

# Sponsorship

## What is a Sponsor?

This is a collective writing of experiences

A **sponsor** is a person that undertakes or assumes certain responsibilities in connection with some other person or group during a period of instruction such as in an apprenticeship. Sponsorship should include the practice and teaching of **responsibility**, which means – the ability to distinguish between right and wrong and to think and act rationally.

In the early days of AA, as a holdover from the Oxford Groups, one had to be “sponsored in” or vouched for just to get into a meeting. So, you met with a group member or members and were questioned about your sincerity for wanting recovery.

Recovery was closely guarded and cherished by those early members. It’s different today. Some people come here with an attitude or belief that AA owes them recovery. We don’t! Our literature specifically says “If you want what we have and are willing to go to any lengths to get it, then you are ready to take certain steps”. There are 12. They are vital if one wishes to recover. That’s where the Sponsor comes in.

A Sponsor’s priority is to **show** the new person exactly how the **12 step program works** while giving them some **living skills** so, as the steps become operational, the sponsee can survive in a world he or she may not know exists and certainly cannot cope with (for the most part) based on his or her current proficiencies. Sponsors do this by sharing their experience, strength and hope with that new person.

## How to Choose a Sponsor

### What Qualities Should I Look for in a Sponsor?

1. The **first** thing to **look** for is a smile. That can be a telltale sign that someone might be sober AND happy – a concept many of us could not grasp when we got here – but later came to believe that it was very possible. A person that dresses well and walks

with dignity and grace portrays the qualities one might wish to have in their life.

2. The next thing is to **listen** for someone who talks about steps and their own sponsor. There is a good chance they may have a working knowledge of the 12 step program. One might listen to life experiences in meetings and see if that individual applied healthy choices to a particular problem. Many of us didn't know what those were. Some **examples** of choice making in discussion might be: how were solutions handled by that person presenting? Were they considerate and or caring? Those might be hints as to that individuals' emotional health.

Listen for a person who is involved with service at some level – be it the group, the intergroup, or the area, because people who are involved are great examples of unselfish giving. You will learn much from them.

3. Get their **phone number** and then call it! If you are going to find out if this person can help you, you've got to find out a little about them and give them a chance to get to know you while you're looking. Do NOT tell them every detail of your life until you find out if they are trustworthy! Remember – trust is earned!!!
4. While you're at it, get phone numbers period. You eventually will need them in your journey through life and recovery whether it be that you can't reach your sponsor or you need a ride to a meeting or you're just plain lonely or crazy or both!

## Where do I look for a Sponsor?

One might ask: "I haven't been to many meetings and I'm not sure I'd get the right one"! How do I do that? Good question – we're glad you asked. There are many different meetings as well as different types of meetings. No one knows who might show up at any given meeting on any given night.

1. The chances of finding a person who has worked the steps will be more likely in **book meetings, book studies**, and AA meetings that have lots of people involved in doing the little jobs within the group such as coffee maker, greeter, secretary, treasurer, speaker seeker and other jobs. Groups where each service position is handled by different people tend to be healthier groups and will generally have a better selection of quality candidates rather than groups where service jobs are handled by just one or two group members.

2. Long standing **clubhouses** are another good source.

3. Perhaps the best sources are **closed AA meetings** where those in attendance tend to focus on AA principles and are looking to avoid distractions from outside issues.

**A temporary sponsor** might be attained while looking for a more permanent one. This arrangement can also turn into full sponsorship and happens all the time. Remember always that we are looking for a **guide** – not a “Buddy”. Many times sponsor - sponsee relationships become friendships, but the object is, to quote:” we work the steps to get well – we don’t get well and then work the steps”. It is not necessary that a sponsor have a similar story or lifestyle and it really doesn’t appear to affect recovery either way. Good things come from a relationship between people who are somewhat different.

**A good candidate may ask** you to help make coffee or greet or get yourself a service job at the group level of some kind, such as coffee maker, greeter or clean-up committee, just to help get you acclimated to our meetings and the people who attend them. Other things beneficial come as a result of doing these particular jobs for a period of time, but they don’t appear at first. The sponsor will point them out as time goes by.

**Don’t be shy in asking for help as many of us were when we got here!** Establish some kind of a relationship as soon as possible so that you can start to recover as soon as possible. You can start working on the steps right now. Your first job will be to learn the nature of the illness of alcoholism – the 3 fold illness – so that you will be able to grasp the rationale behind understanding the solution.

## How to be a Sponsor

The prospective sponsor should have a **working knowledge** of the 12 step program. If you haven’t finished all the steps yourself – your job will be to stay at least 1 step ahead of the person you are sponsoring. Do not be afraid to ask for help from an elder statesman or your own sponsor. You don’t need to know all the answers. That’s why it’s a “WE” program. Your protégée needs to acquire an understanding that the **program and the fellowship are not the same thing**. Meetings are not the same as working the steps. Be sure your prospect understands this because everything that is said in meetings may not coincide with what is written in the Big Book.

You may be asked to sponsor someone with a fairly long period of sober time behind them. They will already have a handle on much of the etiquette that will be discussed, but, chances are that they haven't worked the steps the way they need to be worked, so the principles discussed for step work will apply to them as well.

To be able to show the new person how you took the steps is a beginning. Remember we sponsor people to give back to AA and to insure our own sobriety. Be prepared to motivate prospects to take actions they don't yet believe in to get healthy (spiritually, physically and morally). We who have been graced with this type of sponsorship all agree that our spiritual progress and peace of mind was greatly accelerated because of those people telling us the truth in order to help us save ourselves.

The 1<sup>st</sup> order of business is for the sponsor to **ask the question:** "are you willing to go to any lengths for your sobriety?" If the answer is yes, then you can begin to show them the program of action. If one is serious about recovery, they should be willing to make a commitment to take action. You may need to remind your sponsee from time to time that they in fact did make such a commitment when you first started working with them.

Perhaps your newcomer may need examples of etiquette during meetings. We get to AA in all sorts of various states, so such teachings may be necessary to one degree or another. **Be sure you are showing them by your own example!!** Such examples are:

1. **Don't talk** during the readings or a when speaker is speaking. You need to hear them and, someone else might need to hear them to stay sober today.
2. **Dress appropriately** (as best you can) for the meeting or event so (even at an early stage) you can be an example to someone else of right living.
3. **Don't get coffee** while the speaker is speaking. You may miss the thing that will keep you sober for another day.
4. **Thank people** that have participated in the meeting or have done something to help you personally (by setting up the meeting, making coffee, sharing their story) – even if you don't like the individual.
5. Ask the new person to get (same sex) **phone numbers** from people in the meetings and have them call those numbers so they build a network of people for emergencies.
6. **Service work** (which for some reason is underrated) of some kind should be encouraged because it gives the new person a feeling of belonging.

Coffee maker or setup are great beginner jobs because they put people in meetings early and get them to stay late. Help them with those jobs!!!

(**Remember** – we show people what WE did – if you didn't get that kind of sponsorship – learn it by doing it with your new prospect!)

7. The new recruit needs to find a **Home Group** of THEIR choice. They need a group (rather than a meeting!) where they feel comfortable. Preferably it will be a group that has enough older recovered members to show new people the “ropes” and guide the group's progress – thus the growth and progress of all. One also needs to know that a person does not leave a home group until they have a new home group. They need an anchor point where they know they can just be themselves and just be a part of instead of apart from as most of us have been in the past.

Do not turn over **group books** to new people! Explain what they are and why they are important. Let them know that in time they will EARN the right to handle them. There are many other jobs that a newcomer can do to learn about responsibility as well as the importance of giving back to AA.

Treasurer is **NOT** a job for a newcomer. That person should have a year or two minimum to handle a groups finances. Do not put that burden on a new person!

8. The sponsor needs to teach the **VALUE of SOBRIETY**. A new person should understand that sobriety should be cherished as much as any gift they have ever received or more.

## How to Teach the Program

In its preface, the Big Book proclaims that it is a text book. A text book by nature needs a teacher and a student to initiate the transfer of information. That in itself validates the title of this section. There is a need to teach it.

### **Pass it on.**

If you have not been given the program of action as described in the following paragraphs, this guideline will be helpful in your efforts to teach the steps correctly. We hear in meetings that “there are many ways to work the steps”. However, in Bill W.s' writings, it appears that his intention was that the steps had **one** set of instructions. There are variations to be sure, but not different ways. You may find that you need to do this as you teach the newcomer and that is precisely why this section is so detailed.

This is where the real work begins. **Your main job** as a sponsor is to teach the newcomer about the 12 STEP PROGRAM of Alcoholics Anonymous! Period! Everything else is secondary.

Let me repeat that statement. Your main job as a sponsor is to teach the newcomer about the 12 STEP PROGRAM of Alcoholics Anonymous! Along with

the 12 step teaching may be the need to teach people how to make choices. Over time, the 12 steps will become the framework for a sponsee to make rational choices. Many of us coming into AA only saw black and white. All or nothing. We needed to learn about the middle ground. We find middle ground by applying the 12 Steps.

The directions for working the 12 steps are written in the textbook Alcoholics Anonymous. They are expanded upon in the 12 & 12. They need to be worked using the textbook with the 12 & 12 as a reference. Getting the new person to understand the problem (**Step 1**) is the first order of business.

**Step 1** requires that the new person acquire an understanding of **the mental obsession, the physical allergy and the spiritual malady**. This is critical because one must first know what the problem is in order to work on a solution. We must admit powerlessness and unmanageability. There also is the need for identification from the stories of other alcoholics whether it be it in meetings or one on one. A person will hopefully identify as an alcoholic first to maintain the integrity of AA as described in the 1<sup>st</sup> Tradition (Our common welfare should come first).

Once this is clear, then acknowledging that there may be a power greater than themselves in their own mind (whatever that is for that individual) is next.

**Step 2** written or verbalized seems a matter of personal preference. The object is that for a new person to grasp the idea that there is a vast power at work somewhere and, it's not them!

A decision to let that power be their guide is next.

**Step 3** is where one needs to know that we turn over our will and our lives to the care of God as we understood him. This means that your sponsee will be asked to make a decision to take a 3<sup>rd</sup> step prayer. They need to take a 3<sup>rd</sup> step prayer before they take any further action. You may want to have the sponsee check with you after doing the prayer as they may be inclined to run along a little headstrong into actions they may regret later. The practice of praying first is a learned behavior. Remember, we come to AA with all of our bad behaviors and attitudes that we had when we were drinking. These will need to be addressed with your new person as they crop up. Then comes **Step 4**.

**Step 4**. The 4 column survey in the 4 areas of life is a process very few newcomers can tackle on their own. Workshops are available if you don't have a good understanding yourself. Take your new person to a workshop or sit with someone that has working knowledge of the inventory process. Do not let pride

and ego keep you from giving your prospect the best possible chance of the recovery process. You will learn much more about yourself and thus better insure your own sobriety.

Most new people will need to be persuaded to get this done as it is somewhat troublesome to look at all those painful, nasty things we have done in our days before coming to AA. The 3<sup>rd</sup> column shows areas that need to be desensitized and the 4<sup>th</sup> column will give the sponsor a view of the character defects that need to be changed and help you to see how to best help your sponsee with the rest of the steps.

**The 5<sup>th</sup> Step** is where the person with the 4<sup>th</sup> step sits down to go over their “life story” which has been written about in the inventory. When you are sure that the person doing the inventory understands the 1<sup>st</sup> 4 proposals, most of us take a pause and invite God into the inventory as the step as written requires that action. We have found it best to have the person bring a colored pencil to the 5<sup>th</sup> Step to note any changes found in evaluating the work in the 4<sup>th</sup> Step. The object is for the sponsee to get a clear look at themselves so they can be free of all the things that were blocking them from the Sunlight of the Spirit. **Confidentiality** is the most critical point of this process. Whatever is said in a 5<sup>th</sup> Step needs to stay in the 5<sup>th</sup> step! Everyone who sponsors or hears an inventory needs to be **responsible** here. If someone chooses another to hear their 5<sup>th</sup> Step, the sponsor must be ok with that, but the sponsee needs to know they need to bring the results of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> columns back to you the sponsor so that you can help them with the rest of the steps. At least some part of the inventory needs to be done with the sponsor so that you can get a working knowledge of the person you are sponsoring.

**Step 6** is a willingness step to ready your protégée to let God do God’s work. We can’t get rid of character defects. God removes them in His time. The sponsee needs to keep asking for the willingness to let God do so until they are ready.

**Step 7** asks God to remove the shortcomings while your sponsee practices the opposite of the character defects. This demonstrates the willingness of step 6. This is where one may need to take a critical look at sponsees behaviors and really hone in on necessary changes, those being the practice of the opposite of the defect(s) in question.

**Step 8** is the list taken from the 4<sup>th</sup> step and identified during the 5<sup>th</sup> step of people to whom an amend will need to be made and the character defects to be mentioned during the amends. There will probably be discussion as to what some of the amends one might have to make will be. This step is a preparation of discussion and prayer for Step 9. The sponsor may have their sponsee separate the list into those amends they will do right away, those they will do later, and those they don’t ever want to do, so the list is not so overwhelming. Prayer for

the willingness to make the amends, especially for those last mentioned, will be the order of the day until willingness is acquired.

A plan needs to be formulated for each amend to be made. The **9<sup>th</sup> Step** is one where the sponsee knows you will be available if the fixing process goes sour. They need to realize the importance of the step is that they are going out to **fix broken relationships**. You may have to ask around to get input on how to help sponsees make these repairs always making sure the anonymity of the sponsee is retained. You need to keep them moving at this point as we tend to feel we deserve a break along the way.

**Step 10** is much misunderstood. It is designed to be used at any time of the day – not just at night. It is meant to be utilized when events or people disturb our serenity. People need to be taught to use this step to stay peaceful inside despite the storms around us. Let your sponsee know that this is the practice of the skills learned in Steps 4 – 9 over and over. It will become a **lifetime practice**. This is where one sees the relief available from doing this step immediately. There is also the need to do this at night as described in the text in both Steps 10 and 11.

**Step 11** talks of prayer and meditation. Guidance in this area comes in many forms. Quiet times with your sponsee in reflection of the gifts given and reflecting on inner peace can be wonderful times for both you and your sponsee. A spiritual walk together in nature is a great time of reflection. The key is slowing down to communicate with God. This is critical for your own sobriety. Don't miss out on the opportunity to share prayer and meditation with another alky.

Our **12<sup>th</sup> Step** has 3 areas of focus.

The **1<sup>st</sup>** is the **spiritual awakening**. Is your sponsee practicing living a life using the tools given so far? Do you go back over the values taught in Step 7 which are kindness, compassion, love, truthfulness, courage, giving, and so forth?

The **2<sup>nd</sup>** area is the **practice of the principles** learned in the preceding steps. Has your sponsee's home life improved? Are they living at work like they do in AA meetings? Do they walk like they talk? Are they working with newcomers teaching them what they have learned?

The **3<sup>rd</sup>** area would be to **carry this message**. Have you taken them on 12<sup>th</sup> step calls? Have they visited someone in intensive care, i.e.? It is important to meet some "wet" drunks along the way as it's a great reminder of where your newcomer/sponsee may have just come from.

A sponsee must understand that they need to do these things for 2 reasons. The **1<sup>st</sup>** is simply **insurance against the 1<sup>st</sup> drink**. The **2<sup>nd</sup>** is to **give something back to AA** for the gift of sobriety they have received. This also

insures that AA will continue in the same manner that it has since 1935. In recent years, sponsorship has not been given this kind of attention which is believed to be necessary for our common welfare.

## Working with your Sponsee

New people need both time and guidance when they get to AA regardless of age or background. A 2 way commitment to meet and discuss events in the sponsee's daily walk is imperative. Length of time for these meetings is quite optional. However, we feel an hour a week when new is minimal. They should also meet you at an AA meeting once a week if possible.

Showing that sponsee **how you live** and **how you deal with your own difficulties** is one of the greatest teaching tools a sponsor can use because it shows you walk like you talk. Sometimes it's just a matter of spending time with that individual to let them know they are of value to spend time with. Walk with your sponsee through all kinds of difficulties, i.e. deaths, breakups, job loss, court to name a few. Many of us came into AA with little or no self worth and this is just one little thing to make that person feel a little better about themselves. In AA we change the actions first and, following those changes, the thinking will change and your sponsee will begin to want to do the actions because it feels better when they do them.

All of us at times have felt a need just to be cared for and new people may be extra sensitive in that area. Sometimes a sponsor will need to be **somewhat parental** with a new person. We have sat with new people during particularly rough stretches and given them time and understanding that perhaps was never given in that sponsee's home. Love and understanding may be crucial for them at these difficult points. Always keep in mind that you are a sponsor FIRST and a friend second! Your life and your sponsee's depend on that. The integrity of Alcoholics Anonymous depends on that as well.

Some of us needed blatant truth for us to see ourselves in a different light. **This does not give license for anyone to give brutal treatment or brutal honesty under any circumstances!** Firm treatment is much different than brutality. Others need gentle guidance. However, that does not mean that a sponsor should not keep the individual from continuing on their spiritual journey. They need to keep moving forward with steps and actions.

**Prayer** is a subject that can be an issue to some. When a new sponsee balks at prayer of some kind, you should remind them that they agreed **to go to any lengths** to stay sober in the beginning of your sponsor/sponsee relationship. The 12 step program is based on a person accepting spiritual help, and, if they are unwilling, you may need to move on to someone else until they are ready.

One of our sponsors stated years ago: "If God drives 'em out, alcohol will bring 'em right back in!" We have seen that to be true over many years of observation.

**Phone calls** should be a requirement. Some sponsors ask for a phone call every day – others are comfortable with 1 per week. At least a detailed message is minimal. The new person should develop a phone list immediately (preferably the same sex so that the phone call stays on AA principles) and should learn to use it for a number of reasons. The 1<sup>st</sup> reason is there will be times when you as a sponsor might be unavailable and they may have a critical problem to deal with. A person from that phone list may be able to help at those critical times. Connecting them with others you sponsor or network with makes a new person feel more a part of. Calling people on a regular basis creates a habit which, when things go off kilter for your protégée (as they usually do) they will already be in the habit of calling someone and therefore less likely to seek a far worse solution (Drinking!).

Your sponsee should be coached to **find someone else** to work with as soon as possible whether the steps have been completed or not. We have found that our own growth was greatly accelerated when we started to work one on one with a person less experienced in the steps than we were – regardless of their length of sobriety! They need to know you are available for guidance wherever necessary and that no question is unworthy of an answer.

What about **other issues**? What if the new person is "dually diagnosed" or an alcoholic and something else? Does that mean I as a sponsor can't work with them because they are not "pure" alcoholics? You can absolutely work with these people. We have found that a large percentage of these "other issues" go away when someone really applies the 12 steps to their lives. The key issue is that your protégée be an alcoholic for identification purposes. One alcoholic talking to another alcoholic is still the basis of our entire program. We also need to remember "singleness of purpose", so, keeping those things in mind, go ahead and help these people with our program of action. A lot of us found out we were much more alcoholic once we worked the steps than when we first came to AA!

**What if your sponsee drinks?** Do you throw in the towel and "just let them go"? **No! Absolutely not!** In the Story of "Jim" in Chapter 3, AAs worked with Jim at least 7 times. Chapter 7 gives many examples of how to properly address someone still drinking and should be your guideline on what to do case by case. There are many of us who have had a myriad of experiences, good and bad, that can guide you on this challenging journey. We would not trade those experiences for anything. In many cases, they have taught us warning signs to look for and ways to challenge those still suffering to get them to see the truth about what they are doing to themselves and their loved ones. The greatest gift will be your own personal growth because, once again, you have been stretched to get out of your comfort zone and help another alcoholic.

## Service Sponsorship

A **service sponsor** may be the same individual one uses for step and life guidance, but it may also be someone with more experience in the many different arenas of service. Many of us prefer to have guidance from more than one person when venturing into some of the more challenging service positions, for example General Service Representative. This is an extremely challenging area and requires special guidance. Service sponsorship is an extremely rewarding venture. It gives one the opportunity to pass on what you have learned in the service arena. Look to the various AA pamphlets for help with service also.

When it comes to **AA business**, your sponsee should be guided to listen for the voice of the group – first at the group level and then at the area level. God's voice will become more and more apparent to them as discussion about a subject continues, and thus the sponsee will be able to cast a vote that has the best intentions for AA as a whole.

**Don't just turn your sponsee loose on a service job** without guiding them in the beginning. They need room to make mistakes, but they need training just as one needs training in any new job. Don't do them a disservice – help them when they need it. This is where working knowledge of the 12 Traditions will come to play. When you get your new person involved with service, they will have to understand the importance of why and how the traditions have kept us together.

Teaching your sponsee about service through the **12 Concepts** is yet another endeavor that will expand you as a sponsor. Grasping the full meaning of the concepts is perhaps the most lengthy process for 2 reasons. First, one needs to see the workings of AA at the General Service level. This is where the Concepts really come in to play. To observe AA in action and then question why and how those decisions were arrived at will lead your protégée to delve deeper into understanding the process by which we maintain our integrity at the world service level. This takes some time. The 2<sup>nd</sup> is that there is quite a bit of work to do before one gets to this point (if ever). If you have not done service at this level, by all means have your sponsee seek out someone who has. Not everyone who comes to AA ever gets to this point. Now you will need to sit down with your sponsee and study the concepts just as you did steps and traditions.

## Sponsees' Responsibilities

Do what is asked of you in this outline. If it doesn't sound quite right – question it. Some will ask you to do other things but we tend to stay with this list. Writing out steps is always acceptable. Telling you when to get up or what you can or

cannot eat or drink is not unless you ask for direction in those areas. (These are examples). Honesty, open mindedness and willingness are the keys.

If you feel that your relationship is not what it needs to be, talk about it first to your current sponsor! If it cannot be resolved and you need to move on which happens sometimes, don't leave your current sponsor until you have another in place!

## Conclusion

We have set this on paper as a guide for working with others. The work to be done is described in the Big Book with references from the 12 & 12 as well as other approved literature. There is much more that could have been written, but this summary is intended to get you started on the right track. This arena of Sponsorship, as is stated in chapter 7 of our book is **“an experience you must not miss”**.

Do yourself the service of passing it on. AA needs you to “carry this message” as it's presented in the AA text. We in our groups need you to pass this along so when or if our children need AA, they will get the same message of hope that was communicated to us. Get involved. Help someone else. Trudge this road with us. It's beyond your wildest imagination.

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted

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