

Sponsorship and Co-sponsorship

CoDA Sydney Saturday Focus Group Meeting, 3 May 2008

These excerpts are taken from the *Sponsorship in CoDA* pamphlet and the *CoDA Sponsorship Booklet*.

Sponsorship in CoDA

Sponsorship in CoDA is essentially different from sponsorship in other Twelve Step groups because of the nature of the disease of co-dependence. To be effective, CoDA sponsorship depends on the development of healthy boundaries on control issues such as advice-giving, care-taking and rescuing.

Both having and being a CoDA sponsor gives us the chance to participate in a healthy relationship.

Finding a Sponsor

We can start the process by considering what kind of a person we would like our sponsor to be. If we are looking for a CoDA sponsor, the following checklist could give us some ideas:

- ◆ Someone who's consistent sharing of recovery inspires us.
- ◆ Someone who has worked all Twelve Steps, or who has worked the first Five Steps and is currently working their way through the rest of the Steps.
- ◆ Someone who is capable of being emotionally present and listening with compassion and understanding and without rescuing and advice-giving.
- ◆ Someone who maintains their personal boundaries and does so in a non-aggressive manner.
- ◆ Someone who is knowledgeable about the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions and actively applies them in their own life.
- ◆ Someone who can guide us in a way that is respectful of themselves and us as we work through the Steps and the Traditions.

The place we usually begin the search is in our home group. Some of our meetings offer a list of CoDA members who are willing to be sponsors. It's interesting to discover that many people who are eager to be sponsors are not on the list.

Over a period of time we listen to these people share, perhaps spending some time talking with them after the meetings. It seems to take at least a few weeks to get to know someone well enough to consider them for a sponsor.

If your prospective sponsor is unable to take on the commitment, they will tell you. *Please do not consider this as a personal rejection.* People with recovery place limits on the number of people they can sponsor. Others may feel unready in their own recovery to guide someone else. Keep looking and asking. The 'right' sponsor will emerge.

Commitment, Boundaries and Expectations

Since sponsorship requires a commitment to be in a relationship, it is important to be clear about boundaries and expectations. Meeting to discuss how we will work together – stating our boundaries, limitations, expectations, wants and needs – is the best method for us to begin this relationship.

Sponsees share responsibilities in this relationship: initiating contacts, fulfilling any commitments made to their sponsor, being willing to work the steps, and respecting their sponsor's boundaries.

The following is a list of questions that are helpful to consider when setting the boundaries of sponsor-sponsee relationship:

- ◆ In general, how much time is each willing to give to this relationship?
- ◆ How often do you want to get together or talk on the telephone?
- ◆ Are there certain times of the day or evening that either is not willing to take telephone calls?
- ◆ Are there any foreseeable circumstances that could change the relationship (i.e., a decision to change jobs or workloads, to move away, or to have a child)?
- ◆ Does either member want to set a time limit on the length of the relationship?
- ◆ Does either member want to periodically re-evaluate whether or not the relationship is working?
- ◆ What about celebrations, taking time to acknowledge gratitude for each other?
- ◆ Under what circumstances would the relationship be terminated?
- ◆ Does the sponsor or sponsee expect gifts or money, cash loans, housing, cars, or employment?
- ◆ Are there appropriate boundaries on socializing, sexuality, and intimacy?

Co-Sponsorship

Because Co-Dependents Anonymous is such a new organization, there are few of us that have longevity and experience in working the steps in the CoDA way. As a result of this, co-sponsorship has evolved. Two CoDA members (or a small group of members who are at approximately the same place in the steps) sponsor each other.

Sponsorship and the Steps

Our experience has taught us – the sponsorship relationship can provide only temporary peace of mind, at best, *until we take action ourselves*. For most, true progress in recovery depends upon *working the Twelve Steps*. It is in this endeavour that sponsorship becomes so important.

As sponsors working with others on these steps, it is important for us to stay focused on the fact that we are only one resource – *one among many*.

We can share the ways in which we work the Steps, and we can answer questions from the perspective of *our own personal experience*. Giving specific direction is not something covered by our sponsorship commitment. How can any of us know – let alone choose – what's best for another? In fact, as the result of working Steps Four through Nine in CoDA, most of us learn the folly of 'knowing' what someone else should do. We understand this to be God's job, not ours.

Prayers and Affirmations for Sponsorship

If I am feeling burned out from sponsoring others, I can say:

God, please show me what I need to change in my life and give me the courage and the willingness to have it changed. If I have taken undue responsibility for others, I now surrender and return them to your care and safekeeping.

If I want to find someone to sponsor, I can offer:

God, I am now willing to be of service to another CoDA member. If you think I am ready, please guide us to each other. Thank you.

If I am having trouble finding a sponsor, I can ask:

God, I ask for your guidance in finding a sponsor who will work in a partnership with you and me. Please show me the qualities I need to look for and remove that which hinders my search. Thank you.

It is unlikely that any single human relationship will ever meet all of my wants and needs. Accepting this idea brings some peace of mind and gratitude.

I become open to the fellowship of other recovering people – a fellowship that includes many with whom I share the ups and downs along our individual and collective spiritual paths.

A sponsorship relationship points me in the direction of emotional maturity and leads me toward the ultimate sponsor, my own higher power.

Personal Experiences of Sponsorship

“Sponsoring someone else is my recovery in action.”

“Sponsorship is about partnership. The gifts flow both ways... As I develop my relationship with my Higher Power, with myself, and with my sponsor, I slowly come to feel and to believe there is hope for my life. Sponsorship offers the gifts of nurturing and guidance that I did not have as a child . . . Sponsorship offers me perhaps the first real relationship in which I can practice boundaries. I want to recognize, set, and maintain my own limits. And I want to honour and not transgress the boundaries of the other . . . Sponsorship is a two-way street of commitment, hard work, sharing, vulnerability, integrity, flexibility, and boundary setting. It is perhaps the most valuable friendship I have ever known.”