our homework – the questions -- and then we take turns sharing our answers and sharing on what everybody read. Now we're doing that with *Reaching for Personal Freedom*, where we'll read and answer the questions as we get to them.

When I work with sponsees, we read the literature out loud and we share about principles that we find and how we can apply them in our personal lives.

**Question:** How has your idea of a perfect sponsor changed over time? Also, please let us know about your fears when you started sponsoring.

**Panelist Response (Cindy):** There is no such thing as a perfect sponsor. I haven't been a perfect sponsor, and I feel sorry for the people that first asked me to be their sponsor because it's a growing experience. We're all just struggling along this journey of recovery. What I love about sponsoring people is that I get to work on me. I get as much out of the relationship as they do if not more.

I get to hear their experience, strength, and hope on what they see. I learn more every time I sit down with somebody and read the same piece of literature. We read the daily readers, and we swear we never read that page before. Sometimes in the literature, we read a paragraph and something hits.

I was afraid to be a sponsor in the beginning. When somebody asked me, I went running to my own sponsor. I wanted her to say, "You can say no," but she said, "You have more program than this person so go do it. Just stay ahead of her in the Steps." That was twofold for me. It broke the fear barrier because I was able to sit down and work through the Steps with someone else and it kept me working my Steps myself.

**Panelist Response (Sue):** I don't know if I ever had the idea of a perfect sponsor, but it's the perfect sponsor for me at that time. Whenever I would thank one of my sponsors for spending time with me, she would always say, "No, it helps me more than it helps you." That always helped me to understand that I'm not burdening her because I could use that as an excuse not to call or not to keep that contact. I try to remember to say that to the people I sponsor- because it does help me, and before you sponsor you don't know that.

I've had way more people disappear, fade off into nowhere, or move to other places than I've had stay with me. And at first, I thought that I was doing something wrong, but it wasn't that. This disease just has very profound effects on people, and I don't know what they are all are. Even with people that I've worked with for a long time.

I had to give people the dignity to make their own choices about that relationship. I had to give myself dignity to make choices too because sometimes it doesn't work for me as a sponsor. I cannot sponsor someone else in a way that I haven't been sponsored. Sometimes I sit down with people to talk about the idea of sponsorship and they'd tell me exactly what they want me to do. That has not been my experience in the program and that's not going to work for me because I don't know how to do that. I can only sponsor the way I've been sponsored.

**Panelist Response (Norm):** Initially I was looking at what people were -- whether they were a GR (Group Representative) – or what they had that they could give to me. That just was the shallowness of the way I was when I came in here. Really, the perfect sponsor is whoever Higher Power picks for you. In the infinite wisdom of the universe, we all have the opportunity to be with the person who could give us what we need at that time.

I am trying to be much more open about trying different ways of sponsorship because I have been in situations where people applied a one-way-fits-all approach that didn't work for me. It's part of my learning process for me. Lately I've had people that have gone through the Steps repeatedly. I've been trying to be more open and flexible as to what they are looking for. Usually I wind up getting way more than I know they're getting out of it.

#### **Additional Shares:**

**Member share:** Hi everybody, my name is Jayme. I'm a grateful member of the worldwide fellowship of Al-Anon and Alateen. I've heard a lot of really good things tonight, and I can really relate to a lot of it.

I am sponsored and I sponsor a handful of women, and I also have a service sponsor. I have a service sponsor because my sponsor is not in service at all, and I needed to be able to talk to someone about the things going on in my life that relate to service.

I was asked to look at the questions, choose one, and talk on it for two minutes. I'm in Orange County, California, which is the hotbed of certain types of sponsorship, and I've had a lot of experience with it, so I chose to talk on a principle and how I apply that in all my affairs including my sponsorship relationships.

When I was new in Al-Anon, I was with a crowd of people and there was a lot of gossip and criticism. There were a lot of members knowing what other members said to their sponsors. The spiritual principle that I chose tonight is anonymity. I chose it because it has become so sacred to me because of what I experienced as a newcomer for the first couple years that I was in Al-Anon. For me, anonymity is one of the most important concepts and spiritual principles. I hold sacred what's being told to me by the women that I sponsor, and it's such a spiritual principle for me. I have women that I sponsor, that are friends, that will say to me, "I need to tell you something and this is between you and me." Somebody said that to me today, and I told them, "You don't have to keep telling me that because it *is* between you and me, no matter what you tell me on whatever level it is. Trust that."

Trust is another spiritual principle. I practice it in my own life with my adult children. I have three adult children that are married and have children of their own, and I talk to each of them almost every day. No matter what they tell me, it's anonymous and it's sacred.

As a child, I watched my mother have these triangular relationships. Thanks be to God, thanks be to this program, thanks be to the Steps, and the Traditions, and the Concepts, I don't have those kind of relationships. My children know that if they tell me something, no one is going to know.

Anonymity is very sacred to me so Thank you!

**Member share:** Hi, I'm Diane, and I've been asked to talk about fears of being a sponsor. I am fairly new to Al-Anon. I've been in it for about three years this August, and I just now completed my 12 Steps. It's baby steps, learning each thing that you do and going through it.

My fear of being a sponsor is that I still have a severe case of overextending, or fixing people. I got into Al-Anon late. I am in my 60s so it's very hard to unlearn some of the defects that I have. It's a trust issue for myself. I don't want to cause any harm to anybody.

When I was growing up, I was very quiet. I'm the adult child of an alcoholic. I was quite introverted, and then I swung the other way and got really talkative. I find Al-Anon is the middle ground. I'm trying to learn boundaries and not getting enmeshed with people. I don't want to analyze it, but these are all things I'm learning in Al-Anon. I'm trying to have them become second nature so that I don't cause any harm to anyone else. I wouldn't want to mess anybody up. If someone asked me today, do you want to sponsor, I'd say, "No, I'm not ready." I feel like I need to get more grounded. What I decided for myself is that I'm going to go over the Steps again. It's January so I'll go over the First Step and just read it and go through it again and try to walk myself through these Steps so they become second nature.

Then I'd feel like I'd have more stability and confidence and better boundaries to be a sponsor. Thank you!

**Member share:** Thanks everybody for speaking. It's been wonderful.

The spiritual principles are like file folders for the rules of the road. I have maybe 100 file folders marked love and trust and faith and hope and all that. In each file folder, I have a whole bunch of actions. In "love," I might find patience and tolerance and shut your mouth and things like that.

At first, I thought that the purpose of taking a Step was just to tick the box. I'm done with that Step; now I can move on to the next one. In each Step, I learned skills that give me an opportunity to really learn the spiritual principles of that Step. Someone said they chose their sponsor because they saw that she had the principles of the program tattooed on her heart. I didn't get that the first three months from reading them on the wall. I had to apply them; I had to live them.



How do I apply them in all my affairs? I can be the most spiritually evolved person on the planet, and then I walk in my front door and it's bombs away! Right here is where the tests come, and right here, I learn how to make amends. I learn, and I learn, and I learn.

One of the biggest things I've been learning lately is to look for the good. I have this picture in my head of the way things are supposed to be, and nothing out there is exactly like that so I'm unhappy. When I can truly be present and truly see things as they are, I can see how lovely they are and that's the Steps being here right now with me and my Higher Power.