

SPONSORSHIP

Lois W.

Good evening everybody! There seem to be more young faces here today than at any previous Conference -- younger, gayer, and happier. Let's hope we'll accomplish just as much or more than any Conference so far! Sue asked me to say a few words on sponsorship.

The practice of sponsorship has been greatly neglected in Al-Anon. Its importance in the approach to newcomers should not be overlooked by us. When an older member takes a newcomer under her wing and gives her friendship and understanding, the new member can respond to the program more quickly and many a doubtful prospect can be encouraged to continue her interest in Al-Anon who otherwise might go away disheartened.

In the old days of AA to which I am always harking back, members often took a prospect into their homes and not only helped him to live the program but gave him bed, board, clothing, carfare -- nursing him in a thousand ways. But that kind of sponsorship was never feasible in Al-Anon and I'm not sure that it was a good practice anyway -- except for the AAs that were doing the sponsoring. It was good for them.

However, it would be very helpful if Al-Anon adopted many of the present day AA sponsors' customs. To make sure that all newcomers are well received, the group appoints a special committee which not only greets all new arrivals but sees that that they each have an appropriate, understanding sponsor, one who appeals to the new member. Some Al-Anon groups do this now, of course, and it would be fun to see in how many of your home groups this kind of sponsorship is practiced. (Calls for raise of hands) There must be at least fifteen hands raised. That's very encouraging.

The initial Al-Anon contact is sometimes the one most suited to undertake the responsibility of sponsorship. This includes befriending the beginner, accompanying her to meetings, calling her during the week, and listening to her story, perhaps over and over again, thus making oneself a sounding board against which the new member can pour out her pent up emotions. When the beginner has this outlet, she is not so apt to want to spill over at meetings, which, we all know, is undesirable. The sponsor's example can also be of great help to the recent arrival who thus learns what to do and what not to do.

When the new member is ready, the sponsor should explain how gratitude can be expressed in service, the life-blood of Al-Anon. She can show how the phrase, "Keep it simple" really relates to the program, reminding us not to "fancy it up", but does not refer to the service structure as it is sometimes interpreted to do. A service structure is necessary if there is to be any order or efficiency in "carrying the message". It does not complicate but simplifies the whole fabric of the fellowship, doing so particularly in relation to one of Al-Anon's most important responsibilities, the practice of the Twelfth Step all over the world.

There is another phrase the sponsor should explain if necessary, but not use, as it gives the wrong impression -- "This is a selfish program." Our program, of course, is not a selfish one. Generally what the users of this phrase are trying to say is that the program is one of self-development and improvement, in order to be of more use to others.

So when we try to sponsor newcomers, aiding them to live by the Al-Anon program, we are not only benefitting them but strengthening ourselves as well. Thank you very much.

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