

**Shrink Rap Radio #151, May 2, 2008, Relationships in the Workplace
David Van Nuys, Ph.D., aka “Dr. Dave” interviews Bob Murray, Ph.D.,
and Alicia Fortinberry, MS**

(transcribed from www.ShrinkRapRadio.com by Susan Argyelan)

Excerpt: *It’s really about how we do relationships and there really are simple ways to do relationships better. And unless we hold each other accountable for honestly talking about what it is we need for giving boundaries, for continuing dialogue, for taking the time to get to know each other as people rather than resources, those are the simple things that are going to make the difference. And yet perhaps in our society, they’re the hardest things.*

Introduction: That’s the voice of Alicia Fortinberry, who along with her husband, Dr. Bob Murray, are today’s guests. Bob Murray, Ph.D., and Alicia Fortinberry, MS, are a husband-and-wife team who are internationally recognized experts in psychology, leadership development, and organizational change. With 20 years’ experience in mental health and organizational psychology, Bob and Alicia lecture at universities such as Duke, Tufts, and California State University. As consultants, speakers, trainers, and executive coaches, Bob and Alicia apply a highly practical, research-backed approach to help organizations build leadership that measurably enhances performance, engagement, retention, and the capacity for positive change. Their multinational clients include PricewaterhouseCoopers, PepsiCo, Ford Motor Company, Bain & Co., and Oracle. They also work in the not-for-profit sector and for government departments. Bob and Alicia’s book, [Creating Optimism](#), is an international bestseller. And their latest book, [Raising an Optimistic Child](#), also published by McGraw-Hill, was featured in Time Magazine and is a New York Times bestseller. Their next book guides business leaders to create a positive relationship environment that enhances fulfillment, retention, and health. Bob and Alicia are quoted frequently in major publications from the New York Times to Entrepreneur. Now, here’s the interview.

Dr. Dave: Dr. Bob Murray and Alicia Fortinberry, welcome to Shrink Rap Radio.

Bob Murray: Thanks very much.

Alicia Fortinberry: Thank you.

Murray: We’re delighted to be here.

Dr. Dave: Yes. And you’re all the way in Australia, and here I am in northern California, with the miracle of Skype.

Murray: Yeah, we are. It’s a very dull, rainy morning here in Sydney, which is rather unusual for Sydney. Over the last few weeks, not so unusual.

Dr. Dave: My goodness. And it's about 2:30 in the afternoon here. Now, you're a husband-and-wife team consulting to a variety of corporations on leadership and organizational change. Is that right?

Murray: That's exactly correct.

Dr. Dave: Okay, so before we get into your corporate work, I notice that you've done a lot of work on optimism. And I've been following the career of [Martin Seligman](#) at the University of Pennsylvania, who first studied learned helplessness, which led him then to do research on optimism, and then to the development of positive psychology. Are you at all identified with the positive psychology movement?

Murray: No, we're regarded as the "other optimism people."

Dr. Dave: Oh, really? (laughter) Well, tell me a little bit about that. How did you two get into the study of optimism?

Murray: Lis, do you want to start?

Fortinberry: Well, it's through a number of ways. We were working in a private practice in developing our own method of overcoming depression and anxiety and creating optimism and authentic happiness in people. And the way (inaudible) I found worked really well was to look at the relationships people had around them, and we discovered that if we could get people to have truly supportive and accepting relationships with boundaries, then even the most severe depression got better. And one of the ways we discovered that was that I myself had suffered depression, and through the relationship with Bob and others, that got a lot better. So and then in fact it healed, which was something that the doctors had told me – the psychologists, psychiatrists, etc. – would not occur. So we began to look at the particular kinds of relationships that were the most powerful in changing people, and we found that relationships in which there was a very clear communication about what people really needed and some good negotiation around that, which we had some models for, it was very powerful (inaudible) condition that people were suffering from, or if people just wanted to feel better or make their marriages better. So that was how we came to that, and then we started teaching that method to a number of universities and to the staff at the universities. And then they asked us to come and actually work with the new (?) organizations themselves. And so we brought this idea that mood is, in a sense, contextual. You can't just pick yourself up by the bootstraps and think positive thoughts, although God knows it helps. But the real key is creating an environment around you of truly supportive people who you understand and with whom there are clear boundaries. And that's what we bring into organizations.

Dr. Dave: Yes, that really leads into my next question, and maybe Bob we'll toss this one to you. (laughter)

Fortinberry: You've caught on to us already! (laughter)

Dr. Dave: How did your work in optimism lead to your current work in corporate work and organization development?

Murray: Well, I think what we found, and which a lot of corporations are now finding, is that the biggest problem that they have is stress within the workplace. Usually we're called in not to deal with stress, but basically to deal with a breakdown in relationships in some way. In other words, that they're not doing their assessment dialogues very well, or they're finding it hard to create multidisciplinary teams around particular projects, or they're finding that they've got a very high attrition rate, or whatever the particular problem is that we're called in to deal with. What we find at the base of it is that there simply is too much stress, and it's particularly true that relationships are not (inaudible) human within the corporation. And this leads to a lot of stress. This leads to the attrition, this leads to the kind of dialogues which are unfortunate, at best. It leads very largely to bullying and a whole range of dysfunctional behaviors. But at the core of it is this idea that there's a failure of relationships, that human beings are relationship-forming animals. If you get the relationships right within the corporation, then the rest – productivity, profitability, and so on and so forth, performance – all follow naturally from that. And so basically, that's what we bring in. I think, you know, you were talking about Seligman earlier, and I think this is where we really, this is kind of where he and we separate, although we use a lot of positive psychology in our work, and I wouldn't want to denigrate positive psychology. But I think what we, we see human beings contextually. And we see them in terms of (inaudible) and everything boils down to that.

Dr. Dave: I'm sorry, the Skype is making funny sounds from time to time. You said you see in terms of...and I missed that next word.

Murray: Yeah, in terms of their context, in terms of their relationship context. Human beings have to be seen within the relationship context.

Dr. Dave: So you almost sound like family therapists for corporations. (laughter)

Fortinberry: I did study with [Virginia Satir](#), and of course, [Gregory Bateson](#). You know, you have systems theory...

Dr. Dave: Sure.

Fortinberry: ...in psychology, and to see people as part of a system. But when we say that relationships in corporations aren't human, what we mean is that human beings were designed – and some evolutionary psychology slips in here – but human beings were designed to thrive in the midst of a band or group of people that was truly supportive and truly interdependent and not (inaudible) sense competitive.

You didn't compete internally; you were too busy helping the band survive the external threats.

Dr. Dave: Yes...

Murray: You might compete for rights (?), of course...

Fortinberry: Yes, but not (laughter) not full-time, and probably, to some degree, not to the death, and certainly probably not among the women.

Dr. Dave: You know, this raises for me the question of whether or not corporations are inherently unhealthy places. Sometimes, when I think about the woes of the world, often I end up chalking a lot of our problems to corporations and some of the properties of corporations. You know, the fact that they don't die unless they fail, but they have the status of a person, but a person who can live forever. And there are other things, such as you mentioned competition, that would almost make them seem inherently unhealthy. Do you want to comment on that?

Murray: I think to a large extent (inaudible) that's true, and one of the interesting things we've found in our work is that corporations can have mental disorders...

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Murray: ...just as human beings can. You know, you can have the schizophrenic corporation, which seems to be going in many different directions at the same time. You can have a depressed corporation. You can have a hyperactive corporation. Largely, that's a reflective perhaps of the style of the CEOs which have been at the top of these corporations, but very largely, it seems as if that's so. It does seem as if they act in that way, and it affects everyone who works in these corporations, and of course, it affects the families of those corporations, and so on and so forth. Umm...yeah...

Fortinberry: But you know, if you look at what the corporation's modeled on, unfortunately, very often you have a military or even an assembly-line model. And it's perhaps that corporations are a reflection (inaudible) of our very dysfunctional society that's the problem. And on the other hand, while it's so easy to get depressed... I was speaking to somebody in a corporation yesterday, and he was saying, "How can we possibly get, we're too big to really change things. How are we going to get rid of this stress and this depression in this corporation and make it right?" And you know, maybe it can't be done, but the point is, that that's what has to happen because the corporations are the groupings of our society. Like it or not, they are taking the place of the hunter-gatherer bands that we were meant to be in. And yes, they're way too big; and yes, they require a lot of work. But until we can help people to be harmoniously and supportively together in the space – metaphorically and physically – where they do actually spend most of their time, we're not going to make a chink in the issues of our society.

Dr. Dave: Well, that certainly makes sense to me, that you've got to take your skills – your therapeutic and your organizational skills – to where people are actually living their life, and it is a fact and a truth that a large portion of the planet are living their lives within some kind of corporate structure, be it small or large. I notice you've had some very large clients on your website – you mentioned PricewaterhouseCooper, Ernst & Young, Oracle, Kaiser Permanente... Who would contact you, and what would they bring as the presenting problem? Who typically would contact you from a corporation? How would they know about you in the first place? And then, you know, what would they ask you for? You know, in therapy we talk about the identified patient, and the identified patient brings in a problem which often masks the real problem. Tell me how it goes for you.

Fortinberry: Actually, interestingly enough, sometimes – particularly in the beginning – would be (inaudible) an individual who had heard of us, and we would do some coaching (inaudible)...

Murray: Usually a fairly high-placed individual.

Fortinberry: Exactly right. And then they would ask us to work with their group, and we would work, say, on a problem like helping communication for a division of an organization, helping there be better teamwork...

Murray: Or cutting down on attrition.

Fortinberry: That's exactly right. And then that would spread to... Then somebody else would say, "Gee, the top leadership really could be doing their assessment dialogue better," because if the top leaders are better in their assessment dialogue and helping develop the people underneath them, that will cascade down. And then they would ask us to do that, and then they would say, "My goodness, this is really working, in terms of helping to develop our leaders. Could we create a coaching culture within the organization using these same tools that would transform the rest of the organization and have a real culture where people (inaudible) asked probing questions, looked for underlying issues, could be open and honest and have confidentiality and appropriate transparency, and all of that?" And so we would sort of by stealth (laughs) take over the group. Now we have clients. Along with the ones that you mentioned, we'll be working – Ford, and McDonald's, and Pepsi and so forth – and now they've heard of us from the people in the other corporations that we simply get phone calls saying, "Would you come and do either coaching or assessment dialogue, or a more systemic approach on resilience and vitality?" In other words, would you kind of do a health audit, do a stress audit for our company and help us to create a stress-busting culture, or depression-busting culture?

Murray: Or even a culture that's open to change. For example, we're being called in to do a lot of work in China recently to help them with the process of change, where

you've got people who are very, very tradition-orientated, and the idea (inaudible) change and be flexible within the workplace is quite new to them.

Dr. Dave: Well, something must be working because it sounds like you're very busy, and you're hearing from very influential clients. What is it you do? How - (laughs) what is it you do to work this magic? (laughter)

Fortinberry: We'll let you know about that, David (laughs, inaudible) No, actually...

Dr. Dave: I'm going to take notes! You know, a lot of people would like to break into this. But you guys seem to have figured something out here.

Fortinberry: Well, you're very sweet. I think one thing is that we are actually so passionate about what we do. And sometimes, when people see it working, they actually want to help us. And I think that our success is due to a lot of people helping us, and we're really grateful for that. Another thing is that we have some very clear ideas of how people can relate to (inaudible) that heal and help and change. And they're pretty much the same tools that we've been using throughout our career, the ones we taught at university; the ones we used in our private practice. And at the very root of it is simply having conversations with people in which you express what it is you need of them in very specific terms, and in terms that will elicit not – don't ask for an emotion or a concept.

Murray: Yeah, don't...

Fortinberry: Ask for an action.

Murray: Yeah. It's sort of, a lot of people, for example, I'm sure you've heard this, David, in the workplace, indeed, at universities. Sort of, "I need you to take this on board. I need you to understand. I need you..."

Fortinberry: "I need you to be more commercial!" (laughs)

Murray: "I need you to be more commercial. I need you to be a better team player."

Fortinberry: "I need you to love me."

Murray: Yeah! (laughs) All of these basically (?) are meaningless. I (inaudible) meaningless phrases to, to, meaningless requests to people all the time. And then they go off and they try and do what they think that we're requesting, and we say, "Oh, but you should have known that when I said 'commercial,' I meant blah-blah-blah," whatever it meant, or, "It doesn't seem to me that you're really taking this idea on board." And you say, "But wait a minute. I thought I was."

Fortinberry: Or in the family context, “But when I said I didn’t want to... I said just a little something for my birthday would be fine. You should have known it meant a little something from Tiffany’s.” (laughs)

Dr. Dave: Yeah, right. Right. (laughter). So what would an example, Alicia...then you said that you ask for an action. Maybe you could give us either an actual or a hypothetical example of that.

Fortinberry: Well, a very simple, “I need you to do what you say you’re going to do.” At the workplace (inaudible) office, particularly saying to somebody who is (inaudible) in the hierarchy (inaudible) has more positional power than you. “When I come into the office to speak to you, I need you to either tell me it’s not a good time for us to talk, *or* look away from your computer, put away your Blackberry, and make eye contact while we have our discussion.”

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm...

Fortinberry: You see, that’s so much more powerful than, “I need you to listen to me,” because God knows, in the multitasking society, people could be looking at the computer plus writing a note, plus have their Blackberry to their ear and still claim they’re listening.

Murray: And the poor bunny doesn’t think so.

Fortinberry: That’s right. So you know, it would be something like that. It makes people really think through what it is that they need. And we’re so quick not to do that, because either we don’t ask for what we need or we still have some inhibition that makes us use a generality, so that it’s certain not to be met.

Dr. Dave: Okay, yeah, that’s very helpful. You know, earlier you mentioned bullying, and let’s talk about that in the context of the corporation. How does that manifest, and what do you do about that?

Murray: Well, I think one of the prime causes for bullying that we found is a sense of a lack of autonomy on people’s part. I think it starts right at the top with bullying. You get a bullying culture where, let’s say, you have a bullying CEO or people very close to the top who are very transactional in their relationships, very demanding in their, in the way that they make their desires known; full of threat and so forth. This then becomes part of the top culture of that particular organization. People below that feel disempowered by that, so they tend to try and dysfunctionally show, take some power out on those below them, so they tend to bully on downwards. And I think this kind of “cascading bullying,” we’ve seen that in a lot of organizations. Don’t you think, Alicia?

Fortinberry: Yeah, but you know, it’s really an interesting question of what is bullying. I mean, certainly we’ve heard many examples of people who throw things when

they get angry; obviously, that's bullying. People who scream and yell – obviously, that's bullying.

Murray: Yeah.

Fortinberry: But there's... (inaudible) was at the American Psychology Association, that recently defined bullying also as criticism...

Murray: Yeah.

Fortinberry: ...and criticism isn't simply giving negative feedback. Criticism is giving feedback in such a way that there's nothing the person can do about it, usually in generalities. And it's just a power play. It just makes the person feel bad. Let me give you an existence, an example that I came across yesterday...

Dr. Dave: I would've loved having an existence. (laughter)

Fortinberry: Even I can't see the Freudian implication of that. I'm trying, and I can't!

Dr. Dave: I couldn't resist grabbing that. (laughter)

Fortinberry: Anyway, yesterday in a company in which there was a very formal process of feedback...and this young woman later tries her heart out, comes, really works very hard and is very skilled at what she does. And at my prompting, she went to one of her, uh, the people she reports to, but who is also supposed to be a mentor of hers and said, "You know, I would really like some help here because a lot of the feedback you've given me has been in terms I can't really understand in action. It's been general, and if you could make it more specific, because I really want to do my best and really want to do better, and I'm coming up for promotion. And could you please just be specific?" And he looked at her and he said, "Nobody likes you."

Dr. Dave: Great...(laughs)

Fortinberry: All right? And he said, "Nobody wants to work with you. Nobody likes you." And we were looking at her upward feedback, which she'd just received. And yes, there was some negative feedback by a small coterie of people, but the majority of people obviously did like working with her. But that's beside the point. It is going to be very rare that nobody likes you. I mean, you'd have to almost, well... I can't imagine, but... So he gave her a generality that was a crushing generality...

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Fortinberry: It wasn't true, as most generalities aren't. And it was simply mean, and that's bullying.

Murray: That's bullying.

Dr. Dave: So how are you going to intervene in a situation like that? I mean, you're not likely to be around when that's happening.

Fortinberry: Ohhh, David, I wish I had been. But anyway, that's said as an individual, not as a coach, and we professionals know you're not even supposed to *think* like that. (laughter)

Murray: (laughs)

Dr. Dave: Right, right.

Fortinberry: Besides, bodily harm is not the professional response, but...

Murray: Not the appropriate professional (inaudible)

Fortinberry: Not the appropriate professional response. But what I did, actually, what was nice, she said that if she hadn't been working with me, she would have been devastated. But because she had been working with me, she realized that she was not being given any kind of realistic feedback, that this person was just expressing something, in a sense, about himself. And she pointed out that that wasn't true and is now considering her options. But she will not continue to put up with that...

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Fortinberry: Unfortunately, she's got a very limited – if there were somebody really benevolent, with benevolent concern, above her it would be easier, and there isn't, so... But she's realizing it's a nice, wide world out there. She's got lots of job offers, and if this person isn't going to change, she's decided in her life that bullying is what we call a "red-zone need"; it's her line in the sand. She will not be bullied; it's too dangerous to her emotional health and well-being, and why should she? And so she may leave unless we (inaudible) the organization who can help her, I think, move sideways outside of this person's influence, because he's been told that that wasn't appropriate and he's just not changing.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm. Now, that example is a woman. Do men and women have the same issues around workplace relationships, or would they be different?

Murray: Well, I think that men and women have, very largely, the same issues. Women have slightly different issues with their work/life balance and things like this, which Alicia, you might want to talk about. But I think basically, the issues are the same. And I think what it is, is simply that relationships, that corporations don't, in essence, care about relationships. I'm not even certain that they even care about

people. And that is a wild generalization, but a lot of them just simply don't. I mean, we talk about having assets. We talk about...

Fortinberry: (inaudible) resources.

Murray: We don't even talk about people. You know, "Oh, I'm going to get another resource in on this."

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Murray: Wait a minute; where's the people? I think that the problem is really at the base of it, base of the way that the corporations are structured. The way that they're not there for the people within them; they're there for...I'm not sure what they're there for. A lot of them... I'm not sure that a lot of them are aware of what they're there for.

Fortinberry: Because if they were really there for profit, you're going to say, then having good relationships, all the studies show, is the way to it. Right, Bob?

Murray: That's exactly right. And I mean, for example, you cannot – I don't think – say, "Oh, I'm devoting my life to making Pepsi Cola," or, "I'm devoting my life to making bubble gum." This doesn't make sense to me. In terms of a purposeful life, this doesn't make sense, so therefore, (inaudible) purpose, and the only other purpose that you can have in a corporation or in any gathering is the relationships within it. In other words, people have got to be there to form relationships and have relationships with other people; otherwise, there's no point in being there at all. And I think this is the core of the problem. I mean, it's rather like the emperor having no clothes. They all say, "Oh, we're here to make a profit. We're here to (whatever it is)." But in reality, if they're not there for the people within them – if they're not there for the relationships that people can make within them – what on earth is the point in them being there? And I think it's to say that a lot of the people within corporations are asking just that question. This is where a lot of the present angst is coming from.

Dr. Dave: Yes. It seems to me that I've read that younger workers who are coming in, really are, they're looking for something more than just money...

Murray: Yes.

Dr. Dave: ...in terms of the rewards for their giving their lifeblood.

Murray: Yeah, exactly, and (inaudible) is a transformational leadership style. What they're looking for is some sort of purpose. What they're looking for is a nexus of people with whom they can have, to use their own term, "fun." They're looking for that relationship connection, and this is what they're not finding. And this is why you have such a high degree of turnover of young people within firms. They – a lot

of the companies that we work with now, they say, “If we can keep them, if we can just keep them for three years instead of one and a half...”

Fortinberry: One year instead of six months...

Murray: Yeah, that would be fantastic. You know, to get, let’s say, a young lawyer into your firm, it’s, the recruitment cost is something like \$150,000, and they say, “Gosh, we have this huge outlay in order to recruit these people, in order to train these people, in order to build them up within the firm, and then they leave. And we don’t know why.” I think that the reason why is just that they come in hoping to find something – relationships, purpose, whatever – and they don’t find it.

Dr. Dave: It seems to me that organizational consultants have been bringing this message to corporations for at least the past 40 years, if not longer. (laughs) Why doesn’t it seem to be taking greater hold?

Murray: But I think because before, attrition, for example – just to take that one issue – attrition was never a problem up until now. The demographics have shifted.

Dr. Dave: Uh-huh...

Murray: And there just simply aren’t the bright young things in their numbers to take up the slack. The baby boomers are now retiring; the X generation are looking to retire; the companies are desperately looking for young people who are going to come in; the young people realize that they have far more (inaudible) than their parents or their grandparents did. And then they’re just not willing to put up with the kind of dehumanization that the workplace produces.

Fortinberry: I think, Dave, that it’s also a very interesting question of yours. You know, why doesn’t it work? And as you know, so many of the studies show that the change programs on the whole do not work. And that is a fascinating question because there’s a lot of really smart people doing those programs.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Fortinberry: And it comes down to a system, doesn’t it? Whether the system is a company or an individual, the system doesn’t want to change. And so what happens is very often, that you get a change for a while, and then the system reverts back. So I think part of the problem is, is that there’s this idea within companies that if you just go in and fix it, it’s like changing the machine. The machine will keep going on its new course, and that you have to constantly re-create the change. You have to constantly be looking at (inaudible) relationships, just like in a marriage. And you have to constantly be saying, “Are we being fully honest? Are we allowing each other to change? Are we (inaudible) articulating, are we thinking about what we really need? Are we articulating that?” Are we asking each other, “What do you really need at this moment? What can I do to help meet those needs?”

How can, what goals do we both have in common? Are we working for them in the best way?" And I think it's that ongoing, really kind of sharp-edged dialogue that's missing, and the change programs come in, and people get really excited about it. And then the tide goes out because the organization can't or doesn't know how to keep it going. And then people revert, and then people feel disappointed, and then people feel let down. And then they, after a while they're not going to let themselves hope it's really going to work again. And I think that's very much an issue. And the other problem is that so many corporate (inaudible) come from the top down, sort of like a military campaign.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Fortinberry: "We're going to do this, this, this, and this," and by the time they finish the campaign with the kind of money you're sometimes looking at in a large corporation, the conditions have changed. So I think that you need... I mean, I think everybody's searching for a way, and there's some really wonderful people doing wonderful work around how you do that. But what we do need, what we do know is, that it needs to be ongoing, that it needs to be refreshed and looked at, perhaps, by working with different parts of the companies (inaudible) different ways, and then everybody's sharing their knowledge, so it isn't just one answer for everybody. But I think perhaps, perhaps the main reason that it hasn't worked is because it's so easy to look at all the ways that we might change somehow magically from the inside by thinking better, which, in the end, they've shown, just doesn't work. (inaudible) it's really about how we do relationships. And there really are simple ways to do relationships better, and unless we hold each other accountable for honestly talking about what it is we need for giving boundaries, for continuing dialogue, for taking the time to get to know each other as people rather than resources, those are the simple things that are going to make the difference. And yet perhaps, in our society, they're the hardest things.

Dr. Dave: You know, the things that you've just talked about – and certainly I agree that they're important – but I would think that to corporate types, those would sound like very soft things. And often, they're very bottom-line oriented. And I wonder, do they ever hold your feet to the fire to produce, to perform according to certain measurable metrics?

Murray: Oh, all the time, all the time. I mean, this is the great (inaudible), you know, how do you measure it? How do you measure the fact that our relationships are making us more productive?

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Murray: How do you measure the fact that (inaudible) the coaching program that we're putting in will make people whatever it is that they want to make them? And that's true. And you know, you can point to any number of studies which can show that the kind of programs that we put in will increase productivity or performance by

x%. You can show what's happened in other corporations. And sometimes, they say, "Yeah, but where are the figures? Where are the statistics? Where are the" – oh, what's that lovely phrase which Bain has, love?

Fortinberry: I don't know, "metrics"?

Murray: Yeah, "Where's the metrics on it?" That's not the phrase I was looking for, but no mind. And to a lot of these skills, they've been classified as soft, but they're not, because your productivity, your performance depends entirely on the relationship. Human beings are not machines. Human beings perform well if they're in, if they're surrounded by supportive relationships. They work best if the dopamine within their system is flowing freely, if you like. That is, if they're happy there. Human beings become happy if they're supported by people around them; if they feel they have that support; if they feel there's commonality with the people around them; if they feel that the other people are going to look after them; if there's benevolent concern, if you like; if they feel that people around them are going to do as they say they're going to do. Then they feel happy; then they feel contented; then they're able to be in the flow.

Fortinberry: I think going back to this measurement piece, I think psychology has a lot to offer, because we look at behaviors and we don't look at attitudes. And I think that's very, very important; that a firm needs to say not what attitude but (inaudible) do we want our employees to have, although that's really helpful in many ways. But what actual behaviors do we want to see? And sometimes they're very – for instance, in a coaching program, the kind of behaviors you want to see is people spending whatever the company decides is, what, you know, say, an hour a month with a coachee. It seems like little enough to ask. And to say, "Well, it's not coaching if you don't do that," asking more than telling; giving, exchanging needs in clear ways; talking about what you each need and negotiating. Those are behaviors, and people can say yes for doing more or less than that. That can be observed, that people are doing less or more. You can look at, is there being less criticism and more real feedback? In other words, when people give feedback or give assessments, are they being specific in talking about what (inaudible) they would like to see differently in the future (inaudible) of people. A lot of these things, if you can measure the behaviors, you can measure the change, and then you can also fix that to the bottom line. But the real, I think, the real advance, the real frontier of measurement into the moment is going to be, how do you measure the stress level and perhaps the (inaudible) which is very high in a firm. And how do you correlate that to the policies of the firm? How do you show the board of a firm that what they do has a direct impact on the mental and physical health of the employees? And I think that's the learning frontier that Bob and I are really excited about and have begun some projects on working on.

Dr. Dave: Again, getting back to my question, I'm wondering if, I imagine you sign a contract on occasion, and I'm just wondering, do they insist that there be demonstrable results, and if so, how those results would be measured?

Murray: No, they don't. (inaudible) never actually had a contract...

Dr. Dave: Well, lucky you!

Murray: (laughs) By and large, they don't.

Dr. Dave: Okay.

Murray: I think that with us, people have seen that when we come in, we do actually produce results. For example, on the quality-assessment dialogue program, which is another word that we have for an assessment program, we brought this into PWC in one of their localities. And before that, the satisfaction level with assessment dialogues was 39%. In other words, the vast majority of people there didn't think they were either helpful or useful, or that they got very much out of them. After we taught the senior partners how to have assessment dialogues, how to avoid criticism, how to look for development points, how to bring the other person (inaudible) make a relationship within that space, the satisfaction level increased to 70%. And so yes, you can bring in that kind of measurability.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Murray: And I think that kind of what we've had is from word of mouth: "Yeah, these people actually do work; what they say really works. They may sound a bit flaky because they go on about relationships a lot..."

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Murray: (laughs)

Fortinberry: Actually, we don't get a whole lot of "flaky stuff" because then we start talking about the brain; then they can't tell if we're being true (laughs) or they don't know whether it's real or not, but it sounds good, and it *is* real!

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, right. We have to talk about the brain these days.
(laughs)

Murray: So one brings in sort of neuroimaging studies and sort of, you know, we say, "Well, look. This is how the pathways, how criticism blocks feedback learning, how criticism actually slows down performance, how..."

Fortinberry: (inaudible) then you can show, you know, how the brain responds equally to both.

Murray: Yes, and how it sort of... E-mails actually increase stress, whereas going around the corner to actually talk to someone will decrease stress, and a whole range of things like that.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, that's fascinating. I'm imagining maybe somebody listening to this conversation who maybe works in a corporate setting where they're not very happy. And I know that this is horribly general, but I wonder if there's anything – any word of advice – that you would have for a person who finds himself in that sort of a situation.

Murray: Lis, you're the executive coach...

Fortinberry: (laughs) I think that what someone in that situation has to do is first, look at their relationships. And usually there's a few... If people are unhappy, then they think it's kind of miasmic and across-the-board, but if they look at what's really keeping them awake nights, at what they're taking back (inaudible) and mulling about, or being concerned about, you usually find that it's one or two relationships that are the things that are really creating the most pain. And what we would suggest is that think about what you, start to get back to needs. But it is so vital. Think about what you would need, the people to do or not to do, and in the terms that we've talked about. You know, what actions do you want them to take? Think about it. Would it be doable? Don't worry about it's doable by, oh, Tom, but would it be doable by somebody in Tom's position? Try to make it really specific, and when you have a really specific action – in fact, hopefully a list of them – then look at the list you've made and say, "Okay. Which of these are what we call 'red-zone' needs? Which of these needs are so important to me?" – if there's bullying or criticism (inaudible), undermining in some way, whatever it is – whatever it is to you. Maybe it's even the pay. Whatever it is, which of these needs are worth you drawing a line in the sand and saying, "If this doesn't change, then I'm out of here." That in itself – just that process – will help you get a better sense of autonomy, of being in control in your life. Then have the conversation with somebody, but ask them also to give them their needs of you in ways that are also specific and about actions doable in your position and appropriate. See if you can come to some negotiation with them. Now, your red-zone needs are not negotiable. You know, "You either stop calling me bad names or I leave..."

Murray: "I'm out of here."

Fortinberry: "I'm out of here." But you know, see what (inaudible) of the ones that are negotiable. And some of them are just going to be what we call "green zone" needs, "It'd be really nice." But the orange-zone needs – the ones in the middle that are important, but maybe there's a bit of negotiating room – see if you and the other person can come to an agreement around (inaudible) and then if you can, then as you go forward, see if that person keeps their word and actually does what they say they'll do. And also see if you're able to keep to what you agreed. If the two of you can keep those agreements going forward – and it can include various ways that

you want the other person to support you and what that would really look like – then you will find probably the relationship gets better, and so does how you feel about work, particularly if you do it with a number of key relationships. If you find that you’ve got a whole bunch of red-zone needs there that people won’t negotiate about, or if people don’t care enough to sit down and talk about your needs, then I would strongly suggest that you begin having some headhunter conversations and just explore what your options are so that you don’t feel trapped and you don’t get to that place where you feel that you’re not in control of your life, which is not a good place to be.

Dr. Dave: Right, right. So the basis of much of your work really revolves around what you refer to as “relationship stress” in the job and you found that it takes a big physical and emotional toll on the health of employees and that it ends up costing corporations. As we sort of begin to wind down here, I wonder if there are any points about all that that you haven’t had a chance to make. This is your chance to get in a few last licks here. (laughs)

Murray: (laughs) I think the point that I would make, there’s several points here. Firstly is the alarming point, is that 80% of corporations have absolutely no stress program whatsoever. And the majority of employers don’t see it as a problem – still. And that I find very upsetting, especially since workplace stress is perhaps one of the single (inaudible) problems of our time. But, you know, studies have linked it – workplace stress – have linked it to things like childhood obesity. Our children are becoming more obese because their parents are working long hours and not there, not there to supervise what they eat, and so on and so forth. It’s leading to an increase in white- and blue-collar crime according to some studies. It’s linked to the soaring health costs that we have, the increase in heart disease not to mention somatized illnesses; 80% of all physician visits, as you know, are to do with what are called “functional illnesses,” in other words, ones which have no biological cause, on the face of it.

Fortinberry: Forty-eight percent of family breakdowns can be (inaudible) stress.

Murray: Yeah. Yeah, 48% of family breakdowns can be linked to workplace stress. It seems to me that this is one (inaudible) the issues of our time which is sitting there like a time bomb. And it’s going off in slow motion, if you’ll pardon the mixed metaphor. And it seems that very little is actually being done about it. A lot is being talked about it but very little done.

Fortinberry: And as much as the companies themselves need to do things, companies are simply large, rather amorphous systems. You know, I don’t think that any...and some – and many, many, many leaders have their heart in exactly the right place and are trying to do something. But this also, I think that companies will heal a conversation at a time. I think that people need to be clear about their boundaries. I think we need to get away from our computers and more in front of the people we work with...

Murray: That's right.

Fortinberry: ...and really make a conscious effort to do that. Because that, in the long run, is going to be more important than anything.

Dr. Dave: Well, I think that's a wonderful place for us to close. So, Dr. Bob Murray and Alicia Fortinberry, thanks so much for being my guests today on Shrink Rap Radio.

Fortinberry and Murray: Thanks (inaudible) our pleasure. (laugh)

Dr. Dave: All together, now!

Fortinberry and Murray: (laughter)

Murray: That's us!