

The Root Causes of Destructive Habits, Bullying and Addictions

When we were little children, at a very early age before we perceived anything was wrong in the world, life was joyous and wonderful. And then something happened; some specific event. It could have been anything. It did not have to be tragic or dramatic.

But when that something happened, we asked a question - a destructive question. We asked, "What's wrong?" And by approaching the meaning of the event with that question, we came up with an even deadlier answer. For the first time, before we had any problems or became addicts or bullies, we told ourselves, "Something is wrong with me."

From then on, our minds worked day and night to confirm that opinion of ourselves, flooding us with ideas about our wrongness, burying us in a condemning concept of ourselves. This was all done unconsciously without any real intention; yet despite that, the more our mind probed into our wrongness, the worse we felt. The end result?

We chose not to take responsibility for the world we created, but instead tried to find some way, any way, to feel better about ourselves.

One of the first ways we did this was by flipping the blame away from ourselves onto someone or something else. We said, "Something's wrong with YOU!" or "Something's wrong with THEM!" or "IT," whatever IT was. In other words, we created a view of the world where we were victims of SOMEONE or SOMETHING outside of us.

Addiction is More Than Substances

Over the years, I have met and worked with many addicts -- and they all, without exception, had one thing in common. They all played the victim. Besides their core addiction, they were all addicted to blaming and complaining. My belief now is that this destructive self-victimization -- which led to blaming others and themselves -- came first. Then came their addictions.

To me, the destructive behavior or addiction that a person demonstrates is not the real problem. It is a symptom of the problem. The real problem is rooted deeper, in our hopeless view of the world—That is, in the belief that we have done something wrong and are a victim of something or someone else. This is the fundamental cause of the pain that leads someone to escape into some form of addiction. At least that's my conclusion today after recovering from my own multiple addictions, working with hundreds of other addicts of all ages, and reading or speaking with some of the top addiction authorities in the world.

If this "view of ourselves" is what actually leads us to addictions, we can then say that there are no real victims, whatever the form of addiction, aggressive behavior, or bullying. The culprit is not ultimately a person, an event, society or the drug. It is the mind of the person who has succumbed to his own wrongness, who has re-created the world in his own bad image.

This point of view sheds a whole new light into why people get addicted or how kids become bullies. Rather than tell a kid that his addiction or behavioral problems are the result of a genetic inheritance, environmental circumstances, or upbringing, we can give the power back to the mind of this young man or woman who has misinterpreted his or her value and relationship to the world. As Eleanor Roosevelt said so well, "We shape ourselves and we shape our lives. The choices we make are ultimately our own responsibility."

Yes it's true that some difficult and even tragic events happened in our past. I will never deny that; they happened to me too. But we alone are the ones who assigned meaning to those events. No one outside our own skins can truly interpret this for us. And, if we have made a mistake in creating this meaning, only we can go back and change the meaning we have of our past.

But if we revisit our past in an empowered way and reinterpret the meaning of certain events, we can find our inner strength and power again, and invent a new future for ourselves where there was only survival before. If we commit ourselves to developing healthy habits of thought, feeling and action, we can truly change our lives.

Not Everyone Agrees With This?

Many people have different viewpoints on what causes addiction. Heredity, biology, disease, environment, upbringing. In my perspective, these are all valid. Programs and approaches such as Alcoholics Anonymous have helped me greatly in my own recovery. Therefore my intention is not to say that "I am the authority" or that these ideas are "the truth" -- but simply to offer them as my own best understanding at this time. I also offer them because I've found that they empower youth.

Henry Ford once said, "If you think you can do a thing or think you can't do a thing, you're right." In other words, the mind is very, very powerful. Here's just one example.

When I was a kid, I was raised mostly by my mother. However for about 2 years, I went and lived with my father. When I began living with him, I wanted so much to be like him and accepted by him that I would do almost anything to show I was worthy of being his son.

My dad told me that he had arthritis and he often used to complain about his pain. And in the short period of time that I lived with him, I actually got arthritis. Doctors diagnosed it and gave me pills for it. The same thing happened with ulcers. My father used to complain about his -- and I too ended up getting ulcers and being treated for them by my doctors. Amazingly, both the arthritis and the ulcers lasted only as long as I lived with my father.

That's how powerful the mind can be. And that's why I'm now very careful about telling kids about the "cause" of their addictions. If we tell a child that addiction is hereditary or a disease, and that's the ONLY way it is, those can actually be self-fulfilling prophecies.

Just to reiterate: I'm not saying that those who believe in the heredity, disease or other models are wrong. I'm simply saying that they might not be the best or most empowering message we can share with kids. The power of belief is huge, and way beyond what we currently understand. Noted addictions authority, Dr. Stanton Peele, writes a lot about this and it's one of the reasons he is so controversial. He says if you believe that you have this disease and you're teaching others that addiction is a disease, you're actually teaching people to become powerless.

That's why I focus on the power of choice, and replacing destructive habits with healthy habits. These have enabled me to recover more fully, by seeing beyond my own powerlessness. And daily I see these same ideas helping kids I work with.

After years of working in this field, these insights into "the real problem" have given me new hope and tools -- and the belief that with new, healthy habits, we can build for ourselves a better and brighter future.

In his "THE POWER OF CHOICE" school assemblies, Scott shows how he developed these views on life that led to his addictions, and how he created new ones that empowered him. When kids hear his story, many identify with it and are motivated to do the sometimes hard and uncomfortable work that is part of his 28-Day Healthy Habits Program.