

Working with suspicious, stubborn, and dangerous parts: a Talk with Mike Elkin

Today on IFS Talks we are so happy to be welcoming back Mike Elkin. Mike Elkin is an IFS senior lead trainer who's been involved with the model since 1995. He has been a popular presenter, conducting scores of trainings and workshops throughout the US and Europe. And he's taught level one trainings in Boston since 2003. Mike was a pioneer in applying hypnotic and strategic approaches to addiction treatment and he's integrated those tools into IFS treatment. Recently, he's been co-leading an IFS level two on Depression, Anxiety, and Shame with Ann Sinko. Mike also has a private practice in marriage, family, individual psychotherapy, and he's focused on training therapists in the Internal Family Systems model. He also specializes in high conflict couples, phobias, somatic issues, aftermath of trauma, addiction, eating disorders, and cynicism, and probably so much more knowing Mike.

Tisha Shull: Welcome back to IFS Talks. We're so happy to have you here today, Mike.

Mike Elkin: It's a pleasure to be here. I do want to make one correction, which is I no longer accept therapy clients and I've focused my practice on consultation and supervision and teaching.

Aníbal Henriques: So, welcome back, Mike. It's now 16 months since we sat together for a Talk. In that first wonderful Talk, you could introduce yourself and share many amazing stories on your personal and professional journey. It was such a great talk and you also could present some of your ideas on how IFS sees anxiety, depression, and shame. It was a great episode with so much to learn from you and your huge experience and wisdom. How have you been those days? How active have you been?

Mike: Yeah, I've been busier than I've been in 30 years because you know, I was sort of drifting into a pattern where I was spending a lot of time in a pool room playing three-cushion billiards. And when COVID showed up and I discovered I was not addicted to three-cushion billiards because if I were, I would have kept going to the blue room with all these anti-vaxxers and *Trumpsters*, and I would have gotten sick and died. And instead I was home and I had a lot of time on my hands. So, I started taking more clients and started also getting very interested again in IFS. And that was facilitated by the fact that my youngest son took the training. I did a training in Austin and my youngest son, who's a musician and found that he can't make a living making records anymore because he had two records but didn't make any money from them because they were all free. You can get them, you know... Decided he has to get trained. And I trained him and he's becoming incredibly involved in IFS and he's very talented. And so, mentoring him really got me going again...

Aníbal: Wow, lucky you.

Mike: And I am way into teaching IFS and thinking about it.

Working with suspicious, stubborn, and dangerous parts: a Talk with Mike Elkin

Tisha: Is he using the model as a therapist now?

Mike: He is, he's not a therapist because he has a high school equivalency and two years of Berkeley College of Music. So, he calls himself a spiritual advisor and he's got a full practice and I can't get him to take anybody anymore. He's full up, so...

Anibal: Beautiful, lucky you.

Mike, you have suggested five topics for our Talk today. Sounds like today we will have a full plate of interesting and relevant topics, I would say. Mostly advanced ones, advanced stuff. You have suggested to talk about befriending suspicious and stubborn parts, contracting parts that interfere with relationship, disarming dangerous parts and boundaries and self-defense. So, looks as we will have a full plate of various relevant topics for our community of IFS practitioners. So, let's start off with the first ones, the suspicious and stubborn parts. What are suspicious parts and how do they present?

Mike: Well, generally, you know, you run into it most dramatically with people who've experienced complex trauma, which means their experience was they grew up without a safe adult in their life. And therefore, their protective parts developed very precociously because usually, you know, you could expect parents to set reasonable boundaries around you and communicate reasonable expectations. And if you don't have adults to do that, very young parts need to do that. And they need to do that much younger than they can be expected to be competent at it. So, they're constantly feeling ineffective because they are and they're constantly exposed to shame, which makes them more active. And so, they are going to very much distort the perceptions of these people and then when they come to you, they're going to see you as a threat and they have no confidence that you're going to be acting in their best interest because that isn't their experience of authority figures, their experience of authority figures and grownups is that they basically have no interest in your needs or feelings.

Tisha: What's an example of a common stubborn part that someone with complex trauma shows up with?

Mike: Well, like you say, you know, "is that part willing to have a conversation with you?" And the person would say, "that's crazy, what do you mean a part? What are you...? You know, I don't like to think about parts. I'm not on anything like that." I mean, we all get a little of that with people of less extreme backgrounds, but the more extreme the background is, the more energized those parts are going to be and the less able they're going to be to listen. So, one of the strategies I've used, because I have a background in hypnosis, is to try to confuse them a little bit and not give them the answer they're expecting. Because if they're a little confused, that means they get a little curious and curiosity is the most accessible of Self qualities. So, because, you know, if you learn hypnosis or at least learn hypnosis from an Ericksonian sort of tradition, which I did, you're actively taught techniques for confusing people. And, you know,

Working with suspicious, stubborn, and dangerous parts: a Talk with Mike Elkin

I've sort of let go of my tricky parts, but the technology is still there. And so, what I try to do is not react basically from parts, not react defensively, but react with curiosity. And the more I do that, the more likely it is that I'll be able to get into a useful conversation with some of these parts and try to help them understand what I'm up to. Because what I'm trying to do is get them to hire me as their therapist, just like, you know, if you're working with somebody who is called out in the world DID, which is they have parts that don't subscribe to a general identity when they show up, they try to get them to hire you as their therapist. So, you know, what I do is I understand that the way these parts are reacting to me doesn't have much to do with me. And so, if I can keep the parts of me that take anything personally back and I can remain curious, I can almost always make friends with these guys after a while, because they're doing an impossible job and they're doing it to the best of their ability and nothing they are doing is working. I don't tell them that, they already know that, but I do offer them the option that I think I can help them be more effective and I can help them feel safer and it is my job to address their concerns to their satisfaction. And all I would want from them is that they do their best to make their concerns clear to me so that I can address them.

Anibal: So, that's how you befriend them.

Mike: That's how I befriend them.

Anibal: Are those parts in any way useful somehow for these systems?

Mike: Well, they are doing their best. The problem with protectors is they never protect and there's good reasons for that, but they never protect. What they do in fact is, invariably, energize and attract that which they protect against. That's what they do. That's what protective parts do. That's what they do on a macro level. That's what they do at a micro level. Like, our defense department does not protect us. You know, they see, they perceived a rock for instance, as a threat to us, so we sent over all these protectors and when that didn't work, we sent over more, we had a surge, and so now a rock, of course, is not a threat and totally consistent with our wellbeing as is Afghanistan, which we also sent protectors to. That's how it works at a macro level. At a micro level, you know, if I say, I have a protector, so I look at Tish and I notice that she has a suspicious look on her face. And I say to her, "look, Tisha, I need you to respect me more. I need more respect from you." Now, do you respect me more or less than you did 10 seconds ago? And this part that, you know, its worried with Tisha really thought it was protecting me. It saw a threat and it acted to neutralize that threat by controlling you and telling you that you had to be different. And my guess is what Tisha's part thought was "what an asshole." And so, we're off to a bad start.

Anibal: Mike, those suspicious and stubborn parts can be so triggering for us as therapists?

Mike: Yeah, well, they don't think we're going to help, and they think we're bad. And they question our intentions because we don't make moral judgments on what people do. We make

Working with suspicious, stubborn, and dangerous parts: a Talk with Mike Elkin

moral judgments on why we think they did it. And that's why it's so important to, you know, when you're talking to firefighters to help them understand we know you're trying to help, we know you're not trying to cause harm. We know you can't help doing what you're doing. Because, the thing we cannot stand is moral judgment. And if you feel I'm judging you morally, you have to make me wrong and stop me because you have no choice. We can't stand that. And so, the main thing I try to teach people and the main thing I try to do is convey to every part I run into that I know it's positively intended, and I know it's trying to help and I know it's not trying to cause harm because otherwise that part will experience me as judging it. And then I'm an enemy.

Tisha: Is there some sort of macro function for the system to attract what these protectors are trying to repel?

Mike: I don't know how to answer that. I mean, it feels...

Tisha: We repeat relationship patterns, right? Like unhealthy relationship patterns. And...

Mike: Yes, we do. As a matter of fact, my friend Anne Hallward has suggested that we have a series of conversations about essentially repetition. What'd they call, you know, repetition disorder, whatever, when people keep sticking their face into the same fan over and over again, and how that actually works. And, you know, there are psychoanalytic understandings of that, which is, you know, that people have parts that haven't learned how to relate to people and therefore keep basically making the same mistake and getting the same result and protecting themselves from shame by blaming whoever it is they're getting that same result from. And that's an understanding, but Anne is one of these people who really has to understand things. So, she's goading me to really think about this and we're having a series of conversations about it. But the problem is that a lot of these behaviors essentially got some level, generated some level of relief, like, you know, parts that try and fail and try and fail and try and fail. And at some point, the discovery happens that every time they try and fail to the pain they're already experiencing, they're adding the pain of the shame of failure and the pain of disappointment. And if they stop trying, if they give up, then they experience relief, which is they don't get that shame of failure and pain or disappointment anymore and they experience a sense of relief. And then they associate despair with relief and see despair essentially or giving up or helplessness as a resource rather than... And they see hope as the threat.

Anibal: So interesting.

Mike: And the problem is that these decisions tend to get made, you know, before people are old enough to go to school. They don't have any idea that they may have some more resources someday. And they also have no idea that the price of this relief they're getting is infinite. They're essentially sacrificing possibility. And they don't know that. So, you know, if you explain that to them and offer them the chance of letting go of that burden, often they'll take it. And

Working with suspicious, stubborn, and dangerous parts: a Talk with Mike Elkin

then, you know... But that's one way of befriending say, an extreme protector, is helping them understand that they made a perfectly reasonable response to what was facing them. And they didn't have the resources to understand all the implications of that because they were three or four years old at the time. And here they are, they get another chance.

Anibal: Mike, you say those parts can interfere with the relationship, with the therapeutic relationship, I understood. Are there other parts? Like those ones, suspicious...

Mike: Yeah. Well, that's where I really focus because it's my understanding that the quality of our relationships is a quality of our life. People who have good relationships tend to be happy, productive people, and people who don't have good relationships, no matter what else is going on in their lives tend to be miserable. And there was a time when I was fashionable in the eighties where I was getting clients who were getting their pictures on the covers or magazines, and they were, you know, the movers and the shakers and the captains of industry. And they were all, they were some of the most miserable beings I've ever been in the presence of because nobody liked them, and they didn't like anybody. Their experiences were all people trying to either suck up to them and get something out of them or destroy them in some way or both. And so, they were lonely and miserable and hated everybody and used their considerable power and influence to cause pain. And so, what I tried to do is get to know the parts of them that felt they had to do that because, you know, what I focus on is relationship, particularly the central relationship, because if you've been in a couple, you know that the quality of the space between you and your partner will determine the quality of your life more than any other single factor.

Anibal: Absolutely.

Mike: And so, I'm really interested in the parts that make that difficult, that make that space feel unsafe and threatening and difficult and see your partner not as a resource, but as, you know, a problem you have to deal with. So I'm really interested in those parts and making friends with them and, you know, helping them find a way to feel safer with the partner, because what happens is that once protectors get very active in a couple, then constantly the couple is in the struggle to prove to the other one that there's a better person. That's what couples fight about is who's a better person. And the more seriously they take that struggle, the more miserable they're going to be. So, I try to help them get out of that fight. And the way I help them try to get out of that fight is by helping them become less and less affected by the sense that they're being judged. So, parts of them that are very reactive to their understanding of other people's opinions.

Tisha: What techniques or skills do you use to support people in being less reactive to the judgments of others?

Mike: Yeah. We all have parts that know we're bad. And when something happens out there that stimulates these parts and triggers them, and they become noticeable to firefighters,

firefighters feel extreme shame and then they do - we were talking about that last time - so, and then they do something that they associate with relief, and the problem is that whatever they do usually causes trouble. And then, of course, that generates more shame, which needs more relief, which, and then you get into what Dick calls the... Basically a negative spiral, and it just keeps going and going and going. And so, my firefighters do something and what they usually do is they hit your tender parts because, you know, the shame I feel I have to put out there at seeing you. So, you're the narcissistic selfish, mean...right. And I need to convince you of that, so you'll be better and change. And so, I hit your tender parts, which trigger your firefighters, and then your firefighters come back and help me understand that I'm, in fact, a narcissistic, selfish, clueless one, which hits my tender parts, and off we go. So, what we try to do is go to those tender parts and witness them and provide corrective experiences and help them unburden, and then they're less tender. And so, they're much less likely to get triggered with some, you know, implication... I see a look on Anibal's face, which I associate with something and experience it as an attack and then I go after him and we start that vicious circle and an example I often use, you know, they talk about Velcro and Teflon when you're trying to do is help, you know, hurtful things bounce off rather than stick. And an example I use is if I say like, "I think you're being very selfish here." Even though, you know, I was using that as an example, my guess is a part of you reacted anyway, you just hear the word selfish and you, and it's going to trigger something, probably not that much in this case. But, if I say, you know, "I think you're a communist", which used to be an extremely provocative and triggering word, but it's sort of become unfashionable as an insult, you know, it's much more likely, you'll say, "God, what an odd thing to say. I wonder why Mike said something like that." In other words, curiosity and compassion. That's more likely to happen. So, you're trying to shove things in that direction. You're trying to help basically parts that feel unsafe and judged, feel less judged and less unsafe and the safer this space is between people, well, more likely that the interactions they have are going to be pleasurable and positive because... You know, one thing I say which, you know, I like to provoke people although I don't agree with almost everything our former president said, I do agree, when that riot happened, and I think it was Virginia city, he said there were a lot of good people on both sides. And I agree with that. Because I think the concept of a bad person or a bad part as Dick has just published in a book...

Anibal: *No bad parts.*

Mike: No Bad Parts. If you think of someone as a bad person, or you think of a part as a bad part, you lose any possibility of interacting productively with that person or that part. So, I need to always work on the assumption that I'm dealing with a good person, that I'm dealing with a good person who has been essentially colonized by frightened protectors and therefore their capacity for empathy and connection is being blocked and disabled. And I try to be as curious as possible as to how I can establish communication and connection with that person or that part. But if I dismiss it as negative or selfish or narcissistic, or, you know, any of these labels that we use, I lose my power to be useful or I lose my power to connect. And what we need to do is connect. And the more connected we feel, the happier we feel and the less connected...

Working with suspicious, stubborn, and dangerous parts: a Talk with Mike Elkin

you know, that gets back to relationships. So, you know, I'm constantly trying to make my parts feel safe and help your parts feel safe. And the safer they feel, the more cooperative they will be and the easier our project of healing will be for us to succeed.

Anibal: Mike, you also wanted to talk about disarming dangerous parts. What are those dangerous parts?

Mike: Well, dangerous parts, you know, I mean the most obvious ones are suicidal parts or self-harming parts or parts... You know, I just had a case presented to me where this young woman has been sexually assaulted three times in the last two months, because she has parts that put her in harm's way and essentially get her to trust untrustworthy people or people with untrustworthy parts or people who have parts that basically want to use her as a toy, and don't see her as a person. And so, the problem with that and the person who presented is a very sophisticated therapist, so she knew what she needed from me was support in helping her managers who were going to try to get this woman to stop doing this, to relax and stop trying to make these parts wrong, because that just makes them more shamed and defiant, and make friends with these parts and be curious about what they need from these men that makes them blind to the concern. So that was a dangerous part. Parts that essentially put this person in harm's way and keep her from setting appropriate boundaries to keep her safe. So, you know, I try to make friends with these parts, obviously, especially suicidal parts. And, you know, there are two kinds of suicidal parts. There are the ones that are relievers. They say, you know, well, if you're in so much pain, here's your ticket out. And then there're the punishing parts that say your staying on this earth needs to be removed. And they have to be approached differently, but they're both trying to help, and with these, you know, the punisher parts, what I will very often do with them is I'll listen to them for a little while and then I'll say... If I was working with Tisha, "does Tisha have any idea how much you care about her?" And they go, that's a confusion again, "what?" And then I say, "well, you know, you basically are using her body. And if you kill her, you're going to be killing yourself. And you seem to be willing to die to essentially make Tisha more benign and keep her from being disruptive. So, I can't imagine, you know, if you're willing to die for somebody who's virtue, I can't imagine caring about..." And they get a little confused and then I make a proposal of maybe another way we could go about that, where this part could stay alive and yet Tisha's bad things can be fixed, and I know how to fix them. And I have this resource, I call Self-energy, which I can introduce you to. And the other ones, you know, you just will help them understand that I know a way we can get her out of pain without her having to die. And so, instead of having to die, we'll get her out of pain, and she can have fun instead. And they're relieved to hear that and they can be suspicious but what you're trying to do is get any part you run into to become part of the therapeutic project.

Tisha: It sounds like you're really good with these dangerous parts. You're really good at contracting with them.

Mike: Contracting it's the whole thing...

Working with suspicious, stubborn, and dangerous parts: a Talk with Mike Elkin

Tisha: Yeah. It's making me appreciate what a skill that is and the amount of confidence they really need in order to make these contracts. And does it feel as though when you're contracting with dangerous protectors and I know dangerous is relative, but that's what we're talking about today, does it feel as though they need to experience some of that healing of the exiles soon, if you make the contracts with them?

Mike: Obviously, the sooner the better, but usually when you're dealing with extreme protectors, it's going to take a while to get to the exiles. It's going to be a while before they, maybe are willing to admit there are such things as exiles. But, you know, the reason protectors are so ineffective is that they are not looking out there. In other words, they're not dealing with you. They're dealing with the parts of me that are affected by you, that are reacting to you. So, they don't see you at all. And so, they don't get feedback from your reactions, because what they're focused on are my tender parts that are getting upset, and they're trying to calm them down. They're not trying to deal with you, which is one reason they don't deal with you very usefully. And what you're trying to do is help them understand that. In fact, these exiles can be soothed, that there is a way to develop a relationship with them and there's a resource that can help these protectors essentially feel much less frightened and much less desperate. And because they see this constant fear, this ineffectiveness as meaning that they're worthless and unlovable, you know, because they keep trying to convince you that you're the trouble and you won't be convinced, and they try harder and you get even more (...). And so, yeah, we're trying to get them out of that fight because I've never won a fight and I've never met anybody who's won a fight. I've never met anybody who's won an argument. Have you?

Anibal: I have really not.

Mike: Just checking. Right. So, I try to stay out of fights, and I try to help parts understand that, you know, you can't win them. And it doesn't mean anything about you that you can't win them.

Anibal: Mike, coming back to boundaries and self-defense, what kind of boundaries do you have in mind?

Mike: Okay, well, I have a rule of relationship which goes as follows. If you can't keep someone out of where they don't belong, you can't let them in at all. So, one thing that's necessary for people to feel safe is that people don't go in where they don't belong. And you get to decide where you don't belong. In other words, if I said, "Anibal, can I stick my finger up your nose?" And you say, "no, you know, I prefer you don't," And then I do it. I'm unsafe. And the problem is that if I do that, the minute you see me from a distance of a hundred yards, my finger is already up your nose, because you know that you can't protect that boundary. So, and you can't win a fight. So, the art of self-defense, and I studied martial arts for a number of years. And it did help me be more flexible and strong and keep myself at doing things I didn't like, but it didn't help me with self-defense at all. Because, you know, very seldom did people come at me

Working with suspicious, stubborn, and dangerous parts: a Talk with Mike Elkin

with a knife, but very often they came at me with judgment and with assumptions and with entitlement and I had no idea what to do with that, you know. I knew how to take away their knife if they came at me with a knife, but they just wouldn't do that. They just assumed that I would do things that I didn't want to do and manipulated me into doing that or whatever... They got in where they didn't belong. And so, one is you have to, you know, communicate with the parts that feel invaded, and then you have to be able to speak for them effectively without making the person who's getting in where they don't belong bad, because if you make them bad, it's not going to go well.

For instance, I had a client who was very successful in the corporate world and she was divorced from her husband and she had a complex trauma history. She was divorced from her husband, but she constantly took texts from her husband, or ex-husband, that were insulting to her, but not reacting to them. And it took me a while to help her basically block his number and not take any texts. That's self-defense, okay. And when she did that, and also, I got her to stop negotiating with him and to have her lawyer do that. Now that's very directive. And because I have a background in hypnosis, I'm not afraid of being directive, but I have to make a contract with people in order for them to not feel either disrespected or pushed around by my directive parts. So, what I do is first of all, get curious about the parts that are letting people in where they don't belong and ask them if they want help keeping them out of there and they do, and then I can be directive. And I can say, you know, how would it feel to call your lawyer and say, I'm not going to be talking to my husband at all, I'm going to refer every concern he has to you, and see how that feels, see what parts don't feel comfortable with that. And then we go to them and find out what their concerns are until they do feel comfortable with doing what needs to be done, in this case, to keep this guy out of where he doesn't belong. You know, or kids who think that you're supposed to be their valet and cook, and how to help them understand that those days are gone forever, or, you know, anybody who gets in where they don't belong.

Tisha: I'm thinking about this, this is bringing up this idea like it's really clear when things are direct and explicit, but being a therapist, sometimes, you know, I have a lot of clients who are therapists or myself, there's almost like this energetic exchange that happens where you feel drained, or you feel someone else's pain and, or there's just like this kind of thing that sticks on you. And so, it's like a little less clear, but we feel people stuff. How do you work with that?

Mike: Well, first of all, you get to know the parts that are feeling it. In other words, these are parts that are letting things in where they don't belong. In other words, you know, empathy, you know... "oh, you have such empathy, you'd be a great therapist." No, you won't. Not until you learn how to keep that empathetic part back, because otherwise it's like somebody is down in the well, and you jump down into the well, and if you're both down there, you know... And so you got to get to know the parts that are feeling uncomfortable and find out what their concerns are, and also why they can't, what prevents them from doing something to help them be more comfortable and without giving that moral meaning, in other words, without saying, oh, you know, you're weak or ineffective. But just be curious and find out what they're afraid would

Working with suspicious, stubborn, and dangerous parts: a Talk with Mike Elkin

happen if they said, “could you please get off my face? It's very uncomfortable with you sitting there.” And, you know, “if you don't get off my face I'm afraid I'm going to have to call for help. Because, you know, I don't want to get into a fight with you, but...” You know, but just the insistence on your boundaries and deal with the parts that are uncomfortable doing that. Because of course, especially with people who grew up in complex trauma, is they just, that's not a language they speak, and they never learned it. So, they don't know how to do it. And especially people who grew up in what I call alcoholic families, alcoholic belief systems, where it's considered to be weak and rude to set boundaries. And, you know, so that's a burden that those parts have to be relieved of so that they can step out, because until you can, you can't have relationships because constantly people are in where they don't belong and their fingers are up your nose. And, you know, you're dealing with that all the time and that's no fun. So, yeah. And obviously because therapists are people who need 30 hours of therapy a week, I need to learn self-defense. You know, I grew up feeling very unsafe and I learned how to fight. And of course, learning how to fight those and help you be safe because you can't win fights. So, you know, eventually deal with... You know, when I was dealing with violent men all the time, I mean, I worked in an alcoholism agency and, you know, 6/4, and I know karate, who are they going to send to me? All these violent men. That's what I got. And they were here to teach me that you can't win fights. So, you know, I taught them so that I could learn. Therapists are people who learn by teaching. And so, I had to become an expert on boundaries.

Anibal: Beautiful.

Mike, according to the official IFS level one manual establishing a contract is one of IFS' natural first steps.

Mike: It's the first step.

Anibal: You Mike, are presenting a workshop at the conference called *Negotiating a Therapeutic Contract with Your Client and Their Protectors*. On the flyer we can read this workshop will address what Michael Elkin considers to be the most important element of therapy, negotiating a clear contract. What would you like to tell us about this workshop and the importance of contracting?

Mike: Well, the thing that I keep running... Because I do consultation, is what I do now and, you know, forming more and more consultation groups and I'm trying to help the IFS community see me as a resource for consultation. And what I find most of the trouble is that we have two problems. There are the parts of us that get triggered by parts of our clients and we have to deal with that, we know that, and the other is what's the contract. What is this? What I constantly ask is what is this person hoping they can get from talking to you? And very often pretty experienced therapists don't have a clear idea of that. And if you don't have a clear idea of that, then basically it's very hard to evaluate whether any process is useful or not. Because if you don't know where you're going, then one direction's as good as another. And the clearer you

Working with suspicious, stubborn, and dangerous parts: a Talk with Mike Elkin

are where you're going, the more easy it is to know whether you want to say “would that part, please see if it'll give you some space or do you think that it'd be useful to have that part join the conversation...” And you can make that distinction much more easily if you know what you're trying to accomplish and what parts you're trying to befriend and open up new possibilities for. And the contract can change 12 times in a session.

Aníbal: Yes.

Mike: And the more you recognize, “okay, we're working on something new here,” the more effective you're going to be. So, what I'm trying to do in two hours is help people become interested in putting a lot more interest and focus on that question “what are we trying to accomplish here together?” You know, and when people are going on and on about, you know, injustice that have happened, the question I constantly ask is “how can I be useful about that?” Because, you know, I could be easily replaced by a bartender and for the price of a beer you can get the same thing or a *Coca-Cola* if you're not into alcohol. So, what I'm constantly interested in is “how can I be useful? What are you hoping we could do together about this?” And the clearer answer I can get to that, the more useful I'm going to be. And when I can't get a clear answer to that, I get very curious about the parts that make it difficult to give me a clear answer to that.

Aníbal: Mike, in your flyer for this workshop, we can read that you will teach how to negotiate a workable therapeutic contract and how to enroll skeptical hypervigilant and hostile protectors, to be resources in your project.

Mike: Well, that's pretty much what we've been talking about the last hour. So yeah, in a way I've sort of given that workshop here, but because, you know, what I'm trying to do is communicate what... I've been doing therapy for 45 years, more than 45 years. And so, I'm trying to communicate some of the stuff that I've learned, just because I've had a chance to make an awful lot of mistakes. And then, you know, as I often say, you know, I am lazy, and I just do the same old shit. And then when it doesn't work and I think, oh my God, what do I do? And then I do something. And if that doesn't work, I do something else. And if it works, that becomes a technique. And then I try it again when something happens. And if that doesn't work, I have to think of something else.

Aníbal: Mike, such interesting conversation and topics. So again, thank you so much for having us and for bringing such interesting tools to help us in everyday clinical work. And it was a joy to be here with you and Tisha, and we hope we can keep meeting and sharing this model, our work and our lives.

Mike: Thank you, Aníbal and Tisha. It's so nice to see you again.