

Work in Progress

Published monthly by Michele Crawford

Work in Progress is an electronic newsletter intended to assist individuals seeking optimum well-being.

www.michelecrawford.ca

www.willowhousewellness.com

E-mail to michelecrawford@dccnet.com

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Work in Progress April 2008 Volume III Issue IV

Feature Article: Two models of transcending adversity: Mindfulness and Assertiveness Part Four

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1) Note from Michele

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Dear Reader

The movie Fried Green Tomatoes is a compelling example of the differences between unassertive, aggressive and assertive thinking in the character played by Kathy Bates. It reads like a road map of many individuals' classic movement through these stages.

In the first scene she walks into a senior's home with all her insecurities, self-pity and whining ways on display. She is even stuffing her anxiety, guilt and dejected emotion down as far as she can with sweet candy.

As the movie unfolds you witness her struggles to understand what she wants and then uses indirect and manipulative behaviour to try to get her shifting unformed needs met. She feels every slight or outright rudeness as personal assaults on her identity, responding with a pitiful "why me?" lament.

Meanwhile, day after day, she listens to the decades-old stories of three very strong women, told by a resident of the senior's home. These women dynamically pursued their goals while overcoming incredible hardship. Concurrently, with her best friend, she attends self-development classes designed to find her voice and discover her true identity.

In the beginning, she participates in both experiences with timidity and hesitation. Then the narrative begins to inspire her. Her reactions grow steadily more passionate.

Getting stronger, she is recognizing her needs and wants have not been met in the past. However, her recognition comes with intense resentment and hostility; just another form of immaturity. This is when she swings far over into an aggressive belief system.

Now her major goal is to demand her needs be recognized by others. Anyone that crosses her may get their car rammed in the parking lot. She's destroying walls with a sledge hammer. She adopts a scary nickname.

Strangely, this doesn't bring her happiness or peace of mind. Her food continues to fill that empty place of unmet needs but instead of candy, she's power walking while munching carrot sticks.

As the movie unfolds, her self-discovery and maturity are flourishing. By its closing scenes, she calmly tells her husband what she wants, acknowledges his resistance and explains that even though he will benefit, it will be her effort that takes full responsibility for her goals' culmination.

In the beginning, Bates' character is different in so many ways from her disposition at the movie's close. Her transition originated with her unassertive views, twists through a belief system based on aggression, and ends with assertive thoughts that are linked with her new-found calm persistence, self-valuing and wisdom.

If Bates' face expression, voice tone and physical demeanor could be displayed on a double-split screen, illustrating her unassertive, aggressive and assertive personas; that alone would tell an amazing story.

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2) Feature Article: Two models of transcending adversity:  
Mindfulness and Assertiveness Part Four  
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Over the years, I have noticed many people blur unassertive, aggressive and assertive characteristics. For example, aggressive entitlement is often described as self-confident versus pushy. Unassertive thinking is perceived as noble versus martyred. And an assertive attitude is mistaken for being selfish versus self-caring.

Typical thoughts of unassertiveness are: "I can't do it."; "I SHOULD do it."; "I'm not as worthy as others of happiness or success."; "You are right and I am wrong." and "I can't get what I want because I am not strong or smart enough."

Unassertive thoughts create the emotions of anxiety, guilt, depression and self-anger. Over time, resentment builds into disproportionate rages like hostility, bitterness, spitefulness and contempt. This creates the passive-aggressive scenario.

These thoughts promote outcomes such as: non-action, sacrificing, apologizing, whining, asking in an indirect or manipulative way and giving in or giving up.

Typical thoughts of aggression are: "I MUST get what I want."; "I know what's best for everyone and you must do things my way."; "I'm wonderful and everyone else is bad."; "I'm right and you're stupid and awful if you don't do things my way." and "I can't get what I want and that's AWFUL."

Aggressive thoughts result in such emotions as: anger, anxiety, hostility, depression and guilt.

These thoughts endorse conclusions such as: shouting, name-calling, slamming doors, throwing things, making threats, vindictiveness, an inability to express wants because so enraged and unwillingness to compromise.

Typical thoughts of assertiveness are: "I believe I am not more or less worthy than anyone else."; "We are all entitled to our opinions; if we disagree, we can try to work out a solution."; "This is new to me, but I can try."; "It would be better for me to do this." and "I'm going to try to get what I want, but I'm going to be somewhat flexible if necessary."

These thoughts generate emotional responses that are mostly calm and demonstrate concern. When there is adversity, an assertiveness attitude parallels healthy negative feelings like frustration, disappointment, annoyance, apprehension, and so on.

Assertiveness beliefs result in calm persistence, a forthright stating of opinions and desires, a composed pursuit of reasonable and realistic goals and willingness to compromise.

Unassertiveness and aggressiveness thinking leads to negative emotions, dysfunctional behaviours, relational issues, health problems and illness and so many other tribulations.

Unassertive and aggressive thinkers share three traits: they are immature, controlling and self-absorbed. Unassertive thinkers have enmeshed boundaries; aggressive thinkers have rigid boundaries and assertive thinkers have flexible boundaries.

Since you can't change what you don't understand or acknowledge, the first step is recognizing what the differences are between these three approaches. That will be the focus of the next three parts to this newsletter series.

Michele Crawford RCC CCC at
E-mail: michelecrawford@dccnet.com or
Phone: 604-515-9727
Web Site: www.michelecrawford.ca

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3) About Michele  
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Michele Crawford is a therapist who assists individuals who are struggling with trauma, anxiety or depression. Her passion for her work remains embedded in being able to connect with you in your suffering, helping you find real solutions no matter how complex the issue may be.

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4) Counselling Services  
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Are you prepared to live with more happiness, optimism, confidence, self-worth and hope? If your answer is "yes," then your next step is to contact me for a free 20-minute phone consultation. We can then discuss how I might best help you resolve your problems of Trauma, Depression and Anxiety.

The benefits of counselling with Michele include: significantly reduced stress levels, an optimistic outlook in life, increased confidence and hope.

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Michele Crawford RCC CCC
Willow House Wellness Ltd.
Web Site: www.michelecrawford.ca
E-mail: michelecrawford@dccnet.com
Phone: 604-515-9727
Fax: 604-515-9728