**Self-Compassion and the Art of Taking Care of Yourself**

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Over the years, many airlines have lost many good men who were husbands, fathers, brothers, grandfathers, uncles, friends and colleagues. One of the common themes among these people, and many like them over the years, is the perceived stigma (self or public) surrounding seeking help, whether psychological or medical. Survey after survey suggest that men are less likely to seek help than are women. Which has dire consequences. Health et al. (2018) suggest that the stigma of seeking help is a major barrier that prevents individuals from seeking help, especially when it comes to psychological concerns. Some authors go further by offering that self-compassion may be the biggest factor in reducing public and self-stigma while improving help-seeking behaviors.

Self-compassion involves viewing oneself with kindness and nonjudgement in light of what a person may be undergoing in their lives (Heath et al., 2018). In addition, self-compassion includes approaching one’s sufferings and failures with openness, awareness and less defensiveness while viewing personal suffering as a part of living out the human condition (Booth, McDermott, Cheng and Borgona, 2019).

The nature of pilot DNA certainly works against self-compassion by often promoting strong masculine gender role attitudes (not bad, but a significant barrier) that produce a sense of self-coldness (hating one’s feelings, fight or fight response, aloofness, pride, self-reliance, stoicism, etc.). This suggests that men who believe they are violating their gender roles are more likely to believe that seeking help would have a negative impact on their sense of self-worth. Thus, self-stigma and public stigma impede the path to seeking help and strengthening well established norms of masculinity, particularly in the aviation world.

This became true in my life when my 21 year old son had a major psychological break down as a junior in college. Our lives became embroiled with fears, doubts, uncertainty, anger, etc. as we encountered the struggles of helping our son. Even as a trained counselor and pilot, I hunkered down and tried to push my way through this, embarrassed and ashamed of the feelings of inadequacy and failure as a parent. Fortunately, by God’s grace and the help of others, I admitted that my pride and self-reliance and self- coldness was impeding my son’s recovery and our family’s. I had to learn to treat myself with dignity, less self-blame and while embracing the suffering and seeking help with navigating these troubling waters.

In the end, lowering self-defensiveness and self-blame allowed me and my family to effectively (yet painfully) move towards healing and stability. The art of self-compassion has definitely shown to be directly associated with lower self-stigma while increasing help-seeking behaviors. In the words of Saint Paul the Apostle, “When I am weak, then I am strong”. Treating ourselves with kindness, humility, openness and non-judgement is a major factor in the path towards wellness and resiliency.

If you need help in navigating through times of stress and sorrow, or feeling burdened by life’s uncertainties, please call CAMH at 817-658-9290.