

men talk

tcmc
twin cities men's center

in our 33rd year
of public service

Aug/Sep 2009
Volume 33 #4

The Transformative Power of Owning Shame

— © 2009 BY BOB ANDERSON

At the core of the Men's Center anger management program lies the subject of shame. It's a fearsome subject. I remember one guy who hurriedly grabbed his jacket and workbook and exited the room before the check-in got to him the night the topic turned to shame. He apologized the following week, saying he had felt overwhelmed and scared. Till then, he had been one of those guys who rarely disclosed in group, and we facilitators were wondering how to smoke him out, but from that night on he was candid with the other men and committed to the process.

That's the releasing power of owning shame. For all its fearsomeness, the subject speaks to the men like nothing else in the course. It touches a vital nerve near the core of identity that sparks much of their harmful behavior, and somehow they know this and are willing, even grateful, to be challenged to drop some of their defenses and become more real with themselves and each other.

That's not easy for men, conditioned as they are to maintaining the facade of control and invulnerability at all cost. Yet, as they become aware of the shaming messages they've taken on from family and culture, notice the shame-based rules they follow in their own behavior - be in control, be perfect, blame, compare, deny, distort -and count the cost to themselves and those they love, there's an almost palpable sense of relief that comes over the room. They've broken the one rule that maintains the stranglehold of all the rest: don't talk.

I saw this demonstrated yet again in a recent class I co-facilitated at the Men's Center. It was an atypical class: six of the ten guys were court-ordered, some had been in and out of jail and some had felonies pending or on their record, which kept one man from getting work and housing. Yet on that first night the class was totally typical in its denial and refusal to own the problem with anger.

"The other guy started it." "I just stepped in to help someone else out." "I only have issues with this one person." Most blamed their predicament on misunderstanding, bad luck, the system, its bias toward women, anything but themselves. During check-in one guy raised his foot to show off his ankle bracelet, said he was there only because he was ordered, then wise-cracked his way through the rest of the session. I thought to myself, this is going to be a tough class.

Bit by bit more incriminating facts emerged about their altercations: involvement of alcohol, the brutality of their response, a pattern of losing control. That's often the way it is in these classes. Men begin in denial and only gradually assume full responsibility for their behavior - a cardinal principle of anger management and the beginning of real change. I couldn't imagine a group less entitled to the presumption of innocence.

We spent two sessions exploring the escalation process, how to slow it down, manage stress, anticipate triggers, monitor and modify negative self-talk and intervene earlier and earlier in the process. We looked at underlying causes, what gets them hooked in an escalation, how anger is often a

cover for deeper, harder-to-face emotions like shame or grief or fear, or a core hurt from the past, which intensifies its destructive charge.

The most important thing we did, however, was talk, and here these men came into their own. Their shared predicament created an immediate rapport, gritty honesty and willingness to challenge each other. We went deep fast; no hiding, no games, especially regarding shame.

One night a trucker acknowledged how he always felt guilty when he spotted a squad car. "I don't know why, I haven't done anything illegal, and it isn't like I view these guys as enemies. I depend on them for help and safety.

"I know why," another man said. "Because even though this time you haven't done anything wrong, there've been plenty of times in the past when you have, and you've never been caught." A third man chimed in, "We've all done bad stuff, we're all guilty and we know it!" The room erupted in laughter. There followed a discussion of shame, guilt, innocence and moral responsibility, including a reference to *The Shawshank Redemption*, as deep and heartfelt as anything I've ever heard.

In another session on shame, one man who had held himself some-

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DON'T TALK

This is shame-based Rule #8 from the *Men Helping Men with Anger* workbook.

If you are a shame-based person, you are taught that you should never identify and talk openly about shaming, controlling, abusive, irresponsible or compulsive behavior. It also means that you shouldn't talk honestly about what you think, feel or want. This idea of "maintaining the silence" or "keeping the secret" is not based simply on choosing the option of privacy. Rather, it is based on the belief that it is not safe to talk openly about what you see happening around you because it will lead to punishment of some sort and more shame. It is also based on the idea that, in fact, it is hopeless to self-disclose in an honest and open fashion since "it won't do any good anyway." This "don't talk" rule, and the misplaced loyalty it generates, is probably the single most hindering factor in overcoming the harmful effects of shame. Without honest sharing, healing and recovery cannot occur.

* An example of this in an alcoholic family is the "elephant in the living room" (i.e. the alcoholic's drinking and irresponsible behavior) that everyone knows about but that no one is willing to talk about openly and directly.

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Library Corner

– RAY CLARE, LIBRARIAN



We are pleased to offer our members a unique and extensive collection of quality reading on men's topics.

As a Men's Center member, you are eligible to check out books from our library. And while you are enjoying our many book resources, consider a browsing our large and growing selection of periodicals.

- Men's Health
- Lavender
- Transitions
- Men's Journal
- Voice Male
- Fathering Today

Recent books that have been donated include: *Sex Addicts Anonymous*, *How the Homosexuals Saved Civilization*, *Nothing to Lose*, *The Gate House*, *Blind Fall*, *Quicksand*, *The Crush*, and *Protect and Defend*.

Address Change Notifications

from the post office cost the Men's Center \$1.14 each. Please let us know in advance of mailings! Thanks!

Men Talk is a bi-monthly publication of the Twin Cities Men's Center. Call 612-822-5892, or e-mail us at tcmc@tcmc.org
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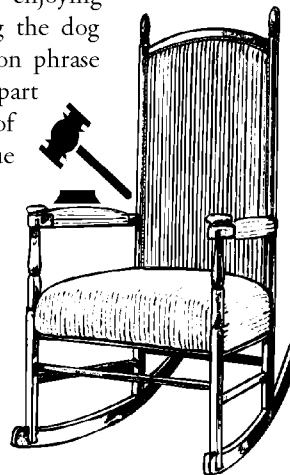
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Greetings from the Chair

Hello, and greetings to all friends and members of TCMC. I hope this newsletter finds you enjoying a little well-earned rest during the dog days of summer. This common phrase for what is typically the hottest part of the year provides a segue of sorts into the theme for this issue of Men Talk in the form of a question: Why do so many men treat themselves worse than they would treat a dog? In other words, why do we often seem locked in a cycle of shame and harsh, self-critical thinking? Bob Anderson's excellent lead article on men and shame discusses the reasons behind and some techniques for addressing male shame. It is worth a careful read by anyone who is a man or knows one -- which should be just about everyone reading this!



In our culture, men are constantly bombarded with messages that discourage the expression of any emotion except anger. Expressing feelings is somehow seen as the exclusive domain of women, and in men, as a sign of weakness. So it's no surprise many

men are reluctant to discuss their feelings and to examine the ways they express their anger.

But while advertising, television, and other popular culture outlets may give us bad advice, it is still each man's decision whether and how to express a particular feeling. If you think about it, nothing is more fundamental to the notion of responsibility.

If you see a little of yourself in Bob's article, think about signing up for an Anger Management class at TCMC. We usually have multiple classes running concurrently on different nights of the week in different locations. If you decide to explore this side of yourself, I think you'll find that, far from weakening you, it will make you a stronger and better-equipped man, able to tackle the challenges that confront all of us in our daily lives.

JOE SZURSEWSKI
BOARD VICE-CHAIR

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what aloof from the group till then, presented what amounted to a brief on his perfectionism and need for control that always left him feeling restless and dissatisfied with himself, no matter how well he had performed. He always gave 110 percent, he said – a lesson learned from his father – yet it was never enough. He wanted a way out of this trap, and his words were about as naked a confession of pain and need as I have ever heard in eleven years of doing these classes.

He had voluntarily taken the class and had previously expressed to one of the other facilitators his misgivings, even resentment, about being in a group with so many court-ordered men, yet it was precisely one of those men – the guy having trouble getting work and housing because of his record – who came to his aid. "What would it mean, what would it look like to you," the man asked, "if you could deliver perfection?" The question floored the guy. It helped him see how thoroughly ingrained and self-defeating his shame-based rules were. In subsequent sessions he returned to that question again and again, and to the man who had raised it, as a touchstone in his struggle to reframe the negative life script that kept sucking him under.

No quick fixes here. We remind the guys that this is life-long work. We give them the tools to keep from spiraling into a shame cycle, exercises to help them confront their inner demons and make peace with their shadow side, techniques to communicate and assert themselves more effectively and resolve conflicts, but the work is theirs to do. As important as these skills are – and they are vital – even more important is what the men give to each other: a safe place to bare their souls and be heard, the knowledge that they are not alone and need each other, and that they have it within themselves to connect across barriers of all kinds, including the gulf that separates men from each other.

Bob Anderson is a long-time member of the Men's Center and facilitator of anger management classes. He has recently published a coming-out memoir, Out of Denial: Piecing Together a Fractured Life, which is available at Magers and Quinn, Micauber's, Amazon and Rainbow Road, and on-line from Lulu.com and Amazon.com.

The Men's Center ALL-PURPOSE FORM

Clip this form and mail to The Men's Center. A regular annual membership at The Twin Cities Men's Center is \$20. With that you get access to the extensive reference library on Men's Issues, receive the Men Talk newsletter, participation in the annual meeting, and enjoy reduced fees to Men's Center sponsored events. If you are able to afford a membership at the Patron (\$40) level, you get free admission to all Wednesday workshops in addition to all the regular membership benefits.

- I want to sustain the activities of The Men's Center by becoming a "20 x 12 Honor Roll Member."
- Please ENTER/RENEW my membership at The Men's Center for the next 12 months:
Enclosed please find \$_____ \$20 (Regular) \$40 (Patron).
- I want to make an additional, tax-deductible gift of \$_____. Thanks much.
- My new/correct address/phone is printed below.
- Please remove me from The Men's Center mailing list; the pre-addressed gummed mailing label is attached.
(You won't receive Men Talk if this box is checked.)

I have these feelings, thoughts, opinions, ideas, news items for The Men's Center:

Date _____ FROM: name _____

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Anger Management Program

The focus of the twelve week anger management class is both education and support. Through class interaction, experiential exercises, lecture, and homework assignments, men will develop new ways to manage their feelings of anger. Following completion of the class, participants can join an ongoing support group to reinforce their new skills. These ongoing support groups will also be facilitated by the trained volunteer facilitators.

Length of Class:

12 consecutive weeks

Number of Participants:

Limited to 12 men per class

Cost: \$215 for TCMC Members (\$225 for Non-Members)

Starting Dates: Classes are filled on a first come, first served basis. Currently two in Hopkins (Tues and Weds), and a new group starting Aug 10 for 12 Mondays in Minneapolis.

Please call TCMC at 612-822-5892 to be placed on the waiting list. State name, address, telephone, preferred starting class. Or if you need further details, call our Anger Management coordinator, John Hesch, on the Anger Management phone 612-229-3102.

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Half Day (4 hrs)	\$25	\$50
Hourly	\$7.50	\$15

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MEN TALK ADVERTISING RATE SCHEDULE

Full Page	7 1/2" x 10"	\$200
1/2 Page	7 1/2" x 4 7/8"	\$125
1/4 Page	3 5/8" x 4 7/8"	\$65
Biz Card	2" x 3 1/2"	\$25

E-mail the editor at tcmc@tcmc.org

THANK YOU!

The Men's Center receives generous donations of baked goods from Wuollet's and Breadsmith Bakeries. You can find them at 25th and Hennepin or 50th and France or online at:



www.wuollet.com
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TMC Office Hours: M, Tu, Th, F ;1-4:30pm. Our telephone (612) 822-5892 is answered 24-hours per day by US West voicemail, and an attempt is made to return calls within 1 or 2 days. Our FAX number is (612) 821-6424.

TMC is in the lower level of "Uptown Office Park," a brick office building on the Northeast corner of West 33rd Street and Hennepin Avenue in south Minneapolis, Enter through the door on the north (3249) end of the building (it has 2 numbers: 3249 and 3255!), immediately turn left and descend the stairway through the fire door to Suite 55. (Formerly) handicapped access is easiest through a side door on West 33rd Street.

Check out our web site: www.tcmc.org or correspond at our e-mail address: tcmc@tcmc.org

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\$1,500 IN PRIZES AWARDED IN TCMC'S PRIDE RAFFLE

BY DON HAUMANT, 2009 PRIDE COORDINATOR

Twenty-one prize winners in the TCMC 2009 Charity Raffle were announced at a drawing held Sunday, June 28th, at the Men's Center booth at the 2009 Pride Festival. Among the prizes were Minnesota Twins tickets, a group membership at the YWCA, several massage sessions and restaurant gift certificates, and free tattooing or body piercing.

Many thanks to the Twin Cities businesses that kindly provided prizes so TCMC could raise donations to support its programs. Donors were as follows: Cafe Maude; Electric Fetus; The Great Metropolitan Back Rub; Jared Gruhl, DC; Hawaii Healing Arts; Minnesota Twins; Page Studios; Cynthia Reuss; Saint Sabrina's; ShopTrustBuy.com; Southside Pride; True Thai Restaurant; UPS Store (28th & Hennepin); and the YWCA of Minneapolis.

TCMC also received much-appreciated financial support from two additional sources: Target Corporation (Albert and Tricia, downtown store; Carrie and Pat, Lake Street store) and ShopTrustBuy.com (Steve Triplett, Jerry Olson).

By all accounts, TCMC's 2009 Pride booth was the most ambitious ever produced. Those individuals who generously contributed their time and efforts were the following: Ed Anderson, Hank Bruns, Ray Clare, Dave Decker, Dave Eckholdt, Kevin Elzia, Randy Genrich, Jeff Haas, Jim Heaney, Nancy Helland, Ed Johnson, Al Jones, Harold Kallio, Patrick Luby, Dick Madigan, Andy Mickel, Gerald Obremski, Michael O'Laughlin, Jerry Olson, Paul Overby, Cynthia Reuss, John Ruud, Bobby Schauerhamer, Ron Stranger Horse, Joe Szurszewski, Mark Thompson, Steve Triplett, Leigh Wahlroos, Tom Weaver, Linda Wray, and the TCMC board of directors.

The Men's Center also acknowledges the kind cooperation of Deanna Alvord and Shari Burt of the Minnesota Department of Corrections for helping to arrange a photo session at one of their facilities. For a complete list of raffle winners, prizes and other info, please contact the TCMC administrative office.

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