



LifeWork Counseling

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Don Olund, LCPC

Don Olund is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor and the owner of LifeWork Counseling. A Relational Communication Specialist, he helps couples and families build respectful, happy relationships by transforming unhealthy patterns into positive connections.

In addition to his clinical practice, Don is gaining attention as a writer and public speaker. He is currently writing a book on bringing respect back in relationships, which will be available soon. He is a frequent speaker in churches, retreats and workshops while serving as a lecturer on the faculty of the Graduate School at Governors State University.



I LEFT MY HEART IN NICARAGUA

Last Thursday I boarded a plane with nine other business owners and headed to Managua, Nicaragua on an exploratory trip sponsored by OrphaNetwork, to help the needy children and families living in poverty in the surrounding burros. These individuals were displaced from their homes in 1998 when Hurricane Mitch pummeled the Atlantic coast causing catastrophic flooding killing nearly 11,000 people.

Sadly, these families continue to live in impoverished conditions with homes pieced together with tin sheets, tree limbs, and cardboard. Without running water, sewage system or basic food supply, children are exposed to hunger, malnutrition, and disease. It is hard to imagine kids growing up under these conditions but it sums up daily existence for many in developing countries.

I went on this trip with an open mind to see what if anything I could do to provide support. Financial support is a given, however I wanted to know if my transferable skills are needed as well. I asked God to show me where he wanted me to focus. Over the course of the four days we spent in Nicaragua, three impressions struck me: the level of poverty, the intensity of passion, and the impact toward progress being made by coordinated efforts of foreign and local leaders. Let me quickly address all three and then I will end with what I sense is my role going forward.

The level of poverty was remarkable. From the moment we exited the airport to enter our non-air-conditioned bus we were bombarded by people trying to sell us things to earn money. Streets were lined with merchants selling fruit, water, trinkets, and other items. Clearly, they are in survivor mode and do whatever they can to not go to bed hungry and live another day.

In contrast to the level of poverty was the intensity of passion I witnessed in Nicaraguan people who have a vision and are making a difference in their area. This is happening primarily through the local churches who are creating jobs, feeding the poor, and caring for the needy.

The impact of progress is evident in the expansion of programs and the effect it is having on the people. Two of my friends are making a tremendous impact in the area. Tony Orsini started a medical clinic a year ago. John Pitzafferro launched a feeding program. On Friday we gave medical attention and fed over a 120 kids in two hours. The next two days we worked at Casa Berne an orphanage that houses over 60 kids. They are receiving excellent care and a quality education, including learning English, that will prepare them for independent living when they graduate high school.

On Saturday, in the Transitions Program, we met with about 100 young adults who graduated high school and are transitioning into adult independence. Some are seeking work, many others are going to college. They face enormous challenges because they do not have families to return to for help and guidance. I talked with a group of young adults and asked many questions to learn about their culture and the unique challenges they face. My hope is to find ways I can bring my transferable skills to use in this area.

Three things happened to me in my four days in Nicaragua. I fell in love with the people. I found my area of passion. I left my heart there. The picture of the fourteen year-old boy Don is imbedded in my memory. We connected right away. I keep his picture to pray for him and as an incentive to work hard in the Transitions Program, so that when he is ready to graduate from the orphanage, he will have great opportunities before him because I did my part to provide support and increase resources.



Bethany Genenbacher, MSW, LCSW, CADC

Bethany received a Bachelor's degree in social work at Quincy University in Quincy, IL in 1995 and my Master's degree from Aurora University in 2004.

She has conducted training for the Fox Valley Crisis Line since 2003 and has also given presentations with various organizations regarding substance use and abuse. In addition, she conducts training on Dialectal Behavioral Therapy (DBT).

Recently she was elected as State President of the Illinois Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.



Being Open About Death

I am writing this the afternoon after we had to put our beloved 8 year dog to sleep this morning. Maxie, the wonder dog, was the kind of dog every kid wanted. She was half lab and half German Sheppard. She was playful with my daughters--they would chase her and then out of the blue, much to their surprise and shirks of laughter, she would start chasing them. She would lay down by them while they were watching TV, and they would lay on her belly. She would jump up on the couch (not an approved activity) every afternoon ten minutes before the bus came, dropping my daughter, her *real* owner off. She was also protective of those girls.

When we found out 6 weeks ago that she had cancer we made a family decision to not move forward with treatment for the cancer, for a variety of reasons. In making this decision, we knew that we were going to lose her. She didn't "act" sick until 48 hours ago. As a matter of fact, she was out running with the girls in the yard the day that she started her decline. The vet told me the next day that dogs want to be with us so much that they will do their best to keep up, even at their own peril.

I have been open with the girls about her health, but try to balance it out so that her health issues were not the focal point in discussions about her. And now that she is gone, I want to make sure I am handling this right. I feel that death is a part of life. We can't, as much as we want to, shield them from death. There are ways to help children cope with grief that makes it more normal and less scary.

It is important to talk about death. By acknowledging death occurs it makes it less scary. A dead animal or even the leaves dying in the fall is a way to begin the conversation. Don't feel you have to have all the answers and be honest that you don't have all the answers.

It's important to understand what age your children are developmentally. Until ages 5-6 most children do not understand the finality of death.

Children may have many reactions to the death. Among them: denial "this isn't happening", no reaction at all, being angry or acting out, having anxiety like attacks, being fearful, confused about the events or death, problems sleeping, changes in appetite, regressing to old behaviors (potty training, baby talk, stomachaches/headaches), thinking they are hearing the loved one's voice or seeing their image and having strong feelings about this.

Allow your children to talk about the death and their feelings in a way that is comfortable to them. They frequently won't use the words we use or express it "properly," but they are putting it in a framework they understand.

Grieving is a process for all of us. It is not going through one stage and then moving onto the next without looking back. The feelings of grief are more fluid and can mix together.

Don't lie about the event. Telling the truth, in an age appropriate way, fosters trust now and in the future.

Listen, listen, listen.

And take care of your own grief.

This is by no means an all inclusive list. There are many books for parents on how to talk to their children about death and dying and many great books for children about death and dying.



Talking to a trained professional helps also. Being able to run ideas by them is a way to not only clear your own head but also to help you help your children. Death, dying and grief are difficult topics and often not thought of until one is in the throes of grief. Don't hesitate to reach out when you need to.

Resources:

National Association of School Psychologists

Hospice

Monique Prohaska, MA, ATR

Monique began the Art Therapy Program at the Southwest Cook County Cooperative for Special Education (1999 – 2011) focusing on individual therapy and small groups for children and adolescents with emotional and behavioral disorders and on the autism spectrum. Currently she has developed another Art Therapy Program at Giant Steps, a school for children on the autism spectrum.

Her practice of art therapy is Person-Centered, which encourages the child to take the lead in therapy with their artwork. This allows children to be more comfortable about opening up.



The Challenge of Letting Go

Lately, I've been keeping a "Commitment Bag" of habits I vow to work on as well as personal and professional goals that I am committed to achieving. Kind of like a "re-packing bag" from one of my previous articles, but more focused on the here-and-now. With this bag, I write down on a piece of paper something that I've noticed about myself that I want to change or have happen and silently meditate on that before dropping it into the bag.

After the thought or the goal has been placed in the bag, I let it go and continue with my day. I try not to ruminate on it or cloud up my brain with so many thoughts or “what-if’s.” I try to just be. Like welcoming panic into my home, I try to welcome the unknown and detach from what I want to happen. Putting all those thoughts and desires into the bag helps me to organize my brain and helps me know they are kept in a place that is safe; a place that is contained. And I can leave it there without excess worry.

The funny thing is that when you let go, that’s when you are faced on a daily basis with challenges that reflect the thoughts and desires that you are wanting to change! We tend to think, “Oh, I want to stop this bad habit of _____” and we put it out there. We think that because we spoke those words that that habit will go away with minimum effort. But, really, for those habits to change or goals to manifest we are going to be put to the test to see how much we really want to change and grow!

One of my slips of paper recently read: “I want honest, supportive relationships in my life. No Drama!”

Well, guess what I’ve been experiencing lately?! A whole lot of drama! When I recognized this drama coming at me in different arenas of my life, I went straight to my “Commitment Bag.” I found my piece of paper and laughed when I saw it. Right then and there, I knew that I was being tested to see if that’s what I really wanted; if I really wanted to shift my life or stay comfortable in my old habits. After I was aware of this commitment of choice, those situations kept popping back up and, rather than being unconscious, I decided to use these opportunities to become very conscious of how I was going to learn from them.



In the last few weeks, I have found myself in three different situations where I normally would have done my usual thing: avoid, stay angry, and defend myself. Those feelings came up a number of times during these tests and I had to do a lot of deep breathing to fight those habitual urges. I was really fighting quite a lot in my head to do something that was uncomfortable, but only in the sense that it was new for me! I had to step out of my comfort zone and it was not an easy battle!

At the end of those three different, challenging situations I found I was able to do the following: 1) Rather than avoiding, I respectfully confronted; 2) Rather than staying angry, I let go of my anger and sent loving kindness to the person who was trying to hurt my family; and 3) Rather than defending myself, I remained silent. By choosing to make a commitment to let go of staying in the same worn-out patterns, I found confidence in myself. I found myself becoming stronger to handle the next challenge knowing that I did have the skills inside of me to do this. And all I needed to do was remind myself that I had a choice: did I want to stay stuck or did I want to choose wisely?



Suggested Reading and Music:

Taking the Leap: Freeing Ourselves from Old Habits and Fears By: Pema Chodron (2009)

Under Pressure By: Queen featuring David Bowie, Hot Space, 1982

You Are a Tourist By: Death Cab for Cutie, Codes and Keys, 2011

Laura Sauerberg, MA, LPC

As a licensed professional counselor, Laura helps individuals, couples, and families of all ages navigate through the emotional challenges, relational issues, and daily complexities of 21st century life.

Laura has been at LifeWork Counseling in Oak Brook, IL for the past two years. She earned her master's degree in Community Counseling in June 2011 and is beginning her career as a full-time practitioner.

Her particular focus is on the emotional and relational challenges of her peers- the Millennial generation. With an experiential understanding of their cultural personality, value system, and methods of interaction, she assists clients with communication issues, life choices, and emotional self-management.



Resistance to Counseling

Many people are apprehensive about starting counseling, and there are many different reasons. One that I have heard many times is a lack of confidence that the therapist can tell him or her something he or she does not already know.

We all think we know ourselves better than anyone else, but I have found that bringing in a third party can have many positive consequences.

You know how if you are doing a puzzle, you start to get confused and overwhelmed, but if you take a break and come back with fresh eyes, you can make progress? I consider a therapist the fresh eyes in an emotional or relational problem that they have become stagnant on.

Bringing in someone who is trained to pick out what is important and what to focus on is giving you an opportunity to see things in a new way. My clients are often hard on themselves for not being able to convince themselves or think their way out of a problem, but I tell them, “You didn’t get here on your own, so you’re not going to be able to fix it on your own”.



Another reason people lack a desire to begin counseling is because a stigma still exists in some of our society that is attached to seeking help in this way. If someone needs assistance in working through a personal problem, it does not make a person “crazy”. Everyone has issues in the way they view themselves, as well as within their relationships with other people. Seeking assistance in improving your quality of life certainly does not make one crazy!

These are just two of the many issues that people face as they make the important decision to face the difficult realities of their life. It is my hope that this discussion is an example of how no one is alone in his or her beliefs or thoughts. By talking about concerns about counseling, we are already beginning the healing process and becoming comfortable with communicating our thoughts and feelings.

Counselors exist to help and normalize feelings that often feel very lonely and chaotic. It is my hope that those who are apprehensive about counseling will read this and know that we as counselors appreciate and understand the obstacles, and that we are here to encourage and help.

Nick Andrus, M.Div

Nick Andrus holds a Masters Degree in Divinity and has worked in ministry for over eight years both as a pastoral counselor as well as creating educational materials and curriculum for discipleship in the church.

He currently is helping LifeWork with creating materials and tools for clients, including this monthly newsletter, and other valuable resources that will soon be offered through the counseling practice.

His primary love is helping people gain the insight and tools they need to live the best life possible, negotiating the complexities of life and learning to take pleasure in life as it is while also creating a better life for themselves and their families.



What is Holding You Back?

I read an amazing book by Steven Pressfield called, “The War of Art: Breaking through the Blocks and Win Your Inner Creative Battles.” I highly recommend that book for anyone who has ever had “blocks” in their lives--times where they want to do something but can’t seem to find the motivation. Whether it is writing a book, making a business proposal, starting a workout routine, etc...we all have “blocks” that keep us from doing things that produce in our lives.

This book is all about identifying what Pressfield calls “The Resistance.” That is, the things that keep us from doing what we know we need to do, the things that deep down we want to do...but for some reason we don’t.

Deep down I think we all are afraid of reaching our full potential.

I think that’s what really causes us to procrastinate.

It's not about being lazy, or unmotivated. It's not even about our life situation. Pressfield even mentions that Tolstoy was able to write immense works of literature (such as *War and Peace*) with 13 children in the house. It's not about how busy or chaotic our life situation is. It's about beating Resistance.

The Resistance is about us being afraid to truly let our light shine. It's about being afraid of being who we truly are. It's about being afraid to stand up and step out--because we are so used to playing along with the crowd. It sometimes is easier and safer to go with the crowd. It's much harder to step out and try to be unique and exceptional--and it seems like it's the exceptional ones that draw the most criticism.

Despite all that, however, deep down we know that we can't ever truly be happy unless we live up to our potential. Many people have to medicate themselves, or seek all kinds of other stimulation through drugs, affairs, tv, etc--all because it is so hard to simply step out and accomplish what we were made to do.

It might not be grandiose.

We all can't be presidents and astronauts.

Maybe its writing a book. Maybe it's learning how to be the best kindergarden teacher. Maybe its making more cold calls than anyone else in the office. Maybe its submitting your creative plan to your superiors. Maybe its ordering the salad instead of the steak.

Whatever it is, don't play it safe.

Don't give into the Resistance.

It does the world no good to play small and safe. In fact, it hurts the world when you deprive it of your best effort.

The greatest thing that can ever be on any tombstone is not "Beloved wife and mother," it's not "Greatest businessman in the century."

The greatest epitaph is simple: "Used Up."

Don't leave anything behind.

Beat the Resistance.

Get out, and be the amazing person within and do the great things that have always been in your heart but for whatever reason, you have left undone.