



Mental Wealth

Newsletter

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YOUR LIFE CAN BE DIFFERENT..

The Value Path

By Karina Stell

A common statement Michael and I hear in Group, and indeed from ourselves in our own personal and professional lives, is "I'm confused what to do".

Being in feeling is always the first and most fundamental place to gain guidance to where we need to examine and be curious about. However in tandem with this, we all need to make choices in our lives in order to be able to choose a job, raise a family, choose a spouse, where to live, and to be a part of the world community at large. So how do we achieve this when we are sitting with a real state of confusion and 'stuckness'?

Reinhold Niebuhr penned the Serenity Prayer and it is a wonderful expression of how to proceed when we are feeling confused about the next step.

**God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can,**

And the wisdom to know the difference

[*The Serenity Prayer* - Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971)]

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy is built around the sentiments of this beautiful poem and if we use it as a signpost to how we make choices in our lives, it can bring us closer to where to go.

The first place to understand is whether we have the power to change what it is we are dealing with. As we've all experienced in our lives no doubt, we encounter things that we have absolutely no control over like illness, death or hardship. We have a choice to struggle with these when they visit us, or we can find a place of acceptance and equanimity with them.

That is not to say that this is easy, nor the 'right' way. However if likened to what happens when a man chooses to struggle in quick sand or chooses to lay on top of it accepting it, the result can be the

difference between emotional survival and damage.

When we do have a choice in how we go, what do we decide? What is our own personal compass? What's right for me is not necessarily right for you. This is why we steer so strongly away from advice-giving in Group.

Each person has their own set of values. Each kernel of meaning about what kind of person they want to authentically be. These kernels are values and our values guide us to making choices for our lives.

Do I want to be a meaningful parent more than the top salesperson? Do I want to save for a house more than having the latest model car? These are simply examples of choices in life and some may choose one and some may choose another. Neither is right or wrong, but who YOU want to be is underpinned by your values and your choices.

Please look out for our new ***Meditation Timetable*** in the therapy room.

Play, Humour and the Here-and-now-now by Michael Cohn



'I went in looking for an experience but came out with a diagnosis'.

Mark Epstein, *Going to Pieces without Falling Apart*

I recently came across a fascinating article on the importance of play, creativity, mindfulness and spontaneity, by Psychology Today blogger Ditta M Olikier Ph.D.

Increasingly it is being accepted that throughout the lifespan, play supports neurological growth and development while building complex, skilful, flexible, responsive and socially adept brains.

She writes that play has long been an important tool for the innovative therapist. And in light of neuro scientific research findings that there is an ongoing active interaction between the brain and the body - the brain affecting the body and the body affecting the brain - it is now clear that emotions can materially affect the body. There are thus important aspects of positive feelings such as delight, playfulness, feeling 'good', enjoyment, laughter, connectedness, and mirroring which are now seen and understood and validated as crucial elements of physical and psychological health.

Research offers evidence that the lack of free play has a strong negative effect on individuals of all ages. How may all of this play out in a clinical setting?

Much psychological training is focused on the somewhat serious business of therapy, therapists trying to understand their clients and their worlds, and hopefully offering elucidating and useful comments, insights and interpretations as clients talk about their lives and their histories.

The emphasis is often on the 'skilled' clinician trying to solve the conundrum of the client's unhappiness and dysfunctional behaviour and, despite the chimera of therapist/client equality buttressed by increasingly nuanced and tendentious terminology of equality, little in the room changes.

Thus, despite the fact that patient becomes client becomes consumer, while Doctor becomes therapist becomes provider, the clinical setting often is bogged down by its very seriousness. As Mark Epstein has written after having consulted a psychiatrist, 'I went in looking for an experience but came out merely with a diagnosis'.

Playfulness, humour and delighted interaction is an ideal way to transform a clinical setting from a possibly didactic 'helping' but one-sided and unidirectional offering, to a mutually satisfying experiential interactions between two connected human beings both of whom mirror and share.

And let it be said that play and humour is far from being the vehicle to allow merely the client to move into a more authentic and experiential place, a place to experience their core. It is as much a vehicle which allows the therapist to break free from a limited and limiting role of Therapist in order to share as a 'therapist in' the therapeutic experience of mutual delight and fun.

In my next post I will describe some of the ways in which humour may be introduced into the room both in and of itself, as well as a means of fostering the here-and-now of the ongoing clinical interaction; so vital as our understanding of Mindfulness grows.