

Sort through Your Beliefs

Commit yourself to setting aside some time to answer the following questions. You might want to do this with a friend or in a group. If you chose to do this in a group, pick people you trust and with whom you feel safe, free of judgment and criticism. Your answers make an excellent starting place to begin a dialogue with another human being and thus a support group, or a personal journal that you can update regularly as new insights come to you. Writing your answers down, in itself, is a significant commitment of your time and energy towards creating health. You will learn a great deal about yourself and your relationship with your body. In this issue of Dr911.com, we will review the questions then, after you've had some time to think about them on your own we will begin the discussion in greater detail.

1. Do you understand how inherited cultural attitudes towards law enforcement, fire, EMS, and emergency public safety professionals has contributed to our experience as professionals? What are the thoughts that arise when you hear the words cop, 911, emergency, search and rescue, and so on?
2. To what extent have you internalized negative cultural programming about your profession?
3. To what extent have you internalized equally negative cultural programming and inherited cultural attitudes towards our physiological processes involving the male or female body?
4. Do you believe you can be healthy?
5. What challenges were parts of your childhood?
6. What purpose does your illness serve? If it is emotional or psychological challenges, job stress or burnout, what purpose does your symptoms of stress serve? What does it mean to you?
7. Are you willing to be open to any messages that your symptoms or illness may have for you?
8. When faced with illness, stress and trauma what is your usual reaction?
9. What is preventing you from healing yourself?
10. Are you following your life's purpose?

11. Do you take on everyone else's problems and put yourself last, or once you're off duty do you put yourself first and deny you have any problems at all in your life?
12. Do you understand the workings of your body and how closely your thoughts and feelings are connected to your physical health?
13. Are you following your life's purpose?
14. Have you designed your life in a way that fulfills both your innermost needs and your desire to be of service to others?
15. Do you regularly appreciate your strengths, gifts, talents and accomplishments?

Get It Straight

"You need only claim the events in your life to make yourself yours. When you truly possess all you have been and done, which may take some time, you are fierce with reality." Florida Scott-Maxwell

Your beliefs set the tone for healing. Positive attitudes accentuate positive growth, negative attitudes impair it. This simple concept seems so self-evident yet is so difficult for many of us to accomplish. Honesty is required to flush out counterproductive perceptions so deeply ingrained you may not realize how pernicious they are. If we examine our beliefs, we are less likely to deceive ourselves with undermining influences that may be internally or externally driven. Our beliefs trigger biochemical responses. No organ system stands apart from our thoughts. What you believe--what you really believe-- programs your neurochemistry.

I'm not suggesting that one become Pollyannaish and put on a happy face no matter how terrible you feel, nor am I suggesting that your new goal in life should be having no feelings whatsoever. You've heard me talk before. You know by now that isn't true and would never be something I'm suggesting. In fact, quite the opposite is true. As health and public safety professionals, we are extraordinarily good at compartmentalizing when we have to, putting the feelings on hold and pushing through it to get the job done. What I am suggesting is that above all else in your life be absolutely true to yourself. The integrity of this truth in itself will free you from unconscious impulses that impede your healing. I was talking with a law enforcement officer the other day that had just returned to full duty after being out IOD (injured on duty) for three weeks. Years ago he sustained a back injury while taking a suspect into custody. He'd never had surgery, was reluctant to go to a doctor, went through periods of time of excruciating pain when he was virtually incapacitated and

unable to do almost anything ("too painful to sit, too painful to stand, too painful to walk,") and yet he felt guilty when he didn't come to work. In fact, most times he came into the division regardless of his condition. "If I'm not knocked out in bed I'm good enough to go to work." This had been his pattern for taking care of himself for as long as he could remember. He said, "I don't complain. I've never complained. It's the way I am. If I go to the doctor, and I don't like to take the time out to go anyway, I don't say anything." I asked him, "Why don't you deserve better treatment than that? You've dedicated your life to protecting and taking care of everyone else around you, and yet when it comes to you and your well being you're not there. What has to happen before you decide you're worth it?" He wasn't able to answer.

Staying true to yourself isn't about being selfish or complaining. It's about being abundantly honest with everyone, including you, and then taking responsibility for doing something about it. "The truth will set you free."

Whatever you do, *listen to your intuitive voices*. These messages can be life changing. It is these voices deep in your heart of hearts that will bring you to hope and ultimately lead you to the future. Please listen. Only good will come from it. Even so, I know how easy it is push this all aside and instead to fixate on what you already know what you've come to feel is right and are comfortable with. I have to struggle with this all the time. I don't always want to look or to do the thing that will take me out of my comfort zone. Sometimes it feels way too hard or overwhelming, and I'm frightened by what I don't know and the potential that things will worsen. I'm asking you simply to allow yourself the possibility of other opportunities, as I've learned to do. Reserve judgment. See how your future unfolds. There's often a synchronicity; opportunities may present themselves. If so, go with them. Be open to where they will take you. Change of this kind always has a component of the unpredictable. It can be absolutely marvelous, mysterious, intriguing. Be prepared for the unexpected.

Get Your History Straight.

How many of us right now today are living out the legacies of our past, our mother, our father, the way things have always been, the way things always will be? Until we're asked to consider it, many of us never really get our medical, social, work and family history straight. At dr911.com we have our clients fill out an extensive questionnaire that covers not only their medical history but their family history, their professional experiences as a public safety professional and a "daily living profile" in which they check off the effects of their living situation, job, relationships and other factors of their health. Many of our clients tell us that until they'd begun this process they'd never really taken the time to think about how their lives have affected them. Taking the time to pull this information together enables them to see the patterns in their lives that they've never noticed before. One man pointed out, "Until I filled out this form I never realized how much alcoholism was in my family, and how often my

father wasn't there because of it." Some women realize the significance of virtually every woman in their extended family having had a hysterectomy before fifty-thus creating a self-fulfilling prophesy around the uterus.

Because conditions such as alcoholism and depression are often denied within family systems, and certainly within emergency public safety systems, the form specifically asks about these things. Through this form, we also pick up on habits and conditions that clients are tempted to downplay. ("I'm not really an alcoholic, I'm just a heavy social drinker.") Also, the emotional impact of a history that includes the premature death of a parent, loss of a partner, or loss of a significant relationship is frequently denied. This, too, is often revealed in filling out the form.

Ted, a 39 year old male sergeant with a history of early testicular cancer and urinary tract infection said to me the other day, "I used to watch my dad beat the living daylights out of my mom and then when he got tired of beating her he turned to me. I moved out as soon as I could drive. I was 16 and I never turned back. I was married by the time I was 17 and a father before I was 18. I never told anyone this, but my wife had a habit of beating on me. I never hit her back. I'd never do to someone what was done to me, until finally I got out of that relationship five years ago; then, my son was in a car accident and I had to take care of him for months. I was "beefed" on the job when I was least expecting it then in the summer I was in another accident and sustained a whiplash injury. I feel like I just want to disappear and cry, but I keep pushing it down. It gets harder to do, but every day I go back to work. Am I feeling this way because I'm turning 40?"

Going over Ted's intake form with him, it was easy to see that he had been through a very significant amount of change and loss in his life, beginning in childhood but lasting well into adulthood, which he'd tried to deal with by keeping everything in order and under control, pushing the feelings down, going to work daily, and appearing cheerful and supportive to everyone else in his life except himself. Even his choice of profession as a law enforcement officer demonstrated to what extent he would go to make sure no one else would ever be hurt the way he had been, and no matter what the cost he would not let himself lose control. He admitted that it seemed harder to keep his spirits up when he was on duty these days, and that when there was no immediate crisis to respond to, he felt inefficient and depressed. He had come in to see me because even though his back pain from the whiplash was gone, his son was in college now, and his job was going well, he realized he was miserable. Nothing has any meaning any more and he realized that he needed to acknowledge the losses he hadn't grieved and the sadness he'd never let himself feel. His life hadn't turned out the way he had expected to but he hadn't given himself the time or space for it to be any other way.

What Ted was experiencing was I usually call an epiphany; "A Dark Night of

The Soul," breaking down to break through. He needed to be exactly where he was, feeling exactly what he was feeling. He took a week off from work and family, rented a cabin up in the mountains, and spent the next week mostly in a flannel shirt and jeans fishing, hiking, sketching, reading, crying, drinking coffee with the man who rented him the cabin, and gradually getting back in touch with parts of himself and feelings that he had been denying for a long time. The next time I saw him, he looked 15 years younger. "Now I understand what you were talking about when you said that feelings aren't about logic; they don't come up just because you want them to," he said. "They come up when it's time; when you're ready. It took me three or four days of being quiet, by myself out on the river before I could really feel anything; before I could really cry. But I also learned that I can get off by myself when I need to in order to do this for myself, The world won't fall apart if I'm not there to keep it in order. What's more I won't fall apart if I'm not constantly keeping myself, and everyone around me, in order. My relationship with my wife (he'd remarried) and son is better. I learned that *when I take care of myself, everything else takes care of itself*