

Chapter 1.2 Personal Changes

Several years after I first saw Billy, in 1998, I had a routine physical exam and the doctor felt a nodule in my prostate, which turned out to be cancer. The Gleason score, which is a measure of the degree of malignancy, was high, 8 out of possible 10. I was treated with proton radiation.

Regarding my cancer, I am what is called a biochemical failure. It is presumed there is metastatic cancer somewhere, but it is not large enough to be detected, except through prostate specific antigen (PSA) level. After discovering the cancer, I thought about how much time I had left and how I wanted to spend that time. My father had gone through the Depression era; he had a strong work ethic. With a severe anemia that must have caused extreme weakness, he still worked every day. I thought I would work forever. I had felt that I enjoyed my work, so why should I retire?

When I reevaluated my situation, for the first time I really admitted how dissatisfied I was with my work. The mental health center had to undergo inspections in order to be certified. It seemed as though each inspection resulted in more regulations, which resulted in more pieces of paper that I had to fill out. This involved more and more time, and I had less and less time to talk to clients. I felt literally that the tedium of my work and the lack of job satisfaction were killing me. I retired from doing medical management in November, 2002; however I continue to do psychotherapy. Since mid-nineteen eighty, I had been utilizing many aspects of Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP) with psychotherapy clients. My part time schedule allowed me the time to study and train more intensively in NLP.

I became fascinated with how much success I achieved in doing therapy. This motivated me to seek more training.

I was able to utilize many of the techniques personally including the procedure for eliminating allergies. My wife followed the allergy-cure protocol with me, which was completely successful in eliminating my cat allergy.

Robert Dilts, Suzi Smith and Tim Holbroom explain the procedure in the book *Beliefs* (1990). In the book the authors talk about how they have worked with the immune system in a variety of illnesses including cancer.

In July, 2004, I went to receive therapy from Suzi Smith, who has done a lot of study regarding the immune system and cancer. One of the NLP pre-suppositions is that any part of you, even a part that produces an illness like cancer, has a positive intent. Because of the cancer, I had already reevaluated my life and had begun doing therapy, which I really enjoy. Every person is different and is a new challenge.

In working with Suzi Smith, I decided that my cancer remission depended on a re-mission: to have a mission in my life; to have a new mission; to have a remission. Doing therapy and doing this writing are part of my remission.

I want to maximize the time I have left. In our culture, we tend to equate happiness with what one wants in life. It is rather hard to decide how to go about being happy. I have changed my thinking due to reading Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. He did research in which he had people carry beepers, and when beeped they were to record what they were doing and to rate the quality of the experience. The highest rating was given to the experience of flow. In his book *Finding Flow* he says, "These exceptional moments are what I have called flow experiences. The metaphor of flow is one that many people have used to describe the sense of effortless action they feel in moments that stand out as the best in their lives. Athletes refer to it as 'being in the zone'; religious mystics as being in 'ecstasy'; artists and musicians as 'aesthetic rapture'." Flow tends to occur when a person faces a clear set of goals that require appropriate responses and provide immediate feedback. Flow occurs when a person's skills are fully involved in overcoming a challenge that is just manageable.

Csikszentmihalyi said (page 31), "When goals are clear, feedback relevant, and challenges and skills are in balance, attention becomes ordered and fully invested. Because of the total demand on psychic energy, a person in flow is completely focused. There is no space in consciousness for distracting thoughts or irrelevant feeling. Self-consciousness disappears, yet one feels stronger than usual. The sense of time is distorted; hours seem to pass by in minutes. When a person's entire being is stretched in the full functioning of body and mind, whatever one does becomes worth doing for its own sake; "living becomes its own justification."

In doing therapy, I satisfy all the requirements for the flow experience. Each person is different; indeed each problem that a person presents is different. I feel that each therapy session is a series of challenges. What does the person want and what keeps him or her from getting it? Is this problem part of a life-long pattern? What questions can I ask to figure out how this person is programmed to produce the problematic state? The challenge is to intervene and create a more useful program to replace the old one. Often the most intriguing aspect is dealing with objections that the person has to making changes.

When I started seeing Billy, I had partially retired and I did therapy because I enjoyed it. I was able to work without time constraints; this enabled me to be patient and thorough. I took notes during and after each session. The notes were to organize my thinking and to plan what to do in the next session. Finding flow required me to prepare myself to meet the challenge each session presented. I wanted to treat Billy for several reasons. I had seen him before and did not feel that I had helped him that much. He had been able to work some when I first saw him and was not able to when I had last seen him. He was willing take risks in order to change. Since I had last seen him, I had acquired

new skills, particularly in NLP therapy, and believed I could meet the challenge his longstanding symptoms presented.

I would like to digress from Billy's therapy to talk about what I do to maximize flow in my life and to give suggestions to the reader. Finding flow involves positive action and planning. Sports and games are ways of creating a challenge, which require utilizing all your skills, and require your total concentration in order to meet the challenge. However, even mundane chores can be made into a challenge. I want to weed eat as fast as possible while still doing a thorough job. When mowing the lawn, I want to find the most efficient route with the fewest U-turns.

Csikszentmihalyi talks about the rewards of a good conversation. He said "The first step is to find out what the other person's goals are: what is he interested in at the moment? What is she involved in? What has he or she accomplished, or is trying to accomplish? If any of this sounds worth pursuing, the next step is to utilize one's own experience or expertise on the topics raised by the other person----without trying to take over the conversation, but developing it jointly. A good conversation is like a jam session in jazz, where one starts with conventional elements and then introduces spontaneous variations that create an exciting new composition."

In summary, in leisure as well as work, a person has a higher quality of life by being active and creative rather than passive.