



PEOPLE FACTORIES Part II

By Louise Elliott

People really are a product of their environment. It gives rise to the nature versus nurture debate. It highlights the question: is personal growth truly possible. It haunts us, 'can society ever change for the better?'

In last edition of Options, 'People Factories' Part I raised the subject that our society focuses on fixing individuals once they are broken. However, we should look more towards the source of the problems, this being mankind's assembly block – the family, or the 'factory of origin'. Here, essentially, developing members of society (the children) have a life path moulded.

The symptoms of 'unhealthy' families frequently stem from incorrect and damaging 'belief systems'. I am talking about belief systems integrated into the machine-work of one's soul during childhood. At this time children adopt an identity based on the 'construction patterns' that their parents model with positive and negative interactions. These can be the subliminal codes and unspoken rules; the do's and don'ts of relating to each other; the bumps of learning through failures, and collectively they slowly shape a child into a capable – or dysfunctional – adult, one manufactured to either assist the smooth tide of society, or to perpetuate damage into other people's lives.

Let's look at the most common, destructive belief systems and consider whether they are affecting you and your family.

A Sense of Shame

Shame is the belief system that there is something not right with you; that you are deficient in some capacity, or innately hopeless. It's the feeling that you are not OK the way you are and need to change; or that 'you've got what you've got, but that's not enough'. It will drive you to obsess over past failures or rejection experiences, sometimes causing you to withdraw or be depressed.

The following examples are familiar misconceptions that can stem from shame: "My dad said I was good-for-nothing, so I will never be good at anything"; or "I'd be more liked by others if I was skinnier"; or "Since I was taken advantage of no one will ever find me attractive again."

Sometimes destructive habits, like

chemical addictions, are formed to escape past pain and shameful experiences. However, bad habits and shame are self-perpetuating: every time the negative habit is given in to it confirms that you've failed yet again, thus deepening the original sense of shame, plus reinforcing the destructive habit.

If you have ever experienced a shortcoming as a child, and have been told that in it you were actually the failure, then hopelessness will be what you come to expect from the future. This is a social thread often seen in struggling communities.

Therefore, ensure that in the family you are rearing that you are not reinforcing a sense of shame into your children. Constant attention to a child's shortcomings creates a sense of defeat and hopelessness. They will begin to make excuses, blame or engage in escapism behaviours to alleviate the negative pressure coming from parent's harsh correction.

A rule of thumb is: address the downfall, but affirm the child. Remember to convey that a 'failure' in behaviour is not a failure into their personhood. In your 'people assembly block' or household, use tools that nurture children's inner heart and self-identity, but do not attack or reject their external 'flaws'.

Need for Approval is the deep-seated belief that you have to be accepted by certain others to feel happy about yourself. It also identifies with the fear of rejection, where if you were to be yourself people would reject 'the real you'. In the hunger for approval you can never relax about your own identity, because the opinions of others mean more to you than who you really are. People can begin to develop a 'fake persona', whereby they adopt a different personality to please whoever is around at the time.

The words that people use to approve or disapprove you become the basis of your identity: 'If you like me, I like me' or 'If you accept me, I accept me'. And of course the opposite applies. It's rather like holding a mirror up in front of your face, so that whatever words others say to you become a reflection of who you are.

Kids will always strive to please their parents. They will do anything to feel love and acceptance from them.

This becomes a problem, though, if the parent withdraws this love and acceptance when the child does something 'wrong'. It sends a message to the child that he/she is only an acceptable person (or is a good person) when their parents say affirming words, and they are a 'bad' person if their parents assess their wrongdoings harshly.

In school, children are vulnerable to giving in to negative or destructive pressures in order to gain acceptance from their peers – due to their hunger to belong. If they experience rejection, it can devastate their self esteem.

Check how you relate to your child; ensure that they know they are always loved and accepted, despite making mistakes or experiencing disapproval. In your people factory (family) keep the cogs of 'Praise, Acceptance and Affirmation' well oiled, and you can be assured of releasing well-adjusted people into society.

Performance Striving is the deep-seated belief that you must achieve at a certain level to feel OK about yourself. This can be identified with the conviction that achieving a certain standard in your life will bring fulfilment, like: constantly having a tidy home, ensuring your kids are always well-behaved, or working hard for a perfect figure. As setbacks are inevitable, this constant striving for high measures will ultimately lead to defeat.

It is a false promise that 'always performing well will increase your self-satisfaction'; it may temporarily meet expectations, but it will never achieve lasting fulfilment, nor sustain self worth.

Unfortunately performance striving can be quite addictive. Sufferers of Chronic Fatigue through to stomach ulcers and angina tend to be people who have overly-high, long term demands on themselves to meet certain expectations.

Children are very vulnerable to the pressures of performance. It is very important that parents foster full acceptance concerning their children's lives. If love comforts your children when they fail to achieve, their self-identity will remain safe.

If your child doesn't reach the high grades, win the races, or achieve the awards, still convey your approval of

their personhood, and don't punish them through disappointment. They will then strive to achieve for the right reasons and be less susceptible to 'burn out' or rebellion later on.

Instinct to Blame is the deep-seated belief that if you fail, you are unworthy of love and deserve punishment. This can be identified with the behaviour of not allowing yourself or others to err.

Some parents correct every behavioural shortcoming of their children, despite how insignificant; or frequently blame their kids for wrong-happenings. Not only does this instil in their child that they are a failure and that every wrong deserves condemning, but it teaches children that personal responsibility can be waylaid to someone else. Is it any wonder we have a society full of litigators.

Listen to the thoughts and feelings that take place within you when something goes 'wrong' – what do you immediately feel and think, and what judgement do you cast?

The belief that 'people who fail deserve to be ridiculed, punished or abandoned' actually conveys 'when you fail you are unworthy of love acceptance and forgiveness'. It explains why children become adults who are fearful to try new things, and blame others for their downfalls.

With your children, ensure that forgiveness comes quickly, let little things slide (as children learn through mistakes) and gently teach natural consequences and personal responsibility for negative behaviours.

Throughout this season – the family season of good cheer, peace and giving – assess how you interact with your family. If you recognise negative belief systems in your life, try not to relate in a similar manner to your children. Go, seek healing from a trained professional and pass on the benefits to your family.

Society can positively change when the people factories (families) producing the members choose to embrace healing and enhance their manufacturing ways. ■

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