

Using the term 'qualifier'

By Joan W., California

I have become increasingly aware of the use of the term "qualifier" at meetings over the last few years. At the newcomer meetings that I attend, newcomers have repeatedly asked what "qualifier" means.

When something doesn't feel right to me, I look to our literature for guidance, and I have not been able to find any reference to that term. I did however read Tradition Five, as well as *Paths to Recovery* (B-24) p. 180, where it states that "only the prospective members themselves can determine whether they are eligible for membership in Al-Anon." Using the term "qualifier" seems to me to add a pressure that they have to immediately identify an alcoholic to comply with some rule that we have.

We recently discussed the issue at my home group's business meet-

ing and several people liked the idea of using words like "I came because of my spouse's drinking," or "I'm here because of my loved one's behavior," which allows the newcomer to identify more readily with our members. After our discussion, I believe the consensus was to avoid the term "qualifier" so as not to send a message of "musts" in Al-Anon.

I'm sure our group would value feedback on this issue for further discussion.

Send your comments to The Forum, 1600 Corporate Landing Parkway, Virginia Beach, VA 23454; fax: (757) 563-1655; e-mail: wso@al-anon.org. We will publish some responses in upcoming issues and also forward each response to the writer.

Have you shared yet about intimacy?

It's not too late to send in your sharing for INTIMACY IN ALCOHOLIC RELATIONSHIPS (working title).

For more details on the project, and a series of questions that may inspire your sharing, please visit the Members' Web site at www.al-anon.org/members. Click on "Submit a personal sharing."

Thank you for sharing!

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Members respond

In the December 2013 issue of *The Forum*, Joan W., of California raised the following issue: "I have become increasingly aware of the use of the term 'qualifier' at meetings over the last few years. At the newcomer meetings that I attend, newcomers have repeatedly asked what 'qualifier' means." Here are some of the responses we received.

Opinions expressed herein are not to be attributed to Al-Anon as a whole.

Jake M. in MA: I was very pleased to read that article. For quite some time, I've been upset when long-time members use this term. I've also experienced newcomers at our meetings asking the question, "What do I have to do to qualify for membership in Al-Anon?"

I feel that the term "qualifier" is misleading, and part of new age jargon/psychobabble which makes one feel guilty about saying another's drinking, thinking, or attitude bothers them. New age thinking, i.e. "we shouldn't hurt anyone's feelings" discourages Al-Anon's efforts to pass on straightforward recovery principles.

This matter was discussed at my home group's business meeting and it was suggested that one person read the article from *The Forum*, followed by feedback from the group members. Hopefully, our group will make a decision to cease using the term "qualifier."

Anonymous: I too dislike the term "qualifier." The Third Tradition states that the only require-

ment for joining Al-Anon is that there be a problem of alcoholism in a relative or friend; there is not mention that we have to specify who that person is.

In my case, I joined because of our daughter's drinking. I came to find out that my immediate family was permeated with persons who have alcohol problems. My list of "qualifiers" would take five minutes to name!

I can imagine newcomers feeling that they have to justify their attendance in Al-Anon. Maybe a newcomer wouldn't want to share because they didn't have the "right" qualifier or the same one as others. We learn in Al-Anon not to focus on the alcoholic, but to focus on ourselves.

Let's please keep Al-Anon simple with no "musts."

Elaine V.: I am a longtime member of Al-Anon. I was married to an alcoholic for 16 years. He is now deceased. I started to hear the term "qualifier" in the past six months. I wondered where it came from.



I don't like the term and it would make me cringe when I would hear others use the word. I don't like it because it puts blame on another person for their need for Al-Anon. It makes it sound like, "If it weren't for the alcoholic, I wouldn't be here." I believe that I am the qualifier. I am the person who needs help from Al-Anon to change and grow.

Carol J. in CA: I've never cared for the term "qualifier." To me, it sounds too much like I'm blam-

ing someone else for my being in Al-Anon. Yes, someone's drinking bothered me, but my own craziness is what drove me to seek help.

Something I heard a long time ago in a meeting reminds me that my focus needs to be on *me!*

Using the term "qualifier" makes it sound like I'd be "fine" if it weren't for someone else—that is *so not true.*

Editor's note: We try to print a balance of responses but in this case, we have only received responses from members who prefer not to use the term "qualifier."