

**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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Feature Article: Change the way you think; Change your life Part Two  
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1) Note from Michele  
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Dear Reader

Long before the rehearsed antics of the Jerry Springer show, some exploitive talk shows depended on participants owning lunacy viewpoints. A research study was designed to explain why people would be willing to face the judgment and possible derision of audiences, both in the studio and the world.

This study discovered that no matter how racist or ridiculous or wrong-headed these talk show participants were, they believed their views were absolutely reasonable. They had expectations the audiences

would be in agreement with them, cheer them on and were shocked when that did not actually occur.

The outrage of the viewers would only sometimes elicit a change in their beliefs. It is like the metaphor of a person digging him- or herself into a deep and deeper hole. Discovering their plight, instead of getting out of the hole, they just dig deeper still.

Most show participants shared the irrational way of thinking called absolutism.

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2) Feature Article: Change the way you think; Change your life Part Two  
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A = Absolutism, also known as right thinking, is an attitude of unconditional, rigid, black and white opinions. The language of absolutism is one of extremes: always, never, empty, full, all, nothing, right, wrong, love, hate, forever.

There are many facets to this irrational concept but primarily, individuals who practice absolutism believe he or she is right, always right and never wrong.

Like all irrational beliefs, absolutism falls along a continuum from extreme to exasperating. It can define a person's life choices or pop up like an annoying itch.

Extreme points of view breed fanaticism. On the farthest end of the scale lie all history's grandiose and pompous folks, megalomaniacs, anarchic despots, zealous dictators, religious zealots, and tyrannical heads of state; one and all believing they were perfectly justified and righteous. In their minds, they decreed the one true path.

The range of absolutism comprises all forms of generalizing, stereotyping, prejudice, bigotry, racism. The narrow parameters of absolutism are often defined by bias, lack of education and critical thinking, as well as ignorance and ethnocentricity. These beliefs promote increasingly constricted unawareness, hostility, hate, fear, contempt.

Along the continuum falls judgment. Many years ago, English Common Law listed countless offences with a penalty of death. Back then, you could be hanged for stealing a loaf of bread.

The accepted wisdom of the day was typical of absolutism. Do not consider context, extenuating circumstances, common sense or empathy. Judge and label the person based on his or her behaviour. Steal bread: you are a thief.

Once a thief, you will always be a thief so let's hang you as soon as possible. Labelling people (including yourself), rather than the behaviour, is irrational because far too many elements are ignored.

Although judging behaviour itself is appropriate (that's why prisons and detention rooms exist), individuals are greater than any given behaviour. There is also context and sociological principles. Finally, by artifacting the judgment (freezing it to be true forever), you do not allow for change, growth or redemption.

Perfectionism and unrealistically high self-expectations are definitely absolutistic. Some perfectionists seek perfection while others' belief systems adhere only to black and white notions; no grays and no colour. You know the best way to do things and believe it should be done just that way.

Never mind the practice of perfectionism is considered a pathology and is foundational to many issues: eating disorders, panic attacks, procrastination, hoarding, depression, relationship conflicts and more.

Practitioners of absolutism use one piece of evidence to prove an ultimate point in all cases. "That man hurt me; all men are scum." "That officer betrayed me; I will never trust another person in uniform as long as I live." "My girlfriend lied; I have no faith in women."

If an absolutistic person is right, the other participant must then be wrong. This would include loved ones and friends. A dialogue with a right thinker becomes scorekeeping and competition. By definition, everyone in a discussion with a right thinker is the opponent, adversary, rival: an enemy.

People who insist on being right usually hate the feeling of being wrong. Yet, you are willing to force anyone in a debate with you to feel that way.

Relationship conflict is often a product of absolutism. A woman accuses her husband of NEVER helping with the dishes. This is an irrational concept because he has washed dishes four times in their thirty year marriage.

And he hears through an absolutistic filter. Instead of her concern for his lack of helpfulness with meal preparation, he hears he is an awful husband. His interpretation of her words leaves him feeling hurt, with an attitude of "What's the use?" It will be a long time before he picks up a dish towel.

They fight because both believe he or she is right and neither feels the other heard because they talk over each other. This is the place of labelling and name-calling. Neither notices the solution because it's hidden by the noise.

It started with a valid complaint on her side. It would be better for him to lend a hand in the kitchen and it would be better for her to express her appreciation of his contributions.

The realistic alternative to absolutism is first and foremost, moderation in all things. It is an attitude built on common sense and balance.

Rational thinking in this area allows for nuance, suggestions, theory, willingness to compromise, assertiveness, empathy for shared bonds, openness, even forgiveness.

It involves an unbiased mind-set; open to others' contribution even if you do not agree. It permits strength in conviction because its basis is reality.

A final note: right thinkers seldom seek therapy. Why would you when you are always right about everything?

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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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