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Vigilance for the Long Haul

Many of us leave not when things are horrible, but when we have one more spiritual hump to get over. We lose our way right before the miracle—sometimes again and again.

— Living Clean, Chapter 1, “Growing Pains”

Most of us have heard the saying, “Don’t leave before the miracle happens.” For newcomers, that can mean staying in a meeting even when the urge to leave feels like more than we can handle. After a little time clean, it might mean taking one more phone call from the sponsee who hears nothing we say or choosing not to react when our boss or significant other pushes our last button—again (and again and again).

But how do we get there? How does the newcomer stay in the seat when everything in them screams: Get up! Get out of here! How does the sponsor dig deep and offer experience, strength, and hope to the troubled sponsee, instead of just sighing deeply and asking, “Have you prayed about it?” How do we shift our focus from the momentary frustration of an argument to the fulfillment we experience in our relationship or career?

It’s easy to do the right thing when things are going well, when we’re getting what we want or think we deserve. Sometimes, though, the “rewards” might seem minimal or feel like they’re taking forever to arrive.

Some members have described recovery as being “a marathon, not a sprint.” Marathoners call it “hitting the wall”—that point in the race when it feels impossible to keep going, and there’s no end in sight. It happens in recovery, too: We live by these principles for months, years, even decades, but some of our hopes and dreams still seem so out of reach. We can’t even see the finish line yet, and we are TIRED. We have to remember that there is no “finish line” in a just-for-today program. We’re not here for the reward at the end.

We keep the pace. Even if it’s slow and steady, we keep moving forward whether we feel like it or not. We might need to stop at an aid station—for runners, a cup of cold water or sports drink every couple of miles makes it possible to go the distance. In recovery, coffee or tea with another addict can get us over that next spiritual hump—to the miracle on the other side.

When I feel like quitting, I’ll take a moment to remember that recovery is a journey, not a destination. I will be vigilant and keep moving forward.
30 MAY

Accepting Another’s Path

I have learned to love and to accept the people I sponsor as the people they are—not little mirror-images of me or any other model of recovery.

—Sponsorship, Chapter 3, “To the Sponsor”

Each of us looks for a sponsor who does the deal: trusts a Higher Power, cleans house, and helps other addicts. We seek out experienced members who have what we want and will accept us without judgment. Most importantly, we look for sponsors who will offer loving guidance through the Twelve Steps of NA.

Such love takes many forms. Some of us rely on our sponsors for an unbiased perspective on our thoughts and behaviors. Others appreciate being offered gentle guidance, tempered with loads of support and empathy. Whether our sponsors apply a firm hand or a soft touch, we learn to confide in them. Their acceptance of us—warts and all—helps us to accept that everything is as it should be.

Working Steps is a process of self-discovery. With a sponsor to hold the flashlight, our hands are free to dig deep. They help us figure out who we are and who we’re not. As one member described it, “This process taught me not to fear the truth about myself. It turns out that I’m not as good or as bad as I thought I was.”

We can learn a lot about recovery by talking to more experienced members. To find what’s true for ourselves, however, it’s helpful to have someone to question our ideas. As one member put it, “Instead of telling me what to do, my sponsor helped me figure out my own answers about who I am.” We may aspire to be like our sponsors at first, but few sponsors are looking to mold a mini-me. Instead, they help us to be ourselves.

My sponsor’s love and acceptance helped me discover who I am, who I’m not, and who I want to be. Today I’ll try to practice those same principles and help someone else on their recovery journey.