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Season 04. Episode 11

## Podcast Title: You Deserve a Better You

Hi, I'm Bruno J

I seem to have irritated a number of well-meaning family members of alcoholics and addicts by suggesting that they need to shift the focus from their loved one to themselves if they are to hold out any hope of having a peaceful and productive life.

The reality is that there is not much, if anything, you can do to change the trajectory of your loved one's disease, short of an intervention, and even then, there's no guarantee that it will stick. But at least you might have the satisfaction of knowing that you tried your best. There is really no such thing as failure so long as you chalk it up as a learning experience.

Let me say this about interventions, and I am a believer in anything that could bring a suffering addict out of the cold and into the light.

Interventions are complicated, often very costly. They take preparation, education and commitment from family and others who care about an addict and want their loved one to make the U turn toward a drug-free life.

There are two types of interventions: professional and family directed.

In a professional intervention, the kind you might have seen on the show of the same name, the professional basically coaches the family on everything they need to say and do, and the professional leads the live intervention itself.

A family intervention is much more challenging because it is managed by people who have no management experience in this type of unwieldy process. Here are the key issues the family needs to address: the family has to agree on the need to intervene; the when and where needs to be established; participants need to be 100% on the same page as to the message; the treatment facility needs to be set to take a new client into treatment; the consequences of a refusal to accept help needs to be agreed to and firmly held to.

I strongly advise that if you are considering the possibility of a family-led intervention, you consult with a professional anyway and he or she will likely be happy to advise you on a "do-it-yourself" intervention.

The second thing I would ask of you is to at least read up on what it would take to plan and execute a successful intervention.

One of the very best sources are two professionals, Jeff, and Debra Jay, who have written and updated the book Love First A Family's Guide to Intervention. I highly recommend that everyone on your intervention team read and discuss the main points the authors make in helping you understand how to go about planning the intervention.

Not only do they cover the process of an intervention, they also provide those who are unfamiliar with the disease - which is almost everyone - some needed insights on how active addicts think and why they behave as they do.

Remember please that active addicts and alcoholics are sick and twisted people who will do almost anything to evade the truth, and that their underlying, driving motive is to get and stay drunk and high.

So, if you are able to manoeuvre your addict into sitting still for just long enough to have a healthy confrontation with those who love him, while he is somewhat straight, that in and of itself is a victory worth writing home about.

And even with that, while about half of interventions result in the addict agreeing to surrender and accept help, there is no guarantee of long-term success.

I myself have been involved in four interventions in the last 25 years, and every one of them was high drama, intensely emotional, painful, and inspiring, all in the same moment. Two of them went off the rails when unthinking family members used the intervention as a means of venting their resentments.

So, there is indeed that one major option, the intervention, that you can try in order to change the trajectory of the disease.

There is a chance but no guarantee of success.

Even if the intervention were to be successful, however that is to be defined, the critical, necessary change for your life to become better, to transform to something approaching normalcy, happens on the inside, not on the outside.

Let me put it this way: if you don't address what the disease has done to your psyche, it won't matter whether your loved one cleans up or not. You will still be fearful, controlling, and resentful, unless you embark on the path of healing for yourself, and only for yourself.

So, let's talk about what that might mean.

Chances are that your self-esteem has taken a hit because you somehow thought that his or her addiction was at least partly your fault. You stared at the videotape of times past and had those "if only" thoughts.

You did not yet know that there was little you could have done save very early before you even knew to look for signs. You can accept this rationally, but you still cling to the idea emotionally.

Chances are that, in your overwhelming focus on your loved one's well-being, you neglected your physical health, putting yourself always in second place in the mistaken belief that your sacrifices and your worries would create a miracle.

Chances are that you may be riding an emotional roller coaster where you are OK only if he is OK with you and you are miserable if he is unhappy with you.

You confuse interference with love, and you cannot understand why your loved one tells you to back off, whether it's called for or not.

Your resentment of the addict causes you to become unreasonable with everyone in your home. You live in the future, fearful of what it might bring, of what the alcoholic might do.

These things didn't materialize overnight. It took a long time for these symptoms of unhealthy living to develop into a serious state of co-dependency.

The main illusion that drives all of this behaviour and all these beliefs is the notion that we have any power over the disease, and we end up doing these misguided things, and we believe these myths because we are so desperate to have this nightmare over with, please.

So, the very first thing is to let go of old, ineffective ideas, and to adopt a new and healthy way of thinking.

The essence of the *new* idea is based on the principals practiced by the members of the Al-Anon program. Before you bail out, allow me to remind you that many, if not most, professionals in the field of addiction recommend some sort of support group to help you through this phase of your life.

Al Anon happens to be a well-respected and structured program of support for anyone who has been affected by alcoholism and drug addiction. I hasten to add that no one program has a monopoly on the truth when it comes to recovery.

The many people whom I've come to know over the last 25 years will tell you that being able to share their worries and joys with others in the essentially the same situation has made the difference between darkness and light.

Closed meetings of Al-Anon are actually open to anyone who needs them, and your privacy is always respected and assured as a matter of long-standing principal. The "Open" meetings are those where the public is invited to attend and hear speakers share their stories of recovery.

Sometimes one speaker at the Open meeting is the Al Anon member and the other is the alcoholic (now sober) spouse of the Al Anon member. Those types of meetings can be truly instructive and are always great fun.

Here's what it says in the Al-Anon preamble, which is read before every meeting.

The Al-Anon Family Groups are a fellowship of relatives and friends who share their experience, strength, and hope, in order to solve their common problems. *We believe that alcoholism is a family illness and that changed attitudes can aid recovery.*

Al-Anon has but one purpose: to help families of alcoholics.

So, it all starts with an essential truth, and unless fully embraced, any progress toward personal recovery is but a fleeting illusion.

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol and that our lives had become unmanageable.

I've spoken of the futility of fighting something over which we have no control. Unless we believe in that truth at the start, the disease will always have the upper hand. We will find in time that there is victory in surrender, but that is a hard one to grasp so early in the process.

We must surrender to the idea that we are powerless over someone else's addiction which has become the family's disease. It has the family in the grip of an obsession to try to control it somehow.

The next step is to ask ourselves: where can I acquire the power to overcome this deadly obsession?

Before you bolt out of here and start thinking now, he's going to bring up the God thing. Well, no, but I will bring up the idea that you probably need any power greater than yourself, because this is some heavy lifting that you don't want to do on your own.

Here's how that might work:

Quoting from How Al-anon Works: "Even if we were furious, shame-filled, or guilt-ridden, there is something amazing, something transforming that happens at an Al Anon meeting. We can't quite put our finger on what that "something" is or why we came away with a greater sense of peace than we walked in with. But it feels too good to ignore. So, we go to another meeting and discover that that "something" is still there.

Maybe, just maybe, we have found some sort of power that could do for us what we have not been able to do for ourselves. Perhaps this is the point at which we come to believe there could be, just could be, a power greater than the disease we have been trying to vanquish by our own power alone, all by ourselves.

So that becomes the beginning of the journey where you make the critical turn from the futile task of saving your loved one from the disease to becoming the person you were meant to be, unencumbered by the impossible, freed from

needlessly carrying a boulder on your shoulder, liberated from a dangerous, life-sucking myth.

You will re-acquire the joy of living in today, fearing not tomorrow, free to pursue your dreams again. You will finally be able to live the sane and serene life you have deserved all this time. The ultimate irony is that you were not able to see that possibility were it not for the desperation that brought you into the light.

So glad you could make it!

What did we learn today?

1. The reality is that there is not much, if anything, you can do to change the trajectory of your loved one's disease, short of an intervention. Even then, there's no guarantee that it will stick.
2. If you don't address what the disease has done to your psyche, it won't matter whether your loved one cleans up or not. You will still be fearful, controlling, and resentful, unless you embark on the path of healing for yourself, and only for yourself.
3. The main illusion that drives this state of mind is the notion that we have any power over the disease, and we end up doing misguided things, and we believe these myths because we are so desperate to have this nightmare over with.
4. So the very first thing to get past the point of being stuck is to let go of old, ineffective ideas, and to adopt a new and healthy way of thinking.
5. We conclude in our desperation that we need to acquire some sort of power that could do for us what we have not been able to do for ourselves.
6. Some of us find that power in our Al-Anon meetings where the collective wisdom of its members guides us to a new and liberated way of life which we have deserved all along.