

**Shrink Rap Radio #449, April 2, 2015, Inside the Criminal Mind  
David Van Nuys, Ph.D., aka “Dr. Dave” interviews Stanton  
Samenow, Ph.D.**

(transcribed from [www.ShrinkRapRadio.com](http://www.ShrinkRapRadio.com) by Paula Bautista)

**Introduction:** On today's show, I'll be speaking with return guest forensic psychologist Dr. Stanton Samenow, author of Inside the Criminal Mind, and we'll be discussing the latest edition of that book. For more information about Dr. Stanton Samenow, please see our show notes on [Shrinkrapradio.com](http://Shrinkrapradio.com).

Before we go to the interview, I want to let all you professionals know that our strategic partner, the Jung Platform, has created CE courses from selected Shrink Rap Radio interviews on topics such as dreams, relationships, synchronicity, trauma and more. Go to [www.JungPlatform.com](http://www.JungPlatform.com) to see the latest courses. Now, here's today's interview.

**Dr. Dave:** Dr. Stanton Samenow, welcome back to Shrink Rap Radio.

**Stanton Samenow:** Well, thank you very much, Dr. Van Nuys, for having me.

**Dr. Dave:** Well, I'm so pleased to have you back on as a guest. Last time we spoke was Shrink Rap Radio Number 238, and now this will be Number 449, so that was around five years ago. And as I noted then, you and I are both graduates of the clinical psychology program at the University of Michigan, and I think you were a year or two ahead of me, but I do remember that we had some contact back in those days, so it's great to have this excuse (laughs) to touch base again.

**Samenow:** Well, I'm glad to be here and to talk with you.

**Dr. Dave:** Well, yes, that's great. And last time, actually, we spoke about this very same book, Inside the Criminal Mind, and now some years later, you've updated it. So, what is it that led you to write this new edition, this third edition of Inside the Criminal Mind?

**Samenow:** Well, the criminal mind is alive and well, and fundamentally, it's the same as it has always been, but the criminal mind has many new arenas in which to function. And in doing a rewrite of this book, I wanted to discuss those arenas, to go into in a lot more detail the thinking patterns that give rise to criminal behavior, to talk about what is being done to try to help some offenders change,

and also to give some attention to some of the newer research that is coming out on possible biological or genetic contributors to criminal behavior.

**Dr. Dave:** Well, that's good. I hope that we could get into all of those new things that kind of have emerged. Is there a fundamental change in your concept of the criminal mind from the previous version of the book?

**Samenow:** There really isn't. It is of a mentality that thinks a certain way. Now, criminality lies across a spectrum, and in fact, our listeners could say, "Well, whether you're a criminal depends on the law. You could be a criminal in California today if the law changed, and not tomorrow if the law changes." But this work that I've been part of and involved in for over 40 years deals with a lot more than laws. It deals with minds and how people live their lives. And so there are people who have made crime a way of life. And there are certain thinking patterns that they have and we all share some of them to some degree. But these individuals are extreme in the certain patterns and the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. So the basic concept is still what it was, but there are many more areas in which these people operate and they do not announce themselves to other people. They are very secretive, they are very deceptive, and they're often very smart.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes. And I seem to recall some of the salient features being things that they are...basically out for themselves, have very little sense of the inner workings of other people. They're so focused on their own narcissistic concerns that they are pretty much lacking in empathy. What are some of the other characteristics, assuming I've got that one right?

**Samenow:** Well, on the empathy, I think this is a great quote, and I heard it from a probation officer. Her client said to her, in all seriousness, "This empathy thing – what's in it for me?"

**Dr. Dave:** (laughs) That's like a stand-up joke. (laughs)

**Samenow:** Well, unfortunately, it was a real-life statement. But a couple of other salient features that I want to emphasize here is that these are people who seek to prevail in every situation, whether they do so by deception, intimidation, or brute force. It isn't just that they're controllers, but that their concept of themselves relies on control of other people. It's control for the sake of control. If you have nine of these people on a baseball team, each of them thinks he should be the captain, and failing that, they'll quit or maybe stick around and make life miserable.

One other feature I want to highlight, and we could get into whatever other topics you want, is that although they are tough, uncompromising, and really have no

concept of injury to others, they also are very fearful, but they do not announce their fears to others. They know the occupational hazards of crime, that they could get caught, convicted, and confined, injured or killed in a high-risk crime. There are rudimentary forms of conscience that they can shut off long enough to do what they want to do, but the most important fear of all, in terms of people who encounter them and deal with them, is a fear of being put down. And from the criminal standpoint a put-down is any little detail of life that doesn't go his way. So if you have one man saving a chair for another, and someone else sits there, you have World War III on your hands. It's like sticking a pin in a balloon. This whole self-image is on the line, because this chair that someone else is occupying...it's his chair. One man said, "When I walk into the room" – speaking of a break-and-entry – "everything in that room belongs to me." That's not a mental illness; that is because he knows right from wrong; he knows the flat-screen TV and the jewelry and the other electronics are not his, but in his mind, they are already his and he just has to figure out how to get them out of there and how to conceal them. But a look, call him a name, anything that doesn't go his way, then/and it is indeed like sticking a pin in a balloon and his whole self-image is on the line. Thus these are people who are chronically angry at a world that they think does not give them what they are due.

**Dr. Dave:** This makes me wonder if these same factors hold true for, say, corporate criminals, white-collar criminals, not the break-and-entry kind of guy who you're going to come across in prison, but maybe somebody at very high levels, very high functioning. Are we talking about the same inner dynamics?

**Samenow:** We are. We're talking about the same mentality, whether the person is a rapist or a white-collar criminal. You are known by the crime for which you were arrested, so a rapist is known as a sex offender, but I have yet to meet a rapist who has not committed other types of crimes. This is not to say that all criminals commit all types of crimes. They have their tastes and preferences in crime like they do in other aspects of life. But the so-called white-collar criminal has the same mentality. When he leaves his four-car garage, five-bedroom house, and goes to his job, he is not embezzling or committing other corporate crimes for the money. He is not impoverished. He doesn't need a proceed. But rather he has the same view as people who commit other kinds of crimes. He's special; he's unique. He's better than others. The laws, the rules, do not apply to him. And I'm using the pronoun "him" but it certainly applies to females.

I have just been evaluating a person who is a manager of a credit bureau, embezzled, if you can believe, over a million dollars as manager of that credit bureau over a period of ten years. And even the auditors she was able to fake out and overcome. And it's the same view. There's no concept of injury to others. There's the belief that she's special, unique, better than others, the knowledge that she could get caught but it wasn't going to happen to her, that she was the

exception. So, to answer your question, these thinking patterns apply not only across different types of crimes, but across ethnic, racial, religious, and other demographic groups.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes. Now going back to that fear that you mentioned earlier...remind me what the fear was, and I'm wondering is there, in some psychodynamic sense, is there some sort of a deep, basic fear?

**Samenow:** Well, really, these are individuals who think in extremes. They're either number one or they're nothing. So, anything that does not corroborate their view of themselves as unique and special, there is the implicit threat of being reduced to a zero. In fact – and I try not to use jargon and to coin even new terms, but there really is a zero state or a fear of a zero state, that the person will be reduced to nothing, that it will last forever, and that things will never be any different. Therefore, these are people who go through life constantly trying to prop up this precarious image of themselves as very special, as powerful, as unique.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes, and so this must affect their thinking processes. They must have to go through some pretty elaborate inner defensive moves to protect themselves from that fear.

**Samenow:** Well, they do. So, after the fact, what they tell other people like you and me, and the police, and court services workers – what they tell us when they're held accountable often has little or no relationship at all to the actual thinking before, during, and after a crime. So if you were to ask such a person, "Who was hurt?" I'm not saying you necessarily would ask that, but you might, and their types of answers you would get are "Well, I know the guy missed this stuff, but I'm the one that's got to do the time." Or he would blame the victim. "Well, you know, she left the keys in that Mercedes. So she was inviting me to take the car. She should have been more careful." "Well, that woman, the way she was dressed and out at the time she was, she was sure looking for something." *Then* they present themselves as the victims of something that was unfair that happened, their unfair treatment. And so, really, people who are victimizers, when they present themselves to others, and this is when they're held accountable, of course want to minimize whatever penalty might await them. And so they render themselves as victims, which is a complete denial of the ripple effect of injury that ripples forth not only to direct victims but indirect victims.

**Dr. Dave:** Okay. Okay, that's very helpful. Well, earlier you mentioned something about some new research emerging in terms of genetic predispositions towards criminality. Tell us about that research and what it means.

**Samenow:** Well, there was a time where it was politically incorrect to even broach the topic of a possible genetic or biological contribution or cause of criminal behavior, the thinking being that this could very well be misused and people could be tagged as criminals and separated out from the population, and...it was really worry about the misuse. And by the way, that worry is not totally misplaced, because if there are such findings, indeed they could be misused.

So what has been coming forth, and really the most notable or, I guess, well-known, work is by a researcher...and I believe the University of Pennsylvania, by the name of Raine, R-A-I-N-E, who's written about the biology of violence, and he made the statement that criminals have – and this is his phrase – “broken brains,” and he's talking about brain pathology and that coupled with certain environmental factors placing them at risk. And I'm oversimplifying, but if you read his work, he will talk about specific brain pathology. The only problem is – well, I don't want to say the only problem – but *a* problem is that he acknowledged is that there are people with similar brain pathology but they don't become criminals. So, we're really not anywhere anything definitive. And furthermore, there are critics of this type of work who say, “Well, even if you find some organic pathology, that the human personality is made up of more than neural circuits, and there's this concept of the mind. So that biology really can never explain it.”

My point is this: Yes, sure, the controversy goes on and there will be more research and more findings, but one very important question is “Does biology have to be destiny?” So, in some families there is a predisposition to alcoholism. That doesn't mean that every family member is going to die in the gutter of cirrhosis of the liver. What it *does* mean, if one knows that one is at risk, all the more reason to choose not to drink. So, as you know, in this book, that our readers who haven't read it don't know, I talk a lot about choice, that people make choices, that crime resides within the individual, not within the environment. Back to my predisposition point here, that if there's a predisposition – I'm saying “if,” because we're not sure that there is – all the more reason...and if you're aware of that predisposition, that one can make choices that do not lead one to the penitentiary. Genetics need not be destiny.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes, and somehow the law always seems to work on the premise that people have choice, and...

**Samenow:** Well, that's a very interesting point, because the next thing that will come along, and there may already be such cases, where a person, instead of pleading not guilty by reason of insanity, will plead not guilty because of brain pathology, or something of that ilk.

**Dr. Dave:** Has that happened yet? Has that defense not been entered yet? It would surprise me.

**Samenow:** I don't know if it has or not. I have read that people can see this coming. I am not aware of actual cases that defense has been used. It may be. I don't know of any cases that have been successful, that's for sure, and I think I would have heard of them if they had been.

**Dr. Dave:** Okay. Now, in the media, there's been a lot of attention paid to the relationship between violent crime, for example school shootings, and playing violent video games, violence in movies and other media, and some of the stuff that I've seen in the media have been truly shocking. What's your view of this issue?

**Samenow:** Well, I wrote a paragraph – I wrote more than that. Let me just read you, if I may, about three or four sentences. This is from page 10, early on in the book.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes, that'd be great.

**Samenow:** “Millions of people watch violence in films and on television programs. For more than 50 years, moviegoers have flocked to James Bond films that are saturated with violence. Millions of children and adults play violent video games. Responsible people are not transformed into killers because of what they watch or play for entertainment.”

Now, my point is this. It is true in some cases that people who perpetrate crimes of violence have played many, many very violent video games and are fascinated by violence and watch violent programs and see violent films. But it doesn't work the other way, because, as I've said, for 50 years, people have seen James Bond films and for years people have played violent video games, but they don't rush out and enact that which they see – to which you may say, or our listeners may say, “There is such a thing as a copycat crime.” That's true; there are people who will enact that which they see on the screen or in a video game in detail. But for every person who does that, millions of people have played the same violent video game, seen the same violent movie, and for them, it is simply entertainment. They would not think about going out and actually perpetrating these crimes.

So, this, again, is my point, that crime resides within the mind of the individual, not in the environment. The environment can provide temptations; the environment can provide opportunities; the environment can provide stimulation, but it is the individual who makes a choice – or more accurately, I suppose, a series of choices. So, a responsible person is not transformed into a killer by the games he plays or the movies he watches.



**Dr. Dave:** Let me push it just a little bit further, though. Might there not be some individuals who are vulnerable in some way, due either to environmental factors or historical factors in their growing up, or genetic factors, who would be tipped over by this kind of stimulation? While most of us would not be tipped over, some people just might not have the predisposition that would protect them from being tipped over.

**Samenow:** Well, you're posing a possibility, and of course, I have to acknowledge there is such a possibility. But then I would really want to know what is the difference, or what are the differences, in the individual who plays the violent video games, and, you know, has come from some very difficult circumstances in life, who is psychologically frail in certain ways, and still would not even fantasize actually perpetrating the crime, and the individual, the hypothetical person that you're positing here who would be, quote, "tipped over the edge." See, what you're, I think, on the edge of saying here is that there is such a thing as an out of character crime, that a person might snap, that a person might do something that is not within his character, and that is often contended. I mean, you read this all the time in newspapers. "Person had no criminal record; he's an effective member of the community; he has a wife and family; he's active in his church, temple or mosque, and it was one thing too much. It tipped him over the edge, whatever the 'it' may be. He snapped."

And I have yet to see that. I would say that there is no such thing as an out-of-character crime. The table next to me is not going to fly unless somebody tries to throw it, because it's not in its character to do so. You cannot act other than who you are.

So, take the person who receives a pink slip. He's laid off from his job through no fault of his own. And it happens. So this is an adversity, to say the least. It can be pretty traumatic. So if you get five people who receive such a pink slip, there may be very different reactions. One guy becomes a recluse, sinks into a depressive funk and does nothing. Another drinks and increases his alcohol consumption. Another becomes angry and fantasizes going to seek redress for his grievance. And another decides he's going to work that much harder to find a new job, and he's not going to waste his time with self pity or drinking or anything else, and he makes a job out of getting a job. Now, those would be different reactions for the same type of stimulus. So, what I found is that what appears out of character really means that not enough is known about the individual, that even people who think they know the perpetrator of the crime – there are things that they do not know about him. And I've written actually a book about this called *The Myth of the Out of Character Crime*, in which I talk about how people like this do not announce themselves to others, that there is a whole aspect of a

personality, thinking that occurs repetitively, over and over and over, until a particular opportunity or set of circumstances presents itself.

So my job, or one of them, is to be a psychological sleuth. When there is a supposedly out of character crime, I have to go backwards and say, "What really was the character of this individual? What is it that we didn't know about his thinking?" And for many of these people, they're bright, they're accomplished, and they're somewhat, shall we say, they're erratic and odd, and people make allowances for them because of their talents, and certain conduct that they might not accept from other people they'll excuse with this type of person until a major crime is perpetuated. We could talk a lot more about this but I know you want to move on to other things.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes, as you're talking about that the picture that's coming up in my mind are some of these mass-shooting kinds of cases, where young people who were (I think often they're young people – I guess not always)...but they've been under the radar and described as nice loners, but then as people like you dig deeper, they discover that well, the worse, maybe subtle signs...

**Samenow:** Well, let's take that word, *loner*. And because many of them are described that way, you're absolutely right. But let's really see what that means: the implication that they are ostracized, or maybe they are bullied. Well, let's take the second one first, that they're bullied.

Kids have been bullied forever. I remember there was a period in school where I was teased and tormented every day after school. It's hardly a new phenomenon. I wrote about this on page 62 in the book, and I said, "Bullies may inflict their particular form of venom, by focusing on physical features, social awkwardness, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or any other characteristic that sets someone apart." And then I go on and say, "Just as children react in different ways to parental abuse, the same is true with how they cope with the abuse meted out by bullies. Some children feel helpless and withdrawn to the point that they avoid going any place, some even refusing to go to school. Some internalize the mean comments directed at them and lose self-confidence. Some become depressed, and some address the situation by standing up to the bully physically or seeking adult help."

And then I cited an American Psychological Association study reporting the results of a Duke University twenty-year study of 1300 children. And the researchers concluded that in contrast to children who were never bullied, those who were bullied *were* at higher risk for psychiatric disorders, including depression, anxiety, panic disorder and agoraphobia. So I'm not saying that bullying doesn't have an impact, but I'm saying you've got to look at the



personality of the individual being bullied and that they respond in different ways.

The loner aspects of it, you need to look at cause and effect. Going all the way back to Columbine – all I know is what I've read – obviously the two people, Klebold and Harris, killed themselves, but they were said to be loners. Well, they *were* loners, but they were loners because they didn't want to have anything to do with most of the other kids for whom they felt contempt. They isolated themselves, and they looked down with scorn on the so-called jocks, and the so-called nerds. They saw themselves just in the manner that I described when we started, as special, unique, different from the others, so they rendered themselves as loners, and they were, I imagine (I don't know) – but they may have come across as odd or scary, and others sensing the contempt that these two felt for them, didn't want anything to do with them. So rather than being ostracized through no fault of their own, because of their personalities, because of their views, because of the way they behaved, they isolated themselves.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes. I thought that was a really fascinating discussion in the book. I remember reading that. Do I also recall that being a bully can be a sign of criminality to come?

**Samenow:** Yes. Absolutely. And I don't mean an isolated case where somebody calls somebody a name a few times, but we're talking about bullies: people who build themselves up by tearing others down. And that is very, very concerning. It is a harbinger of more trouble to come, and it can be a forerunner of this criminal personality I'm talking about.

**Dr. Dave:** Okay. Now, earlier, we were talking about the law and how the law holds people accountable. What about the insanity defense? Are there cases in which that in fact has worked for people?

**Samenow:** Well, you know, this was another aspect of doing this new edition, because I have taken the approach and I've stated that the insanity defense is more often than not a charade participated in by the courts, well-intentioned mental-health people and the criminal himself. However, I have supported the insanity defense in two cases in the last few years. Mostly I have not found that the legal standard for insanity is met by the people I evaluate. So, yes, it is certainly possible.

In the one case that I wrote up in the book was a woman who (I don't know if I said if it was a woman or a man, but anyway, I've just said it it's a woman; I'm not identifying her) who one day woke up and was hearing voices...I mean, she had been hearing voices, but on this particular day, the voices told her to go to the grocery store. The end of the world was here, she could just help herself, nobody

would ask her to pay, everybody was taking what they needed to make provisions, and then to get home as quickly as she could. Hearing the voices, she goes to the store. She's very puzzled and confused, because doesn't look any different from normal. People are putting groceries in their baskets, they're lining up at cash registers and paying for them. But she hears the voice, and she grabs the groceries, starts to leave. One of the store staff stops her; she in a panic knocks the person down and leaves. They call the police (the store does), and the police arrive. She walks out with her groceries; she doesn't think the police are there for her, gets in her car, and then she sees the police are pursuing her. The voice is telling her, "Drive home, drive home, drive home." She doesn't live very far. She's been on this route many, many times, and the police are after her and she accelerates, and she's driving 80 miles an hour in a rather busy suburban area to get to her residence. She turns into an alley, and there's a police car there to block her, and she stops, and then she rams the police car with her car. The police get out, and they tell her to get out of the car. She won't get out; she won't respond to the police. They drag her out, and they call an ambulance, and that's the short story.

Now, you could say, "Well, if she was able to elude the police at 80 miles an hour and drive through the traffic, she couldn't have been too crazy." But this is a route that she knew, had probably taken day in and day out for years, so, I mean, it was practically automatic. Point of it is that long before this occurred, she had been hearing voices. I talked to her psychiatrist; I talked to her family members, and she had gone off her medicine, which she had done before, and I found that she did not know right from wrong, that she could not appreciate the major character and consequences of her crime. So that was a case and I said that she was mentally ill, legally insane, and actually they decided not to prosecute, but they used a psychiatric disposition. So, there *is* such a thing. But, in more cases than not, although the person *might* have a mental-health record, that does not mean that does not mean that they were insane at the time of the crime. And it takes a lot of interviewing, a lot of time interviewing the alleged perpetrator, talking to collateral references, looking at police records, reviewing mental-health charts, so the insanity defense is rarely used to begin with, and very rarely is supportable.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes. Okay. Now, one of the new contributions to this book is you wrote a chapter focusing on the sexual life of the criminal. What was behind that and what did you discover?

**Samenow:** Well, since writing the first edition, and even the second edition, which was 2004 (that was 10 years ago), there has been a lot written and a lot of turmoil in the criminal-justice field about how to treat sex offenders. And we have the advent of the Sex Offender Registry, specialized sex offender treatment programs, certifying practitioners as sex offender treatment providers. And so

what I wanted to transmit in this Chapter, Number 7, that I called Sex for Conquest and a Buildup of the Self, is that the criminal is perceived...this is just in the vernacular, so to speak, that criminals are often portrayed as having unusually strong sex drives. The issue is having power over others. It's making the conquest. And so I discuss the thinking patterns that occur in rape, child molestation, voyeurism, indecent exposure, sexual exploitation in adult relationships, as when a therapist has sex with his patients, which of course totally unethical and is punishable by losing one's license, and I was saying all this is variation on a theme, that it is doing the forbidden for the buildup of the self. If you take indecent exposure, it's the shock value, the control of exhibiting oneself to others, and, you know, that you will either be found an object of interest or you're going to be found attractive, or that there will be such shock that the person will be just dismayed. So it's, again, control; it's power, and that's what it is.

And that is the same with regard to rape. It's a sex crime but it's about conquest, and that's what it is – conquest, power and control. So I wanted to talk about how the current criminal does not see the sexual...if you want to use the word *partner* or *target*...as a human being. As one said, “I didn't care if she was deaf, dumb and blind; all I wanted was her torso.” So I'm talking about the thinking patterns, as we've discussed somewhat earlier in this interview, in showing how they apply to the sexual realm.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes, yes. Now one thing that you've written about is US Attorney-General Holder and his use of something called the pipeline-of-education-to-prison concept. Can you tell us what that's about and what your stance is?

**Samenow:** Yes. Well, the evidence to me is that it's a totally flawed concept, the concept being that kids in school who have conduct problems – and I'm not talking now about the kid who talks too much in the classroom, or the kid who's occasionally disruptive. I'm talking about the person who ruins the classroom climate for the kids who want to learn: the youngster who starts fights; the youngster who steals; the person who will not do what a teacher asks him to do or assigns him to do, who keeps the classroom in turmoil. So, what is a teacher to do? Are the other 20 students to have their education chronically disrupted day by day by this one person? Well, the school has to do something. And this is a person who rejects the school, believe me, before the school ever rejects him. So, Holder's concept here is that the school really doesn't know how to accommodate these people, and the school rejects this person, and the school makes an outlaw of him, and before you know it, he's in juvenile detention, and before you know it, he's in prison. And it's as though the schools have somehow failed this person. Well, you know, if the schools offered a course or courses on arson, armed robbery and lock-picking, *maybe* these schools would hold these kids...

**Dr. Dave:** (laughs)

**Samenow:** ...and if they required those courses, not even then. These students are well-known to councilors, teachers, school safety officers. They endeavor to turn the class into a war zone, and it's because of the behavior that they engage in, the choices they make. It isn't the school that is causing these people to end up in prison. It's a totally flawed idea.

**Dr. Dave:** Okay, this brings another thought to mine. Given your emphasis on personal responsibility, what do you make of the fact that African-American males are to such a great extent overrepresented in prisons?

**Samenow:** Well, the statistics seem to indicate – and I know about statistics; you can do anything with statistics. They do commit a disproportionate share of crimes. They commit their crimes mainly against other African Americans, and yes, there are injustices in the system, of course, and they're trying to rectify some of the more egregious ones, such as the differential sentences between crack and powder cocaine, which has resulted in more African Americans being locked up for longer times. But there are injustices, to be sure.

But you've got to look at who's committing the crimes, where they're being committed, against whom, and to say, “Well, it's a result of prejudice and discrimination” – it's pretty easy to say that, but you have to look at the cases person by person. And so, most African Americans, as with any group, are not criminals. And in fact – here we are back again with this social determinism, where people say, “Well, look, if you're poor, if you're African American, and you're from a neighborhood where the gangs roam and weapons are as easy to come by as cigarettes, you are sadly at risk.” And sociologists will even say it's a normative or adaptive response to commit crimes. Well, I've interviewed scores of people who are from such environments, and in almost every case, they have a brother, a sister, maybe more than one, who have grown up under those circumstances or even worse. And they did have problems. Again, the environment certainly causes a lot of challenges and struggles. But what has impressed me more and more over the years is not the environment that a person comes from, but how he chooses to respond to life.

**Dr. Dave:** Okay. Well, not totally unrelated: what is your thinking about the legalization of marijuana?

**Samenow:** Well, I don't get on a soapbox and preach about this. I have never favored the legalization of marijuana. I still don't favor the legalization of marijuana. I understand where the tide seems to be going with having them legalized in the state of Washington and Colorado, and most recently, small amounts of it in Washington DC. And you might say, “Well, why?” It isn't on some high moral or

puritanical grounds, but I guess it's that when the number of kids – teenagers – I've seen over the years who have based their lives around marijuana, even when it was illegal, they choose their friends based on “Can I get it?” They decide whom to date on the availability of it. Their lives revolve around this drug, and it certainly interferes with concentration, with attention, amotivational syndrome as well known, where kids who are bright and who are using marijuana day in and day out, their grades are dropping, they're not using their potential, and it's part of a whole culture and has been part of a whole culture for people who use it this way. And they're irresponsible in many other ways as well.

Now, you might say, “Well, you could say the same with alcohol.” That's true. And I'm not recommending we go back to Prohibition, but I am saying this: before we legalize yet another substance, mind-altering substance, let's try to anticipate what social damage may be done. Just because we have alcohol that's legal and easy to get, that's not an argument for legalizing marijuana, also, a mind-altering substance. And I think the jury is out, by the way, in terms of whether we're going to see more driving problems, with people who drive under the influence of marijuana and other ill effects. The experiment's too new, so we'll have to see.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes, right. Yes. I'm interested in seeing as well. What's your view of the prison reform suggestion of allowing more non-violent offenders to remain in the community versus being incarcerated? People sometimes talk about prison as a school for crime.

**Samenow:** Well, it is very expensive to keep a person locked up in a prison, or even a juvenile detention center. It is very expensive. I know that we had in this country experiments with so-called deinstitutionalizations, meaning opening the prisons and detention centers. But I'm not talking about mental hospitals, but in Massachusetts, way back in the 80s, and I remember a probation officer calling me and telling me his view of what had happened with the deinstitutionalization and freeing people from prison and putting them in the community. There had been a huge increase in crime in the community.

However, having said that, there are people who are non-violent. It is extensive to maintain them in prison. And so if there is a way – and there should be – to maintain them in the community, at less expense but with *meaningful* community corrections, not lip-service community corrections, then that would be a good thing. Meaningful community correction entails, first of all, supervision and monitoring – knowing where people are. That's number 1. It's public safety. Number 2: it is offering an array of services, notably significant counseling services for those who are amenable to try to help people recognize errors in thinking, what they lead to, and to learn and implement correctives, as well as other things – job training, educational opportunity, social skills, and money

management. So, certainly, if resources are allocated...that's a big if, you know, having somebody see their probation officer once a month for 15 minutes is not responsible community corrections. So yes, I think that the prison reform movement is well-based. The question is will it be funded, and will it be meaningful, or will it be again just dumping offenders out into the community? We'll see.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes. Now, you mentioned the correction of thinking errors, and I know that's been a strong theme for you in the past. It sounds like it's still something that you emphasize.

**Samenow:** Well, behavior is largely a product of thinking, so what I'm saying to you right now is a result of the thoughts I'm having, and if there's been a sense that it has been not grammatical or it stopped in mid-air, it's because of the thoughts that come together, one interfering with the other. Proverbs says a man "thinketh in his heart, so is he." So if I want to change something about myself, whether it's impatience or I want to lose a few pounds, whatever it might be, number 1: I have to believe that there's a problem. Number 2: I have to become aware of my thinking that leads to the behavior and I have to be aware of what that thinking's consequences are, and then if I don't like those consequences either to myself or others, then I have to catch the thinking and deter it and implement correctives. That's true of me and I am not a one-man walking crime wave or a bank robber or thief. And that's true for any of us. If we want to change anything about ourselves in a meaningful or enduring way, so it is with people who have the type of personality that you and I have been discussing, that if they are to change in a meaningful and enduring manner, what must change is thinking. Sure, helping get job skills or GED, but if that's all you do you'll have a criminal with job skills or GED. So he's still a criminal. So, thinking must be addressed.

**Dr. Dave:** This sounds like shades of Albert Ellis, and more recently cognitive behavior therapy. Have these been strong influences in your thinking?

**Samenow:** Well, let me say that the whole thinking here, the idea, and the study of the mental make-up of criminals actually predated a lot of Ellis – not by me, but by my mentor who died in 1976, Dr. Yochelson. And in the three-volume work *The Criminal Personality*, which was the product of his research and I did the writing of the books, he described the mental makeup of people who make crime a way of life. And so yes, of course, we have in common with Ellis and other cognitive behavioral therapists the emphasis on thinking. But this work that I've been part of for all these years under Dr. Yochelson began in 1961, and it has endured to this date, was focused exclusively on offenders – people who made crime a way of life.



**Dr. Dave:** What's your advice to parents? You know, some parents probably have kids that get chronically into trouble. Maybe they see some troubling signs that a kid might be headed in a somewhat criminal direction or maybe a major criminal direction. What's a parent to do?

**Samenow:** Well, I know this sounds like pushing another book, and I don't mean to do that. But I did write a book called *Before It's Too Late: Why Kids Get into Trouble – and What Parents Can Do About It*. And I'm saying that people don't just become criminals at 15 or 35, but there are thinking patterns that expand and intensify, and those are the key words. They expand and intensify, and they can start early. So a fourth-grade teacher who has kids six hours a day, if you said, “You have a kid who constantly blames others, who rarely takes responsibility for what he does, who instead of internalizing that you shouldn't hurt others and it's wrong to hurt others, becomes more dangerous than others. You have a kid who tries to prevail at every turn, takes any means to an end, and lies as a way of life, I think that a teacher who has a kid like that six hours a day would certainly be able to recognize those patterns. So I'm saying is we need to move back in time, not – and I emphasize not – to label little kids as criminals, but just as we try to identify early learning, emotional, and physical problems, so it is to try to find kids who are showing these patterns – and I do emphasize the word *pattern* – not a kid who gets into a fistfight once or takes a candy bar from a store, but where there's a pattern and try to work with that kid a lot earlier before he becomes a one-man walking crime wave. In other words, the thinking errors, as patterns do appear early.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes. And is there any research on working with such kids in the way that you're advocating? Showing that you can do something upstream that will show results downstream?

**Samenow:** Very little. And I'll tell you why (well, one reason why) – is that if you start working with a teenager who's already knee-deep in crime, he thinks he's more invulnerable than even the adult may think. After all, he may have been doing what he's doing for years, never had to pay a price until now, and nothing significant has happened that has even gotten his attention. So this work is used in juvenile detention centers, but the motivation is much tougher with some teenagers than it is even with adults who have been in and out of correctional and other centers. In terms of doing this with children who are much younger, I do not know of any research on this at all. And I think that it's most unfortunate because I really think that it needs to begin before the adolescent years. That's obviously what I'm talking about – it has to be adapted to younger children.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes. Are there implications in what we've been talking about in your work for psychotherapists?

**Samenow:** Well, the type of psychotherapy that I practice – and by the way, I am a therapist. I'm not just a forensic guy and an evaluator. I do see some people who actually come with problems of living. And I also do very adversarial custody evaluations as an attendant evaluator. So I think when emphasizing not what happens to a person but how one deals with it, what the thinking is, it's important and critical whether you're dealing with identified criminals or you're dealing with people with other problems. Even people who come from circumstances, and as I've said, that they didn't create, or things that happened in relationships that they didn't count on, and maybe they were not even to blame. The focus still needs to be in part – in part – how you handle it; how can you improve; what role did you play that may have contributed to the situation; what is your thinking about how to handle it. So it is the psychology of personal responsibility, and I want to make it very clear it's not blaming people for the things that happen to them, but it's focusing on thinking patterns as to how one copes with life, whatever life hands out.

**Dr. Dave:** Okay. What if you got a huge grant somehow of a million or more dollars, how would you use it?

**Samenow:** You asked me a question. You asked me a question about community correction. And I think probably I would either want to use that in a pilot program for community corrections where you had a very strong counseling component, focusing on thinking errors, among other things, and/or this idea that we were talking about earlier, of trying to work with young kids and developing materials, so that therapists could work with young kids and the thinking errors but adapted to a younger age. Those would be two directions.

**Dr. Dave:** Here's a related question. What if you could change national policy? What would you change?

**Samenow:** Well, I'm sounding like a broken record, I'm sure, but...

**Dr. Dave:** (laughs)

**Samenow:** ...being a mental-health professional and being a psychologist in particular – you know, it seems to me that in the criminal justice area and in fields related to criminal justice, counseling psychological work is kind of seen as a frill, too expensive, something that, well, you know, we really can't do, and it takes too long and it's hard to measure outcomes. I would say it depends on when you're starting and swinging back because policy makers are realizing that “lock 'em up and throw the key away” – it's expensive, it doesn't really work, so now there are more resources starting to flow into the counseling psychological end of things, working with people when they're in the county jail when there may be some vulnerability, when the door is closed behind them, and that which they knew

could happen but wouldn't happen to them has now happened. So even starting this work in the jail and following them on release. And this isn't for everybody. I'm not naive. I know there are many offenders who would reject whatever I'm talking about just like they've rejected everything else. But these opportunities should be made available for those who will avail themselves of them. And there are those who will.

**Dr. Dave:** Okay. Well, the first edition of your book was published in 1984, the second in 2004, and now this most recent one in 2014. What have you found with respect to the book's reception in the criminal justice community, and academia, and society at large? Evidently, something good must be happening or you wouldn't keep updating it.

**Samenow:** Yes, well, of course, with respect to the new edition it's too early to tell, because it just came out in November 2014. Well, I have spoken in 48 of the 50 states, some of them I've spoken in more than 20 times...

**Dr. Dave:** Wow.

**Samenow:** ...and my predominant audience – not totally – has been people who were in the trenches, people who were in corrections, people who are in psychology, who work in correctional institutions, probation and parole officers at work in the community, and the reception has been actually over the years quite good, because they say I'm describing the people they work with everyday. And number 1, it's confirmation of many of their observations, which of course is always good to have validation, but secondly, it is helpful to them, whether they are therapists or whether they are correctional officers or even law-enforcement officers, because I have done training for law enforcement as well. It has been helpful in the way they manage offenders and in the way they interact with offenders, So from people in the trenches, they wouldn't keep inviting me back to speak and buying the interactive videotapes and workbooks and using this work if it weren't of use. So, it's been good.

Now, from some of the more traditional academic bastions, people who are still wedded to deterministic views of human behavior, people who are taking the sociological perspective – no, I'm not invited to speak for those groups. That's for sure.

**Dr. Dave:** (laughs) Okay, well, it's been delightful for me to speak with you and so, Dr. Stanton Samenow, I want to thank you for being my guest again on Shrink Rap Radio.

**Samenow:** Well, it's been a pleasure. You're an absolutely great interviewer, and I enjoyed the interview very much. Thank you for having me.