

Intervention: A Dramatization

Characters

Paul, a forty-two-year-old with an alcohol and cocaine problem

Walter, his seventy-six-year-old uncle

Audrey, his seventy-two-year-old mother

Joanne, his thirty-eight-year-old sister

Kimberly, his wife

Thomas, his fifteen-year-old son

Emily, is thirteen-year-old daughter

Rob, his best friend, and the chairperson

Joe, his workplace supervisor, unable to attend, but wrote a letter

The intervention is taking place in the living room of Paul's mother's home. Paul was told that the family is gathering there for an early birthday party for Joanne. Paul is expected to arrive with his wife, Kimberly, and children, Thomas and Emily, at 1:00 p.m. The other family members will arrive thirty minutes earlier.

Paul's supervisor, Joe, could not attend but wrote a letter for the intervention. His letter is read by Rob.

Paul is not expecting his best friend, Rob, to attend the party, so Rob parks his car in in a church parking lot two blocks away.

A day earlier, during the rehearsal, the team drew up a seating plan for the intervention. Everyone takes their seats before Paul arrives. Paul's wife and children will immediately go to their assigned seats upon entering the house. Rob, as chairperson, will greet Paul and escort him to his seat.

Paul has a close relationship with his mother, Walter. His best friend, Rob, is as close as a brother to him. Therefore, he is seated between the two of them. Paul is seated away

from the door. To leave the intervention, he'll have to walk past his best friend, his daughter, his son and his uncle. Paul has deep respect for his uncle and great love for his son and daughter. The three of them are seated together to create a strong emotional force. Paul and his wife, Kimberly, love each other, but their relationship is strained from the years of addiction. Therefore, Kimberly is seated away and out of direct eye contact with Paul. Putting space between Paul and his wife helps minimize anger. Paul has always been close to his sister, Joanne, so she is seated next to his wife to help neutralize the anger between Kimberly and Paul.

The time is 12:45 p.m. The members of the intervention team take their seats in the living room. Paul, his wife, and children are expected to arrive in fifteen minutes. All beverages, food, and cigarettes are put away before the intervention begins. Telephone ringers and cell phones are turned off. The team waits, listening for Paul's arrival. Pets are moved to another room or put outside. When they hear a car pull up, Rob, as chairperson, gets up to greet Paul at the door.

Paul: Rob, I didn't know you were coming to Joanne's party?

Kimberly, Thomas and Emily walk past Rob and go to their seats in the living room.

Rob: [warmly] Paul, you know how much we love you, buddy. We're here today because we have some important things we want to share with you. Come on in with me.

Rob: [gesturing toward the couch where Walter is seated] Here. Take a seat next to your mom.

Paul sits down next to his mother and Rob sits down next to Paul. Paul looks around the room at everyone. The room is silent.

Paul: [tentatively] Hey, this isn't quite the party I was expecting. What's up?

Rob: [calmly] Paul, we're all together because each of us has written you a letter, and we'd like to share them with you. We ask you to just listen as we read, and your sister would like to read her letter first.

Joanne looks up at her brother and after a two-second pause begins to read her letter.

Joanne: [begins to cry and takes a moment to compose herself] Dear Paul, You have been the best big brother a sister could ever want. I've admired you my whole life. Everything seemed to come easy to you – friends, sports, career. I always admired my big brother. And even though I was four years younger, you always made time for me. I know I must have driven you crazy, but you put up with me. My favorite memories are when we'd play Scrabble or Monopoly on Sunday afternoons. I loved those times together. Mom would make popcorn, we'd laugh, get competitive, occasionally cheat, and you'd even let me win once in awhile. How about when you got your driver's license, and you would take me out driving in dad's car? We'd listen to rock n' roll and stop for hamburgers at that drive-in on London Road. I was on top of the world. I felt so sophisticated driving in a car with you. When I went away to college and got my heart broken, you were there to pick up the pieces. Applying for my first big job, you drilled me with every interview question you could dream up. And I got the job and \$25,000 a year. I thought it was a fortune. I couldn't have done it without you. Paul, throughout my

life, you were always there for me. I don't know if I've ever really thanked you or told you how much I love you. I can't imagine my life without you.

Joanne continues her letter by sharing her concerns about the alcohol and cocaine problems she's witnessed. She ends her letter by asking Paul to accept help. Paul stares down at the floor. Rob glances at Kimberly to cue her that it's her turn to read her letter.

Kimberly: Dearest Paul, You have been my best friend for 22 years. When we first met at Ron Baker's party, we became instant friends. You made me laugh all night long. We were both dating other people, but our friendship grew until we fell in love. Dating you was an adventure. Hiking, skiing, whitewater rafting – we had fun. You have a gift for making the best out of life. But more importantly, you are kind and giving. You are always there for a friend. You have such compassion, and it's what I love about you. I know we've hit some rough patches lately, but I hope you don't doubt my love for you. I'm so sorry for all of the arguments. I just didn't know what to say or do. Frustration led to anger too many times. I know it's been bad, but you must know that it's because I'm afraid I'm losing you—I don't want to lose you. I love you and want to spend my entire life with you.

Kimberly continues by giving examples of how alcohol and cocaine have caused negative consequences. She offers hope and a vision for their future together. Then she asks Paul to accept help today. Paul tries to control his emotions and doesn't look at his wife. Rob glances at Walter, Paul's uncle, to cue him that it's his turn.

Walter: [gazes at Paul steadily for a few seconds and then reads his letter] Dear Paul, You're my nephew and my brother's son. Since I had five girls and no boys, you and I

grew particularly close over the years. You, your dad and I had many a memorable fishing trip. You were a fast learner and caught quite a few impressive fish. Of course, we loved going up to that hunting shack Granddad built. We'd hunt pheasant all day and play cards all night by kerosene lamp. Those were great days. You were a trooper. You didn't complain much even when it was cold. Your dad was sure proud of you and so was I. When you got that football scholarship, your dad was walking on clouds. He would always say, "He's a good boy."

Walter finishes his letter by talking about the changes he'd noticed in Paul, but that he hadn't known the cause. Knowing now that it is alcohol and cocaine, he suggests Paul takes the best course of action and accept professional help. He reminds him that there is no shame in asking for help, noting that even the best athletes require help from others. Tears are welling up in Paul's eyes. Rob nods at Audrey, Paul's mother, to cue her that it is her turn.

Audrey: [crying softly as she begins to read] Dear Paul, I'm so proud of you and I love you. You are my firstborn and my only son. You mean the world to me. God smiled the day were born, because He knew you had a kind heart and would bring good things into many lives. You certainly brought joy and love into my life. You were my little Pauly, full of smiles. You loved animals and remember the stray dogs you'd bring home? Thankfully, we found the owners for most, except for Rusty. You loved that dog and he loved you. When you went to school, he'd sit by the front window everyday and wait for you to come home. I've always felt that you were a special gift to this world, and I think Rusty thought so, too!. When your father died two years ago, you were by my side. You came over every single day to see how I was doing. You did a lot for me – working on the house, changing the oil in the car, and mowing the yard. And you always made me

laugh. You'll never know how much I looked forward to your visits. You made it possible for me to get through that first year after losing your dad.

Audrey goes on to describe how alcohol and cocaine is taking away his best qualities and then asks Paul to accept help today. Paul nods yes to her request, tears in his eyes. Rob nods to Emily, Paul's daughter, who begins reading her letter.

Emily: [looks at her dad and offers a small, understanding smile] Dear Dad, you're a great dad. When I was little, you always gave me rides on your shoulders. I really loved that. You taught me to swim and ride my bike. You always seemed to have time for me and Thomas, and we had a lot of fun. You'd tease me and I'd pretend to get mad, but I wasn't really. I just loved you a lot. I was glad you were my dad. But lately things have been kinda bad. Mom cries a lot, and you're not home much. I worry that you'll get a divorce. I know you love me, but sometimes it doesn't feel like it. I think you maybe have forgotten about us. We don't do much anymore. I know this is a disease. I want you to get better. I want you to get help. I want you to be happy again. Please, Dad, accept the help. I love you.

Your daughter, Emily.

Paul: [crying] I love you too, Sweetie.

Rob glances over at Thomas so he knows he can begin his letter.

Thomas: Dad, writing this letter is hard for me. I'm not really so good at this sort of thing. But I want you to know that I love you. We've done a lot together, especially when Granddad was still alive. The fishing was always great. Of course, playing football with

you, Uncle Jake and the cousins was always a blast. But, most of all just hanging out together and talking. Lately, it seems you're pretty irritated. I find myself just staying in my room when you're around. Sometimes I stay at Scott's house for the weekend just so I don't have to come home. I guess I don't really feel like I have a dad these days. Sometimes I get really angry at you, but I've learned a lot and understand things better now. So, I hope you agree to get the treatment everyone is talking about so then we can all be a family again. I miss the way it used to be, and I think we could be happy again.

Love, your son, Thomas

Paul puts his face in his hands and then looks up at Thomas and says, "I want us to be happy again too."

Rob: [turns toward Paul and begins to read] Dear Paul, We've been best friends since our freshman year in college. You were always the guy who was good at everything you tried. Great football player, skier, tennis player – you name it. We had a riot together. Remember the summer we learned to scuba dive in the Bahamas and that huge shark swam up alongside us? I'll never forget the look on your face. Or the time almost froze to death when we decide winter camping sounded like a good idea. We had so many wild times. But, beyond all the fun, I always new I count on you and you've never let me down.

When I got married, you were my best man. When you got married, I was yours. You're my son's godfather, and I'm your son's godfather. That makes us family in my book. My kids call you "Uncle Paul," and love you very much. Lately, however, they've asked me why they never seen you around. At that moment I realized that I was avoiding you, not helping you. You would never do that to me, so I promised myself I would do the right thing.

That is why I am here today. I am willing to do the tough thing and ask you to accept treatment for your alcohol problem, because I am your friend and I love you. We've gone through a lot together, and we'll get through this. We've made all of the arrangements for you to check into treatment today. Paul, will you accept the help we are offering you?

Your friend always, Rob

Silence

Rob: [looking directly at Paul] Paul, are you willing to go into treatment today?

Paul: [composing himself] You're all probably right. I might have a problem. But I can't go anyplace today. We're in the middle of a big project at work, and it's not as if I can just disappear from my job. Maybe in a month I'll go. But, really, I think I can handle this on my own. I promise you all that I won't drink anymore. Not a drop.

Rob: [calm and steady] In the past, you've gone on the wagon. That's been an attempt to control this problem, but it hasn't worked. We've learned that recovery requires accepting help from others. Also, we have a letter from your supervisor, and he asked us to read it to you. He writes:

"Dear Paul, Our company has a policy that supports treatment for alcohol problems. I have made arrangements for your medical leave. The only thing you need to do is to make a phone call to me once you've been admitted into treatment. You can be assured that the reason for your leave will be kept confidential and your job will be waiting for you upon completion of treatment. On a more personal note, I have a son who is recovering from alcoholism, so I have an intimate understanding of this problem. Please know that I support you in your decision to accept help today. Sincerely, Joe."

Silence

Paul: [deep sigh] I guess I don't have much choice. Okay, I'll go. But how long do I have to stay?

Rob: Paul, that is for your treatment team to decide, but most treatments are about 30 days. The treatment center knows what works. Will just ask that you follow their recommendations.

Paul: [nods] Okay. I guess I will.

Rob: [standing up] I think I can speak for everyone in this room when I say we're really proud of you.

Everybody gets up and hugs Paul. Rob and Joanne walk Paul out to the car. Paul's suitcase is already in the trunk. Paul, Rob, and Joanne get in the car to drive to treatment. Walter calls the treatment center's admissions department to tell them Paul has agreed to accept help and is on his way. Everybody drives in a separate car to join Paul, Rob, and Joanne at the treatment center.

A Different Ending: Using Bottom Lines

The scenario you just read ended positively, but sometimes alcoholics and addicts refuse to accept help. When all objections have been answered but the alcoholic still refuses, the chairperson introduces the bottom lines just as Rob does below.

Paul: [annoyed] I have too many things going on right now and my final answer is no. I am not going to treatment.

Rob: [calmly] We respect your decision to make this decision for yourself, although we're not happy with your decision. We hope you respect the decisions we've made. Each of us in this room loves you very much. For that reason, none of us is willing to do anything that will continue supporting your alcohol problem. We've also decided that if you do not choose treatment, we must take care of ourselves. We've all decided what that means for us. We'd like to share our decisions with you. Your sister will begin.

Joanne: [reading] Paul, I love you so much that I can't bear to watch you self-destruct. I'm no longer willing to pretend everything is all right, because it isn't. If you decide not to get help, I will no longer look the other way when you drive drunk. I'd never be able to forgive myself if you killed yourself or someone else. I've learned that every half hour, someone dies in a drunk driving accident. I can't stand by and do nothing anymore when I see you get behind the wheel intoxicated. As difficult as it will be, I will call the police if I see you drive drunk. Please get help so it never comes to that.

Paul: [impatiently] Listen. I can handle this problem on my own. Besides, I don't think this is anybody's business. This is my life, and I'm not hurting anybody.

Rob: [calmly] You've tried to handle it on your own before without success. We've taken time to learn about this problem, and we now know that recovery requires getting outside help. And it is our business. Each of us has been hurt by this problem. It affects

all of us more than you can know. Now let's hear what your uncle has to say. [nods to Walter]

Walter: [reading] Paul, your dad was always straight with you. Since he isn't with us, I'm going to be straight with you. Your drinking and cocaine use is causing your family a great deal of pain. You say you are too busy to go into this fine treatment center. There is nothing more important in your life than your family. You are a husband and a father. Your first responsibility is being the kind of man who can do that job right. It's time you make a choice about what's really important in your life. I'd like to see you accept help today.

Audrey: [reading] Paul, I've learned that I've enabled you to continue drinking. I'm not proud of it, and I've vowed to stop doing it. I've let you stay at my house when you and Kimberly have fights, and many times you've shown up drunk. I've cleaned you up, put you to bed, fed you in the morning, and never said much about the drinking. I didn't even know about the cocaine. I've let you come home whenever you want, making it easy for you to run from the responsibilities of your family. I'm ashamed to say that I've even let you blame Kimberly for your problems. I'm not going to bail you out anymore. If you get thrown out of the house, you'll either have to get help for your drinking or find another place to stay. I won't help you while you're drinking anymore, but I will help you if you want to get better. Won't you please accept help today?

Rob: [reading] You're my best friend and you can always call me if you change your mind and decide to get help. I'll pick you up and drive you to treatment anytime. But I'm going to ask that you don't stop by the house until you get help. If you choose alcohol over treatment, you can't be around the kids. They don't need to see you like this. They

look up to you. I can't bear to see their hearts broken. It doesn't mean we don't love you. It means we are deciding how to take care of ourselves. Won't you take care of yourself and get help today?

Kimberly: [reading] Paul, as much as I want to save our marriage, I can't live with your drinking and cocaine use anymore. If you decide not to get help, I have to think about our children. We can't keep living like this. Until you get help, you need to find another place to live. If you want to drink, you can't live in our house any longer starting today. But if you choose help, I'm willing to do my part, too. I know we could rebuild our marriage if the addiction was no longer an issue. Won't you please accept help?

Thomas: Things have been so bad around our house. I'd rather see it get better, but if it isn't going to, I think it's probably better that we don't all live together. I'll be going to college in a few years, so it won't matter so much to me then. But Emily will be home for a lot longer. There are too many fights now. I just don't like being in the house. I think you should get help if it would make things better. I like the way you used to be, Dad.

Emily: Dad, Mom talked to me about her decision to ask you to leave the house. I don't think I've ever cried so hard. I never thought this would happen to us. I don't want our family to break up, but I understand why Mom is doing what she's doing. Our life at home has been pretty bad. Won't you go to treatment instead? [begins to cry] I told Mom you'd get help if we asked.

Rob: Paul, we'll all stand by you if you reach out for help. Will you accept the help we're offering you today?

Paul: [visibly shaken] I need a minute to think. Mom, is there any coffee out in the kitchen?

Audry: Yes. There's some in that should still be hot.

Paul gets up and walks into the kitchen.

Rob: [quietly, to the team] Everybody stay seated and remain quiet. Let him have some time to think.

After several minutes pass, Rob motions to Walter.

Rob: [quietly] Maybe you should go check on him.

Walter gets up and goes into the kitchen to talk to Paul.

Walter: How're you doing?

Paul shrugs his shoulders.

I know we're asking you to do something you don't want to do. It's not about wanting to go, Paul. It's about needing to go. One thing I've learned about life, success usually requires doing things we don't want to do. This is going to take guts. It may be the toughest thing you ever do. You're going to have to say yes when everything in you wants to say no. [putting a hand on his shoulder and looking him in the eye] Are you ready to do what you need to do?

Paul: [sighs deeply] Okay, okay. I'll do it.

Walter: [patting his back and smiling] Let's go tell the others.

Together, they walk out of the kitchen back toward the living room.

A Variation to the Ending

Every so often the alcoholic or addict steadfastly adheres to his decision not to accept help even after the bottom lines are read. Sometimes this happens because the alcoholic doesn't believe his family members and friends will follow through with their bottom lines. Other times, the alcoholic wants to feel in control and decides to try it his way. When his way doesn't work, it's time for the most 2 or 3 members of the team meet with him and ask him again to accept help.

This is a good time to ask the alcoholic to tell the group why he isn't accepting help. Listen closely. He may provide information you need to help him change his mind. If not, the chairperson closes the intervention as Rob does below:

Rob: We accept the fact that getting help is ultimately your decision. We've told you the decisions we've made for ourselves and ask that you respect them. The last thing I have to say is that we came together today out of our love for you.

The chairperson should stand after closing the intervention, cueing everyone else to do the same. The alcoholic or addict will usually leave at this point. It's a good idea for the treatment team to reassemble and discuss their feelings with each other. Pay special attention to children who've participated in the intervention. They need to hear that they

did a good job and that the alcoholic's refusal to accept help doesn't mean he doesn't love them. It's a good idea for someone to spend the night with the spouse and children of the alcoholic. In the last scenario where Paul refuses help, Kimberly and her children plan to spend the night at Audrey's house in case Paul comes home drunk or angry.

When an alcoholic refuses help, it doesn't mean he won't ever choose recovery. It just means the process is going to take longer. Stick with your plan. Keep a loving mindset, follow through with bottom lines, and make future decisions as a team.