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Season 04. Episode 08

Podcast Title: Are You Wasting Your Energy?

I'm Bruno J.

The tidal wave of addiction and alcoholism continues unabated, even though the substances involved are morphing. Teenage use of alcohol in the US is declining and being replaced by even more dangerous substances, including cheap Fentanyl, a synthetic opioid that's 100 times more powerful than heroin per gram.

In the US, there are now more people dead from drug overdoses than die from car and truck/SUV accidents. That's more than 30 thousand a year. The sad number comes in at 82 victims each and every day all year long. And it is not getting better.

One great organization that's worth checking out is called Shatterproof (www.shatterproof.org). They are very well run, (I happen to have met the founder Gary Mendell); they are dedicated to educating the public on the nature of addiction, on the injustice of stigma, on the need for treatment, not jail. The main mission is to promote legislation affecting addiction treatment and shaping medical curricula that will enable more physicians to diagnose and refer addicts to the right professionals and treatment centres.

Why are we talking about this?

The sad facts concerning the disastrous consequences of the opioid epidemic, made worse by the corona virus pandemic, point to the need for a more enlightened public attitude and more assertive approaches to prevention and treatment.

And then there is the personal side of this dilemma.

You as an individual, as just one person in the family, may be able to do absolutely nothing about your loved one's addiction, and you are *wasting your energy* trying to change your addict.

But there are things you *can* do.

You can help the cause by getting educated and supporting an organization like Shatterproof, and/or getting in touch with your local mental health county or city agency and ask what an ordinary citizen can do. You will be surprised at what is possible.

An example: I volunteered to hold meetings in our local county jail for male clients who were temporary guests of the state. I learned that a full 90% of the inmates who were there awaiting trial were arrested in connection with an offense that was either directly or indirectly associated with drugs or alcohol.

There are women in jail for nonviolent offenses who have become separated from their children, whose children are often taken from them to overstretched county authorities to deal with. There are all kinds of ways to help those affected by addictive disease, and without judging. We are the lucky ones if we are not in jail and reasonably healthy, with some cash flow coming in.

My sense of gratitude when I encounter those whose lives have been shattered by substance reaches new heights every time, I go even a little out of my way to help.

There are ways to help yourself, because this is really about you, not about the addict or alcoholic.

Allow me to explain. The following narrative is drawn largely from the book [How Al-Anon Works](#) and it is so direct, the truth is undeniable.

Each of our lives has been devastated by someone else's drinking and drug abuse. We cannot change that fact. We have been profoundly affected by the

disease of alcoholism and drug abuse. Its effects continue to permeate our lives. Nor can we change the behaviour or attitudes around us. This includes other family members who are in denial, or who are in a rage, looking to punish the perpetrator.

We can't even put a temporary stop to the drinking or drugging. We are powerless over alcohol and drugs. As long as we persist in the delusion that we can control or cure the addiction, its symptoms, or its effects, we continue to fight a battle that we cannot and will not ever win.

Our self-esteem suffers, our relationships suffer, and our ability to enjoy life suffers.

Here is the clincher, and the title to this essay.

All of our energy is wasted on a hopeless endeavour until there is nothing left over for attending to our own needs. Instead of giving of ourselves, we give ourselves away.

Our lives have become unmanageable. This realization is our first halting and often scary first step into the light of truth.

Life becomes unmanageable whenever we lose perspective about what is and what is not our responsibility. We take offense at actions that have nothing to do with us. Fact is, addicts do what they do because that's what addicts do: they lie, they steal, they make promises that they break without even a hint of guilt.

At some point in your healing, you will be able to detach from the addict's insanity in a healthy and loving way. That is your goal.

In the meantime, however, we think that by intervening we can ignite some positive change. Our misplaced concern for others becomes intrusive, meddling, resented and absolutely doomed to total failure.

Instead of helping those we care about, we demonstrate a lack of respect and create discord in our relationships, which is the last thing we wanted.

When our preoccupation with others distracts us from our own responsibilities to attend to our physical, emotional, and spiritual health, we suffer, and needlessly so.

By surrendering to a simple truth, that we are completely, utterly powerless over someone else's addiction or alcoholism, we achieve the first of many victories that follow.

Taking this first step allows a great weight to fall from our shoulders. We let go of the losing battle we have been waging. *We are done with wasting our energy on an illusion.*

This realization is a big deal. Smashing the myth that we are responsible for the addict's behaviour unleashes new energy that we can harness to shape our own future, unencumbered by fear, resentment, and a bad opinion of ourselves.

We no longer feel isolated; we meet people in the same boat who have seen the light and have conquered their fear and shame.

We have discovered that there's a community of thousands of people drawn from every sector of society, for we know that addiction is an equal opportunity disease. It respects absolutely nothing, not education, nor social class, age, or race.

Having been blessed with the gift of desperation, we step into the light and go on to help others who are in despair themselves.

We are finally putting our energy to productive use, instead of allowing it to fuel the illusion that we can, on our own, win a battle with an enemy over whom we have no power.

We have learned that, speaking for the family member who loves an addict:

1. Addiction has had a far more powerful effect than we realized. It denied us any sense of normalcy and dealt out punishment that, ironically, we inflicted upon ourselves.
2. All of our energy is wasted on a hopeless endeavour until there is nothing left over for attending to our own needs. Instead of giving of ourselves, we give ourselves away.
3. By surrendering to the simple truth, that we are completely powerless over someone else's addiction or alcoholism, we begin to unleash better possibilities for ourselves.
4. We now understand that at some point in our healing, we will be able to detach from the addict's insanity in a healthy and loving way. That is our goal.

5. We are then able to live our lives unencumbered by fear, resentment, self-pity, or regret. We are able to unleash boundless energy in pursuit of our own aspirations.