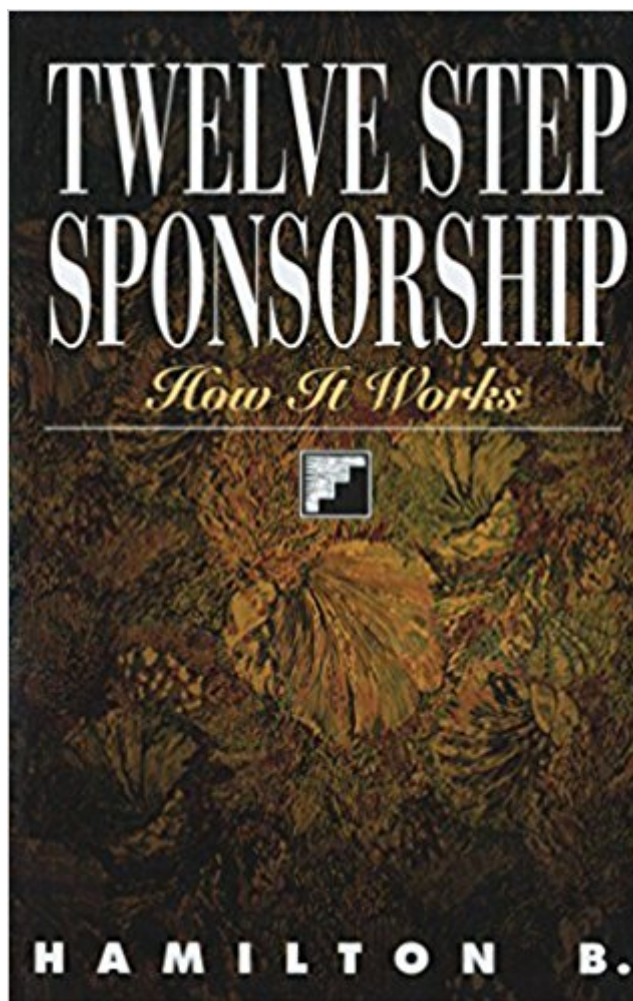


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# Twelve Step Sponsorship: How It Works



## Synopsis

Twelve Step Sponsorship is the first truly comprehensive look at sponsorship, a role recovering people benefit from both as sponsees and ultimately as sponsors. Sponsorship is a rich and enduring part of tradition of Alcoholics Anonymous. Twelve Step Sponsorship delivers both the theory and practice--how to do it and why--in a clear, step-by-step presentation. Written by the author of *Getting Started in AA*, a widely acclaimed guide for the newcomer to the program of AA, Twelve Step Sponsorship is the first truly comprehensive look at sponsorship, a role recovering people benefit from both as sponsees and ultimately as sponsors. Twelve Step Sponsorship includes informative sections that deal with: Finding a sponsor Being a sponsor. Twelve Step Sponsorship offers a welcome reinforcement to the tradition of "passing it on" from one generation of sponsors to the next.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Hamilton B. is a recovering alcoholic who has been sober in AA for more than twenty years. As an AA member, Hamilton maintains his anonymity "at the level of press, radio, and film." He holds a BA degree in psychology from an Ivy League college, and a PhD in organizational behavior from an eastern University. Hamilton is a recognized expert in the areas of alcoholism recovery and spirituality in organizational settings. He has been quoted in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *USA Today*, *Newsweek*, and numerous other newspapers and periodicals; he has appeared on CNN, CNBC, Oprah Winfrey, *A Current Affair*, and numerous other

television and radio programs; and he has testified before committees of both the United States House of Representatives and the United States Senate as an expert witness on alcoholism. Hamilton has served on a variety of corporate and foundation boards, has taught as an adjunct professor at an eastern medical school, and has worked with the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. In addition to the two books he has written for Hazelden, he is the author of a book that deals with organizational issues and a forthcoming book on leadership. His areas of expertise are alcoholism and spirituality in organizational settings.

**Introduction** When I was new to Alcoholics Anonymous, people in the Fellowship suggested that I find a sponsor. But how was I to find one? And where? And, most important, who would it be? The AA Big Book didn't mention sponsorship, and there were no books written about it. I was scared to ask someone to sponsor me, so I put off getting one. I kept thinking I could do it myself. I couldn't. Now I see how much not having a sponsor delayed my progress in AA. When I was new to AA and looking for a sponsor, I didn't even know the right questions to ask. After a while, I did get a sponsor. Then one day, someone asked me to sponsor him. Suddenly, I had a big responsibility. I had dozens of questions that I wanted answered. And quickly. What was I supposed to do as a sponsor? How would I know when he was ready to take a Step? What if he drank? I had nothing to rely on but my own sponsor and what I had heard about sponsorship in AA meetings and from other sponsees. **Twelve Step Sponsorship: How It Works** came out of those early sponsorship experiences and out of the fear and earnestness I saw in my own sponsees when they were asked to sponsor somebody for the first time. They had many questions, but AA's only publication on this topic was a thirty-page pamphlet called 'Questions and Answers on Sponsorship.' So when a friend of mine made the suggestion, I decided to write something that would guide Twelve Step members through the sponsorship process. The result is a guide for both sponsors and sponsees, for both newcomers and old-timers. Its purpose is to help sponsors be the most effective sponsors they can be, and to help sponsees get the most they can out of having a sponsor. Because my experience and knowledge are mostly in AA, the ideas here will reflect mainly an AA perspective. Yet, this book will be useful to people in any Twelve Step Fellowship—e.g., Al-Anon, Narcotics Anonymous (NA), Cocaine Anonymous (CA), Overeaters Anonymous (OA), or Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACA)—who want to take advantage of the special resource of sponsorship. This book discusses what a sponsor does, how to find a sponsor, and how to be a sponsor. It also explains how to help a sponsee work each of the Twelve Steps. This book is a guide to the sponsorship process. The suggestions in **Twelve Step Sponsorship** did not originate with me. Everything in the

book comes from AA through its members, meetings, and publications, but it is filtered through my perception. The only real authorities in AA are the Big Book (entitled Alcoholics Anonymous), Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, other Conference-approved literature, and decisions of the AA General Service Conference (as AA's elected voice). These sources are largely silent on sponsorship, so most of what is in this book comes from my own experience and from the experience of other AA members. As with AA, the only authorities in other Twelve Step Fellowships are their Conference-approved literature and their equivalent to the General Service Conference. In the process of writing Twelve Step Sponsorship, I have discovered just how different opinions are within the Fellowships regarding sponsorship. Part of the reason is that there is no authoritative book on the subject that we can all use as a common reference point. Instead, we have relied on what our own sponsors have told us and on what we have heard in meetings. Sponsorship has been a word-of-mouth phenomenon. The result is that the contents of this book do not necessarily represent a consensus of opinion within AA on sponsorship. The book represents my considered opinion and the opinions of those with whom I have spoken while writing it. Twelve Step Sponsorship is not an AA, Al-Anon, NA, OA, or CA Conference-approved book. In the best Twelve Step tradition, use what you can and leave the rest. In the best Twelve Step tradition, use what you can. Many AA and other Twelve Step Fellowship members will not agree with the detailed suggestions and commentaries in this book, although I believe they will largely agree with its four major points. Those points are as follows:

1. The primary responsibility of sponsors is to help their sponsees work the Twelve Steps.
2. A sponsor and sponsee have an obligation to discuss their mutual expectations, objectives, and requirements, if any, regarding the sponsorship relationship before they enter into that relationship.
3. A sponsor shares his or her experience, strength, and hope with his or her sponsee rather than trying to run the sponsee's life.
4. A sponsor must never take advantage of a sponsee in any way.

Sponsorship is intensely, wonderfully personal. Each of us brings our own ideas, strengths, and weaknesses to it as both sponsors and sponsees. No one is an 'ideal' sponsor and no one is a 'perfect' sponsee. Thank God. But we can all learn to be better sponsors and better sponsees. Undoubtedly, there are certain native talents to the sponsorship art, but there are also some principles that can be brought to bear. Those with a load of 'talent' still need to understand the guidelines. Those with less natural 'talent' can improve their effectiveness by increasing their knowledge about sponsorship. No set of rigid rules could possibly do the phenomenon of sponsorship justice, but it is my hope that the observations in this book can begin to capture its spirit. As with all teacher/student relationships, it is difficult to tell who

learns more: the sponsor or the sponsee. <sup>1</sup>What Does a Sponsor Do? In some ways, a sponsor is like a good friend, a wise teacher, a private tutor, a favorite uncle, a seasoned mentor, an experienced guide, and that older brother or sister we always wanted but never had. Sponsorship, which includes aspects of all these roles, is nevertheless unique. A sponsor is someone who has been where we want to go in our Twelve Step program and knows something about how we can get there. His or her primary responsibility is to help us work the Twelve Steps by applying their principles to our lives. Sponsorship is a basic part of belonging to a Twelve Step Fellowship and potentially one of its richest experiences. Sponsorship can be, like friendship, one of life's great blessings. A sponsor's primary responsibility is to help a sponsee work the Twelve Steps. But sponsorship can also be a scary experience, at least at first. We become vulnerable whether we want to or not. We take on responsibilities and develop expectations. We take risks. We reveal who we are and unload our secrets. We let another person into our lives in an honest and intimate way. We drop our facade. It can be frightening as well as exhilarating to trust another human being and to build a relationship with him or her. This chapter describes some of the reasons for overcoming a natural reluctance we have to share our lives and our secrets with another human being. It explains what a sponsor does and, therefore, why it's important to have one. But first . . .

### A Brief History of Sponsorship

The idea of sponsorship was born in Alcoholics Anonymous, the original Twelve Step Fellowship. *Living Sober*, an AA publication, describes how the term 'sponsor' came about. In the earliest days of A.A., the term 'sponsor' was not in the A.A. jargon. Then a few hospitals in Akron, Ohio, and New York began to accept alcoholics (under that diagnosis) as patients—*if* a sober A.A. member would agree to 'sponsor' the sick man or woman. The sponsor took the patient to the hospital, visited him or her regularly, was present when the patient was discharged, and took the patient home and then to an A.A. meeting. At the meeting, the sponsor introduced the newcomer to other happily nondrinking alcoholics. All through the early months of recovery, the sponsor stood by, ready to answer questions or to listen whenever needed. Sponsorship turned out to be such a good way to help people get established in A.A. that it has become a custom followed throughout the A.A. world, even when hospitalization is not necessary.<sup>1</sup> Sponsorship has since become one of the foundations of the recovery programs of all Twelve Step Fellowships and one of the greatest blessings of membership.

### What a Sponsor Does

AA defines sponsorship in this way: 'An alcoholic who has made some progress in the recovery program shares that experience on a continuous, individual basis with another alcoholic who is attempting to attain or maintain sobriety through A.A.'<sup>2</sup> Every sponsor is different, just as each sponsee is different, but certain activities, responsibilities, and obligations are common in sponsor/sponsee relationships. The primary ways in which a

sponsor shares his or her experience, strength, and hope to help a sponsee are as follows. A sponsor helps us work the Twelve Steps by providing explanation, guidance, and encouragement. Helping a sponsee work the Steps is a sponsor's most important function. The Twelve Steps are the foundation of AA and other Twelve Step recovery programs. The Steps require us to take action, but they were not meant to be worked alone. In fact, we cannot work them alone if we follow the way the AA Big Book suggests that we work them. The meaning of the Steps and how they are applied to life require explanation and interaction. A sponsor can help us translate the general principles of the Steps (a set of ideas) into the specific activities of our lives (our behavior). A sponsor can provide some temporary discipline and motivation as well as the ongoing encouragement that we may need to work the Steps. There are times that call for 'tough love' in spo...

Interesting book

Great book for new (or soon to be) sponsors. I like that it is written both for the sponsor and the sponsee. It really helps me guide my sponsees through the steps! Thank you!

Excellent guide to sponsorship with any 12 step program!

I've been asked to sponsor people before, but each time we got started, I just told them to read the Big Book, starting with "How it Works" and then read straight through from page one. And then they should discuss it with me; but always call me before drinking! That's as far as we got, and the ones who I still see at meetings (two folks) each got themselves other sponsors without letting me know. I found out by accident. Of course, I'm glad they're still sober, but I wish they would have helped me learn how to sponsor them. My own sponsor was really about that casual, so I didn't know any other way. But I have really learned a lot from this book, and I do think the one person I'm sponsoring now is definitely getting somewhere. We're ready for the 9th step next, and I know we will get through it together! Thank you Hamilton B.

Excellent guide to 12 step sponsorship from both sides; from how to pick a sponsor, to how to approach the goal of completing the steps from both sides, with recommended readings and how to handle each step. I've recommended this to my sponsees (as part of their own "sponsorship library," because their next role will be to pass it on.

This is a very helpful guide to sponsorship. It works closely with AA literature, specifically Big Book and 12 and 12, and has wonderful structure to keep both the sponsor and sponsee on track. I found the guidance for Step 4 particularly helpful and frankly wish I had it when I did my own 4th step. It clearly explains the columns in a way that neither the BB or 12 and 12 could, in my opinion. I can't be certain but maybe if you're a seasoned sponsor who's brought many people through the 12 steps, this book might be superfluous. But for someone like me who, in my 7th year, is just beginning to help other alcoholics through the steps, I am finding it indispensable and a welcomed resource.

The book is a good one to have and is very helpful in mine and my sponsee's recovery.

What a gift to sponsorship. This little guide/text book is invaluable for sponsors (and Pigeons as well). It has explanations, reading lists and good information. Included are check points to let you and your Pigeon know when a Step has been completed. The Steps have worked in my life for over 30 years and this will help me to share the gift I've been given.

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