

What is a Healthy Meeting?

**Assembly Presentation
May 15, 2021**

History and Background

We receive frequent emails and questions from members about various customs and practices at meetings that are concerning.

These are the broad topics that our members bring up most frequently:

- ❖ **Sponsorship**
- ❖ **Dominance**
- ❖ **Newcomers**
- ❖ Affiliation with Outside Entities
- ❖ Group Autonomy
- ❖ Financial Management
- ❖ Literature

We will cover the **first three topics** today, and the remaining topics at the November Assembly.

The first thing we do to address the concern is research the Conference Approved Literature (CAL) that is pertinent to the issue at hand.

The following considerations regarding “healthy meetings” are based on:

- *Our Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual*
- Other pertinent CAL related to the topic
- *Southern California Policy for Resolving Group and Member Concerns*: (<https://www.scws-al-anon.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/SCWSArea-Policy-Final-10-24-20.pdf>)

Sponsorship

Conference Approved Literature (CAL) related to “Sponsorship”:
(note: “Conference” refers to the World Service Conference or WSC)

- ❖ “AI-Anon Personal Sponsor: an AI-Anon member with whom a member can confidentially discuss personal problems or questions and someone who willingly shares the experience, strength, and hope of the AI-Anon program.”

(AI-Anon/Alateen Service Manual, 2018-2021, version 2, p. 73)

(We will be referring to current Service Manual as “SM” going forward)

CAL related to **Sponsorship** (cont'd)

- ❖ Between meetings, we can call our sponsor when we face a difficult situation.
- ❖ A sponsor is someone to turn to who already knows our story
 - respects our privacy and will keep what we say absolutely confidential
 - listens, shares experience, strength, and hope, and offers support and encouragement
- ❖ Sponsorship is a mutually beneficial relationship.

(How Al-Anon Works, B-22, p. 36-37)

CAL related to **Sponsorship** (cont'd)

- ❖ 2006 World Service Conference (WSC) Chosen Agenda Item
Question: How does the fellowship help newcomers understand that Al-Anon sponsorship does not include:
 - Pyramid sponsorship--Sponsor, grand-Sponsor, great grand-Sponsor;
 - Need for prior approval to be in a group;
 - Being told not to attend other meetings;
 - Fear of leaving the group, alienation, snubbing, or ridicule.
- ❖ Following the 2006 WSC discussion, the *Sponsorship – Working Together to Recover* (M-78) *Bookmark* was published in 2007.

(Many Voices, One Journey, B-31, p.361-362)

CAL related to **Sponsorship** (cont'd)

- ❖ Sponsorship is:
 - A relationship built on equality, anonymity, and trust
 - A commitment to practice healthy communication--not based on intimidation or demands
 - An experience based on unconditional love, not shame or judgment
 - A one-to-one relationship; not an exclusive club
 - This private relationship is focused on the Al-Anon principles. (*Sponsorship – Working Together to Recover (M-78) Bookmark*)

CAL Related to **Sponsorship** (cont'd)

- ❖ “Another source of difficulty can arise with sponsorship. It is important to make clear the distinction between guidance and advice. Guidance comes through sharing, listening, explaining the program, and pointing out choices available. Guidance never imposes a decision on someone else or dictates a course of action. The use of this Tradition will prevent a Sponsor from assuming authority over the member being sponsored; it offers protection to them both.” (*Al-Anon's Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, B-8, p. 92)

The next slide presents a question about Sponsorship.

Based on the CAL you've read in the previous slides,
which of the answers seem to be the best "fit?"

[Hint: the **bold** answers are most consistent with our principles!]

Sponsorship

- ?** If a newcomer says at a meeting that s/he needs a sponsor, what might you do?
- A. Assign a permanent sponsor to them.
 - B. Offer them the Sponsorship Bookmark and suggest that they attend several different meetings and listen for someone who “has something they want.”**
 - C. Offer to be their temporary sponsor in order begin working the Steps until they identify someone who feels “right” to them to be their “permanent” Sponsor.**

[Reminder “Hint”: The **bold** answers are most consistent with our principles!]

Dominance:

Conference Approved Literature (CAL)

- ❖ **Tradition Two:** For our group purpose there is but one authority— a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern. (SM, p.16)
- ❖ **Dominance:** No member of Al-Anon should direct, assume authority or give advice. Our program is based on suggestion, interchange of experience, and rotation of leadership. We progress in our own way and pace. Any attempt to manage or direct is likely to have disastrous consequences for group harmony. (“Three Obstacles to Success,” SM, p.22)

CAL related to **Dominance** (cont'd):

- ❖ The Group Representative (GR):
 - should be members with experience, stability, and an understanding of the Traditions and how they work as applied in the Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual (P-24/27).”
(Al-Anon Guidelines, Group Representatives, G-11)
 - the GR represents the group’s concerns and wishes at the District and Area, as well as informing the group of what is happening in Al-Anon in the District, Area, and worldwide.
 - GRs and other officers are leaders and trusted servants. . . yet they have no authority over the group. (SM, p.65)

CAL related to **Dominance** (cont'd):

❖ **Knowledge-Based Decision-Making (KBDM): The Process**

KBDM has four essential elements based on a philosophy of:

- open communication between leadership and membership;
- dialogue before deliberation;
- all decision-makers having common access to full information;
- and it exists in a culture of trust.

(2006 World Conference Summary p.6)

CAL related to **Dominance** (cont'd):

❖ **Knowledge-Based Decision-Making: The Process** (cont'd)

- it is not necessary to choose sides or develop evidence with an end in mind.
- provides for open dialogue, so everyone's needs are heard,
- expectations and preferences are acknowledged, and
- ethical dimensions are considered, being ever aware of the likely evolution of the environment in which members live.

(2006 World Conference Summary p.6)

CAL related to **Dominance:**

❖ **Group Conscience: What Is It?**

- When it comes to a serious Group Conscience, slow down, make sure everyone is informed, give the Group time to hear what is being said, work toward unanimity, listen, and be prepared to bring your mind into alignment with “a loving God...” (Bret H. R., *In the Loop*, March 2019)
- Do I bring my concerns to the group level with love?
- How am I a leader and a trusted servant? How can I be a leader without “being in charge?”
- Am I listening for God’s words in others? What do I hear?

(*Paths to Recovery*, B-24, p.152)

CAL Related to **Dominance** (cont'd)

- ❖ “Al-Anon is a fellowship of equals. We are equally important, regardless of our social status, education, intellectual qualities, color, nationality, or religion.” (*Al-Anon’s Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, B-8, p.92)
- ❖ “We are all experts because of our experience, and we are all beginners because our lives are in a constant state of growth and change. Newcomers are as likely as longtime members to utter words that inspire and inform.” (*How Al-Anon Works*, B-22, p. 108)
- ❖ “Don’t dominate, nag, scold, or complain.” (*Alcoholism, the Family Disease*, P-4, “Do’s and Don’ts”)
- ❖ “All Al-Anon discussions should be constructive, helpful, loving and understanding. In striving toward these ideals, we avoid topics that can lead to dissension and distract us from our goals.” (*SM*, “Three Obstacles to Success”, p. 22)

CAL Related to **Dominance** (cont'd)

- ❖ “Today I know that for unity to exist in my family and in my group, all of us must have a voice. No one voice is less important than anyone else’s. I have a responsibility to listen, to share, and to accept. Tradition One lifted the burden of control off my shoulders.”

(Paths to Recovery, Al-Anon’s Steps, Traditions and Concepts B-24, p.139)

- ❖ “Tradition Two shows us how to practice the first three Steps as a Group...we learn that it is best not to force a particular decision or to continually restate our views. That is controlling.”

(Paths to Recovery B 24, p.145)

CAL Related to **Dominance** (cont'd)

- ❖ Many groups request that only members who regularly attend the meeting vote at the group business meeting. Members who regularly attend more than one group may wish to consider at which group to vote on District or Area matters, keeping in mind that our principles are spiritual and voting on an issue more than once could be viewed as trying to control and dominate the outcome. (*SM, p. 51*)

CAL Related to **Dominance** (cont'd)

- ❖ **Tradition Nine:** Our groups, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve. (*SM, p. 17*)
- ❖ Large groups may choose to have a . . . Steering Committee . . . as suggested by the group conscience. (*SM, p. 36*)
- ❖ Some larger meetings have a Business or Steering Committee that meets separately to prepare an agenda for the business meeting. (*SM, p. 51*)

The next two slides present questions about Dominance.

Based on the CAL you've read in the previous slides,
which of the answers seem to be the best "fit?"

[Hint: the **bold** answers are most consistent with our principles!]

Dominance



You attend a meeting with a self-appointed “Steering Committee” whose members meet privately to decide how the meeting should run. What do you do?

A. During meetings, point out that this is dominance and does not follow Al-Anon’s principles.

B. Challenge the Steering Committee’s members to explain why they think that dominating the Group is okay.

C. Follow the *Service Manual*’s guidance regarding business meetings and bring up the issue of the Steering Committee at a business meeting, without discussing personalities. Decide as a Group whether or not to have a Steering Committee, how to define its function and membership, and how it will be responsible to those it serves.

[Reminder “Hint”: The **bold** answers are most consistent with our principles!]

Dominance



At your Group's business meetings, one or two longtime members "tell the Group how Al-Anon works" and control the Agenda and order of speakers at the business meeting. What do you do?

A. During the business meeting, challenge those members to defend their behavior, using quotes from CAL to prove that they're not following Al-Anon principles.

B. Get together with a small group of members before the business meeting and vote as a block against any suggestions by the longtimers.

C. Place Knowledge-Based Decision-Making on the agenda of the business meeting and have a thorough discussion about how it works. Decide as a Group whether decisions will be made by majority vote (50% + 1) or "substantial unanimity" (2/3rds of the voting members).

[Reminder "Hint": The **bold** answers are most consistent with our principles!]

Newcomers

- ❖ “Having a plan in place to welcome newcomers and visitors to your group throughout the year helps newcomers and members alike.”
 - Does your group have a “greeter” to welcome those attending your meeting?
 - Does your group have enough Newcomer Packets and literature on hand?
 - Does your group have current meeting lists on hand?

(Welcome Checklist)

- ❖ “Members listen to each other without criticizing, passing judgment, or giving direction. There are no right or wrong answers. All share as peers, and every member is listened to with courtesy and respect.”

(Information for the Newcomer, pamphlet-S-4)

CAL related to **Newcomers** (cont'd)

- ❖ “Do attend at least six meetings before deciding if Al-Anon is right for you.” (*Welcome, Newcomer! Packet: K-10 -- So You Love an Alcoholic*)
- ❖ “Take what you liked and leave the rest.” (*SM, p. 20*)
- ❖ “Don’t try to push anyone but yourself.”
(*Alcoholism, the Family Disease, P-4, “Do’s and Don’ts”*)
- ❖ “When members feel safe and are safe at meetings, the unity of our groups (Tradition One) is maintained.”
(*Let’s Talk About Safety in Al-Anon Meetings! WSO 2019*)

CAL related to **Newcomers** (cont'd)

- ❖ Are we forming cliques or being indifferent to other members of the group?
- ❖ Do we encourage everyone to participate in the discussion by sharing and listening?
- ❖ Do we refrain from giving advice?
- ❖ Are newcomers encouraged to share?
- ❖ Do we read the “Three Obstacles to Success in Al-Anon” and explain what is appropriate to share in a meeting?
- ❖ Do we let newcomers know what sponsorship is and how to obtain a Sponsor?

(Al-Anon Guidelines, “Taking a Group Inventory”, G-8a)

CAL related to **Newcomers** (cont'd)

- ❖ Al-Anon Members are:
 - old, young, female, male, Asian, Black, Hispanic, Native American, Aboriginal, Pacific Islander, and Caucasian
 - children of, employers and employees of, friends of, parents of, grandparents of, siblings of, spouses and partners of alcoholics.
- ❖ We will not find all of these types of people at every meeting, but we will find a common bond; alcoholism, which we call a family illness.

(Al-Anon Family Groups Welcome...African Americans...African Canadians...All People of Color, pamphlet, S-68)

CAL related to **Newcomers** (cont'd)

- ❖ It is not always easy for newcomers to know whether or not they belong. Many of us had to overcome years of denial before we even suspected that alcoholism existed in our families.
- ❖ Fortunately, it is left to us to decide for ourselves in our own time whether or not we are qualified for membership. Thus, even if they feel uncertain about whether or not they are in the right place, newcomers are always welcome in Al-Anon.”

(How Al-Anon Works, B-22, Tradition Three, p.110)

CAL related to **Newcomers** (cont'd)

- ❖ **Attraction -- Tradition Eleven:** Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion...”
- ❖ It has always been Al-Anon’s approach to carry a clear and simple message about our program of recovery – that is: to let people know what we are, what we do and how they can come into contact with us. We do this in many creative ways while avoiding high pressure tactics which distort our message of hope or bring us into public controversy.

(SM, p. 123)

CAL related to **Newcomers** (cont'd)

❖ **What is “Attraction”?**

- In Al-Anon, attraction means we share how the program works for us and how it can work for others. We attract when we convey that Al-Anon and Alateen groups are friendly and inviting to all.
- Attraction is drawing others to us by reflecting positive qualities. Means of attraction include:
 - * Providing information
 - * Generating goodwill
 - * Cooperating with professionals and the media
 - * Explaining how Al-Anon/Alateen works in our lives

(Attracting and Cooperating, A Guide for Members in Public Outreach Service, pamphlet, S-40)

CAL related to **Newcomers** (cont'd)

❖ **What is Promotion?**

“We attract interest in Al-Anon Family Groups when we communicate what our lives were like before we came to Al-Anon, what we found in Al-Anon that helped us and what our lives are like today. In error, we would be promoting Al-Anon if we offered promises, guarantees, personal advice or gave the impression that we are the experts who know what is best for all families and friends of alcoholics.” *(SM, p.123)*

CAL related to **Newcomers** (cont'd)

- ❖ If we “promote,” we no longer merely exhibit our value and worth; instead, we are in a “selling” mode that may result in resistance rather than encourage the attraction of new members.

Promotion means:

- * Using “pressure tactics”--not taking “no” for an answer.
- * Making promises.
- * Comparing ourselves to self-help or professional programs for families.
- * Exaggerating or misrepresenting Al-Anon’s purpose; that we can help everyone.
- * Presenting ourselves as a spokesperson for Al-Anon Family Groups, by allowing our full name, face, and membership to be identified at the level of press, radio, film, TV, and Internet.”

(Attracting and Cooperating, A Guide for Members in Public Outreach Service, pamphlet, S-40)

The next slides present questions about **Dominance**.
Based on the CAL you've read in the previous slides,
which of the answers seem to be the best "fit?"

[Hint: . . . you already got the hint!]

Newcomers

? When newcomers show up at your meeting, you might:

1. Tell them that your meeting is the best Al-Anon meeting in your District and the only one they should attend,
2. Get their telephone number then call and text them often until they attend your meeting,
3. **Give them your phone number and invite them to call you if they have any questions,**
4. **Let them know that we recommend that they attend at least six different meetings before they decide whether or not Al-Anon is right for them.**

[Reminder “Hint”: The **bold** answers are most consistent with our principles!]

Newcomers

? You attend a meeting where you hear a fellow member pressuring a newcomer to attend their meeting, and only their meeting. What should you do?

1. Immediately interrupt the fellow member and tell them that we don't recruit members in Al-Anon and, furthermore, that they are not welcome at your meeting.
2. **After the meeting, gently and lovingly approach the "recruiting" member and remind them that Al-Anon is based on attraction rather than promotion.**
3. **Call a business meeting and discuss adding something to your meeting's format like the following when there are newcomers at your meeting: "Al-Anon is a program of attraction. Do attend at least six different meetings before deciding if Al-Anon is right for you."**
4. **Consider adding some of the readings on "attraction" and "promotion" to your group's format when there are newcomers present** (from *Attracting and Cooperating*, Pamphlet S-40).

[Reminder "Hint": The **bold** answers are most consistent with our principles!]

**Questions
or
Comments?**

Contact us at:

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