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Four Major Points of Sponsorship

1. The primary responsibility of sponsors is to help their sponsees work the Twelve Steps from the Big Book and 12/12.
2. A sponsor and sponsee have an obligation to discuss their mutual expectations, objectives, and requirements, if any, regarding the sponsorship relationship before they enter into that relationship.
3. A sponsor shares his or her experience, strength, and hope with his or her sponsee rather than trying to run the sponsee's life.
4. A sponsor must never take advantage of a sponsee in any way.

Sponsorship is intensely, wonderfully personal. Each of us brings our own ideas, strengths, and weaknesses to it as both sponsors and sponsees. No one is an "ideal" sponsor and no one is a "perfect" sponsee. Thank God. But we can all learn to be better sponsors and better sponsees. Undoubtedly, there are certain native talents to the sponsorship art, but there are also some principles that can be brought to bear. Those with a load of "talent" still need to understand the guidelines. Those with less natural "talent" can improve their effectiveness by increasing their knowledge about sponsorship. No set of rigid rules could possibly do the phenomenon of sponsorship justice, but it is our hope that the observations in this booklet can begin to capture its spirit. As with all teacher/student relationships, it is difficult to tell who learns more: the sponsor or the sponsee.

A Brief History of Sponsorship

The idea of sponsorship was born in Alcoholics Anonymous, the original Twelve-Step Fellowship. Living Sober, an AA publication, describes how the term "sponsor" came about. In the earliest days of A.A., the term "sponsor" was not in the A.A. jargon. Then a few hospitals in Akron, Ohio and New York began to accept alcoholics (under that diagnosis) as patients--if a sober A.A. member would agree to "sponsor" the sick man or woman. The sponsor took the patient to the hospital, visited him or her regularly, was present when the patient was discharged, and took the patient home and then to an A.A. meeting. At the meeting, the sponsor introduced the newcomer to other happily non-drinking alcoholics. All through the early months of recovery, the sponsor stood by, ready to answer questions or to listen whenever needed. Sponsorship turned out to be such a good way to help people get established in A.A. that it has become a custom followed throughout the A.A. world, even when hospitalization is not necessary.

Sponsorship has since become one of the foundations of the recovery programs of all Twelve-Step fellowships and one of the greatest blessings of membership.

What a Sponsor Does Not Do

What a sponsor does not do is as important as what he or she does do. The following list describes some things a sponsor either cannot or should not do.

- 1) A sponsor cannot keep a sponsee in recovery. Whether or not to drink or use or to engage in compulsive behavior is a decision they alone can make. One of the sayings in our fellowship is that sponsors "don't take the credit when their sponsees stay sober and they don't take the blame when they drink."
- 2) A sponsor is not a therapist. Sponsors are not psychiatrists, psychologists or therapists (unless they happen to be psychiatrists, psychologists, or therapists, but even then, they don't act in that capacity with their sponsees). It isn't a sponsor's function to provide therapy to a sponsee. There is no "treatment plan" other than working the Twelve Steps. All sponsors can do is share their experience, strength, and hope concerning their own recovery. The sponsor is not the therapist and the sponsee isn't the patient. The Twelve Steps are about spiritual growth, not therapy.
- 3) A sponsor should not attempt to control a sponsee's life. No Twelve-Step Fellowship ever tells a member what he or she has to do. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking, using, or engaging in compulsive behavior. Whether or not to work the Steps is left entirely up to the person. In the same way, it is not up to a sponsor to control a sponsee's life. Advice is a tricky thing because we never really have enough data about someone else to make a decision

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for him or her. Nor is it our responsibility to do so even if we could. Twelve-Step programs emphasize sharing experience, strength, and hope with one another--not offering advice. In a sponsee's early days of recovery, a sponsor may wish to make strong suggestions to his or her sponsee about what to do and what not to do. For example: don't drink or use, go to meetings, read the Big Book & 12/12, call your sponsor, and so on. But these suggestions are still suggestions. The sponsee is better off when the sponsor leaves the actual decision to them while describing the program principles and experience that are relevant to that decision. As sponsees, each person should retain the responsibility for making the basic decisions about their lives, including the decision to stay in recovery.

- 4) A sponsor should not permit, much less encourage, a sponsee's unhealthy dependence. A sponsee's only dependence should be on the Fellowship and, ultimately, on a Higher Power. A healthy interdependence, however, always exists between a sponsor and his or her sponsee.
- 5) The most fundamental responsibility a sponsor has toward a sponsee is never to exploit him or her in any way. In practical terms, it means that sponsors should not try to use their sponsees as a way to borrow money, make money, have sex, advance their careers, or do anything else that harms their sponsees or puts them at risk. A sponsor has a sacred trust toward his or her sponsee. The relationship between a sponsor and a sponsee is inherently unequal because the sponsee is seeking guidance and has placed himself or herself in a vulnerable position. Even when there is no difference in the length of sobriety, a sponsor has a psychological advantage. In technical terms, a power differential exists that leaves sponsees vulnerable to manipulation. Morally and ethically, a sponsor may not take advantage of that vulnerability in any way whatsoever.

Sponsorship Expectations

Perhaps the greatest potential source of misunderstanding between a sponsor and a sponsee is the different expectations each has for the sponsorship relationship. The sponsor views sponsorship in one way, and the sponsee views it in another way. When the relationship doesn't turn out the way each wanted it to, they are both disappointed. To prevent this situation from developing, we have a responsibility to discuss our understanding—and the potential sponsee's understanding—of the sponsorship role.

Our first responsibility to a potential sponsee is to discuss our mutual expectations for the sponsorship.

As a potential sponsor, we are saying, in effect, "This is how I sponsor somebody. If this is not what you are expecting from me, then we need to discuss whether or not we can work together as sponsor and sponsee." To adequately cover this area, we need to discuss the following issues with a potential sponsee:

- Our mutual understanding of sponsorship. What does our potential sponsee think it is? What do we think it is?
- Our mutual expectations for the sponsorship. What does our potential sponsee want from us? What do we expect from him or her? What are our obligations and responsibilities to each other?
- Why our potential sponsee is changing sponsors (if the sponsee is not a newcomer). Since behavioral patterns tend to repeat themselves, explore the reasons for the change. What was the source of the potential sponsee's dissatisfaction with his or her former sponsor? What does the potential sponsee expect from us that he or she did not get from the previous sponsor?

If we discuss our mutual expectations at the beginning, the sponsorship will go more smoothly.

This booklet provides a checklist of some common expectations between sponsors and sponsees. We may have other expectations that are unique to us as sponsors, and we should discuss them as well. Our expectations reflect, to some degree, our style of sponsorship. If our potential sponsee is not comfortable with that style, we are better off finding out now. Or if our potential sponsee is not willing to follow the basic ground rules we intend to set, we should know that too. If we decide that the match between us is a good one, we can proceed with the sponsorship. If we decide that it is not, we will save both of us a lot of pain by declining the sponsorship opportunity.

Our goal in interviewing a potential sponsee is to determine how well we will work together. Each sponsee is different. An approach that is effective with one sponsee may not be effective with another. And what may be effective in the first months of recovery may not be effective in the first years. We have to meet our sponsees' needs as they exist at the moment, because those needs will

change as our sponsees grow in the program. We have to be willing to let our sponsees change and grow—and even grow away.

In the special case of oppositesex sponsorships, samesex homosexual sponsorships, and samesex gay/straight sponsorships, an additional step is required in the interview process. Sponsors and sponsees develop an intimate and trusting relationship with one another. In such an environment of acceptance and vulnerability (and love), it is possible for sexual feelings to develop. To guard against problems arising from that development, certain precautions should be taken from the beginning. These precautions include the following:

1. Ask yourself if your potential sponsee may have a romantic or sexual interest in you that is motivating the sponsorship request. If it is appropriate, ask your potential sponsee that question. Ask yourself the same question regarding your inclination to accept. If any answer is yes, don't sponsor the person.
2. Consider discussing the risk that sexual feelings might develop and agree to terminate the sponsorship if they do.
3. If sexual feelings do develop, break off the sponsorship and cease sponsorship activities (stop working the Steps together and so on). Then suggest that your sponsee find another sponsor as quickly as possible, using a temporary sponsor if necessary. The temporary sponsor should be told about the situation.
4. Begin a "coolingoff" period in which contact between the two of you is broken.

The last suggestion may sound harsh, but if the attraction is based on real love and not on dependency associated with sponsorship, it will survive this break. While the action may not be pleasant for either party, it is the price to be paid for the risk that was taken in the first place and the situation that developed.

The following is a list of common expectations that are often discussed with a new sponsee. Once these expectations have been discussed and agreed upon, they become the ground rules of the sponsorship.

SOME EXPECTATIONS TO CONSIDER IN SPONSORSHIP

1. **Ethics**
2. **Confidentiality**
3. **Mutual honesty**
4. **Working the Steps**
5. **Meeting attendance**
6. **Sponsor availability**
7. **Frequency of contact**
8. **When and where to call**
9. **Sponsor replacement**
10. **Spirituality**

1. Ethics

Sponsorship is not a casual relationship with another person. It is a relationship carefully structured to serve a specific purpose within the program. It is, above all else, a sacred trust that we have accepted. It is not a burden, but a gift; and it carries specific responsibilities and obligations. The relationship between a sponsor and sponsee is never equal, although the mutual benefits may be. Sponsorship is a sacred trust. It goes without saying that we should never try to exploit or take advantage of a sponsee in any way. Nor should we ever do anything that even suggests it. Sponsors and sponsees are not just friends, although there are elements of friendship involved. As sponsors, we are charged with helping our sponsees work the Twelve Steps and with guiding their recovery program based on the experience, strength, and hope of our own recovery. In many ways, they are our students.

Our special relationship with sponsees requires us to live by strict moral and ethical standards. We are never to do anything that would harm them in any way—physically, emotionally, spiritually, financially, intellectually, socially. We are not to use them as a way to make money, to borrow money, to have sex, to advance our careers, to improve our social status, or to get anything from them whatsoever for our own personal gain. If we cannot trust ourselves to live by these strict ethical standards, we should not sponsor them.

2. Confidentiality

The pledge of confidentiality between us and our sponsee is the basis of the trust we share. Our mutual promise not to repeat anything told in confidence opens the way to selfexamination and selfrevelation. We both have a right to the privacy of our lives. The confidentiality that we maintain for our sponsees covers all their lives, not just their secrets. The only exception we ask for, as sponsor, is permission to discuss our sponsee with our own sponsor whenever we believe it is in our sponsee's best interest for us to do so. A sponsee's confidence must never be broken.

Our level of confidentiality includes the identity of our sponsees. It's up to them, not us, to reveal that we are their sponsor. Such protection is warranted if our sponsee and we are to build a safe, longterm relationship. If someone asks us about an individual whom they know we sponsor, we simply tell them that we never discuss our sponsees with another person.

We advise sponsees, however, that the confidences between us are not protected by law in the way that privileged information is between an attorney and a client or a priest and a parishioner. And sponsors do sometimes drink or use again. In addition, as sponsors, we have a legal obligation to report certain ongoing crimes (such as child abuse). Therefore, our sponsees should be careful in sharing certain information that could be seriously damaging to them. In such cases, we suggest they consider meeting with a clergy person or doctor for that portion of their Fifth Step when the time comes.

3. Mutual Honesty

Twelve-Step recovery is based on the capacity to be honest, so honesty is one of the ground rules we discuss at the beginning of the sponsorship. Since many newcomers learn honesty while in the program, the goal is progress, not perfection. If your sponsee has a serious problem with being honest, honesty should be a focus of your work together. The Steps, if worked properly, will make us honest. In the meantime, we expect our sponsees to be honest about their drinking or drug use and about the basics of the program, including whether or not they are working the Steps. Honesty is a twoway street, and what is appropriate for our sponsees in this regard is also appropriate for us. As sponsors, we try to model honesty for our own sponsees, both selfhonesty and honesty with others.

Recovery is based on the capacity to be honest. On the other hand, it isn't necessary for us to reveal everything to our sponsees at the beginning of the relationship just as it isn't necessary for them to reveal everything to us. We may both want to see how well the relationship works before we reveal our deepest secrets.

4. Working the Steps

The Steps form the basis of the Twelve-Step recovery program. Other program activities (meetings, sponsors, and Conferenceapproved literature) are designed to support us in working the Steps. Since our primary function as sponsors is to help our sponsees work the Steps, we should emphasize their importance from the beginning. Our expectation for each of our sponsees is that he will be willing to work the Twelve Steps, and we ask for that commitment before agreeing to sponsor him. Starting the Steps is a priority for program newcomers.

5. Meeting Attendance

For newcomers, the suggested meeting attendance is ninety meetings in ninety days. Such a rigorous meeting schedule gives newcomers a firm grounding in program principles and establishes a new behavioral pattern based on acceptance of their alcoholism / addiction. It also represents a commitment to sobriety and to the work it requires. Ninety meetings in ninety days can also be recommended to help newcomers reduce their loneliness and sense of isolation. For these reasons and more, many of us have the "ninetyinninety" expectation for our sponsees and make that commitment a condition of sponsorship.

We encourage newcomer sponsees to include as many speaker meetings as possible in their ninety meetings. Speaker meetings help newcomers identify as alcoholics, addicts, or compulsive individuals. Speaker meetings also show newcomers that they can recover in a Twelve-Step program and that they can be happy and successful. In speaker meetings, they get a full hour of experience, strength, and hope relating to recovery.

6. Sponsor Availability

If our potential sponsee expects a lot of attention that we won't have the time to provide, we need to know that before we accept the sponsor role. Otherwise, problems will soon arise in the relationship. It is true that the degree of time we can make available to our sponsee changes, but there is an overall time availability that is characteristic of our style of sponsorship. Only by discussing this issue can we be sure that our expectation of availability matches our potential sponsee's expectation of contact.

7. Frequency of Contact

As a condition of sponsorship, many sponsors ask that a new sponsee call them every day for a specified number of days. In the case of a newcomer, it is ninety calls in ninety days to match his meeting attendance. We may limit the number of daily calls to thirty or sixty days for sponsees with more sobriety. There are several reasons why we ask a new sponsee to agree to this schedule:

- It is an expression of our mutual commitment to the sponsor/sponsee relationship.
- It allows the sponsor to monitor his daily progress in the program which is especially important with newcomers.
- It is an expression of his willingness to work the program and an act of selfdiscipline that provides a model for other areas of his life.

- It allows us to get to know him quickly.
- It gives the sponsor the time he needs with him to discuss program principles and their application to his life.
- It shows the sponsee how to break out of the loneliness and isolation of the addictive life by reaching out to another recovering person. "Reaching out" is not a natural reflex for most of us who are new to a Twelve-Step program, and so we need the practice.
- It establishes a habit of regular contact that will continue throughout the relationship (although not daily later on).
- The length of time spent on the telephone is not as important as the call itself. When sponsees don't have time to talk, they just check in, or they leave a message on the answering machine and fulfill their commitment that way.

8. When and Where to Call

It is important to discuss with our sponsees when and where it is appropriate for them to call us and for us to call them on a nonemergency basis. For example, is it okay to call each other at our workplaces? If so, during what hours? What kind of message should we leave? Is it okay to call at home and, if so, during what hours?

Most of us urge our sponsees to call us any time, day or night, if they are about to take a drink. In fact, it is crucial that they do so if the call is all that stands between them and a return to active addiction. We have a program friend who, upon agreeing to sponsor someone, hands her new sponsee twentyfive cents and says, "This is so you'll always have a quarter to call me if you need me. But call me before you drink." Set up ground rules for telephone calls from your sponsee.

9. Sponsor Replacement

Sponsees deserve to know that they are welcome to change sponsors whenever they want. We make this point clear in our first meeting.

10. Spirituality

The purpose of the Twelve Steps is to bring about a spiritual awakening. Since some of us are more spiritually oriented than others, our potential sponsees have a right to know the degree to which we will emphasize the spiritual aspect of the program as well as our level of tolerance for different religious or spiritual beliefs. If your interpretation of "God as we understand God" is no God at all, your potential sponsee should know that as well.

Introducing the Steps

A sponsor's single most important responsibility to a sponsee is to help him or her work the Twelve Steps. To work a Step means to understand its principles and apply them to daily living. The term "work" is appropriate because the process involves a lot of effort. The following is an introduction to the Steps, including their history and themes, and describes a detailed program for working each of the Twelve Steps with your sponsees.

Purpose of the Steps

For members of Twelve-Step Fellowship, the Steps serve a specific purpose. According to AA co-founder Bill Wilson, their author, the Twelve Steps "are a group of principles, spiritual in their nature, which, if practiced as a way of life, can expel the obsession to drink and enable the sufferer to become happily and usefully whole." In other words, the Twelve Steps can keep us clean, sober and happy. They serve a similar function for other Twelve-Step Fellowships by relieving their members of addictive or compulsive behaviors and thoughts. Dr. Bob, AA's cofounder, said, "Our Twelve Steps, when simmered down . . . resolve themselves into the words 'love' and 'service.'" The Twelve Steps can keep us happy and in recovery.

The Twelve Steps are introduced in Chapter 5 of the AA Big Book with these words, "Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path." "Our path" is the Twelve Steps. They are the heart of recovery. To work the program is to work the Twelve Steps. To live the program is to live the Twelve Steps. AA's Promises are said to come true with working the Ninth Step. A spiritual awakening occurs by the Twelfth Step. The freedom and happiness of millions of alcoholics, AlAnon members, drug addicts, compulsive gamblers, sex addicts, compulsive eaters, compulsive spenders, and others, are based on these twelve simple steps.

History of the Steps

The first members of Alcoholics Anonymous relied on a word-of-mouth program to stay sober. As the Fellowship grew and spread to distant cities, the AA pioneers were afraid that their program would get seriously distorted in its constant re-telling. They decided, therefore, to write down what they had learned in a book to be given to new members. The foreword to the first edition of the AA Big Book states, "We, of Alcoholics Anonymous, are more than one hundred men and women who have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body. To show other alcoholics precisely how we have recovered is the main purpose of this book."

Bill Wilson took on the task of writing the first part of the book. At Chapter 5, he realized that he would "have to tell how our program for recovery from alcoholism really worked. The backbone of the book would have to be fitted in right here." The "backbone of the book" was the Steps. Until then, AA's word-of-mouth program had been based on six Steps. These Steps are described by Bill Wilson in Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age: A Brief History of A.A., as follows:

1. We admitted that we were licked, that we were powerless over alcohol.
2. We made a moral inventory of our defects or sins.
3. We confessed or shared our shortcomings with another person in confidence.
4. We made restitution to all those we had harmed by our drinking.
5. We tried to help other alcoholics, with no thought of reward in money or prestige.
6. We prayed to whatever God we thought there was for power to practice these precepts [principles].

Later in Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age, Bill described the process by which he wrote the new Steps for Chapter 5 of the Big Book:

"Finally I started to write. I set out to draft more than six steps. How many more I did not know. I relaxed and asked for guidance. With a speed that was astonishing, considering my jangling emotions, I completed the first draft. It took perhaps half an hour. The words kept right on coming. When I reached a stopping point, I numbered the new steps. They added up to twelve. Somehow this number seemed significant." The Twelve Steps were published in the AA Big Book in April 1939. Chapter 5 of the AA Big Book contains the Twelve Steps.

For interpreting the meaning of the Twelve Steps, the Big Book and Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions (the Twelve and Twelve) are the basic AA authorities. Because Bill Wilson wrote both books as well as the Steps themselves, his other writings on the Steps are also authoritative. The Twelve and Twelve is an important addition to the AA Big Book because of its detailed treatment of the Steps. According to the foreword, the book "presents an explicit view of the principles by which A.A. members recover" and "broadens and deepens the understanding of the Twelve Steps as first written" in the Big Book. The Twelve and Twelve was published in April 1952.

Why the Steps Are "Suggested"

The suggested nature of the Twelve-Step program of recovery allows us as addicts or alcoholics to make our own decisions about working the Steps and about applying their principles in our lives. Responsibility for working a Twelve-Step program rests squarely on our own shoulders. No one will force us to do anything. The lack of rules, regulations and required Steps keeps us from a state of rebellion that would work against us. Bill Wilson writes in the Twelve and Twelve, "Alcoholics Anonymous does not demand that you believe anything. All of its Twelve Steps are but suggestions." By calling the Twelve Steps "suggested," the Fellowship left the decision to work them entirely up to us.

The fact is, however, that while the Twelve Steps are only suggested, they do make up the recovery program. And it is the Fellowship's only program. **Working them is crucial, therefore, to the achievement and maintenance of sobriety. Perhaps the best way to summarize the suggested nature of the Twelve Steps is this: *We don't have to work the Twelve Steps unless we want to stay in recovery. Recovery is a daily choice we make.***

Working The Steps With Our Sponsees

What It Means to "Work" a Step

It is not coincidental that the term "work" is used to describe the application of the Twelve Steps to our daily lives. Bill Wilson writes, "All of the Twelve Steps require sustained and personal exertion to conform to their principles...." While recovery itself may be by grace, the joy of recovery is earned by hard work. That work is defined by the Steps.

"Working a Step" or "taking a Step" consists of two phases: the first phase is gaining an understanding of what the Step means. It could be called "understanding the Step." This learning phase is undertaken in a formal way with a sponsor. It involves reading the Big Book and other Conference-approved literature, talking with other group members, and carrying out whatever reading assignments a sponsor makes. The objective of this phase is to get our sponsee to understand the Step as it relates to him or her and to feel it emotionally. It is not enough merely to appreciate the meaning of the Step intellectually. The first phase of working a Step is understanding what the Step means.

The second phase of working a Step is a conscious effort to change our behavior in accordance with the principles of the Step. This phase could be called "applying the Step." In other words, it is the application of the principles of the Step to daily life. This phase of the Step involves attending meetings to hear how others apply the Steps, prayer and meditation, and daily, disciplined effort. It means asking ourselves, "How does this Step apply specifically to my life?" and "How do I change my behavior to live its principles?" It is not easy to change the ingrained habits, thought patterns, and perceptions of a lifetime. Yet that is exactly what the second phase of working the Steps is about. The second phase of working a Step is to apply its principles to our daily lives.

The Twelve Steps are designed to bring about a spiritual awakening. The Twelfth Step makes this purpose clear: "Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps...." It is the spiritual awakening that removes the compulsion and brings about our recovery. For the spiritual awakening to occur, the Twelve Steps should be worked in the prescribed order, one Step at a time, beginning with the First Step. Each Step flows logically from the one before it and builds upon its principles. Practically speaking, when we work a Step, we are working all the previous Steps as well. Therefore, we cannot skip Steps and effectively work a Twelve-Step program. The Twelve Steps make up a complete program. Each Step is supposed to be worked in order.

Because the order of the Steps is not random, conventional Twelve-Step wisdom suggests that when a sponsee is having difficulty working a Step, it is because he or she has not completed the prior Step. Many a sponsor has helped a sponsee break a logjam of inaction by suggesting that he or she return to the previous Step to work it more thoroughly.

Timing of the Steps

A newcomer is ready to begin the First Step as soon as he or she becomes your sponsee. Start him or her on Step One and provide a general introduction to the Steps along the lines of this booklet.

A new sponsee who is not a newcomer to the program should participate with you in a thorough review of his or her whole recovery program, including the Steps that he or she has worked. After such a review, some sponsees realize that they have not worked as many Steps as they had thought. In such cases, they return to the first unworked Step. Your new sponsees should review each of the Steps with you to be sure they have actually worked them.

There is no prescribed timetable for taking each of the Steps. Since both the AA Big Book and the Twelve and Twelve are silent on the issue of timing (except between some individual Steps), the opinions expressed here are strictly our own. They are based on an analysis of Twelve-Step literature and historical practices, interviews with other Twelve-Step members, and our own experience. In AA's earliest days, when its recovery program consisted of only six steps, the steps were taken quickly,

beginning with "the surrender." The surrender in its original form was an element of early Twelve-Step work that was later abandoned. It is described in the following paragraph from Dr. Bob and the Good Old-timers: A Biography, with Recollections of Early A.A. in the Midwest.

The surrender was more than important; it was a must. Bob E., who came into A.A. in February 1937, recalled that after five or six days in the hospital, "when you had indicated that you were serious, they told you to get down on your knees by the bed and say a prayer to God admitting you were powerless over alcohol and your life was unmanageable. Furthermore, you had to state that you believed in a Higher Power who would return you to sanity. There you can see the beginning of the Twelve Steps," he said. "We called that the surrender. They [Dr. Bob and the original AA members] demanded it. You couldn't go to a meeting until you did it. If by accident you didn't make it in the hospital, you had to make it in the upstairs bedroom over [at the Oxford Group/AA meeting} at the Williams' house."

After the surrender, many of the steps—involving inventory, admission of character defects, and making restitution—were taken within a matter of days.

"Step Nine" in the Twelve and Twelve (written by Bill Wilson in 1952) gives us some additional insight into the timing of the Steps. Referring to the amends called for in Step Nine, Bill writes, "We may not want to say anything for several weeks, or longer. First we will wish to be reasonably certain that we are on the A.A. beam." The implication of this passage is that the Ninth Step could be taken "several weeks" into sobriety.

We know from AA history that it was the preference of Bill, Dr. Bob, and the AA pioneers to move new AA members rapidly through the Steps. The fundamental guideline, therefore, based on practice and tradition, seems to be for sponsees to work the Steps as quickly as possible while still being thorough. The Steps are, after all, the key to achieving and maintaining sobriety, so that approach makes sense. In the thirtyday inpatient treatment programs for chemical dependency that were prevalent in the 1980's, it was customary for the recovering alcoholic/addict to have taken Steps One through Five by the time he or she had finished treatment.

Because the Steps are the key to a lasting and rewarding sobriety, **they should be worked as quickly as possible while still being thorough.** The timing of the Steps will naturally vary from sponsee to sponsee. What is appropriate for one may not be appropriate for another. As sponsors, we must feel our way along with our sponsees on this matter. However, the general guideline is to maintain a firm but gentle pressure to keep working the Steps. The idea sometimes heard in meetings of taking "one Step a year" **is not supported by Twelve-Step literature or tradition.**

STEP STUDY

One of the characteristics of the following worksheets is the assumption that studying is an important part of Step work. By assigning sponsees specific passages to read and questions to answer, we can provide a structure for their efforts and actively involve them in Step study. Without readings from the Big Book and the Twelve and Twelve, it is difficult for them to learn what the Steps mean, what is expected of them with each of the Steps, and how the Steps can make a difference in their lives. These are programs of action based on the Twelve Steps.

Your sponsee needs the direction and guidance that you can provide to work the Steps successfully. Readings from the AA Big Book and Twelve and Twelve increases a sponsee's understanding of the Steps.

Providing the study suggestions, reviewing the readings yourself, scheduling meetings, and answering your sponsee's questions takes time and energy and sacrifice. There is no shortcut for us as sponsors, just as there is no shortcut for our sponsees. There is a Twelve-Step saying that fits here: "You can't give away what you don't have." Sponsors who want to help their sponsees with the Steps have to know the Steps themselves. **If we haven't worked the Steps of the Big Book, if we aren't growing in the Steps, if we aren't deepening our own understanding of the Steps, we're not in a position to help our sponsees.** Teaching the Steps is a form of Twelve-Step work through which we learn too. When making study suggestions, it is helpful to remind sponsees of two things:

1. They don't have to do the readings if they don't want to. But if they don't want to, it is appropriate to discuss the reasons for their unwillingness and their lack of commitment to studying the Steps.
2. Sponsees will not be tested on the material, and they won't be graded on it. The reason for the readings and the questions is to help them understand what the Step means and to give them some information they can use in discussing the Step with you. The readings will also familiarize them with program literature and resources so they can find authoritative answers to their questions about the Steps.

As sponsors, we are not authorities on the Steps. The AA Big Book and the Twelve and Twelve are the authoritative sources.

Formal Meetings with Sponsees

It has been our experience that sponsees require formal meetings devoted exclusively to Step work if they are to work the Steps satisfactorily. Step work cannot be accomplished just over the telephone, in brief encounters after meetings, or in other haphazard ways. The basic structure we can provide for working the Steps consists of suggested readings and questions followed by discussions with our sponsees. It is through these discussions based on the readings that we can teach our sponsees the meaning of the Steps.

One or two formal meetings may be all that are required for each Step. The first meeting is an introduction to the Step and is held after your sponsee has finished his or her suggested readings and study questions. In that meeting,

- Read the Step.
- Remind our sponsee that what we have to say about the Step is strictly our own opinion.
- Reassure our sponsee that our discussion will not be a test on the readings.
- Explain in a general way what we think the Step means.
- Discuss the Step in terms of the suggested readings and questions. We base that discussion on the ideas contained in the following worksheets on the Steps.
- Try to answer any questions he/she may have.

After the first meeting on the Step, a lot of work can be accomplished over the telephone and after meetings as your sponsee goes through the process of understanding and “applying the principle” of the Step to his or her life. The last formal meeting occurs when your sponsee “takes” the Step in your presence. The way in which the Step is taken differs for each Step. This final meeting helps create a rite of passage that brings a sense of completion to the Step and moves your sponsee on to the next Step.

Format of the Step Worksheets which Follow:

These step worksheets contain an organized program to assist you in the process of leading your sponsees through the Steps. They can be used like lesson plans for teaching the meaning of the Steps and how they can be applied. Each worksheet covers one Step completely.

All the Step worksheets are divided into the same sections to make it easier for you to follow the format and help your sponsee work the Step. You can use the worksheets as a reference from the moment your sponsee begins work on the Step to the final meeting in which he or she formally takes it with you. The contents of each Step worksheet are shown below and are explained in the following paragraphs:

WORKSHEET CONTENTS FOR EACH STEP

1. Timing of the Step: How to tell when your sponsee is ready to work the Step or how soon a Step should follow the previous Step.

2. Step Study: Suggested readings and questions for your sponsee to help him or her understand the Step. The questions are based on our personal experience, conversations with other program members, and on the assigned readings from AA's Big Book and Twelve and Twelve.

3. Understanding the Step: An interpretation of the Step that you can use as a basis for discussing the Step with your sponsee. This portion of the worksheet breaks the Step into its various parts, ideas, or phrases and answers the questions that were given with the readings. Since this interpretation is based on our own understanding of Twelve-Step literature, on discussions with other program members, and on our own experience, you may not agree with it. Use what you do agree with and find useful. Ignore the rest. You may want to have your sponsee read this portion of the booklet in preparation for discussing the Step, but it isn't necessary.

4. Applying the Step: How your sponsee can apply the Step to daily life.

These worksheets include suggestions for structuring the final meeting in which your sponsee will formally take the Step. Since each Step worksheet follows exactly the same outline, you can use these worksheets as a ready reference for:

- Suggesting specific readings and questions for each Step.
- Discussing the meaning of the Step.
- Structuring the last meeting on the Step so that your sponsee has a sense of having "taken" the Step.

No two sponsees will work the Steps in the same way, just as no two sponsors will guide their sponsees through the Steps in the same way. These worksheets propose a set of guidelines, suggestions and recommendations. Certain suggestions will appeal to you more than others. Some recommendations will match your style of sponsoring and some will not. The Step worksheets are detailed because they were written for those who are new to sponsoring as well as for those who like detailed suggestions.

Progress, Not Perfection

Just as all the Steps except the First represent ideals rather than perfectly attainable goals, so the standards we have described in this booklet are ideals of sponsorship. All of us as sponsors and sponsees fall short. We certainly do. But that does not mean we should not have a picture of what the ideal might be so that we can continue to strive for it. "Progress, not perfection" doesn't mean we should not try. In fact, it means the opposite. We never give up trying just because we can't achieve perfection. On the other hand, we don't beat ourselves up for failing to achieve it either.

No one is a perfect sponsor. No one is a perfect sponsee. It's progress, not perfection that counts.

In the final analysis, what lies at the heart of the sponsorship process is the authenticity of the relationship we build with our sponsees. If we are honest and ethical with them, respect their vulnerability and their trust in us, help them work the Steps, and model Twelve-Step principles to the best of our abilities, we will have served them well. And they will reward us many times over with their growth and development in the program, their insights into recovery, and the examples they have set for us. An AA friend of mine believes that "God loans us a sponsee for a time." We are to make the most of that loan, treasuring the time we have and the opportunity for the Twelfth Step work it provides.

Dr. Bob summed up the meaning of the Twelve Steps in two words, "love and service". That summary could apply to the meaning of sponsorship as well. We hold sponsees, like the proverbial bird, in the palm of our hand. If we squeeze our hand, we will keep the bird, but we will smother it. If we open our hand, we allow the bird to grow and live. But we also allow it the freedom to leave us and fly away. It is the act of helping sponsees grow enough in the program to leave us that is the true measure of our love and courage.

Another friend of mine once told me, "It's not just that we have to let people come into our lives. It's also that we have to let them leave." We are all on loan to each other. One way or another, nothing is permanent in life except the love that passed between us.

Some Questions Sponsors Ask about Sponsorship

What is my primary purpose as a sponsor?

Your primary purpose is to help your sponsee work the Twelve Steps. All your efforts and activities as a sponsor revolve around this central responsibility. Working the Steps is your sponsee's key to lasting recovery and to the fulfillment of the Promises.

What are the best suggestions I can offer my sponsees?

Don't drink or use. Go to meetings, read the Big Book, 12/12 book, and conference approved literature, work the Steps, say your prayers, and call your sponsor. Also, help another addicted person, and take life and recovery one day at a time.

How do the responsibilities of a temporary sponsor differ from those of a primary sponsor?

We have the same responsibilities to a temporary sponsee as to a "permanent" one. Because temporary sponsees are generally newcomers, temporary sponsorships tend to be intense and timeconsuming. Temporary sponsorships can be a big help to newcomers while they look for a primary sponsor. The major difference between a temporary and primary sponsorship is that the temporary sponsorship is based on immediate need, and it is often without the thorough discussion that normally accompanies the selection of a primary sponsor. As a result, the difference in expectations between the sponsor and sponsee may be great, and the longterm match between the two may not be good. The relationship can certainly work for the short term, however, while the temporary sponsee looks for a primary sponsor and learns how to stay in recovery.

What do I tell my sponsees when they ask if they have to go to meetings for the rest of their lives?

There are at least two good answers. The first is the onedayatatime answer. It is this: when we think about not drinking or using and "the rest of our lives," we are dealing with a very long time. Our Twelve-Step program suggests that we think in terms of a much shorter period: one day at a time. Or even one hour at a time if necessary. If we stay clean and sober one day at a time, the rest of our lives will take care of themselves. Whether or not we will attend meetings for as long as we live is not a decision we have to make today if we are taking life and recovery one day at a time.

The second answer is this: although we don't have to think about the rest of our lives today, the truth is that there are no graduation ceremonies in Twelve-Step programs. Recovery is a journey and not a destination. It is a process. We are never cured of our addiction. Experience indicates that those who continue to attend meetings have a better chance of staying clean, sober, or abstinent than those who do not. Since the price of a return to active addiction is potentially death, continuing to go to meetings is a reasonable choice. Those of us who have made that choice have found a bonus in it: our lives have continued to get richer and more enjoyable.

How many sponsees is too many?

It depends on your personality, the circumstances of your life, and your degree of preferred involvement with sponsees. It depends upon how long your sponsees have been sober, since newcomers require more time and attention than midtimers. Only you can decide. In making the decision, be fair to yourself as well as to your sponsees by not taking on so many that you shortchange them.

Our grandiosity is easily fed by the attention of numerous sponsees so we have to be careful about having too many. We have known program members who compulsively collected sponsees and moved with an entourage from meeting to meeting. There is a limit to the number of sponsees we can work with effectively. It is a disservice to them and to ourselves if we develop a sponsee addiction. The intensive work of sponsorship restricts the number of sponsees we can handle comfortably.

What are the warning signs of a slip?

There are numerous warning signs of a slip. Some are subtle and some are not so subtle. When you get to know your sponsee well enough, you will know when he or she is off the beam. You may even know before your sponsee does. The exhibition of only one warning sign may not indicate trouble. For example, someone may cut back temporarily on his or her meetings for a good reason (frequent travel, for example). Or he or she may be cutting back from ninety meetings in ninety days after several months in the program.

Be alert to the warning signs of a slip in your sponsees. Each of the conditions listed below should be discussed with a sponsee when it occurs. In combination, they suggest a potential problem:

- Cutting down on meetings; cutting meetings out altogether is a very dangerous sign.
- Re-associating with old drinking or using friends. Returning to old drinking or using haunts.
- Seldom calling you, or not calling you at all.
- Forgetting how bad it was and focusing on how good some of the old times were in their drinking, using, or compulsive days.
- Abandoning prayer and meditation.
- Isolating themselves, especially from program friends.
- Complaining that meetings don't work anymore.
- Not working the Steps.

When is it appropriate for a sponsor to terminate a sponsorship relationship?

The termination of sponsorship is a grave matter that requires thought, prayer, and consultation with your own sponsor. There are situations in which it is warranted because it serves the best interests of both you and your sponsee. Some of the criteria that can be used to determine when a sponsorship relationship ought to be terminated are:

1. If the relationship is endangering your own sobriety or seriously impairing your serenity for whatever reason. Your recovery always comes first. Terminate any sponsorship relationship that is endangering your own recovery.
2. If your sponsee outgrows you, and you think that he or she would make more progress with another sponsor.
3. If your sponsee refuses to work the Steps. It is very difficult to help a member of the Fellowship who won't work the Steps. You may prefer to spend your time on someone who is willing to work them, since helping your sponsee do so is your primary responsibility as a sponsor.
4. If the sponsee cannot or will not work on being honest with you and others about his or her life. Twelve-Step Fellowships are programs of honesty. A sponsee who is not open to learning honesty is difficult to help. The truth is that a sponsee who is not willing to get honest is not willing to enter recovery. As with other guidelines, there are exceptions, particularly with newcomers who are, by nature, dishonest. It is progress, not perfection, that counts. If your sponsee is working hard at getting honest, that effort itself is a form of progress and honesty. If dishonesty is a major character defect of your sponsee, it should be a regular topic of discussion between the two of you, and something he or she is consciously working on.
5. Whenever anything happens that leads you to believe that the sponsorship is no longer in the best interests of your sponsee. Terminate any sponsorship relationship whenever it is in the best interests of your sponsee to do so.

How do I desponsor somebody?

By meeting your sponsee face-to-face and telling him or her honestly why you are terminating the sponsor/sponsee relationship. It is important to model honest, responsible behavior in this process. If the problem is with you (for example, if you are unable to keep a confidence), be honest about the specific problem. If amends are called for, make them forthrightly at this time. Concentrate on cleaning up your side of the street, and don't worry about your sponsee's.

If the problem is with your sponsee, deal with the issues matter-of-factly. You do not have to apologize for desponsoring someone. It was a privilege you extended, and you have a right to withdraw it.

However, you owe it to your sponsee to explain clearly why you are terminating the sponsorship. Only then can your sponsee learn from his or her mistakes and fully understand the consequences of the inappropriate behavior.

What if I make a mistake?

Congratulations, you're human. Promptly admit it in accordance with Step Ten, "Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it." If amends are due, make them. Learn from the mistake. And go on.

How soon can I sponsor somebody?

There are no rules about when you can sponsor somebody, and there would be exceptions if there were rules. Nevertheless, some general guidelines that are probably good for both you and your prospective sponsee are listed below. Not every program member will agree with them. You are probably ready to sponsor someone when you have met all the following criteria:

1. You have a solid foundation in your program, which usually means a minimum of one year of continuous recovery.
2. You have a sponsor yourself.
3. You have worked the 12-Steps with a sponsor.
4. You have read the major Conference approved literature (the Big Book, the Twelve and Twelve, and other conference approved literature) and have an understanding of the literature.
5. You attend meetings regularly.
6. You are continuing working the steps with a sponsor and should be in service work and learning the traditions.

We earn the privilege of sponsoring someone after we have passed certain milestones.

If your sponsee gets ahead of you in working the Steps, you should resign as his or her sponsor. Since your primary responsibility is to help your sponsee work the Steps, and since "you cannot give away what you don't have," you can't help him or her with the Steps you haven't worked. Theory is not enough. You have to actually have worked the Steps yourself to guide your sponsee through them.

How do I treat a highprofile sponsee such as a politician or an actor?

The same way you would treat somebody who was not famous. In fact, it's crucial that you treat your highprofile sponsee that way. One of the problems for celebrities who are trying to recover is that they are likely to receive special treatment that indulges their fantasies and their grandiosity. Celebrities are like everyone else, except they are famous. They are just as likely to be ungrateful, angry, depressed, on the pity pot, and selfcentered as the rest of us. What they need in a sponsor is someone who will call them on their inappropriate behavior and addictive thinking. They need the same discipline and tough love as everybody else in the program.

When dealing with a highprofile sponsee, always protect his or her anonymity. Never break it to anyone. It is nobody's business inside of the program or outside of the program whom you sponsor. You have no right to tell anyone that you are sponsoring a famous person, much less tell anything that the person has told you. If you are not capable of keeping your famous sponsee's identity completely confidential, then you should refuse to sponsor that person. Not being able to brag about your sponsee is the price you pay for sponsoring him or her. Celebrity sponsees need tough love and protected anonymity.

One other requirement for sponsoring highprofile people is being willing not to take advantage of them. If you cannot resist the temptation to ask them to help you sell a movie script, find a job, influence a piece of legislation, get you a coveted ticket, arrange an invitation to a party, set up an introduction, and so on, you have no business sponsoring them. It is a betrayal of the sponsorship relationship to ask highprofile sponsees to do anything other than to work their programs to the best of their abilities.

Should I offer to sponsor someone?

Absolutely, as long as you're comfortable making the offer and it's followed with, "When you want another sponsor, you're welcome to find one." This approach works best on a temporary basis since it's difficult to tell whether or not a sponsorship will work in the long term without a discussion of mutual expectations. This offer can be a great blessing for newcomers who haven't mustered enough courage to ask someone to sponsor them. Once they've had a temporary sponsor, it's easier for them to find a primary sponsor later. An offer to sponsor someone can introduce sponsorship to a newcomer who is afraid to ask.

With whom can I discuss my sponsee's problem?

Only with his or her grandsponsor (i.e., with your own sponsor) unless you have his or her express permission to do otherwise. The confidentiality that you must maintain between you and your sponsee prohibits you from talking about your sponsee's problem with anyone else inside or outside the program.

Is it okay to assign readings to a sponsee for discussion?

Yes. In fact, it's a good idea to give reading assignments to your sponsee. Assignments in the Big Book or equivalent and in other Conference-approved literature can familiarize your sponsee with the program and provide a specific topic for the two of you to discuss. Making an assignment has the added advantage of getting you to do the reading yourself.

Reading assignments are good for both you and your sponsee.

Is it okay to give sponsees assignments other than readings?

It is, in our opinion, if the assignment is offered in the following way. We tell our sponsee that we want to give him an assignment because we believe that it will help him in his recovery. We explain what the assignment is and why we think it will help. We ask him if he is willing to accept the assignment. If he is not, we ask him why not, but then we let it go. If he accepts the assignment, we ask him to make a commitment to keep it. If he does not keep it, we discuss why he hasn't. The advantage of this approach is that it keeps us from telling our sponsees what to do.

Most of the time, the assignments we give a sponsee are for fixed terms, and they are designed to illustrate some character defect or to help him practice a Twelve-Step principle or new behavior. Temporary action assignments for sponsees can help them practice Twelve-Step principles.

How far do I have to go to keep a sponsee in recovery?

You never keep a sponsee in recovery! You are not responsible for anyone's recovery but your own. Neither are you responsible for anybody's slip but your own. It is easy to get caught up in our own grandiosity and think that we are keeping our sponsees in recovery. We are not. As AA says, "We don't get sponsees sober; we don't get them drunk." Another AA slogan that fits is, "We carry the message, not the alcoholic." Sponsees keep themselves in recovery through their program, the Twelve Steps, and their Higher Power. This concept of a sponsee's responsibility for his or her own recovery is essential to maintaining our own humility. It also takes a great burden off our shoulders.

It is never our responsibility to keep sponsees in recovery. That's their job.

When am I enabling a sponsee?

Whenever you try to do a sponsee's work for him or her, that's enabling. Enabling is trying to provide an "easier, softer way" for a sponsee or trying to protect a sponsee from reality, from legitimate pain, from the consequences of his or her actions, or from the hard work of the program. Whenever we enable by making decisions for our sponsees or doing for them what they should be doing for themselves, we are taking away their autonomy and undermining their recovery. Enabling in all its forms is against Twelve-Step principles.

How do I handle relationships among my sponsees?

Although not every program member will agree with this answer, we believe in keeping our sponsees separate from each other. We never mention one sponsee to another. We never reveal their names or their activities. And we never take them anywhere together as a group. If our sponsees figure out who their fellow sponsees are, that's okay, but we don't tell them. We believe in this separation of sponsees for several reasons:

- It strengthens our humility. Our grandiosity is easily fed by being surrounded by an entourage of sponsees. Sponsees are not trophies to our recovery.
- It eliminates the potential development of "sibling rivalry" among sponsees. It is easy for sponsees to become jealous of one another over the amount of time and attention paid to them in relation to their fellow sponsees.
- It prevents us from intentionally or unintentionally playing favorites with our sponsees or putting one against the other for our own selfish ends.

Some sponsors prefer to be with only one sponsee at a time.

What can we recommend to a sponsee as a substitute for a Twelve-Step meeting?

There is no substitute for a Twelve-Step meeting. When your sponsee is feeling squirrely, it may help to read one of the story chapters in the Big Book or equivalent or something from other program literature. Prayer and meditation, calling another member of the Fellowship, making a gratitude list, applying the appropriate Step, or working with another addicted person may also provide relief.

What should we tell a newcomer sponsee about thirteenth stepping?

There is no thirteenth step. The phrase is used to mean making inappropriate sexual advances toward a person in the Fellowship, such as a sponsor approaching a sponsee or an established member approaching a member with less than a year of recovery.

During the first twelve months of recovery, it is sometimes suggested that members of the Fellowship not involve themselves in "romantic entanglements" (an old AA euphemism for sexual affairs) while they go about the business of stabilizing their recovery. The reason for this suggestion is that a sexual affair diverts the newcomer from his or her primary purpose of staying in recovery. It may encourage that newcomer to transfer his or her dependence to the new love object rather than to the Twelve Steps; raises all kinds of emotions that the newcomer is not prepared to deal with; and is likely to lead the newcomer back to active addiction.

For these reasons, and because of the emotional vulnerability that makes new members easy targets for manipulation, thirteenth stepping is unacceptable. It is a betrayal of the program's safe and trusting atmosphere.

Unfortunately, there are members of both sexes who prey on newcomers and the emotionally vulnerable. Newcomer sponsees should be warned about this possibility. As a rule, the men or women who romantically interest your sponsees in their first months or year of recovery will no longer interest them in their second or third years. They will have changed too much as a result of their progress in the Fellowship.

In the first year of our sobriety, most of us have little to offer emotionally. So those with substantial recovery time who come on to newcomers sexually have a problem. Or an objective. Perhaps they are looking for sex without emotional commitment (often a prelude to being dumped). Or perhaps they are taking advantage of the newcomers' emotional vulnerability because they can't compete when the playing field is level. Perhaps they are so emotionally stunted themselves that only a newcomer will find them attractive and vice versa. Whatever the reason, they are bad news for your sponsee.

Even so, your sponsee may choose to get sexually involved with someone from the program during the first year of recovery. The choice is his or hers to make. All you can do is try to keep your sponsee focused on the Steps and the hard work that needs to be done in the program. You can tell him or her, "This may be the love of your life, but if it isn't and it comes to be a bad end, don't slip." Warn your sponsee against thirteenth stepping. It is unacceptable behavior in Twelve-Step programs.

What is the greatest danger in sponsorship?

We're not sure what the greatest danger is, but a significant one is sponsor possessiveness. It isn't just a control problem. It's the kind of possessiveness that keeps a sponsee from growing, from making his or her own decisions and mistakes, and from becoming his or her own person. We have seen sponsors who became so possessive of their sponsees that they act like jealous lovers.

Such sponsors want to embed themselves in their sponsees' lives, controlling their decisions and keeping them dependent. These sponsors are bitterly disappointed when their sponsees leave them, generally after a year or so. "I did so much for them!" they complain. "How could they have left me like that?" The answer is to save themselves.

Be careful about possessiveness and control. If you work well with sponsees in the early days of their recovery, but not later on, and they leave you with bitterness, look at your side of the street. What do you need to change about yourself? What does this pattern tell you about your ego and your need to control? Our goal in working with sponsees is to help them grow up and find "a new freedom"—not to imprison them.

Some Questions Sponsors Ask About Their Sponsees

What if my sponsee doesn't do what I tell him or her to do?

As sponsors, we are to share our experience, strength, and hope with our sponsees rather than tell them what to do. Even the Twelve Steps are "suggested." Sponsees deserve to make the basic decisions about their lives including whether or not to work their program or to stay in recovery. As their sponsors, we are entitled to suggest, but not to dictate. One of our responsibilities is to prepare our sponsees to be accountable and responsible for their own behavior. We can't accomplish that objective if we are telling them what to do. They have a right to their own mistakes and to the lessons they will learn from them. As sponsors, we share our experience, strength, and hope with our sponsees rather than tell them what to do.

Not everyone in a Twelve-Step program would agree that sponsees are not to be told what to do in the early days of their recovery. We hold to the idea that how they live their lives is always their decision and we should not be deciding for them. To do so creates an unhealthy dependency. It is up to us, however, to help them see, realistically, the alternatives they have. Newcomers frequently have trouble sorting out alternatives. We will help them do that, and we will bring Twelve-Step principles and experience to bear on the issue, but we will not make the decision itself no matter how much they plead or how much we want to. When they ask, "What would you do if you were me?", we answer quite genuinely, "I don't know, because I'm not you." We are willing to tell them what we believe program experience suggests, but we always leave the final decision to them. We feed our grandiosity when we try to run our sponsees' lives.

How do I handle it when my sponsee has another sponsor who disagrees with me?

It's unusual for a sponsee to have multiple sponsors. However, if your sponsee is getting conflicting suggestions from another sponsor, try to help your sponsee sort out the alternatives, bringing Twelve-Step principles and wisdom to bear. The decision is your sponsee's. If you are not heavily invested in whether or not your sponsee does what you think is best, it won't matter as much.

What do I do when my sponsee lies to me?

Confront the sponsee immediately. A Twelve-Step program is one of honesty, and honesty is something we're trying to teach our sponsees. If you and your sponsee are not developing increasing trust and honesty with each other, the sponsorship is in jeopardy. Honesty is one of the ground rules. However, we don't expect a new sponsee to reveal everything at once regarding the past and certain issues in the present, nor do we reveal all our private issues. As trust builds between us, we are each more willing to share our secrets with the other.

Newcomer sponsees fall into a special category. Very often they don't know how to be honest, so the approach with them is different. For some newcomers, learning to be honest is a process that takes time and many failures. Some of us have lied to ourselves and others about so many things for so long that we barely know what the truth is when we finally make it into the program.

Learning to be honest is a process for some of us. There is no reason for us, therefore, to expect instant honesty from a newcomer sponsee. Dishonesty is something that the two of us can be aware of as a problem and work on together. This approach isn't intended to provide an excuse for lying, but to allow progress (rather than to demand perfection) in this area. On the other hand, we do expect our sponsee to be honest about his drinking or drug use (or equivalent addiction or compulsion) and about the fundamentals of his program. Help your sponsees work on being honest with themselves and with others.

My sponsee calls too often. How do I handle that?

Set your boundaries. You have a right to your time. Discuss the situation and try to resolve it. If it's a matter of excessive dependency, address that issue. If your sponsee simply wants to talk with you more than you want to talk with him or her, discuss the problem openly and try to resolve the conflicting expectations by coming to a mutually acceptable compromise.

What do I do when my sponsee is seeing a therapist who says that the sponsee doesn't have to work the Steps because they are covering his or her basic problems in therapy?

First, a little background. Beginning in the summer of 1944, after nine years of sobriety, Bill Wilson sought treatment for depression from Harry Tiebout, M.D., a nonalcoholic psychiatrist. Dr. Tiebout was an early and enthusiastic supporter of AA, and the two men developed a "longstanding" friendship. During this period, Bill Wilson relied on AA and its Twelve Steps to keep him sober. He relied on Dr. Tiebout to help him make progress on other issues in his life. Dr. Tiebout never presumed to treat Bill's alcoholism. Some sponsees may try to use therapy as an excuse for not working the Steps.

Coming between your sponsee and his or her therapist is a no win situation. You do have the right, however, to point out to your sponsee that Twelve-Step programs are the most effective treatment for certain addictions and compulsions, a statement that is confirmed by scientific research.

What your sponsee claims the therapist has said and what the therapist has actually said may be very different. Ask your sponsee if he or she is trying to use the therapist as an excuse to avoid the hard work of the Steps. If your sponsee continually refuses to work the Steps, consider resigning as sponsor. Since your primary responsibility as a sponsor is to help your sponsee work the Steps, you cannot work effectively with a sponsee who won't work them.

What if my sponsee is suicidal?

There is no easy answer to this difficult question. Each situation is different. If there is a clear and present danger, you may need to suggest that your sponsee call 911. Otherwise, we have a responsibility to see that our sponsee has told a member of his or her family (spouse, sibling, parent) about the suicidal feelings or that he or she has sought professional help. Beyond that, all you can do is be available on a reasonable basis and turn it over. The basic guideline is that you are not in charge of your sponsee's life, and even a decision as profoundly important as life or death is his or hers to make. It is not within your power to keep someone alive. Suggest to suicidal sponsees that they seek professional help.

You also have a responsibility to yourself in these cases. Should your sponsee commit suicide, you want to know that you have done everything you could reasonably have done to prevent it. In other words, in the tragic event that your sponsee follows through with the threat of suicide, you don't want to burden yourself with guilt because you did not urge him or her to get help. Ask yourself what reasonable behavior would be under the circumstances. Seek the advice of your sponsor. Do what you can. Turn over the results.

How do I know when I am "carrying" my sponsee?

We are carrying a sponsee when the sponsee has little commitment to Twelve-Step recovery and is participating only because of our pressure. If the relationship is largely onesided, and it feels as though your sponsee isn't bearing his or her fair share of the relationship, you may be carrying that sponsee. For example, you initiate the telephone calls, take the sponsee to meetings he or she won't attend otherwise, and make continuous suggestions that are ignored. One way to test for this condition is to avoid calling your sponsee for a while and see what happens. If your sponsee does not call you, you have probably been carrying him or her. One of AA's great sayings is, "We carry the message, not the alcoholic." Let the sponsee go. We carry the message, not the sponsee.

What do I do with a sponsee who is obviously depressed?

There is not an easy answer to this question. A significant percentage of alcoholics and addicts are depressed when they get clean and sober. Some of us come out of that depression rather quickly in recovery while others do not. Some depressed members of the Fellowship need professional help. The difference between "being depressed" and the chronic, pathological condition of depression is not one that most program members are qualified to determine.

One effective technique that is often suggested for getting out of a depression is to make a gratitude list. Take out a pad of paper and write, "Things to be grateful for" at the top. Start with "I'm sober (clean, abstinent) today" and continue the list, writing down every single thing you can think of to be grateful for. By the time your arm is sore, you may have a different outlook on things. When your sponsee is depressed, suggest that he or she make a gratitude list.

What do I do if I think my sponsee is relapsing?

If the evidence is strong enough to make you suspicious, ask him or her about it. You must have some reason for suspecting it, so a discussion of that reason is in order. Rumors are not reliable, so it would have to be some action on your sponsee's part, some change in attitude or behavior, or some eyewitness account that made you suspicious. As a rule, you will find out soon enough. An alcoholic or addict finds it is very difficult to conceal his or her drinking or using from another alcoholic or addict. We know them too well.

What do I do if my sponsee slips?

Ask your sponsee if he or she has a desire to stop drinking, using, or engaging in compulsive behavior. If your sponsee wants to quit, get him or her to a Twelve-Step meeting as soon as possible, and follow the guidelines in the answer to the following question. If your sponsee does not want to get clean or sober or abstinent or claims to want recovery but is unwilling to attend a Twelve-Step meeting, there is nothing more you can do except be available should he or she decide otherwise. As the saying goes, Twelve-Step recovery is not for those who need it, but for those who want it.

What if my sponsee slips and wants to get back in recovery?

Get him or her to a meeting as quickly as possible, preferably one where he or she can pick up a new desire chip. This symbol of starting over, admitting powerlessness, and asking for help can be powerful. Then:

1. Welcome your sponsee back into the Fellowship.
2. Get your sponsee started immediately on the First Step.
3. Re-establish him or her on a newcomer's program of ninety meetings in ninety days, daily calls to check in, prayer and meditation, readings in the Big Book or equivalent, and so on.
4. Help your sponsee learn from the slip. What did he or she do or not do that contributed to the relapse? What should he or she do differently in the future to protect against another one?

When a sponsee slips, get him or her to a meeting as quickly as possible.

What if my sponsee asks for money, a place to live, or to borrow my car?

Tell him or her that the answer is no. Sponsorship is a special relationship created to help your sponsee stay in recovery by helping him or her work the Twelve-Step recovery program. If you try to make it into something other than that (a love relationship, a buddy relationship, a banking relationship, an employer relationship), it may destroy the usefulness of the sponsorship.

Friendships and families—not to mention sponsorships—have broken up over questions of money. One of the ground rules from the beginning should be to not lend money, furnish lodging, provide an automobile, or do similar favors for a sponsee. These services are not part of the purpose of sponsorship. Refuse any effort by your sponsee to abuse the relationship in this manner.

If you want to lend your sponsee money, you can certainly do so, but then ask him or her to find another sponsor.

Sponsorship is a special relationship created for a single purpose: to help sponsees recover by applying Twelve-Step principles in all their affairs.

How much advice on matters outside the program should I give my sponsee?

Darn little. We are not in a position to advise our sponsees on their jobs, their spouses, their girlfriends, their boyfriends, or whether or not they should go back to college. What we can suggest is that they apply the Steps to these issues, especially the Third and Eleventh, and practice Twelve-Step principles in all their affairs. One of AA's Twelve Promises is that AA members will intuitively know how to handle situations that used to baffle them. If our sponsees rely on the Steps and their Higher Power, the answers will take care of themselves.

My sponsee just wants to be my buddy. Is that okay?

No, it is not. Your role as a sponsor is more purposeful than that of a buddy. Our conversations with our sponsees should be semistructured in that we focus with them on how they are applying Twelve-Step principles in their lives. Did they work on their character defects today? When they were wrong, did they promptly admit it? Have they sought through prayer and meditation to know the will of God as they understand God? Have they helped another alcoholic or addict? Did they go to a meeting? Have they been honest with themselves and others? These are the kinds of questions we ask as sponsors. They are not our only questions, of course, but they provide the framework for our conversations. They are not the kinds of issues that generally come up in buddy talk. Sponsorship is a structured relationship with a specific agenda: helping the sponsee work the Twelve Steps and stay in recovery.

When should I suggest that my sponsee seek professional help?

The term "professional help" usually refers to a psychiatrist, psychologist, or other therapist who deals with emotional problems, and that is the way we have used it in this answer. We recommend to suicidal sponsees that they seek professional help immediately. In those cases where our sponsee's problems seem to be more than addiction or compulsion alone, where he is suffering terribly without relief despite his best efforts to work the Steps, we suggest that some form of counseling might be called for. The Big Book refers to "our psychologist" as one with whom to share our Fifth Step, so there is precedence for it.

Furthermore, Bill Wilson saw a psychiatrist for his depression, and AA statements make it clear that the Fellowship has no quarrel with mental health professionals. In an address to the New York City Medical Society on Alcoholism, Bill Wilson said, "We know, too, that psychiatry can often release the big neurotic overhang from which many of us suffer after A.A. has sobered us up."

The decision to seek professional help is your sponsee's. Only he or she can decide whether or not it is right. Many emotional problems do clear up after a period of recovery in a Twelve-Step program. Others do not. The decision has to be made case by case. Some sponsees need to seek professional help.

What if my sponsee hasn't called me in weeks?

It depends on how new your sponsee is to the program and to the relationship and whether or not you have called him or her. Several weeks is a long time not to have talked with a sponsee. A sponsee who hasn't initiated a call in a long time or hasn't returned your phone calls is probably in emotional trouble or no longer interested in your sponsorship. On the other hand, maybe he or she is on vacation. You will have to determine what's going on. Confront your sponsee, and try to resolve the problem.