

SCA

SEXUAL COMPULSIVES ANONYMOUS

SPONSORSHIP

“Sponsorship is two people with the same problem helping each other to work the Program. It can provide a framework for a sexual recovery plan and for doing the Twelve Steps, and can bring emotional support at difficult times.”

The word “sponsorship” was not in the original Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Big Book. It is an aspect of the 12 Step Programs that evolved over time. Originally, AA members were asked or even assigned to watch over newer prospective members of the fellowship. There were no special requirements, except that the member doing the helping had more experience in sobriety than the newer member. It could be weeks, or days more sobriety than the new prospect.

In time, a bond often formed between the two, owing to one wanting sobriety, and to the other wanting it for the sponsee. But in the beginning, both sponsor and sponsee may ask what this sponsorship idea is all about. Whether through reading of SCA literature, or because of more experienced members of the fellowship, we begin to construct a

concept in our minds. Some groups ask for a show of hands, of those who have sponsors, and those who are willing to be a sponsor.

This is a good time to take note of who is raising their hands, and when. Do we want to choose a sponsor who also has a sponsor? Or is it enough that this person is willing to be a sponsor? The primary aspect of a sponsor is that of having the experience of recovering—to whatever extent—from sexual compulsion. This is someone who understands experientially what we are going through, unlike someone who merely studies sexual compulsion.

Just as having a sexual recovery plan (SRP), is no guarantee of sexual sobriety, having a sponsor is no guarantee either. We may think of it as a “practice relationship” for our other relationships. Its value lies in being a somewhat formalized relationship, in a sometimes solitary world. Both sponsor and sponsee must come to terms with their readiness, willingness and ability to engage in the relationship.

How does one know when they are ready to be sponsored? It often begins with the First Step of SCA’s Twelve Steps. When we can admit that we were powerless over sexual compulsion—that our lives had become unmanageable, it is easier to accept the help of another. After all, we could not stop acting out our sexual fantasies unaided for very long. But knowing how hopeless a situation can get, may not yield the same results as wanting to live a better life. Sponsorship extends this hope for a better life. It is a more personal mode of carrying the message.

So we decide that we are ready to be sponsored. How then, do we go about getting a sponsor? One member set a goal of asking three people in two week’s time a question such as: “Without making a commitment at this time, I was wondering if you are available to sponsor, and how would it be if you sponsored me?” After two weeks, he had

three people from whom to choose. The first time he did this exercise however, he was uncomfortable with his choices. He merely set another two week period, and asked three more potential sponsors the same question. He found his sponsor.

At any rate, we begin the process. Some SCA groups assign temporary sponsors to newcomers. Others have experienced members who offer their sponsorship. The prospective sponsee is always free to decide on his or her own, without pressure. Still, after many false starts, it is a relevant question to ask when we will be ready?

And this question of readiness applies to prospective sponsors as well. How many times must an experienced member of the program be asked to sponsor, before agreeing to do so? Sponsorship has a way of knitting a group together. We must examine for ourselves the consequences to our group, of declining to sponsor others. Some of us have found that it is incumbent upon us to assist others in their recovery in order to maintain our own sexual sobriety. Sponsor and sponsee each must arrive at their own conclusion regarding readiness.

To ask someone to sponsor us may be an incredible leap of faith. We feel vulnerable. Our past history regarding relationships may cause us to hesitate. But this may be an opportunity to change the old patterns, starting with our new relationships. Before disclosing too much information, one may ask the other if there are any “deal-breakers.” An agreement of temporary or interim sponsorship may provide the reassurance we need, that SCA is indeed a safe place for us to recover from sexual compulsion.

To some, a sponsor is an authority figure—a boss, and we are afraid of entering into yet another power struggle. So an examination of our motives will be helpful at this time. Perhaps we can look at what sponsorship *is not*, in order to see its outline more clearly. A sponsor *is not* a potential sex part-

ner, *is not* our higher power, *is not* our parent, *is not* our therapist, *nor* employee. And a sponsee *is not* a child *nor* minion. We are to be careful about choosing or accepting someone whom we expect to manipulate.

Many groups have a “trophy sponsor”; a good example of recovery, clearly respected by the group. To some, having this person as a sponsor may seem to be a way of acquiring the respect of the group. And sponsors are not immune to the pride accompanying large numbers of sponsees.

Some sponsors may find a limit to the number of sponsees they can take on. An early SCA member in the Los Angeles area, Hunt B., finding himself with a number of sponsees, and not wanting to overextend himself, asked two questions of prospective sponsees. His first question was: “What brought you to SCA?” If the answer was “The bus,” he would move on to other prospects. But if the answer was more or less an admission of powerlessness over sexual compulsion—and of unmanageability, he would ask the second question.

Hunt’s second question was “Do you hear what you need to hear at meetings?” This was an attempt to find out the prospective sponsee’s level of open-mindedness. The answer told him of their ability to ask for help, and of their ability to accept help. A good guide in these situations may be to ask ourselves whether we can be helpful to the prospective sponsee.

In the way adolescents sometimes engage in dangerous behaviors like drinking, sex or smoking, as their ticket to adulthood, they can also take on adult responsibilities, such as getting a job or earning a degree, to feel like an adult. By sponsoring others in SCA, we become more adult, and get to practice adult behaviors. *We* get the opportunity to grow into this new life of recovery.

When we find someone who agrees to explore sponsorship with us, we may want to meet in a

public place initially. This can be thought of as an interview. It is an opportunity for each to get to know the other, and see if we are compatible. We share our stories, exchange contact information and begin to establish boundaries. We could even have questions prepared ahead of time: Will there be assignments, or suggestions? How often do we meet in person? What media are we to use: telephone calls; voice mail; email; letters; text, or some other means of contact? Who calls whom, how often, and how soon is contact expected to be returned? Upon answering a call, we can say things like “I have five minutes to talk”, or “Can I call you back in half an hour?”, or “I cannot talk now.” We can disclose times it is not okay to call.

Both are helped by knowing what triggers either one to act out their sexual compulsion. This is an oversimplification, but some believe the sexual addiction is triggered by a fear of entanglement. And that the love addiction is triggered by a fear of abandonment. When these dynamics are acting within the sponsor-sponsee relationship, it can exert harmful pressure on it. Awareness lets us decide on how to proceed.

Since abstinence, and subsequently our sexual sobriety is determined by—among other things—how long it has been since we engaged in our bottom-line behavior, we are encouraged to share our SRP with our sponsor. The sponsor is not expected to determine what is on the SRP, but to provide feedback and suggestions. We are careful to avoid a sexual recovery plan that is too heavily weighted in one direction or another. Neither too strict to accumulate abstinence from our bottom-line behavior, nor too lax to move us in the direction of sexual sobriety. For its structure, some sponsors and sponsees will arrive at an agreeable framework, for establishing and amending it. And we have SCA literature on the subject.

If one agrees not to get angry or take it personally when the other expresses a need, or discloses a slip, it creates a safe environment for expressing

our needs. This goes for both the sponsee and the sponsor, as our roles can occasionally reverse. Generally, a sponsor ought to know when some significant event has occurred in the sponsee's life. This saves time in getting current, when some other crisis may be imminent. We want to emphasize the importance of encouraging any member who has had a setback in recovery, to stay connected to the Program. This can help prevent a slip from turning into a relapse. We are all learning to resolve problems, and this interaction is part of learning how to treat each other.

Ongoing contact with one another can establish a baseline measure of daily life. We get to know when the other is in need of help, or doing just fine. We develop a sense of commitment and accountability, unknown to us in our acting out phase. This is active, deliberate recovery, and an end to our isolation. We find the courage to acknowledge our need of help; to ask for help and to accept help in whatever form it arrives.

Sponsors provide crucial help and guidance when working the Twelve Steps: When to move forward, and when to linger on a Step. To paraphrase the AA Big Book, when we spend time on our sexual compulsion, its influence grows; and when we spend time on our spiritual recovery, it grows. Where we spend our time is up to us.

Our sponsors often, but not always hear our Fifth Step. One can expect to receive feedback from those who hear our Fifth Step. It is a fine line between acknowledging and accepting what has been found, and working to change it. Here is where a sponsor can reassure us that we are in the right place; and furthermore, to encourage us to stay in recovery, to stand up for our right to recover. It means a lot for someone who knows all about us, to keep working with us.

At this point, we may find it necessary to investigate further actions, or even other means of recovery. Whether that means more action, getting

another sponsor, joining another Twelve Step Program or getting a sponsor in another Twelve Step Program, we push ahead in our recovery. Many SCA members benefit greatly from seeing helping professionals in the field of recovery from sexual compulsion, along with attendance at meetings. Very few people in SCA will say that theirs is the *only* way to recover from sexual compulsion, be it in the form of a sexual addiction or a love addiction. The recovery is there for us. Like happiness, recovery is a lifelong goal, but it is always close at hand.

We often find in time, that the quality of our problems will improve, with fewer of them being trivial. When we are at that low point in our recovery, and want to hear words of encouragement from our sponsor, we will sometimes be disappointed. Making errors is part of finding our way. Though we may have little else, we see that we are not alone, and that things will change.

Reintegrating sex into our lives as a healthy element is a delicate matter. A sponsor often introduces and encourages the sponsee to use the Tools of the Program at this time. The Tools can be thought of as resources, and ways in which our Higher Power shows up in our lives. *The Tools That Help Us Get Better* are only the start of our resource list. They change with use and refinement into assets, upon which we can depend when we need help. But it is up to the sponsee to take the actions necessary to make the transition from a life run on self-will, to one which depends upon a Higher Power for its source of strength.

Each of us comes to the program for different reasons. Likewise, members sometimes move on for reasons not readily apparent. Departure is a clear and deliberate action with some members; their needs were not met. Sometimes a sponsee can outgrow the sponsor. Others drift away, never to return, once they get a sponsor. Some leave the group when their reason to attend has been satisfied. Did they get what they wanted? It could

be that they wanted to get back their relationship, get their job back, save money or recuperate. It is hard to say why, since they may often have trouble perceiving their reason for attendance in the first place as well. AA has a saying: “The Program is not for those who need it, it is for those who want it.”

The answers to these questions are revealed in time, as we work the Twelve Steps. Getting a sponsor promotes a sense of hope. A sponsee's responsibility is to summon as much honesty, open-mindedness and willingness as possible. Some say this **H**onesty, **O**pen-mindedness and **W**illingness is part of working the first three Steps and “**H.O.W.**” it works. As we move through the Twelve Steps, we improve our relationships with our Higher Power, ourselves and with society at large. We become willing to sponsor others, as part of our Twelfth Step. Although we are by no means restricted to working all Twelve Steps before we sponsor someone. This spiritual awakening is after all, an awakening to the way our Higher Power manifests itself in our daily lives. And helping others awaken to their Higher Power can change the world.

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