

9/30/17

The end of the another month. Turning points, anniversaries and other changes (even of a calendar page) sometimes bring out uncomfortable feelings, even if there is a positive aspect to the change that is occurring. Honor your feelings, but try not to let them rule your day.

9/29/17

When working with people who have been in the "system" for many years, you can understand why they might be skeptical about whether you will be helpful or not. To end up in the "system" most people have had one or more negative events occur in their life. Along the way some professionals have helped them, and others have appeared to betray their client's trust. People who have had these life experiences would be fools to blindly trust a new therapist to look out for them and their interests. As a result, therapy with people in this situation tends to take longer to get started, because there can be a fair amount of testing of whether the helping professional can be trusted. As a client in this situation, realize that your cautiousness makes sense. Just understand that therapy may proceed at a slower pace for you because of your previous experiences and your need to be more careful.

9/28/17

As a therapist, I am a fan of working with other people. In the last 30+ years I have never worked in a solo practice. While providing therapy isn't a physical job, it can be cognitively and emotionally demanding. One aspect of providing good care is to have peers to discuss cases with as well as your reactions to them. If there is an ethical complaint filed against a provider, the PROCESS by which a therapist decided how to intervene can be as important, if not more so, than the CONTENT of their decision. If you are in the market for a therapist, ask them if they are in a group practice, or if they are part of a consultation group. Even the most well trained therapist can have blind spots or buttons that get pushed. Having trusted colleagues to discuss cases with is a critical part of remaining helpful to the people. If a provider is practicing in isolation, I would be cautious about using their services.

9/27/17

When is the last time you set a goal and actually did your best to follow through in doing it? People who tend to get more of what they want in life have short and long term goals. You don't have to be perfect, especially in the beginning when you are starting something new or heading down an unfamiliar path. But with goals and attempts to attain them, its easier not to get stuck in a rut.

Set a small short-term goal and attempt to accomplish it. Maybe it's to make your lunch and bring it to work, rather than to spend money on the spur of the moment buying prepared food. Perhaps it's to take a ten minute walk during your breaks at work instead of sitting in front of the computer playing games, or texting with friends and family. Whatever the goal(s) may be, most of us feel better when we set goals for ourselves and attempt to achieve them.

9/26/17

I sat in on the teen group for the first time in a while. One of my individual clients was graduating. I feel hopeful because he has made a remarkable transformation in the time I have known him. He has always been a good kid. Now he is a good kid with a little more direction and self-control.

9/25/17

I did some fall cleaning at home this weekend. I feel so much better that the area where I spend 90% of the time at home is cleaner and better organized. If I am bored, I get a lot of payoff in cleaning up, even just a little bit. It's not like a top to bottom thing. But if one area is improved, it feels good.

9/24/17

Are you feeling a little isolated? Are you wishing you had a broader circle of friends? While apps and websites that promote activities may be part of the solution, I would encourage you to consider something first. Think about what do you like to do. Engaging in that activity with people who have a similar interest is a great way to make new friends. Apps and/or websites may facilitate linking up with people with similar interests, but they aren't required. For example, if you like to hike and camp, join the Mountaineers. If you are into mushrooms, attend a Puget Sound Mycological Society Meeting. If you like poetry readings, check out the Seattle Weekly or The Stranger and look for local venues that have poetry readings. I live by a shop that sells spiritual objects that also offers meditation space for people free of charge. They have classes on mindfulness as well. These suggestions (and others like them) can be a low-tech alternative to find activities to do and/or meet new people.

9/23/17

I went to a concert at a local club on Wednesday. The performer asked that people only take pictures during the first two songs, and requested that people put their phones and cameras away after that and focus on enjoying the show. A person next to me repeatedly was not respecting the request. On two occasions the artist stopped the show and stared at the person. The person had this shocked look when this occurred, like "are you looking at me?" The person put their phone away and the musician resumed performing. We live in a society where many people believe that the rules do not apply to them. I have never seen a performer actually stop and stare, and wait for the person to stop and respect their wishes, but I wholeheartedly approve.

9/22/17

There is a book from about 5-6 years ago called "Thinking, Fast and Slow" which I am reading. It talks about our brains having this two-part process when we deal with information. The first part deals with what is familiar and that we tend to handle in an automatic fashion. The second process deals with situations and information that is less familiar that requires more processing and conscious attention. The second process uses a lot more energy - literally. This tends to be an efficient system of conserving energy. When you think about learning, it can sometimes feel like hard work. And in particular if it is something new, this can literally be true.

9/21/17

There is nothing quite like the feeling of putting on a new pair of shoes. Although they aren't always the most noticeable part of an outfit, they certainly can make a difference. I had a client bring in his new shoes today to show me. They weren't even on his feet, which I found rather amusing. He pulled them out of his backpack to show me. They were very nice and I could see why he was proud of them. I hope there is a day sometime soon when he actually lets himself enjoy them on his feet.

9/20/17

One of the more rewarding aspects of my career is training apprentices in the field. The beginning of the process can be difficult. But then you see the transformation occurring before your very eyes. Things that were difficult for the apprentice to catch and address start becoming second nature. You see their confidence grow, as does their presence in the room with clients. And then the pride in them and their skills swells.

9/19/17

When completing forensic evaluations, sometimes it is really sad because there are many serious concerns that are raised that must be addressed. Recently one of my reports was eerily on-point to a degree that rarely happens. I felt prescient in this particular instance. You can't really pump your fist in the air and say "Nailed it!" in these situations. But it is an odd experience to understand a person to the extent that you know what their next moves will be.

9/18/17

Over the last few days, I have had several opportunities to tell people how much they mean to me. In return I have been told this back. There is something very gratifying about these exchanges. The world can be a dark and dismal place. Knowing there are people that care about you and that you can show care and concern for in return makes life a little brighter.

9/17/17

As I noted last month, the universe has brought into my life people who are struggling with drug abuse. Recently I was talking to a young man who was incensed because he perceived that I did not believe he was remaining sober. This is because I stated that in a month or two he would have clarity about an issue that I felt he didn't currently see in an objective way. Sometimes people can actually be easier to be around high, and the real work begins once they are sober. If you have used drugs to manage your thoughts and regulate your feelings, there can be quite a rebound effect coming off of them, whether they are legal or illegal drugs. When you have avoided for months, or even years, it is really hard when you get clean and you are flooded with thoughts and feelings. If you are in this situation, please be patient with yourself and those around you. Remember it will get better with time. Sometimes people choose mental health therapy or CD treatment to help them get through this, other people have opted for 12 Step programs. Some do both. I strongly recommend having a lot of support in place when you embark on starting a life of sobriety. Stopping your drug or alcohol use may truly be the easiest part of the process. Living sober from day to day can be much, much harder.

9/16/17

There are people in my life who are very sensitive about having their picture taken. They don't like it. And they really don't like it when they're posted on social media sites. There are a variety of situations in our lives when obtaining consent is required. The next time you want to take a picture of someone, consider asking for their permission first. You might get a more natural smile when you do.

9/15/17

I was on the local NPR station in Seattle in the wake of the mayor of Seattle resigning. The topic was about the importance of talking about sexual abuse. It's an uncomfortable topic. But sexual

abuse thrives in silence and avoidance. Here is a link to the podcast version if you are interested in hearing it: <https://t.co/yDyHezeqOB>

9/14/17

Living with uncertainty is difficult. People at times will settle for a less than optimal outcome to avoid waiting and dealing with the anxiety that comes from not knowing how things will turn out. Positive coping mechanisms can be a lifesaver to get you through these times. Doing a little bit of yoga, reading a book, or playing some video games can help pass the time. If you can be patient, many times things will turn out better than if you force a decision to be made immediately.

9/13/17

I was talking to a client about battling feelings of loneliness and isolation. When one has money (or the ability to borrow money) there are many diversions one can buy to help ease the intensity of unpleasant emotions. But these are only band-aids. And after the money is gone (or you find yourself in debt) you actually may feel worse than you did before. But there is an answer. In the immortal words of Whitney Houston, "Learning to love yourself is the greatest love of all." At the point you can enjoy your own company, that is when you will attract people and move away from a place of despair about feeling alone. The next time you have a little time to yourself, figure out how much you like being in your own company. If you don't, think about what could you do to make yourself a more enjoyable person to be around, and go for it.

9/12/17

Over the weekend I went to two musical performances. It is interesting when people communicate through art. It impacts you in a different way than with words spoken in a conversation or during a discussion. Art tends to create a visceral reaction. While this can draw us into the art, it can also repel or repulse us. I tend to be affected more by sound than visual art. When you want to take a vacation from life's stresses, or if you need a way to battle boredom, check out some art. If you are feeling brave experiment with something new and different. For you music lovers, if you love country, try a little EDM. If you are into rock listen to a show tune. For the more visually inclined, if you tend to like paintings, check out some sculptures. If you love photography, maybe check out some watercolors. And if you need comfort, go for what is familiar.

9/11/17

I remember exactly where I was 16 years ago when "9-11" occurred. It took a little time to understand the magnitude of what had happened. The U.S. has remained relatively unscathed when it comes to directly feeling the impact of war on civilians. Pearl Harbor is probably one of the only other recent examples. Its interesting that countries such as Russia and Germany are calling for Trump to take a different approach with North Korea than he is. Both those countries have suffered on their own soil when it comes to war, and know better than us what that is like. I am hoping that there are diplomatic ways to reduce the tension between North Korea and the U.S.. Especially when the prospect of nuclear weapons being used seems to be on the table.

9/10/17

On Friday I went to a training about the interventions being used with men who get caught trying to buy sex (patronize a prostitute). A key part of the class is to discuss how men in this country

are socialized to act, and encourage these men to break out of rigid roles they tend to live in as a result. The class promotes things like, it's OK to express emotions other than anger and being "horny". And that there is value in connecting with one's sexual partner when being physically intimate. One of the quotes from a program participant he shared with us was about the person's motivation to have sex with prostitutes: "I buy sex because there is only one thing I am more afraid of than intimacy and that is rejection." Fear of rejection is a powerful motivator to inhibit us from taking risks with other people or in new situations. Taking healthy risks is part of what makes life worth living.

9/9/17

My first boss was a man named William Chace. He ran one of the oldest restaurants in Bellevue at the time. I respected him immensely. One of the things he modeled to his employees was that there isn't a job that's too menial for an owner to do. If you were around him enough you would see him emptying the trash, cooking food, seating people at their tables, picking up garbage in the parking lot, or washing the windows. His philosophy was that you do what needs to be done. Mr. Chace set a standard that I try and hold myself to as much as possible 40 years after I learned this lesson from him.

9/8/17

Growing up I had a friend who loved to be the center of attention. Starting as a young adult he chose to do stand-up comedy (and act) to make a living. One of the things I admire about him is that he doesn't curse or use vulgar language on stage. His philosophy has always been that it takes a more clever person to go this route. I admire that he has stuck to these values as a professional entertainer.

9/7/17

Holding on to anger and grudges generally isn't helpful to do. I am not necessarily an advocate of forgiving in all situations, and I'm definitely not in favor of forgetting. However, when you hold onto an intense amount of anger or bitterness when you perceive you have been wronged the primary person it impacts is you. By doing this you are giving others and/or situations a lot of space in your head and heart that they probably don't deserve. While it is important to remember what has happened, try letting go of the hate. You will free yourself of a heavy burden.

9/6/17

Anxiety about school starting is common right now. This is especially true when people are going from elementary school to middle school and sometimes even more so when people go from middle school to high school. I have spent many sessions in the last couple weeks talking to kids about the transition back to school from summer break. Questions like: "Will I fit in?" "Will I know anyone?" "How am I going to find all my classes?" and others came up again and again. My biggest piece of advice - "Be yourself!" My second piece of advice - "Be nice to yourself and others because everyone is stressed right about now." And a note to parents - Please take a little extra time to talk to your kid this week when he or she gets home about school.

9/5/17

Changing a part of one's life can be difficult. For many people making small incremental changes is easier than making one or two big ones. The movie "What About Bob?" popularized the phrase "baby steps". I had a grad school professor whose favorite saying was "Inch by inch it's a cinch." Many times a large task can seem overwhelming. But when broken down into smaller tasks or changes, it suddenly feels more manageable. When feeling overwhelmed with your To-Do list or changes you are trying to make, take one small part of it and work on that. When that becomes natural or automatic then pick another. Before you know it, you will be well on your way.

9/4/17

As articles regarding people who are transgender have become more commonplace in the mainstream media, sadly the focus has been on bathrooms rather than other issues. Imagine being born into this world and your outward body parts (sex) conflict with your internal sense of self (gender). Compassion is the word regarding this issue. Not hassling people regarding the bathroom they use is one part of it. Using their preferred gender pronouns is yet another basic yet important way to show respect for trans folks.

Beyond that, many of us grew up in a world where gender was a binary concept. You were either MALE or FEMALE. But some PEOPLE don't identify that rigidly with one gender. This has always been true, but now it has been normalized to the point that many people openly talk about this in regard to their gender being fluid. There are days and times when a person may feel and act more stereotypically male, and other days more female. This way of viewing gender may not make sense to you, but do your best to remain open-minded and realize that just because you don't understand something doesn't make it wrong or bad.

9/3/17

We all search for meaning in life. Having a purpose in life tends to help us get up in the morning and face the day. If you are struggling with depression or lack of motivation, try finding a way to volunteer. Even if you are struggling financially, finding a few hours a month to help others will improve your outlook. People get inspired to help others when tragedies like Hurricane Harvey (and now Irma) occur. But it's good to donate one of our most precious gifts - our time - even when there isn't a national disaster. It can be formally through a non-profit agency, or informally on one's own. The next time you are feeling down, bored, or feeling a little numb, consider volunteering your time.

9/2/17

There is an acronym in the behavioral change business called PIG – the Problem of Immediate Gratification. It is the issue of wanting something now vs. focusing on what you need. Delaying gratification can be difficult. However, it is part of the process of maturing. Try fighting back against temptation that in the long run isn't good for you. If you succeed - congratulate yourself on a job well done. If you don't succeed pick yourself back up and keep trying.

9/1/17

A new month. A new look... A colleague wore something new and a little different than what they typically wear. The person seemed a little self-conscious about it. After several compliments, the person's face lit up as they realized that they had made a good choice.