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DON'T CALL ME CRAZY

What I Wish I'd Known About Recovery

By Marty Raaymakers

When people ask me to write about recovery now, my brain always seems to gravitate to the things I know now that I wish I had learned a lot sooner. After all I was raised in America, the land of the free and the home of the brave and in America all things can be fixed.

When talking about recovery and mental illness, for many of us a permanent fix is not possible. Things do get better, even awesome sometimes. It usually takes a time and hard work to achieve. It took me quite a while to find my way.

This is what I wish I had known:

Meds don't fix everything. I really didn't know that. Someone said, "You need to get some help, let me find the name of someone who will be good." That person said, "Take this medicine." I assumed it would fix everything. Meds helped, but I had to put a lot of work into my recovery as well.

Finding the right med is awesome, but always have plan B. Lot's of people put crisis plans into place but don't ever think about a plan B, a plan that may prevent you from reaching crisis. What do you do when stress hits and the med isn't enough? Or what are you going to do if the med stops working? When there is no plan B, a person ends up going down hill until the crisis plan is needed. Always have a Plan B.

Learning good coping skills is almost more important than the medication. Learning good coping skills is something that I didn't want to do. I was ashamed of who I was so learning to want to take care of myself was hard. I'm now into Yoga, exercise and the support of friends.

Needing support is OK. My Community Mental Health service provider kept telling me that they were going to help me be independent. My thoughts on that were that I wasn't really supposed to need to lean on anyone. It took me a long time to find out that people aren't really independent but interdependent. Or as a wonderful friend says, "friendships aren't equal, they are reciprocal." Guess I am still learning.

Doing enough of what you love to do, as long as it's not hurtful or harmful helps one's mental state. I used to reward myself for doing all the things I thought I had to do, but didn't want to do, by doing some things that I love to do. Now I realize that if I do less of the "ought to do" things and more of what I love, I feel healthier. Of course I had to find the support that allowed me to change the balance between the "ought" and "love" things.

Figuring my checkbook isn't the beginning or end of my life. I kept hearing people tell me that so and so needed to learn how to figure out his checking account so he could move out on his own. I still don't balance a checkbook well. I look at it once a week and if it gets too complicated then I can always work and hire an accountant to take care of that. I do have the responsibility to find a good accountant. Remember that friend? For the price of a lunch she'll double-check after my accountant. (Keeping up with laundry is the same way.)⁷ If one would rather earn money so they don't have to do something, that's OK. I don't want to mow a yard, grow a garden, maintain a house, drive an economical car, scrimp on my pennies, or live in a Section 8 apartment building, so I need to earn money. If I want to travel, I need to earn money. It is important to know this since I don't fit in a 9-5 job very well. I had to find what I do well and stick with it. When I get stuck in a 9-5 job that anyone can do, I become less well. So I do what I can to earn money and have learned to love that. It does require me to keep tabs on my expenses (why I also earn enough to pay an accountant.)

Recovery is a wonderful, precious thing to me. People ask me if I am afraid that I might become ill again. No, I am not afraid anymore. I have Plan B. I don't have to be in a crisis to use Plan B.

IN AN EMERGENCY or CRISIS:

Call 911, go to the nearest emergency room or follow the emergency instructions provided by your doctor, mental health professional or care team. If your community has a mental health car, you can call 911 to request it.

What To Do if Your Workplace is Anxiety-Inducing

By Laura Greenstein | Feb. 22, 2018

There are so many aspects a job that can cause anxiety: having tight deadlines, trying to harmonize a work/life balance, dealing with office gossip and politics, meeting your supervisor's expectations... the list goes on.

Thanks to all this, most people who work will experience some anxiety at some point. But what do you do if your workplace makes you feel that way on a regular basis? When you dread stepping foot into the office day after day. When something about your job makes anxiety your norm.

When you have an anxiety disorder and work constantly triggers your symptoms.

Depending on your situation, it might be helpful to evaluate whether your job is right for you. But if you aren't able or don't want to change jobs, there are ways to manage workplace anxiety.

Practice Self-Awareness

Before you can improve your situation, it's important to understand what exactly is creating your anxious feelings or worsening the symptoms of your condition. Even if the root of your anxiety is something you can't change, like having more work than you can handle, knowing the cause can help you figure out next steps. It's a lot harder to reach a destination without a map.

Share Your Feelings

It may be helpful to talk to a trusted coworker as they can relate to and sympathize with your anxiety. If you don't have a coworker you trust, you can talk to a friend, family member or mental health professional. Talking about anxiety with the right person can help you process these intense emotions and it can be validating if the person is supportive and understanding. They might also have ideas or suggestions to help you cope.

Release Your Thoughts

Anxiety feeds off itself and one anxious thought can turn into 100 pretty quickly. There's no way I will meet this deadline. What if something else comes up? What if Steve thinks the project is terrible? If you're feeling inundated with this kind of thought-spiral, it can be helpful to release your thoughts.

One of the most effective ways to do this is by writing them all down. Do a brain dump of all your anxious thoughts—not to understand them, but just to get them "out." If you're at home (or somewhere you feel comfortable) thinking about work drama, you can also sing your thoughts.

The idea of these practices is that you can't write or sing as fast as you can think, so you'll actually be slowing down while you release your unhelpful thought patterns.

Know When to Ask for Help

If you're drowning in work, having a hard day or feeling like you can't meet your supervisor's expectations, ask your colleagues for help. While it may feel like everyone handles their own work and stress independently, and you should too, this is often not beneficial to anyone. Asking for help when you need it alleviates your burden and builds trust among coworkers. If you feel guilty for taking up their time, offer your support the next time they need help.

Don't Call Me Crazy

by Robert Spencer

In the light of recent events, there has been a lot of focus on mental illness and it hasn't been positive. Studies have shown that people living with mental illness are far more likely to be the victims of violent crimes than the perpetrators, but that doesn't stop some in society from blaming us for almost every violent act reported.

And there is a word that has bothered me since I was a teen, and I hear it repeated almost daily, from people in power (who should be more thoughtful) and people on the street, sometimes many times a day.

So, I consulted an online dictionary and found the definition of the word. What follows is the definition and a few thoughts regarding its use in society.

Crazy – adj.

1. Mentally deranged, especially as manifested in a wild and aggressive way.

“Stella went crazy”

Synonyms: mad, insane, mad as a March hare, deranged, lunatic, etc.

Informal: mental, nutty, bonkers, loopy, bats, raving mad, crackers, etc.

Antonyms: sane

2. Extremely enthusiastic

“I'm crazy about Daphne.”

Synonyms: passionate about, (very) keen on, enamored of, smitten with, devoted to, etc.

Antonyms: indifferent, apathetic

What a word, and with two almost entirely different perspectives. In my 50 years on this planet, I have heard that word used more times than I can count. And the word didn't bother me until I graduated from high school. Then came a doctor's visit, and a diagnosis, and “crazy” was not a word I ever wanted to hear again. But I do hear it, from family, friends and strangers—a mixture of the first two definitions of crazy. Sometimes, it is the rather harmless definition; often, it is not.

The word has, unfortunately, become commonplace, similar in some ways to the word “like,” which invaded our lexicon in the 80's. But the word “crazy” is different. I've had to listen to “armchair psychologists” define what “crazy” behavior is and in the same breath say what a “crazy” party they went to the night before. Words are like that. But in society, some often use the dictionary's first definition to categorize and stigmatize a group of people who do not deserve such harsh treatment. Then, a word is more than a word.

Mental illness is an illness, even though some choose not to accept it. “Crazy” has been a word to portray those who suffer with mental illness as dangerous, weak, unpredictable, unproductive and incapable of rational behavior or relationships. It is a word used without any serious thought or consideration. But, in a strange way, we see the first two meanings used to hurt some and benefit others. It is a word that can be used to criticize an individual or group, keep a stigma in place or, when used in commercials, sell cars, sweets and even peanut butter (i.e. “Come to Crazy Al's used cars for the best deals”). What a word, indeed.

So, what is the solution? Many dictionaries are constantly being revised to accommodate the newest slang. If the first definition of the word “crazy” must have a place in the dictionary, make it the last definition:

3. (Of an angle) appearing absurdly out of place or in an unlikely position.

“the monument leaned at a crazy angle”

Or perhaps it is time to retire the first definition altogether and begin to strive to be a more enlightened society. It has been a verbal weapon long enough. Folks can be crazy in love, crazy about old movies and crazy about cheese. And let that monument lean at its crazy angle but leave it at that. There is always room in our world for more empathy.

Below the Neck: Working for a Healthier Body

What Do You Mean, “Below the Neck?”

In reaction to the statistic that people who live with psychiatric brain disorders have an average life expectancy of 53 years, which is 25 years shorter than the 78 years average life expectancy of the general population in the U. S., NAMI developed the “Hearts and Minds” program. This program has three parts: smoking cessation, nutrition, and exercise. Each part provides ideas that can help people to become healthier. The goal is for people, through “Hearts and Minds” to learn to make life style changes.

The emphasis is on beginning by taking small steps, making small gains. Smoke 10% fewer cigarettes a day, eat an additional serving of fresh fruit and one or two servings of vegetables daily, and cut back a little on fats and sweets every day. Start walking 15 or 20 minutes a day, 5 or 6 days a week. Research literature indicates that small improvements in diet and exercise habits make a difference in health and life expectancy. The “Hearts and Minds program is inexpensive and most of the materials can downloaded at no cost by going to the NAMI web site at nami.org.

Take a moment to consider all the people in your life: your coworkers, friends, family. At any given time, 1 in 5 of these individuals is living with a mental health condition. You may have noticed them struggling, but if you're not a trained mental health professional, you may not have known how to help. However, you can help. You can be supportive and encouraging during their mental health journey. Here are a few tips on supporting the mental health of those you love.

1) Educate Yourself

There are hundreds of mental health concerns; your job is not to become an expert in all of them. When you do notice potentially troublesome symptoms, it's helpful to determine if those signs may indicate a mental illness. Familiarizing yourself with common symptoms can help you understand and convey your worries. You may also benefit from expanding your knowledge by taking a course or joining a support group of individuals who can relate to the hardships you and your loved one may be facing.

2) Remain Calm

Recognizing that a loved one might need help can be daunting, but try to remain calm—impulsively approaching the individual might make you seem insensitive or aggressive. Try to be mindful and patient. Take time to consider your loved one's symptoms and your relationship before acting. Writing down how you feel and what you want to say may be useful to help you recognize and understand your thoughts and feelings, and help you slow down while connecting to your good intentions.

3) Be Respectful and Patient

Before talking to someone about their mental health, reflect on your intention to promote healing and keep that in mind. Ask how you can help in their recovery process and be cautious not to come off as controlling. While encouraging a person to seek help is okay, it is not appropriate to demand it of them. Let them know that if they ever wish to talk in the future, you're available.

4) Listen

Give your loved one the gift of having someone who cares about their unique experience. Don't bypass their narrative by making connections to others' experiences. You might recognize a connection to your own experience, however, sharing your story prematurely may undermine their experience. You may be prepared with hotlines, books, or a list of community providers, and although these are excellent sources of support, it's important to take time to thoroughly listen before giving advice. It's a privilege to have someone share intimate details of their mental health. Be present and listen before moving forward.

5) Provide Support

One of the best ways to help is to simply ask how. It's not helpful to try to be someone's therapist, but you can still help. People don't like being told what to do—asking how you can help empowers them to take charge of their recovery, while also letting them know you are a source of support.

6) Establish Boundaries

As you support your struggling loved one, it's important to consider both your boundaries and theirs. When trying to help, you are susceptible to neglecting yourself in the process; boundaries will help you maintain your self-care, while also empowering your loved one. Be sure you're not working harder than they are at their own healing process.

As a caring person, you may grapple between wanting to encourage and support your loved one while wanting to honor their process and independence. Unfortunately, there are no foolproof guidelines for helping your loved one on their journey towards recovery. However, you can connect to your intentions, convey compassion and maintain your own self-care while empowering your loved one regardless of where they are in their healing journey.