



Myth Busting and Discovery of Truth

**If I didn't define *myself* for myself,
I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive.**
Audre Lorde

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The assumptions that undergird, "Counseling is just for people with problems," underestimate that it is a *remarkable resource for the resilient*. Resilient individuals have acquired skills over the course of their life, possibly inherited, often unknowingly, perhaps intentionally. For those of us seeking to acquire these particular skills later in life, it is imperative that we define these qualities that are seemingly intrinsic to some and extrinsic to others. The good news...it is not too late for the belated bloomer.

There is a tenet that fuels my approach with EAP client-employees; it's a belief that people have the ability to be resilient. (Yes, it is preprogrammed in the mother board of our brains...keep reading). In some theoretical approaches, "People are **not** viewed as mentally ill, rather, they are sick of playing certain roles." The context in which we *live life* can sometimes cause us to question our emotional health when we are triggered by people and circumstances.

Situations in life and the experiences in the world of business have created vulnerabilities with specific biases toward, "*How we conduct life*" and a certain way that we solve problems. Sometimes they are functional and workable solutions, and then – sometimes – NOT! We all have *acquired a certain lens in how we see*: problems, pain, others, and ourselves. When life hits us (hard), it is tempting to judge

ourselves for not doing better or feeling better, **faster**. Perhaps we are the observer of someone else in pain and we cannot fathom how they get out of bed every day to face life. Then, on the other hand our mirror neurons* allow us to experience empathy. But... perhaps we cannot tolerate thinking of another's' pain and we dismiss, patronize, or judge them, thinking, "I don't want to hear your issues. Just get over it." Sounds cold and cruel doesn't it? But if we are honest, there are moments when we really do think like that. It is because we are anxious ourselves, in not knowing how to help.

There are no hackneyed answers. Until we are faced with insurmountable odds ourselves, we are not required to *come to the table* with workable solutions. **But if... you are...** the person surviving the loss of a spouse or child; if... **you are...** the one that has been diagnosed with a debilitating prognosis, you either sink or learn to swim rapidly if you have not already gained resiliency skills earlier in life. Karen Vaughn, the mother of Aaron Vaughn (Seal Team Six) stated in an interview, "*I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change; it is now time to change the things I cannot accept.*" Then added, "*You never really recover from something like this, what you have to do is figure out how to live in light of the new life you are in. We will never have another moment where we don't miss*

our son.” In the middle of tremendous loss this mother’s resiliency rose to the occasion to give her will to “...figure out how to live in light of the new life,” she was in. She wrestled with a word we all wrestle with in our pain, sometimes it feels like a dirty word and at other times it brings a breath of relief... **ACCEPTANCE.**

Acceptance is the last stage of the grieving process. Although the grieving process is not a linear progression because we cycle through the stages of pain over and over, it is cyclical – it is not lockstep. It is not easy... through personal experience I can attest, “It’s gruesomely hard.”

Overwhelmed? If you find yourself overwhelmed, you really do not have to, “Fake it ‘til you make it.” Well, you can if you want to. It is not my goal to tell you what you can or cannot do. However, if your old paradigm (you know – that particular way you have always done life), isn’t optimal and working for you, there are options. Being an analytical person, these options have encouraged me in my personal discovery and are supported by an abundance of research. **Hang with me as I provide technical jargon and break it down to language that makes sense.** (I like to be educational while at the same time speaking to the heart).

There are three important points to ponder:

1. **Neuroplasticity:** Simply put, our brains can change. The old idea that the brain does not change is simply wrong. Neuroplasticity means that even in old age (*whew*), new connections and neural networks are born and can continue development. Regardless of age, genetics, background or life experience, change *can* happen.
2. **Epigenetics:** Basically, the genes we were born with are likened to a motherboard on a computer. We were given a complete set at birth, but our environment modified some and others **were not switched on.** (Talk about *Switched at Birth*, I feel short changed). Great news, the switches can be turned on later in life. We have more in our genes than we have ever experienced.
3. **Intentionality:** Something is required for the new learning process. When you and your counselor pay attention to your life story, your brain as well as the counselors’ brain changes. Ultimately it is an experience where you learn how to be connected with another person in a new way, allowing yourself to experience a release of serotonin in the brain. (For those who remember John Denver, liken it to a “Rocky Mountain High”). There are moments in a counseling session where you will experience internal strength and insights that provide what you need to go another step or two in your process of life. This is a natural chemical in the brain that allows us to begin to *feel better* in the midst of our pain. It is not a permanent fix, (*There are no permanent fixes*)

just like medicine, the effects wane. That is why it is important to learn the skills to access the resources that have been *preprogrammed within our internal system – our mind.* Remember, “The mind uses the brain to create itself.”

Invitation: There is a basic human need to feel understood and valued by others, personally and professionally. It is important that you know, how I view you, when you utilize your EAP benefits. I view individuals and corporations as *dynamic rather than static*, as developmentally moving forward in life. One of my goals is to reinforce life-sustaining beliefs and behaviors with those who are already making good choices. This strengthens and reinforces appropriate leadership and, in turn, serves as a model of resiliency within your organization. Because we periodically visit you in your environment, we are able to consider the interaction first-hand, experiencing part of your culture with you; getting to know you in a professional atmosphere as well as a personal setting. As a result, we can access a multi-dimensional approach rather than a one dimensional method. We understand that there is interplay between corporate mandates, personal issues, and environmental situations that trigger us negatively or create feelings of satisfaction. “**How to**” handle those feelings appropriately are part of the tools that are available to you.

There are few places in life where someone is dedicated to your well-being, especially in the corporate setting. Your company values you in such a way that it has provided a package benefit called an Employee Assistant Program (EAP). Please contact us, we do care.

Credits for inspiration:

Mirror Neurons: Dan Siegel website: www.brainsciencepodcast.com.
Important points to ponder, inspired by, Counseling Today December 2009 (p. 44).
Crash on August 6, 2011; 2011 Chinook shutdown in Afghanistan, Aaron Vaughn Seal Team Six; Reaction from Karen and Bill Vaughn, interview by Clayton Morris; Fox News



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