

A SPONSOR'S TOOLBOX

OA HOLIDAY WORKSHOP: SPONSORSHIP DAY

Getting a Newcomer Started and Other General Information for Sponsors

PREPARATION

It may be helpful for a new sponsor to study the OA pamphlets *A Guide for Sponsors*, *Sponsoring Through the Twelve Steps*, and *Where Do I Start?*, plus the oa.org download *Temporary Sponsors: Newcomers' First Twelve Days*.

MATERIALS

- *A Guide for Sponsors*
- *Sponsoring Through the Twelve Steps*
- *Where Do I Start? Everything a Newcomer Needs to Know*
- *Temporary Sponsors: Newcomers' First Twelve Days*
- *Alcoholics Anonymous, Fourth Edition*
- *OA and AA Twelve and Twelve*
- *The Twelve Step Workbook of Overeaters Anonymous, Second Edition*
- *Twelve Step Workshop and Study Guide, Second Edition*
- Getting Honest About Your Food and Weight – 3 column exercise (attached)
- Food Slip Inventory – Slips are learning experiences. What did you learn? (attached)
- Sponsorship Success podcasts at oa.org/sponsorship-success:
 - *What is a sponsor?*
 - *Why should you get a sponsor and how can you get a sponsor?*
 - *Why be a sponsor? Why be a sponsee?*
 - *When can you start sponsoring? When can you start being sponsored?*
 - *What are the sponsorship job descriptions – from sponsor to sponsee and back?*
 - *How can you break down the barriers for both parties?*
 - *What are some different sponsoring styles?*
 - *How do you work the Twelve Steps with a sponsee?*
 - *How do you work the Twelve Traditions with a sponsee?*

GENERAL THOUGHTS ON GETTING NEWCOMERS STARTED

- Set a time to talk or meet. Both the sponsor and sponsee should have a copy of *Where Do I Start?* for use at the meeting.
- Set expectations in the first conversation regarding honesty, scheduled calls based on discussion and agreement from sponsee, timeliness, assignments, reading, writing, and studying the nature of the disease.
- Talk frequently using *Temporary Sponsors: Newcomers' First Twelve Days* as a guide for reading and discussion. Advance through the guide at the suggested pace unless more time is needed. Share your experience with getting honest with the food. The sponsee needs to hear about your recovery.

- Once the sponsee has developed a plan of eating with your guidance, continue frequent contact with the sponsee. Emphasize that they should not deviate from their daily food plan once it's agreed on and committed to you. Other suggestions are weighing and measuring of food, for now, in order to learn the portions that will eventually get the sponsee to a healthy body weight. Also suggest weighing once a month to establish accountability, yet not focus on weight loss.
- Ask the sponsee to make telephone calls to other members to get and give support.
- Suggest that the sponsee go to as many meetings as possible. The more meetings, the higher the probability of success.
- Now is the time for the sponsee to begin working the Twelve Steps using the OA *Twelve and Twelve, The Twelve Step Workbook of Overeaters Anonymous, Second Edition*, or the *Twelve Step Workshop and Study Guide, Second Edition*. Set a schedule for the sponsee to read each Step and answer the questions in the chosen workbook. Review the answers with the sponsee and allow time for answering any questions they may have.
- By your example, begin demonstrating OA program practices, such as: "One day at a time," "first things first," "live and let live," "let go and let God," no gossiping, no taking other people's inventories, and other practices. Lead them to feel and know that our program is one of love, concern, and support. We are a fellowship of people who share a common problem and a common solution.
- Remember that slips are learning experiences. Do not waste them! If the sponsee has a slip, have them do a slip inventory. Emphasize that immediately telling you about the slip will empower them to get started again. Holding on to the secret usually leads to more eating. Slips do not need to become relapses. (See attachment.)
- Sponsor your experience: binge eaters, anorexics, bulimics, restrictors, and/or gender.
- Do not expect success; and do not fear failure. We do Twelfth Step work to give what we have so we can keep what we have been given. We are not sponsoring or telling our story to newcomers to make them abstinent, nor to keep them in the program. We sponsor to keep what we have. This is the right motive. This motive will keep our pride out of the way and prevent many heartaches and disappointments when some of our sponsees choose not to accept the gift of the program.
- Share *your program*. Keep the time on the phone *program oriented*. Do not allow social conversations to override your need to carry the message. It is important that the newcomer realize you are where you are because of the program.

- Remember that we are sharing our own experience. Do not give professional advice. We are not doctors, therapists, clergymen, or family counselors. When people ask for such advice, guide them to the professionals who are competent to give it. Do not get into egotistical vanity. The only thing you have to offer is your experience in the program.
- Do not avoid or apologize for God when you are first explaining the program and your experience to newcomers. Remember Appendix Two of the Big Book that describes spiritual awakening as personality change sufficient to bring about recovery. Emphasize that both the problem and the solution are physical, emotional, and spiritual.
- Do not make promises. The only thing we know for certain is that if someone follows the program sincerely, they can get abstinent and find recovery. Initial abstinence from the numbing effect of compulsive overeating may mean feeling more pain. But if they are working the program completely, they can remain abstinent and serene despite problems.
- Share your struggle if you struggle. Do not allow yourself to be put on a pedestal. Let your sponsee know that the disease is arrested, not cured, and that you are only one bite away from losing your abstinence. Point out that you are only an instrument of a Higher Power.
- Do not sell—or dictate—instead of sharing your experience to date in the program. *Tell them what happened to you.* We all know our own story very well. We share up to where we are in the program.
- Do not sponsor too many people. One may be enough for some; three or four may be okay for others. We should sponsor only that number to whom we can give the full benefit of our sponsorship. As people of extremes, beware of burning yourself out. We can overdo it by taking ourselves away from our family too often or wearing ourselves out to the point of setting ourselves up to eat again. The OA Twelve Step program can be the foundation for our life, but it is the program that frees us to live our life.
- If you give the program as it is written, you will be giving your newcomers a great gift, while at the same time holding on to the gift that the program has given you.
- Do not predict who will make it and who will not. It is impossible to know. Anyone can make it that follows the program sincerely, no matter what their background, their program, or the circumstances of their life. All that is needed is willingness to take action.

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GETTING HONEST ABOUT YOUR FOOD AND WEIGHT

Without a precise and honest ***plan of eating*** we waste endless hours arguing with ourselves and ultimately give in to our own lie that we can have just one bite and stop. Likewise, unless we consider quantity, we may not reach a healthy body weight, which is part of the definition of abstinence in OA. One way to begin is by looking at everything you consume. Construct a three-column list of *all* the foods you commonly eat. Be extremely specific. Do not say vegetable—instead, name the specific vegetable and how it is prepared. Do not say protein—instead, name the specific protein, such as steak, chicken, or fish, and how it is commonly prepared. Do not say sugar or candy—say instead the specific candy bar, ice cream, donut, cake, or junk food you eat. Include condiments, table sugar, sugar substitutes, and salt. *Leave out nothing that you eat or drink.*

Column A	Column B	Column C
Foods that you know in your heart of hearts are trigger foods—foods that you often eat too much of; foods that you never have “just one” of; foods that you consciously or unconsciously turn to when your feelings are particularly unpleasant or pleasant, foods that call to you, comfort foods.	Food that sometimes may be a problem.	Foods that clearly are not a problem for you; you can take or leave; are clearly not a comfort food for you; that you do not overeat.

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FOOD SLIP INVENTORY

- The food is always the last to go, so inventory it first. Write down exactly what happened as if there were a video camera rolling.
- Remember that food is the symptom, not the problem. Before the slip occurred, there was emotional distress of some sort. Go back several hours, the previous twenty-four hours, or even a few days and then go forward.
- What feelings were you experiencing before the slip? (*It may help to think about this first and to talk to someone else to get it clear before writing*).
- Were you avoiding facing something?
- What lies did your disease tell you that you decided to believe? How did you decide that it was okay to eat and drink?
- What was the spiritual problem? Was God anywhere? Did you do your morning Eleventh Step work?

Going forward:

- What physical actions are you ready to take to become abstinent and stay abstinent?
- What emotional actions are you ready to take to become abstinent and stay abstinent?
- What spiritual actions are you ready to take to become abstinent and stay abstinent?

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FIFTEEN CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE SPONSORS

1. **Abstinent:** The sponsor is abstinent, and abstinence is the most important thing in their life.
2. **Available:** A good sponsor has the time to spend talking with the sponsee. They are available when needed for an emergency. They are available for personal contact in addition to the telephone.
3. **Committed:** The most effective sponsors are committed to program, sponsoring, and trying to pass on the message of recovery to others.
4. **In recovery:** The sponsor lives in recovery on all three levels – physical, emotional, and spiritual. They “walk the walk” as well as “talk the talk.”
5. **Program foundation:** They have a strong foundation in program Principles, the Steps, Traditions, Tools, and particularly the Big Book.
6. **Twelve Step-based:** The sponsor has knowledge and experience in working the Steps. They try to apply the Steps to everyday living.
7. **Focused:** The sponsor keeps the phone call with the sponsee focused on the Steps and program rather than social things.
8. **Good listener:** Effective sponsors are good listeners.
9. **Clear expectations:** From the beginning, the best sponsors set out clear expectations, limits, and goals for the sponsor/sponsee relationship.
10. **Shares experience only:** Truly effective sponsors know their limits. They do not play God, therapist, counselor, or social worker. They share their program experience only.
11. **Humility:** Good sponsors know when to say, “I don’t know,” “I have no experience,” or “Perhaps this is a situation where you might need some help outside the Twelve Step rooms.” They do not allow themselves to be put on a pedestal.
12. **Honesty:** The best sponsors are rigorously honest – both about themselves and with the sponsee. They do not enable. Their approach tends to be compassionate tough love.
13. **Supports and encourages:** Effective sponsors help sponsees to grow, learn to do new things, take risks, and learn from their mistakes.

14. **Attitude:** Good sponsors demonstrate compassion, empathy, patience, a sense of humor, and a positive attitude about life.
15. **Knows when to let go:** Good sponsors know when and how to detach with love and “let go” of sponsees when it becomes appropriate.

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TIPS FOR SPONSORING

Take what you want and leave the rest!

1. Live in your own program to the best of your ability. You cannot give to others what you do not possess; live in the Steps and use the Tools.
2. Be honest and open about your own program with those you sponsor. Share your successes and hard times; if you attempt to disguise your struggle, your sponsee will realize it.
3. Realize that the answers to questions and suggestions for recovery are in OA literature and the Big Book. You do not have to know all the answers—only where to find them.
4. Your experience is your foundation to sponsoring. Share your experiences while remembering that theirs may be different than yours—and that's okay! If your guidance is in accordance with program, you are fulfilling your obligation.
5. Explain to a new sponsee what you are going to do, then do it. Explain that we are compulsive because we have problems dealing with life's issues. Explain that the process of working the Twelve Steps provides us with the tools to face and enjoy life, to the extent that the need to compulsively overeat will be lifted. Explain that your sponsorship is intended to guide them through that process.
6. Explain to a new sponsee what their responsibilities are. Agree on exactly what you will do and what they will do about such issues as food plans, calling, writing, etc. Whichever path you choose, agreement between the two of you as to how to approach recovery is essential. It may be a specific or very general agreement, and the agreement may change, but begin by walking the path together.
7. Listen and accept. There is no good or bad recovery. We all do the best we can. Accept and support, but always offer program, even if you believe it threatens the relationship. We never need apologize for offering recovery, as that is all we have to give.

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What do you say to someone who calls and says, "I want to eat"?

1. What happened just before these the food thoughts, since it is feelings that trigger obsession?
2. Compliment them on picking up the phone before taking a bite.
3. Say, "Put down the food, just for now."
4. Tell them to come up with the Tool that would be most helpful at this time.
5. Assess what is currently going on in their life.
6. Ask them what they like best about their abstinence.
7. Ask them about their goals.
8. Tell them to get out of the kitchen and/or move away from the food.
9. Ask them to make a gratitude list.
10. Say the Serenity Prayer with them.
11. Read OA literature to them or with them.
12. Share your experience, strength, and hope.
13. Ask them about what triggered the urge to eat.
14. Help them plan to attend a meeting and keep coming back.
15. Ask for help from your Higher Power.
16. Remind them to remember that the goal is to abstain from the first bite.
17. Ask them to take an action other than eating.
18. Pray for willingness.
20. Tell them: "Just STOP!"