

What I learned from my sponsor

When I share at meetings or with other OA people, I am surprised how often I quote my very first sponsor. She was such an instrumental part in my recovery.

When I entered the room in May 1985 for the second time, I knew I was desperate and needed help. I had earlier exposure to OA meetings a few years prior, but I was not ready then. I had to learn the hard way about this disease. So, when I realized I was truly out of control with food, I knew I needed OA. I knew the steps were a way to get to the bottom of why I ate (anger) and how to deal with it, and I needed to be around people who understand how I ate and would not judge me.

Step 3 of the program was the most worrisome as I was agnostic and was not sure how I could get past that step. I started listening to shares and found a sponsor who was also agnostic. She turned out to be exactly what I needed.

First off, she had me list the binge foods and food behaviors. Food remaining became what foods I could eat (food plan) and the food behaviors were behaviors I was to avoid (abstinence). She told me to make good food choices and whatever I had been doing, I had to stop doing it. I knew how to eat healthy, so I started making good food choices. As for stopping, my behaviors I had been weighing every day, calculating my daily calorie intake, calculating how much I would lose in a week, marking the calendar with an X for every day on a diet. That was diet behavior and a numbers game, and it made me crazy. I decided I was not going to treat my program as I did a diet. I do not track or weigh my food, I don't weigh myself except at the doctor's office, and I do not count my days abstinent. I also shared with her that when in a restaurant I was scared I wouldn't order enough food and I would still be hungry. My choices had to be perfect. She told me that if I was still hungry I could order more. I remember saying, I can? She said yes. And by giving me permission to order more, I relaxed about making perfect food choices and surprisingly I never had to order more.

Another thing I remember her telling me was that we are all sick in this program, some are just sicker than others. This was in response to having someone accuse me of something I didn't do. It helped me be compassionate toward that person.

My sponsor helped me get out of myself by showing me how to be comfortable in your own skin. When at a doctor's office, they mentioned her weight and she said that this was where God wanted her to be. She was not obese when that comment was made, she was just a big boned woman. I will say she never mentioned, nor did we ever talk about God, except in her telling me about the doctor appointment. In fact, in Step 7 where it says to "have God remove all these defects of character," she simply looked at my list and then told me to not do them anymore. I interpreted that to mean to be mindful of my actions and when I see one of my character traits showing up, I am to change my behavior.

She also loved to wear funny t-shirts and do silly things. Things I was too embarrassed to do. I could be myself around her.

On a phone call with her, I shared how I was still unhappy on how I still yelled at my kids. I figured after 2 years in program, I should have my act together. She said that if you yell at your kids when before you would have picked them up and slammed them against the wall, well

that's progress. She was right. When I looked back at how I used to treat them, this was definitely better and I relaxed. Progress, not perfection.

I owe a lot to this person. We are no longer in touch, having both moved out of state before the internet. I have had several sponsors over the years but my first sponsor is the one that taught me the most.

- Anonymous