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Season 05. Episode 13

Podcast Title: You're Not Thinking Straight

Hello, I'm Bruno J., and welcome back to Busting Addiction and Its Myths, and if you are a first-time listener, welcome aboard.

This marks episode 13 of season 5, which makes it 65 total episodes, once a week without a break. Drug addiction and alcoholism are such wide and deep topics that there are always new insights to bring to our audience.

We are also a bit proud of being named as one of the top 100 podcasts in our category by Feedspot, a respected third party, so we must be doing something right, bringing what we hope are valuable perspectives to the challenges of addictive disorder.

Today, I want to talk about the cunning, befuddling and sneaky nature of the addict's or alcoholic's thought process and how that can provoke insane responses on the part of the loved one.

I have spoken before about the undeniable fact that when there is an addict in the house, whether living under the same roof or not, the whole family succumbs to the addiction.

Academic studies abound, and they all report the same truths: that an addict's behaviour affects everyone in the family in some negative way, that the family unit becomes dysfunctional as a result, and that the family invariably reacts in irrational ways.

Much of what the family tries to do is related to controlling the addict's abuse of drugs or alcohol, to covering up the abuse out of shame, to some form of enabling (such as paying for a bounced check), to other behaviours that stir even more conflict or retaliatory action such as locking him out of the house, screaming or even more violent behaviour.

Some of these actions are well-intended, out of love, but they are also completely misguided, arising from a lack of understanding of the nature of the disease.

Let us first examine how a committed, that is, a full-blown addict actually thinks, that is, how his thinking is organised.

It might help you understand how to deal with "it" better if you think about the difference between the *addict* and the *addiction*. It is a wide gulf, actually, because the concept leads us to think very differently about the issue. It leads us to a more objective and realistic view, which is what my entire podcast is about.

The insight I quote below comes from Addict in The House, authored by Robin Barnette, a recognised educator in the addictions and recovery field. That said, his is a common view among those who have experience in the field.

He says: "Saying no to someone who is obviously suffering is agonising. But saying no to your loved one's *addiction* can be gratifying and empowering. When you truly grasp that you're fighting the addiction, not your addicted loved one, it becomes much easier to set boundaries... and you'll become more able to truly help and to avoid inadvertently feeding the addiction".

Therefore, it also helps to remember that addiction's *only purpose is to feed itself*.

To do so, it uses a wide array of strategies, hijacking the addict's intelligence, skills, and relationships.

So, when I say that you're not thinking straight, I mean that you (Mr. Addict) *can't think straight because the addiction is doing the thinking for you*.

It has taken over your brain, and now you, acting on behalf of your addiction, are making weird decisions that only sabotage your well-being and hurt your loved ones.

Here are the survival strategies that the addiction deploys to protect its existence:

1. *Denial* takes countless forms in and of itself besides straight-up lying. It includes minimising to make the quantity used more "acceptable", as if there were an acceptable level of cocaine one would use. Denial also includes shifting the focus to another abuser by saying: "You think I'm bad, now Johnny over there, he's a real addict, not me".

Any success, such as a decent job or good grades that the addict is still achieving will also be quoted as evidence that he is "normal".

2. *Justification* is when an addict offers seemingly logical reasons for drinking or using, and for the resultant behaviour that follows. Justification is both internal and external. The addict may decide to

steal mom's necklace to pawn, *saying to himself* that she hasn't worn it in years, and besides "she won't miss it anyway".

External justifications for using or drinking to excess are expressed in a way that family members and others will easily relate to. Addicts will express innocuous-sounding excuses for using, like "blowing off steam", "unwinding", "chill", and so on, often connected to a "stressful" job or marriage.

What the family does not point out or even think about, is that everyone experiences stress in life, but not everyone abuses substances to escape reality and deaden the pain that sometimes comes with it.

3. *Internal deception* means we will not admit that we have a problem (It was 20 years before I understood that myself, having sobered up at the age of 46.)

Most deception has to do with hiding the fact of use or abuse from family members, who also happen to be the easiest to deceive due to the level of trust inherent in most family units.

They just do not want to believe that they have "that kind of problem", not in their family, anyway.

Remember that the addiction fears discovery and is terrified of losing the ability to feed itself with its drug of choice.

That's what these strategies are designed to do - find any way for the addiction not to get found out.

4. *Manipulation* is the MO for the addiction to get what it wants and to avoid what it doesn't. Of all the tools addiction uses to protect itself, its favourite might be *you*.

The most commonly exploited quality is *love*.

The more someone cares for the addict, the more susceptible the family member will be to inadvertently protecting the addiction.

Perhaps the most flagrant example is blaming the family member for "the problem". In a furious argument, the addict will say: "We wouldn't be having these problems if you weren't so f..ng crazy".

Notice the shift to "we". What happens next is that the family member immediately becomes defensive, and while confused mom is explaining herself - her son has deflected the question - he makes his getaway.

"Remember", I say to my Al Anon friends: "he doesn't see his addiction as the problem, he sees *you* as the problem because you are in the way".

So, what have learned to help explain the idea that the addict or alcoholic *is not at any time thinking straight* because the addiction has taken over his entire thought process?

1. Family members need to make the distinction between the person as an addict and the addiction as an entity that warps his thinking and takes over his thought process.
2. The sole purpose of the addiction is to feed and protect itself. It lives in constant fear of death, of being denied the means to stay alive and thrive.
3. Therefore it employs a full suite of clever strategies designed to have it flourish, and to protect itself whenever threatened. It plays both offence and defence.
4. The main strategies addiction and alcoholism to keep their motors running are: denial, justification, deception, and manipulation of the people who love them the most.
5. Recognising that it's the addiction which has stolen a love one's thinking makes it easier to say no to the person one loves and will prove to be a liberating and empowering idea.