

Recovering from Addiction: A Journey in the “Art Creating Meaning”

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Abstract

As we continue to live, there will be experiences of loss. Loss can be defined as anything from death, to anything of which you feel deprived (affection, work, self-esteem, relationship, joy, hope, courage, etc.). You define what it is you have lost. In the Art of Creating Meaning, we take the experience of loss and grow from it. Eventually, the loss becomes a triumphant experience. During the journey of Creating Meaning, you will learn to tap into your hidden strengths and talents. We will explore your creative side and build upon it. In the process, your self-esteem will be enhanced and your confidence will soar. Before long, you will regard the loss as a beautiful experience that has helped motivate you to do even more beautiful and wonderful things in your life.

What is The Art of Creating Meaning?

In the Art of Creating Meaning, we take the experiences our clients suffering from drug abuse and grow from it, as well as create something positive and substantial from the lessons learned (Tyson, 2011). Eventually, the losses become a triumphant experience. During the journey of Creating Meaning, one will learn to tap into hidden strengths and talents. We explore the client's creative side and build upon it. In the process, their self-esteem is be enhanced and their confidence will soar. Before long, they will regard their history of substance abuse, a beautiful experience that has helped to motivate them to do even more beautiful and wonderful things in their lives. Thus, the Art of Creating Meaning is a very useful way of overcoming various challenges of life. It will become a skill that our clients will find themselves using to assist them in understanding areas in life that are a source of confusion. Ultimately, their perspective of life will change for the positive (Tyson, 2011).

This paper will demonstrate how The Art of Creating Meaning, can help people who are recovering from drug use. We will have a working understanding on how to help their clients of this population, build and grow from their history of substance abuse and beautify their road of recovery. Therapist will be shown how to tap into their clients' natural creative skills to show them their hidden talents and abilities, Seligman (2012).

The 5 Steps to The Art of Creating Meaning

The Art of Creating Meaning was born from the observations of how people experience loss (Tyson, 2011). We are aware of the progressive 5-Step process of how people experience grief, which is a form of loss, (Kubler-Ross, 1969). The steps are, Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and Acceptance. Unfortunately, after the 5th step of Acceptance, there is no step to rebuilding ones' life after the loss. This where The Art of Creating Meaning, can assist our clients.

The Art of Creating Meaning is focused on building lives up, after the devastation of loss. The 5-Steps of The Art of Creating Meaning are as follows, Acceptance, Resuming Normalcy, Making the Decision to Grow From the Experience, The Process of Creating Meaning and Gratitude. The substance abuse population has experience profound loss on many different levels. These steps can be used to assist them in rebuilding their lives and growing because of their experiences.

Acceptance

Acceptance is the last step in Kubler-Ross' theory but the first step in The Art of Creating Meaning. At this stage people process their emotions and can accept the loss and the fact that it cannot be undone. It is at this point that they can plan for the futures and re-enter daily lives. But, what does this mean to the drug abuse population?

At this point, the substance abuse population are usually at an “all-time low.” They have loss a considerable amount of treasures in their lives. They begin to accept the fact that their addition is the cause. Acceptance resembles the Step 1 of the 12-Step Program of Recovery, which states that one must admit that they are powerless over their addiction and their lives have become unmanageable, (Williams, 2011).

This step in *The Art of Creating Meaning*, promotes the ability for our clients to be honest with about the choices they have made to bring them to this point in their lives. Matthew, (2016) conducted a study of Gay and Lesbian drug abusers.

In the study, the participants stated that once they accepted that the abused substances to mask their sexual orientation, healing began. Bring our clients through this step will help them to understand the past and give them the courage to face the future in their road to recovery, and making it less difficult to stimulate their creativity (Eshleman, 2014).

Resuming Normalcy

After our clients have accepted the results of their drug addition, we can assist them in the second step, Resuming Normalcy. Although their lives will never be the same, because of their drug use, we can help them find a sense of normal living, during their life in recovery. This means whatever the client believes is a healthy, normal life without drug use. Recovery experiences regarding resuming normalcy vary widely, but better functioning is typically reported after longer periods and is associated with supportive peer groups and more engagement in meaningful activities, and supports models promoting the development of peer networks immersed in local communities, (Hennessy, 2018).

With an active life, as described by Hennessey, (2018), our clients can find the support and encouragement they need to move to the next step with confidence. It will take our clients a great deal of inner strength and fortitude to make the decision to grow because of the losses experienced during their lives in the drug culture. This is an important step and our clients will need us to help them make sense of the losses incurred.

Making the Decision to Grow From the Experience

In this step, we must ask our clients a question that will cause pain and heartache. The question is, “What have you learned as a result of your life as a substance abuser?” In these open-ended questions, we will assist the client in digging deep into their experiences, which will include many painful memories for the client. We must assess whether the client is ready to move into this area of our work with them. We can assess this by observing how they are living at that moment. Have they been “clean” for a significant amount of time? Are they able to identify their triggers? Do they have a Safety Plan in place if they feel the need to use? Do they make use of the Safety Plan? Are they productive in their lives? Are they adding to the lives of others in a positive manner?

There are many other questions you can ask to assess their growth. Motivational Interview can be an excellent way of obtaining information regarding our clients’ level of growth. If we are satisfied that our client is in an emotionally safe place in their recovery, we can, “What have you learned as a result of your life as a substance abuser?” with assurance that they are ready to make the decision to grow from their experiences. Once we have asked this question, we have the tools to help them explore various ways they can grow, by using what they have learned from their lives as drug users. The lessons learned from their experiences will be the foundation we can use to assist them in a higher level of growth and personal development. Positive Psychology theorist, Martin Seligman calls this development, Post-traumatic Growth, which is the use of trauma to promote growth.

The Process of Creating Meaning

The fourth step in *The Art of Creating Meaning*, is the process of coming into seeing ones’ creative work come to fruition. Remember, *The Art of Creating Meaning*, we take the experiences our clients suffering from drug abuse and grow from it, as well as create something positive and substantial from the lessons learned (Tyson, 2011). Therefore, we will be working with our clients to build a monument, as it were, to the lessons learned from our suffering.

We will be working with our clients to help them create something that adds value to their lives. This may be done through artistic expressions and various other methods. By inspiring meaning, the client perpetuates the value and importance of their experiences during their drug use. Living creating meaning involves the courage to overcome the pain of experiences, while continuing to affirm inwardly that life with all its sorrows is good. One thus transcends the losses of the experiences and develops a permanent link between themselves and what they have lost because they understand that everything is meaningful even if in a sense, it is beyond our understanding and that there is always tomorrow.

Tyson, (2018) uses an acronym to assist in the process of creating meaning, which is C.R.E.A.T.E. Each letter stands for a word that promotes the creative process. The words are, Care, Relevance, Engagement, Attitude, Time and Elevation.

The words of the acronym as values found in Seligman’s values of Positive Psychology (2006). Seligman’s research encourages us to tap into areas such as well-being, flow, personal strengths, wisdom, creativity, psychological health and characteristics of positive groups and institutions, to assist our clients. These values cause our clients to experience positive emotions, which assist in the healing and creative process.

Care

The first step of the process and the principle representing the first letter in the acronym is, care. Our clients will identify something about which they had a deep concern. It can be the rights of animals, children, the environment, domestic violence or poverty. We will work with our clients to explore their deep concerns and use it to help build their creation.

Relevance

Relevance pertains to something in which the client is particularly close. An issue with which they can identify will be most useful. For example, if the client resides in an area where pollution is a prominent problem, they may want to advocate for “Smoke Free” laws in their housing development. This will help to increase the quality of the air in the building. In doing something, closely connected with their everyday lives, the clients can see “fruit of their labor,” and be proud of the fact that help to do something that will help the community.

Engaging

Whatever way our clients choose to create meaning, it must be engaging. Seligman, (2016) states that there is an element of “flow” when one is deeply engaged in a project. In “flow” we become so significantly involved with the project that we become one with it. Such positive engagement in an activity that our clients care about and that is relevant to their lives, causes positive emotions. These positive emotions enhance the creative process, making the final product of their creation, something in which our client can be proud.

Attitude

A positive attitude is necessary in creating something meaningful. The creation loses its significance if it is not done with a constructive outlook. This may be a challenge for some of our clients because they may choose to create projects that are time consuming or require the involvement of other people who may not share their passion for their work. This is where we can be a calming source to them, encouraging them to remember the reason they are creating this work. It is a testimony to the lessons learned from years of drug use. It is a memorial to the pain they have suffered and a symbol of how they overcame that pain. It is a representation of how they are better people of substance and depth due to their experience. It is at this point that we urge them to maintain a positive attitude about the creation process.

Time

The creation that our clients decide upon, must be one that takes a significant amount of time to complete. Time is an important element, as it gives the client the opportunity to reflect on their experiences, the lessons learned from them and how they have become better people as a result. It must be a work that requires patience and endurance. A creation that takes a significant amount of time, such as going back to school for a GED or a degree, is valued more highly than one that does not require much time to complete. A creation that is time demanding heightens the client’s sense of accomplishment success.

Elevation

The final product of the creation must promote a feeling of elevation, triumph and completions. These are feelings that are not a part of the drug users’ everyday lives. The feeling of elevation that come from seeing the finished product of one’s creation is inspiring and reassures our clients that they can make something beautiful and important that contributes to the world.

Gratitude

Finally, the final step to The Art of Creating Meaning, is the ability to be grateful for their experiences during our clients’ time of drug use. The feeling of gratitude shows that the client can look deep beyond the surface of their lives. They can see past the pain and loss caused by their drug use. Moving pass these obstacles allow our clients to see the personal development that has come from the experiences. They see the exquisiteness of the finished product of their creation and they are grateful. They are grateful for the resilience, the fortitude, the strength and the courage it took for them to come out of a live of drug use and to build a beautiful life as a result. This is The Art of Creating Meaning.

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