

CPI *Unrestrained* Transcription

Episode 3: Dan Lonigro

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Terry: Welcome to *Unrestrained*, the podcast series from CPI. Here you can enjoy conversations where professionals on all sides of crisis and behavior management relax and open up about themselves, their workplace and their clients. You'll get the latest tips and trends from the best in the business, so tune in often to integrate their experiences with your own.

Hello and welcome to *Unrestrained*, the podcast series from CPI. Today I am joined by Dan Lonigro, Global Professional Instructor and certified road warrior. Hello, Dan.

Dan: Hi, Terry.

Terry: Welcome. I'll begin today by, because I was lucky enough to have you as a Global Professional Instructor for my own Non-Violent Crisis Intervention training, I know that a life lived on the road was in your blood fairly early on and I'm hoping you can talk about your personal history, including your early travel experiences and how they helped create the professional identity and lifestyle that you enjoy today.

Dan: Well, I was thinking about that. I remember my earliest memory, I must have been six or seven and my mom had a strict rule, "Don't leave the yard." I didn't follow that rule and it was garbage day so I got into some garbage and it was really smelly. Of course she didn't see me in the yard and freaked out and got into her '68 Buick Skylark and just went barreling down the street looking for me. She found me and I just reeked.

So she brought me home and gave me a bath and a spanking and put me to bed, in that order.

Terry: How old were you at the time?

Dan: I was like six or seven. I still remember it. She brings it up every Christmas, of course, for my kids. But I was hooked. I was like, "Okay, I don't care I got a spanking. I've now seen the other side."

Then my friends and I, we used to have a game where we would go and ride our bikes as far as we could until we got lost. The fun part was now try and find your way back home. So we would always run into a highway or some landmark where, "Oh, okay, there's the sled hill or the forest preserve," or, "Oh, there's National Supermarket."

Terry: What town were you raised in?

Dan: This was Mount Prospect, Illinois, right outside Chicago.

We'd see something that our parents, the road that they brought us down so, "Okay, now we know how to get back." I think that was the beginning of just wanderlust. Although I was with my friends, I was really the only one who caught that bug. So I always just liked looking beyond the horizon.

My first job after college, although I was supposed to go into production, that's what we paid for with my degree . . .

Terry: What was your degree in?

Dan: Radio and television production.

Terry: Oh, really? Wow. Where did you go to college?

Dan: It was Southern Illinois University in Carbondale.

Terry: Oh sure.

Dan: Which was, at the time, the number one school in the country -- well, one of the top 10 -- for that degree and the facilities were great. Communications was my major but I got out and I just thought I'd better start doing what I really want to do, and so I started traveling. I got a job in the travel industry. Not that I didn't use my degree, but I thought, "Okay, maybe I should stick with this. This is what I really like."

I was a tour guide in Phoenix and an operations manager for a destination management company and a program director in Chicago. For eight years I was just traveling all over, Bahamas, Arizona, L.A., just all over the country. Even did some gigs on some cruise ships too.

Terry: Wow. So this is in your 20s.

Dan: Yeah. I was single and it was just great. I think to answer the latter part of your question, what got me ready for this, was I started learning about how to deal with people in some very hyper situations because the travel industry is really . . . People get excited and they get upset. "Where's my luggage?" "Where's the bus?" "This isn't working." "Our

reservations . . ." and people just get all bent out of shape. It forced me to manage behavior, as well as I started to learn how to negotiate.

I realized that, wow, everything's negotiable, and you just really have to ask and you can get a lot of what you need just by asking and negotiating and working with people.

Terry: Setting some limits?

Dan: Setting some limits and just saying, "Hey, this is how I feel about this."

Then I wanted to continue traveling but I really wanted to, again, be on the horizon as far as I could. So I saw this job for teaching English in Japan and, to be quite honest, I did it on a lark. I was just kind of grinding my wheels back home here.

Terry: This is after eight years in the travel industry.

Dan: Yeah.

Terry: So you're about 30?

Dan: Yeah, about late 20s and I was having fun but I wasn't going anywhere in life. Not making a whole lot of money either. I thought, I've got to get serious.

But when I saw this ad, because I was subscribing to travel magazines, being in the travel industry, and it said, literally, "Work in Japan. Teach English. Make lots of money." Sounds good to me. I'll do this. I had no attachments really.

But it was then, once I got overseas and started teaching that, that's when the calling came, how most people have a calling and then they follow it. I just went, as I said, to go do this job and then I realized I just fell in love with my students. I realized they really need help but they depend on me, because many of them were studying English for their livelihoods. These were people in their early 20s and they needed English, English being one of the major business languages in the world, they needed this language, this skill to succeed.

So I thought, "Wow, they're really depending on me and I've got to make sure they're successful." Again, I fell in love with my students and . . .

Terry: Imparting critical knowledge to them really gave you a sense of purpose then, I would think.

Dan: I think that's it, yeah. When you saw the look in their eyes of what they needed, you just couldn't help but feel like, "This is right."

Terry: You mean that thrill of recognition that they would have?

Dan: Yeah, and understanding. I would get so excited when they would just learn a phrase. I would see them out in the community and we'd go out and speak in English. My father would always say this, "What's your niche in life? What's your niche in life?" He would drive me crazy because I never knew and I'd be like, "Dad, back off. I don't know what I'm going to do with my life." Finally here it was. It was just staring me right in the face and I thought, "Great. Okay, finally I know what to do."

Terry: What a great aha moment.

Dan: Exactly. That's exactly how it should be described. Once I got home, I thought, okay, I've got my love of travel. I've got this love of teaching and coaching and motivating people. What a perfect storm because I came home from Asia with a wife and a baby boy and there was the ad for . . .

Terry: And a vocation.

Dan: And a vocation and the skills. And there's an ad for Crisis Prevention Institute saying, "Looking for professional instructors," and I thought, this is perfect. What great timing. All the stars just aligned.

Terry: Tremendous.

Dan: So that's how I got here. Yeah, it's all right.

Terry: All right. Well, in addition to keeping up a blistering travel pace as a Global Professional Instructor, you also started blogging. You got over 100 blogs for CPI now. I think you were one of the first ones with CPI to actually really jump into blogging. I've read your writing and I've enjoyed it a great deal.

Dan: Thank you.

Terry: Talk about how that sort of dovetailed into this profession that you had and why you took to the writing in such a strong way.

Dan: I had written some articles for CPI for Journal of Safe Management and the Instructor forum. I think I was at a meeting with Judith Schubert, our President, and she was talking about how they were encouraging her to write a blog. I think it was Heath Copps.

Anyway, Judith was talking about it and I had this idea, this epiphany, like, okay, I went up to Judith and I said, "You write about it from the corporate angle and I'll write about it from the road. Like dueling pianos, we'll have dueling blogs but it'll be non-violent dueling blogs." She says, "That's great."

So I did the first one. It was in Ohio, Columbus, and I enjoyed writing it so much. She wrote another blog back and then I just kept going with it. From the beginning it just seemed like a lot of fun and it was. I'm still enjoying it now.

Terry: Tremendous. One of the blogs that I enjoyed especially was a recent one of yours. It was about the five things difficult people are really saying and I was wondering if you could tell our listeners about that blog a little bit.

Dan: Well, I've always said, and I say this to my groups every week, that crisis intervention doesn't have to be complex. I think a lot of people have that idea that maybe because of some of the wording and terminology that you have to have a master's degree in psychology, and that's just not the case at all. It's just some basic golden rule, treat others as you want to be treated, type of stuff.

I took it from the perspective of, okay, what calms me down. What do people do when I'm upset in a retail store or on the phone with the bank? What helps me to just chill out. I thought, well, there's certain things like I want to be heard.

Don't give me a scripted response. I can't stand that when they do that on the phone. Just talk to me like I'm a real person. Listen to what I'm saying. Think about your response, that's all. Don't be a robot with your response. Don't give me the corporate line because that's going to just make me more upset. I want a resolution.

"Okay, you've heard me. Great. You've used those great listening skills. What are you going to do about it now? Do you have a plan? Are you going to get back to me? Now that I've come to you, I would like you to do some type of, again, resolution."

I don't want to be judged -- pretty common sense. Who does? So don't compare me to others or tell me to calm down, because that's very judgmental when people say that, I think. Again, I don't want to be compared with others.

Finally, follow up with me. I think that's really crucial, because that speaks volumes when you get back to me. I think CPI does a really good job with that. I've heard many customers on the road say, when I talk on day three about the benefits of being a certified instructor, without a doubt some veteran instructor in the group will say, "Yeah, and I like that you guys call us back," or, "I like that you got back with an email," and, "Boy, I called in and ten minutes later somebody called me back."

They're so impressed about that and I am as well impressed because you hear it all the time. Somebody will call a company and they never hear from that company again. I think corporate America in general has to do a better job with that.

Terry: It's a great perspective that you started with to write this to sort of say, "Hey, when I'm maybe being perceived as difficult, why is it? What could the other side do better than they're doing?"

Dan: Yeah. In fact, I've even told people, if I've been on the phone with a utility company or I've been at a retail store and I'm upset and they've done something to calm me down or resolve my issues, I always compliment that. I say, "You know what? You've got great people skills." They'll look at you like, "Yeah, I do," and they're very confident about that. It's almost like they're not surprised that you said that. So I just love that. I think, again, it doesn't have to be complex, everybody out there can learn these skills. It's not difficult.

Terry: That's a great takeaway right there.

One of your blogs begins with a really provocative sentence and it's this, "I know it's hard to believe, but the individuals in our care are actually doing us a favor by displaying acting out behavior." How so? I think that might be counterintuitive to some people.

Dan: It is. When I wrote that I thought, "Okay, I've really got to explain this." I think all Global Professional Instructors will have those epiphanies, those aha moments when they're out there in front of a group, and that statement was one of them. I just blurted out one day to a group, "And by the way, they're doing you a favor." The group looking at me like, "Huh?" I thought, "Okay, now I have to explain this."

It was in my mind, I just had to put it into words. I said, "Well, think about it. In many crisis situations you might not know what to do. If you use our program, which has models, crisis development model, verbal escalation continuum, coping model, so on and so forth, their behavior fits into the model. The model then tells you what response to use, which then has a calming effect on the individual."

So if you're in a situation and the person displays a behavior, they're doing you a favor because they're actually part of the program now. They become part of the program that you're using, or that you should be using. They play a role.

Now, for example, the crisis development model, they yell and scream and make threats. Okay, wow, I know that's the defensive behavior from the model and I need to take a directive approach, and I can customize that by removing the audience and taking their threats seriously and allowing the venting and so on and so forth. So they're doing you a favor by telling you through their language and behavior what you need to do.

Terry: By review of the model and what stage . . .

Dan: By literally giving you the answer.

Terry: By literally giving you the answer.

Dan: So when you act out, you've just given me the answer because your behavior ties in perfectly with the response that I'm supposed to use. So I don't have to second guess or pull some intervention out of a hat. I know what to do because by you swearing or yelling or being belligerent, you've told me what I need to do.

Terry: I see.

Dan: I know that's kind of a twisted logic for some people.

Terry: Well, if it gives you orientation within the model about what you're step you're at then you can just look across the integrated experience to what your . . .

Dan: No, that's perfect. I love how you said that. They help you orient. That goes back to what I said about getting lost and then seeing maybe a highway or a bridge or something that, "Oh, yeah, my mom drives me to the dentist that way," and then I orient myself and I'm able to get back. That's a perfect analogy, Terry, right there.

It's all about the patient, the client, the student, helping you orient to find where you need to go with the intervention. Isn't that doing you a favor? In my mind it is. Maybe that's a paradigm shift for some people, but I think if we put it in that perspective that, no, this person isn't belittling me or abusing me or badgering me.

They're actually helping me. They're helping me use this wonderful intervention. They're doing me a favor. That should be the mindset we should all have.

Terry: That's great. It reminds me of something you said at the very beginning of the training that I enjoyed was crisis behavior is needy behavior, and if you can figure out how to fulfill that need in a way that is mutually acceptable to both people, then that is fulfilling the model.

Dan: Yeah, in fact my first supervisor here at CPI had an open door policy. He said, "Dan, if you ever have a problem, come and see me," and I made liberal use of it, whether it was a problem with the schedule or travel or I just was unsure, especially that first year. I would say, "Rob, here's the situation, blah blah blah." "Rob, I'm having difficulty with this, yadda, yadda, yadda."

He would eventually bring it around -- and I'll never forget this. He would always let me vent and then he would say, "Okay, Dan, what do you need?" I loved how he just boiled it down to that. "You've been going on now and I've heard you, I've been listening. Maybe 90% of your energy has just been some venting but you need something. What is it? Tell me so I can help you."

I'd say, "Well, I need this. I need X, Y and Z." He'd say, "No problem. I'll make that happen." I like how he helped me, the person who was in crisis, focus on, "You have a need here."

As a trainer, I've taken that perspective and realized that crisis behavior is needy behavior. I've told hundreds of people that, hundreds of groups. Crisis behavior is needy behavior and if you want to de-escalate the person, meet the need. Behavior is communication.

So if we take those two thoughts, behavior is communication and crisis behavior is need behavior, then when people behave in crisis mode, they are communicating a need that they have. Which goes back to our earlier point -- they're doing you a favor by telling you what their need is. Now, sometimes they can't verbalize it. We have people who are on the spectrum or short term memory deficits, cognitive deficits and so on and so forth, but their behavior still will indicate that they are in need of something. So all we really have to do is meet the need.

Terry: Excellent. Great. What lessons from the non-violent crisis intervention training have you most internalized and found repeated value in, possibly even to your own surprise?

Dan: That it's really just a matter of using the program. I've told groups this before is that don't reinvent the wheel. Don't leave here and then go back to the same old, same old, or leave what you've learned here in the hotel. Go back and use the program.

We've now given you this wonderful product. You've earned it through all this hard work. So why would you not use it? It just doesn't make sense. A, it's not complex, you've got the skills. B, we've put things in some organization for you and helped you understand people in crisis. Now just use the product.

Sometimes you will come across people who say, "Well, I don't know what to do," or, "What do I do in this situation?" or, "What if?" and you get those "what if" questions. I say, "You already have the answers. Just plug the program in. Just use the models. What does the behavior tell you? Whatever the behavior tells you, you should use the right response that he's given you. Don't reinvent the wheel. Don't second guess."

If you just use the program, you'll find that it's working for you. It's not going to work every time in every situation with every person, but in most situations, under most circumstances, with most people, most of the time, it's highly, highly effective and the more you use it, the more success you're going to have and the more confidence you're going to build and the more competent you're going to become. That will in turn then breed more success and more use of the program.

It's just like a wheel that once you push that wheel or that boulder down the hill it just gains momentum and it just gets easier and easier and easier. I have found that too. It's

just like, “Wow, now I’ve found crisis intervention, where have you been all my life?” Boy, I wish I knew this 15, 20 years ago.

I find that people have that epiphany as well and they’ll say, “Wow, I can use this anywhere.” And I say, “Yeah, you can. You can use it at the dentist’s office. You could use it here in the hotel.” Yes, it’s designed for people in human service, but it’s not something that you can only use when you’re at your job, nine to five. You should be using it all the time. It’s highly effective.”

I think that’s the biggest takeaway or the biggest thing that’s surprised me is that it’s not just a job, it’s a way of life, literally.

Terry: All right. Well, that dovetails into the question I was going to say about the biggest takeaway from non-violent crisis intervention that you want people to know. I think you’ve just expressed it is that this model is exportable and if you trust the model and you have a basic functional knowledge of where you’re at within it, that you will have an action step prepared that you can then trust, hopefully.

Dan: Yeah, and share with others too, that integrated experience that you have with somebody who does calm down as a result of your using of the program. Now you’ve just got a convert because they realize that you are empathic, that you do care about them, that you do care about their needs. It’s like a domino effect. That’s going to affect them, which is going to affect everybody else they touch.

I think that’s the greatest prize for me, or as far as what have I really enjoyed about this job is that I know that I’m going to have an impact on people three generations down the line. I don’t mean age generations. For example, I train a nurse to be a certified instructor. She in turn trains her staff at her hospital. They in turn treat their patients in a more empathic way.

So the patient benefits, yet it came back to the instructor at that program, but it even goes back earlier to CPI. So I have Crisis Prevention Institute to thank because they trained me, they gave me the skills, they gave me the knowledge. It just reverberates out there like a pebble in a pond. I know that that’s an old cliché but it’s true. That ripple effect, and it goes on and on and on, who knows how far down the line it could go, to somebody’s children. That’s just such a neat feeling.

Terry: That’s fantastic, Dan. That’s great. I think that we’re probably good. Are there any final thoughts that you want to share with . . . ?

Dan: I think I’m spent, yeah. I can’t think of anything else to say.

Terry: All right. Thank you, Dan. I thank Dan Lonigro for being our guest today here on Unrestrained.

Dan: Thank you, Terry.

Terry: You're welcome.

Thank you for listening to Unrestrained. Tune in again soon for our fourth episode featuring Josh Ladouceur, CPI's Senior Level Certified Instructor and registered practical nurse at the Waypoint Centre for Mental Health Care, up north of Toronto, eh?. Until then, this is Terry Vittone, hoping your intention is prevention.