

Work in Progress

Published monthly by Michele Crawford

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

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Work in Progress August 2008 Volume III Issue VIII  
Feature Article: Change the way you think; Change your life Part One  
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1) Note from Michele  
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Dear Reader

The Greek philosopher Epictetus said, in 100 BCE: "A man is not disturbed by events but by his interpretation of those events."

Based on this viewpoint, Albert Ellis developed the concepts for Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapy (REBT) in the 1950s. He was cognizant that current approaches in therapy did not elicit change.

Even though there is an explosion of books utilizing this model to-day, twenty-five years ago, when I was first employed as a counsellor, this approach was rare. I had read about REBT in textbooks and found

Ellis' style to be blunt and a little cold. So at the time, I was not particularly impressed.

A number of years later, I attended a graduate class for group therapy. Our Professor, Dr. Barry Morris, was the Director of the Canadian Institute of Rational Emotive Therapy. The trends in counselling at that time were very complicated and required long-term therapy. Cognitive behavioural models were definitely the minority.

In Dr. Morris's class there was a fellow student who had attended once-a-week therapy sessions (not cognitive behavioural) for two years to deal with her husband's temper, drinking problem and his leaving her for a woman half his age. Her focus was two-fold: how to win him back but also be able to vent on what a horrible person he was. During her years in counselling all her symptoms steadily worsened.

Dr. Morris asked her one question based on the REBT model. I watched with astonishment as she shifted her belief system and was able to let her ex go and be at peace. Now recognizing her interpretations caused all her current and past problems, this classmate rapidly made significant changes and learned a philosophy that could serve her well in every situation. She then transformed her life.

On that day, my viewpoint of therapy practices changed and I have embraced the REBT model ever since. In the beginning, that was not so easy.

Even ten years ago, it remained difficult to find therapists trained in a cognitive behavioural paradigm. I discovered many therapists were even antagonistic towards cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). Then a noteworthy revolution was created by Dr. Phil. He made cognitive behavioural models popular by demonstrating their effectiveness.

Cognitive behavioural genres are researched more than any other approaches. Their concepts are appealing because they are evidence-based, focus on common sense, apply to all situations and work FAST to achieve measurable change.

CBT's foundation is that emotion, behaviour, consequences and our inherent fight or flight response are created by our thoughts and beliefs; not by events, people, experiences, things, the past, the future, etc.

2) Feature Article: Change the way you think; Change your life Part
One

One day a man was driving to work, listening to the radio. The DJ challenged the men in his audience to surprise their wives with a bouquet of flowers for no reason other than to lay bare their love.

He knew his wife missed and suffered from his lack of affection and few loving efforts on her behalf. In this moment he decided to change that.

Making arrangements for flowers to be delivered to his wife's office, the man was caught up with anticipatory excitement. As he imagined her happy reaction to this enterprise, he became more committed to being a better partner. He promised himself he would design other ways to express his love in the future.

The flowers arrived at the woman's desk by noon, accompanied by a sweet note. She was immediately suspicious.

The only reason she could think of why her husband would send flowers was to amend guilt. Spending the better part of the next hour pondering what he had done, she finally came to the conclusion he was having an affair with the young single mother across the street.

Ruminating on this theme all morning, she couldn't eat because of acid churning in her stomach, snapped at her co-workers, often ran in tears to the bathroom and worked herself up into picturing the divorce. Becoming so agitated she could no longer concentrate on her work, she went home early to confront him. Distracted, she ran a red light and almost caused a traffic accident.

Meanwhile, the man's elated anticipation has been steadily growing as he predicted her welcoming him home with her arms open wide. He kept telling himself he needed to reconnect more with his wife and visualized many other pleasant ways to surprise her; also imagining her various delighted reactions.

When the man opens the front door, his wife is immediately there spitting venom at him for his betrayal and deceit. At first, he is not sure what she could mean. Stunned, he just looks at her and asks an

inane question. "Did you like the flowers?" When it becomes evident his wife is accusing him of having an affair, he stops talking.

The woman's rage and hurt are escalating because he is not defending himself. Now convinced he is guilty of cheating on her, she talks about a lawyer and ending their twenty-year relationship. The man quietly goes upstairs, packs a bag and slips out the back door.

To re-gain a healthy sense of control it's vital to identify what beliefs (interpretations, assumptions, perceptions, filters, biases, attitude, thoughts, word choice, inner-critic, etc.) you tell yourself about what happens.

If what happens created your emotional and behavioural responses, then you are at the mercy of the events in your life and the world around you. You would be like a leaf in a fast-moving creek; going every direction the creek takes you.

It is hard work to change the way you think, especially in an emotional moment. Recognizing this, Ellis has made up words and uses mnemonics. Mnemonics help trigger your memory. For example, F.E.A.R. is false evidence appearing real.

Over the next five newsletters I will describe the five irrational ways of thinking, organized under the mnemonic of making too big of A.D.E.A.L.: creating disturbance in your life.

A = Absolutism
D = Demandingness
E = Esteem
A = Awfulizing
L = Low Frustration Tolerance

This story would have had a different ending if the woman decided not to act on her assumptions and biases until she had evidence to support her beliefs. Or if she had simply phoned her husband to ask about the flowers, they could have shared a transformation of their relationship. Change the way you think and you change your life.

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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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