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Busting Addiction and Its Myths Episode 5 Season 3

An Interview with Tim -Words of wisdom for families

This records my interview with Tim, who owns and operates a sober living home and is himself a long-time recovering person.

This article covers these topics:

1. The secret is there is no secret. Everything an addict or alcoholic needs to know has been written and published, from 1939 until now.
2. The longer an addict/alcoholic stays in a somewhat controlled recovering environment, the greater the chances of long-term success.
3. The family has no idea and will often deny that they are as sick as the addict, that they are as powerless over addiction as is the addict.
4. The family member doesn't realize that she needs to shift the focus from the addict to herself to start the healing process.

5. There is much help available, from Al Anon, to Co-dependents Anonymous, to counsellors trained in addiction. AODA stands for Alcohol or Drug Addiction trained professionals.

I ask Tim: “What possessed you to start a sober living facility? I managed a place called the Manitoba House and I know it’s way more difficult than it looks”.

Tim: “ I believe I’m a natural caregiver and after I sobered up 20+ years ago, I decided that it was time for a really solid sober living facility in our city that could house more than a handful of men - yes, this is not a co-ed place – and provide them with a firm foundation that would help them achieve long term sobriety. So, I bought a duplex and spent a year rehabbing it to accommodate ten men in five bedrooms, with three bathrooms and two kitchens, and I decided to call it Promise View. We’ve been here now almost ten years”.

Q: “So I am sure you have learned a lot in that time, and that’s the main reason we are here today, and we are grateful for that. First question then is: tell me about the idea that the secret is there is no secret”.

Tim: “People, by that I mean the parents and other loved ones and the addicts or alcoholics themselves have these misguided notions that AA is a cult, or that there is a secret way around addiction or that it can actually be cured if only they were given the secret code.

A lot, but not everything, is known about addiction and alcoholism, and more is known about how to arrest it and treat it than is known about the cause. That is very interesting to me, but the point is we know an awful lot about how to beat this horrible disease.

One of the things I preach, and this is as much for the sake of the family as it is for the addict, is that the longer you stay in a recovering, safe environment, the better are the odds that you’ll stay clean and sober long term.

You would be shocked and amazed, however, at how wrong we can often be about someone’s chances of succeeding. I’ve had 100% confidence a guy would make it leaving here and he drives his truck over to the very nearest bar – and there lots of them within a mile –and gets drunk and then calls me begging to come back, or better yet, I get a call from the cops that one of my boys just got arrested for drunk driving, less than a week after leaving.

The point is that recovery is an inside job, in that you do not really know what is going on in the mind of the alcoholic, since they are so good at putting on a show for their audience, parents, doctors, counsellors, and even judges.

By and large, however, the longer they stay in our type of environment, the more time they have to establish a healthy way of living. Which means accepting responsibility for chores and other things, making time for prayer and meditation, going to AA or NA meetings, showing up on time for work if they work, getting and meeting with a sponsor on a regular basis, dumping friends who still use or drink, and not drinking or using one day at a time, and working the 12 steps of AA or CA or NA.

The secret is a daily commitment to change your thinking and your actions in a healthy direction”.

Q: “Now tell us about the role of the family. Do some illusions have to be smashed”?

Tim: “This is where it gets interesting. I’ve known a few families who dumped their problem child off on us and the rest of them all go on a cruise! Or they feel that now it’s all up to the facility to fix their kid, and that the boy just has to relax and let others care for him, just like in the cradle of enabling that he lived in at home until he got into big trouble with the law. And then it costs mom and dad way too much, and now he’s dumped on us.

They haven’t realized, either, that they are as powerless over their son’s addiction as is the son, and they have tried everything in the world to get him to stop or to control his using. They will deny that this is a family disease, and that they are all nuts, not just the problem child. Denial is a central problem in recovery. Smashing denial gets you the truth.

Then another thing happens that takes them by complete surprise: I tell them they need to shift the focus from their son’s problem to what they can do for themselves to heal and recover from the insanity imposed by this disease.

I explain how their actions were well-intentioned but misguided, as they were dancing with the devil but didn’t know it. They thought they could control it, or cure it, and they also suspected that that they may have caused it, and all of that was an illusion that had no impact on the course of this progressive disorder.

Most parents and loved ones close to the addict alcoholic feel guilty that they need to re-focus their energy to caring for themselves, as opposed to doing something for their addict, when all they can do is talk them into treatment or have them go to a 12-step meeting.

If they are lucky enough to find themselves at an Al Anon meeting, 12-step meetings for families and close friends of addicts/alcoholics, they will learn about a new way of loving, of loving detachment, about non-enabling, and about taking better care of themselves. Fact is there is lots of help available for those who are crying out for help: Al Anon, Co-dependents Anonymous, counsellors, Open AA meetings or Open Al Anon meetings where the public is invited to hear speakers from “both sides of the aisle” share their experience, strength and hope”.

Q: “And the main role of the family is...”?

Tim: “Bottom line, the family is the main and often the only force in getting the loved one, the addict or alcoholic, to accept help. In second place is their employer. The family can see the damage to their loved one while the loved one is blinded by his addiction. The employer often cares enough to give the employee a leave of absence and will take his employee back under certain obvious conditions. But ultimately it is always up to the individual to face the truth, for it is knowing and acting upon the truth that he will be set free”.

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