



# TOGETHER WE CAN

A publication of the NYS Capital District Intergroup

May 2013

Editor's note: When I was a kid, Dear Abby, the advice column, was enticing because my mother thought it dealt with subjects too controversial for a family newspaper. Of course, that made me read it more! I found Abby to be straightforward, generous, and helpful. In that spirit, I'm testing out our own Dear Recovering-Addict Abby column.

## Dear Recovering Addict Abby,

I really need a sponsor, but don't know how to get one. They say, "Look for someone who has what you want, and ask how he or she is achieving it." But I feel too awkward. How did YOU get your sponsor? *Confused*

## Dear Confused,

Have you ever watched a baby walk? Go to YouTube and look for a video. I'll wait. Did you notice that babies don't take little steps? They go way beyond what they are actually ready to do. What they do is fall, laugh, get back up, and see if they can do it again — except faster and farther.

I get that it's hard. When I was a newbie, the mysterious process of identifying the right sponsor also stymied me. Here are some hints to getting unstuck. First, accept that there is no "right" sponsor. You may have to try some on before you buy. Second, attend meetings you haven't been to. There are a bunch of sponsors out there you haven't met yet. Third, call a lot of OAs and ask this question: what can I expect from a sponsor? You'll build some new relationships and have more realistic expectations once you do find a potential sponsor. Fourth, what's the rush? It may take a while to find "someone who has what you want." It took me over a year. In the meantime, try looking for a temporary sponsor or someone you can report your food to every day. Good luck, and remember that sponsorship is just one of the tools. *Abby*

## Dear Recovering-Addict Abby,

I feel guilty every time a call is put out for service. I know I should, but I'm scared of commitment/don't play well with others/travel/have kids/a job, etc. But they keep saying that service is essential to my recovery. What do you suggest? *Scared of Service*

## Dear Scared of Service,

Service doesn't have to be a huge time commitment. Start by being abstinent. Next, get to a meeting early and help set up. Then talk about your experience and share your strength and hope in meetings. There! You've done service! When your schedule allows, pick up something more!

Over time, look for a little something else that you can do. At the end of the meeting, say "hi" to a newcomer or put away chairs. After that success, volunteer for something with a short-term commitment. Who knows, you might find that you enjoy service and be willing to do even more! *Abby*



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*(A few weeks later, Abby has some additional thoughts to share)*

**Dear Newcomer,**

I'm proud of you for writing both letters. A first sign of willingness to ask for help.

Your feelings of awkwardness and uncertainty are very common and the only mistake you can really make is to do nothing. Action is the key.

Your questions actually go hand in hand and you can find the right sponsor and start doing service at the same time.

Here's a list of how I would start:

- Come early and stay late after meetings and see what members approach you to chat and offer encouragement. Good sponsors do that.
- Come to Intergroup or a group business meeting and watch who is doing service and taking responsibility for keeping our meetings healthy.
- Call a few members and see if they know they should do most of the talking because they know you may not know how to engage. Also, see if they return calls if you leave a voice mail.
- It's okay to take people's inventory outside the meeting as well to see if their "movie matches their soundtrack."

Integrity and authenticity are both natural consequences of a 12-step lifestyle and should be high on the list of what you want in a sponsor. A slim waistline is great, but it doesn't go very far in handling real life challenges like death of a loved one, job loss, and the end of a relationship or illness. A working knowledge of the 12 steps (which is the primary reason for having a sponsor) will.

I hope this helps. I wish you all the blessings that service to the fellowship and having and eventually being a sponsor can offer. With love and respect, *Abby*

## Three Views on Sponsorship

### *Simon Says....*

"Find a sponsor who has what you want, and ask how he/she is achieving it." It seemed to me that the next phrase was "And do the same." I asked someone to be my sponsor because she seemed to have what I wanted. And, as I got to know her, I knew I wanted what she had. So I did what she did and what she asked of me.

After all, my best attempts failed me. And hadn't I said that I believed a power greater than myself would restore me to sanity? And hadn't I said that I made a decision to turn my will and my life over to the care of God as I understood him? If I really meant that, taking a sponsor put the rubber to the road.

To me, that meant acknowledging that my addicted thinking does not have my own best interest at heart. God would have my best interest at heart and I would know that through another person. So I committed to following the lead and instruction of someone who has my best interest at heart, my sponsor.

And this is important: I have done and do *everything* my sponsor asks me to do outright or suggests I consider. To me there are no distinctions between a request and suggestion. My response is simple. I do it, whether I agree or not, whether I had tried the suggestion before or

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not, whether I want to or not. I might complain a bit. I might cry. But I do it. Not everything might work and that's okay. I will only know that if I try. I haven't been let down yet and I don't imagine I will be.

I sponsor much the same way. I love you until death and I won't love you to death. Sponsorship isn't friendship. It's like having a private tutor. When I look back at my life's teachers who have helped me the most, it has been the ones who had high standards and held me accountable And I have learned the most doing the things I really didn't want to.

Sponsorship is one of the only relationships I have where I know someone loves me enough to point out where I am hurting myself and offers to help me stop. Whether I do or not is completely up to me.

I have an obligation to my sponsor as well. My willingness to follow her suggestions has an effect on her recovery. And I have learned more about compassion and what it means to be in a loving relationship because I've had people show me compassion and love.

I have had sponsor relationships evolve and change over time and I imagine they will continue to do that. It is the nature of growth that some things end so others can be created. I am blessed by the generosity of my sponsor to and I am grateful for the opportunity to share what I have been given so I can keep the same.

## *Passing It On...*

Sponsorship has been the most transformative tool in my recovery program.

It was difficult for me to ask for help. The steps that I take daily to connect with my sponsor remind of my powerlessness over food and that I need help with this disease.

The sponsoring relationship has opened many pathways for me. My sponsor guided me in developing a plan of eating based upon nurturing and caring for myself that has never felt like deprivation. I commit my food in the evening for the next day via e-mail, and also write a synopsis of my day. I also have a daily phone call to my sponsor. As a result of these routines, I am able to share my thoughts and feelings on an ongoing basis. My sponsor helps me put things into perspective, to attend to what is important and let go of the rest.

My sponsor also strongly encouraged me to reach out to others to develop support beyond our relationship. I am grateful for this encouragement, as I have developed wonderful connections with others in program.

I also do step work with my sponsor and chose to share my fourth step inventory with my Sponsor during Step Five. Through working the steps, I have been able to accept responsibility for many of the things that I had carried for years prior to coming to OA. I have been able to accept the past and look forward to today.

I am also a sponsor. I try to help sponsees find their own way in the program and develop what works for them. I have learned a great deal from them.



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## *Confessions of a Selfish OA Sponsor*

Sponsoring is work. A sponsee is asking me to work for them. I can accept the job or decline it; it's up to me.

As much as I like to, and feel responsible for, helping other OA members, I won't do it if it off-centers me. I have no patience for drama or dishonesty. None. If I am going to sponsor you, you must be direct and honest with me.

I assume that if you've asked me to sponsor you, you want me to tell you the truth as I see it and understand it. I try to do that as gently and directly as possible.

In my experience, recovery is a hard and painful process. I won't work with anyone who isn't willing to change in ways that are hard and can be painful. Not everyone is.

I won't work with someone who doesn't want or value their recovery as much as I want them to recover and value their recovery.

I think it's a good idea to have a trial period to make sure there aren't mismatched expectations and that the sponsee doesn't have needs that I cannot meet that are not addressed by another support person. It has to feel like a good fit and work for both of us.

My first sponsor made me call her and three other OA members every day. I require that of my sponsees, too. I cannot and will not be someone's entire support system; it doesn't work. I am infinitely fallible and often unavailable. This has evolved into...

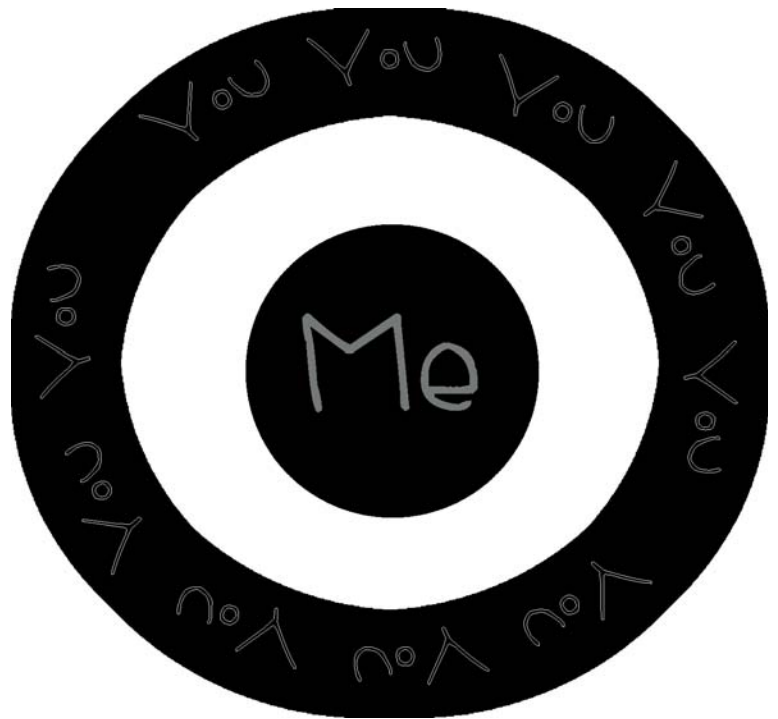
I believe in the team approach: whether you call your support system a clean team or a Greek chorus, a posse or an Empyrean choir, it's necessary for each of us to have a network of people we speak to regularly, and who support us in our recovery. I don't know anyone with long-term recovery who doesn't have a support team. You can have as many people on your team as you like as long as you maintain regular contact with them.

Your team members can be specialists. I have had people on my team with whom I could talk about my mother; how to adjust my abstinence while I was pregnant and nursing; and for help with food choices, shopping, and cooking. I have someone I call when I have questions about G-d.

G-d rarely speaks to me directly; I most often hear what I need to hear from the people on my team. If they are all saying the same thing, I take that as direction from my higher power.

My belief in the team approach notwithstanding, I also think it's essential that (at least) one person knows the whole truth about your life. That includes the thoughts in your head you'd prefer not to share and what you're putting in your mouth and why. That person is usually your sponsor.

In my experience, sponsorship pairings don't work out more often than they do, and I think that's OK. When it works, you'll both know it.



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## Service as Being Part of the Family

I used to shudder at meetings when anyone made a pitch for service. Included in that shudder was a big dose of guilt. What was I doing to keep this wonderful family functioning so well? I had a soft place to land when the outside world was causing me pain. I had people who understood my struggles, people who paved a way for me to overcome them. I didn't want to be the family member who sat immobile while someone else emptied the dishwasher, changed the beds, did the laundry, took out the garbage, and did the vacuuming. I knew I needed to contribute to keep my soft place to land available to me and to feel like a real member. I wanted to be a shareholder (stakeholder) in this magnificent program. Furthermore, if I didn't get further involved it would be easy to slip out the door and never come back. I could stay on the periphery and not really own that I was one of the compulsive eater family.

Finding a comfortable fit for me was important. My sponsor encouraged me to find a way to give back. There were lots of little opportunities for newbies. It was simple to put out or put away the display of literature, set up chairs, handle the Lifeline drawing, make "we care" calls. By attending business meetings at the places I regularly attended, I learned of jobs that needed to be filled.



When I finally achieved a good stretch of abstinence, my sponsor encouraged me to become a sponsor and volunteer to chair meetings that had abstinence requirements. It felt like I had reached the next level of service and I admit it was terrifying at first. I had witnessed others before me doing these jobs. I could ask for help from them in how to do them. There was literature available on how to sponsor. Each new step in offering my efforts and time to the group gave me more of a feeling of really belonging. I was not just someone's college roommate who had no place to go for the holidays. I became more and more a real member of the family.

When asked to take on service at my regular meetings as program chair, treasurer, secretary, etc., I was reluctant at first, feeling stingy with my time, not wanting to be committed to always being there, having a fear of failure. Then, out of a sense of how much I needed this program to stay alive and thrive and out of my desire to be a well-thought-of member of the community, I somewhat grudgingly took on more responsible time-consuming jobs.

Voila! My commitment to sobriety increased with the time spent on program jobs and with other contributing program people. I had an instant "clean team." My work relationships with these folks gave me an ease with them, a closeness to them, that made me feel cared about and comfortable enough to call for their support with big and small problems in my life and with my food.

It was only a matter of time before I'd be drafted for Intergroup service. The big, scary thing that goes bump in the night. I had heard things! Rumors about long meetings. Rumors about people who love to hear themselves talk. Rumors about contentious issues. This was not for me. I hate conflict. I am impatient with people who want to rehash everything that's already

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been said. I hate anything that feels like time is being wasted on petty stuff, on nit picking, on trying to reach consensus with unreasonable people. Okay, I hate bureaucracy!! Every board I've ever sat on, every association meeting I've ever attended has been pure hell for me.

Someone I liked who was an officer of Intergroup strong-armed me into coming to a meeting as a "visitor." Amazingly, the meeting was well run and had a time limit of one hour and 20 minutes. They used a talking stick strategy to ensure that each participant got the floor and a fair hearing.

I could see that being a part of Intergroup would be a challenge for my character defects. I would have to use my mantra "principles before personalities." I would have to use the serenity prayer. I would need to let some things go like my fears, my control, my grandiosity. I would have to develop my humility and acceptance. I'd have to open my mind and my heart to people I wouldn't ordinarily choose for my friends. "Aren't those the next miracles I am hoping for in this program?" I thought to myself. Intergroup meets only once a month. I could probably endure 80 minutes once a month of an activity I didn't relish if the result might be more of the promises coming true, more of my character defects being released, and more of an ownership in an organization that continues to save my life and give me a great life.

I had to wonder, "Can't this OA program work just fine without Intergroup? Why is this needed? Can't we just have our little business meetings to work out individual meeting issues?" I had to believe that Intergroup served some purpose I could believe in. So I asked, read some of the minutes of previous meetings, talked to people I knew who served in Intergroup. When I learned about how Intergroup carries the message through its Public Information committee to folks who are still suffering and don't know about us, when I realized that we wouldn't have updated meeting lists, or a newsletter or an answer phone or workshops without Intergroup, it became clear that their mission was important to the survival of OA and to my own recovery. I had to step up. I needed to take my turn to walk the dog, dust the furniture, and scrub the bathroom. In so doing, I'm not on the outskirts; just visiting, thinking I might not need to be in this family. I am a full partner in this "household," sharing in the tasks that keep it functioning.

A quote from Homer in the Iliad: "Light is the task when many share the toil."

A motto for Rotary International: "He profits most who serves best."

## Service Over the Years

In 2011 I wrote a short newsletter article on how service has been a lifeline to OA for me. I wrote that have always been a lot better at keeping commitments to others than those I make to myself. Service is one of those commitments made to others.

More than once I have been ready to quit OA. Usually, the only thing that kept me coming back was some sort of service commitment, either at the meeting level or to Intergroup. I had *promised* to do something. So, I planned to stay in OA only so long as it took to finish that commitment. At one point, I had completed all my OA commitments, and I had even let my sponsorships dwindle to one sponsee. What I noticed was that the more I detached from OA, the worse my food got. Eventually I was in relapse.

I came back and resolved to stay. To strengthen that resolution, I started taking on service commitments again and making promises to others. As my program got stronger, so did my abstinence. Clearly, service is absolutely vital to my recovery. It keeps me connected. It is a lifeline.

## We're on the Web!

Check It Out:

[nycd.oagroups.org](http://nycd.oagroups.org)

Meeting Lists

OA Information

Inspiration

Event Calendar

Links

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**World Service**

[www.oa.org](http://www.oa.org)

**Region 6**

[oaregion6.org](http://oaregion6.org)

**Capital Region  
Answer Line**

Meeting  
Information

(518) 292-0666

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Tradition 7 tells us that we need to be fully self-supporting and that doesn't just mean via financial contributions. It means we need to share the service work as well.

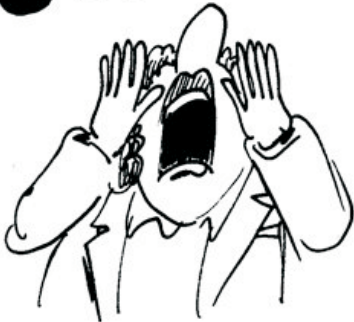
The March 30th *Voices of Recovery* entry could have been written by me:

When I first joined OA, I shied away from service opportunities. I told myself several things: "I'm too new," "I don't know enough about the program to perform that particular service," "It will take too much time from my work or family," and best of all, "In the past, I have given too much of myself to other organizations. Since I don't know how to give in a healthy way, I am going to be very cautious now."

In order for me to reap the benefits of service I had to get over the hurdles I set up to sabotage my own attempts at recovery. I had to blindly volunteer to perform service even though I did not feel experienced enough or recovered enough or healthy enough to set appropriate limits around my service. Even though I thought I was making it easier for myself by not doing service, I was actually making it harder on myself by denying myself the tool that so effectively enhances my recovery.

What kind of service is helpful? Any kind of course! Over the years I have filled various functions at the meeting and Intergroup levels. I regularly attend business meetings and have served as treasurer, literature person, key holder, and alternate Intergroup representative at the meeting level. On the Intergroup level, I started by filling in as the literature person when the previous person left. Then, I wrote for our newsletter and started serving on a variety of the Intergroup committees including public information, nominations, Answerphone, and outreach, to name a few. I've worked on events such as the sharathon. Eventually, I was creating my own projects such as the "100 Calls" project. Over the last several years, I have filled the various Intergroup trusted servant positions including treasurer, recording secretary, vice-chair, and chair.

# Volunteers!



We have many opportunities to do service beyond formal committees and board positions. Every call we make or take is a service. Participating in a meeting is a form of service. Writing an article for the newsletter is service. Sponsoring another member is service, and a vital one, too. For all of this "work" we get back ten times in recovery benefits.

Tradition 7 reminds us that individuals need to set healthy limits on their service commitments. This tends to be a challenge for me as I am interested in so many aspects of our program. Recently, I have stepped back to encourage others to do service and reap the same benefits I have. Much of the service I do now is informal and more social. For example, I have worked on several "prayer and healing" blankets for members facing health challenges. I encourage members to get together socially for games or cards.

Anything we can do to help strengthen another person's recovery (and hence our own) is service. What service can you do today?

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## Update /Opportunity for Service

*Using Answerphone for OA News: (518) 292-0666*

For the person considering OA, Answerphone offers:

- General information about OA
- A list of questions to help you decide if OA is for you
- What you can expect at an OA meeting

For those already active in OA, you can get:

- Recent changes to OA meeting times or locations
- Upcoming OA events and “save the date” information
- NY Capital District Intergroup bulleted list of news items
- The current newsletter topic and call for articles
- Information about online and telephone meetings

Importantly, a caller can request a return call from an OA member. It’s an excellent service opportunity to sign up for a week to return calls. **Contact Linda L at 756-2565 or boisclairlin@yahoo.com.**

***New Workshop: Meetings in OA, Sunday May 5th 1:00-3:30 p.m., St. Peter’s Hospital, Mercy Conference Rooms 1 and 2***

Listen, Share, Connect!

Discussion and activities about the importance of various kinds of meetings as a tool in your recovery.

Safeguard your recovery by learning more about:

- different face-to-face meeting formats
- telephone meetings
- online meetings

***Sixth Annual OA Weekend Retreat: Don’t Pick Up! Emotional, Spiritual, and Physical Recovery***

June 7-9, Light on the Hill Retreat Center, Ven Etten, NY (between Ithaca, Binghamton, and Elmira

\$260 for two nights lodging, six meals, program, and use of grounds. Some partial scholarships available

More info? Tracy B @ 518-495-0655 OR Viven R@ 607-387-3481

***What If You Showed Up and No One Was There?***

**Send changes regarding your meeting to K. at 482-7253.** This phone number is also on the printed meeting list. Sending your meeting changes via e-mail is also possible.

**Printed list:** Please submit changes no later than the first Saturday of February, April, June, August, October, and December (all even numbered months). This meeting list is posted on our Intergroup Web site subsequent to printing.

**WSO Web site:** If you prefer to not make changes to your meeting listing on the WSO Web site, K. will ask our Intergroup Web person to make those changes for you.

**Information Line:** K. will forward pertinent meeting changes to the person who maintains the outgoing message.

*Thank you to all who provide service by keeping our meetings vital and available!*