

Mountains to Conquer

Column by Bob Coombs, MA
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This Column is written especially for men!

Mind Tricks and Thinking Styles

Often, a man will think thoughts that are dangerous. All too often, a man is caught in a situation where his mind plays tricks on him. This leads to suspicion, jealousy, stalking behavior and often violence. This can be avoided.

There is a new TV Series titled, "My Own Worst Enemy". The concept is so true for many men and women in our society. The violent crimes that are reported on our News, and the overcrowding of our prisons, tells us that our culture has a problem with people going over the edge beyond logical and rational thinking. Many people seem to lose their ability to restrain their thoughts and actions and thus act out in hurtful ways toward themselves or others. The result is all too often injury or death to a spouse or girlfriend, and incarceration in prison.

Example # 1. Jennifer came to my office to ask for help. This attractive teen-aged girl stated that her boyfriend, Mark, was threatening to kill himself if she broke up with him. She said that her best friend, Amanda, had insisted that she talk to a counselor.

Jennifer said that she was scared because Mark had watched her from a distance while she was working at a local drive-in restaurant. She was afraid that he might do something physical to hurt her or friends that he did not like.

Example # 2. Nikki confided in a counseling session that her husband, Jack, was starting to use physical force on her because he believed that she might be planning to leave him. She said that he had been calling her from his job at least three or four times a day to make sure she was at home. She could not go next door to have a short visit with her neighbor Nancy. If she did not answer her phone every time Jack called he would accuse her of having an affair and then yell at her in a rage for at least 30 minutes.

In both examples above, Jennifer and Nikki were facing possible danger of being physically battered or even killed by the men in their lives. This type of violent acting out is often driven by a person's chronic thoughts of mistrust and rejection. When these thoughts are not stopped, they can turn into uncontrollable anger, anxiety or depression. This can lead to suicide attempts or violence toward others including spouse or family members.

In this issue of the Polly's Place Newsletter, I will share the tools to help you reduce troublesome thoughts. There are several strategies that will reduce your chances of doing hurtful acts. Because your mind can play tricks on you by thinking the worst of a situation, your thoughts may put you at risk of hurting yourself or someone close to you in your home or workplace.

Tool # 1. Journaling your thoughts for up to a week. This journal can help you with a technique called “Thought Stopping”. Thoughts which trigger strong emotions such as anger, anxiety or depression, must be recognized by the man or woman who is thinking about how they are treated by others. Once the thought and emotion are recognized, the man or woman should write down the thoughts in a list. A new list should be recorded for each day and saved for finding ways to stop the troubling thoughts.

For each troubling thought, write down the following:

1. Time of Thought? (Night or day?)
2. Emotion experienced?
3. Situation which triggered thought?
4. Describe thought. (How was it frightening, painful or hurtful to you or someone else)
5. How true? (Do I have proof?)

Many people see their thoughts as real when they are only based on past experiences or suspicions that the mind created without actual cause. This is what I call “having your mind play tricks on you”. When this happens, your mind makes you think the worst, or most hurtful thing is happening to you, when actually it may not be happening at all.

Tool # 2. “Talk it over”. Take your list of troublesome thoughts and share them with a knowledgeable professional person such as a professional counselor, Pastor or Doctor. Ask this person to help you understand what may bring up these thoughts. Then ask this person if they see your thoughts as needing support beyond what you have been able to do for yourself.

Tool # 3. “Medication”. One private prison that continues to do research on causes of crime and violence reported that they found that both men and women who commit seriously violent crimes show high levels of testosterone and low levels of serotonin on their blood chemistry. Excessive levels of testosterone cause a tendency to be aggressive. Deficiency of serotonin causes slowing down of thinking and increases the possibility of using poor judgment.

If you often feel angry or depressed, you could ask to discuss medication with a medical professional who has experience with medications used for mood adjustment and hormone regulation. By doing this you may feel safe, calm and not feel that others are hurting you.

Remember, you are ultimately responsible for your own actions, so get the help you need if your thinking is directed toward hurting yourself or in hurting or killing someone else.

Tool # 4: “Consequences”. A family that I worked with in Hawaii was assigned to me to provide Court Ordered counseling services to deal with Drug Abuse charges by both parents. Both parents worked hard learning problem solving skills and better parenting skills than they had previously used.

One day, the Island Police Patrol passed their house with its siren blaring. The father of this family immediately said to me, "Every time I hear the Police siren, I immediately go into a panic. Even though I know that I am meeting all of the Court's requirements, I still react to the belief that they may be coming for me.

Fear and guilt are overpowering emotions. I recommend that you review the "Stop, Think, and Do not react" technique before you act out some thing hurtful and violent. Thinking about "consequences" before you take an action will give you more time to choose the best thing to do so you can avoid hurting someone or even worse, ending up in State Prison for years or Life.

Next Issue:

My next column will address other areas of our thinking styles which may show up as non-drug addictive patterns, including, but not limited to pornography, over spending and over work.

Your feedback is welcome. Write to:

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