

LAWYERS Assistance

By J.E. (Buddy) Stockwell

HITTING BOTTOM

No one can make an alcoholic or drug addict accept help. It is only when the alcoholic or addict honestly admits a substance use disorder and genuinely surrenders to help that the seed of recovery can be effectively planted and hopefully flourishes. Commonly referred to as “hitting bottom,” this potential turning point is, in large degree, unpredictable as to both when and if it will happen for any given person suffering from alcoholism and/or drug addiction.

In recovery circles, we listen keenly to the personal stories of “high bottom” alcoholics and addicts who luckily made it into recovery without severe and irreparable consequences and also shudder when hearing the personal stories of “low bottom” alcoholics and addicts who literally lost everything and very narrowly escaped with their lives before accepting help and getting sober. Some do not make it out. They perish from the disease.

There is always intense curiosity among those in recovery as to how each person managed to escape the immediate grip of alcoholism and addiction and somehow turn successfully toward recovery. What did that particular person’s path to recovery entail? Was there strong and loving acceptance and support from family? Was the person’s employer supportive, too? Or, did the person manage to hit bottom, survive and miraculously make it into recovery despite unsupportive family, friends and employers, etc.? Surprisingly, no definite criteria can explain why some people accept help early and some people reject help to their ongoing detriment.

As the fabric of recovery from substance use disorders continues to be woven with millions of individual stories now told, some things do remain clear: hitting bottom is not only unpredictable but appears to be rather *mysterious*. It leaves witnesses with the general impression that it is totally

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random as to who will make it into recovery early and stay in recovery versus those who suffer repeated appalling consequences and still steadfastly reject help, even to the point of their death.

It can be very frustrating and challenging when working with certain alcoholics and addicts who, to the untrained eye, seem to perpetually *choose* to ignore every crisis and consequence and reject every offer of help. These people appear to be defiantly set upon an intentional mission of digging a “deeper hole” of consequences for themselves through sheer recalcitrance. In truth, the ongoing destructive behavior in these “low bottom” cases often emanates from the extremely powerful denial component of the diseases of alcoholism and addiction.

As one would commonsensically expect, as denial and ego both increase in any given alcoholic or addict, so does their ability to rationalize, minimize and ignore substance abuse-related consequences. For example, arrests for driving while intoxicated are often deemed merely to be bad luck. Trouble at work for missing deadlines or failing to meet obligations due to drinking or hangovers is blamed on the employer or fellow employees who are all somehow uptight, unfair or simply too demanding. The practicing alcoholic or addict is also often quick to blame others for the ever-widening path of destruction being visited upon family and personal relationships. The family is often chided by the alcoholic or addict for not being understanding and supportive, all of which is the practicing alcoholic’s or addict’s

shorthand for “if you really love me you will continue to bail me out and clean up all my messes, tolerate my substance-related bad behavior, and let me continue to abuse alcohol and drugs in peace.” But there is no peace when a practicing alcoholic or addict is in your immediate ranks . . . not for anyone involved.

In the often heartbreaking business of trying to help practicing alcoholics and addicts into recovery, and watching them suffer in the grip of the disease, the catchphrase “*it takes what it takes*” is used as shorthand within the recovery community to succinctly describe the sheer randomness of what it will finally take for any given person to hit bottom and really surrender and accept help into recovery.

Against the backdrop of the above, one serious question presents itself: Is there *anything* that any of us can do to help a person get into recovery earlier rather than later or not at all, or are we all resigned to simply watch the person incur ongoing damages? The answer is that in some cases we CAN do something! A professional intervention can be successful in encouraging someone to surrender to recovery now, before things get any worse for them and those around them.

In the next *Louisiana Bar Journal*, we will continue this conversation and specifically address the subject of professional interventions. Until then, if you or someone you know needs help with any mental health issue, make a confidential call to LAP at (866)354-9334, email LAP@louisianaLAP.com, or visit us on the web at www.louisianalap.com.

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