

Arizona Sponsorship Workshop

Saturday, March 21, 2020

Segment Four – Panel shares and discussion on Steps 1, 2 and 3

- Techniques for working these Steps
- Literature used

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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Beth:

Hi, my name is Beth, and I am a very grateful member of this program. Today I'm celebrating my Al-Anon anniversary and couldn't think of a better way to do so than participating in this workshop.

I am at a point in my program where I am beginning to work with a fair number of sponsees. This is the first time in sponsorship that I have been able to start doing anything more than Steps One, Two, and Three with a sponsee. I actually have two sponsees that are going through

Steps Four and Five with right now. I thought that Steps One, Two and Three would be the best for me to share on since I've got lots of experience there.

Step One: We admitted we were powerless over alcohol -- that our lives had become unmanageable.

It seems to me that I attract sponsees that come in angry, and that's probably because I came in angry myself. I think we attract people who can identify with us. It was so crucial to me that I learn to move the idea of alcoholism as a disease from my head to my heart. I find that transition is really critical with just about every woman I sponsor. I know I had a really hard time admitting my powerlessness until I could fully comprehend that the alcoholic I'm powerless over is sick so I do a lot of work at the beginning with my sponsees on really getting that knowledge to move from head to heart.

We have a lot of wonderful literature. I use *How Al-Anon Works* and *Paths to Recovery*. Quite early on, I also use that wonderful pamphlet called *Merry Go Round Called Denial*. That one really seems to get the point across.

Quite often I go back to the original instructions for the first Step because it's so important that they understand the disease concept. Once that idea gets into their heart and into our discussions, I can hear that my sponsees have the knowledge that the person they're concerned about and obsessed with is sick. Then I find it easier to go on to other discussions.

Sometimes it involves reading and sharing one paragraph at a time from our literature about our powerlessness over people, places, and things. We are powerless over just about everything in our lives, everything but our own responses (rather than reactions). Different people seem to vary between whether their major issue is the powerlessness or the unmanageability of what life has become. And which one the sponsee is struggling with more often guides where the conversations go and determines which one we focus on first.

Once we've gone through all the questions at the end of Step One in the *Paths to Recovery* book, the next thing I do is ask, "How do you feel? Are you ready to move on to Step Two? Do you feel you are truly at a point where you have completed Step One? This is something you're going to have to do on a daily basis, but are you at a point where you're comfortable moving on to Step Two?"

Step Two: Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

One of the first things I do, especially with sponsees that are having God issues, is to ask them to stand naked in front of a full-length mirror and honestly look at themselves and ask if they really think that they are the most powerful thing in the universe. I have yet to meet anybody who, upon doing that exercise, really thinks they're the greatest thing. That visualization of looking in the mirror really gets across that there has to be something in the universe greater than they are.

From that realization, it seems to be much easier to move on to admitting that our thinking hasn't been quite normal. I do a lot of discussion with sponsees about how Al-Anon's use of the term "insane" or "restore me to sanity" does not mean that they need to be locked up in a straitjacket. It just means that their thinking isn't whole -- they've given away part of the whole pie.

When we experience insanity by doing the same things over and over again but expecting different results, we have expectations that aren't realistic. Then the ladies I've worked with seem to comprehend that there is hope that they can get pieces of themselves back through turning to something that's greater than they are.

It can be the group, a sociologically acceptable version of God, a religious entity, or whatever their personal concept is. I usually go into depth with, "What do you feel is your personal concept? How are you visualizing? How are you thinking? Do you realize that if at any point in your recovery journey, you discover that your Higher Power is not big enough for you, you can fire him and find a new one? It's okay to be mad at your Higher Power. God understands." These are all lessons that it took me years to get. It's really important.

Some of the people I work with come in with a decent faith, but a lot of them come in with the same thing I did -- that God is a terrorist and is going to get them if He finds them. We start shifting that to a concept of a loving Higher Power that cares about us. That's a real journey for a lot of the women I work with, just as it was for me.

I always share with my sponsees that I struggle with that phrase about being "restored to sanity." I don't think my Higher Power restored me to sanity. In my upbringing, I don't think that I ever was sane. I think God has granted me sanity for the first time in my life. That's a big piece of my sharing -- that I was in a family where I was "off the wall" from the get-go. I have no memories of being whole in my thinking or how I reacted to the world. For me, it's a gift that I've got any sanity at all so I make sure that my sponsees know that there is the possibility, even if you come to the realization that you never were sane, that you can get this gift.

Step Three: Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.

The "we" is personal with each person -- all you're doing is making the decision that you're going to do it. You're making a commitment that you are going to follow through by doing the rest of the steps. Making the decision that you're going to do it doesn't get it done. What gets it done is working the rest of the steps. Again, you always have to go through all the readings. Go through the questions at the end of the chapter on Step Three in *Paths to Recovery*. We have lots of discussion about, "How do you feel? Have you tried doing this? Have you tried a slight change in attitude? Okay, you did that! You did this. You used the new tool. What was the response to you? Do you feel that things are improving and getting better?"

I use a lot of touchstones like that. We do a lot of sharing back and forth and listening to where they are coming from and hopefully getting across that participation is really important. You only get it by practicing it. You only get it by giving it away. I am a firm believer that only making one meeting a week is fine, but if that is the case, you should be making lots of phone calls. My personal opinion is that I didn't grow very far or very fast on one meeting a week. I needed more than that. In today's world, that's going to be difficult for a lot of us.

I do a lot of work long distance on the phone. I was meeting one of my sponsees face-to-face while she was here, but while she's in Canada, we've been working over the phone. That's working great. I'm in Yuma. I had been meeting with my sponsees here in Yuma at the library. The library's closed now so we're working on the phone. That's not something that's scary for me. It's something that I have found works very well.

Melody:

Thank you for this opportunity to speak on Steps One, Two and Three. When I look back on the person I was when I first came in, I see a young woman that was deep into a pit of quicksand. And the more I struggled, the deeper I got. I didn't know it at the time, but when I went to that first meeting, I was reaching my hand out to a power greater than myself. And when I asked somebody to sponsor me, I was again reaching my hand out to that power. Working the steps gave me a firm foundation, especially Steps One, Two and Three. Working those steps was building a foundation and that foundation was a reliance on a power greater than myself. From that point on, I could build the life that I had always wanted but could never seem to get.

Working Steps One, Two, and Three involves reading conference-approved literature, doing some writing about how the Step applies to my life, and then sharing that with my sponsor. My favorite book is *Paths to Recovery* because the main text on each step is pretty comprehensive. The stories provide me with different perspectives on the Step, and the questions provide a basis for doing some writing. I strongly believe that writing should be done with pen and paper, not on a computer. Something happens for me when my thoughts go from my brain to my hand and then come out on paper. I have huge awareness when I do that, and so I strongly suggest to my sponsees that they do the same. As far as the literature that they use, I'm open to that. I suggest *Paths to Recovery*, but if they'd rather use another piece of literature that's also fine.

Step One: I understood when I got here that I was powerless. I was so beat down by the family disease of alcoholism. I just knew that, but I had no idea that my behavior was controlling or manipulative. I thought that's just what you do. There's a problem; you fix it. I didn't understand that going-along-to-get-along and people-pleasing were forms of control and manipulation. I did that to keep the alcoholic from being angry.

I had no idea how my life was unmanageable. Everything looked good on the outside. I was responsible. I went to work. My bills were paid. My house was clean. My child was clothed and fed. I thought everything was perfectly managed. I had no idea that my violent and rage-filled

rampages through my house were a sign that maybe things were unmanageable. Nor did I understand that spending nights on the floor crying to a God I didn't even believe in was a sign that my life was unmanageable.

What really helped me when working Step One was listening to other people. My sponsor shared with me. I listened to people in the meetings talk about those specific things -- the specific actions that they were taking to try and control what they were powerless over. Specifically, what in their lives was unmanageable? I recommend that to my sponsees. When they're having trouble identifying those things, talk to other people. Bring the subject up in the meetings. Read the literature. I share my own experience, and I'm looking for them to be able to start to identify those things.

Step One is about awareness. I cannot change anything I'm not aware of. It doesn't mean they have to identify everything, but just get a start on it. For me, working the Steps is a lifelong process. I really like the analogy of the peeling of the onion. I think those layers come off when they're supposed to. I don't feel that as a sponsor, it's my job to take off anybody's blanket of denial. That can actually be harmful so I might point out what I'm seeing and hearing from someone who is struggling. And then I ask, "Do you think that's what might be happening?" And if the answer is no, I let it go. But sometimes the answer is, "Yes, that's exactly it!" They can identify. So the goal is just to start identifying those behaviors of control, manipulation, and unmanageability in Step One.

The very first time I read Step Two, I zeroed in on the "restored to sanity" part and I thought, "Well, that's kind of weird because that implies that I'm insane, and I am not the insane one. I'm the one who's got it all together. You just follow my plan and everything's going to be fine." By the time I finished working Step Two, I had come to believe that yes, I was insane and that I needed to be restored to sanity. Every morning when I got up and went into my kitchen, the first thing I saw was the fist-sized hole I put in my kitchen cupboard and that was a clear sign of my insanity. You know, it took working the Steps to figure that out.

As I began to work, to do the reading and the writing, I began noticing instances where I would respond differently. I would react differently. Something kind and loving would come out of my mouth instead of something critical and hateful, and it would catch me by surprise! I would think, "What? Where the heck did that come from?" Then I'd remember that there's a power greater than myself out there and he's helping me out. I would share those things with my sponsor, and she encouraged me to keep a miracle book to write those things down. Again, writing with pen and paper.

To be honest I'm more in favor of doing a gratitude list. I express what I'm grateful for on a daily basis because it helps remind me on a daily basis that God is working in my life and can restore me to sanity whenever things get out of balance. I strongly recommend gratitude lists to my sponsees. It's helped me to change my perspective from the glass is half empty to the glass is half full. In Step Two, I'm just kind of looking for when I can say, "Yes, I need to be restored to sanity." That's acceptance.

Step One is awareness; Step Two is acceptance of my behavior and acknowledging that I need help. I'm looking for the ability to accept that and begin to identify specific instances in which there is a Higher Power helping out.

The important part of Step Three for me is the "God of our understanding" part. I was pretty closed-minded when it came to the program. Anything having to do with God, higher power, spirituality, or prayer -- I didn't want to hear it. I chose not to hear it for about three months because I didn't want to leave. There was something about the meetings that was really attractive to me, but I felt like if I let that "God" information in, I was going to have to leave.

I'm so very, very grateful that nobody told me what I needed to believe or who I needed to believe in and that I was given the space and the time to come to my own understanding. Again, that's a lifelong process. Just at the last Sponsorship Workshop, I had an awareness about my Higher Power that brought me to an even deeper understanding of Him so my relationship is constantly evolving, and I allow my sponsees the space and the time to do the same. To come to their own understanding. Again, there doesn't need to be a complete picture -- just the beginning of that understanding.

I feel the same way about prayer. I was very closed off to prayer for a long time. I'd never done prayer. I didn't know how to do it. I didn't want to do it. There are a lot of good suggestions in our literature about prayer and meditation and what that means. It's mostly the suggestions of our members and what has worked for them. There are no rules about how to do it. Other than the Serenity Prayer, you won't find any specific prayers in our literature.

I prefer to pray in my own words and not recite something that has been written. However, there were a few people in the very beginning who told me that I should be praying on my knees. That is a position, because of my past history, that I associate with dominance and humiliation. I didn't want to do it, and I don't do it, but I went through a period of time feeling guilty about it because I was told I *should* do it. I didn't understand exactly why I didn't want to do it. I just knew that. It took me a while to figure it out. So, I don't have any rules for sponsees about prayer and meditation. I allow them to decide for themselves how they want to do that.

Step Three is the action part. One is awareness, Two is acceptance, Three is action. And of course, the action is not turning my will and my life over. I do that in the rest of the Steps. It's making the decision that I'm going to turn my will and my life over, and I do that.

I make that decision in a number of ways. Every time I call my sponsor, it's a decision. It's a decision to turn my will and my life over. Every time I go to a meeting, every time I pick up a piece of literature, every time I'm of service -- those are all decisions. Every time I take an action contrary to what I would have done in the past, I'm turning my life and my will over in that decision. Being able to understand that takes the mystery out of it.

I get a lot of questions from my sponsees. How do I know I'm turning my will over? How do I know what God's will is? How do I know that I'm following it? All I need to do is use those tools. God has given me those tools to help me. I believe I don't need to know what God's will is. I don't even need to know if I'm following it. I just need to take the next right action. If I'm in doubt then I pick up a tool, and that might lead me to some clarity of what it is I need to do or just simply take an action contrary to what I've done in the past. Helping a sponsee to understand that just really takes all the question and the mystery out of it.

Oftentimes I'll get calls from sponsees that are upset because their self-will has gotten in the way one more time. I encourage them to literally pat themselves on the back for calling me because that's picking up a tool and doing something different. I encourage them to pat themselves on the back every time they use a tool. In the very beginning, my sponsor used to say, "Well, I guess you are human." I can clean up whatever mistake I have made. Only once I came to believe that I was human and it was okay did I then stop getting down in the dumps and complaining to her. She didn't need to tell me that I was human anymore. I understood it for myself. I always try to be encouraging, never condemning, with my sponsees.

Kim:

I want to share a little bit about walking into my first meeting. It was in a private Alano club. We had big banners of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. We would read the Steps and Traditions and people would talk about working the Steps and my thought was, "Are you kidding me? I have been working to save my own bacon! To keep my life together! To keep my marriage together and you're talking about having to work on something?"

I walked in wanting a quick fix. But there was also something in the meeting that kept drawing me back. I sat there and compared the differences. I'm not like that. I don't do that. I'm not that old. I don't have all those kids. I was looking for differences instead of commonalities. But I stuck around because of the love. There was something in those meetings that drew me, for one hour, into a place where I was safe. I didn't have to have any answers. I could just listen. And that's one of the best gifts that Al-Anon has given me -- to become a better listener.

In Step One, I definitely knew that my life was unmanageable because I ended up in Al-Anon. But the powerless part was really hard for me. I didn't understand that alcoholism was a disease. I was in the program quite a while before I actually found a sponsor. We formed a relationship first before we started working the Steps, and one of the things that we did together was to attend speaker meetings. We went to open AA meetings. For some reason, listening to someone tell their story was the kind of thing that I was starting to grab on to. It was working for other people. Could it work for me? Was there a possibility that maybe my life could get better? If I was willing to just look at my part instead of always looking at what the other person was doing.

I had a very loving sponsor. She kept me on track. I'd call and want to sing the "hims." Always talking about "him." She gently guided me back to my part by asking, "What is your part? What could you do differently?" I didn't want to look at me. I wanted to look at that other person and I wanted them fixed. I thought by me going to Al-Anon it would fix another person. That was just where I was at in my own illness.

I was encouraged to read lots of literature, especially about the disease. Once I could get this idea from the head to the heart -- that this person I loved didn't wake up every morning and decide to make my life miserable. When I walked into Al-Anon, that's what I really believed was happening. That this person chose to do this to me. It was intentional. It was mean. So here I am now getting new information that this disease has control over someone I love. That he doesn't choose to get up every morning and act or behave the way he does. And now I am being introduced to a program that's going to help me act and behave differently. What a gift.

One of the slogans was "Just for Today." When I'd start complaining, she'd say, "Just for Today. Let's just get through today." And the slogan "One Day at a Time." Just one day at a time is all you have to do to get through this. I was anxious but scared. I wanted to move forward, but I was also terrified of moving forward. And she would just say in a really loving way, "Let's just do it together." I'm just so grateful for sponsorship.

On Step Two, we came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. There was a power within the meeting that I felt. I was avoiding that whole God thing too. Whenever any of the Steps were talked about that had a God in them, I was like, "Ugh! Do I have to figure this God thing out right now?" I just want to get better and I want him to quit drinking and we can talk about God later. Just listening in meetings and getting that support, I could pick up the phone and share my crazies. "I'm nuts. This is what I'm doing." Never once did she say, "Oh my God! You did that?"

We've all done these things. I am not any more special than the next person. Somebody talked about picking up that heavy phone, and I remember going through those periods of that phone weighing around a thousand pounds. It was so hard to admit when I behaved badly, but I was starting to be transformed through sponsorship and through literature and through writing.

We used *Al-Anon's Twelve Steps & Twelve Traditions* and a lot of daily readers back then. That's kind of what we had. Now we have such wonderful workbooks that are fabulous and *Paths to Recovery* and *How Al-Anon Works*. Reading the stories of what other people have gone through helps me to know I'm not the first. When I hear the stories from the people that paved the way for me to start to heal from a disease that I didn't cause and that I can't cure and can't control, especially by one of our founders such as Lois what a gift that is!

On Step Three, I made a decision to turn my will and my life over to the care of God as I understood Him. Here I know I'm ready and I have to start looking at how I can come to understand what my Higher Power might look like. I needed my loving sponsor. We just talked a lot about it. She said things like, "Was it the meeting? You can make it your meeting. You can

borrow mine. My God's working for me. I think He could work for you too. You want to pray to my God? Pray to my God!" I just took the little baby steps of starting to do things differently and just opening the door to the possibility that I would find a way to my own higher power.

I remember I'd gone to a meeting and said something. After the meeting, a woman walked up to me, and I thought she was coming after me. Now I know she wasn't. She said I had used a word that was a word we didn't use in Al-Anon. Oh, I was mad! I walked out of that meeting and I went home and called my sponsor! Well, thank goodness I had a sponsor to call because I had such thin skin back then, it might have been my exit out. I called my sponsor and she talked through it with me. She was absolutely right. What that woman was trying to do was to help me. I was lucky to have a connection with someone who could help me through those things about the program that I didn't understand. She was patient. She would just encourage me to try to turn my will over. She would say, "Just try it. Just see how your day goes. If you just get up this morning and turn your will over and see how your day goes."

That relationship ended. It was not how I would have liked it to end. She worked a good program and I worked a good program, but we couldn't resolve this thing that happened between us. It was very difficult. I became aware that sometimes things like that just happen even when we have a good program of recovery.

What that did was get me out there looking for a new sponsor. I actually asked someone who was at my very first Al-Anon meeting, so she knew me from day one. We set up a time every Monday to talk. She is in the Midwest. There's a two-hour time difference now. We talk for 30 minutes. We keep on track. We don't have to tell a catch-up story. I can also call her anytime during the week if anything is going on. I like that structure. I had no structure in my life.

I was just kind of existing before the program. For her to set some kind of a time up just for me felt really special. I try to do that with other people that I've sponsored. I went through a period of time where I sponsored quite a few people before I moved to Arizona. Some of them left and found other sponsors, and I really saw where my ego got involved in sponsorship. It hurt. It was painful but it was such an awakening that I had started to get my ego involved in someone else's recovery, which I had no business doing.

Today I like to let people I sponsor set their own pace. I have one who's in a real hurry. Just let's get this done! And I remember that feeling too, "Let's hurry and get through this. I don't want to feel the pain too long. I don't want to sit in these Steps too long. I might get uncomfortable." I mentioned about slowing down. I'll do it once and I won't do it again because it gets to be her journey. Just like my sponsor lets my journey be my journey. The shared experience and the laughter have so much healing power for me.

The sponsorship bookmark is one thing that I always hand out to people that I sponsor so we have some kind of guidelines for our relationship. Some of my relationships with people I sponsor have turned into very deep, heartfelt relationships that I just cherish. And whether I was their sponsor or not, they would be somebody I would want to hang out with. I encourage

people to go to as many meetings as they can and read literature. There's a lot of chatter that we can get distracted by if we don't stick with the program and stick with the literature that we have. I'm grateful that my sponsor and I usually talk about the reading of the day out of our daily readers on the Monday mornings that we talk. We'll always talk about them unless there's some other big thing going on. We just stay connected. I am just grateful for this opportunity.

Question: How do you work the Steps to enrich the faith of your sponsees in their Higher Power?

Panelist response (Beth): I try to encourage them to be more aware and mindful of the little things that happen in their day that might be signals from a higher power; that their Higher Power is there and putting pluses in their life. A butterfly flitting by or hummingbird or the sudden awareness of color in flowers or a sunset. Does somebody say something that just resonates? All of these are little gifts that my Higher Power is putting in my path. And if I can be mindful and aware that that's where they're coming from, that these are being granted, then that helps my connection. And so, if I can share that this is what I do, and they might want to try it. You know, give it a shot. It can't hurt. Basically what I do is share my experiences.

Question: How do you help sponsees find out what's right for them in terms of spiritual practice?

Panelist response (Melody): I share what I do for my spiritual practice and refer them back to the literature. There are a lot of good suggestions concerning prayer and meditation in the literature. And the best is trial and error. Try something. If it works for you, great. If it doesn't, try something else.

Question: Kim, you talked about changing sponsors because they couldn't get past something. How did you handle this problem with your sponsor?

Panelist response (Kim): I tried to make direct amends and my amends weren't accepted. That's all I could do, but the hurt was still there. I had a hard time just letting it go because I wanted to go back over it and make amends over and over again. Finally, one of my dear Al-Anon friends said, "You only need to do that once. You don't have to continue doing it over and over." Yeah, it was tough. Thanks.

Question: If you have sponsees write on one question in particular, would you share that question? On Step One, Two or Three.

Panelist response (Melody): I think a good question for Step Two is to write about sanity and what that would look like in their lives.

Panelist response (Beth): Basically, where do you see patterns in what you do and how you act and react? I'm big on having them look for patterns in their life.

Member Share (Joseph): Hi, everybody. I'm a grateful recovering Al-Anon person. In working the Steps with a sponsor, I have to tell you about my first meeting. The first meeting I walked into was full of women. They were trying to get me to go to the AA meeting and I said, "Well, I'm looking for Al-Anon." They told me this is the place. And there was one guy, way in the back, Barry, that jumped up and said, "Well thank God that there's another guy that's coming into this meeting!" The sponsors that I had at that time were a mixture of women and men because there weren't that many men in Al-Anon. What they had told me collectively is, number one you're powerless. Has anything that you've ever tried worked with the alcoholic or the drug addict? And did you come here because you're drained? Because you can't think of anything else? And at that point, I knew I was powerless. I needed to do something and listen to the program.

One of the first things they said was read something about alcoholism and the illness every day. And I said, "Every day?" Is there enough literature out there for that? And they laughed at me like you guys are! And they said, "Well, of course there is." One of the other things they said was that they would restore me to sanity. I learned that I was practicing what I was going to do with the addict or alcoholic over in my mind. I was thinking to myself, "I'm going to say this. Then they're going to say this. Then I'm going to say this. And then they're going to say that." What I found out was, I was on that hamster wheel for hours. And I got exhausted because I wasn't getting any answer.

If you ask anyone else, I was crazy because I was talking and there was no one else in the room. My sponsor told me that if there's nobody else in the room, stop your thinking about that stuff. Talk to your sponsor. He said, "When you walk this path, you will learn to live above your circumstances." And so that was one of those things that I had to really turn over. I had to make the decision to turn over my will and life. And I said, "Well, what does that mean?" He says, "Turn your thoughts and your wants over to the care of a God that you understand." That was another thing that was helpful for me. I needed something to be a little bit more structured.

Years ago, he and a few others went to an Al-Anon workshop. They had somebody by the name of Mary Pearl, and she had a Twelve Step Al-Anon workbook way back then. I don't even know if it's around anymore. It's a good thing I had a copy of it, but he walked me through those Twelve Steps. They had questions and slogans, and those are the things that helped me. I'll pass with that. Thanks.

Question: How do you guide resistant sponsees if you've ever run into any of those?

Panelist response (Beth): For me, the first thing to figure out and discuss with them is where the resistance is coming from. A lot of times, it is really a lot of anger at the alcoholic/addict in their life. And, back to that first step, the piece of information about it being a disease. When the understanding moves from head to heart, then all of a sudden compassion comes in. And when compassion comes in, resistance leaves. And so often, it's that disease thing. If they can't get that, then they're going to be angry. It so often boils down to that. This is a disease and you cannot have compassion if you truly do not understand that that's what it is.

Question: Melody, how many sponsors have you had? Did you feel like leaving the sponsor that told you to pray on your knees?

Panelist response (Melody): I have just had the one sponsor for the whole time I've been in Al-Anon. She probably did tell me to pray on my knees. I've heard it from other people as well. She's always allowed me to take what I like and leave the rest. And I do the same thing as a sponsor. We worked it out and she's helped me in so many ways and I appreciate her service to me. Thanks

Question: Can you share how your concept of your Higher Power has evolved and what did it?

Panelist response (Kim): The program. You know that "Keep coming back." Listening to what works for other people. My Higher Power has changed. I'm kind of a chameleon. We've gone through lots of changes together. My Higher Power is a number of spiritual things. So, I'm grateful. I'm just so grateful that I stuck around. I don't ever feel stuck with my relationship with my Higher Power and what I define my Higher Power as on a daily basis.

Member share (Barbara): Working the Steps with a sponsor: One, Two and Three. When I came in, it was obvious to me that my life was unmanageable. I couldn't even see the kitchen countertop in my kitchen. I was late to everything that I went to. When she asked me to write down what I was powerless over, realizing what I was powerless over, and looking at that which I did have power over and wasn't managing, gave me a lot of freedom.

Step Two: Came to believe that a power greater than myself could restore me to sanity. I was asked to write what sanity looked like to me. Coming from an alcoholic family, it wasn't actually about restoring sanity but *finding* sanity for me and what that looked like. She had me write down what family looked like, what characteristics were in a family. This helped me put a concept of a God that I could then in Step Three turn my will and my life over to. When I first got that sponsor, she said that I could work all the Steps that started with a one but come back and work all the ones in between.

I went for a while, and I didn't get a sponsor right away. And I like to say that I can't sit in the garage and turn myself into a car. It just doesn't happen. I have to go to the meetings. For me, going to meetings and then getting a sponsor and working the Steps is when the magic starts to happen. God started doing for me what I could not do for myself, and it just starts happening. Like someone had said, for me one meeting a week wasn't really enough because I had that insanity around me for so many years. Things started to change when I started going to two meetings and open AA meetings and listening to all the other people and how they've been changing themselves.

Question: When working the first three steps with a sponsee, what effect does it have on you?

Panelist response (Beth): A tremendous effect. I firmly believe that I have to work Steps One, Two and Three every morning as part of my process of getting out of bed. When I'm actively working with a sponsee and redoing all the readings and redoing all the questions and sharing back and forth, it just keeps getting deeper. Every time, I come at it from a slightly different angle, and I learn a little bit more about myself and my relationship with my Higher Power continues to grow. The self-awareness just deepens everything on a continual basis.

Question: If calling a sponsor or consulting literature are examples of decisions to turn your life or will over, are there actions that you see with sponsees that indicate they're not making that decision?

Panelist response (Melody): Yeah, not calling me. Not doing the work. Showing up to meetings without any writing to talk about. Wanting to just talk about the other person and not focus on themselves. Those are all indications that they're staying in self-will and not turning their life over.

Question: What do you do about that, when a sponsee is stuck in self-will, and not willing to turn that over?

Panelist response (Melody): Well, I talk about it with them. I set some boundaries if I have to and go over what my expectations are again. I ask that when we meet, there needs to be some writing done. I just recently had a sponsee who was really stuck on him, him, him, and I just kept gently bringing her back to you, you, you. Now she catches herself when she's doing that. She'll say, "Oh wait, I'm into him. I need to start talking about myself." So yeah, that's what I do.

Question: What can a sponsor do to help a sponsee move forward if you feel they're stuck on Steps One, Two and Three? Is that even something a sponsor can or should do?

Panelist response (Kim): You know, I really let the people I sponsor set their own pace. I don't feel like it's my spot to tell someone to move along, move along now. I was given lots of grace and lots of time to just work the Steps at my own pace. I wouldn't be comfortable with that.

Member share (Jennifer): When I came in, it took me a while to find a sponsor. And then I went through three sponsors. None of which were really a good fit. It took a while before I found a sponsor who I felt comfortable with and I could actually work the steps in with a way that made sense to me. One of the things that I really appreciated was that that sponsor held me accountable in a way that made me aware that I was responsible for my own recovery. If I wanted to get anything out of this relationship, I needed to show up on time. Not only show up on time but be ready and be prepared. So things came to my attention that I wasn't even aware that I was doing, and she just helped bring that to my attention in a loving and kind way.

Step One was the most important to me. We really worked that one hard, and it felt like I stayed on Step One for about ten years. I don't think it was quite that long. It just seemed that way. But it was so important when I finally had that breakthrough on really understanding how

powerless I was over people, places and things. Once I started understanding that, had that awareness, then I could start to see how unmanageable other things were. Because I couldn't see that. I finally learned how to tell if I was in Step One. I'd get into a situation, and I was able to get in touch with that feeling in my stomach. If my stomach is all tied up in knots, I'm trying to control something and I get to figure out what it is. But if my stomach is calm and I'm feeling good, then I'm in a good place and I'm listening to my Higher Power.

Question: Have you had an experience in pushing a sponsee to accept your Higher Power? How did you make it right? Or has that happened to you?

Panelist response (Kim): You know, I have to say I haven't had either one of those experiences and for that I'm grateful. I have been given free rein to explore my beliefs and have allowed people that I sponsor to explore their own beliefs.

Panelist response (Beth): I haven't tried to push mine on anybody else because it's been so critical to me that I be allowed my own, but I lost a sponsee because she was trying to push her beliefs on me and I refused. I come from a non-Christian background. She was very insistent that I join her Christian church fellowship, and it just was not going to work.

Member share (Joy): I'm a grateful member of Al-Anon and Alateen, and the worldwide fellowship of Alateen is a part of us. When I first came into the program, I didn't need the program. It was suggested I come here. And so, when I came here, I just came here to help all you guys.

As I was in the meeting for a period of time, people kept smiling at me and telling me to keep coming back, and I did because I was trying to support my alcoholic who had gotten into recovery. When I got into the program, I thought I pretty much knew more than you guys. Then I started listening and started hearing some things. And people came up to me after the meeting and said, "Joy, you might like to get a sponsor." And I thought in my head, "Thanks, but no thanks."

I decided to prove to everybody that I didn't need a sponsor. I went and picked the right person, and I said, "Would you be my sponsor?" She said she couldn't be my sponsor because she had too many sponsees already. I thought, "Oh my goodness." So I left that meeting with my tail between my legs and wondered what I was going to do now. I came back the next week, and that lady came up to me and said, "Joy, I found you a sponsor." And I thought, "Really?"

Of course, my whole purpose was to prove to everybody I didn't need one so I accepted her offer, and it was amazing because what happened is that I realized that I didn't know very much. I needed to have an open mind. I needed to see gray rather than black and white. I told my new sponsor that I had already got Steps One, Two and Three, and just need help on Step Four. She said, "No. No. No. We will start at the beginning, at Step One."

She made me read the first pages of the *Paths to Recovery* -- the introductory stuff. Who does that? I learned so much about the program just reading those first pages. When actually doing Step One, Two and Three with her, I realized that I didn't understand what powerless really meant. And that I didn't really know what "came to believe" meant. Because I was reading it. Every time I read that Step I said, "I believe" because I came from a religious family. As a little girl I went to Sunday school and I knew God, but I had pretty much forgotten Him in the backseat of the car of my life. I wasn't using him in my life by the time I came to Al-Anon because I didn't need him anymore.

Al-Anon awakened me to realize that I needed a power greater than myself, and that I needed to lean on God, not on my own will, but on God's will. Steps One, Two, and Three were the opening door to that awareness. I realized Step One is about getting honest with myself. Step Two is about having faith and believing that I can come to believe. I don't have to believe. I just have to be willing to come to believe. Then Step Three allows me to make a decision. I don't have to do anything. I don't have to turn over my will yet. I just have to be open minded and willing to listen. Make a decision that I'm going to be willing to listen. That's what I had to do and then went into Step Four. It's been an amazing journey in program and I'm grateful to be here.

Question: Melody, somebody would like you to share more about seeking God's will. This person thought that they heard you say you don't have to know God's will; you just have to take an action to find clarity.

Panelist response (Melody): The best example I can give of that is early on I kept praying, once I learned how to pray, for the courage and the strength to leave my home which is what I felt I needed to do. I could never get the courage. I could never do it. In the meantime, I just kept working the Steps with my sponsor, going to meetings, putting one foot in front of the other. And after probably about a couple of years of that, I was at a Step Two meeting listening to other people share. It suddenly occurred to me that God had been giving me courage and strength to stay in my relationship. *That* was His will for me. And I have done that. I didn't know that's what His will for me was, but I was following it. And that's why I don't need to know. I just need to keep putting one foot in front of the other and using the tools of the program.

Member share (Kathy): Thanks for asking me to share. You know, when I came to the program, I wasn't really sure why I was there. I was a rule follower. I follow the rules, and I came. What I found is that I was very, very resistant. It took me a long time to get a sponsor.

Once I got a sponsor, she gave me work to do, and I just dragged my feet continuously. It took me forever to do the writing. I think a lot of it had to do with my perfectionism. Was I doing it right? Thinking that everything that she was asking me to do had to be harder than what she was asking me to do. She gave me some simple writing assignments that could have taken me a couple hours to do at most, but it took me months to do them and it was just me dragging my feet. I'm really grateful that she allowed me the time that I needed to be able to face that and to be able to do the work that I needed to do.

When things went crazy in my life, I really got busy with my program. I finished my first three steps. And then I started to really work on my fourth step. I believe that God gave me the grace that I needed and allowed me to work my program how I needed to work it. I remember when I was doing my writing on my second and my third step and just realizing the things that I had done and how it had impacted my family. That was just such a huge awareness. I may not have been ready to hear that when I first started. It's just wonderful to have a sponsor and have somebody who allows you to work your program, the way that you need to do it at your own pace.

Additional shares:

Beth: It's a daily process for me still. Having a God box is a really important thing for me. I go through it every six months to see how many times I've put the same thing in. Being able to admit my powerlessness just took such a weight off of my shoulders and gave me such a freedom. I think it's very critical because I can be a real control freak. So, I need to be powerless.

Melody: Yesterday I met with two different sponsees. The first one shared an awareness that she had had doing some pretty deep writing, and it was just incredibly beautiful to listen to that awareness she had come to. The second one had a huge awareness while we were talking. And again, it was just so beautiful. I just am so grateful that I get to be on the other side of the table, watching the light come on in somebody's eyes.

Kim: One of the things I suggest is to form a group with your program friends and share your gratitude with each other on a daily basis. That's what I do. I love it. Some of these women I've never met before, but I get to see their hearts and hear what they're grateful for.

Joseph: The only thing I'd like to say is Al-Anon has taught me how to live life, and I'll keep coming back. Thanks.

Jennifer: What came to my mind was, I can't. God can, and I think I'll let Him. And it's very applicable for the situation that I'm in right now.

Barbara: Al-Anon is not a program for people that want it. As we know, there are a lot of us that wanted it. It's not for people that need it. It's for people that work it. And the people that stay and work it are the ones that can survive, and God comes around.

Joy: Well, I realized that when I got my sponsor that one time, by the other person giving them to me, that it was actually the Higher Power that gave me that sponsor. So today I rely on my Higher Power, to help me make decisions in my life. And I do reach out to people in the program because I think that's how we are being touched by Higher Power. I want you all to know that if you keep coming back, you too, can get the recovery that you need. I mean I believe I have found mine. Thanks.

Kathy: I've watched the Higher Power thing work - through working my program and working my sponsee's program and just even in the sponsorship workshop so just keep looking for the miracles. Do your gratitude lists and keep coming back.

Cindy: I'm Cindy. Grateful to be here. Thanks to all the speakers. This is the Al-Anon cha-cha-cha, 1-2-3, 1-2-3. And one more time, it comes to play. I'm so grateful. I found out that I lost a good friend in program last night. And it's back to 1-2-3, 1-2-3. I was told to write a resignation letter to God. In Step Three, I was offered to share somebody else's Higher Power while I figured out mine. I'm grateful to have a sponsor that I can call. I can read literature out loud with her and look for spiritual principles and figure out how they apply. I'm grateful for the honesty, the acceptance, the faith, the hope, the trust, etc. Love you guys. Glad you're here.

Claudia: I just want to share one question I often use with sponsees in Step One. I ask them to write about the situation that brought them to their knees. How they felt. I think it helps them understand what powerlessness feels like to them. I am so grateful to this Area, to this fellowship, to the people that are here, to the people that aren't. Other than that, I'm not very grateful. Thank you so much for being here.