

SPONSORSHIP GUIDELINES: **Information & Strategies for Groups**

CLARIFYING SPONSORSHIP

Sponsorship is an effective recovery tool widely used in Families Anonymous™ (FA™) and other Twelve Step programs. It traditionally pairs a sponsor, who has experience in actively working the Steps, with a sponsee, who may be a relative newcomer to the program. A sponsor assists a sponsee in studying the Steps and Traditions and applying the basic principles of FA's recovery program. Both the sponsor and the sponsee hold confidential anything that is shared between them. (Note: Men sponsor men; women sponsor women.)

ENCOURAGING SPONSORSHIP IN MEETINGS

TOPIC MEETINGS: For Understanding the Concept of Sponsorship

Topic meetings are a good way to introduce and reinforce particular recovery concepts. Discussion topics for a sponsorship meeting could include: What is a sponsor? Who can be a sponsor? How to choose a sponsor? How to be a sponsor? Members can share how being a sponsor or sponsee has aided in their recovery.

The FA literature resources at the end of this article have a wealth of information helpful for leading sponsorship discussions at meetings. For example, *The FA Tools of Recovery* has several pages explaining sponsorship that can be read aloud and discussed at meetings; it also has a short section about leading a topic meeting on sponsorship (see the "Contents" page). *Today A Better Way™* has many readings in which members share their experiences as sponsors and sponsees.

STEP MEETINGS: For Appreciating the Benefits of Sponsorship

Step meetings and sponsorship seem to go hand in hand. Many groups discover that discussing the Steps in their meetings leads individual members to appreciate the benefits of sponsorship and to embark on sponsorship relationships that help them probe more deeply into themselves and move forward in their recovery.

Groups frequently choose to devote one meeting each month (often the first meeting of the month) to studying a Step—Step One in January, Step Two in February, and so on through Step Twelve in December. Step meetings are an appropriate time not only to explore the Step, but also to emphasize the value of sponsorship. During a Step Five meeting, for example, the meeting leader might begin by asking if anyone is familiar with Step Five—and, more specifically, has worked Step Five with a sponsor—and wishes to share some thoughts about it. The leader can then expand the discussion by inviting comments from the rest of the group.

GREETING NEWCOMERS: To Create Personal Connections That Can Lead to Sponsorship

Sponsorship can be fostered, and continued meeting attendance can be encouraged, by having a current member act as a "greeter." The greeter's role consists of welcoming newcomers to that week's meeting, presenting them with a Greeter/Contact card (#6006) (containing the greeter's first name and telephone number), and extending a cordial invitation for them to call. The position of greeter can be rotated as decided by the group.

The greeter (or another current member) can also initiate a follow-up phone call in the days after the meeting. This shows the group's concern for the newcomer's well-being and state of mind and is another step toward creating a personal connection that might inspire the newcomer to return—and hopefully to choose a sponsor.

Not knowing the newcomer's home situation or who else might be privy to a phone call or voicemail message, callers should state only their first name and should identify their connection as, for example, "we met Monday evening" rather than mentioning FA specifically. If appropriate, the greeter could confirm privately, ahead of time at the meeting, that the newcomer is amenable to being called. The idea is to avoid being invasive or putting the newcomer on the spot.

Callers can use the following tips to keep the conversation moving along productively:

- Explain why new members are called after their first meeting (for example, to touch base with them and see how they are doing)
- Ask if anything was said at the meeting that the newcomer identified with
- Ask whether the group meeting was or was not what the newcomer expected, and then ask the reasons why
- Relate your own first meeting experience (if relevant)
- Tell what you heard at your first meeting that you wanted to know more about (if relevant)
- Encourage the newcomer to make a six-week commitment to attend meetings before deciding if they are offering the help needed

TELEPHONE LIST: To Connect Potential Sponsors and Sponsees

The group's phone list is an invaluable tool for connecting potential sponsors and sponsees as well as for supporting personal recovery and fostering group cohesion and unity.

This is because members often find themselves wanting to reach out to each other between meetings. They may start by calling the same two or three people, then calling one person more than others, and eventually deciding to ask that person to be their sponsor.

Every member needs to receive the group's phone list and be encouraged to use it. Copies should be set out on the meeting table each week; they can also be placed in the *Welcome!* (#6002) packets given to newcomers, or they can be handed out in some other way to first-time attendees.

MEETINGS + SPONSORSHIP → RECOVERY

We support one another during our meetings—yet, at the same time, we avoid concentrating our discussions too much on the concerns of just one person. Having these two simultaneous goals is for the benefit of all who are attending. It is also in keeping with Tradition One, which tells us that the good of the group must always come first, and that personal progress for the greatest number depends on group unity.

Sponsorship augments meetings. From an individual perspective, it enables someone to embark on a more intensive journey of self-exploration and self-healing than would be possible during meetings. From a group perspective, it enhances group unity by strengthening members' recovery.

Sponsorship is different from the more-casual interaction that can occur outside of meetings. One example of such an interaction is the phone calls discussed earlier. Another is when a seasoned member approaches a newcomer after a meeting to lend additional support by sharing a meaningful personal experience. (This can begin an empathetic connection and encourage the newer member to return.)

Such after-meeting and between-meeting exchanges are necessarily brief and specific. Sponsorship, on the other hand, fills a need for more individualized attention and allows for broader, lengthier, and more in-depth interaction that moves us further along the path of recovery.

Here are brief answers to some frequently asked questions:

- *How should I get a sponsor?* Ask! (This is usually done in private.)
- *Who would be a good sponsor?* Answer this question by trusting your mind as well as your "gut" feelings. Do you feel a connection with someone who has had life experiences similar to yours and has found solutions in the FA program? Are you drawn to someone's "program wisdom," sensible ideas, positive attitude, and serenity? Listening to what members share during, after, and between meetings is invaluable for picking a sponsor.
- *When is the right time to get a sponsor?* The right time is anytime a sponsee is ready and willing to embark on an in-depth journey of self-discovery and self-healing.

SPONSORSHIP HELPS EVERYONE

Sponsorship is nominally about a *sponsee's* growth. But, in reality, it provides an added bonus, in that the *sponsor* derives benefit from the interaction as well.

If a sponsor and sponsee meet weekly, then each of them receives, perhaps, an hour of feedback on issues of concern. This is more than either could derive from their group meetings alone, and it allows for a degree of closeness and understanding that is often indispensable for individuals to open their hearts and begin healing.

There is yet another wonderful thing about a sponsorship relationship: Not only do two individuals grow through sponsorship, but their growth adds to the value of their group's discussions. Sponsorship magnifies the constructive potential of the FA group and the FA fellowship as a whole.

FA LITERATURE RESOURCES

A number of FA publications contain useful information about sponsorship. They are particularly well suited for helping a group plan and conduct sponsorship meetings and Step meetings and for guiding an individual member along his or her road of recovery.

- *Today A Better Way* (#1015) contains a wide range of “daily readings” written by FA members who describe (among other things) the value of sponsorship and their experiences as sponsors and sponsees.
- *FA and Sponsorship* (#1020) provides an in-depth description of the sponsorship relationship and the ground rules for being a sponsor or sponsee.
- *The FA Tools of Recovery* (#5001) is a handbook that guides members in developing new thinking patterns and modifying their actions and reactions. It explores sponsorship (“The Tenth Tool”), the telephone (“The Fifth Tool”), tips for leading meetings (“The Sixth Tool”), and a wide variety of other topics.
- *The Twelve Steps of FA* (#1004) offers profound insights into each Step from the perspective of FA members’ experiences. It is one of FA’s earliest publications and has been updated and printed continuously for more than four decades.
- *The Twelve Step Workbook* (#1019) includes and expands upon the contents of #1004 (described above) and presents a wealth of challenging exercises encouraging self-assessment and recovery.
- *The Twelve Traditions in Action* (#5010) is an in-depth exploration of FA’s Traditions and their fundamental importance in maintaining and growing our groups and the fellowship. The chapter on “Tradition One: Unity” explains why unity is so necessary within each group; the chapter on “Tradition Eight: Sponsorship” offers reasons for studying both the Steps and the Traditions.



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