

By Chandler Scott McMillin

Part Seven: Intervention- Not Just for Families

One way to employ leverage is in combination with the power of consensus via a ‘mini-intervention’. The involvement of a small group of professionals brings added strength to the message and often achieves a result that would otherwise prove difficult or impossible.

Ramon is an alcoholic with three drunk driving convictions and two previous treatments as an outpatient, both successfully completed. He’s back in treatment for a third time after his most recent arrest. His counselor Michael has received reliable reports from two other clients that Ramon is drinking again, in a semi-controlled fashion, and hiding it from the staff. Michael hasn’t been able to make much headway with Ramon so he’s assembled an informal intervention team consisting of Sarah, one of the group leaders, and Carlos, the clinical supervisor. Ramon shows up for a regularly scheduled individual session and is surprised to find himself faced with the team.

Michael explains their purpose – to review and make observations about Ramon’s progress (or lack of it) to date.



Ramon: One drink, OK? That’s all it was.

Michael: We heard you were ordering drinks all night. They had to call you a cab to get home.

Ramon: I called the cab myself!

Carlos: Because you were drinking.

Ramon: Because... never mind. You can’t prove this. (To Michael:) You’re just trying to get me in trouble!

Sarah: This is your third treatment, Ramon. Not your first.

Ramon: And I been doing good, right?

Carlos: You’ve been participating. Making the meetings. Passing your drug tests.

Ramon: You bet your ass I have!

Michael: But you’ve done that before. Completed programs and then got another arrest. Aren’t you tired of this? Getting busted and having to jump through all these hoops.

Ramon: Sure, I’m tired of it.

Sarah: So why do you think you keep doing it? Drinking, even while you’re in treatment.

Ramon: I don’t know. I guess – I want to see if I can control it. And I can. I can control it.

Carlos: Then how do you explain all the arrests and convictions for DWI?

Michael: I guess I’ll start. The big concern is, I’ve been hearing that you’re drinking again.

Ramon: (*instantly defensive*) From who?

Michael: Other people in the program.

Ramon: (*challenging*) It’s that bitch Clara, right? She hates me.

Carlos: It’s from more than one source, Ramon.

Ramon: Who else said that about me?

Carlos: The point is – is it true?

Ramon: No. Absolutely not.

Michael: What about that night at Charlie’s Grill?

Ramon: (*surprised*) What night?

Carlos: Your birthday party.

Ramon: (*puzzled*) Nobody from here came to that party.

Sarah: It was in a restaurant, Ramon. Somebody was there having dinner and said you were drinking.

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Ramon: That's other people! Things come up! I'd be fine if they would just leave me alone.

Carlos: I doubt that, Ramon. You're a three time offender. You had your first treatment four years ago.

Sarah: We're not the enemy, Ramon.

Ramon: I know that. But you don't understand... *(trails off)*

Carlos: All we want is to see you stop getting arrested. You know that. And I have to believe that's ultimately what you want, too.

Ramon: *(nods)* I do.

Some things to note about the above interaction:

1. It's much harder for Ramon to deflect the group than if it were Michael alone.
2. When Ramon lashes out at one member, somebody else answers. This prevents the conversation from breaking up into individual arguments. Ramon has to face the group consensus.
3. As the supervisor, Carlos lends a little extra authority to the conversation.
4. The group has enough evidence to effectively refute Ramon's denial – an essential component of successful intervention. If they hadn't, they'd have had to bluff a little – but that can result in a positive outcome, too.

There may be points of conflict, but ultimately, both parties 'win' only if they can achieve the same thing.

This mini-intervention takes only a short time but leads directly into Ramon's individual session. With the initial denial overcome, Ramon and Michael can have a decent conversation about a painful subject. That was the point: to get past denial so that a productive discussion could occur.

Some general guidelines for such interventions:

- » It's best to have 3 or 4 persons on the intervention team. One should be the primary clinician for that client.
- » If possible, make sure one team member represents the program's authority – a senior clinician, perhaps, or the program's Director.
- » It helps if every member of the team has some personal

experience of the client – in group, for instance. But it's not absolutely necessary.

- » Prepare a list of evidence to present to the client – factual, specific, and dated if possible. The primary counselor can be responsible for assembling this evidence. Intervention isn't really about emotion – it's about the presentation of facts.
- » Have a clear goal in mind – a modification of the treatment plan, for instance, a contract with the client that provides better monitoring or supervision.

A Note about Congruence

By the way, it's worth noting the use of congruence in the case example above. We're simply referring to the way Carlos finishes by drawing attention to the major point on which all can agree – the need to avoid another arrest in future. That outcome is in Ramon's best interest as well as the program's. In pursuit of that goal, their interests converge. There may be points of conflict, but ultimately, both parties 'win' only if they can achieve the same thing.

It's a great way to reduce conflict and re-establish a positive connection with the resistant client. In effect, Carlos reminds all concerned that there's a bigger picture here. They're partners in pursuit of something important.

This fact is easily forgotten in a conflict. Never hurts to remind ourselves.

Summary

A mini-intervention such as the above doesn't require a big investment of staff time. Nonetheless it carries considerable power as a motivational tool for the 'stuck' client who, left to his own devices, is well on the way to yet another failure.

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Part Eight: Creating the "Win-Win"



Chandler Scott McMillin, Principal of Recovery Systems Institute, has created and operated successful addiction treatment programs for more than thirty years. He has written countless articles and co-authored seven books on addiction treatment and helped hundreds of families with successful interventions.