

Arizona Sponsorship Workshop

Saturday, April 18, 2020

Segment Five – Panel shares and discussion on Steps 4, 5, 6 and 7:

- 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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John:

Well, good morning, everybody. My name is John, and I am a grateful member of the Al-Anon and Alateen family groups. I'm zooming in from San Francisco. It's nice to be here and see so

many people in Al Anon working recovery today. I want to thank Claudia for inviting me to share experience, strength, and hope on sponsorship.

It may be helpful to do just some of the who, what, when, where, why, and hows of sponsorship. I am somebody who has been lucky with and greatly benefited from sponsorship. I had been in Al-Anon less than two months when I asked for sponsorship, and I worked with that same sponsor for nine years until he moved to Europe. At the time, I had also been working with a service sponsor and so at that point it made sense for me to ask her to become my personal sponsor. I asked her if we could work the steps together. She said that it would be an honor. I think this is probably one of the nicest responses that I could ask for so I'm going through the Steps again with her, and I'm getting so much more out of it this time.

So what is this sponsorship that we hear talked about in meetings and in our literature? For me, Al-Anon is a spiritual program which makes sponsorship a special kind of relationship because it is spiritual in nature.

Who is a sponsor? I hear people say in meetings, "How do I know who to ask?" Well, the Eight Tradition says that our 12-step work which involves sponsoring should remain forever nonprofessional and it can be practiced by any one of us. A sponsor is someone who has a sponsor and is working the three legacies of Al-Anon in their own personal recovery. Therefore, they have the experience to share. It is not a teaching program. I've learned over the years that I'm not responsible for my sponsee's recovery, and I cannot want recovery for my sponsees more than they do. This is so important. I prefer the analogy that a good sponsor shines the light while the sponsee does the digging. I also like the analogy that a good sponsor lays out the buffet, but it is up to the sponsee to get up and serve themselves. In Al-Anon we help each other see our available choices, and my sponsors have both very effectively laid out the buffet of choices and I have just been willing to get up and to make use of those choices. These choices are also laid out in our literature, and I'll talk more about literature and what I use when working Step Four, Five, Six, and Seven.

Why do I need a sponsor? Al-Anon is a 12-step program and we are encouraged to work the Steps with someone who has their own personal experience working the Al-Anon program. Many times members say they are studying the Steps on their own, but this is not a figure-it-out program. It's a program of action. I learned early that I have been affected by the family disease of alcoholism to the point that my thinking has become distorted or sick. Today I understand I cannot heal a sick mind with my own sick mind. I need the objective perspective of my sponsor.

How do I get a sponsor? There's an old spiritual saying, "When the student is ready, the teacher will appear." Of course, sponsorship is not a teaching relationship, but I think the spiritual axiom applies because we must be willing to ask those five hard words, "Will you be my sponsor?" I do believe that asking for help is what helps heal alcoholism. I didn't ask for help before I came to Al-Anon because I already believed I had the answers. That belief system effectively blocks God out and asking does something that makes room for God to come into my life. When I ask for help, it's called humility.

When do I meet my sponsor? There is no one right way. It's up to the members of the relationship to negotiate what works best for them. This is where I began to learn to trust my sponsor by keeping my focus on myself instead of worrying about his schedule for him. I worked with my sponsor every other week for the first six months. My progress was so slow that I became resentful, but I had failed to realize that my sponsor had asked me how I would like to meet, and I had said, "Well, maybe every other week." I had been too afraid to ask for what I needed and to take up his time. I was also brand new to recovery and didn't know anything about keeping the focus on myself. I was managing his schedule for him and developing a resentment. When I finally got up the courage to talk to him about it, he said, "Well, what would you like to do?" I told him I'd like to meet every week and he agreed. I thought *wow, it's as easy as that!*

What do I do when I meet my sponsor? When I'm sponsoring, I always like to begin with the sponsorship bookmark that was read here today. I think that the wisdom of sponsorship on this bookmark is pretty much everything I need to know to get started. I certainly had a lot of incorrect ideas at first so I like to read it with sponsees and then talk about what sponsorship is and what it isn't. It also introduces the important topic that sometimes relationships end and that letting go of the sponsorship relationship is not a sign of failure. I needed that permission with my sponsor relationship that ended after nine years through its natural course. It helped knowing from the beginning that if it didn't last, I hadn't failed.

Then I like to spend the first several visits going through the first 100 pages of *How Al-Anon Works*. Reading it chapter by chapter is where I see the program about Al-Anon come alive for sponsees. In the process, we begin to get to know each other and it lays the foundation for Step One.

So, let's look at Steps Four through Seven. Thank God by the time I reached Step Four I had worked Steps One, Two and Three because those steps are about keeping the focus on myself and admitting where I have the ability to influence change. On the bookmark that was read today, it says I can and must change my attitudes and my actions if I want to recover. In Step

Two, I'm introduced to the concept of a power greater than myself and come to have a relationship with it. Then in Step Three, I learn to begin turning my will and my life over to the "care" of that higher power, so that when I begin that Fourth Step inventory, I hopefully will not use it as a tool to beat myself up.

When I worked the Fourth step with my sponsor, I used Al-Anon's *Blueprint for Progress*. There are 26 chapters in that workbook on topics like honesty, communication, relationships, finance, spirituality, and many others. There I began to really get to know myself. I was told early on that an inventory is a written list, and that there's no such thing as a mental inventory. When I hold all those thoughts, ideas, and beliefs in my head, it gets rather swimmy in there. Writing them out on paper gets those things out of my head where I can see them more objectively and most importantly can share them with my sponsor.

I went through that slow process. I expressed wanting to go faster with my sponsor and he said, "John, I don't set the pace," and I thought *dammit, he's right*. It just had to move as quickly as it did. He also said something else that I didn't really understand or like in the beginning but have come to understand as true. He said, "It does not matter what step you're on. The only thing that matters is that you're on the path and working the steps." Today after having completed the 12 Steps, Traditions, and Concepts, I've gone back to the beginning and I'm working them again. I'm actually back on the Fourth step. I see the only thing that matters is that I'm working the Steps today.

I sponsor how I have been sponsored. That's often what I hear members say because that is the experience that I have to share. In Step Five I work with my sponsor from *Paths to Recovery -- Al-Anon's Steps, Traditions, and Concepts*. We read the stories in the introduction and do the writing on each question. It said make a list of the people that you trust and would be willing to share your Fifth Step with and, of course, I chose my service sponsor. I had already gone through the Fourth Step with my sponsor, so he already knew everything in there. I wanted that objective perspective of somebody I hadn't been sharing it with for the past year and a half and it was the most valuable thing that I did. I had to get on a plane and fly to Colorado. We spent three days together going through the fifth step, and I had a transformative spiritual experience. This led me to reconnect from an estranged relationship with my mother and family.

Step Six can be summed up as exhausting all other possibilities. I learn from pain. It is the great motivator. I become so uncomfortable that I am more willing to do the unknown than I am to stay in the discomfort of the familiar. It's like becoming willing to ask for sponsorship or walking into my first meeting. I become willing to let God come into my life. For me, Step Six is about

God and working the questions through *Paths to Recovery*. I like comparing readings in *How Al-Anon Works* with *Paths to Recovery*. I also rely on and encourage my sponsees to read all the good stuff in the three Al-Anon's daily readers. The same process of reading the questions and writing on them together goes with Step Seven. Thank you for the opportunity to share.

Maureen:

Hi everybody, I'm Maureen, a grateful member of Al-Anon/Alateen family groups and thankful that I was asked to be of service today. Every time I am of service it helps me to grow just a little bit more. I've learned a lot from listening to the sponsorship series. It's been very helpful to me, and I hope that today I might touch somebody's life.

That's true pretty much every time I work with a sponsee; I ask my higher power to guide my thoughts and let those guide my words. Each person is different, and there are so many different ways to work the steps. As John shared, I do what my sponsor did. I use the *Paths to Recovery* and for Step Four, I have used the *Blueprint for Progress*. I was thankful for being asked questions that helped me to think and go back to some experiences in my life. It is what I needed. It would just be too overwhelming for me to sit down and write my life story, so I love the way that the *Blueprint for Progress* is broken up into sections. Of course, by the time you get through to the Fourth Step, you know, believe, and trust in a Higher Power.

Sponsees and I usually work the Fourth and Fifth Steps together with the *Blueprint for Progress*. If the sponsee has a different idea of how they want to work the Fourth Step, writing their life story for example, that's perfectly fine. They are an individual, and it's their program. Where do we do this? They set the pace; they set the place. A lot of times it's in their home because it's a pretty confidential discussion, and we don't want anybody to overhear. I had one gal that chose to do the Fourth Step quite differently, using a different program altogether. She was one of my first sponsees and in hindsight I should have encouraged her to use the *Blueprint for Progress* or Al-Anon literature. That was my bad. I learn from experience and am growing all the time. After she did it, she was in this panic and fear. As you know, if we went through the Al-Anon way, she would have found out, "Yeah, I'm not supposed to beat myself up." We find the balance of our character defects. Some are good; some are bad. It just depends on the way we use them.

Working Steps Four and Five together is not so overwhelming. I also have found spontaneity helpful while working with sponsees. Once while on a fourth, the sponsee was having a life issue with something that they were not yet working on in the *Blueprint for Progress*. It was one of the other chapters: fear, anger, frustration, or finances. So, I told them, "You know, we really

don't have to work these in order. If you're really having an issue with that, why don't you go ahead and work on that section now? Maybe that will give you some help and perspective. Then we can talk about it, and it might help you find a solution."

Another tool I use is the 12 Steps in 15 Minutes -- see the handout "Changed Attitudes through Working the Steps". Sometimes it can be really helpful to focus on a specific issue that they or I may be having. That's been a good "go to" for me and my sponsees.

Time can vary when I do a Fourth and Fifth Step together with someone. It opens up a lot more conversation and that can take a little more time. One question might have 30 minutes of conversation, and another might only lead to five. There is no timetable or limit. They set that pace. I'm retired so I have the time to work with people pretty much whenever they need it. I do have some boundaries but, if they need to, we can meet more than once a week or for longer than an hour. Working it out together is part of the relationship.

Having a sponsor taught me how to have an intimate relationship. How to be trustworthy, communicate better, ask for help, and those sorts of things. I encourage my sponsees to contact me, to pick up the phone and call me when they're ready to call me. We usually set up a once a week call time, and if they don't call, then they don't call. I may check on them the next day, but I know I sometimes forget to call my sponsor too. I'm on my second sponsor. When I first started meeting with her, she said, "Call me every week." I would always forget because I didn't have a set schedule or a cell phone to remind me. At that time, I had somebody that was calling me once a week, so after apologizing umpteen million times to my sponsor for not calling, she finally suggested I call her after I talked to this other person. What a great idea; why didn't I think of that? This started a habit and commitment to talk once a week. We've been in a relationship for so many years now; we don't necessarily talk a lot about a specific problem or the Steps. We've become friends, and that's important for me. I didn't know how to have or be a friend before. It was very important for me to experience that sponsorship relationship that grew.

I learned how to pick up that hefty phone to ask for help. It was hard for me and until I got myself in the habit and grew comfortable with it, it wasn't going to happen. I know I'm not alone and I encourage sponsees to reach out so they know they are not alone. That's why I encourage sponsees to reach out to me and have other Al-Anon members that they can contact to reason things out with. Sometimes I'm not available or sometimes it may be a topic that I have no experience, strength, and hope to share on. Sponsorship is only an exclusive relationship to a point. It's important for them to know that it's okay to reach out beyond it. I

encouraged them to have a backup they are already comfortable with and to first contact them when they're not in crisis. You don't want to be calling somebody out of the blue in a crisis. Similarly, it's important to let them know that, if at any point in time they're not comfortable with the relationship that we're building together, we need to talk about it. It's up to them to bring it up. I can't do it for them. I had some difficulties with reaching out to a sponsee that may not be calling me on a regular basis, and I finally had to ask, "Okay, are we doing this or are we not? Do we need to continue with this relationship? What do you want to do?" I was afraid to do that; I had to talk to my sponsor about that. It was great and it worked out fine. She was like, "Oh yeah, I do really want to do this. I need to buckle up and start getting back on the program."

I use *Paths to Recovery* for Four, Five, Six and Seven so there's not a whole lot of variance there. They answer the questions, we discuss each question together. If they have a particular question that they have a problem or confusion with, they can put an asterisk by it. We later discuss it. Maybe they need to do a little work on something here or there. I encourage that. But if at any time they feel unready to move on to the next step, that is their decision. I can't make them. Just like I can't force the alcoholic to quit drinking. It's their program; they've got to work it. They've got to want it.

If they have a problem with one of the questions I just say, "Go to the CAL, the daily readers; look in the back." Looking at the readings sometimes helps jog their memory, their ideas, and thoughts. Those daily readers are good literature as prompts to open up conversation for those questions. If they get stuck on something, they know we can reason things out. That's what it's all about.

I liked when John shared about doing his Fifth Step with someone other than the sponsor he was working with at the time. I think I need to put the idea to work with my sponsees. Let them know if they don't want to do the full Fifth Step with me, I would encourage them to do it with someone they trust. On the other hand, if we're done and they still feel like they need a little more work, maybe they could do it with somebody else. Another trusted person could give them somebody to throw ideas off of and get a different perspective from.

The sponsorship series has helped me grow a lot as a sponsor. I look at things differently and use more techniques. Somebody asked me about having a personal relationship with your sponsor and I'm like, "Wow, I have such an intimate relationship with my sponsees." We're not hanging out or going to parties together, but they are my friends. Most of the time I share Al-Anon events with my sponsees, and I love that. I think that it's up to each person to know how far they want that relationship to go. The other great thing about a sponsor and sponsee

relationship is learning that we don't have to have the same viewpoints on everything, but we can still be friends and respect each other.

Because I learned more about myself when I read and answered all the questions with my sponsor and our back-and-forth dialogue, I do that with all of the 12 Steps. We just do the questions and talk about them together if they choose to. I encourage them by sharing how that process helps me to really feel like I worked the step and didn't just fly by it.

In Step Six, you become ready and willing and you're not going to actually do anything. I encourage them that this is not something where you have to make any big changes. You just have to become willing so don't be afraid to work at answering the questions. It's part of the process to prepare for the rest of the step work. Other than answering the questions and working those through with me, it's really something that's personal between them and their Higher Power. Then they will know when they are ready to move on to Step Seven.

In Step Seven you become more aware of your shortcomings so that you can catch yourself and realize things you want to change or do not want to do anymore. My first personal sponsor is also my service sponsor, and she is very much into service. She lives in another state. I do reach out to people here in Arizona, but different areas do things differently in terms of the guidelines although the principles are the same. I use that sponsoring bookmark a lot. I give it to my sponsees when they ask me to be their sponsor. Thank you!

Jud:

Howdy, my name is Jud. I'm a grateful member of the worldwide fellowship of Al-Anon and Alateen, and I hail from Santa Fe, New Mexico. I just want to share first how I came to be. I was born into the family disease of alcoholism. My mother was an alcoholic and died of this disease. I've had alcoholic husbands, friends and coworkers. You name it. My life has been touched by this disease day in and day out for all of my years.

I came into the program first of all in Cleveland, Ohio. I was dating a man who went into treatment and when he got out, he went to AA and I went to Al-Anon. They were in the same building so I *had to go* to be a support to him. For a really long time I just went for him until I began to hear the slogans like Listen and Learn, and I would say, "Oh, all right. Take the

cotton out of your ears and put it in your mouth." That kind of thing. I really wasn't interested in getting into the Steps, sponsorship, or any of the other aspects for a long time. The reason was honesty. I wasn't able to be honest with myself so why was I going to be honest with you and tell you who I was.

Through a series of circumstances, I got a sponsor. I'd been a rule follower for many years, and they said, "Get a sponsor!" I asked a woman in the home group I went to. It was an interesting meeting because AA was founded in Akron, Ohio, and came up into Cleveland. I belonged to the sixth oldest Al-Anon group. It had already existed for 25 years when I joined. There were a lot of old-timers there, and so I listened and learned some more. My sponsor finally said to me, "Your silence is selfish." Thinking *Oh my God, I can't be selfish*, I began to open up.

I began to do little service jobs. Back in Ohio, they have the "kitchen" where you go early, bring the donuts and cookies and make coffee. I got to listen as I worked. I began to hear what was being said, and I began to look at my own powerlessness and unmanageability. Step-by-step with her help, we continued to do the Steps.

Back then when I came in, there was only *the* daily reader, *One Day at a Time*. I happened upon this one sentence among the millions of sentences that talked about how much easier it is to be honest with other people than with yourself. That was the beginning of my looking at the Fourth Step. I use the *Blueprint for Progress*. The very first section is on honesty and that has been the touchstone, the grounding stone, the essence of my life. I need to be first and foremost honest with myself. I need to share with you how I am, what I'm about. How do you work this program? I use H.O.W. a lot (honesty, open mindedness, and willingness). That's really how I lived my program. I struggled with it. I didn't want to tell you about how I treated myself, how I was more there for you than I was for myself, and that I knew more about you. I really didn't know who I was, and the Fourth Step really helped me to look at other aspects besides honesty. The section after honesty is self-worth, and there's not a better placement for it! Certainly there are other sections on fear and anger, control and intimacy, finances, frustrations, etc., but having honesty and self-worth speak first off was magnificent.

I really appreciated all the questions, and the importance of writing was mentioned. If you ask me a question, can I conjure up an answer just by sitting there thinking? Not so much. I love being asked the questions so when I got through with the *Blueprint for Progress*, I set up more time with my sponsor. I love telling stories about myself these days. I told her that we absolutely had to meet two nights because I had so much to share and it would just not suffice to have three or four hours -and we did.

Certainly what came out of that fit right into Step Six, becoming ready to have God remove all these defects of character. The glaring defect of character was grandiosity. I thought so much of my experience. That is really a fun memory to discover things about myself and to then begin to set them aside. I know in Step Six that I wasn't entirely ready for a long time. I thought, *I'll just work my character defects to the ground before I have to give them up*. Well, it became painful after a while to live in denial, grandiosity, and to live *my way or the highway*. I used to believe that my story was all from my childhood. I was told often to get down off the cross because somebody else needs the wood. That kind of thing. Or I would do the Al-Anon salute -- "Oh, poor me, my childhood." I was ridiculous, but I needed to discover how ridiculous I was. Eventually, through, the help of all the literature, my sponsor, phone calls, going to meetings, and using that thousand-pound phone, I began to open myself up. I came to the point of the Seventh Step -- humbly asking him to remove our shortcomings.

During this whole time through the Fourth, Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Step is when I really established my relationship with a higher power. I was someone who was using the group as their higher power because I had grown up in an organized religion where there was big talk. It was just "My name is Jud" and there were x's through my name because I had all of these character defects. I needed to establish my own higher power relationship for working Steps Four through Seven. I really cemented that for myself, and I carry my Higher Power with me as I travel through my days.

Over time I began to sponsor others. When someone asks me to be their sponsor, one of the things that I continue to do is first meet up with them. I want to know what it is before we agree. We both need to pray about this relationship so we both know what we're looking for. I want to hear about them, what they know for themselves, how they got to the program, and what they're expecting of themselves and of me. Then we work it out.

Writing and reading is important, and I have used *Paths to Recovery*. More so these days, I use *Reaching for Personal Freedom*. I also like the piece where you get to ask questions or where they get to ask questions of themselves. Each relationship with a sponsee is different. I have one who lives in Ohio, one in Minnesota, and some here in New Mexico. Some have been around a long time while some are newer. Some I speak to every week. Some I physically see and some people I just talk to. There's no cut and dry way in which to sponsor.

One thing that they all need to do is to be of service. They need to be of service within their groups or above the group level. I tell them that's what I was taught by my sponsor. I didn't get out my lanyard, but I do have one that says, "Get in the car." My sponsor back in Ohio would say, "Get in the car, we're going to the conference." "Get in the car, we're going to a workshop." "Get in the car, get in the car." *Why? I don't want to go.* "Well, who cares if you don't want to go, you're going. You want to take care of yourself, you want to keep coming back." So that's been important. Reading, writing, speaking, being honest, asking oneself, and considering.

I'm also part of the group here in Santa Fe where we have a beginners meeting. I'm one of the ten rotating facilitators. We cover the first three steps. It just matters that you keep coming back; it matters that you keep looking at yourself. Mostly it's about being of service and being attentive to your recovery by checking in with yourself. I have in my hand the new service manual, the second edition. They threw in the new bookmark which has a picture of a family, and it says, "we found hope in the midst of an overwhelming situation." Well, these days are a pretty overwhelming situation, but the family disease of alcoholism is also an overwhelming situation and we need to take it a day at a time, keep it simple, and keep coming back.

One last thing. As I now look across my home, I see a piece of framed calligraphy in my kitchen that says, "The best way out is always through," and that's been one of the watchwords of my recovery. I always wanted to delay or distract or go around the bend, but then I remember that my sponsor said to me a long time ago. "If you always do what you've always done, you always get what you've always gotten." It is like a slogan. Well, my sponsor would actually say, "Geez Jud, come on! When you keep doing the same thing again and you keep hitting the wall, how about this time you turn left?" That's what I live by because the best way out is always through. Thank you.

Questions:

Question: What's the difference between a regular sponsor and a service sponsor?

Panelist response (John): Al-Anon publishes a pamphlet called *Service Sponsorship -- Working Smarter Not Harder*. In the disease of alcoholism, I work harder. In recovery, I'm learning to work smarter. A service sponsor is somebody who has experience doing the service that I am either doing or am interested in doing. When I hit two years in Al-Anon, I got certified to sponsor Alateen. My sponsor had never sponsored Alateen, and I realized I needed help that he wasn't experienced with. There is so much great literature on Alateen service and a pamphlet called *A Guide for Sponsors of Alateen Groups*. There's a pamphlet called *Alateen Sponsorship - Is It For Me?* A service sponsor is someone who can perhaps guide me through working the Traditions or Concepts around a service position but primarily a service sponsor is someone who has experience in that service. Thanks.

Question: What is "The Steps in 15 Minutes"?

Panelist response (Maureen): Well, I was introduced to it in a workshop at one of our conventions and I was told it was also done at the national convention this past year as well. It's basically the 12 Steps and each step has a few questions that are pertinent to that step. You just answer those questions, and it helps with the specific issue that you want to work on. Like getting my son a job or something that you really have no control over anyway. When there is something I can't get out of my head, I go through the Steps with it. It helps me to come to more of an understanding of what's going on in my head. What's really happening? Usually, it's my fear.

Question: What do you do if a sponsee is just not willing to write down her step work?

Panelist response (Jud): I've had just one sponsee who wasn't a writer. She was more of a dictator so she used dictation on her phone and created recordings of her Fourth Step. That worked for her. It was different, but it really didn't matter. What mattered more was that she was doing the Step. I've also had conversations with sponsees about what's at the base of their unwillingness to move along because I don't know and it's not my program. It's *their* program. What do they want for themselves? Do they have a belief in the 12 Steps or is it fear or whatever? I've had conversations, but there's more than one way to do a Fourth Step.

Question: John, one participant loved the buffet analogy. The sponsor sets up a buffet; it's the sponsee's responsibility to get up and serve themselves. The question is, how do you respond to a sponsee who wants you to be a waiter and suggest an entrée?

Panelist response (John): As I understand it, in Al-Anon I am recovering from telling people what to do, making people do things so I don't make my sponsees do anything. I asked a mentor in Al-Anon years ago, "How do I get my sponsee to go to more meetings?" and she said, "Oh no, dear, you don't make them go to more meetings, but you can ask them what is their commitment to their recovery?" If they're willing to commit to two meetings a week, then one of the things a good sponsor can do is create accountability. I can hold sponsees accountable to what they say that they will do. The buffet is really to just let sponsees know they are responsible for their own recovery and, if they don't get up and serve themselves, they will starve to death. I'll leave it there, thanks.

Question: Maureen, a member would like to know a little bit more about how you define your relationship with different sponsees and whether you have a friendship or not?

Panelist response (Maureen): I consider most of my sponsees friends, but maybe that's just because of the small community. I guess I don't want to be put on a pedestal. I'm just like everybody else. I'm working this program. I have character defects I'm always working on. When I have a conversation with my sponsees, I tell them as well about some of my character defects and what I've used to get through that. Sometimes it can develop into going out for lunch. I can't say I've gone to a movie just for grins and giggles. Mostly it is Al-Anon events. In the car, we can have a meeting before and after the meeting. There you get to know people on a different level. You know, we learn a lot about each other whether you have kids or are retired, if you have the same interests or hobbies like hiking, and that kind of thing. In that case, yeah, you go hiking with a friend even if it's a sponsee; it's a friend. I hope that answers that.

Member share: Hey everybody, I'm Carrie. So, I was thinking about all the different ways I have worked Step four: on my own, with a sponsor, and with a sponsee, I had the short little blue book (that baffled me, I didn't get it), the bigger blue book, then the green book, and the option to do columns. I think I've tried just about everything.

The way that my previous sponsor and her group generally did a Fourth Step is by writing your life story. You do it in 24 hours; you share the Fifth Step the next day and you're done. I'm lucky to put two hours together, much less two whole days so that didn't work for me as much. But I tried a bunch of different things on this journey to work through my story. I think doing the column method has actually turned out the best results for me.

I have recently worked on my core beliefs through the Steps. Core beliefs are in my way and keeping me from growing. I've done the traditional Fourth Step on people, places, and things

entirely, but with this method I worked beliefs through column by column on Steps Six through Eight. I actually enjoyed working in this tightly knit group where we gave each other feedback. It has been the best method. The group included my sponsor and some of my sponsees. It came together organically as a different approach to working the middle steps. One of the biggest revelations that came out of it was in the Sixth Step. It asks, "Am I willing?" The question I got from my sponsor was, "Can you tell God you're willing?" And I said, "Yeah when he stops laughing because he knows that's not true right now."

I do encourage folks to read everything they can on the step before they work it, and then sit down and work that step. We figure out what method will work the best for them because we do have so many options and there isn't just one way.

I continually ask, "How is what you're looking at here keeping you separate from your God?" And that's how we take the approach and look at the fear of it, look at the inventory and their part in it. What is your fear about moving forward with this information? Things like that.

Our *Paths to Recovery* has been incredibly valuable for Steps Six through Eight. Working through that and answering the questions in the back really guides my thoughts. What I found about my willingness in Step Six was pretty funny, *yeah, I can tell God no*. What I learned in Step Seven, in the *Paths to Recovery* book on page 73 made a big difference to me both when I read it and worked it with sponsees. When I humbly asked him to remove my shortcomings, I had to take a look at my passivity within that. I worked on my perspective and where I thought, *I had not let go of my shortcomings because "God" hadn't taken care of that yet. I still have it so it must be "his will" that I have not let it go*. Getting really honest has been a big leap. Now working with my sponsor and sponsees, I am looking for where my shortcomings are active and dealing with that in the moment versus being passive and putting it on God. It boiled down to patience versus passive. I just must not be done with it (willing) yet.

Praying to be seen in the moment where my shortcomings are active was a natural outcome of working the core beliefs through the Steps. Right now, we are working through Steps Seven through Nine to become willing and then making the amends. These Al-Anon friends and I came up with our own slogan: "Has no one hit you with a shovel?" Apparently, that's not a slogan but looking for where I can be more active in my own recovery has been an evolution of discovery. Thank you.

Question: Maureen, you say that you let your sponsees decide when to move on to the next step. Do you ever feel like you need to move them along or hold them back? What tools do you use?

Panelist response (Maureen): I may feel that way, but that's *my* will. I guess I would have a discussion with them; everybody's different. I have several sponsees at different levels of recovery and on different steps. Some are in crisis every day. Some aren't. Some have been in the program a long time. Some are new. It would just depend on the person. If they seem to be one of those people that just keeps complaining about the alcoholic all the time and dragging their feet without really working the program, I would definitely have to have a serious conversation about moving on. Maybe going over what we discussed when we first met -- we were going to talk once a week. Perhaps finding a different sponsor because this is not working out. I did hear one sponsor on the sponsorship series mention giving them 15 minutes to complain about whatever it is they want to complain about, and then it's time to get down to business. That may also be an option.

Question: Jud, what do you do with the sponsee who won't show up for meetings, is not active in the program, but likes to call you and complain?

Panelist response (Jud): Well, I had that happen to me and I needed to let go of them. I was just looking again at the sponsorship bookmark where it talks about being equal partners in recovery. If I'm the one who's doing all the poking and prodding and suggestions here, there, and everywhere, it is not working right. I'm involved in my own program, and I have the dedication to it. The sponsees must also have dedication to their own program. They need to want to have recovery. They need to be able to look at themselves and be honest. I can't do that for them. Now certainly sometimes I've tried to do it for them. Oh, I'll offer you a suggestion. Mine is not to give the answers; mine is to be there to support recovery. One woman popping into my mind was back in Ohio where I still have a core group of friends I visit. I just had to tell her, "I can't do it. I need to take care of myself. You will find a way; you will find another sponsor or you won't. I'm not going to continue to participate with dragging you along." That's it.

Member share: Hi everybody, my name is Yvonne. The number one thing my sponsor told me is, "I don't work the Steps. The Steps work me." My time is pretty quick and fast. God's time is a lot slower, and God has a different kind of clock. I always keep in mind that I have to give sponsees the time and God the opportunity to work with them as well as with myself. I've done the Fourth Step many times, and I do what my sponsor did with me. I tell them there is no right answer -- just your answer. That was the hardest thing for me to overcome. I discovered that when I was doing the Fourth Step, the more thought and pondering I did searching for the right answer, the harder it got for me. My best writing was at 5 a.m. because I had a 7 a.m.

appointment with my sponsor and there was no time for thought. Intuitively, I would answer it and be amazed at what came out.

Who am I to tell them what is right? For them to find out who they are, it needs to be *their* answer whether it feels right or wrong. If it's the wrong answer, God will present them with enough opportunities to find out that it wasn't exactly what it was supposed to be and if it's the right answer, well great -- one step closer to some serenity and peace in your life.

Step Six is one of the hardest steps I ever worked. The change is in Steps Six and Seven. I give them the opportunity to sit in Six for a while -- to really get familiar with the God of their understanding. Step Six is between them and God, not as much between me and them. That's where I learned, physically, to have a visceral experience of how I live. Not just understanding it *up here (in head)*. That's easy for me; I love to reside *up here*. But I need to really understand my body and my feelings, how I live, and how I am affected. Not about how I affect other people anymore, but how *I* am affected. It became so painful that I found myself on my knees saying, "Yes, I'm willing." Okay, well, let's think about that. Let's sit with that for a while.

I love what you're doing here. I love this platform. I love sponsorship and being sponsored. What I cannot forget is that I don't work Steps; the Steps work me. When the Steps work me, it gets really serious, and it gets hard. And then it gets easier. Thank you so much for giving me a voice Claudia and thank you all for being here.

Question: Do you have any tips for someone who is afraid to ask, "Will you be my sponsor?"

Panelist response (John): My first thought is if there is hesitation, I would be wondering: What's the hesitation? What's the fear? When the student is ready, the teacher appears. The same is true also when the teacher is ready, the student appears. Maybe some prayer and meditation, checking in with Higher Power on what the fear is about. When I asked my service sponsor to be my service sponsor, it's because I felt safe with her. No fear.

Member share: I've gotten so much from sponsorship. Thank you for all of your stories. I also worked with my sponsor out of *Blueprint for Progress*. I was really more interested in giving the right answers than I was in giving *my* answers because I didn't really know what I thought or felt. I had a lot of challenges, and it went slowly for me. I spent a lot of time with him working on Steps One, Two and Three. Working Four and Five were also very slow, but I think Step Six was really the one that has been a challenge for me, and I got so much out of it.

When I came into the program, I didn't know why I wasn't able to get over anything in my life. I wasn't able to get over the fact that I grew up in an alcoholic home. I wasn't able to get over old relationships, myself, or the things I considered my failings. I came to learn that I could not tolerate myself. More than anything, my sponsor just held a space for me that I couldn't hold for myself. He allowed me to be honest with him in a way that I had never been with anyone.

While we were working, I had an opportunity to do some Step Nine work even though we weren't on that step. Some things came together, and I really felt my Higher Power was offering an opportunity to do some work on Step Nine about an old resentment about a woman in my life from 20 years prior. This resentment was with me every day of my life, and I couldn't talk to anybody about it because I was embarrassed by the fact that I was still holding resentment. I could talk to my sponsor about it.

When the opportunity came up to make amends, I was so caught up in the fact that I wanted to do it, but just not now. I wanted to get better, be better and more confident. In the program's terms, I wanted more power than I had. As I was leading up to making a decision, I was talking to my sponsor and all I could do was remain open. I wanted to make a decision and knew that my decision was *no, maybe next year. Not now*. When I would get to talk to him, he would just look at me and say, "When is she coming?" "In like two weeks, and two weeks feels like 10 minutes so that means I have to decide right now." He would just look at me and light-heartedly say, "Oh, you've got time, but don't worry about it." I almost wanted to punch him. What do you mean I have time? I have to decide now. What he was doing was holding a space that allowed me to sit in my discomfort, to sit in the crucible. I couldn't tolerate this, and I couldn't be a new me. I got to sit in the feeling and really reside in a heap of surrender. I could not have made that move without him. That opened me up so much because I learned the difference between being ready and being willing. That knowledge serves me every day in my life. I now know I have a choice: I can spend my whole life getting ready and then not do a thing, or I can surrender and be willing. My world opens up and it's because of this program. So, thank you.

Question: What's the most important thing you know about working Steps Four, Five, Six and Seven with the sponsee?

Panelist response (John): I am not responsible for my sponsee's recovery. I cannot want recovery for them more than they do.

Panelist response (Maureen): Just listen, be encouraging, and ask your Higher Power to be with you and your sponsee each time you meet.

Panelist response (Jud): Sponsors demonstrate how to use the Al-Anon principles and act as recovery resources. This idea is stated well on the sponsorship bookmark. Lastly, “figuring it out” is not an Al-Anon slogan.