



Affective Center for Therapy

2560 W. Shaw, Suite 105, Fresno, CA 93711

559.436-0428 Fax: 559.436-0438

I HAVE A DREAM

I had a Dream

Who stole my dream?

Everyone has had a dream. The dream for one person could be house with a white picket fence, or to play in the major league. What is your dream?

I had a dream of building my own Company and having branches all over the country.

I had a dream that I would be the top salesman in my company.

I had a dream that I would retire by 50.

I had a dream that I would sing my songs at the Grand Old Opera.

I had a dream that I would get married and stay home with my children and never have to work unless I wanted to.

Have you ever had a realistic dream that just never happened? You knew that your dream could have happened if only. . . . Have you ever dared to dream the impossible dream and it turned out, that for you, it was impossible? What excuses did you use to justify the fact that you did not achieve that dream?

- It was because this person kept me from achieving it.
- My husband/wife wasn't supportive.
- The people I needed wouldn't do what I needed them to do.
- The boss had it in for me.
- It was because I had to take care of my children because my wife/husband left me.
- I guess it was not God's will for my life.
- It was because of the economy.

Notice that almost every excuse was because someone or something outside of you would not cooperate. In this way, you get to be the victim.

In my experience, it is seldom the result of outside forces, but the result of things that you did or failed to do that caused the demise of your dream. Even after the dream has died, some people will cling to their dream and will keep doing what has not worked for them in the past. Then, it is not the dream that is the problem, it is their beliefs.

For example, for twenty years she kept telling herself and others that this dream of changing the world was possible and "We can do it." But, as the years passed, her one marketing outlet grew smaller and smaller and it became harder and harder to believe in her dream. She blamed others and tried harder to control everything and everybody. Then, she saw what could have been the big chance to make the difference. She had the funding, she had the team that could make the dream come

true, she had people who had the expertise and training and who wanted to buy into the dream. It was all set to go, and she sabotaged it.

As I listened to her story, at first it sounded like a tragedy of life. Then I began to see what was more important than her dream was that she needed to have control. “I cannot trust anyone with making my dream come true.” Without knowing it, for her dream to become a reality and for her to be successful, meant giving up control. “If it gets big, I will not be able to control all the aspects of the dream (and I must have control).”

There is nothing wrong with wanting to keep your dream small, but do not lie to yourself and others by saying you want to make it big and affect hundreds of lives. What you believe determines what you feel and what you feel will determine your behaviors. The belief I was hearing was something I am sure she learned as a child, “If I want the job done right, I have to be in control because if I’m not, bad things will happen and people will get hurt. Nobody, else will do the job right without me having to check on what they are doing. Therefore, everybody should trust me and never question what I say.” This belief, I am sure, was once true for her as a child, but as an adult this is a formula for staying small. It is what killed her dream.

Another client came to me with the dream of making it big financially in business. Now, after he had “almost become wildly successful for the third time,” he watched himself destroy his dream. After the third time of doing this, he was smart enough that he could no longer fool himself with excuses about how others had stopped him from being successful. “I could have sold my last company for over four million dollars if only I had not starting chasing women. I knew better, I really did not want them. I never had this problem until the company got big.”

Over the next few weeks, I learned that he came from poor, tight knit, hard working people. His father said rich people were evil, immoral degenerates who used both men and women as their play things. “I know it was not my past gambling, drug or alcohol use and women that destroyed my dream. They were just my way of making sure that I never reached my dream.”

As we talked, he became aware that he had right brain pictures of his father ranting and raving about the rich, immoral people and how much he hated them. One day he blurted out, “I almost became one of those rich people that my family hated so much!” No wonder he had to destroy his dream. It was that or lose his family.

Logically, in the left brain, he knew that not all rich people were “evil, immoral degenerates” and that he was a good man that never used or abused anyone. But, the old memories and flashbacks fueled his fear of rejection and conspired to destroy his dream.

If you find that your dream of making a difference or changing the world seems to crumble every time you get close, it is time to stop blaming and start looking at how you are doing it.

It is easy to make yourself into a victim. I warn my clients that when they come in and tell me that they had a bad week, I will ask them, “And, how did you do that?” Or, if they tell me that they had a great week, I will ask them, “How did you do that?”

Your life does not happen in a vacuum; you are constantly creating and uncreating it by the conscious and unconscious choices you are making. This is not to

say that bad things don't happen to everyone. The difference is what you can learn from the experience and how you will do it differently next time.

Have you ever wondered what is going on inside of the women who cry as they watch the bride go down the aisle? In talking with a friend of mine, she said it was because these women were remembering their trip down the aisle and then the disillusionment their life had turned out to be. I am sure this is not true of everyone who cries at weddings. But would it not be better to look at your dreams from time to time and question, "Is what I am doing really going to get me what I want in the long run?" For the lady with the dream of building a large organization and, at the same time, holding a belief that she needed to control all aspects, it was her not recognizing the contradiction that would eventually doom the project.

You do not have to live with the regrets and tears of your past if you are willing to make the changes to your life that are not working for you now. The first step is to become aware and accept the fact that you have contradictory beliefs. This is probably the hardest part of change. If you are having trouble with this part, find a therapist who can help you spot your contradictions.

Now that you know what your contradictory beliefs are, the second step is to, on a daily basis, confront yourself with the contradictions. "I know I have contradictory beliefs. On the one hand, I believe I want a big organization that can help people change their lives but, at the same time, I believe I have to control everything because others will not do it right and people will be hurt. I can't do both!"

This second step requires placing two contradictory beliefs side by side in the logical, left side of the brain. It will then create a mental tension that will eventually result in one or the other belief going away. Back in the 1950's, a Stanford professor, Leon Festinger PhD, called this process cognitive dissonance. He believed that people want their cognitions or beliefs to be consistent with each other and with their own behavior. Inconsistency or dissonance within a person's beliefs will make people uneasy enough to alter these ideas so that they will agree with each other.

In this case, the dissonance could result in the client's beliefs changing to either: 1) "I really want to keep my company small, and that is OK." Or 2) "I don't have to control everything and nothing so bad will happen that cannot be fixed."

You can use this process to help you change your life so that you can achieve your goals.

Myron Doc Downing PhD, LMFT

DocDowning@att.net

© 2005