

August Thoughts for the Day

8/31/17

Some times when frustrated or angry it is easy to resort to name calling. For example, when someone has a strong emotional reaction, it might be tempting to call the person "childish" and encourage them to "grow up." However, if you focus on describing behavior as non-judgmentally as possible, you may be more satisfied with how the conversation ends. Rather than calling someone childish, if you validated them by noticing that they had strong feelings about the situation and ask them for their THOUGHTS about it, you not only may find out why they reacted so strongly, but you may also help pull them away from their strong emotional reaction and help them think more rationally about the situation.

8/30/17

I have a couple clients who are open about being part of the Dan Knoepfler fan club. It's an amazing feeling to be part of inspiring people to try harder and do better. Don't get me wrong, I have my share of detractors as well. Mental health treatment is a lot about the fit between the provider and the person receiving help. And with a good fit people can accomplish a lot in therapy. I believe one of the most important experiences for me in becoming a mental health care provider was going through therapy myself. It can be frustrating, painful, and helpful all at once. And it can take a little time to see the progress one is making. But if you stick with therapy, a lot can be accomplished.

8/29/17

Some people carry a ton of guilt around with them wherever they go. Forgiving oneself can be tougher sometimes than forgiving others. To truly forgive oneself, it might be worth considering the criteria you apply to others when forgiving them and then apply it to yourself. Furthermore, to be worthy of forgiveness, I am a proponent of there being some type of atonement for whatever caused you to feel bad in the first place. It may be as straightforward as a sincere and heartfelt apology. It might involve doing more than that. It should come as no surprise that most if not all major religions have a process by which one can atone and then be forgiven. We are all forgivable if in our hearts we have a sincere desire to change and decide not engage in hurtful behaviors again. We don't have to be perfect, but we do have to try to change.

8/28/17

Rigid roles in relationships over time can cause them to grow stale. This can be true whether it is a friendship, a romance, or any other type of relationship. If you are dating and tend to be the pursuer, have you ever kicked back and let the other person pursue you? If you tend to be the person who is on the receiving end of attention, have you ever made the first move? Try it sometime and see how it feels. You may be surprised how it makes you and your relationship partner feel.

8/27/17

I was reading *The Metamorphosis* this weekend. Imagine being part of a network of family and friends. Then you (and/or your life) are transformed into something hideous and you are viewed as less than. Initially those who love you will support and assist you in your time of need. But then at some point they grow tired of it, and they just tolerate you. Eventually they want you gone because it is too hard to have you around and all that that entails.

We have all reached our breaking point with a Gregor Samsa in our life. But if we have support as care providers, and get a break now and then, we can offer more support and for longer periods of time. We can all get compassion fatigue if we don't take care of ourselves. If we don't take time to refill the well we eventually will have nothing left to give.

8/26/17

Research shows that abstinence-only sex education fails in accomplishing the goals it aims to achieve. However, comprehensive and accurate sex education is effective in lowering pregnancy rates, lowering rates of the transmission of STIs, and in general it delays when people choose to have their first sexual experiences. In spite of good intentions on the part of people promoting abstinence-only sex education, the research shows that it is a misguided approach.

Talking to your kid about sex, STIs, pregnancy prevention, and learning to delay gratification are difficult subjects to bring up. But it's easier than dealing with your kid being a parent as a teen, or dealing with an STI that may stay with them the rest of their life. If you aren't comfortable doing this alone, there are many books that can assist you, there are places that offer these discussions for parents and kids, and there are many qualified mental health professionals who specialize in helping parents talk to their kids about sex. If you as a parent believe abortion or using Plan B is wrong and not a reasonable choice for a teen involved in an unplanned pregnancy then it is even more urgent for you to have a frank conversation with your son or daughter now.

8/25/17

Going back to the Time Magazine issue on happiness, it didn't surprise me that people in relationships tend to be happier than people who are single. Couples with kids aren't necessarily happier, but an overwhelming majority have few regrets about being a parent. On the social front, people with more friendships tend to be happier than those who don't. And people of faith (regardless of which one) tend to be happier than their counterparts who don't have faith.

8/24/17

Time magazine has a special issue devoted to the "Science of Happiness". An interesting part was about money and happiness. There is a minimum threshold that is required to be happy, which is enough to take care of basic needs. The more money you make the more there are diminishing returns. This means that every additional dollar you make over a certain amount generally brings less and less happiness. And it is common that the more people have the more they want. A couple additional interesting points were made.

One is.... What you actually make is less relevant than how it compares to the neighbors. In a nutshell the person who is better off (than the neighbors) in a poorer neighborhood tends to have more happiness than the person who is less fortunate in a richer neighborhood.

And one other important point is that money spent on experiences tends to bring more happiness than on things. Things don't tend to stay shiny and brand new. Experiences tend to only get better with time, especially as the negative memories fade away.

8/23/17

Sometimes needing help can be frustrating. Even disappointing. Denying one needs help doesn't usually work out that well. At times it can even make you look foolish for refusing assistance. It's not always even about asking for help from someone. It can be needing the help of something inanimate. I am sort of in denial about needing to use reading glasses. The issue is serious enough that about 40% of the time I need them, but I can get by over half the time without them. I think once I hit the 50% mark I'll be ready to use reading glasses most of the time, maybe.

8/22/17

I'm doing a presentation tomorrow. I am nervous because I am less prepared than usual. I know my subject matter. but I haven't mentally rehearsed as much as I should have.

Note to self: Procrastination - bad!

Note to self part 2: It's never too late, until it is.

8/21/17

This weekend two comedy greats died - Dick Gregory and Jerry Lewis. Whether you agreed with their messages or not, their legacy was to use their gifts of communication to try and make the world a better place.

8/20/17

Lately I've been better about turning off the TV completely during waking hours. I've enjoyed it a whole lot. I live in the heart of the city, so it is never silent. But the sounds of the city, even when loud, are a different type of sound. They aren't trying to sell you anything, except for the drug dealers and they usually whisper.

8/19/17

Photobucket recently changed their structure and started charging to host images or other files that you post or use on a third party site, otherwise known as "hot linking." Certainly it is their prerogative to stop offering something for nothing. The sad part is that it went from zero to \$400/year. Change is inevitable. How you respond to change determines how happy you are or how much you suffer. I'll miss you Photobucket. Not enough to give you \$400/year.

8/18/17

Are you contemplating taking medication to help you more effectively manage your mental health issues? There are people who swear by their meds, and others who eschew using them. Questions to consider:

- 1) Have you tried other methods to manage the condition that didn't provide satisfactory results?
- 2) What does the medication claim it will do?
- 3) What are the known side effects of the medication?
- 4) Will the benefit outweigh the potential side effect(s)?
- 5) Will the medication change your body or functioning in a permanent way (for example some anti-psychotic medications can cause permanent tics)?

This is not an exhaustive list of ideas and questions. And only you and your prescriber can decide whether it is worth trying medication. But for some it can be a life saver. For others it can dramatically improve functioning and/or one's quality of life. I am not an avid fan of medications, nor am I completely against the idea. But like everything in life, it is worth considering the pros and cons before making a decision.

8/17/17

Within the mental health field, there are many specialties. If you have a specific issue you want to address, make sure you ask your potential provider if that is within their area of expertise. Similar to physical health care providers, there are generalists and specialists. Many people can be treated by a generalist. However, there are issues that are narrow enough in scope that it makes sense to seek out a specialist.

One of the most important aspects of selecting your healthcare provider is the fit with the person. Sometimes we don't have a choice because of who is a preferred provider within the network of people or clinics approved to provide us services. However, many times, even within that network there are a few options. Asking questions, or giving it a trial run can be a wise way to approach starting therapy.

8/16/17

I was inspired by my cousin today. He is an artist among other things. Someone asked on social media if anyone other than the artist should be allowed to destroy a piece of artwork. My cousin's reply was "[Art parallels life, and life is not permanent.](#)" Life is precious and transient. Live in the moment, while not forgetting one's past, or planning for the future.

8/15/17

A client was doing everything but accepting responsibility for what he had done. He professed to be devout in his faith. I asked him why he wasn't praying for strength to deal with the issue instead of focusing on defending himself. He said he would pray if I did along with him. He did, and I did with him. In asking God for strength, and in facing the problem rather than trying to avoid responsibility he actually received a less negative response from someone he expected to be judged by. In the end he thanked me for praying with him because things turned out much better than it would have otherwise. Prayer didn't solve all his problems, but it did give him the strength and courage to face what he needed to face.

8/14/17

There are many ways to soothe oneself as a way to provide self-care. Think about which of the 5 senses helps you relax or be calm, or gets you worked up. Find things that soothe you when it comes to that sense. Some people love the smell of freshly baked bread. Others like a hot shower. Some people have a favorite piece of music they listen to. There isn't one right answer to this. It's figuring out which of the senses impacts you the most and when it comes to that sense, what changes your

mood in the way you want it to. I have a can of citrus (lemon) oil spray. I don't know why the smell of lemons puts me in a good mood, but it does. Smelling the scent of lemons is one example of a self-soothing technique I use.

8/13/17

At least once a month I push myself to really test my limits physically. Usually I do this by walking and doing stairs. I walked 9 miles around town Sunday and did the equivalent of 21 flights of stairs. Usually I do my 10K steps a day, so this was about double that and the stairs were way beyond what I normally do. It is a good thing to push ourselves to go further and do more than we usually do. Don't let fear of failure prevent you from testing your limits. And if you don't do as well as you had hoped, try not to judge yourself. And if you judge yourself, try not to judge the judging.

8/12/17

There are people who are determined to self-destruct and there is little that can be done sometimes to stop the train until it wrecks. That doesn't mean you should stop encouraging the person to make different choices. But realize that sometimes there has to be an opposing force that is met before change can occur. You hope it doesn't result in serious harm or death in the meantime. But a determined person will sometimes show you how little control you really have if you try and stop them.

8/11/17

Be kind. You can't always rewind.

8/10/17

I had a client come in yesterday and tell me he broke an expensive piece of electronic equipment that was important to him. His frustration boiled over and in the moment it felt very cathartic to smash something. Then the reality of what he had done settled in. Replacing not only the hardware but the software is going to be costly. Sometimes it is tough to take a step back and cool off. In the moment it can be tempting to say or do things we will regret. People have been taught to take deep breaths and count to ten. Not only is there a physiological change to the body through this process, but it does something else that is equally important. It buys time to think. It doesn't take away one's option to say what one was going to say or break whatever it is you were contemplating breaking. It just gives you a little time to weigh whether that is really what you want to do.

8/9/17

I have a professional neighbor who has fallen on hard times. He can't afford rent for an office as well as pay for a place to live. His professional practice provides low-cost services to the poor. He has chosen to live in his office for the time being so that his patients have a doctor to see. It's easy sometimes to be judgmental of others and their life decisions. However, it's much more useful to find a way to be compassionate because in the end we are all just doing our best to get by.

8/8/17

I was sitting with someone who was talking about how he has been called "retarded" for many years. We talked about how harmful it is to instill in someone the belief that they aren't smart. As much as we fight this, it's hard not to internalize labels when they are spoken by someone close to us. Inspire people to be aware of their intelligence and share it with the world. Having faith in a fellow human being and their ability to contribute will bring a smile to their face and warm their heart. Help inoculate them from the people in the world who purposefully or inadvertently make them feel less than.

8/7/17

A mentor of mine taught me that when people are thinking about suicide or feeling hopeless, remind

them that you care if they live or die. It's very simple yet quite powerful. Many people who struggle with depression and/or have suicidal thoughts received messages that it would've been better if they had never been born. We all have a purpose in life and it is our job (with a little help from our friends) to figure it out.

8/6/17

Not sure why the universe is sending people with drug addiction issues into my professional life, but there is definitely a pattern emerging. Regardless of the substance or behavior, it always makes me wonder how people would fare if their favorite coping mechanism became off limits or even illegal. Is there any activity that you like that you would risk jail time to do? If your Xbox and games became illegal, could you, or would you stop playing? When thinking about asking people to stop using drugs, beyond the obvious issue of physical withdrawal, do they have any other ways to cope that aren't destructive or illegal? Just say "No" isn't enough. There needs to be a plan in place. And would you take a 3a.m. phone call from a friend or loved one white knuckling it, truly trying to abstain? Before you tell someone they should stop, are you willing to be part of the plan to support them if they do make an attempt to quit?

8/5/17

Today I was talking to a person who is quite different in the way they deal with the world, and even as a human being. When asked how they feel about being different, the person told me they don't judge their uniqueness as being positive or negative, they just acknowledge that that is who they are. I aspire to be more like that.

8/4/17

I really loathe my commute many days. I used to love driving. But I will say that the rules of the road have broken down. Maybe it is more accurate to say that they have changed. Driving in the city requires a lot of attention and vigilance because there are more people driving who are less polite, more aggressive, and generally will do most anything to get one car ahead. Today, for whatever reason, I didn't let other drivers and their aggressiveness bother me. The consequence of this was that I may have ended up getting home 5 minutes later than I would have otherwise. However, I walked in the door when I got home a much happier person.

8/3/17

Trying to disconnect from politics in our country is difficult. On the one hand, disconnecting is good for my blood pressure and overall stress level. However, at the same time there seem to be scary changes that are within the realm of possibility, and ignoring politics would be like burying one's head in the sand with one's backside fully exposed. Everyone has to find a place where they are comfortably connected, but not to the point that it is overwhelming. That can fluctuate for me from not watching or reading the news at all, to immersing myself in what is going on. Try totally disconnecting for a day and see how you feel at the end. It can be really nice.

8/2/17

I did a more traditional mindfulness exercise completely focusing on breathing and nothing else. I forgot how helpful it is to do this. I have vowed, even if its only for a couple minutes, to do this every day.

8/1/17

Sometimes people say the darnedest things. Today someone came in and told me that they were co-dependent and cant stand being alone or lonely, but wanted that to change. When asked what their plan was to deal with this, the person said, "There's one thing I can tell you for sure, I will never be able to fix this problem on my own."