

Arizona Sponsorship Workshop

Thursday, October 19, 2019

Segment Two – The Twelve Steps and Working the Program:

- What does it mean to “work” the Steps or the program?
- How can the Twelve Steps help me?
- What are the benefits of working the Steps with a sponsor?
- How do I know who’s working the Steps?

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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Maria:

Thank you so much for asking me to talk about the Twelve Steps, what they mean to me, and how they have changed my life. It has changed my life a lot.

I came to Al-Anon two and a half years ago. When I first got here, I hung around and met some people for only a month or two. I realized I needed to get a sponsor, and I needed to work the Steps. I needed to just do all the suggestions. So luckily, in the beginning, I was very willing to do that. I was just in a lot of pain so I was willing to do whatever it took to start changing my life.

The first question: What does it mean to work the Steps of the program? One of the first things that I think about is the word "work." Whatever I put into it is generally what I get out of it. I think that's an important principle for me in a lot of areas, and it has been here too. When I first got a sponsor, we sat down and talked about things like meeting every week and what kind of expectations she might have of me. In the beginning, she had me call her every day. That was beneficial for a couple of reasons. One was accountability -- making me accountable to somebody was important. Another reason it was helpful was that we talked every day. We had to talk about all the little things. We met once a week and, during our meetings, we read through the literature. She was able to share a lot of her experience.

In the beginning, I cried through the whole thing. After a few months, when I quit crying so much, we got a little more done. I do remember at the time thinking about it as if it was a job -- as if it was really work. I had to set aside time to do the writings, read the literature, and make a daily phone call. Prioritizing that is one of the things that has made my life change so dramatically in a short time.

In the beginning I do remember feeling, maybe even only after a couple months, "Oh, I probably know how this works. I have ideas." I thought I knew what was going to happen and each time I was taught differently. One of the things that didn't happen the way I thought as we went through the Steps (I think my sponsor was just so intuitive) was that we went through the Steps at a pretty slow pace. In my opinion, what that did for me was that any time I had a feeling, I really had to work through that feeling. I had to sit with that feeling. I had to become comfortable in my own skin while working those Steps. It really helped not to necessarily just speed through them even though I thought, "Check! Check! Check! I'm done with this one."

She had me do some different assignments. One of the assignments I did for each Step was to go back and define each of the words in the Step. When I first read that, I interpreted it to mean that I should rewrite the Step in my own words. So luckily, she was able to guide me. I did have to go back and look up the definitions, but in putting the Steps in my own words, it really gave me a much deeper understanding of them.

For example, in Step Three, I had to really look at what it meant to turn my will and my life over. I was able to put that in my own words, and I turned a lot of those things into prayers. I would write a little thing about each Step and then I would put it in the visor in my car. I don't recommend that anyone read while they drive, but for me that's what worked when I would stop and read it.

Working the Steps of the program has been something that has taken consistency, prioritizing, and some work to be able to do the things that my sponsor asked. I really thought that I knew how some of these things were going to go.

For example, when we started doing Step Four, I thought I was going to be taught how to keep my mouth shut. I was going to learn that if I would just quit telling everybody what to do, quit controlling and talking all the time, and quit saying the first thing that came into my mind, my life would be better. What happened was, in working the Step and really digging deeper into what my natural reactions were, I found there were a lot of areas where I didn't speak up when I should have. It wasn't just that I was ordering everyone around; it was that I didn't understand (and still don't sometimes) which things are the important things that ought to be said and which were none of my business. I think that working the Steps has really given me a much better understanding of when to keep my mouth shut, and it has helped me to be thoughtful when I do speak.

One way that it's helped me to be thoughtful is something that my sponsor asks me. "How about if you come at it with curiosity?" So when I do decide to say something, if I am going to say something that's important or that's scary to say or when people are sharing things with me and I'm listening, it's helpful if I ask questions and listen and come at it with curiosity. "I wonder why this situation happened," or "How can I help you with this particular problem?" rather than being accusatory and factual in all my sharing.

That leads into Question Two: How can the Twelve Steps help me? Those are some ways that help me for sure. Another thing that's helpful and has been mentioned here before is the paper my sponsor gave me named "Working the Steps in 15 Minutes" and I've used that concept quite a lot.

If I have an issue, resentment, or problem with a person, it's super beneficial for me to sit down and say, "Ok, I'm powerless over alcohol. I'm powerless over the people. I'm powerless over whether my kids do what I want them to do." If I have a situation where my kid is not doing what I want him to do, I examine where my life is unmanageable around this kid and what he's doing. In Step Two with this kid and this situation, where am I insane? How can I be restored to sanity? What kinds of things do I turn over in Step Three based on getting this kid to do whatever it is I think I want him to do? A lot of times, by the time I get all the way through to Step Twelve, the problem is gone, or at

least it has been redefined in my head! I generally have a lot more peace and serenity after I apply the Steps to the problem.

In general, I can slow down after doing the Steps. The Steps have helped me to understand myself better. They have also helped me to recognize when I need to make amends and help give me the courage to do that. I think every time I practice some humility and I practice apologizing, it gets a little bit easier the next time. So those are some areas where my life has improved with the Steps.

The next question, what are the benefits of working the Steps with a sponsor? I definitely do not have a good perspective of my own life, but someone looking in from the outside (my sponsor) can really help with that. Another benefit of going through the Steps with her also has been being able to really trust someone. As I share more and more of my life with her, I am more willing to trust her and am more willing to make a real partnership with somebody. That's just been so hard to do in the rest of my life. I think as I trust my sponsor more, it probably helps me to trust other people.

One of the things about my sponsor is that I feel she's a person who never waivers. She always believes in me. She often says things like, "I'm sure you'll pick the right thing," or "I know you'll make the right decision." I love that because she doesn't give me advice and she doesn't tell me what to do. In the beginning especially, I just wanted her to tell me exactly (step by step) what I needed to do with each thing. Instead she came at it with curiosity, and she asked me a whole lot of questions. In the end, that really helped me know myself better.

The last question asks, "How do I know who's working the Steps?" I really think this question is really aimed at how to pick a sponsor. So how do I know who in the rooms would be a good sponsor? How do I know who is working the Steps or that it's helping them in their life? Really, I know by their actions.

I do have kind of a funny story about finding my own sponsor. I wouldn't recommend this, but my husband and I had known this woman and her husband long before I'd come to Al-Anon. I had been coming to Al-Anon a couple months, and I had been telling my husband that I thought I would ask her to be my sponsor. When we were in the same room, he went right up to her and said, "Hey, has Maria asked you to sponsor her yet? Will you be her sponsor? She really needs one." So, my husband got my sponsor for me. Again, probably not your recommended way to do it. Luckily, it happened to work out for me.

If you're looking for a sponsor, I think it is important to look for somebody who shows up for meetings and who shares honestly. I think it is easy to tell when someone is just sharing from their heart. I know when my sponsor and I first sat down, it wasn't really like a formal interview. There were some questions. I wanted to know some things such as did she have a sponsor? I wanted to know if she works the Steps. I wanted to know what that looked like in her life. It was easy to see. I had the benefit of knowing this

woman years before. I got to watch her walk through some hard stuff and she did that with dignity and it really showed me that this person had really been changed by the Steps.

I feel very grateful to be in Al-Anon.

Cathey:

Talking about sponsorship is just excellent. There are a couple of things you are going to hear me say repeatedly and I apologize ahead of time, but these have become a part of my program. One is why anonymity is the spiritual foundation of the whole program. I look at what does it mean to work the Steps for the program. When I got here, I was incredibly focused on how to stop somebody else's drinking. It had created a world full of fear, desperation, and anger. With the Steps to work the program, this means I get to have the opportunity to live my life free from that desperation, fear, and anger, or at least to know how to handle that fear and anger when they do show up.

Probably the best thing that has happened is that the utter hopelessness that I lived with when I got here has been relieved, and it was relieved as a result of working the Steps. For me, it means having things that I do or use every single day. It's not about having a program and going off and doing something that is not a nice thing to go do or go live in a world of desperation and not reach out for and use the tools of this program. It's about using the tools and not living in that desperate world. I carry a little pamphlet from this program with me everywhere I go. It is the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions pamphlet. I use that to focus on a Step throughout the day.

This program is a spiritual program so the Twelfth Step tells me exactly what I am going to get as a result of this program. I am going to have a spiritual awakening as a result of these Steps. I'm not going to get it from me, and this is my opinion. For me the spiritual awakening comes about as a result of my study, my peeling apart each Step, growing, and being willing to change. It is not looking for the world to change for me, but for me to change so that I can live comfortably in my skin. The Twelve Steps are the only way that I know to achieve a spiritual awakening. I tried a lot of different things before I got here and none of them worked because they just didn't work for me. They may have worked for others but not for me.

With my first sponsor, the way Steps were worked is I had to be able to identify the principle from the Step. What does each individual Step mean for me? My sponsor insisted that I work them in the order that they are written and I do exactly what each Step required of me. I don't pick pieces of a Step and not say, "I'm going to take this and leave the other part of the step behind." Probably the best indication of that is in Step One. She insisted that I not get stuck on and live in the hyphen. She said, "Let's look at this whole step. What does it mean to be powerless over alcohol? What is

unmanageable in your life? How do you tie those two together, because one of them is looking outward and the other piece of that Step is looking very much inward?" The benefits I got from it is that if I tended to stray off the path or away from what the Step was trying to bring to my life, my sponsor could gently guide me back. Sometimes that had to be repeated. It meant that I had to listen and pay attention to what was going on and be willing to explore and be honest with myself and say, "You know what I didn't recognize that I needed to change." I couldn't hold on to a thought and let it block me from the change that the Step was trying to bring into my life.

I think when I was selecting a sponsor, they told me to look for somebody who had a working knowledge of this program. It required very much that I hear what people had to say. I looked for someone that understood this program, understood the Steps, and had applied them in their life. I could tell that based on how they shared in the meetings. It was very important to me to be able to identify with that person and feel that I want to have a program like you have. I don't want yours because it's yours and anonymity is the spiritual foundation. We are all going to find our way here through using these Steps.

The next question: How do I know who is working them? Sometimes I have to ask. My sponsor wanted me to be able to say, "Here is the principle I am working on, here is how I am applying it, here is where I am being challenged by this Step, and here is how I can bring about changes in my life. Here is what I need to go do." When I first came in, it meant I spent a lot of time reading and re-reading the very same thing. I still do today. I tend to work things a little slower at times. I might read the same thing on a Step for months and read and focus just on that.

As a sponsor when I work with new people, I listen to the person to get to know them to determine what's the piece of literature that is going to best help them. My responsibility as a sponsor, as I see it, is to help them go through the Twelve Steps so they have a spiritual awakening for themselves. It's *their* spiritual awakening, not mine. I don't know what water tastes like in *their* mouth so I can't say that if you work it this way, here is what you are going to get. When somebody tells me that they have had a spiritual awakening, the closest I can come to identifying with that is to know what my spiritual awakening has done for me. My spiritual experience tends to be about thirty seconds long, literally, but the lasting impact is just amazing to me. It's very important for me to be focused on a Step, and always be working a Step. My sponsor was always working a Step. I have had multiple sponsors in this program. My first sponsor stopped coming, and my second sponsor passed away. They both had a lasting impact. I can still hear my second sponsor's questions all the time. The things she was always asking me, the things she was looking for and trying to help me explore and stretch my thinking so I didn't hold onto my preconceived ideas.

One of the things that I have learned in this program is that the very thing that will block me from my Higher Power is when I start trying to hold on to an idea and say that is not

going to work for me or my case is different. Fortunately, every Step helps me put down that preconceived idea that I want to hold onto forever and be willing to give it up.

For anyone who is new in the program, the one thing that I could wish for them is that they are desperate enough to be willing to work the Steps. The Twelve Steps don't know who is working them; they are there to be worked. The Twelve Steps make it possible for all of us to have change come about in our lives because we all have the same spiritual potential. It will play out differently in each person's life because we are different. Yet, we all have that capability. It's important for me to know from each Step what it is I can go back and explore, what is the new thing that I can find.

I am currently working on Step Eleven and have been now for several years. In my work with Step Eleven, it points me in the direction of all the other Steps at times. One of the things I have learned about Step Eleven is that it talks about seeking through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understand him. I happen to be reading the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions pamphlet on Step Eight. Step Eight talked about spreading our discontent with others. Well, I can't be trying to improve my conscious contact with a God of my understanding if I'm always going around with an angry attitude or being disrespectful of others. Step Eleven brings an atmosphere of grace to everything that I do, and it is up to me to be willing to do that. The only way I was able to do that was by watching my previous sponsors practice it in their lives and be attracted to it enough to be willing to go through the things that they went through, which were the Twelve Steps. They could get to the point where they were in an atmosphere of grace in their lives. That to me is what it brings about and why anonymity is the spiritual foundation for me of this whole program.

Michelle:

First question: What does it mean to work the Steps or work the program?

It is actually possible to be an Al-Anon member and not work the Steps. That is an option. It is possible to be an Al-Anon member and not work the program. That is also an option. I know of a few people who just show up for a meeting now again; it is enough for them and that is all they want. However, when I got to Al-Anon, I felt so terrible and at my wits end. I had nothing left in my bag of tricks to fix my situation. And because I am a person who really loves to learn and I tend to dive into a thing when I am intrigued, I dove in. Working the Steps and working the program means there is a commitment involved; it's time, energy, and a willingness to learn. It's a willingness to be humble in a way that I hadn't been willing to do prior to this.

When I first started, I went to meetings probably three or four times a week. I didn't have a sponsor yet, but I was listening very carefully to what people were sharing. When I felt bad, I would go to a meeting every day. A couple of times I went to two meetings a

day because it really made a difference. It gave me a little bit of relief for part of a day and a little bit of relief was better than none. We had lots of literature at our house already so I had plenty of readers and other literature to look at. Eventually after I stopped crying, I was able to seek people after the meeting, which was not my strong suit. I don't really approach strangers comfortably. But people were so willing to share with me that after a while it seemed like less of a weird thing to do.

I got a sponsor within the first couple of months. We started working the Steps in *Reaching for Personal Freedom*. I am a child of the 60's and 70's, and I love a workbook. Going through the questions and answering all the questions was right up my alley. I ended up having a timing problem with my first sponsor. She was out of town and not as available as would have been ideal. I wandered around without a sponsor for a while. A gentleman who I had become very fond of in one of my meetings, an older gentleman who has since passed on, asked me if I knew so and so? I said, well I have seen her in meetings and heard her talk. Then he said, "I think she would be a good sponsor for you." I said I don't know her, and he said, "Would it be ok if I called her and asked if she was taking new sponsees?" He called her and she said yes. We met, talked, and shared our stories. Basically, I had an Al-Anon fix up for the sponsor I have now. We have been together for four years. Honestly, if left to my own devices I would not have chosen her myself, but I believe that it was a Higher Power moment for me that someone else knew her and had the sense that this would be a good combination.

So, how did I work the Steps? We went through *Reaching for Personal Freedom*, and we met every week regularly. I would call her in between if stuff came up. When we got to the Fourth Step, I tried doing it with *Blueprint for Progress* and just did not find it to address the major obstacles for me in living a life of serenity and a connection to my Higher Power. It just didn't fix the things that I really wanted to focus on. So she said, "OK it's your program. You can do it how you want."

What I did was I came up with a list of my own assets and my own obstacles, or as we call them, character defects. I really dug into those things, asking where did this come from? How did I develop this particular trait? What function did it serve for me when I was younger growing up in alcoholism? How does it show up now and how is it getting in my way? And that was a very useful framework for me to work Step Four. We did Step Four and Step Five kind of simultaneously. I would work on it; I'd go in and talk to her about it. We kind of mixed those two Steps up. Then when it came to working Steps Six through Twelve, we were a little more structured working with *Reaching for Personal Freedom* again, and that was comfortable for me.

How can the Twelve Steps help me? I am a person who really feels compelled to do something when my serenity is disturbed. It took me a long time to realize what serenity was. When I finally got little glimpses of it, then I could recognize when I was losing it. When my serenity is disturbed, my habit has been to do something to take control or to say something to just get in there. One of the big things that the Twelve Steps do for me

is that they give me something to do when I am feeling resistant to my powerlessness. They give me a focus and direction when I am not sure what the right thing to do is or when I am absolutely sure of what I want to do and it is probably the wrong thing anyway. I have not had a framework to work with like this before I joined Al-Anon. I was always just reaching for the things I had always used which were how can I fix this? How can I change you? How can I correct what is going on in my environment so that I will feel more comfortable?

The Steps helped me to live life on life's terms. They helped me settle down and understand my correct place in the universe; that I am not in charge of the many things I thought I was. For instance, one of my habits is to fix the adult children I have who are often struggling financially. Here, I have some money! You can have some money. It never occurred to me until I started working this program that my help was a detriment to other people. It was giving them the impression that they couldn't handle their own lives, couldn't figure out their own solutions, and weren't competent, capable human beings. When I got that urge to send somebody money for a plane ticket (which happened recently), one of my Al-Anon friends gave me a way to work the Twelve Steps in fifteen minutes. If I am finding myself in a situation, I can go through Steps One through Twelve quickly in my head or in a notebook and it settles me down. It relieves the feeling that I have to do something. The Steps are a set of spiritual principles that work in all areas of my life, even in situations that are unrelated to alcoholism and with problems that are not particularly spiritual.

I'm not living with alcoholism anymore. I have not lived with alcoholism since I was 18. Yet, I have those habits, the way of thinking about things that I developed while I was living there. I didn't know I had alternatives or choices about how I was going to manage myself. I thought the way I was going to manage myself was by managing other people. If other people got themselves straightened out, then I would feel fine. This gives me a focus for myself, and then I don't have to worry so much about what other people are doing.

What are the benefits of working the Steps with a sponsor? OMG! How could I not work the Steps with a sponsor? Again, the inside of my head has certain grooves and pathways it wants to run all on its own in the ways I have thought all my life. If I keep doing those things, then I will keep getting the same kind of results. When I have a sponsor working with me, I get that outside perspective. I get to hear that I have more choices than I thought I did. I get to break out of that closed system in my head because I could totally fill out a workbook by myself, right? I could probably do that in a week as opposed to several years. With a sponsor, I get to work the Steps in depth. I get feedback and am accountable to someone else. I don't get to justify myself and not hear back that is what I am doing. I really appreciated hearing that from my sponsor. "I'm not sure that really is an amends; you don't sound like you're completely convinced you did anything wrong here." Ok, I had to go home and think about that, and she was right.

There is an intimacy that comes from working with a sponsor and that's new for me. I have a spouse and I have children and friends, but this is a different level of intimacy. It is a spiritual intimacy that I didn't ever know existed. She encourages me. One of the things that I had asked early on was for her to tell me I am doing well even if it looks terrible. Even if the way I'm doing things is kind of a mess, can you just tell me I'm doing well, because I have enough in my head telling me I'm not doing well. She really does encourage me which makes me feel stronger and more capable of continuing to try. She is helping me to get to know myself in a new way.

How do I know who is working the Steps? I don't really know who is working the Steps. When I first saw this question I thought, "That's not my business." But if I were shopping for a sponsor today, I would be listening carefully in meetings to hear what people are sharing about. Are they sharing out of a depth of knowledge of this program and its principles and how those things have worked in their lives? Because this just isn't an intellectual exercise; it's like here is the principle, now go use that. I really like to hear how people are solving their problems everyday by using the Steps and Traditions, and what tools they find best suits them for that moment. My current sponsor has a very broad and deep knowledge of the Steps and Traditions. She has an active relationship with her sponsor. She goes to meetings regularly and this program is an important part of her life, not just something she is doing with her spare time. Those things along with her kindness and an ability to listen to me without being judgmental are indicators to me that she has a strong program.

Question: How long did you call your sponsor every day? How did you transition into not calling every day? Can you tell us a little more about those calls?

Panelist response (Maria):

I don't feel like it was very long. I think it was probably at least a month and then we were able to transfer to email after the time that we talked every day. I was so comfortable with my sponsor that I was just really able to talk to her about it. "Hey, I know I missed a couple of days last week. Are you ok with that?" We were just able to talk about that. What did those calls look like? Sometimes they didn't focus on recovery. Sometimes it was just, "Hey, I went to this new restaurant", or "I have just seen this new movie," and for me that kind of conversation was important because I was developing a relationship with my sponsor. I needed to know that she was real. I needed to know that she had lots of parts to her life like I did. A lot of the conversations were like, "OMG, he just did this and what am I going to do?" That happened an awful lot in the beginning. There was a lot of crying. Often, I would call her on my way to work, and I'd been crying and would have to sit in my car for a few minutes. Again, going through the Steps really stopped all that. It didn't stop the crying 100%, but now I have a decent relationship with my emotions and I don't feel so completely out of control most of the time. I don't know when the daily phone calls stopped, but I can say that I talk to her at

least once a week on the phone. It goes through phases, sometimes it is four or five times a week, and sometimes it's less.

Question: When you have a new person to sponsor, what things do you ask of them?

Panelist response (Cathey):

First, they have to commit to starting with the Steps. Start with the First Step looking at what it means in their life. Some questions I always ask is, "What is the best thing you have heard at the meetings?" "What is the best thing they have read?" "What is the principle are you practicing with that Step?" I do this regardless of how far along they are, even if they are just starting out. The Fifth Step directs us in how we interact in this program. It says "admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being," so I immediately let them know that I am not their Higher Power. I will be here to guide you, but I will encourage you to look inward first and then talk. We get together on a regular basis, and they practice using this in their life, and I have sponsored people who have been here a while and I have sponsored those that are new.

Question: When you have a new person to sponsor what things do you ask of them?

Panelist response (Maria):

I went through all the stuff I did that my sponsor had me do because all I have is my experience with her. The first time I sponsor anybody, I feel like I have to listen to my Higher Power. I have to look at intuitive thoughts, but I also don't have a lot of experience in this so I just needed to do it exactly how she did it with me. I imagine I might feel I would have more freedom on how to sponsor later.

Panelist response (Michelle):

I asked people to meet with me regularly because it just saves having to go through everything and catch up. If I am meeting with someone only once a month, then there is so much catching up to do before focusing on the Steps. That doesn't seem efficient or effective to me. I typically meet my sponsees once a week, but you know things come up. People go on vacations, but typically once a week. We are working out of some book or literature; I don't care which one, they can choose. When possible, I ask them to get to a couple of meetings a week. The other thing I want is always a fine line because it is *that* person's program, not mine. It has to feel mutually agreeable. One of my sponsees would call up after a crisis and tell me about it then say, "It is alright now." You should call me when your serenity is disturbed, call me when you are feeling crazy; maybe you save yourself a few days or a week of feeling crazy. I really encourage my sponsees to call me as often as they need to.

Question: How long was it before you found your second sponsor? How long of a time elapsed before your Al-Anon fix up, and during that time period how many weekly meetings did you attend?

Panelist response (Michelle):

My first sponsor ended in April and my second sponsor was found in June so I was just floating around for a couple of months. I believe I was going to at least three meetings a week. Even though I did not have an active sponsor, I was still trying to bathe in as much active recovery as I could.

Question: Early on, my sponsor told me we were not “friends” and at the time that hurt my feelings. Now eight years later, we are good friends. Can you please address this for new people?

Panelist response (Michelle):

I don't think I have ever said I don't want to be friends with a sponsee, or that I don't want them to be friends with me, but we don't go to the movies, we don't hang out and go to dinner. We have a particular type of relationship, and it focuses on recovery typically. That is how I am with my sponsees. I don't think there are any rules about that. It is just what is comfortable for me and for the other person so far. I think I would just phrase it as we don't hang out, we just have this particular kind of relationship.

Panelist response (Maria):

In the beginning of the relationship, I invited this person into my life to tell me really hard things. In the beginning, I did not think of her as a friend because I needed to think of her as someone I needed to listen to even if I did not always agree. Over time I feel our relationship has changed and we have become more friends, but there is a tiny difference between my friends and my sponsor friend because she is still somebody that I need to tell me the hard things. With my friends I may see them making decisions that may not work out all the time, but it is not my job to tell them that. I may just have to love them through that, and my sponsor may not do the same thing. I would think that as I am sponsoring someone, it may be my job to let them know where they may be going astray.

Panelist response (Cathey):

I make it a point not to tell them we are going to be friends. It is a different kind of connection we have when we sponsor someone and when we are sponsored by someone because it is such a vulnerable setting. It has to be full of honesty. I don't want my sponsor to tell me what I want to hear. I want them to tell me what I *need* to hear and when I am sharing with a sponsee, I have to remember what my role is. I'm not here to be a friend, and I'm not here to be a therapist. I don't have experience with that. I can

only share my experience, strength, and hope and keep it within the facts of what I know. Through the years, we may do things that look like friendship, but that is not really what it is about. I have had people tell me that they have heard that if you want a friend, go get a dog. A friend may not always tell me what I need to hear or what I need to work on, but a sponsor has never failed me. I hear her in my mind always asking, "Cathey, what are you doing on Step 11?" She did not live long enough for me to find out why she always asked me that. I have been exploring why she always asked me that and I think it was to keep me on track, not because we were friends. Friends have come and gone, but what my sponsors have taught me has stayed over the years.

Question: What is the process of working the 12 Steps in fifteen minutes?

Panelist response (Michelle):

This person gave it to me. She got it at a convention or workshop. I have the questions written out, but most of the time I am not carrying those around. Now I can sit with a notebook and go through the Steps quickly with a specific problem in mind. If somebody left dirty dishes in the drainer, how am I going to handle that without yelling? This is not an alcohol related problem, yet it is disturbing my serenity. What is my powerlessness here? Where is the insanity here? Can I turn this over to a power greater than myself? What is my part? Can I tell this to someone else and the God of my understanding? It just quickly summarizes those Twelve Steps and it's very useful to me because most of us do not have the luxury of sitting and spending an hour on something. As we are trying to figure it out, I tend to go back to the habits that I have which are the ones that got me into this program. This is an excellent little tool for me to be able to quickly run through the Twelve Steps, turn it over to a power greater than myself, get some perspective on it, and find a spiritual solution instead of a non-recovery solution.

Panelist response (Maria):

I often do the Twelve Steps while I am driving to and from work. Step One: I am powerless over that lady at work that does this, I am powerless that she does that. It would be insane to talk about her behind her back; that is no good. Where is my Higher Power in this? I don't ever write it down. In that half an hour drive, I often find a solution I hadn't thought of. My Higher Power helps me to find the strength I need in this situation. It's effective and I really like it.

Panelist response (Cathey):

I have to use this program throughout the day and keep literature with me that is small enough to fold up in my pocket and take to the restroom with me. When I go to the restroom and take a minute, it helps to keep me from the thinking I was having and knowing that I need to let go. The practice of the Tenth Step throughout the day allows me to see what Step I need to turn to based on the behavior or the incident, based on the events that are happening around me. I know the minute I get too far away from

my Higher Power that now I am letting my self-will run things. What is it the Fourth Step pointed out to me? It pointed out that those things that I have done in my life have blocked out my Higher Power. How do I use all the pieces of this? I have to be familiar enough with the Steps and have to work them enough to know that when I take my little piece of paper or my pamphlet and head to the bathroom, here is what I am going to gain. My sponsor had me start that very early on in the program because we did not have all the tools that we have today, all the books and things. We had only a few pieces when I came in.

Question: What is the second question you asked yourself about your assets /defects? How does the asset show up?

Panelist response (Michelle):

The first question I asked is, "Where did this come from?" The second question is, "Where did this perfectionism come from, where did it originate? How did it serve me at the time?" Third question is, "How does that trait show up now? How is that impacting my serenity?" If it is an asset, then cool. Those are the ways I structured that Fourth Step.

Question: How do you get over the feeling it is about you when sponsees don't want recovery as badly as we did and they walk away?

Panelist response (Cathey):

Place them in the loving care of their Higher Power and hopefully they will get desperate enough to come back. This is not a keeping score kind of program; anonymity is the spiritual foundation. I don't know what the path to somebody else's Higher Power looks like. I have seen a lot of people come and go in my lifetime in this program, and my hope for them is that their life will get desperate enough for them to come back and work it. It is not necessarily with me. I don't have the answers for everyone. Sometimes I have to let someone I have sponsored go be a minority voice for themselves so I let them go with my Higher Power and hope they can find theirs.

Panelist response (Michelle):

I have had only one sponsee disappear. She was putting a lot of effort into it, but then she went on a trip, got sick, and I never heard from her again. We come to this program at a time that is right for us. Maybe some people have to have a certain number of false starts and maybe for some people it just really doesn't do what they need it to do. I have to be willing to accept that and understand this program is about me and getting a corrected perspective of me in the universe. That it is not always about me. There are factors in people's lives that have nothing to do with me at all.

Member share: I really liked the way these speakers have touched on desperation forcing us to do something different, and Michelle talking about getting to the root cause of character defects

Question: What is your opinion on sponsoring someone who is not in your local area?

Panelist response (Cathey): In today's world of cell phones, texting, and all the technology, I sponsor people who live in different states. I think it works great.