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Please Silence Your Phones...

Before I begin, I'd like to preface this by saying that this is merely my experience, and my thought-process as a result of that experience. I have a sponsor who has a sponsor, I have served at ASC, H&I, a Homegroup Level, and I sponsor men. I have had two sponsors since I got clean, and both of them have rarely picked up the phone when I call. I learned to develop relationships with them through persistence and by leaving voicemails every day- and I was actually able to get to a point where I could talk-through the majority of my own perceived problems on their answering machines. I believe that talking to their voicemails instead of them so often served me very well, as I was forced to develop a support network and build a relationship with the God of my (mis-) understanding. Also, it makes me appreciate even more the time they've dedicated to meeting with me weekly, and when they have picked up the phone I have valued our conversations more, as I haven't relied on them to solve my problems and instead have attempted to take personal responsibility for my actions and behaviors- which allowed me to speak to them from a place of humility, equality, and anonymity. Basically, I have spoken to both of my sponsors knowing that as we have walked through this recovery thing together, we've really just been two human beings who've struggled with the disease of addiction sharing our experience with each other.

"We share from our own personal experience what it has been like for us. The temptation to give advice is great, but when we do so we lose the respect of newcomers. This clouds our message. A simple, honest message of recovery from addiction rings true," (Basic Text 6th Edition, p51). That's really what I've tried to accomplish with this article. I don't know if it's "right" or "wrong," I don't know if this has meant I'm a poor sponsor, and I didn't know whether or not any of this would really matter to anyone besides me, but my phone has almost ALWAYS been on silent. I choose when to pick up calls if I see it ring. If I'm out to dinner, hanging out with a friend, or spending time with my family; I'd find it rude to do so. Their time is just as valuable as my own. If I am meditating, driving around blasting music, or celebrating life by the pool or at the beach, or watching a movie; most of the time I ignore my phone, as it rings fairly frequently these days. I don't believe that anyone's emotional state should be considered an emergency. My first sponsor often asked me "did you pray to be restored to sanity?" And if I'm wrong, these addicts reaching-out have other people to call because they got meeting lists at meetings and have other phone numbers to utilize for help, or not and sit on the pity-pot. My sponsees know to leave me a message, and I usually get back to them within a day or two, or sometimes earlier if I sense that they really need to talk to me. I'm not crazy enough to believe that my behavior has the power to override their desire to get clean and stay clean or take them out. I do, however, try to reciprocate any efforts they make in their willingness to stay connected to me, and the rooms in general.

I have been a whole lot of places over the brief almost 6 years I've been clean, and before this period I'd never developed the ability to appreciate the freedom and security that I'd received by knowing that I'm not God. It is not my responsibility to assume the role of spiritual giant and immediately stop everything I'm doing and pull out the "Solution Bazooka" (thanks for

that one David) to solve everyone else's problems. As a recovering addict, I believe I have an obligation to help others, yes; but not at the expense of my own serenity. I am not on-call 24/7, I am not a counselor, I am not to be treated as a bank or a taxi service for the men that I sponsor. They know this because I ask that they read the IP on sponsorship. They know that my sole responsibility is to guide them through the 12 steps (and traditions and concepts if they so choose), and that anything they get from me other than that is icing on the cake. My recovery is my responsibility, and I know that one of the things that happens through that miraculous process of the twelve steps is that I develop a relationship with a higher power that is personal, meaningful, and has results that I can see in my everyday life- "results count in recovery," (Basic Text 6th Edition, p44).

For me, I believe in the exceptional value of "inconvenient service" as well: those times where I've got plans and God says "no DanO, my plans are more important." I'm not saying that every single time in these situations I don't pick up the phone, because sometimes I do; nevertheless, I'm honestly not willing to write about those moments, as that's not the focus of this article. I think what I'm trying to share here is that I've learned that there's very little in life that needs to be handled in the next hour, so my phone is on silent during the meeting. Sometimes I'll text people back during the meeting to let them know I'm in a meeting and will call back, and sometimes I actually feel bad about that because it detracts from the sacred value of the meeting for me, and also carries the message to the newcomer who may be watching that it's ok to play on your phone while you're in a meeting- I don't believe that it is ok, nor do I believe I'm so important that I'm constantly being watched by others; but I acknowledge my small sphere of influence. I believe that holding a reverence for meetings and not getting up once I sit down (even when I'm late, once I'm down I'm down, period) until it's over has value to me, even if I do horse-around a little too often during meetings. And I believe, wherever I am, having my phone on silent helps me maintain a sense of true engagement with my surroundings.

Again, I'm not perfect, and am definitely still a work in progress, and who knows maybe I'll retract this entire viewpoint next year if I stay blessed, but it's been working for me. I'm also sure to indicate this to these men in the beginning- you can be as needy as you want, but it doesn't mean I'm going to change this process for you. I explain to them if they want me to sponsor them, I have expectations that they will call me every day, leave me a message, and work the steps. And for some crazy reason that is beyond my understanding, through God's grace and mercy, the men I'm honored to sponsor, with whom I often create real, lasting relationships, tend to stay clean. Imagine that!!! The twelve steps being the focus of sponsorship rather than me playing uncertified counselor and trying to give advice and tell them how to live their lives; and instead sharing personal experience with each other... (Still working on becoming willing to let go of that sarcasm.) And I know that that's not ME that's working those miracles, I know it's the journey through the twelve steps of Narcotics Anonymous that provides us all this marvelous choice- to go on to the bitter ends, or find a new way to live.

In loving service from a satisfied and grateful member of Narcotics Anonymous,

-Daniel O.