

Region 9 Assembly 2013 - Sponsorship Readings

1 Reading on Sponsorship

In Overeaters Anonymous, we are told that "together we can do what we could never do alone". Nowhere is this principle more simply and clearly practiced than in the sponsor-sponsee relationship.

2 Reading on Sponsorship

Sponsorship is one of the vital keys to recovery in OA. Sponsors are abstinent OA members who are committed to refraining from compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors. They are practicing the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions to the best of their ability, and are willing to share their experience, strength and hope with other compulsive eaters. Sharing with others is one way sponsors maintain their recovery; thus, both sponsor and sponsee benefit from the relationship.

By reaching out for help from a sponsor, a sponsee is putting into action the words of the OA Promise: "I put my hand in yours, and together we can do what we could never do alone". Reaching out for help involves a degree of surrender. The sponsoring relationship involves commitment from both individuals.

At certain point in the sponsoring relationship, it is appropriate to encourage your sponsees to indicate at meetings that they are qualified sponsors. By sharing up to their level of experience, they can start giving back what they have received in order to maintain spiritual recovery and abstinence.

3 Reading on Sponsorship

When I take a sponsor, both of us understand that we may or may not discuss food and food plans. The whole idea of having a sponsor is predicated on my need for guidance in working a spiritual program – by someone who has attained a measure of experience in doing so.

4 Reading on Sponsorship

A sponsor is an OA member who shares the message of recovery on an ongoing, individual basis with another member called a sponsee.

For many of us, an important part of sponsorship is guiding a sponsee through the Steps, based on personal experience, strength and hope.

As sponsors, we listen, support and are understanding. A sponsor/sponsee relationship, as it deepens in honesty, may evolve into a lasting friendship. It is important to know that a sponsor's role is not one of therapist, doctor, lawyer or other professional.

Serving as a sponsor helps reinforce our physical, emotional, and spiritual recovery. It also provides an opportunity to strengthen our relationship skills, both with another individual and our Higher Power. Sponsoring keeps us from isolating and teaches us how to support another human being seeking recovery. Sponsoring keeps us in touch with what brought us to the program and can also remind us where we might return. Also, as we give back what we've been given, we strengthen our group and the Fellowship as a whole. OA needs sponsors, and sponsoring is a privilege to be shared by as many as possible.

We make a vital personal connection with a sponsee. This program is not meant to be worked alone, and many OA members attribute their progress to the fact that someone took a special interest in them. As we share the miracle of this program with our sponsees, we are privileged to witness their transformation as they journey from isolation to recovery.

5 Reading on Sponsorship

It is easy to see OA as another way of losing weight, a means of learning some more tricks. When sponsoring people, I also need to find a balance: a focus on what they have learned that day about themselves, food, and nutrition, and a focus on how a power greater than themselves is helping them get well. It's about reminding myself that this is a three fold program – physical, emotional, and spiritual.

6 Reading on Sponsorship

Newcomers are more likely to return if someone in the group gives them personal attention and encouragement.

If people ask you to sponsor them, remember that this may be the first attempt they have made to establish contact with someone in the program. If you are truly too busy, take the time to introduce these new members to other qualified sponsors. If a newcomer does not follow through, don't take it personally.

Be realistic about the times you want the person to call. If you are never home at night, don't tell someone, "Oh, you can call me anytime." If the person calling you stops calling, find out why. Don't ever give the impression, "You blew it." It's much better to focus on the positive: "Okay, let's go forward, one day at a time."

7 Reading on Sponsorship

An action which helps promote personal abstinence is to work with a sponsor. Find a sponsor who will help you with the program of recovery on all three levels: physical, emotional and spiritual. Many OA members find it helpful to commit their plan of eating to a sponsor each day.

8 Reading on Sponsorship

A friend, a role model, a source of information in my recovery process – a sponsor is all these things and often more. A sponsor is someone who is first of all willing to seek recovery for herself and then to help me find my own way – not by possessing all the answers but by accepting me as I am. The definition that stays in my mind is: a sponsor is one who guides by example, not someone who just points the way.

The example my sponsor set was one of a continuing losing abstinence and recovery via the twelve steps, one day at a time. She came into program about eight months before me, and she saved me from many a "skinned knee". For the first time, I was willing to let another's experience guide me; she was living the program and sharing it, and it was working!

I do not sponsor a large number of people, usually no more than 2 or 3. My program of recovery teaches me to let go, to allow others to assume responsibility. I am responsible for continuing my own recovery, which is all I have to share. And the beat goes on.

9 Reading on Sponsorship

It worked for my sponsor. Am I willing to do the same? How badly do I want to recover? I was willing to go to any lengths to practice my disease. Today, I need to do the same to achieve and maintain recovery. The tools are there to help me. Do I use them all? I am willing to follow a plan of eating and with God's help I can. I can go to meetings to hear how other compulsive overeaters have dealt with the challenges of life - without eating over them. I hear at meetings that eating over an issue doesn't solve the original problem. It adds a second problem as well.

My sponsor suggests that, if I am having a problem, I contact another OA member and ask, "How are you doing?" this does help me. It is not important to analyze why or how our program works. I need to take the actions that worked for my sponsor and others – and keep on coming back!

10 Reading on Sponsorship

Sponsors are OA members who are living the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions to the best of their ability. They are willing to share their recovery with other members of the Fellowship and are committed to abstinence.

We ask a sponsor to help us through our program of recovery on all three levels: physical, emotional, and spiritual. By working with other members of OA and sharing their experience, strength and hope, sponsors continually renew and reaffirm their own recovery. Sponsors share their program up to the level of their own experience.

Ours is a program of attraction; find a sponsor who has what you want, and ask that person how he or she is achieving it. A member may work with more than one sponsor and may change sponsors at will.

11 Reading on Sponsorship

At a recent conference, I saw Step Twelve acted out in all of its glory. My 3 sponsors, all of whom have back-to-back abstinence, were there encouraging, telling others how to do it. They knew that they would probably not hear anything new for themselves. They went only to bring the message of healing to someone who was still suffering.

They are living proof of good health, energy, and normal weight. They are the promises exemplified. Their faces shone with abstinence and the joy of themselves.

As if that were not enough, when we got home, we all attended our regular meeting. The leader of the evening had us share what we had experienced at the conference. That way, everyone got to go.

As we hugged each other goodbye, one of my sponsors was chuckling to herself, "I have to hurry home in case my new sponsee from the conference calls." She just keeps on giving and giving and giving.

I follow my sponsor's example. I am abstinent, healthy, and enjoy my life and everyone in it. I am ready to sponsor. I finally have something to give.

12 Reading on Sponsorship

My first meeting was one I will never forget; it was that inspiring for me. I had chosen a beginner's meeting where only the leader showed up, so it was one on one. I felt very comfortable sharing my story with her and listening to her describe the Twelve-Step program. The more I went the more I absorbed. My first year attending the meeting I was quiet and didn't share; instead, I listened. After a year, I got fed up with struggling with my disease, and I found a sponsor.

It was a slow but uplifting process for me. I would not be here today if I hadn't made the choice to live life again. After choosing a sponsor, I committed to a food plan and a certain way of eating. Calling my sponsor every day, committing my food, going to meetings, and reading and following the Steps are a major part of my life now.

13 Reading on Sponsorship

Very often I hear struggling newcomers say they don't have a sponsor and can't call anyone because, "I'm afraid I'll bother people." This article is for them and for all who are afraid to reach out. I want them to know how valuable they are to my program.

I've been a member of OA for 4 and 1/2 years and have maintained a back-to-back abstinence for almost 2 years. At meetings I offer myself as a sponsor. Sometimes I think I have enough people to sponsor, but I let God make the decision. Consequently I make and receive a lot of calls – but it was not always this way.

In the beginning my sponsor was the only person I ever called. I was afraid to "bother" someone else. Today I know that I am important, but it took a long time and consistent abstinence for me to realize it.

This past summer I started working with this young woman, 23 years my junior. I began to feel that helping her was a way to make amends to my own children for my behavior while in the grip of my disease. I knew that God had put her in my path so that I could take a closer look at how I related to my daughter.

And then a serious problem occurred in my marriage. Suddenly there was a huge financial burden and some hard personal decisions to be made.

I was overwhelmed by the needs of this newcomer. Since my first relapse thought is: "I am junk!" I tried to push her away with my behavior. I felt I had no recovery to give her, and told her to get another sponsor. She stuck to me like glue anyway. "You're not getting rid of me that easily!" she said. "I want you, and I'm keeping you!" Often she'd challenge me, saying: "I haven't seen you at meetings lately. You can't afford to give up your meetings because you're busy." To my disease, this newcomer was an annoyance. To my recovery, she was a lifeline from my H.P.

Never feel like you will be bothering someone when you call or ask them to sponsor you. This is how the program works!

14 Reading on Sponsorship

I spent almost 2 years working the Fellowship rather than working the Steps. Finally I found a sponsor, and all that changed. I feel blessed that my first sponsor's abstinence was the most important thing in his daily living. In our earliest phone conversations, out of habit I always said, "How are you doing?" His instant response was always, "I am abstinent." At first I thought he was just being cute. Today I realize that "Abstinence first, without exception" is the only way to live recovery in serenity. I also realize he had to be living abstinence in recovery if he was to have any hope of sharing it.

In those early days, I had no idea I shared the blame for my failed relationships. It had not occurred to me I needed, among other things, spirituality, daily practice of our tools and personal commitment to working the Twelve Steps. The thought that I needed to work on my resentments and character defects might have seemed important, if I thought I had any! But I thought all I needed was the right diet, and all I wanted to talk about in my early meeting with my sponsor was the food. I thank my HP that my sponsor had sufficient patience and understanding to keep saying, "For today, let's continue our work on the Steps. That's how I got abstinent, and it is the path I am suggesting for you."

My sponsor was abstinent and never wavered from the steps he had taken to get that way. I continued to whine as he guided me through the Steps, but work the Steps I did. Indeed, I was blessed with abstinence in the midst of that process.

Thank God for abstinent sponsors.

15 Reading on Sponsorship

Styles of sponsorship vary from person to person. We are each free to approach it in our own way. It is important to explain one's approach to a sponsee up front, reaching understanding and agreement. As we change, our style of sponsoring my change. This is not uncommon and is a natural part of evolving in the program.

Sponsors share the experience, strength and hope they've found in Twelve-Step recovery. Support, honesty and a positive attitude enrich most sponsorship styles.

There is a fine line between being supportive and giving advice. Sometimes a sponsee will look to a sponsor to solve a particular problem. Often the best solution is to encourage the sponsee to apply one of the Steps or Traditions to the situation.

Communication and feedback are important in both directions. The key is honesty, open-mindedness and willingness. Ideally, sponsorship is a two-way relationship based on acceptance and respect.

There are structured approaches to sponsoring as well as easy going and flexible ones. Some sponsors, in varying degrees, may encourage sponsees to read and write daily, make daily phone calls, commit food for the day, and/or attend a certain number of meetings. Others may make few such suggestions. Most sponsors, however, stress that a sponsee's eventual commitment to some type of OA service is vital to her or his continued recovery.

16 Reading on Sponsorship

I did not want a sponsor. I didn't need one. I came from AA to OA: I knew all about it. In fact, I was doing it – abstaining, maintaining a 30-pound weight loss. I came to meetings to straighten you out! The thing that finally deflated my fat ego was a slow, insidious adding of food: a teaspoon of this, a dash of that. Thank God that I did keep coming back to meetings, so I could realize that I had been on a diet and an ego trip. Then and only then did I really come to desire abstinence for its own sake, and peace of mind through sharing.

So I got a sponsor. Then it became such a blessing and a relief. Little by little I began to share my daily ups and downs as well. I let her get to know me. I began to change my attitude, to soften, to love myself.

Today, I believe that sponsorship is more than a "tool". It is a new way of like. Over the years my sponsor has become the closest of friends, even closer than kin. She literally knew me inside and out. She knows when I'm under stress and when life is a breeze. She knows what precautions I need in order to abstain in all situations.

Sponsorship is a wonderful answer to the question so often heard: What do you do when you stop overeating?

REGION 9 ASSEMBLY 2013 – SPONSORSHIP – ANSWERS

- # 1 - "Twelfth-Step-Within Handbook", page 25
- # 2 - "Sponsoring Through the Twelve Steps", page 1 & 3
- # 3 - "For Today" book, page 353, December 18
- # 4 - "A Guide for Sponsors" pamphlet, page 2 & 3
- # 5 - "For Today" book, page 206, July 24
- # 6 - "OA Handbook for Members, Groups and service Bodies". Page 5 & 6
- # 7 - "A Commitment to Abstinence" pamphlet, page 3
- # 8 - "Lifeline Sampler" book, page 265 & 266, March 1983, "What is a Sponsor?"
- # 9 - "For Today" book, page 268, September 24
- # 10 - "The Tools of Recovery" pamphlet, page 4
- # 11 - "Voices of Recovery" book, page 60, February 29
- # 12 - "OA Members Come in All Sizes" pamphlet, page 6
- # 13 - "A New Beginning" book, 48 – 50
- # 14 - "Lifeline" magazine, February 2013, page 17, Joe
- # 15 - "A Guide for Sponsors" pamphlet, page 6 & 7
- # 16 - "Lifeline Sampler" book, page 355 & 356, September 1980, "Sponsorship, A New Way of Life"