

AN OLDTIMER'S OBSERVATIONS ON SPONSORSHIP (written in the male context because I'm old!)

I have, so far found six characteristics of an effective sponsor:

1. As a heterosexual male, a good sponsor for me is a sober male. I believe any successful sponsorship relationship must have no sexual dynamic. Sponsorship is not about relating to another individual. It is about getting better someone else's way. I must take the sexual component completely out of this relationship.
2. A good sponsor has worked the 12 Steps.
A sponsor's primary job is to coach me thru actually working all 12 Steps. Every good coach I have ever heard of was at some time on the field playing the game. Therefore, a good sponsor has actually worked the Steps from the book Alcoholics Anonymous.
3. A good sponsor has a sponsor himself.
Hopefully this means he is surrendered and someone else is running his program. Definitely it means we have a plan when I bring him a question he can't answer. This also indicates he is a follower, which is an important spiritual principle. This is evidence he is not in charge anymore.
4. A good sponsor will tell me the truth I don't want to hear.
He can't be interested in what I think of him. He must be willing to risk the relationship by giving me the unvarnished truth. He must be willing to say things to me like: "You are not doing the following....and I don't think this is going to work." Or, "I am afraid for you because..."
5. A good sponsor is active in service work.
All of the winners I know are active carrying the message. They all go out of their way for the fellowship. For example they show up early at their home group and make coffee and make the newcomers welcome; answer phones at central office; take meetings into jails, prisons, insane asylums, hospital rooms, treatment centers etc.
6. A good sponsor laughs a lot, enjoys life and is not a complainer. A complainer is still in charge. Spiritually awakened people just seem to laugh a lot. It does not mean that they don't cry and have hard times. They do. It means that they are generally happy people. If you have the opportunity to visit his home take it. How do his spouse & kids treat him and act around him?

How do I find one of these? (By the way, one is the correct number of sponsors!)

The best place to look is literature studies limited to people of your sex. People who are serious about recovery frequent these meetings. Next, look for someone who seems to know the literature and who always talks about his experience in doing whatever is being read and discussed rather than his opinion on it. Also look for someone who seems to smile and laugh a lot.

Do NOT look for someone you can relate to. If you are new you know little about recovery and can therefore only really relate to others who know little. You need someone whose directions you will follow. The only reason I followed my first sponsor's directions was that I wanted to feel like he looked. That is, he was sober and happy about it.

Next approach this individual after a meeting and inquire if you may ask him some personal questions. After a meeting is better than before, as this process may take some time. If his answer is not "yes, ask anything you like" he is not your guy. If as you ask the following questions he becomes angry or refuses to answer, he is not your guy.

The questions are:

Have you worked the 12 Steps from the Big Book?
Do you have a sponsor?
Are you active in service? If “yes”, what do you do?
Does your sponsor allow you to sponsor?
Are you enjoying your recovery?

The man who says “yes” to all of these has a need to give what he has. And his need is every bit as important as your need to receive it. You are not begging and you are not giving up part of your manhood by asking for help! You are assisting him in getting to the next level of his own recovery.

If you get “yes” responses to all of these questions say to him, “If you will please sponsor me, I promise I will do whatever you ask and never argue with you.” If he agrees, make your promise come true.

When should I change sponsors? This is the question that plagues every newcomer. Fortunately the answers are simple.

Change whenever you find that you are doing everything your sponsor asks and still aren’t growing. Change if you lose respect for your sponsor.

How do I go about changing?

First, following the above mentioned process, get the new one. Next, thank the old one. Say something like, “Thank you for all you’ve done for me. Thank you for all I’ve learned from you. Thank you for all of the time you’ve spent with me and for the sacrifices you’ve made on my behalf. God and I both know that you’ve been a tool in His Hand in my life. Thank you. It is only fair for me to tell you that I’ve asked someone else to sponsor me.”

Adults announce, children explain. If he explodes, you have definitely done the right thing by changing because he got his ego tied up in sponsoring you. Also he has a sponsor to process this with if necessary. You don’t have to answer any questions but you may choose to. It will be your choice with the guidance of your new sponsor.

When you can ask your sponsor the same question today that you asked him yesterday because you can’t remember the answer, then you have a sponsor. Stop trying to manage what your sponsor thinks of you. All of the lessons aren’t for you. Maybe the reason you can’t remember the answer to yesterday’s question is because your sponsor needs to hear himself say the answer again.

You know you have found a great sponsor if after “interviewing him” & you ask him to be your sponsor he has some requirements for you. Things like: agreed upon number of meetings per week, required reading out of the Big Book and other approved literature, taking the Steps from the book and service commitments. Lastly if he says something like, “the last requirement is after a time you feel the need to get another sponsor you are required to do so.....you have my blessing & I will be happy for you! Then you can be sure you have found the right guy!

Sponsorship is always a two-way street. If it is working for one of you it is working for both of you. You cannot receive without giving and you cannot give without receiving.

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