

## For Those Who Care About Another

### Understanding Responsibility

We don't make personal Changes in a Vacuum. The Human being is a Social creature. We Have Families, we have Significant Others, and we have Friends, Colleagues, and Acquaintances. Once we have initiated and begun to make changes in ourselves it will have effect on the "others" in our lives. These "others" do, and will in turn, have effect on us.

Change will almost invariably create anxiety to some degree. How best to Help, how best to minimize conflict and anxiety, how best to keep together the "Good" in our relationships without allow the natural "Anxiety of Change" from pulling it apart? This is a Complex Issue. This essay is intended only to "bring to light" a Few of the factors involved and prompt further study and effort.  
To That End...

What Follows contains edited excerpts from "Chronic Anxiety and Defining A Self"— An Introduction to Family System theory, by Michael E. Kerr, published in "The Atlantic Monthly" September 1988.

Dr. Murray Bowen, a professor of Psychiatry at Georgetown University Medical Center, seeing that the family is not a collection of autonomous entities but rather an interlocked emotional unit unto itself developed the concept and perspective of a "Family Systems". One aspect that led to this conclusion of emotional interdependence and the family as a unit was the observation that family members frequently function in "reciprocal relationships". One example is where one member will act "strong" in the face of another's 'weakness'. This process was frequently played out with one member become Anxious about what he or she perceived as a problem or potential problem in another. This anxiety then would tend to exaggerate the demeanor, appearance and attitude of the anxious one and further escalate "Problem - Anxiety- Caretaker" cycle. This then results in a greater "caretaker" role which further enhances the 'weakness' of the other. Each person becomes an emotional prisoner of the other while giving a pseudo sense of togetherness.

Because of this and a number of other reciprocal relationship systems, it is suggested that it is important when making personal changes to also focus attention and have strategies in place to address the family unit as well. When one person makes a "Change" in this system it will have effects on the other persons role. Those effects may be subtle or intense. This resulting change will create "stresses" in the other. If these stresses are not addressed in healthy ways the family unit may break down or the personal change may not be successful.

The goal derived from the family systems theory is to gain differentiation or individuality while maintaining togetherness. Differentiation is the evolutionary desire in each person to be an individual – to grow to be an emotionally separate person with the ability to think, feel, and act for himself. Togetherness is also an equally strong "force" to keep families emotionally connected and operating in "concert" with one another for the evolutionary advantage that provides.

It is the balance of these two major drives and the Traps that are inherent that will be further addressed here... The capability to be an Individual in a group  
At one end of the spectrum, are peopling that live in a feeling world. Some however may be so sensitized that they become numb. In general, people at this level are so responsive to others opinions and what others want from them that their functioning is almost totally governed by their emotional reactions to the environment.

At the other end, goals and principals direct a person. While sure of his beliefs and convictions, he is not dogmatic or fixed in his thinking. Capable of hearing and evaluating the viewpoints of others, he can discard old beliefs in favor of new ones; he can listen without reacting and communicate without antagonizing others. He is secure and his functioning is not affected by praise or criticism. He can respect the identity of another without becoming critical or emotionally involved in trying to modify that person's life course. Able to assume total responsibility for himself and sure of his responsibility to others, he does not become overly responsible for others. He is realistically aware of his dependence on others and is free to enjoy relationships. He does not have a "Need" for others that impairs functioning and others do not feel used by him. Tolerant and respectful of differences, he is not prone to engage in polarized debates. He is realistic in his assessment of himself and others and is not preoccupied with his place in the hierarchy. His expectations are also realistic. He tolerates Intense feelings well and does not automatically act to alleviate them.

Most people wish to be individuals but are not willing to give up togetherness to achieve more individuality. People frequently are willing only to be individuals only to the extent that the relationship system permits and approves. There is a misunderstanding that giving up togetherness does not mean giving up emotional closeness. It does mean however that one becomes less dependent on the support and acceptance of others.

Some degree of rejection predictably occurs when a person embarks on a path of "change". The rejection, in whatever form it takes, is designed to restore the balance. To navigate through this emotional quagmire requires a well thought out direction and tolerance of intense feelings that might incline one to give up.

These intense feelings are fed by the "fear of what might be". Here arises the trap. When people become more anxious, the pressure for togetherness increases. During high anxiety periods human beings strive for oneness through efforts to think and act alike. It is ironic that this pressure increases the likelihood that there will be

fragmentation and further anxiety created by the desire to be an individual. So, a greater need for togetherness is experienced with a simultaneous need for greater distance and emotional insulation. The less tolerant they are and more irritated by the differences. They are less able to permit one another to be what they are. Feelings of overloaded, overwhelmed, and isolated increase...along with feelings that are accompanied by the wish to have the responsibility removed. (I.e., addictive behavior or separation) With these aversive possibilities people become more intent on getting others to do their way. Frustration when others resist often lead to disappointment and anger, further increasing the likelihood of giving up or withdrawing.

Efforts to get others to change can escalate problems of feeling criticized, defensiveness, and counterattacks. The flames are fanned when each blames the other. Projection of one's feelings AND attitudes onto another may also be used to relieve anxiety by allowing one to view another as the problem. Contact is often kept brief and superficial to reduce discomfort. Dealing in this way however creates an emotional investment in the success of the new relationship that they easily lose perspective and recreate problems they thought they had escaped. In addition by denying the anxiety in an attempt to manage, it may raise the anxiety in the other. So one may become more comfortable with oneself but increase the level of anxiety in the other. Such an outcome is a mixed blessing. Efforts at stress management may also include outside or group activities. These efforts are useful adjuncts, but the problem with using a group in this way is that improvements in functioning may depend on maintaining the group relationship. Also Efforts to pursue symptom relief may overlook the cause. This process is automatic and often begins when a person feels rejected or ignored (real or imagined).

So, how to break this natural Cycle?

When a family member can become more aware of his own part in whatever problems exist, becoming willing to assume responsibility for that part, and become more able to act on that basis, improvements in his functioning will not be contingent on someone else's "absorbing" his share of the family's immaturity. To diligently remove one's personal "demanding ness" even when the "problem" is not yours. To recognize the Desire for Emotional Closeness and Plan and perform acts toward that goal, yet maintaining separate and individual responsibilities. To accept others for who and where they are yet support and encourage change. Recognize this process may contain events of Intense Emotion and Reactivity. This allows for a calm, accepting, responsible individual to have a gradual calming effect on the other. People are keenly aware or sensitive to the emotional states of others and make automatic adjustments in response.

It is a change in functioning that does not lead to the seesaw effect.

## **Things To Do If Your Loved One Is Addicted To Drugs And/Or Alcohol:**

1. Don't regard this as a family disgrace. Addictive behavior is something all humans express to some degree or the other. When it it "Gets out of Hand"... Humans Can and DO make Changes.

2. Don't nag, preach or lecture to the person. Chances are he/she has already told him or herself everything you can tell them. He/she will take just so much and shut out the rest. You may only increase their need to lie or force one to make promises that cannot possibly be kept.

3. Guard against the "holier-than-thou" or martyr-like attitude. It is possible to create this impression without saying a word. A person's sensitivity is such that he/she judges other people's attitudes toward him/her more by small things than spoken words.

4. Don't use the "if you loved me," appeal. Since addictive behavior is compulsive...this approach will very likely increase counterproductive guilt.

5. Avoid any threats unless you think it through carefully and definitely intend to carry them out. There may be times, of course, when a specific action is necessary to protect children. Idle threats only make the person feel you don't mean what you say.

6. Don't hide the drugs/alcohol or dispose of them/it. Usually this only pushes the person into a state of desperation. In the end he/she will simply find new ways of getting more drugs/liquor.

7. Don't let the person persuade you to use drugs or drink with him/her on the grounds that it will make him/her use less. It rarely does. Besides, when you condone the using/drinking, he/she puts off doing something to get help.

8. Don't be jealous of the method of change the person chooses. The tendency is to think that love of home and family is enough incentive for seeking change.

Frequently the motivation of regaining self-respect is more compelling for the person than resumption of family responsibilities. You may feel left out when the person turns to other people for helping stay sober. You wouldn't be jealous of the doctor of someone needing medical care, would you?

9. Don't expect an immediate 100 percent change. In this effort, there is a period of "convalescence." There may be relapses and times of tension and resentment.

10. Don't try to protect the person from using/drinking situations. It's one of the quickest ways to push one into relapse.

They must learn on their own to say "no" gracefully. If you warn people against serving him/her drinks, you will stir up old feelings of resentment and inadequacy.

11. Don't do for the person that which he/she can do for him/herself. You cannot take the medicine for him/her. Don't remove the problem before the person can face it, solve it or suffer the consequences.

12. Do offer love, support and understanding in the recovery.

### **A Personal Observation**

When interacting with others... Keep Your Goal in Mind.  
Many Beliefs may create a "Feeling" that tries to "drive" Confrontation. Feelings of Injustice, of Unfairness, or Frustration and a variety of other Demands. Sometimes to win is to Loose. So Keep the Goal In Mind and ask yourself before you say or do something ---

"Is This Going to help me Obtain My Goals? "

Look not so much for a resounding YES, since oft times the solutions are complex and elusive. Look more for the point blank " NO "...this will only anger or upset the other person.

Then keeping in mind your Goal...Stop and Don't!

It may have a Feeling that this is somehow "Not Right"...however By Placing your Goal at the Forefront of your Mind...you will be able to correct that feeling to knowing that you are doing "What's Best" at the moment.

It's a Win-Win!!!

### **Seven Guidelines for Great Relationships and Better Communication**

1. Accept your partner 'as is.' Avoid blaming. Determine that you are in your relationship to enjoy yourself, not to try to fix, reform, or straighten out your partner. Be responsible for your own feelings. Allow yourself to influence your partner, but do not demand that he or she must change. Also, give her or him the freedom to influence you. Yes, to persuade and inform you.

2. Express appreciation frequently. Avoid steady criticism. Acknowledge your partner often for small things. Find, discover, or even create things you really value about your partner. Say them. Honesty is important here. Avoid the main relationship 'killer' - frequent criticism of your partner.

3. Communicate from integrity. Be honest regarding beliefs and evidence that conflict with your own views of what is happening. When your partner is right, admit it. Be both honest and tactful. Allow different perceptions to exist. Agree to stop penalizing each other for your honesty as you now often may do. Agree that both of you will be honest and let the other 'get away' with honesty.

4. Share and explore differences with your partner. Explore disagreements with your partner to move toward a higher resolution that accepts parts of both your views. Or, to agree to disagree. Additionally, be ready to compromise without pretending that you agree when you really don't agree.

5. Support your partner's goals. Don't surrender your own integrity and your own important desires and views, but go as far as you honestly can to support your partner even when you clearly disagree.

6. Give your partner the right to be wrong. Respect both of your rights to be fallible humans- your inalienable right to make mistakes and to learn from your own experiences and errors. Don't honor only your own right to be an error-prone human!

7. Reconsider your wants as goals that you may achieve later. (This is a guideline that enables you to work properly with the other six guidelines.) When you don't get what you want or desire, remind yourself that you don't have to get what you want, now or ever!

Note: Choose to practice the Seven Guidelines as a unilateral commitment regardless of what your partner does or doesn't do. Each time you have not succeeded, look to discover a mistake you may have made. You also may have something significant to learn about your way of talking or listening.

#### Tips for Learning and Using the Guidelines

To start you off, here are three simple tips:

Tip #1: Learn 'by littles.' Take one small bite size piece to 'master' at a time. Don't overload yourself by trying to learn these Seven Guidelines all at once.

Tip #2: Test our assertions, one at a time. Test our claims to prove to you that the Seven Guidelines are valid. Or to prove them false. Be willing to rework our guidelines to make them more understandable or workable for yourself.

Tip #3: Make continuing small improvements in your understanding or use of the Seven Guidelines every week. Aim for improvement, not for perfection. Persist!  
Taken from the book, Making Intimate Connections, 7 Guidelines for Great Relationships and Better Communication by Dr. Albert Ellis and Ted Crawford

### **Forgiving and Acceptance**

Forgiving is extremely important in eliminating anger toward yourself and others. If you think forgiving means doing something only for someone else, you are mistaken.

Forgiveness turns down the heat under your pressure cooker. If you don't turn down the heat, you'll eventually cook yourself. Heart attack and stroke are strongly correlated with continuing anger. Endless anger poisons every relationship. If your anger doesn't actively drive others away, it prevents intimacy from growing. Forgiving is the best thing you can do for you.

The obstacles to forgiving others are exactly the same as the causes of anger. You either thinks they did what **MUST NOT** are done to a star like you, or they didn't do what **MUST** be done for a star like you. In any case, they are worms. They well **DESERVE** whatever harm can be sent their way. By applying these same ideas to yourself, you'll be unable to forgive even you.

In saying this, I do not intend to condone even the smallest harm that people have done to each other, not to mention the major atrocities History clearly shows that humans are fully capable hurting each other in brutal and cruel ways. You may deplore these acts. You may do everything you can to prevent them. But, no matter how inhumane you rate harmful acts done by humans, they are hardly inhuman. As history clearly shows, humans can act very, very badly. Therefore, you have no sensible reason to believe that humans **MUST** not act badly toward you. This same point holds true for the universe in general. The badness of any event does not serve as proof that it **MUST** not happen. Clearly, the universe is capable of doing whatever it, in fact, does. The universe is not out of whack because you get harmed.

### **Acceptance Versus Approval.**

One reason people have so much trouble with this point is they confuse acceptance with approval. Just because you accept that certain things happen with the universe, in general, or people, in particular, does not mean that you approve those things. If you're going to get yourself to buckle your safety belt, you had better accept that you could be in an accident. You don't have to approve of people being hurt in accidents, but you had better accept it. If you don't accept this fact, you have no reason to buckle up. Refusing to accept that auto accidents can happen to you doesn't reduce the probability of accidents. Such refusals may actually raise your chances of being in an

auto accident because you drive less carefully. If you don't buckle up, you are just that much more likely to be hurt should an accident actually happen.

The same point holds true with the universe, in general, or people, in particular. While you cannot change everything, you can certainly change some things. But, even the things that can be changed must first be accepted. Otherwise you will never be able to effectively deal with them. If you forget that acceptance and approval is not the same thing, you will not only find it difficult to accept some things, you will find it almost impossible.

### **Forgiving Versus Forgetting.**

Forgiving does not mean forgetting. People learn from experience. If you touch a hot stove, you can learn to be more careful around hot stoves in the future. You can't learn this lesson if you forget about the hot stove you touched. Remembering the way people have behaved in the past doesn't mean throwing it up to them at every opportunity. Such behavior is only an attempt to hurt them now for the pain they brought you in the past. Remembering means using what you learned from the past to make better predictions about the future. If you forget the past, you cannot learn from it.

People often experience pain when they don't get what they want. In any close human relationship, you won't always get what you want. So, it's only reasonable to predict some pain. However, there may be some ways of being hurt you especially want to avoid. People who have hurt you once in these ways may not necessarily do it again. But, before you take another risk, you are wise to look for evidence you won't be hurt in that way again. A promise not to hurt you may be enough. But, if a person has a history of breaking promises, you are wise to look for additional evidence.

People can change. But, unless a person's environment has been greatly altered, or the person has been diligently and persistently working on change, the chances are the person will keep right on doing what they have been doing up to now. This is true for all humans including you.

It is correct to assert that we should never forget the six million Jews murdered in the Nazi death camps. Neither should we forget the five to seven million non-Jews who also died in these same camps under the same thoroughly nonsensical idea that some people are super-humans while others are sub humans. If you forget the past, you cannot learn from it.

## **Forgiving Versus Excusing.**

Forgiving doesn't mean excusing either. I can see two sensible reasons to excuse what someone has done. The first reason is that making restitution proves impossible or undesirable. An eye for an eye may make some people feel better but it's none the less stupid. Doubling the blindness in the world will hardly make humanity see the good more clearly. In many cases, something actually can be done to make restitution. If a person can make something better, which they have made worse, it usually isn't good to excuse them from doing so. Ask them to make better whatever it is that they can, indeed, make better.

The second reason to excuse what someone has done is you don't think anything further need occur in order for the person to learn from his or her experience. People can often learn quickly from their first mistake. Unfortunately, people sometimes try to evade responsibility for what they have done. No one can learn from their behavior if they insist they are not responsible for their actions or that what they did was not an error.

Excusing a behavior is a bad idea if it encourages evasion of responsibility, and prevents people from learning from what they have done.

## **What's To Be Done?**

The most difficult part about overcoming anger is getting you to work at it. Righteous indignation is the drug of choice for many people. The addicting properties are powerful! Learn to distinguish your anger from your annoyance. There's a big difference between a great deal of annoyance, and just little bit of 'gut busting' anger. Learn to recognize the difference. Keep working to remember that acceptance doesn't mean approval, and the differences between forgiving, forgetting and excusing.

Copyright 1998 (c) Hank Robb.