

Emotional Healing

by Michael Taylor

In 1989 I was experiencing a series of traumatic experiences that were beginning to take their toll. My divorce and separation from my kids were extremely painful and had begun to negatively impact my life. I had slipped into a deep state of depression and was barely able to function on a daily basis. As my depression deepened I went into isolation in which I literally shut myself off from the outside world. Although I was able to go to work and function in that capacity, I was completely disconnected from any social settings. I was not dating. I did not socialize with my friends. I had difficulty sleeping. I would rarely eat and I had begun to lose weight which was rare for me being a former personal trainer that took excellent care of my physical body. After several months I began to have fleeting thoughts of suicide and it appeared that my situation was hopeless.

In an effort to alleviate some of the pain, I begin to read books dealing with depression. As I read them I could see myself in some of the stories. I definitely had all of the symptoms of depression and I knew that I had to deal with it head on if I ever wanted to get my life back on track. After reading several books I realized that I was still deeply depressed and had not really began to deal with the issues that were causing my depression. Instinctively I knew that I needed help and I decided that I would go to therapy.

After making the decision to get help, another series of challenges surfaced. First of all, how was I going to find a therapist? How would I know which one to choose? What if the therapist couldn't help me? Would I be able to change? Could therapy "fix" me? What about the money? I was completely broke and definitely could not pay someone to listen to my problems. What was I going to do? These are just a few of the questions that were going through my mind. My greatest fear was wondering what would happen if my employees found out. As a manager, I was considered the leader and I definitely did not want to appear weak in front of my co-workers. I believed that I needed to keep this a secret so that I would not lose the respect of my employees. In addition, I did not want my superiors to know because I thought I might lose my job if they found out.

After a few months of agonizing over these questions I knew that I had to take the chance and try therapy. I didn't have any other choice. It was seek help or die. There was no grey area. I decided that I definitely wanted to live and I somehow gained the courage to go to the therapist office.

My first attempt at therapy did not go well. I walked into a therapist office and pretended that I was seeking information for a friend. I'm sure the people there knew this but they allowed me to walk out with some of their brochures and a phone number to their suicide hotline. To be honest I was absolutely terrified. Although I was scared, deep down I knew that I would have to gain the courage to try again. I waited a few days and tried a different therapist office. This time I had a completely different result. As I walked into the office I believe the receptionist picked up on my fear. I had begin asking her questions about depression and whether or not they had any books that I could read. All

of a sudden a therapist walked out and began asking me questions. "May I help you?" she asked. "Not really, I'm just looking for a little information about depression" " Are you depressed?" "I'm not really sure" I answered. "Why don't you come inside and lets talk a little. Is that alright?" "I guess so."

As I followed her into her office it felt as if my heart was going to jump out of my chest. I was so nervous and afraid that I was literally dripping with sweat. She obviously picked up on this and began to put my mind at ease.

"What is your name?"

"Michael"

"Well Michael I can sense that you are a little nervous so let me start by asking what I can do to help you. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Well maybe. I have been doing some research about depression and I think I'm depressed but I'm really not sure."

"Do you feel depressed"

"Based on what I've read so far I think I am. But to be completely honest I'm not sure I know exactly what depression is supposed to feel like. Does that make any sense to you?"

"It makes a lot of sense to me. Unfortunately most men do not recognize how they feel. Men have been conditioned to disconnect from their emotions and that makes it extremely difficult for men to express how they really feel. Most men will tell you what they think but they usually do not know how they feel. You apparently fit into this category."

"I'm not sure if I really understand what you are saying but a part of me thinks that you are right."

"You just validated the point I made. You are currently speaking from an intellectual perspective instead of an emotional one. It sounds as if you are disconnected from your emotions."

"Lets assume that you are right. If I am disconnected from my emotions how do I get reconnected? Do you have any books on how to do this?"

"Unfortunately you can not reconnect to your emotions by reading books. In order for you to reconnect you have to relearn how to feel. This can be accomplished through therapy with me or any trained therapist"

"I really don't understand what you mean. But if I decide to relearn how to feel how long will it take?"

"I really can't answer that question. It's really up to you and how committed you are to doing the work."

"What do you mean doing the work? What kind of work is involved?"

"In the therapeutic community we use the word work because it takes a considerable amount of effort to heal yourself so that you can reconnect with your emotions. Doing the work means that you become willing to opening yourself up on an emotional level. This can be quite difficult at times."

"Well I believe I'm ready. I'm really tired of being alone and I definitely want to experience some fun in my life again. I think I can do this so how much will it cost?"

"I operate on a sliding scale based on your ability to pay. The most important thing is for you to make the commitment to yourself to heal and we can address the money issue at a

later date. Are you ready to begin? Let's set up a date and time for you to begin your healing."

"I just wanted to thank you for being so nice and understanding. The truth is I was about to run out of your office before you showed up. Now I am really glad that I came because I really believe that you can help me."

"That is a great attitude to have. I'm glad that you trust me enough to work with you. Just remember that I can guide you but you must be willing to do the work. As long as you believe that you can heal I can assure you that you will. Just stay committed and trust the process and you will be just fine. The truth is you have already done the hard part by showing up today. It takes an incredible amount of courage to be here and I'm proud of you for taking the first step."

As I left the therapists' office that day I knew that I had just taken the biggest step of my life. I did not know what to expect but I knew that I was willing to do whatever it took to heal my emotions and relearn how to feel. I became committed to my own healing and I can now say that I am emotionally healed and connected to my authentic self. As the therapist mentioned, it was not easy but it was definitely possible. It has been one of the most challenging yet most fulfilling journeys of my life. I can not put into words the joy I feel on a regular basis as a result of doing my emotional work. My relationships now work, my creativity and sense of reverence is enhanced, my love of nature has been rekindled and my professional life is rewarding and fulfilling. I took the road less traveled and it has made all the difference in the world for me.

I wanted to share this story because there is such a negative stigma about men and therapy that I believe it's time for a new conversation. In this new conversation men will recognize the importance of healing their emotions and they will put forth the effort to do their healing work. When we learn to support each other in our growth we can remove the fear and stigma of being emotionally vulnerable which will ultimately result in us being happier human beings. I personally believe that this is the most important work men can participate in and we must begin supporting each other through this process. If we will gain the courage to do this work we will see a decline in domestic violence, child abuse, alcoholism and random acts of violence.

The time has come for a new conversation about our emotional healing. Are you willing to join the conversation?