

Preface

UNDERSTANDING THE DILEMMA

*Wholeness or well-being is not the absence of brokenness.
Instead it is what you choose, at the center of your life,
to do with your brokenness.*

Howard Clinebell

Once I read a book by Sark (yes, just one name) called *The Inspiration Sandwich*. She stated that writing a book is like writing a love letter. That resonated with me because that is how I feel about this book. I have been in the process of writing this book for many years. Originally, it was full of dry "to-do's." I then decided that I wanted it to be more conversational, more like a letter. So this is my love letter to you.

My daughters are grown, and I'm left with my dog. I don't have the stress and strain of day care, school, after school activities, work schedules and the demands of fixing dinner, etc.; but I did. Through my work I have talked to hundreds of families who have shared their stories with me and with their information and mine, I have learned some helpful things that I trust will help you.

The work I do involves organizational consulting, training and speaking. In the over 25 years of being in this business, I have worked in hundreds of different organizations, from high-tech and scientific, to heavy construction and manufacturing. The list encompasses small companies, large organizations, government agencies, non-profits and corporations. I think I have just about seen it all. I've seen good managers and bad ones, excellent companies and failing ones. I've seen wonderful and productive employees flourish under self-serving, arrogant managers. I've seen wonderful companies go down in spite of their great values, benefits and employees. I've seen optimistic and positive people come from the most dysfunctional environments...and I've seen very unfortunate dysfunctional people come from very loving and healthy environments. I'm not a scientist so I can't talk about genetics or why certain individuals are more "resilient" than

others. I can talk “turkey” about what works on a day to day basis to get us through whatever circumstance is in front of us.

We are unsure about everything: relationships, jobs, health, world stability, you name it. And of course we are overwhelmed, over-stimulated, over-worked and over-tired. Welcome to the 21st Century.

I hear people complain of being tired, scared and depressed. Everyone is juggling as fast as they can, and at the same time trying to maintain a sense of composure, equilibrium and poise. Many times I have looked up at Whatever pleading in distress for a mommy to comfort and support me and a dad to fix everything because I feel so overwhelmed. Well, no such luck. So how do we manage this crazy time we’re in?

When people write books, it's usually because a theme is burning inside. That yearning which needs to be expressed comes from a profound experience, or a series of profound experiences, that cause one to need to write it down, either to challenge, entertain, enlighten, or just to exorcise a nagging demon. The insights I share have aided me in managing my own challenging life situations and are a result of years of informal research, study and application. I can't tell you how many books and articles I have read over the years written by experts to help me understand what my problem is and how to live with it. I'm supposed to be positive, optimistic, not worry, manage my stress and live a balanced life. I'm not supposed to worry about tomorrow because “tomorrow will take care of itself.” I'm supposed to look at the bright side and if I ever think negative thoughts then whamo, those negative thoughts will become a self-fulfilling prophecy. No matter what I do, I'm doing it wrong.

Well, I do worry, I do get stressed, I do struggle with depression, I do have negative tapes that run through my head, I don't always eat right and I don't exercise every day. I wonder every month if I'll have business next month. I have lived the gamut between living my life successfully and not so successfully. I have done and said things for which I am truly ashamed, and have had other fleeting moments of angelic behavior that I wished everyone would notice. “So,” you ask, “why should I read your book?” Precisely because I am just like you! I get overwhelmed,

depressed, scared and experience every other negative feeling that plagues us as humans. **However**, when I'm in the midst of depression or worry or beating myself up, I've learned some skills that help me get through it. Some of these techniques I've learned myself and others I have learned from many people I have met throughout my life. I also have learned from those experts I have read. Over the past 25 years, I have shared these techniques with thousands of people who find themselves stressed and burned out and their lives hopelessly out of balance. Although there are so many books out there about stress, burnout and balance, this book is written with simplicity and clarity and I hope you will find something helpful and affirming for you.

If you are reading this book, you probably are one of us who is trying to juggle all areas of your life so that you can "have it all and do it all." We want to have exciting careers where we are acknowledged for our unique contribution to our job, a personal life full of adventure and meaning, quality time with children who are brilliant and charming, an active and stimulating social life, an intimate relationship that is satisfying and close to perfect. Instead we are anxious about being laid off and so exhausted at the end of the day that exercise, cooking a gourmet meal and meditation are out of the question. More often than not we throw something on the table from the grocery store deli for dinner. Intimate time alone and making love with a spouse or significant other has become a fantasy, and quality time with children is found in the car driving to and from little league, ballet and music lessons. Balancing one's external life is a worthy notion, but in my experience, it cannot happen until the internal life is more balanced. So the first place to focus is on the inside. I am not implying that this book will make you internally balanced in order to be balanced externally. My goal is to bring attention to the various segments of our lives that make up the whole of who we are, because ignoring any one of these parts will over time create stress.

Managing stress, avoiding burnout and achieving wholeness involves attention to the seven most important areas of our lives: 1) physical health and well being, 2) emotional understanding and control, 3) spiritual health, 4) intellectual pursuit and

challenge, 5) family and social relationships, 6) career satisfaction and 7) soul discovery.

In order to balance these areas of our lives, we need to know what gets us off track in the first place. What goes on in our deeper selves? What makes us tick? Why do we feel happy and exhilarated one minute and hostile and aggressive the next? We are not mentally deranged or un-whole because we experience negative emotions. We are not unbalanced if we have a bad day. We are just human! We don't have to hide who we are and what we experience by faking a "happy face." In today's world of a quick fix, people anxiously look for a solution to the confusion and pain caused by stress, trying dieting, drugs, psychotherapy, changing jobs, houses, or spouses. Nothing seems to result in more than a temporary fix. Understanding our interior dynamics is the first step to bringing harmony, wholeness and balance to the seven areas of our lives.

In Chapters 1 - 3, we will begin to understand the causes of stress and burnout. These chapters provide simple analogies to explain the origins of stress and how to take preventative measures to stop the downward cycle. These chapters also explain how prolonged stress leads to the devastating illness of burnout, which is pervasive and can debilitate people for the rest of their lives. We will learn how to recognize the symptoms at each stage of burnout and understand the harmful effects on our body.

Chapters 4 - 9 help us to begin the healing process by understanding each of the seven areas—our physical, emotional, spirit, intellectual, relationships, career and soul—in order to experience how the pieces fit together to create our whole Self. Understanding and addressing each aspect, a piece at a time, makes the task of self-healing less overwhelming.

At the end of each chapter, I have included a list of references. I am familiar with these references and have included them because I have found them helpful as it relates to the content of the specific chapter.

Many who pick up this book will read it for help in the process of discovery. Others will read it to give insight into how they might help a fellow worker, a spouse, significant other,

friend, parent, or child. My fervent desire is that you will find the book truly helpful in your own search for balance and joy.

Let me assure you, again, that this book is not about finding a way to get rid of stress forever. It's about finding ways to deal with it on a day-to-day basis. It also is about finding proactive ways to make our lives less stressful. Understanding and accommodating our emotional, physical and spirit needs helps us to lessen the stress that we encounter every day.

Publishing this book is a project that I want to open up to my readers. As you are reading the book and you think of things that you would like expanded upon, coping methods you have learned, or whatever you would like to see included in a book of this nature, please write me at dkercher@aol.com. I will include your ideas, comments and lessons in the next edition.



PART I
TELLING YOUR STORY

*Is there ever any particular spot
where one can put one's finger and say,
"It all began that day, at such a time
and such a place, with such an incident"?*
Agatha Christie

*To have one's individuality completely ignored
is like being pushed quite out of life.
Like being blown out as one blows out a light*
Evelyn Scott

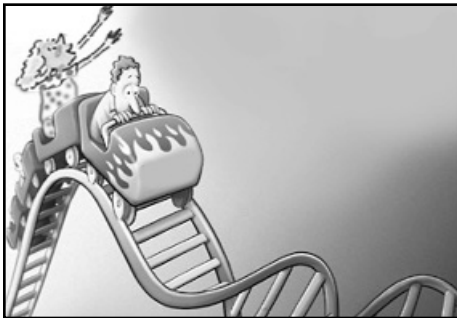
When I was growing up I loved to listen to my aunt and mother talk at the kitchen table about their childhood memories. My mother was the oldest of four children and was afflicted with nerve deafness when she turned 15 years old. It was very traumatic for her to leave her family in South Dakota to go to deaf school in Gooding, Idaho. Many of the deaf from that school moved to Spokane, Washington, during the depression because there were jobs for the deaf in lumber mills and at the printing presses of the local newspapers. She met my father there and they were married in 1938. My father was also deaf and quite a bit older than my mother. Since my mother was such a "catch" she married the one man who had a job at that time, although she always believed he was beneath her. She was never happy and struggled with bitterness, anger and depression all of her life.

The only time there was laughter in the house was when my aunt (her sister) would come to visit. Those wonderful times, watching my aunt finger sign the words to my mother, my mother talking back in her high-pitched, kind of squeaky voice, both of them laughing hysterically about growing up on the farm, taught me how important it is to tell stories that recall fond, warm and funny memories. I know that those times of hilarity at the kitchen table were what kept my aunt and mother able to cope with their very difficult and painful circumstances at the time.

Every once in a while they would include me in their memories and explain certain events so that I, too, could laugh hysterically along with them. It felt good to be included and it felt good to hear the stories about how life was when my mother was growing up. Sometimes they would talk about very ugly memories and tell sad and bitter stories, but somehow when they said goodbye to each other at the end of the day, they both walked away feeling much better. I remember mom being kinder, warmer and gentler after these visits. She seemed calmed and renewed in her spirit able to face another day.

There is something very healing about telling our stories because it helps us to understand how and why we developed our own perceptions, beliefs and values about ourselves and others. The reality of our experiences often is skewed through the lenses of our perceptions about them. The interpretations we make about the perception of events throughout our lives often become more understandable when we begin to consciously remember and talk about them.

For example, if you and I are on a roller coaster together and I am terrified and you are having the time of your life, is it the



roller coaster that is stressful?

If you and I are being laid off from the same company and I can take it in stride, whereas you become overwhelmed with anxiety attacks, is it the layoff that is stressful? If someone we know seems to travel along life's path, taking things in

stride, whereas we beat ourselves up and are filled with worry, is it life that is stressful? In these examples, we can see that it is not the roller coaster, the company, or life that is stressful. It is our perception of those events that causes us stress. The perception of life events lies in the eyes of the beholder. To begin to manage the stress in our life, we have to first change the way we think about it. In order to do that, it is helpful to know how we built those thoughts and perceptions in the first place. That's why it is important to tell our story.

EXERCISE-TELLING YOUR STORY

My daughter, Heidi, is fanatical about pictures. When you walk into her house you see pictures everywhere of everyone who is important in her life. She has pictures of me and her dad, grandparents, friends, her daughter and husband and many family members. I have found a wonderful kind of comfort in looking at all of those pictures—people who are smiling out of the frames with their special significance to my daughter. Each of those pictures tells a story. Each of the people in those pictures has contributed to Heidi's story. Those smiling people have impacted my daughter and molded her into the person she is today. They give her a touchstone, a reminder of roots and stability and of the people who love her.

How about you? Find as many baby and childhood pictures as possible. Find a tablet and pencil and begin to write. Who is that

little person in your childhood pictures—

that little boy with the baseball cap, smudged knee and bandaged eye,

or that little girl in the new pinafore holding the cat by the head? How did you think of

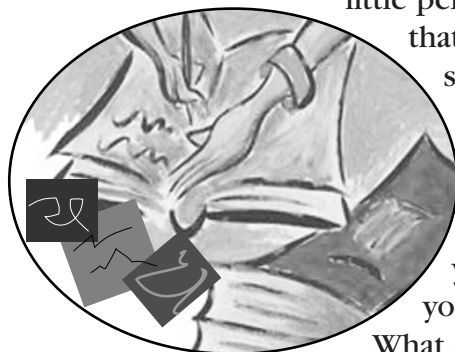
yourself physically? What did you look like? How tall were

you? What did you do in school?

What subjects did you like? What did

you do with your feelings? Capturing the memories of who you were as a child and teenager helps you to understand how significant events impact your perception of yourself as an adult.

As you consider each decade of your life (1 - 12, teens, 20's, 30's, etc.), recall the events, the pain and joy that contributed to your life. Examine the lessons you learned, and how the many aspects of your Self developed. Tell about parents, friends, grandparents, sisters and brothers. What did they teach you—good and not so good? Who were you as you were growing up? Write as many things as you can possibly remember that contributed to who you are now. It will help to provide some objectivity as to



why you have the perceptions you do and why you think the way you do. This kind of self-reflection begins to open the door of understanding to the sources of the stress in your life.

When I look back at my own story and see my own pictures, when I share those stories with my family, I realize how my past perceptions have left an indelible mark on me in how I view things today. So when things happen to me they are filtered through the unique glasses of my perception which may or may not be objective. Telling my story helps me gain a better objective perspective and gives me greater understanding about why I am the way I am. When I know that, or see that, I can begin to make concrete behavioral changes.

I grew up believing my mother never loved me. I have gone over and over my memories and I can never remember a time when she said, "I love you." I do remember every beating, every cruel word and her rejection of me. I know, intellectually, that she loved me as best she could under her difficult circumstances, but through my perceptions, I believed that if my own mother couldn't love me, then I was pretty bad. Compounding those perceptions, starting as a little girl, it seemed that I was prey to many men who abused me sexually and verbally. The rejection from my mother created an insatiable need to be loved and affirmed and made me always fearful of rejection. The sexual abuse from men made me believe that if anything was wrong in the relationship, it was obviously my fault.

These experiences have created "stress triggers" which are clearly related to whether I perceive people like me or not. If I perceive that people don't like me, or that I have not pleased them, I immediately believe it is my fault. So my life has been a constant dance of trying to please people. Since I never believed I could possibly please anyone, I lived in agony that it was not only my fault, but that I was bad, therefore I was hopeless.

Telling and writing my story have given me an opportunity to see how those experiences left me with perceptions about myself and my relationship with others that are not really true. I know now that when I become the most anxious and stressed it's because I perceive I'm being rejected or that I'm not loved. This emotional reaction could be called one of my "stress trigger

points.” I become and stay anxious until I perceive that the relationship is okay.

To help us find our “stress triggers” by telling our stories, I would like to explore with you what I call our Seven Areas of Wholeness. Exploring each of the seven areas separately through the following questionnaire helps us to understand how they contribute to our uniqueness and wholeness and to also see in what areas our particular “stress triggers” might lie. Each of the chapters will then explore each area of wholeness in order to find specific ways to reduce stress and create balance.

SEVEN AREAS OF WHOLENESS

The following questions are given as a guide to help you find your own specific and unique answers to your stories and also to identify the areas where your stress triggers are the most troubling. Take as much or as little time as you like. When you begin to read the chapter that corresponds with one of the areas of wholeness, it might be helpful to review what the most stressful triggers are for you.

SEVEN AREAS OF WHOLENESS QUESTIONNAIRE

Physical Concept and Well-Being

We all wish we had a body that met some standard that we, or others, have set for us. Using the following questions, tell your story of how your perceptions of yourself have directly impacted how healthy your body is today.

On a scale of 1 to 4, rate the degree of stress each of the following statements causes in you today.

Remember those areas that are particularly stressful to you. When you read the chapter on understanding spirit needs, look for ways to reduce stress in this area.

Intellectual Stimulation and Expansion

It is important that the mind never stops exploring new thoughts and ideas. It's that creativity that helps to keep our minds vital, adding productivity and longevity to our lives. However, if we have been taught negative beliefs, we might not be able to rid our mind of obsessive thoughts which get in the way of our ability to be creative and productive. Using the following questions, tell your story by thinking about the events and memories in your life that have contributed to the way you value and use your mind.

On a scale of 1 to 4, rate the degree of stress each of the following statements causes in you today.

- 1. I have obsessive thoughts
- 2. I believe my mind is healthy
- 3. I am able to focus on projects
- 4. I like to search for new ideas
- 5. I like to solve problems
- 6. I allow myself to be creative
- 7. I am not troubled by recurring thoughts
- 8. I enjoy learning

Not Stressful.....Very Stressful			
1	2	3	4

Remember those areas that are particularly stressful to you. When you read the chapter on intellectual stimulation and expansion, look for ways to reduce stress in this area.

Family and Social Relationships

Relationships can be the source of major stress triggers. Our life experiences and messages we received have impacted how we relate to others in our lives now. Using the following questions tell your story by thinking about the events and memories in your life that have contributed to the quality and satisfaction of your relationships.

On a scale of 1 to 4, rate the degree of stress each of the following statements causes in you today.

	Not Stressful.....Very Stressful			
	1	2	3	4
1. I am comfortable in my relationship with my spouse or significant other				
2. I am comfortable in my relationship with my children				
3. I am comfortable in my relationship with my parents				
4. I am comfortable in my relationships with my close friends				
5. I make friends easily				
6. I like to entertain				
7. My spouse or significant other likes me				
8. My children like me				
9. My friends like me				

Remember those areas that are particularly stressful to you. When you read the chapter on family and social relationships, look for ways to reduce stress in this area.

Job, Career, Professional Contribution

Our jobs and careers contribute greatly to our sense of meaning and can be our greatest source of stress. Using the following questions tell your story by thinking about the events and memories in your life that have contributed to the quality and satisfaction of your job, career or profession.

On a scale of 1 to 4, rate the degree of stress each of the following statements causes in you today.

1. I have a sense of awe/wonder about life
2. My life is meaningful to me
3. I am comfortable with the mysteriousness of life
4. I question why bad things happen
5. I know I am guided by a Power greater than myself
6. I am maximizing my potential
7. I am comfortable that I am making a meaningful contribution to life
8. I believe that God is loving not punishing
9. I believe that God is the divine source within me
10. I am not afraid of death

Not Stressful.....Very Stressful				
	1	2	3	4

Remember those areas that are particularly stressful to you. When you read the chapter on Soul Discovery, look for ways to reduce stress in this area.

When you have thoughtfully gone through this exercise, you'll find your stress triggers, and you will have a better sense of what is present and what is missing in the seven areas of wholeness. This exercise in self-reflection will illuminate the areas that are painful and most stress producing in your life. When we keep these insights in mind, we are more sensitive to ideas on how to manage those particular parts of our lives. Keep your notes accessible as we journey through this book. This knowledge will help as we explore the ways that healing can begin within these seven areas.

References: To learn the importance of telling stories, read the series of books about *Chicken Soup for the Soul* or *Kitchen Table Wisdom*. We find comfort in listening to stories. What are the stories that touch you? What kind of stories make the most impact on you?