

CHANGING THOUGHTS AND CHANGING BEHAVIOR

This month my clients struggled with using the power of their minds to change their behavior. I haven't liked watching infomercials or talk shows where a guru tries to get us to believe that we can change our behavior with just a change in thought. I don't like reading self-help books that claim the same thing. However, I also can't deny that I keep seeing it in action. People do change -- sometimes in an instant.

I don't usually see myself as a cognitive therapist, but I can't deny what I keep seeing and I am slowly beginning to embrace how easy behavior change can be just by changing a thought (hey, there is potential for change, even in an old dog like me).

What kept coming up this month with clients is how people believe they are the victims of consequences or situations or of their own unconscious. I think Sigmund Freud did us a great disservice implying that we are driven by forces (unconscious) that we cannot see. I continue to see clients change their lives in miraculous ways simply by choosing to. I see people that have fought with regular exercise, weight loss, drinking, relationships, communication, employment, etc. who one day come to terms with how behavior is a choice and that we are not controlled by hidden factors. We can, at any moment, just decide to change our diet forever, or give up caffeine – forever. We can change anything if we really want to.

In graduate school I watched professor, Fred Moore, intervene in people's thoughts many times. A student would be complaining about a struggle and then imply that they couldn't figure out why they would be sabotaging themselves or unable to change. Fred would say, "Oh, so you do blah, blah, blah... Well, that must make some sense..." The student would say, "Huh?" Fred would say, "Oh, I mean you must have a good reason for doing that (behavior)." It was so disarming and effective that I use it a lot.

In order for a phrase like that to work though, you have to be honest with yourself – not lie to yourself, dig down deep and ask, "Why would I do that? I ate a whole bag of chips because...?"

If you look hard and thoroughly, you will have an answer. Once you have it, then you are "awake" and at choice. And then you can change your behavior in an instant, just like the gurus keep saying. Your mind is powerful, but you have to know the right questions to ask it.

Thanks again to my amazing clients that keep reminding me why I do what I do.

Sincerely,

Russell

Copyright © 2005 Russell Wilkie, MFT