

Watch your Margins!

Last week, my son who's in middle school came home with a writing assignment corrected by his English teacher. In the margins were red marks with both positive comments and feedback on how to improve his paper. Ugh! How I hated getting those red marks from teachers when I was in school. But like it or not, teachers are trying to do the right thing by providing much needed feedback on the writer's own language/thought development and the way the writer expresses those thoughts.

Like writing in the margin of an English paper, we all could stand to be in the margin of our lives once in a while. Often we get swept up in our own stories forgetting about the margins. We get so wrapped up in our thoughts (T), Emotions (E) and Actions (A) (or TEAs) that we can't see straight. We've been thinking, feeling and acting in certain ways for so long that we don't realize they've become unconscious, they've become our identities.

By spending some time in the margins, we can witness our TEAs; take notes and analyze the manuscript of our lives. If you have ever worked with a coach or therapist, or even talking about problems with a friend, it's like being in the margin. It's slightly outside our selves, on the fringe of our lives looking in.

How often do you spend time in the margins of other people's lives? When you judge other people or try to understand their behaviors, you are in the margin of their lives, taking notes, asking questions, observing them, drawing conclusions. Why not use that same strategy in your own margins?

Counseling, therapy, NLP, journaling, coaching are all great catalysts to help us become witnesses to our own thought patterns and how those thought patterns connect to our emotions and actions. But first we need to: 1) *become aware* of our own patterns of thoughts, emotions and actions and their interconnectedness, and 2) realize that *we all have the ability and "responsibility" to make desired changes in our lives*. That's the big a-ha!

Here's an example of how spending time in the margin of my own life, helped me to shift to a more resourceful state.

At a recent speaking engagement, I was feeling anxious and scared about presenting the next day. I didn't feel I was prepared enough (or that's what I was telling myself). Having practiced being in the margin in different areas of my life and work, I could easily recognize the trigger of anxiety that was starting to build in me as I thought about presenting the next day. I could observe how my thoughts of being unprepared fed my feelings of stress and fear, while the stress and fear fed my thoughts of being unprepared and inadequate.

I tested the limits to see how quickly my thoughts and emotions spiraled down to fear, anxiety and panic. And also witnessed those thoughts and feelings travel in the other

direction upward as I explored feelings of ease, connection and clarity. What I noticed was that the fearful feelings were feedback that drove me away from my goal and the abundant, expansive feelings drew me closer to my goal. Although the latter was much more challenging, I was able to focus more on the good feelings (clarity, ease, and flow).

How was I able to shift? - by simply *allowing* the feelings of stress and anxiety to “be”. I wasn’t trying to “get over it” but to just experience that feeling and hold it to see what happens. I found I was able to disconnect the yucky, anxious feelings from the thoughts of being unprepared and reverse the direction upwards to thoughts that said, “You are prepared and if you forget what to say, don’t worry, you are good at thinking on your feet.” These thoughts fed better feelings like easiness, comfort and centeredness.

If you are just starting out with being in the margin, there are many exercises you could do such as a regular practice of relaxation or meditation. Any practices that can slow down the mind will help condition it to become a witness to thoughts, emotions and actions and reveal just how busy the mind actually is.

By carving out some time in our busy schedules to witness our TEAs, we can glean insights about ourselves, what we are doing well as well as what we would like to improve.

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