

Sponsorship Guide: Grounded in the Big Book

Introduction

This guide is for those who are ready--or nearly ready--to begin sponsoring others through the Twelve Steps as laid out in the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* (the Big Book). It is designed to dispel common myths, offer clarity on the sponsor's role, and ground the entire sponsorship experience in the text of the Big Book itself--from the cover through page 181, including the "Spiritual Experience" Appendix.

This is not a guide for those seeking modern interpretations, therapeutic overlays, or alternate philosophies. It is intended for those who want to pass on the precise set of instructions that produced the first recovered members of Alcoholics Anonymous--and continues to produce freedom from alcoholism today.

What Is and Isn't a Sponsor?

- The word "sponsor" does not appear in the first 164 pages of the Big Book.
- However, the principle and role of a sponsor is embedded throughout the first 181 pages and highlighted from page 89 to page 181.
- In early AA, "sponsorship" referred to vouching for someone's membership in the group, similar to sponsoring a member into a private club.
- Today, it's often misconstrued as spiritual parenting, amateur therapy, or life management, none of which are supported in the text.

A Sponsor Is:

- A recovered alcoholic who has had a spiritual awakening as a result of the steps
- Someone who is willing to take another person through the steps as outlined in the book
- A conduit for the message of recovery, not the power source

A Sponsor Is Not:

- Responsible for someone else's sobriety or outcomes
- A therapist, life coach, guru, or emotional dumping ground
- Required to have perfect knowledge or advanced years of sobriety

What a Sponsor Does and Doesn't Do

A Sponsor Does:

- Share their own experience with the steps
- Take the newcomer through the book and the process
- Keep the focus on the instructions in the Big Book
- Help the sponsee access a relationship with a power greater than themselves

A Sponsor Does Not:

- Diagnose, analyze, or fix someone's trauma or mental health
- Become the moral authority in someone's life
- Need to know all the answers
- Have to carry the emotional burden of someone's life circumstances

Common Pitfalls and Misconceptions in Early Sponsorship

- "I'm supposed to fix them"
- "I have to be their therapist or life coach"
- "I have to know all the answers"
- "I shouldn't sponsor unless I have a decade sober"

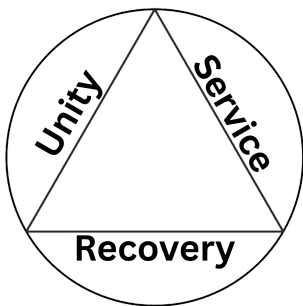
What If I Mess Up?

- **You're going to.** It's a part of the process.
 - Being still inexperienced and having just made conscious contact with God, it is not probable that we are going to be inspired at all times. We might pay for this presumption in all sorts of absurd actions and ideas. Nevertheless, we find that our thinking will, as time passes, be more and more on the plane of inspiration. We come to rely upon it. (pg 87)

What Qualifies Someone to Start Sponsoring?

- *But the ex-problem drinker who has found this solution, who is properly armed with facts about himself, can generally win the entire confidence of another alcoholic in a few hours... That the man who is making the approach has had the same difficulty, that he obviously knows what he is talking about, that his whole deportment shouts at the new prospect that he is a man with a real answer, that he has no attitude of Holier Than Thou, nothing whatever except the sincere desire to be helpful; that there are no fees to pay, no axes to grind, no people to please, no lectures to be endured-these are the conditions we have found most effective. (pg 18)*
- "Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics." (pg 89)
- "We have recovered and have been given the power to help others." (pg 132)
- Willingness, not perfection, qualifies someone to sponsor.
- Additionally, the beginning of Step Ten reads: "We vigorously commenced this way of living as we cleaned up the past." This is a clear indication that sponsorship (as part of Step Twelve) can begin once amends are underway, and as Steps Ten and Eleven develop into active practices.

Circle and Triangle: And the First Promise of the Big Book



- **Unity:** Unity is found in the **Fellowship** of Alcoholics Anonymous
 - It is described in the **12 Traditions**
 - We bring our **Body** to the **Fellowship**
- **Recovery:** Recovery is found in the first 164 pages of the **Big Book**
 - The **Recovery Process** is described in the **12 Steps**
 - We bring our **Mind** to the **Recovery Process**
- **Service: Service is Sponsorship**
 - It is described on pages 89-181 in the **Big Book**
 - We take our **Awakened Spirit** out into the world to serve others
- The circle around the triangle signifying "**As One**"
 - If I bring my **Body** to the **Fellowship**, my **Mind** to the **Recovery Process** described in the **Big Book**, and then take my **Awakened Spirit** out into the world to be of **Service**, then I can be "**happily and usefully whole**" as described in the **12 & 12**.
- This can be used as a **Spot-Check Inventory**
 - Am I in all three sides of the triangle?
 - Is it an equilateral triangle?
- **The Circle and Triangle** were once found on the **Title Page** of the **Big Book**
 - The **Title Page** contains the **First Promise** in the **Big Book**
 - Who we are: **Alcoholics Anonymous**
 - What we do: **The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism**

Timeline of Action in the Big Book

The Big Book provides multiple time markers for when actions occur:

Step(s)	Language Used	Page	Timing
Step 2	We found that <u>as soon as</u> we were able to lay aside prejudice and express even a willingness to believe in a Power greater than ourselves, <u>we commenced to get results</u>	46	Immediate
Step 2	<u>As soon as</u> we admitted the possible existence of a Creative Intelligence, a Spirit of the Universe underlying the totality of things, <u>we began to be possessed of a new sense of power</u> and direction	<u>46</u>	Immediate
Step 3	...if honestly and humbly made, an effect, sometimes a very great one, was <u>felt at once</u> .	63	Immediate
Step 3 to Step 4	<u>Next</u> we launched out on a course of vigorous action...	<u>63</u>	Immediate
Step 4	Though our decision was a vital and crucial step, it could have <u>little permanent effect unless at once</u> followed...	64	Immediate
Step 5	We have put our finger on the weak items in our personal inventory. <u>Now these are about to be cast out</u> . This requires action on our part	72	Immediate
Step 5 into 6	Returning home we find a place where we can be quiet <u>for an hour</u> , carefully reviewing what we have done.	75	Same day
Step 6	If we can answer to our satisfaction, <u>we then look at Step Six</u>	76	Same day
Step 7	<u>When ready</u> , we say something like this...	<u>76</u>	Same day
Step 7 into 8	<u>Now</u> we need more action	<u>76</u>	Immediate
Step 9	<u>Now</u> we go out to our fellows and repair the damage done in the past.	<u>76</u>	Immediate
Step 9	...there may be a valid reason for postponement in some cases. But <u>we don't delay</u> if it can be avoided.	83	Without delay
Step 10	We <u>vigorously commenced</u> this way of living <u>as we cleaned up the past</u> .	84	While still making 9th step amends
Step 11	But we must go further and that means <u>more action</u> .	85	Immediate
Step 12	But this is not all. <u>There is action and more action</u> . "Faith without works is dead." <u>The next chapter</u> is entirely devoted to Step Twelve.	88	Immediate
From day 1	Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics. It works when other activities fail.	89	Immediate; practical service is vital from early on.

Recovered vs. Recovering

The word "recovered" appears throughout the Big Book:

- The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism (title page)
 - First promise
 - If those who wrote this book recovered, then we too can recover.
- We, of Alcoholics Anonymous, are more than one hundred men and women who have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body" (pg xiii)
- To show other alcoholics precisely how we recovered is the main purpose of this book. (pg xiii)
- We have recovered, and have been given the power to help others. (p. 132)
- Let his family or a friend ask him if he wants to quit for good... Then his attention should be drawn to you as a person who has recovered. (pg 90)

The book does not support the idea that recovery is an eternal process of barely managing illness.

Why Identify as Recovered?

- Then let his family or a friend ask him if he wants to quit for good... his attention should be drawn to you as a person who has recovered. (pg 90)
 - You don't know who's in the room.
 - Someone might be dying in silence.
 - Someone may be watching and waiting to hear whether anyone in the room has actually recovered, or if this is just another holding pattern.
- Your identification:
 - It's not arrogance, it's clarity.
 - It's not exclusion, it's an invitation.
 - It's not boasting, it's bearing witness.

This is in line with the Third Step Prayer (pg 63):

"...Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of Life."

You're not claiming to be cured. You're claiming that the problem has been removed (p. 85) and that sanity has returned as a result of the Steps. **That's recovered.**

Descriptions of Untreated, Treated, and Recovered Alcoholism

Untreated Alcoholism (The Bedevilments pg 52)

- We were having trouble with personal relationships, we couldn't control our emotional natures, we were a prey to misery and depression, we couldn't make a living, we had a feeling of uselessness, we were full of fear, we were unhappy, we couldn't seem to be of real help to other people.
- Not only did this describe me at the end of my drinking and drug use, but it also describes the internal discomfort that I have sought to numb all my life using food, sugar, nicotine, caffeine, porn, masturbation, sex, money, status, shopping, gambling, kleptomania; I could increase the list ad nauseum.

Treated Alcoholism (9th Step Promises, pp. 83, 84)

- We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace. No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows. Self-seeking will slip away. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change. Fear of

people and of economic insecurity will leave us. We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us. We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.

- Alcohol did all of these things for me too. When it was "working," somewhere between 3 and 5 drinks, I experienced all of these effects. The takeaway is that alcohol treats alcoholism really well and effectively, until the day it doesn't, and then never does again. I did indeed realize that Jack Daniels was doing for me what I could never have done for myself.

Recovered From Alcoholism (10th Step Promises, pp. 84,85)

- And we have ceased fighting anything or anyone - even alcohol. For by this time sanity will have returned. We will seldom be interested in liquor. If tempted, we recoil from it as from a hot flame. We react sanely and normally, and we will find that this has happened automatically. We will see that our new attitude toward liquor has been given us without any thought or effort on our part. It just comes! That is the miracle of it. We are not fighting it, neither are we avoiding temptation. We feel as though we had been placed in a position of neutrality - safe and protected. We have not even sworn off. Instead, the problem has been removed. It does not exist for us. We are neither cocky nor are we afraid. That is our experience. That is how we react so long as we keep in fit spiritual condition.
- I am no longer treating my alcoholism. My new role in my sobriety is to "grow in understanding and effectiveness," whereby maintaining my fit spiritual condition. So sobriety is no longer my focus, if indeed it ever was. I am to live a rich, full, vibrant life that others can see and wish to emulate (bearing witness to those I would serve, in the 3rd step prayer) and ask for guidance on how to do so.

	<i>Page Number</i>	<i>Context</i>
Recovered	<i>Title Page</i>	"The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism"
Recovered	<i>xiii (Foreword 1st Ed.)</i>	To show other alcoholics precisely how we have recovered is the main purpose of this book.
Recovered	<i>xiii (Foreword 1st Ed.)</i>	We, of Alcoholics Anonymous, are more than one hundred men and women who have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body.
Recovered	<i>xv (Foreword 2nd Ed.)</i>	Alcoholics Anonymous has mushroomed into nearly 6,000 groups whose membership is far above 150,000 recovered alcoholics.
Recovered	<i>xvii (Foreword 2nd Ed.)</i>	Their very first case, a desperate one, recovered immediately and became A.A. number three. He never had another drink.
Recovered	<i>xxv (The Doctor's Opinion)</i>	This man and over one hundred others appear to have recovered .
Recovered	<i>17</i>	We, of Alcoholics Anonymous, know thousands of men and women who were once just as hopeless as Bill. Nearly all have recovered .
Recovered	<i>20</i>	...we have recovered from a hopeless condition of mind and body.
Recovered	<i>29</i>	Further on, clear-cut directions are given showing how we recovered .
Recovered	<i>44</i>	If a mere code of morals or a better philosophy of life were sufficient to overcome alcoholism, many of us would have recovered long ago.
Recovered	<i>90</i>	If he says yes, then his attention should be drawn to you as a person who has recovered.

<i>Recovered</i>	96	...he might have deprived many others, who have since <i>recovered</i> , of their chance.
<i>Recovered</i>	113	He knows that thousands of men, much like himself, have <i>recovered</i> .
<i>Recovered</i>	132	We have <i>recovered</i> , and have been given the power to help others.
<i>Recovered</i>	133	We, who have <i>recovered</i> from serious drinking, are miracles of mental health.
<i>Recovered</i>	146	An alcoholic who has <i>recovered</i> , but holds a relatively unimportant job, can talk to a man with a better position.

The New Job Upon Recovery

Our next function is to grow in understanding and effectiveness. This is not an overnight matter. It should continue for our lifetime." (p. 84)

- **We are not cured of alcoholism. What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition.**

Step Twelve is not constant vigilance over drinking. It is the continued maintenance of our fit spiritual condition:

- Having had a spiritual awakening... we tried to carry this message."
- The spiritual awakening is the solution.
- The carrying of the message is the job.

The focus now shifts from "How do I stay sober?" to "How can I help others experience the same freedom I have?"

Closing Statement

This guide is not meant to replace the book. It is meant to drive you back into the book. As you sponsor others, keep asking: "What does the literature say about that? Everyone is entitled to the dignity of their own experience. Run the experiment."

We do not sponsor as authorities. We sponsor as servants, sharing a set of instructions that worked for us, with love, precision, and integrity.