

Guiding Clients in Self-Awareness for Authentic Identity Management

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How do you prevent the client from listing roles they play versus identifying the core of who they are?

A:

Both actions are important. The easier assessment involves their listing of the roles they perform and provides an inventory of the multiple hats that they move in and out of throughout their interpersonal interactions. Then, providing the language suggested in slides 16 & 33: "How do I present myself..." in each role is crucial to getting at the 'core of who they are' in their image presented to others. As their guide, consider having them check each question for how do I present myself in each role, with identifying their own self image, feedback from others, and their future goals and consideration of feelings relevant to each. I suggest building an exercise that lets them assess congruity or matching across:

- (a) How do I see my self as a mother, co-worker,....? (reflection from view of self)
 - How do I feel about this perception?
- (b) How do I present my self as a mother, co-worker,...? (reflection from self view and feedback from others)
 - How do I feel about this presentation or behaviors shown?
- (c) How do I want to perform as a mother, co-worker...? (goals)
 - Why? [How would such performance/actions/behavior make me feel?
- (d) How do I want to be seen as a mother, co-worker,...? (goals and reflection of future image & influence)
 - Why? [How would such an image or images make me feel?]

Hope this helps address how using language to add specifics to their interpretation and evaluation of the views of self can provide specifics to their inventory of role performance and goals for improvement & change.

How does the experience of telling one's story in 12-step settings relate to the brand building process?

A: Telling one's story aligns with the brand building process through both being heavily dependent on taking an inventory (searching & fearless) of past behaviors and feelings, image presented, and impact upon others. I view the telling of ones story as first highlighting the seriousness of past using behaviors, giving emphasis to Step 1, when that happened, and the critical tipping point that got one there. Finally, ones story at some level can or may include what relapse prevention and recovery means to the person.

The brand building process can happen throughout the construction of wellness and recovery. I would say that if at all a specific part of the telling of ones story, it would be integrated into ones mindfulness of what relapse prevention means to the person and some of the steps they are taking to know self, learning to love themselves so that recovery can be sustained and their future potential found & enacted.

What do you suggest for reframing ones negative self assessment?

A: This is an important question because so many of ones negative views of self are imprinted from cultural and family scripts. Thus, I think working on their assessment of the scripts that have guided and presently guide the views of self has real potential. Possibly ask them to develop the scripts that they have been taught about what it is to be a man or a woman, to survive, to be a mother or father, or.... Often, the imprinting of who I am through past scripts, is taught through behaviors shown by parents, extended family, peers, and community and perhaps not through words. Those teachings are even harder to get at, examine, interpret, evaluate, and reframe because as children we mimic roles and behaviors without really knowing the reasoning (language and words) behind such behaviors. So, coming to a point that I can acknowledge what are the scripts that I want to be guided by, rather than those imprinted that add a lack of health in my growth, well-being, and recovery? The branding statements are like scripts for reframing and the language used in describing self can be powerful in identifying positivity in who I am, how I want to be seen, and how I want to influence.

How can we help clients to understand how they interpret and evaluate how they behave and feel if they have never thought about this process before? - James

A: Great question! In addition to my answer on the last question that involved assisting clients on identifying their past scripts that have guided them in their negative self assessment, I suggest breaking down the interpretation and evaluation process through the lenses they may have been using to interpret and evaluate their actions and feelings. If they have been walking around saying they are wrong because they feel anger or fear but haven't considered where their interpretation and evaluation of 'wrong' comes from there is little chance to reframe their perceptions. If they can mentally and emotionally break down the process of creating an interpretation, then there is more probability they will be able understand that there are multiple ways to interpret and evaluate.

Ask clients to determine 5 individuals that they think about when they think about who they are. In other words, have them consider how each their mom, dad, uncle, co-worker, and sister sees them. What is positive & what is negative about those views? Now, how do each of those views affect their own perception and interpretation of how they view themselves. This work can help them determine why they interpret and evaluate themselves (behavior and feelings) fairly accurately, harshly or with unfair judgments. Ask them to develop criteria for evaluating their behavior and feelings. Throughout this process, ask them if they would like to have some, all, or none of their mother's view integrated into the interpretation and evaluation of good or bad, right or wrong, etc. when interpreting their behaviors and feelings. And, why? Again, there are all kinds of ways, within your own style :), to guide them in their understanding that the lenses of interpretation and evaluation are influenced by our perception of others' views and a whole lot of 'shoulds.'

Regarding James' question, do you think a simple Johari's window would be a great intro prior to sharing your information today?

A: I think that many would benefit from the simple but meaningful Johari Window model for understanding that self has what is known and not known to self and others. One of the more important lessons that can be learned from this model is that through self-disclosure (lessening hidden and expanding open) we learn more about self, while others learn more about us they can share their views of what we do not know or realize (lessening blind and expanding open) and, we again learn more about self. This gaining of information about self through sharing with a counselor, sponsor, recovery meeting, trusted other and their feedback specifically supports the stages of building self-awareness!

Sounds like we should be doing this first for ourselves before we try to guide our clients in it?

A: Yes, I really do think this important self work for all of us. One of the more important advantages of this is that you will have more language and feelings to share with your clients, as you can let them in on your experiences of your process, set-backs, struggles, and successes!

I have always guided my clients towards being themselves and hanging up the masks we wear in different roles in life. Should I back away from that concept?

A: I completely agree with your perspective, it just matters what their definition and perspective is on 'being themselves.' The focus of the self assessment work, is to guide them in learning more about who self is and which behaviors of 'being themselves' matches the image they present to others and the desired views of self. We can walk around behaving in certain ways and say, that's how I am and take it or leave it. While it is great to have acceptance of who we are, we can also rationalize not closely looking at self or not changing how we perform through the statement of "that's just who I am." Therefore, the interpretation and evaluation process of behavior and feelings will help them clarify their definition of 'being themselves' as authentic and also healthy for their recovery.

Additionally, I am hoping the information I covered on view of self through how others perceive me, and the image I present to others will help you consider the important conversations to be had about the difference between wearing unhealthy or unauthentic masks and performing various roles that call for various behaviors. The bottom line is that the more consistent a person can be across all roles, the more authentic they are. They may need to perform differing behaviors but for instance being kind is a characteristic of self that they value, then hopefully kindness is intertwined within their various role performances. However, as they build upon their recovery program, they see that assertiveness is important in many of their role performances to keep their integrity. Thus, working on how can I sustain my kind heart with enacting my integrity to not be walked on and to instead, practice assertiveness (respect my rights and the rights of others) becomes important in being themselves while enacting their truth within the various roles they perform. So, assisting them in understanding when roles or characteristics and behaviors seem to be in conflict and, with practice, can either be integrated into being their true authentic selves or are in need of being assessed for what is desired in presentation of who they authentically are. Lastly, I think a great conversation with a client would involve the question: "when is my performance with others a mask and when is it who I am?" The realization that socio-cultural expectations do influence our assessments of ourselves and our perceptions of how we should behave is critically important.

If one can build their cognitive functioning to the point of behaving authentically upon integrating their consideration of:

(1) who am I (how should I behave based on my feelings, desires, and interpretations)?, (2) what are the expectations of my socio-cultural contexts?, and (3) what do the individuals involved expect or want;

then, ones performance is mindful, has potential for wellness, and doesn't need a mask.

Many of my clients tend to have a negative self-image. Assuming that they seek and receive positive image feedback, how do we promote acceptance and trust in that information?

A: Great question! Provide them with questions or develop questions through conversation with them, agreed upon between the two of you, for them to determine the credibility of the information and its source. Examples of questions to pose upon receiving positive (or negative feedback) might be:

- (1.) What was said?
- (2.) Who said it and what is their relationship with me?
- (3.) What do they have to gain from telling me this? (i.e.: If they have nothing to gain, like want a favor or..., then the statement has more credibility.)
- (4.) Do you trust, respect, or value this person? (if 'yes' is answered to any of these, then the client can be encouraged to place more value on the feedback.)
- (5.) Then, is there an example of them behaving in this certain way that makes the person's feedback believable

from their self view? If this is tough for them to get at, have them put themselves in the shoes of the person who provided the positive feedback and have them consider why it makes sense that they would say this about them.

Hope this addresses the often difficult task of learning to like or at least appreciate self, their characteristics, behaviors, and so on.

(6.) Lastly, without continuous giving of affirmation to the point of the client depending on it, your own example of a positive or positives you see about the client, why and what has given evidence to your perception is a great way of modeling of the use of language to emphasize interpretation, feedback, and methods for evaluation.