

Helping Heroes Right Their Stories



A Manifesto & Playbook for Treatment Court Practitioners

MATCP 2026 Annual Conference

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SECTION 1 — THE WOUND BEFORE THE CHARGE

Meet Casey



1	2	3	4
A Person	A World	A Disruption	A Wound
Before the military and the charges.	A life organized around purpose and service.	Something shattered the identity she had built.	She has been carrying it ever since.

We know what she was charged with. But what was her story?

Every person in your treatment court has a story with this basic architecture.



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The Diagnostic Trap



ASSESSMENT

What an assessment captures

- Symptoms and diagnoses
- Criminogenic risk factors
- Substance use severity
- Mental health indicators
- Housing and employment status

What it cannot capture

- Why this story bent this direction
- What the person was made for
- The structure beneath it
- Whether another story is possible
- What makes lasting change worth it

*The behavioral problem is sitting on top of a narrative problem.
If you only treat the behavioral problem, you only manage the symptoms.*



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SECTION 2 — WHAT WE'RE ACTUALLY DOING

What We Already Do Brilliantly



Look at what Veterans Treatment Courts already provide.

Accountability

Court-supervised structure creating floor for change.

Community

Connection and belonging that sustain motivation.

Needs/Barriers

Identifying and addressing criminogenic needs.

Treatment

Clinical care that addresses SUDs and mental health.

The structure you build (the accountability, the community, the interventions) is not the problem. It provides the foundation.



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Structure vs. Direction



STRUCTURE

Clears the path

- Identifying needs and barriers
- Housing stability
- Employment support
- Treatment compliance
- Tells us what is blocking the path



DIRECTION

Gives the path purpose

- The story — who the person is becoming
- Why is this path worth walking?
- Converts vision into internal motivation
- Tells us where the path is going

You can build a road to nowhere, clear every obstacle — and still have a participant standing in a cleared field with no idea which direction to go.



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The Cleared Field

The graduate walks out clean, sober, housed, employed.

The structure is built. *But eighteen months later, they are back.*

Not because the treatment failed.

But because their story never changed.

They learned compliance.



What they needed was authorship.

They finished a program. They didn't change their story.



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Two Stories



Shadd Maruna: The most reliable difference between people who stop offending and those who don't was the story they told about themselves.

Condemnation Script

- The past feels like a verdict
- Who they were is who they are
- Change feels possible but unreal
- Behavior follows the story

Redemption Script

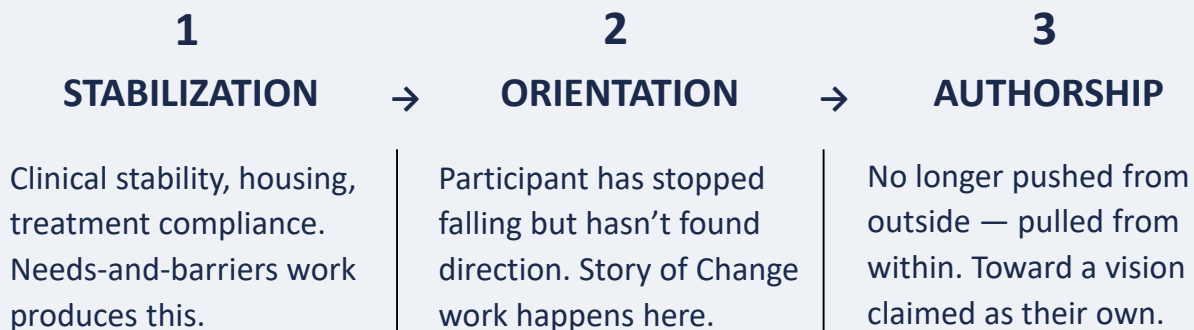
- The past becomes a chapter, not a verdict
- Difficulty reinterpreted as equipment
- The broken road becomes a credential
- Change is real and self-sustaining

Stories aren't supervised. They are written.



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Authorship is the Goal



*Compliance is externally sustained. Authorship is intrinsically driven.
Which are we building toward?*



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Veterans Treatment Court as the Journey

Every veteran's story has the same shape. Treatment court is the journey through it.

WHOLENESS	→	THE WOUND	→	THE JOURNEY	→	THE GUIDE
The veteran's vision of who they were meant to be — before the wound.		Trauma, discharge, fracture, loss. The organized center shattered.		Veterans' treatment court — the path toward healing and wholeness.		The graduate comes back to serve others who are still on the same journey.

When we realize that Veterans Court is a story, we understand that we can narrate every phase differently, including those moments that look like failure.



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Participant → Hero



The last slide named the shape of the journey. This slide names the traveler.

<p>VICTIM</p> <p>Passive. Needs help with stabilization. Waiting for rescue. The story happens to them.</p>	<p>HERO</p> <p>Active. On the journey. Not without wounds - but moving. Capable of facing a dragon.</p>
<p>VILLAIN</p> <p>Active. Exploits others. Minimizes harm. Resists accountability. Undermines the group.</p>	<p>GUIDE</p> <p>The ultimate return: the hero who comes back to help others on the same road.</p>

Participant → Hero *is the lens through which everything else is seen.*



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SECTION 3 — THE VETERAN'S SPECIFIC WOUND

The Military as Meaning-Making Institution

FORMATION

The military answers the questions most people never fully answer:

Who am I?

What am I for?

Who needs me?

What is worth dying for?

Service doesn't just train people. It forms them. What is taken from Casey is not a job — it is her answer to the question of what she exists for.

Creating more structure cannot fill a formation vacuum.



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SECTION 3 — THE VETERAN'S SPECIFIC WOUND

The Organizing Center ... Lost

What is lost at discharge:

- A clear answer to what I stand for
- A community of belonging and accountability
- A mission that organized daily life
- An identity that gave suffering meaning
- A story that made sense of everything



To understand what was lost, we need to see what was left behind.



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The Mottos: Compressed Narrative Identity

Army

This We'll Defend: *Loyalty - Duty - Courage*

U.S. Marine Corps

Semper Fidelis: *Honor - Courage Commitment*

U.S. Coast Guard

Semper Paratus: *Honor - Respect - Devotion*



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The Mottos: Compressed Narrative Identity

Air Force

Aim High... Fly-Fight-Win: *Integrity - Service- Excellence*

U.S. Space Force

Semper Supra: *Character - Commitment - Connection*

U.S. Navy

Non sibi sed patriae: *Honor – Courage – Commitment*
(*Not for self but country*)



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Vision, Vocation, and Virtue



We've named what was lost. Now let's name what must be built.

VISION

Direction to travel

The north star; who a person is becoming, aimed in the direction of what they desire most. Appeals to the imagination.

VOCATION

People to serve

Areas of our lives through which love of neighbor is expressed outwardly and daily. Without vocation, the new story has no place to be lived.

VIRTUE

Character to stand

The way we habitually think, speak, and act, formed through practice and community in the direction of what we desire the most.

Vision, Vocation and Virtue are sustained within a community of fellowship.



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The Two-Step Interpretive Move



This two-step interpretive move tells you how to read a participant's story.

Step 1: Name the Dragon



Step 2: Ask Why

Identify the risk factor, using a validated assessment or screening tool.

Examples: Antisocial associates.
Substance Abuse, Employment deficits.

The instrument doesn't lie. You don't soften it.

Not as an excuse — as an explanation.

What happened in this person's story that bent this domain in this direction?

This converts a risk factor into story material and reveals the structure underneath the misdirection.

The instrument names the dragon. The question reveals the story beneath it.



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SHIFT 1

Compliance → Authorship



FROM: COMPLIANCE

- “Is she meeting her conditions?”
- Necessary — the court requires it
- Behavior change lasts while pressure continues
- Compliance — real and valuable, but fragile

→ TO: AUTHORSHIP

- “Is she beginning to see herself as someone in control of her own story?”
- Use compliance structure as scaffolding
- Ask the authorship question every interaction
- Compliance by desire outlasts your involvement

The goal is not a veteran who complies because they have to, but because they want to.



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SHIFT 2

Problem-Solving → Story-Righting

FROM: PROBLEM-SOLVING

- Diagnose failure, adjust intervention
- Evidence-based clinical response
- Treats behavior as a problem to solve
- Treats all relapses the same way
- “What happened and what do we change?”



TO: STORY-RIGHTING

- “Where are we in their story?”
 - A relapse mid-divorce in Phase One differs from one in Phase Four.
- **Perception:** see the hero in them.
- **Interpretation:** Use the two-step move.
- **Formation:** Remember that it takes vision, vocation, virtue, fellowship

Same veteran. Same behaviors. Same court. A different lens changes everything.



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SHIFT 3

Graduate → Guide



GRADUATE



GUIDE

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defined by what she completed • Looks backward at the finish line • “Congratulations! You made it.” • The Wound is what she survived. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defined by whom she serves • Faces forward to those in need • “Someday, what will you give?” • The Wound is what equips her. |
|---|--|

When your graduate becomes a guide for someone still early in the journey, it is not a program outcome. It is the whole point.



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The Peer Mentor — The Embodiment

The Peer Mentor is living proof that the shift from Graduate to Guide works.

- The peer mentor is the graduate who became a guide - not a support mechanism, but a presence.
- They have lived through Wholeness, The Wound, and The Journey, and found a new story. They have come back to say so in person.
- Their effectiveness depends on standing outside the judicial compliance structure. This separation is precisely what preserves their power.

The moment the participant becomes the guide is what we have been building toward from the very first session.



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SECTION 5 — THE EXERCISE

Before the Charge

Picture one participant on your caseload.
Not your hardest case. Not your star pupil.



Before the charge...

Before the diagnosis...

Before their service...

Who was this person trying to become?

What happened to that version of them? Do they know you see that person?



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Your Assignment

On Monday, ask a participant:



“Before all of this, who were you trying to become?”

- What did that person care about most?
- What happened to them?
- What would it take to find that person again?



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The Story Still Being Written

Remember Casey. We asked: we know what she was charged with. **But what was she made for?**

Casey didn't just graduate. She found what she was still made for. She came back. She sits beside someone else in the middle of the journey she once survived.

She is no longer someone being helped.

She is someone helping others. She has become a guide.

She became a guide because someone asked the right question.



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The True Work of Veterans Courts

You do not need to replace the vital structure of identifying and addressing needs and barriers. You simply need to give that structure a direction to serve.

Help your heroes right their stories.

This is not more work than you already do. It is the same work - with a direction.



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