

It Is Worth The Effort...

Julie Hryniewicz-Hache -- Wednesday, November 29, 2006, 9:49AM



Cleaning out and organizing all of the boxes, bins, clutter, and junk in our basement, a couple of weekends ago, I realized just how much "stuff" we collect along the way. Although I thought I had been keeping up on it, there were apparently many items that got thrown into containers during our last move; things that I didn't even remember we had. There were also paint cans, cupboards of shoes, recycling, and clothing items that were supposed to be given away, that had found hiding places in the most obscure spots. Since I am a huge advocate that de-cluttering and organizing our spaces has a tremendous positive effect on our health, and the basement had been draining my energy, I decided to dive into the process when I had two available days in a row.

Since attempting to eliminate anything that we might possibly "need again", is one of my husband's greatest nightmares, and it was important enough to me to address the problem, I pretty much accepted that I was on my own in the process. I took each box, one at a time, to an area on the floor that I had designated for sorting. I made piles for things to throw away, things to give away or sell, and things to keep, just as in the home renovation shows (that have caused a minor addiction for some of us). This process of sorting worked well, and out of respect and courtesy, I encouraged my husband to come and check before the final purging took place.

As you can imagine, there were some items that came out of the piles; however, our agreement was that those reclaimed items would go out to his shop if he wanted to "keep them for a rainy day". Considering that his shop is twice as big as our house, I didn't think that it was a huge sacrifice. He was a bit concerned that the house looked like a bomb hit it because there were empty boxes and bins, garbage, piles of clothes, and

open doors all over our home. My basement project turned into me going through every closet, drawer, and cupboard in the whole house to see if there was anything I could get rid of. In the end, I was quite satisfied that I had eliminated several large garbage bags of clothing and numerous boxes and items for recycling. My mission had been accomplished and by the end of the second day, our home and my energy felt renewed.

This brings me to my point. Often times when we are dealing with any issues in our life, it requires things to get messy first. Facing, accepting, or admitting that we have a problem requires strength, courage, and work. Just as in the process of de-cluttering, cleaning, or organizing our home, office, garage, or car can be grueling, exhausting, draining, and involve some negotiating, it is well worth the effort in the end. Try to remember the feeling of when you just hiked a large hill or mountain to get to the glorious view at the top, or after you have painted a room and put the furniture back in place, or when you have finally settled a disagreement. You feel proud, accomplished, and relieved that you have tackled the task.

Let's take for instance, the problem of sibling rivalry; it's a syndrome dating back to Cain and Abel, because people can't quite figure out how to eliminate it and it is widely accepted as part of life. Siblings wrestle, banter, argue, and poke each other constantly and this can be a source of agitation for their parents. What is interesting; however, is that when one of them is spoken to, about the behaviour, they often go to the other's defense and says that it is no big deal and they were just playing. This enabling behaviour then perpetuates the cycle and it is near impossible to get anywhere because they are constantly defending the other. The problem never goes away unless you get to the root - the battle and competition for attention, love, and things is usually the source.

This cycle also rings true in domestic abuse; the victim truly loves the other person, regardless of their hurtful behaviour. When someone comes to their call or cry for help, or attempts to intervene in the situation, the victim will often defend and cover up for the actions of the perpetrator. I have seen this endless times when responding to domestic calls, as a police officer, that the victim will say that everything is fine or fail to appear in court when charges are laid. The good news now is that legislation orders police officers to lay a charge, where they have reasonable grounds to believe a domestic assault has taken place, regardless of the victim's willingness to testify. This is often the first step in connecting to programs that can be beneficial.

When we make excuses, justify, defend, or cover up the behaviour of

someone who is violent or hurtful, emotionally or physically, we are enabling the situation to continue. Even though we think that we are protecting the person involved and attempting to keep the peace within the family, we are actually causing that person to continue to suffer in his or her own agony (the agony that is leading them to be violent in the first place). I have heard endless victims say they their loved one is a great person, other than when they are "drinking", "high" on drugs, or "off their medication". What this means is that they are able to keep their pain at bay, until their defenses are down when they indulge in a stimulant, such as drugs or alcohol. The source of their problem is not the use of the stimulant, but it is the root issue that lead to their substance use in the first place.

Our ability to understand addictions and the root cause of violence and criminal behaviour is assisting us in identifying ways to make things better. We cannot make things better if the victims and families continue to cover up the behaviors of people who are in agony. We are not doing someone any favors by pretending that the problem doesn't exist. Whether the root cause is a childhood involving abuse, neglect, poverty, or grief or trauma as an adult, the only way to get the person help, is by allowing them access to the systems and agencies that are in place to deal with their painful pasts or their self-defeating beliefs.

Most times, in order for things to get better, we must make a bit of a mess. We must dig out the old stuff, put it out on the table, and figure out a plan to make it better. Yes, it does take work. Yes, it can be difficult. Yes, it may take a bit of time; however, it is well worth the effort in the long run. Assisting a loved one to get the resources and information they need, can change all of your lives. It is not about blame, because blame focuses on the past; however, it is about hope for the future. Are your loved ones and the family unit not worth the initial effort to take the first steps? If you knew that you could be a part of making things better, would you do it? We teach people how to treat us by establishing the limits of what will we define as acceptable or not.

If you feel that you are living in a situation that is no longer acceptable, it is not important that you have all the answers in how to fix it. What is important is taking the first step to break the cycle and get the assistance, resources, and support that you need to make your situation better. Your loved ones deserve to be free of the pain that is causing them to hurt you or you to hurt them. The only way that the pain goes away and the abuse stops is by identifying and dealing with the source of that pain and deciding that you are not going to give it power over you. You cannot change anyone else but yourself; however, the most loving thing that you can do for your relationship is to assert your limits and

take action. Life is too short to avoid the work involved in making your life better. The end result is worth the effort...

"Action is the antidote to despair." Joan Baez

If you are involved in the cycle of violence: The John Howard Society on King Street provides Anger Management and other free support services (759-1703), Women in Crisis (759-1230), Wife Assault Helpline (1-800-461-2242), or Vincent Place Men's Shelter on Albert (253-2770).

Photo by Tim Hache