

## LEADING CHANGE BY EXAMPLE - With Love from Dr. G

Original post date for San Diego Route 91 Community: 26Jan2018

Greetings country family!

We are fast approaching 4 months since 01Oct2017. Hopefully many of you are feeling significantly better than four months ago, but maybe you still have family members, friends, or acquaintances who do not appear to be doing so well. There are many reasons for why some people recover more quickly than others (discussed below), but if you're feeling better, my guess is you want the people around you to be feeling better too. It can be very challenging to know just how to "reach" the people around us, whether they are friends, coworkers, neighbors, or your own children. We can use a few strategies that will help us not only support the people we care about, but also increase the likelihood of positively influencing them.

Many of these strategies require your knowledge of basic psychological concepts, many of which have been presented in my previous postings. To have more tools and to learn new skills, I encourage you to review or read the documents I have previously posted in the order that I posted them:

25Oct2017 – Trauma 411

29Oct2017 – Rules and Compassion (PDF poster)

04Nov2017 – How PTSD Develops (also included Classical Conditioning diagram PDF)

01Nov2017 – Sleep Basics

04Nov2017 – Why Avoidance Makes It Worse

13Nov2017 – Finding New Meaning After Trauma

20Nov2017 – Anxiety and Panic

27Nov2017 – How to Change Unhelpful Thinking (also included CBT Thought Record and Unhelpful Thinking Styles PDFs)

17Dec2017 – Healthy Communication

27Dec2017 – Closing 2015 by Paulo Coelho

15Jan2018 – Tips On Managing Nightmares

26Jan2018 – Leading Change by Example

Immediately following the shooting at Route 91, we all returned home and began to process what we had just experienced. At that point in time, we were all at the same starting line for this new event. Personally, I was arrogant (and subsequently profoundly humbled) in thinking that my level of experience and expertise in the field of trauma would somehow immunize me against the expected symptoms a majority of people experience following a combat-like situation. However, I quickly recognized that my brain was just like everyone else's, and my limbic system did not care what I knew or did not know. In that

first month or two, I too was easily triggered (by everything!), hypervigilant, emotionally sensitive, detached, anxious, and experienced sleep disturbance and decreased enjoyment in the activities that I normally loved (even my country dancing!)...just like everyone else. These reactions were normal and expected at that time. However, now moving further away from Oct 1<sup>st</sup>, we all begin to see more obvious differences in people's coping and mental health status. This is related to a number of factors, some controllable and some uncontrollable. It is helpful to understand these differences because this knowledge will help us foster more compassion and the ability to approach others in more effective and beneficial ways.

There are a number of factors that play a part in someone's ability to heal and recover from trauma. Some people (perhaps even as much as half of the population) have "sensitive" brains – this means they have a biological and genetic susceptibility to developing symptoms of anxiety and depression when under severe stress (so there is likely mental illness in the family). People also have a different set and amount of resources (e.g., family support, social network, healthcare, financial stability, health status, time, faith), which are critical in our ability to recover. Everyday stressors can overload someone who is low on resources, and trauma can simply put a person over the edge especially if they were already vulnerable. For many concert-goers, the Route 91 massacre was not their first life trauma. Unfortunately, trauma can have a cumulative effect for those folks who never processed previous traumas adequately.

People also have different levels of insight, self-efficacy (confidence in their own ability to cope with adversity), and motivation to change. Resources and support is almost always available to a highly motivated individual, but to someone who remains in denial about how dire his/her situation is, those resources are irrelevant. Healing is within reach for all of us, but some of us will get in our own way when it comes to recovery (and that is the task of a good therapist, if you happen to be engaging in individual therapy currently...to help you get YOU out of your own way).

So, how can we help the people we care about who don't have (or don't think they have) as many resources, have a history of trauma, preexisting mental illness (mood or anxiety disorders), or just seem emotionally constipated (this means emotionally shut down, numbed out, and non-expressive)? Well, the answer is simple. We focus on what we can control (refer back to the 5 Bucket Rules), which is our own thought-processing, our own feelings, and our own behaviors. We accept where our loved one is in their recovery process and we accept that there is free will and autonomy. We validate and acknowledge the pain they are experiencing without judgment, and we reassure them that we are "here" for them should they need anything. We teach them what we are learning (this means you need to be learning new things and making change yourself!) as it relates back to us. Instead of telling another person what to do (GET OUT of their bucket!), we show them what we are doing. We model mental health,

psychological mindedness, happiness, and overall change and if we have done a really good job of it, then the people around us may start to get on board. After all, it's working for you! This is the extent of your control over other people (which is NONE). Period. At best, you may have influence over them. This strategy is really frustrating and counterintuitive for most of us. We want to instruct the people we care about because we think we know what's best for them, or we just really want to help them feel and do better. But this goes against the simple idea that we want to show them that we have confidence and trust in their own ability to recover. When we try to tell other people what to do, and even worse, we give ultimatums, we are really just telling them that we think they're an idiot and cannot figure it out, so we are tasked to tell them how to fix their situation. Not really what we're aiming for, right?

The Bottom Line: Stay focused on your own healing and stay in your bucket. Work on learning how to communicate more effectively and compassionately. Lead by example...showing the world how well you are healing will naturally influence others to be curious. They will seek out your guidance and then you can positively influence their self-motivated change!

- With Love From Dr. G