

WARNING: Therapy May Be Hazardous to Your Health

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So, you might ask... Why would a psychologist write something about therapy that would put him out of business? "He must be crazy" you say???? Well, maybe a little I must admit, but I would dare to say in a good way. Unfortunately, our culture pressures people to go around acting as if everything is "just fine," when often times the case is that their life is something other than "fine." We are all on what I fondly call "the planet of misfit toys" trying to fool one another that we have our shit together better than all the other misfits in this world. Leading to so much unhealthy competition, rejection/judgment of ourselves and others, insincerity in our relationships with one another, and countless Facebook posts. Seems to me that it might be a heck of a lot easier in the long run to stop this ruse and start giving acceptance and support to both ourselves and others.

So, to answer your question about why I would say something so blasphemous about counseling, is because research finds that typical therapeutic approaches are not effective for most people and can actually dig people deeper into their pain. According to Dr. Scott Miller, the leading expert in the effectiveness of psychotherapy, research indicates that "between 5 and 10% get worse and 35-40% experience no benefit whatsoever! That's half, or more." Commonly, people have come into my office and shared that they have been to many therapists with very limited and even counterproductive results. Most therapy tends to have clients talking for hours on end with little direction, goals, or useful input from the therapists. Unfortunately, as therapists, most of us have been taught to take the client deeper into their pain and emotional expression as a means of finding a way out. Empathy, one of the main tools offered in the trade, gives a temporary sense of being understood and not being alone in their pain, but gives little resolution or healing to the presenting problem.

I find that in most cases, empathy just digs people in further because it communicates to their deeper mind that the problem from the past actually still exists and/or defines the individual. For instance, mirroring the pain expressed by the client back to them about past abuse communicates to the subconscious mind that the abuse is still happening, that they are still in danger, and need to feel fear or anger to remain safe from something that is in the past (i.e. it doesn't exist so is no longer a threat). Because of this, empathy and talking about the person's problems tends to keep them locked in the past rather than directing the mind towards clarity and healing. I find supportive respectful compassion to be much more effective in helping the mind and body get unstuck from the trauma of the past that no longer exists. My goal is to move the client's mind from a sense of continued suffering from past pain to a place a freedom and clarity. Once this happens, I find that positive changes come naturally and are long lasting.

As psychologists and counselors, we are commonly taught that if the client isn't getting better then in some way it must be their fault. They aren't ready, aren't motivated enough, are being difficult, getting secondary gains, or have conscious or unconscious resistance. I suggest that this is a way that the

profession has learned to put off the responsibility of therapeutic competence and the responsibility for change unfairly onto the client. For instance, there is a joke about this very issue. "So, how many therapists does it take to change a lightbulb? Only one, but the lightbulb has to want to change itself." I used to find this joke funny, but now I find it insulting to people who are desperately seeking help from counseling and getting subpar therapy. This would not be acceptable in any other profession. Imagine going to a mechanic and her saying to you, "Well, I'd like to fix your car, but you aren't motivated enough." Imagine a dentist saying that the reason he can't fix your teeth is because you are being resistant. With the dentist we are all being "resistant," but the dentist gets the job done. Clearly, people come for counseling because they want change and are motivated to do so otherwise they would not be spending their time and money coming to therapy. I view it as a collaborative relationship, where I am committed to everyone of my clients to take responsibility for the growth and healing.

The way that I view therapy is that it is my responsibility to create the therapeutic conditions and effective interventions necessary to assist people in making the changes they want. I find that this perception about my responsibility as a therapist makes me much more effective in helping people achieve their desired changes. In addition, I find this mindset helps clients to relax and be more engaged in the process.

Part of the reason for this therapeutic ineptness of the field and the profession blaming clients for lack of change is that typical therapy tries making changes only from the conscious regions of the brain. The reason for this approach tends to be ineffective is that real power for change lies in the subconscious regions of the brain. Most of our thoughts and feelings arise from the subconscious which is housed in the primitive mind and the primitive mind is the part that is directly connected into the body and emotions. For instance, if a person wants to quit smoking consciously 100% but the deeper subconscious isn't on board then it will quite likely fail. Because the subconscious mind wants it, it will use distorted logic as well as urges and desires in the body that drive the person back to smoking. Trying to change things from the conscious mind is like trying to drive a car from the back seat or change the radio station by pressing on the speaker. The person knows where they want to go and what they want to listen to, but the subconscious mind is the one driving much of the time. Most therapy, in this way, is like trying to move a smoldering log by its smoke or trying to move a tree by its leaves and limbs rather than by its roots.

If the conscious and subconscious mind are at odds, then a lot of effort needs to be used to make any level of long term change. For instance, if I think something consciously but feel subconsciously differently then I don't "believe" it completely. In behaviors, we largely do what we feel over what we think. In this situation we spend a lot of time and energy trying to convince our feeling/subconscious self to get in alignment with the thinking/conscious self. For instance, I may think it doesn't make sense for me to feel afraid about speaking in a group, but if I feel fear then it will drive my sense of self and action because the power is in the deeper mind. Now, when you are able to get what you feel in alignment with what you think then

you actually believe it and no work is necessary to get yourself to act accordingly. With this alignment of the two areas of the brain then energy is freed and you are able to move unhindered by any internal resistance towards your desired outcome. So, when I know it is unnecessary to feel fear about speaking in a group and my deeper mind and body realize there is no danger, then I truly believe I am safe freeing up energy and preoccupation allowing me to show up more as myself rather than as a scared rabbit.

Here are some other myths about therapy:

You must talk about your problems over and over again in great detail.

The problem is that you haven't expressed your feelings and emotions enough.

Therapy takes a long time.

You must identify the source of the problem before you get better.

Diagnoses are important in understanding and helping people.

You have to make yourself open and vulnerable.

It's more important to focus on the problems and what is going wrong rather than making healthy adjustments and building on all the things that are going right.

I have been trained in most therapeutic approaches and I have taken the best of all of them and have integrated them into my personal approach. My method to counseling tends to be different from the typical approach in many ways. I endeavor to bring my authentic, yet professional, self into the session. How can I expect another person to show up as their real self if I am not? I view it as my responsibility to help you make the changes happen for you to live a better life. I tend to be much more active and directive helping all levels of the person's mind move towards optimal health that is of their greatest benefit and that of the world they live in. I find that most people's minds are generally doing fine overall and only need an adjustment to free up blockage and distortion. Kind of like a watch that needs a new spring. The watch doesn't need an overhaul, it just needs a small part of it to work better for the whole system to respond. I strive to work with the person on all levels of mind so that change tends to be natural, automatic, effortless, and long lasting. I find that creating an environment of curiosity, play, and inspiration are much more effective in helping the deeper mind of the person make the healthy shifts that he/she desires. It is my goal to make therapy fun and highly effective because I know that our minds tend to approach what feels good and beneficial. I've found that these elements have helped me to become a much more effective and enjoyable therapist.