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# Early Intervention Saves Lives

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It's often been said: "alcoholics and addicts simply will not accept help until they hit bottom on their own and finally decide for themselves to get help." That common belief is incorrect, dangerous, and potentially deadly. In truth, a well-planned professional intervention can be very effective in raising an alcoholic's or addict's "bottom" and helping the person into life-saving treatment before serious consequences accumulate.





In my last column, we took a long hard look at just how astonishingly powerful the symptomology of Denial is in alcoholism and addiction cases. We also acknowledged that the Denial component in such cases is particularly supercharged among legal professionals. Because of our education and experience, we are highly skilled in the art of Denial and mounting a defense.

Many times, Denial is also very strong in those people who are around the alcoholic or addict. Family and friends try and keep the peace and may unwittingly enable and feed the disease of alcoholism or addiction. Peers and employers may simply turn a blind eye when the behavior is not yet impacting clients or the firm's bottom line. In truth, however, as the disease progresses, everyone involved is impacted, either from having the disease, or having the alcoholic or addict's behavior damage the people around them.

Ultimately, when things get bad enough, pure frustration sets in. A common fallback position is to finally give up on trying to help anymore and instead

simply hope that the alcoholic or addict hits bottom on their own somehow and gets help.

Intervention is an alternative that can shorten the process of hitting bottom. The art and science of intervention began to evolve in the 1960's with the legendary efforts of Dr. Vernon Johnson, an Episcopal Priest. He devoted much of his life to helping alcoholics into early recovery. Dr. Johnson's famous book, *I'll Quit Tomorrow: A Practical Guide to Alcoholism Treatment*, Harper & Row 1980, declares that it is pointless and dangerous to sit by and wait to help an alcoholic until he or she has hit bottom on their own.

The "Johnson Model" for intervention deems that each and every crisis that an alcoholic or addict encounters along the way represents an opportunity to break through the alcoholic's denial and convince them to accept help. A DUI arrest, loss of a job, or any other glaring consequence of ongoing substance abuse may provide the catalyst for conducting a successful intervention.

Intervention techniques continue to improve and experts Jeff and Debra Jay, both former clinicians at the Hazelden Foundation, have been recognized as national leaders in the field of intervention. The Jays' work has been noted by CNN, PBS, *Forbes*, *The Washington Post*, *Parade* magazine and *USA Today*. They have appeared frequently on the Jane Pauley Show and The Oprah Winfrey Show. In 2000, Hazelden published the Jays' definitive book, *Love First, A Family's Guide to Intervention* and a third edition was released in 2021. The Jays have authored and co-authored additional books, all of which are authoritative texts about intervention and addiction treatment.

One of the most identifiable advances in the Jays intervention design is their commitment to carefully structured and comprehensive support to the family before, during and even after the intervention. Research over the years has revealed that quick "hit-and-run" interventions may very well get an alcoholic into a treatment facility, but those efforts alone do not provide the family with what it needs to heal and support the alcoholic's or addict's long-term recovery after treatment.

Recovery from addiction is indeed a family mission and it is a marathon, not a

sprint. There will be rough patches in every person's recovery and there will also be challenges for the family members too. Families must be on guard not to default to their old status quo of coping behaviors that often unwittingly supported the disease of addiction and hurt rather than helped. To be successful in supporting the alcoholic or addict in recovery, a family must "stick to its guns" and render support as a well-trained team. A professional intervention provides that training.

An intervention offers needed relief to the family irrespective of whether or not the alcoholic or addict agrees to treatment or is successful in recovery. The Jays describe addiction as "a destructive force that runs through families like a freight train." By confronting the alcoholic or addict, the family can end its enabling and return to core family values that have been compromised by alcoholism and addiction. If an addict or alcoholic refuses help during the intervention, the participating family members will have perfected their individual "bottom lines" and can be steadfast in articulating the changes they will make in their behavior toward the alcoholic or addict: no more money to support an addictive lifestyle and no more help in cleaning up alcohol and drug related disasters. Instead, the family's efforts will be openly focused on treatment and recovery.

The message to the alcoholic or addict is crystal clear: we love you and our family will do anything in the world to support your treatment and recovery but the family will never again do anything whatsoever that will support, even obliquely, the disease of addiction. This liberates families from further enabling the alcoholic or addict and allows the family to restore its integrity and heal as a unit notwithstanding the alcoholic's or addict's eventual prognosis.

In addition to teaching Intervention techniques for use in family settings, the Jays also educate their students on conducting "Executive Style" Interventions. For use in corporate executive settings and with an eye toward providing maximum privacy to public figures, this model utilizes a very small intervention team and incorporates referral to discrete treatment facilities.

In June of 2014, I had the exceptional experience of completing Jeff and Debra Jay's Intervention course at the Betty Ford Center. I earned their Certified Clinical Interventionist credential. This nationally acclaimed course is offered by

the Jays only once a year and is limited to 20, select professionals in the field.

I have been involved in interventions in one form or another for almost 40 years. When I went to inpatient treatment for alcoholism in 1982, and while still in the facility and nearing completion of my treatment, I was asked to be on an intervention team. It was my first exposure to the process. Since then, I have participated in countless intervention efforts and done so in just about any setting you can imagine. I want everyone to have an opportunity to get help early on and before they start to lose things that they will never get back.

Over the last four decades, the diseases of alcoholism and addiction are still the same: extremely powerful and deadly adversaries. However, we have learned much more about how these diseases develop and impact us, both physiologically and spiritually, and we are learning much more about how to effectively challenge and treat these diseases.

The good news for Tennessee's legal profession is that TLAP is exceptionally qualified to help when it comes to Interventions. It never costs a penny to call the clinical experts at TLAP. You can obtain advice on how to help someone who has not yet hit bottom. In appropriate cases, at no cost TLAP will facilitate an Intervention and try to help. Such efforts can cost thousands of dollars, but TLAP never charges a fee for its services.

If you need TLAP's support, call 615-741-3238, email to [tlap@tlap.org](mailto:tlap@tlap.org), or visit us online at [www.tlap.org](http://www.tlap.org). As a matter of law, all calls are confidential and you do not even have to give your name. |||



**BUDDY STOCKWELL** was appointed by the Tennessee Supreme Court in July 2020 as executive director of the Tennessee Lawyers Assistance Program (TLAP). He comes from south Louisiana where he has been a volunteer and program monitor for the state's Committee on Alcohol and Drug Abuse and the executive director of Louisiana's

comprehensive Judges and Lawyers Assistance Program (JLAP) peer professionals' program. He is a certified clinical interventionist through "Love

First” training at the Betty Ford Center and has personally been in recovery from alcoholism for over 38 years. Stockwell earned his law degree from LSU Law School in 1993. He practiced in both large and small firm settings, including a solo practice in Baton Rouge where he focused heavily on domestic litigation. Read more about him at [tba.org/Stockwell](https://tba.org/Stockwell).

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