

NEWSLETTER - SEPTEMBER 2010

MIAMI-DADE CHAPTER

Florida Association of Marriage and Family Therapist



ORGANIZER'S MESSAGE

By Michael J. Alicea, MS, MSW, (Ed.D. Candidate)

The other day, I started thinking about change in perspective. How sometimes for years I go along seeing things one way, only to have something happen that causes me to see in a whole new way, forcing me to question what I've held as ironclad truth, or gain insight into what has seemed elusive, or reinforce and expand understanding of something I've had trouble articulating. Seeing things from a different angle can also lead to more respectful, harmonious relationship, as I get past my assumptions and hear more of what is behind what another person is expressing.

And isn't this part of what we do as therapists? No matter what our approach, a piece of what we do is help people enlarge their awareness of where they are in a process, opening up more possibilities for understanding and moving forward. It can be relief for someone to hear that she (or he) is experiencing emotions and other symptoms typical for what she is going through and isn't bad or, (the awful word) crazy. Often that's just what a person needs to kindle a small but vital ember of hope. And this can work both ways. I'm amazed at how many times a client will make an observation that gives me the piece I need to enlarge my understanding about something I've been struggling with.

I'm also grateful for the people, both presenters and members, who share their expertise in our meetings. Time and time again I come away with at least one aha moment that increases my insight into something I've been working on. Not that I immediately try the latest technique, but my thinking about a subject gets stirred up and pushed to a new level. New ideas are invigorating.

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These are hard times. We're experiencing turmoil and loss as well as promise. Keeping equilibrium calls for creative thinking, for trying different solutions when the old ways no longer work. Looking from another angle can give you a needed chuckle, stimulate your curiosity, or send you in a direction you've never considered. Why not peek under your refrigerator once in a while. You might find, as I did, cobwebs that need cleaning out, a few trinkets you didn't even know you'd lost, and maybe even a tiny troll asking nothing more of you than a kind welcome.

Come, join us.



THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING CONNECTED

Robin Kaye Stilwell, M.A., LMFT
AAMFT Secretary

When I first hear the phrase “being connected”, my thoughts gravitate towards the arena of personal relationships. “Having connections” has the connotation of receiving some special benefit or preferential treatment, as in “The wait at Joe’s Stone Crab was 2 hours long, but we were immediately seated because we have connections, or, in other words, having a relationship with someone who has influence. It is often applied, additionally, to employment opportunities, as in, “Although I was the more qualified applicant, the other person was hired because of their connections.” Where do connections come from? Do they automatically stir up a sense of unfairness, envy or resentment, or are they valued? You might be wondering what this topic of “connection” is leading?

There is no doubt about the importance or value of a community. Being part of a community implies that relationships are established, that we take an interest in, are concerned, involved and invested. In a community, people look out for one another and take their interests to heart. One involved person alone does not have the power to make a community function optimally. Of course, we can always sit back and be the Monday morning quarterback, criticizing what others have done, then wait for them to take care of our needs. At some point in time, however, there is a point in which there your own voice is vital.

My involvement with AAMFT began at the local Chapter level when I recognized the importance of meeting other MFT’s. I eventually was privileged to being elected to serve on the State Division and later the

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Central level. Throughout, I was continuously encouraged by relationships I had developed and the value I place in being connected and actively involved.

This has significantly impacted my life. I attribute my being able to practice and earn a living on the hard work and diligence of those in the MFT community who invested themselves in fostering connections and taking ownership of the field.

Fortunately for Marriage and Family Therapists in Miami Dade County, Michael Alicea has stepped up to the plate and has invested his time and energy in re-creating a connection for the local chapter.

We now have an opportunity to connect with our colleagues in the AAMFT Community. You never know where it might lead?

A LETTER FROM MARIA C. GONZALEZ, LMFT:

Inspired by Michael's message for this newsletter I would like to share some opportunities available to us therapist, especially those with over five years of experience. We all know that in hard times we are brave enough to do the things we would probably not do when we are in the comfort of our lives, particularly our professionally. I know the profession is going thru many changes and transformations, and it is not only being influence by the advancement of technology but the many years of thinking and doing therapy differently as MFT's has catch up to us. So re-inventing how who we are continues to be an adventure.

Since November 2009, I was hired by MHNGS as a Military Family Life Consultant. This company has a contract with the Department of Defense to provide Solution Focus short term non-medical support to the military and their families in all the Armed Forces. For more information you can to their website: www.mhngs.com. The other two companies places therapist directly at different Army Bases: Ceridian thru Military-One-source www.ceridian.com; and the other is Serco Inc; www.serco-na.com. Currently all three of them are hiring. In matter of fact the Armed Forces cannot filled the vacancies fast enough; especially if you have Addictive Disorder Experience. The difference between them is, MHNGS services are "off-command", meaning no written records are kept, and the therapist are hired as contract professionals for 30, 45, 60, 90 days assignments anywhere in the world.

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The other opportunity requiring some more serious thinking and if you are less than 42 years old is to become an officer in the Military. For information you can contact the Bureau of Labor Statistics at www.bls.com, or talk to any Armed Forces recruiters in your community, I know they will gladly assist with your questions. If you have questions in general about my experience please feel free to contact me at casy007@bellsouth.net.

I was told shortly I was licensed, by the Assistant Principal who was my trainer for the beginner's teacher program as a Trust Counselor in Miami-Dade County Public School System, "Maria the sky is the limit....." She off course was referring to the unlimited opportunities at MDCPS at the time. I did not stay more than two years but I walked away knowing in our profession the only limitation are those we placed on ourselves.

LESSONS FOR SURVIVING IN THESE HARD TIMES

As we face these hard times, I offer ten lessons from my personal experience of financial loss to encourage you and your patients. These principles, and taking life one day at a time, have been of great value to me.

1. Refuse to Take On the Spirit of Fear

The spirit of fear is present on a massive level. It's essential not to allow the spirit of fear to overpower you. Try to rise above it.

2. Deal with Reality

It's important to face reality; don't bury your head in the sand. Look at the hard facts of your financial situation, as painful and traumatic as they may be. The things you based your security on may be gone now.

3. But Recognize that Facts Aren't the Complete Reality

Don't let facts be the complete reality that determines whether you're happy or sad, fulfilled or miserable. Take a look at the non-tangibles, like health and family. Leave the tangibles and the number crunching up to bookkeepers. Realize there's so much beyond that.

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4. Don't Let Your Emotions Dictate Your Perspective

Don't let your emotions dictate your perspective; don't let your history determine your future. Don't get fixated on what's been taken away or lost. Be aware of it, deal with it, and shift your perspective as quickly as you can.

5. Appreciate What You Have

If you have your health and a loving family, the things that really matter, embrace them. Appreciate what you have, what you've been given, and how good things have been. Recognize the ways your life has been rich and full.

6. Examine Your Spiritual Life

This is a good time to consider where you are with your spirituality. Is this an area you've neglected, or that you've used as an escape? Look to the people you consider spiritual to guide you. Work towards finding the balance between trusts in God's provision and taking the responsibility to do your part.

7. Reach Out to Others

You are not alone. Many people are experiencing what you are, and far worse. If you haven't been charitable, this is a good time to start because so many are in need. If you don't have money to give, give of your time and yourself.

8. Look for Opportunities

Now is a good opportunity to consider things you may have been distracted from. Is it time to develop a different career, to improve your relationships, or to grow personally in new ways? What about your life needs to change?

9. Find Help

Examine your emotional life. If wounds and scars from your past are distorting your life now with fear, this is a good time to get professional help. There's help out there for you.

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10. Don't Give Up

Let me encourage you - hang in there. Don't let your finances determine your future. Remember that there's far more to life than that. Through all that we are experiencing, I believe something will come out of this for good.

INTERN BULLETIN BOARD

Do you have something you would like to post/share with others? Perhaps you just passed your exams or are looking for a study partner? Are you looking for an unpaid internship? Do you know of an agency looking for an unpaid intern? If you have something to post, let me know at miamidadechapter@hotmail.com

INCORPORATION OF THE MIAMI DADE BOARD

Keeping an eye on the care of our chapter, I have been researching the incorporation of the Miami Dade Chapter as a non-profit organization. Establishment of our non-profit status will protect future Boards and the Miami Dade Chapter in general. If you have any suggestions, or would like to help facilitate this process, please let us know.

MONTHLY PRESENTATION



*In August we had a wonderful presentation given by **Walt Liebman, LMFT, Ed.S.** Entitled: "The Role of the Marriage and Family Therapist in Parent Coordinating." Walt Liebman, LMFT, Ed.S. Is a licensed marriage and family therapist in South Miami and Hialeah, and has been in private practice for the past twenty-two years. Additionally, for the past twenty-five years he has been on the adjunct faculty of Miami Dade Community College where he is currently teaching the following courses: Parent's Divorce Workshop (CODP)- (State mandated course for parents), Sand Castles, (State mandated course for children), Conflict Resolution, Communication Skills, Empowering Your*

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Relationship, The Joys of Being Single, Seven Easy Ways to Enhance Your Marriage, Learning to Identify and Mitigate Stress, Developing and Implementing Constructive Parenting Techniques, Starting Over, Preparing for Your Marriage, Effectively Managing Your Divorce; and, Modeling Good Relationship Skills to Children. For those who are interested, his entire presentation is available on an audio arrangement that is digital and accessible in MP3 format. We hope to have his presentation available on our web site soon.



In September we were also privileged to have a presentation given by Premysl Ulman, LMFT on the topic of “Narrative Therapy.” This presentation (and all future presentations) was video taped and then converted to digital format that would be available for review in both Widows Media as well as MP3 format. His presentation in video format will eventually be posted on our web site for review as well. Premysl will present a Part 2 of “Narrative Therapy” at our October Chapter meeting, scheduled for Saturday, October 23, 2010, from 11:00 am to 12:00 pm, and it will also be video taped and made available on our web site for review to our members.

The present format for our meeting will usually commence with a one hour executive board meeting, followed by a one hour presentation by one of our members. It is our plan to eventually certify these presentations with the State of Florida and the Florida Division of Marriage and Family Therapist, as well as offer CEU credits to our members for a nominal fee as a means towards generating revenue for our Chapter.

If you have any suggestions for a topic or speaker, please let us know.

INTERN SUPPORT GROUP

Our goal in creating an Intern Support Group is to facilitate the Registered Intern in their journey toward eventual licensure. Do you have questions about interning, counting hours, or the MFT licensing exams? Would you like to connect with other Interns and licensed Marriage and Family Therapist? Or are you just interested in supporting this worthwhile endeavor? Please call or send an email to miamidadechapter@hotmail.com. We’re here to help you find answers to your questions. We also plan to create an online group

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through our Blog and Twitter accounts. Let me know if you'd like to get in on the discussion.

The Intern Support Group is open to all pre-licensed trainees and interns. The content is open to whatever those who attend would like it to be. It would be an informal conversation where we can provide mutual support, information, resources, networking, referrals, job hunting resources, and licensing exam tips to each other as needed. The group would be a safe place to reflect and share with each other about our challenges in the field of Marriage and Family Therapy. The group would be free of charge and attendance is on a drop-in basis with no commitment or obligations to attend other meetings.

Please let me know how the Miami Dade Chapter can be of help. What would you like to see happen this year for our group of Interns? Is there interest in a support group forming? A consultation group? A study group? Please call or email and let me know what suggestions you may have. It is my hope that we can support each other. And to our licensed colleagues, thank you again for your continual support. Your ideas, comments and suggestions are very much welcomed, and needed!

BOOK REVIEW

As part of our intended series of generating a column that would be devoted to the idea of having a reader-generated feature in which we share ideas that we use in therapy that are quick, humorous, or unusual and that really seem to click with the clients we serve, I was motivated (after Premysl Ulman's presentation on Narrative Therapy) and read the book entitled: "Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends" by Michael White and David Epston, (New York: Norton, 1990).

Having seen Premysl Ulman's presentation gave me the motivation to review this book that had been on my bookshelf for many years. It was given to me, and I just never got around to reading it until now. I was already favorably predisposed to reviewing this book and was not in the least disappointed. It was such a relief to anticipate something good and have it come true. I found this book to be quite the landmark theory that it was when it first came out in 1990 (in both theory and practice).

The authors present a rather new analogy or shall I say metaphor for the bases of therapy, that of the narrative text analogy. By this analogy, the authors put forth the notion that life experiences are uniquely tied to a

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storyboard of many meanings. In essence, people experience problems when they, or others, have storied their experiences in a way that does not sufficiently represent their lived experiences.

Given this possibility, the goal of therapy then is to co-author a new meaning or story as you will, that facilitates experiences that is helpful, satisfying, and more open-ended. Michael White is uniquely qualified to state that one of the problematic ways that experience gets storied is that people become identified with their problem, as if they and the problem are one. Assuming that this way of storying one's situation leaves the client feeling powerless, White and Epston introduce the idea of externalizing the problem, separating the problem from the person, whereby all concerned can join collectively together against the problem and discover times when they may have had more influence over their problem. The remainder of the book demonstrates how they further this re-authoring in the special narrative forms of letters, documents and certificates.

I found the strength of this book in the presentation of this new narrative analogy of sorts. This positive orientation is a much welcomed relief from all the pathologizing of a client's past. The concept of externalizing the problem is very practical with its step-by-step procedures.

If there was a weakness in the book, it is that it read together like a series of articles rather than a cohesive book. A stronger development, especially on the therapy of Foucault and more examples with respect to procedures, it probably would have made the book even clearer and much more practical to the practicing therapist as such. Overall, three thumbs up.



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