

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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Feature Article: Change the way you think; Change your life Part Six

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- 1) Note from Michele

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Dear Reader

Until half a century ago, life in Canada could be very unkind. Adversity was the norm: wars (although usually fought on other nations' land); years of financial hardship and poverty, including the Great Depression (pre-dating the welfare system intended to provide a buffer); incurable diseases and malnutrition (millions of people routinely died from a myriad of diseases including influenza and measles); diminished social consciousness (which promoted racism, sexism, classism and so on).

By comparison, Canadian history then took a turn and the 1950's and 1960's were relatively free of large-scale hardship. With this easier climate a burst of idealism filled the vacuum left by the fading of universal privation and suffering.

There was a cultural cliché of the time: "If it feels good, do it!" It appears that over time, without the temperance of genuine deprivation, this mind-set transformed into intolerance for any discomfort. If it doesn't feel good, you don't have to do it.

At the same time, consumerism emerged which led to the "ME" generation of the 1980's. A family's spending almost all of their income on necessities in the previous decades became a household of credit, splurging vast amounts on luxuries and owning multiple big ticket items. Countless inventions and technologies made existence more effortless.

Instead of widespread gratitude, many individuals have become less patient and humble and even more demanding. Over time, the concept of gratefulness for privileges transformed into a mandate for immediate effortless gratification.

People began to use language usually assigned to real adversity to describe simple aggravations that are a routine part of your rhythm of life. You decided that you have no tolerance for anything in your way: whether it's anything bestowing a challenge, an impediment or rejection, an obstructed goal or an unexpected turn of events. You may also resist having to feel any negative emotions.

Low frustration tolerance beliefs are self-fulfilling. By employing this language to describe aggravations, you ratchet their impact up to the level of genuine hardship.

Events like 911 and Katrina help to regain focus on what the human spirit is capable of enduring and overcoming. Other less fortunate countries model perseverance through calamity while you complain of insignificant detours along the road of excess.

Within this low frustration phenomenon comes a loss of striving. Striving builds character. Individual's standards for themselves are lowered. Immature reactive emotions and behaviour are exhibited publicly as well as privately.

The quiet dignity of one's suffering after an entire village is washed away in a flood is in stark contrast to an adult's temper tantrum because the power went out for a few hours or a nail broke ruining a recent manicure.

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

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L = Low Frustration Tolerance is the belief you do not have to put up with any discomfort. These irrational beliefs denote the absence of appreciation, patience or tolerance for any irritation. They avert perseverance and downgrade moral fiber.

The language of Low Frustration Tolerance involves the state of "I can't stand-it-it-is." Low Frustration Tolerance comprises statements like "It drives me crazy," "I'm at the end of my rope," "I can't handle it," and "It's TOO hard!" When voiced to describe anything that is not catastrophic, these statements are completely false.

The literal translation of "I can't stand it!" means you would immediately drop dead. For example, your saying you can't stand the weather is not accurate for a number of possible reasons. An offer of money could make it bearable. Perspective can be changed by hearing of worse weather elsewhere. You have probably been standing this weather for years and you're still fine.

The point is by thinking and saying the words, the worse may as well be your reality since you have elevated your emotional and fight or flight response to extremes. The language of Low Frustration Tolerance exaggerates your level of discomfort. Your internal compass does not fit your external reality.

The emotional outcomes of low frustration tolerance include jealousy, dissatisfaction, all forms of anger including resentment, hostility, bitterness and especially frustration, anxiety such as worrying, dread and exaggerated fears, despondency and depression.

By thinking this way you find yourself immediately in Wackoville ((Volume III Issue IX). By definition, being there eliminates any tolerance you could have produced. The thoughts themselves create the problems and outcomes.

Behaviours include, but are not limited to, boredom, minimal effort, procrastination, avoidance, addictions, crime, aggression and suicide. Results like road- and flight-rage, divorce, law suits, dependencies and acts of violence are only a few consequences that follow the belief "I can't stand it!"

Low frustration tolerance beliefs led parents and the education system to be overly concerned about the self-esteem of their children. Fear that awarding one team in the soccer league a trophy would destroy the self-image of all the other team members prompted the norm of presenting all participants an equalizing medal.

This approach taught kids their effort isn't necessary and when impediments demand effort, you can do nothing, over-react with anger, exaggerate to embellish drama, explode: you get the idea.

The problem with this approach is disregarding the true builder of confidence. The foundation of stable self-worth is struggling through difficult challenges and overcoming adversity.

An experiment with Grade 12 students a few years ago demonstrates the outcomes of awarding children for minimal efforts. All participants were given a difficult math problem to solve. When they could not complete it, half the group were told they were really smart.

The other half of the group were commended on how hard they persevered. All the participants were then given a second difficult math problem and every one of the first group refused to try it. The entire second group took a crack at it with an attitude of hope, pride and determination.

Perseverance is the opposite of low frustration tolerance. Rational thinking embodies resolve and maturity. It's a decision to accept life can be difficult but typically, in our culture, most difficulties are minimal compared to elsewhere. Difficulty is also transitory.

Choose words that are accurate. Life is difficult, not too difficult. Adversity is hard, not too hard.

Aggravation is just that: only aggravation. You can stand it. It doesn't drive you crazy.

Michele Crawford RCC CCC
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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I want to reassure you that your e-mail address will never be shared or sold to anyone else.

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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