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Busting Addiction and Its Myths Episode 3 Season 3 Part 2 of 2

Robert Speaks About Recovery - Part 2 of 2

The Cunning, Baffling, Powerful Family Disease: Part two of my interview with veteran counsellor Robert.

Here is what Robert, our lead counsellor at SafeHouse Rehab Thailand, talks about in the second part of his interview, explaining what it takes for him to stay clean and sober and what one can do (and not do) for a loved one suffering from addictive disease.

1. I have acquired a great deal of empathy for the families of addicts and alcoholics because of my exceptionally hard upbringing as a poor bi-racial kid in the UK.
2. To get sober, I had to admit that my best thinking got me to the gates of death and hell, and that I needed to surrender my old ways of thinking.
3. To stay sober, I needed to see this as a commitment to a new way of life and to understand that it was an all or nothing deal, that it was 10% stopping drug abuse and 90%-character development.

4. It is true that for most addicts, they need to hit bottom before they accept help, but there is also an informed intervention about which there is lots of guidance.

5. The most important thing that actually can be done by anyone who loves an addict, for sure, is to shift the focus from the addict to oneself, because it is all about what you *do have the power* to do.

Back to Robert, our veteran counsellor whom we lured to Thailand from his practice in the UK. Coming in from the rain and fog of London to our year-round warm and sunny climate might have had something to do with it.

Robert, I promised to ask you for our part two of this interview these questions: what does it take for an addict/alcoholic to not only get sober, stay sober, and beyond that, to go onto to live a transformed life free of the compulsion to sabotage oneself and to live a life which we call “happy, joyous and free” ?

Part two of that question: what can a parent or anyone who loves an addict do to get an addict to make the change from his current way of existence to a new way of life?

Robert answers: “You’ve touched on the very reason for what I now devote my life to. First, I go back to the struggles I lived through as an unwanted bi-racial kid growing up in a poor part of London. That set me up for a life of dysfunction and I resorted to smoking crack cocaine to escape the pain, the environment, my so-called home life where my stepdad beat me, and so on.

How does that experience help me? Well, in several ways: one, I know that if I pick up a drug again – especially crack cocaine - it'll be worse than ever, as addiction is progressive; it always gets worse, guaranteed; two, I never want to go back there because it was hell and I hurt a lot of people, including my six children - I was a true menace to society; three, I now have genuine empathy for those who suffer from this disease, knowing it to be a disease and not some moral failing.

If a client or a fellow in my recovery program understands that I am also an addict at heart, but now recovered, they are far more likely to trust what I say, because they know it comes from the heart and is sincerely only meant to help them.

So, I am therefore far more effective as a professional for having been gone through both the hell and the redemption that comes with making amends and being of use to my fellow addict and to help the society which we inhabit.

The first thing I had to do after all the effort I had made to stop using drugs was to accept that my best thinking got me nowhere, and that I had to let go of my old ideas, or the result would be zero until I let go completely. In other words, this is an all or nothing deal.

We believe in our recovery program that we needed to admit to our innermost selves that we could not be like normal people, that we cannot take it or leave it, that we had lost the power of choice when it came to alcohol or drugs, legal or not".

I then ask: "So it's about surrender, or is it commitment"?

Robert states in return: "It's both. Surrender is a dirty word today, more than ever in our combative society. But that simply means to me that I had to put down my ego weapon and stop arguing and resisting something that sounded totally foreign to my ears. and that I needed to jump in with both feet and give it my all.

That was not too hard because I was so damn motivated to get out of the hell, I was living in.

I did realize at the time -20 years ago - that I was getting ready to die. On the path to destruction.

I did not realize, however, that the basis of my recovery consisted not just stopping drug abuse, but that it was 90% about character development, because I never had any - no training, no good parenting, no idea what good character was.

I did not understand as I do now that what will truly keep me clean and sober is working the principals of honesty, kindness and unselfishness along with some courage that I get from prayer and from others around me whom I trust and love.

That way, I do not have to control my cravings because I do not have any. They were lifted very soon after I threw in the towel and asked for help, from any power greater than me. I have not been haunted since".

I then ask: "Robert, what can a parent or loved one do to steer the addict in the right direction, or said more directly, to get him to stop using drugs, forever"?

He states: " Bruno, the first scary answer is that anyone who loves the addict has to get over this idea that it's not the loved one's decision to make and that

the addict has to hit bottom first before he or she will accept help. Problem there is that the addict may stay down there the rest of his life, not matter what you do or what happens to him. Any mental illness, even minor, gets worse left untreated. And so on.

The second answer is that some experts ask the question a different way. They ask that *if hitting bottom is just a way for them to get ready to accept help, then what else could help get them ready?*

What they point to then is an informed and supervised *intervention*, and I emphasize *informed*. I will refer you to an excellent review of and training manual for a family intervention. It's authored by two well-regarded professionals, Debra, and Jeff Jay, called [Love First, A Family's Guide to Intervention](#).

In it you will not only find out how to set up and conduct a proper intervention but also you will get some astonishing insights into how an addict's mind actually works. Not what you would expect unless you've been there as we both have.

The other answer, and this is the most do-able and important for you, and it has to do with what you are doing to get out from under this family disease wherein you have all become sick without knowing it.

That means that you need to shift the focus from your addict to yourself and accept the truth that you are as powerless over this disease as is the addict himself. No power whatsoever, no matter what you now believe or what you may have tried in the past.

Whatever you tried to do, you more than likely did it in a well-meaning way, but you were misguided. You were uneducated about the cunning, baffling nature of addictive disorder. Then there is the other side: you felt rage, resentment, the desire to punish, you were afraid of the next moment, you walked on eggshells, the addict was living in your head rent free 24/7.

You became the co-dependent: your emotional well-being was chained to your addict's behaviour. You were up only when he was up, and you were down whenever he was down or mean to you. You felt responsible for making him feel better and he pushed you away anyway, so you felt unloved by the one you love.

You come to realize that you deserve a better way of living, no longer enslaved to his disease, and you take steps toward your liberation, and don't feel guilty about it. You find that he is occupying less and less of your mind space so that you have moments, then hours, then days of peace, at last.

You find your way there by joining a recovery group like Al Anon, found at al-anon.org, and reading a book like Melody Beattie's Co-dependent No More: How to Stop Trying to Control Others and Care for Yourself. The title itself defines the issue nicely.

Finally, even if you find yourself free of this disease by working your own program, swimming in your own lane and not allowing anyone to violate it or you violate the other person's- in other words know the boundaries - and gain a healthy, loving detachment from "his "insanity, even then there are some things you can't undo. That's a reality you can make amends for but can't change, as there is no hope of a better past. Ok to look at the video to learn from it, but you don't need to stare at it.

You will also find that, as Al Anon promises, when you stop trying to control and accept things as they are, and when you start acting in a compassionate, loving and non-enabling way, the family situation will get better and the odds are that loved one is more likely to seek help.

I hope all of that helps someone who needs and deserves help with this cunning, baffling, powerful disease. God knows we all need help.

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