

## **The 4 Foundations For Building a New Tomorrow**

### **“Building Renewed Hope for a Healthy Family and a Happy and Whole Child”**

Now that we've gone through the 4 Quadrants, and before I start introducing the 7 steps that I use to help families move from crisis to a healthy happier family and a happy whole child free from the grip of alcohol or drugs, I'd like to take a little time to underscore the importance of 4 Building Blocks that are the foundation of any self development or self growth work. These are especially true when working with families where each individual member is an integral part of the larger family system and each family members behavior impacts everyone else. The 4 building blocks are Compassion, Communication, Understanding, and Commitment. We'll start by taking a brief look at the first two.

Change, especially when it means taking a hard look at ourselves, and our behavior, is hard. That's why these 4 foundational concepts are so important to the overall growth and health of individuals and the family. That's also why it's important to have a system that systematically supports each person's efforts to change their lives.

#### **BUILDING BLOCK ONE - COMPASSION**

The first building block is Compassion. Change often requires that we look deeply into ourselves and acknowledge parts that we may not like. However being angry with ourselves often impedes our growth rather than helps it. Acceptance and compassion for ourselves is a much more effective first step towards change. Compassion acknowledges our humanness and allows us to make a decision to try new and different behaviors or attitudes. A good friend of mine use to tell me that more than anything we're all subject to the human frailties. We all grow up and learn how to be in the world, and for better or worse, what we learn is who we become.

Knowing that, if given the choice, we would all choose loving, caring, and supportive relationships in our lives provides us with the opportunity to choose those outcomes when we face our shortcomings. Pema Chodren talks of our soft spots. This is that place in our hearts where we feel our frailties, our humanness, and our pain. It is from this place that we are able, if we allow ourselves to feel it, to connect with others and to understand their humanness and frailties. Staying in touch with our soft spot we can be open to being compassionate with others in our families when there are problems and when they are behaving in destructive ways. Each person wants the best but may not know how to have it. Knowing that and connecting with them from that place rather than from anger or frustration is the beginning of the path to change.

#### **BUILDING BLOCK TWO - COMMUNICATION**

One of my favorite sayings is that “the problem with Communication is the belief that it actually occurs” What does this mean? Well, you've probably noticed that when we have conversations with others it's not unusual for people to be more concerned with what they're going to say next than with hearing, much less understanding, what someone else

is saying. Communication is often a series of monologues rather than dialogue. Communication is often more about getting ones point across or defending ones position than it is hearing what someone else has to say and coming to understand in a new way who that person is or what their life is like. Learning to listen and understand are skills that can be learned and are essential to change, understanding, and caring. It's hard, but possible, to learn how to be more present when talking to someone, even about difficult situations, to be present rather than thinking about what has been or worrying about the future.

### **BUILDING BLOCK THREE - UNDERSTANDING**

Understanding comes from communication and transforms us. Listening and truly wanting to know the world from the perspective of another without judgment gives us the opportunity to “see” the world with new eyes; to literally see the world from the eyes of the person that we're talking to. This is different than making assumptions or inferences of about what we believe someone else's behavior means when filtered through our own personal biases. We can only know the world from the spot on which we stand and in order to know more about the world we need to be able to see and hear the perspectives of others. Letting go of our assumptions about someone else's behavior we can broaden our perspective, and come to agreements based on shared interpretations and shared meaning. From here we can have new agreements, and learn to trust. Win-win, and win-lose solutions to problems often arise from finding a way to compromise and live with another person or group rather than creating a new and shared perspective that transforms both parties or groups. In order to be transformed we have to be able to rise above the system we are embedded in. When we are caught up in, or run by, the picture of the world that we've come to know, it can be difficult or impossible to see, let alone understand, the perspective of another. In order to truly understand we need to be able rise above and look back at the system we live within to truly see how it drives our behavior and inhibits our ability grow and change.

### **BUILDING BLOCK FOUR – COMMITMENT**

Dealing with someone who is in crisis is a very stressful. Making changes in one life, especially difficult changes, is also hard work. In both instances it takes not only hard work but a commitment to stay the course even when things are at their worse. Without a commitment it's difficult to carry out the actions day in and day out that will lead to real change. Real change comes from a different outlook, different attitudes, and different behaviors. It's helpful during the most difficult times to ask which outcome we would like. Do we want our family to remain in crisis and pain or do we want a happier and more loving home. It's easy to not do the work of change but harder to live with the outcomes that arise from that choice. Nevertheless, and with both the best intentions and the realization of what the outcomes of our choices might be, when faced with difficult struggles day in and day out it's can be very difficult to hang in there. This is especially true when our commitment is not just to our hard work but also to the financial burden that comes with it and often times the toll that it all takes on other members of the family.

Remember though that our commitments lead to actions in the form of new behaviors that can result in new and better outcomes for us and for our families.

In a future article I'll begin to introduce the 7 Steps to Change that can help families achieve their Goals.

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