

By Chandler Scott McMillin

Part Nine: The Antisocial Client

Most criminal justice programs encounter a fair number of clients who exhibit some or all of the following traits:

- » Opposition to authority,
- » Difficulty managing anger, and a preference for intimidation to get one's way,
- » Impulsiveness,
- » Attraction to risky, even dangerous, activities, and
- » The habit of avoiding responsibility for one's actions

Combined with addiction, it can be a job description for treatment failure. Recovery is about making good decisions and staying the course despite the setbacks that inevitably occur. That's not a task at which such clients excel.

Disrespectful of authority, they provoke and upset those who have it – sometimes for no apparent motive. Their fondness for risk and excitement makes them ill-suited to a 'straight' lifestyle they would no doubt describe as boring. Impulsive decision-making translates to the same errors made over and over. And they're likely to leave a trail of broken promises and fractured commitments.

Let's look in on one such client. Sam, 26, has a record that includes a year in a juvenile facility and another in an adult lockup, both for drug-related crime. Now Sam explains his termination from a recent job:

Counselor: This is the third job you've lost, Sam.

Sam: I can't help it if people don't like me!

Counselor: Maybe that's not the problem.

Sam: What else could it be?

Counselor: Not showing up for work?

Sam: I showed up! Most days. Until they started ragging on me.

Counselor: Ragging how?

Sam: This guy I worked with didn't like me from go. He snitched me off to the foreman, like the little bitch he is.

Counselor: Snitched about what?



Sam: (*shrugs*) One day my girlfriend's car broke down. I had to leave for a couple hours to take her to the doctor. The doctor run late. I didn't get back that whole day.

Counselor: You explain that to the supervisor?

Sam: Hell yes. First thing next mornin'.

Counselor: But not before you left work.

Sam: Nah. What if he say no? I still gotta go.

Note that Sam blames his lost employment on other people. His boss dislikes him, his co-worker has it in for him – it's as if he's a passive observer of events, rather than an instigator.

Counselor: So this other employee told the boss that you left.

Sam: Yeah. I shoulda give him a beat-down when I had the chance.

Counselor: Good thing you didn't.

Sam: I couldn't. Two of his boys was on our crew. I mighta got jumped.

Counselor: If I understand correctly, you were actually fired for being absent without leave.

Sam: That was their *excuse*.

Sam has no trouble impugning the motives of others. He's nowhere near as critical of his own.

Using Leverage in Counseling the Court-Referred Client

Counselor: You could appeal. It's a big firm. You could take your case to Human Resources.

Sam: (*shakes his head*) I already told'em to shove their damn job. I don't let nobody abuse me.

Counselor: (*sighs*) The Court requires you to have some type of employment.

Sam: Jeez, don't bring them into it! Gimme a chance to find something! This isn't fair!

Sam impulsively burned his bridge before he was all the way across. Now he panics at the thought of consequences. Of course, if he were honest, he'd admit to hating the job and the responsibilities it involved. And if he had any insight, he'd recognize that he set up his own termination.

Nobody was surprised when Sam tested positive for cocaine later that same week.

This is a client that can be helped by the intelligent use of leverage – and probably not through other means.

The leverage in this instance will come entirely from the threat of incarceration. Unlike Brenda, Sam doesn't long for a better life. He'd be happy just being a more successful criminal.

However, it turns out that as a recidivist, Sam is facing some serious time. He'll comply to the extent that he believes the alternative is incarceration. The minute he stops believing that, compliance will cease.

Credibility: The counselor seems to have a reasonable rapport with Sam – important because so few people do. Sam leans towards the belief that others are sabotaging him. He will no doubt test boundaries periodically, requiring enforcement. And given his tendency to denial, we can assume that the farther he is away from his last crisis, the closer he is to the next one.

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Recognizing Sam's agenda: This is easy. It's to stay out of jail while at the same time avoiding whatever resembles hard work. The Court wants Sam to get a job in the 'straight' world, and he will because he has to, not because he wants to. The program can address Sam's attitudes about employment through counseling, but they're not likely to change all that much during treatment.

Setting boundaries: Working with Sam means a fair amount of regular face-to-face contact – because you can't rely on his self-report – and random drug testing. Even then he's slippery enough to hide the occasional relapse. His counselor may be able to bend rules in other areas, but not when it comes to drug tests. Sam misses a required test, consequences must quickly follow.

Trades with a client like Sam usually involve his continuing quest to bend rules for his personal convenience. He requests a week's visit with his uncle at the beach; the program might make that contingent on clean urines and near-perfect attendance. Goals for Sam have to remain short-term. He needs support and a reasonable amount of prodding to accomplish them.

Can someone like Sam recover from addiction? Sure. But the course is usually a bit rougher than the average, and requires a greater investment of clinician time and effort.

And of course, patience.

Summary

Understanding the traits associated with the Anti-Social client and their agenda can help you use leverage to increase compliance. They'll need a greater investment of clinician focus, and make progress in smaller, slower increments.

Coming Soon:

Using Leverage With Court Referred Clients (complete)



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