

December 2017 Thoughts for the Day

12/31/17

It's the end of the year. What can I say about 2017? It was a mixed bag of good, bad and annoying. I can't say I am sad to see 2017 end. However, I am looking forward to 2018. It's going to be a good year.

12/30/17

I have a client who is becoming quite successful. I am impressed with his accomplishments. I think if I had to pinpoint one thing that is a key to his success it's that he has a solid support network of people in his life. Friends, family, and coworkers are all behind him 100%. I met him at one of the lowest points in his life and he is truly a phoenix rising from the ashes. It really seems like he had to crash and burn before he could succeed. But it is a lesson that even when you crash and burn it is possible to rebound.

12/29/17

It's New Year's Eve Eve Eve. I find that a holiday turning into a holiweek annoying. Yeah there is New Years Day and New Years Eve. But suddenly all these days surrounding a holiday seem like they have become an excuse not to work, or to put in an appearance and not much else. But even more so than that, complaining about this stuff makes me realize I am becoming a grumpy old man.

12/28/17

My mom is a kick in the pants sometimes. She let us know that on occasion she is the bartender at her senior living center on social night. A retired therapist probably makes for a good bartender. It sounded like fun until the jealous octogenarian wife caught her husband flirting with the bartender.

12/27/17

In my field, especially in the 80s and early 90s, aversive conditioning was part of treatment for people. The sad thing about aversive behavioral treatment is that at best it is only a band aid, and many times a not very effective one. The problem is that if you take away a negative or destructive behavior and do not have a positive replacement behavior, it is more likely you will return to the old negative behavior. The next time you are thinking about stopping something negative in your life, think about the positive replacement behavior(s) you are going to use, and start doing those things before you even attempt to stop the destructive behavior. You may have better success in accomplishing your goal(s) in the long run.

12/26/17

I am part of a group that creates a Dead Pool (or Death Pool). You pick 10 people you think are going to die in the upcoming year. They have to be somewhat famous. For each person who dies that you pick you get points for them by subtracting their age from 100. So younger people are worth more points, because in general they are less likely to pass away. It can sound a little morbid and insensitive. However, one of the things I enjoy is reading people's obits. Many times you learn a lot about famous people that you wouldn't have otherwise known.

12/25/17

19 years ago I met the love of my life. We never got married and have this interesting thing going on. We've decided that every day is a choice. It's interesting to think about having made this choice to be together almost 7000 times. Some days it isn't even really a conscious thing. Other days it has definitely been a choice. This may not work for everyone, but it does for us.

12/24/17

I haven't been to as many live shows lately. While I kind of miss them, I am appreciating a break from them as well. Plus it saves money too.

12/23/17

A colleague let me know a friend was getting divorced. He said that our friend's partner had been unfaithful. I feel for our friend because he and his wife have two young kids. There is no good time to get a divorce, but when you've just had kids, it is a particularly stressful time for it to occur.

12/22/17

I set a very important limit yesterday. It's funny because I was super nervous about the idea of setting the limit. It wasn't even the reaction I might get that created the nervousness, it was the reaction within myself that I wondered about. But once I did set the limit, it was like the biggest weight was lifted off my shoulders.

12/21/17

How are you holding up as the holiday season is in full swing? Make sure you do your stress inoculating activities on a regular basis this time of year so that you don't succumb to the pressure on all of us during this time of year.

12/20/17

For many years I didn't send holiday cards. But I joined a group and one of their traditions is that they send holiday cards. There are about 45 people in this social group. It is a major undertaking to prepare 45 holiday cards and to send them out. But it's actually pretty fun to receive all the different holiday cards in return.

12/19/17

I have a client who asked me whether I like to drink. I let him know I actually don't drink at all. It's not a judgment, it's just that I don't enjoy the feeling most of the time and I hate hangovers. I do like many sauces with wine or other alcohol used when making them, but that generally means the alcohol content is low or non-existent from cooking.

12/18/17

We ask guys in group to step up and be role models as they are getting ready to graduate. I was frustrated this past week when someone didn't aspire to do that for his fellow group members. When I challenged him, he made some very helpful comments to others. I hope he will do more of that without prompting in the future.

12/17/17

Roy Moore appears to have been defeated in Alabama. Regardless of whether you are a Republican or Democrat, it is reassuring that his history was taken seriously and people in Alabama decided there was a better person to represent them.

12/16/17

One of my nieces announced she is having a kid in the spring, making me a great uncle to-be. And my mom will be a great grandmother for the first time. Apparently my mom is excited, because this is something she has wanted to be. Funny the titles people want. I wouldn't have guessed that it would be important to her, but you learn something new about people all the time, even about someone I have known 50+ years.

12/15/17

I was watching a rerun of "Maude" starring Bea Arthur. The plot was about whether men and women can just be friends. The conclusion of this episode was that maintaining platonic friendships is difficult when you are attracted to the other person. And in Maude's case she was more optimistic that she could have a male friend than was true for her in the situation.

12/14/17

Twice in the last week I have been told by people that I was talking too loud. Generally I am good at being mindful of the volume of my voice. But there are people in my life who tend to make me more animated in my conversations, and when that occurs I get loud.

12/13/17

I was talking with a person who said that recently she made a comment to someone and the person burst into tears and left the room. When she described what she said and the context, I was perplexed why the person had such a strong reaction to her comment. She had some uneasiness about this occurring. Not because there was anything inappropriate said, but because of the strong emotional reaction was something she didn't expect or particularly want to evoke. At the end of the conversation she said something very important, which is that she is not responsible for the other person's emotions. That doesn't give a person permission to be mean or cruel, but at the same time, there are situations when being direct and assertive can create uncomfortableness.

12/12/17

Today is my older brother's birthday. Some days I wonder what I would have been like without his influence in my life. As a kid he was such a jerk to me, and yet he grew up to be an amazing person. There is a lot of research that human brains don't really fully develop until people are in their mid-20s. And the part that controls our impulses develops last. Funny how that works. The gas pedal of the brain develops early, and we don't get our brakes until much later. God help us all to survive our teens and early twenties. It tends to be smoother sailing for most of us once we reach ~25. Having said all this, what my brother taught me was how to stand up for myself and be assertive, and at times even be aggressive. I think many people have a lot of negative associations with being aggressive. And while it shouldn't be one's go-to response most of the time, it is a useful skill. Just as passivity is. Sometimes the best response is no response at all. Anyway, happy birthday to my brother who taught me many of these lessons through life experiences.

12/11/17

I was meeting with a client at the jail, and another person being detained was talking to a lawyer. The lawyer wanted to know why this person keeps going back to heroin. The person told the lawyer that heroin is the only thing that blocks out the horrible memories from the past. The lawyer kept trying to get a commitment from the person to stop using. I wanted to jump in and say that until the PTSD is treated that person will never stop using. But I didn't since it wasn't my place. But if I run into the lawyer in the next week or two I might suggest that he get his client some trauma-focused CBT therapy and perhaps that may help.

12/10/17

The lackluster Sounders looked so outplayed by Toronto yesterday. I'm not sure why they played so poorly, but it was hard to watch. They picked a bad time to have an off day.

12/9/17

For people in Washington, the long stretches of gray skies during the winter can cause you to have very low Vitamin D levels. When I was first tested my levels were so low I was put on a super mega-dose of Vitamin D for awhile to help my body get back within normal limits. There was an

amazing impact on my mood and energy level. If you are feeling sluggish during the winter months, perhaps you are deficient in Vitamin D. Your doctor can run a simple blood test for this and let you know. Of course the other solution for low Vitamin D levels other than a supplement is to get some sun. Perhaps a winter trip to Florida, California or Hawaii just might be the ticket.

12/8/17

Diabetes is a disease that profoundly impacts a person's life. Not just because of the frequent testing, and need to use insulin. But things like it can cause you to lose limbs, eyesight, sexual functioning, and put you at higher risk for kidney and heart disease. Some of the medications that treat diabetes can actually cause people to gain weight, which is an unfortunate situation. If you haven't had your blood sugar tested, maybe at your next physical get it checked. Early intervention and management is key to avoiding some of the most harsh effects of diabetes.

12/7/17

This past weekend a retro-TV channel had a marathon of "Family" episodes. I remember growing up with that show. I did not remember how physically affectionate the family members were with one another. But it's actually nice to see people show non-sexualized affection on TV.

12/6/17

I was grumpy all day Saturday this past weekend. What is a cure for that? For me it is doing something, specifically cardio. I had procrastinated doing my steps. By about 9p.m. I was sick of being around myself and did my 10,000 steps. After finishing I was in a better mood. Wow, I may have enjoyed my Saturday a heck of a lot more if I had only motivated myself to do something earlier.

12/5/17

I'm getting excited about the Sounders playing again for the title on Sunday. As a kid I hoped for a winning team, but never really had those dreams realized. Seattle now has a team that may win back to back championships.

12/4/17

Someone I know is facing a crisis at their church. It's one thing when you are facing a crisis. But what does one do when the church is struggling? My suggestion is to turn to people of faith for strength and support. Remember that you also have a personal relationship with God that doesn't require a church. If things are too "hot" at your church, maybe take a break and attend at another church on occasion to go to a place where there aren't distractions. Most of the time crises will pass, and the dust will settle. Time does tend to improve many situations, because it allows for solutions to arise.

12/3/17

I went to an all day training yesterday about predicting violence. Sadly, having a troubled childhood and coming from a broken home makes you more likely to be violent in the future.

Adult live-in relationships tend to make you less risky for engaging in any type of criminal behavior, including violence, assuming you don't have a partner in crime. Staying in school and not getting into trouble at school also improves your chances of a more positive future. Only use alcohol in moderation, and drugs as they are prescribed to you, or recreationally (if they are legal in your area) in a responsible manner.

Another interesting piece of information: People who tend to have a lot of casual sex also appear to be at a higher risk for engaging in violent behavior in the future. I'm not sure why, but it is something I noted.

It should be no surprise that generally one of the best predictors of future risk is a person's past behavior. Which means if you have a long-standing history of violence, especially violence that has resulted in charges and/or convictions, it is more likely you will engage in violent behavior in the future. Also being involved in non-violent criminal behavior makes one appear riskier for future violence. How does one deal with mitigating the risk for these factors? There is no magic answer, but one option is this: Stay out of trouble, and specifically trouble relating to violence. Your risk for engaging in violence tends to decrease the longer the amount of time that has passed since your last incident of violence. But in violence risk assessments that time being violence-free only counts if you aren't locked up in prison or other secure facilities.

Therefore it is never to late to take a different path. Because it does help. Start today and move forward.

12/2/17

The place where I get my car serviced always details my car as part of the deal. Even when it's as simple as an oil change. I admire the owner's business practices for doing this. He takes pride in his work, and wants you to take pride in your vehicle. When I drive off in my immaculately cleaned car after it's been serviced, I know I treat my car better. It's an interesting dynamic.

12/1/17

Wednesday was a turbulent day at work. More ups and downs than usual. In some respects I have done this by design to myself. I try not to schedule myself in a way so that there are multiple people at the same place in therapy with the same issues, back to back to back. I find that if I don't mix things up a little over the course of my day, the first person gets my best work, and subsequent people do not always get me at my best. But when my day is filled with people who are at different places in therapy and presenting with different issues, they get me at the top of my game.