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## Using Pop Culture to Impact Positive Change

by Chris Boyd, M.A., R.C.C.

Seven years ago, a colleague and I attended an annual conference in Washington, DC called the Psychotherapy Networker Symposium. We were excited about meeting one of the key note speakers, John Gottman, a marriage and relationship researcher and expert whom we learned about while in grad school. We kept seeing a man of similar stature walking through the hallways of the hotel but were disappointed each time to realize that he wasn't John. Upon arriving home and looking at the conference Facebook page, we discovered that the guy who reminded us of John Gottman was actually Steven Spielberg! We had been so fixated on meeting a certain psychologist (whom most people have never heard of) that we failed to recognize and have an opportunity to meet one of the top directors of our time!

I was curious to know why Steven was at a psychology conference. In my research, I read that his films have an element of psychological sophistication to them. Through cinema, Steven often incorporates challenges he has faced in his life, such as parent-child discord, parents who are reluctant or absent, and bullying. Although they depict such challenges, his films are designed to be optimistic overall and usually have a childlike sense of wonder and hope to them. Steven, along with many other directors, writers, producers, game makers, etc., design their artistic craft to appeal to a person's psyche, by making it relatable, exciting and moving. If we too can find a way to utilize the powerful imagery, stories, metaphors, messages, and icons of pop culture, we will access a plethora of resources for growth, change, and healing.

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## New Possibility: Executive Coaching

by Simon Hearn, Ph.D., R.Psych.

Having trained in and practiced psychotherapy for 35 years, I have decided to apply my skills in a new arena. I have been undergoing training through the College of Executive Coaching, based in California, toward becoming a certified Business/Executive Coach.

Business or Executive Coaching differs from psychotherapy, in that it addresses career issues in the present and future, and doesn't treat emotional symptoms such as depression, anxiety, or trauma. Business Coaching also is different from Life Coaching, in that it is primarily about flourishing in the workplace.

Work is such a big part of our lives, and we want to be happy in what we do. Coaching is about helping you make your mark career wise, while still leaving space to enjoy satisfying personal relationships and to breathe.

In 2001, the Manchester Consulting Group conducted a study designed to examine the effects executive coaching had on an organization's profit and loss. Regarding overall satisfaction with the coaching process, 86% of executives and 74% of stakeholders reported being "very satisfied" or "extremely satisfied."

Coaching may be about sorting out your goals, and basing your work life on your most precious personal values. An initial interview question might be: If you could take one step today toward your envisioned future, what would be most meaningful?

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My intention is not to encourage more screen time, as it is my opinion that kids have way too much of that already. But pop culture, if we like it or not, is very appealing to children and teens. The goal is to meet them where they are and to use pop culture to assist in creating a more balanced routine and ultimately cut down on the amount of screen time moving forward. In this article, we will explore how I have used pop culture while working with children/ teens: to help develop and enhance the relationship, to gather information, and (in part 2 of the article) to help facilitate positive change in their lives.

### **Developing and enhancing the relationship**

Finding common ground or a shared interest with a child/teen makes creating a safe and comforting environment significantly easier. Asking a child or teen about his or her favorite show, band, videogame, and/or sports team can generate dialogue. If you know what they are actually talking about it can lead to a more engaging discussion. I started playing Minecraft because that's what most of my younger clients were playing (to be honest I still play it every few days and find it rather relaxing). My knowledge of that game has paid dividends for connecting with kids. But even if you don't know what the child/teen is referring to, it's important to have a genuine curiosity in what he or she is saying and be willing to explore the different areas of interest. Even if you don't enjoy it or agree with it, we need to be interested in pop culture because our children and teenagers are interested in it and we are interested in them. (Note: I am not advising that you should explore any aspects of pop culture that are morally offensive to you.)

### **Gathering information**

Working with children and teenagers involves a relentless pursuit to uncover positive traits and indicators of resiliency. Once you know what shows, games and songs the child/teen is interested in and have explored them yourself, go more in-depth by learning about their perception of them. What do the pop culture preferences say about them? I typically do a value clarification exercise with my clients. Our values need to be our compass for navigating through difficult situations; if we foster our values we feel good, if we contradict them then we can feel bad.

If a client is unsure what values are most important to them, I often explore what their favourite Netflix shows are. I once saw a teen who was referred to me due to intense behavioural issues and he was on the verge of being kicked out of school. During our intake session I learned that he was a big fan of the Walking Dead. I was thrilled to find out that his favourite character was Daryl (who is loyal, caring, reliable, tough and calm) and his least favourite character was Nicolas (who is two sided, cowardly, and self-centred). His preferences told me about the values and traits he has, aspires to have, or at the very least, respects.

The questions you can ask are endless! Ask about what they like or don't like about the plot or storyline. Empower them to think critically; it's an important life enhancing skill that is often under utilized in our childhood and youth. If they are playing a video game, focus on how they play the game; the skills that are entailed to be successful in the game can be transferred to life's challenges.

In part 2, we will explore practical ways in which I've used pop culture to facilitate positive change in the lives of the children and teenagers I work with. Stay tuned!

The coach might ask you to talk about a time in your life when you were very energized, hopeful, and excited. What was going on, who was involved, and what was it that made you feel so enriched by that experience? "Would you enjoy it if we could bring something like that type of energy and satisfaction again through our coaching work together?"

A coach gives intensive support for developing and achieving career targets. The process may also examine work relationships, Team or corporate organizational problems. Coaching may help you challenge "self-derailing" work behaviours.

Typically, the process starts with some assessment procedures, which could involve personality testing, and explorations of values, strengths and weaknesses. A coach may liaison with your company's Human Resources, your boss, and/or coworkers to help you advance.

## **Business Coaching is .... primarily about flourishing in the workplace.**

Your coach can be an accountability partner, helping you stick to and manage your targets. He may assist with strategies for coping with competitiveness, favouritism and other "office politics" problems; or address fears around confidence, confronting negative evaluations.

A coach can be a trustworthy confidante, sounding board, advisor and thought partner. She may at times be a *counsellor who lets you vent your feelings, and provides emotional support; a cheerleader and reinforcer, who expresses confidence in your current abilities, and encourages your ability to learn and grow; she can be a mentor, who provides long-term support and guidance.*

A coach may also be an educator and a resource provider, can help you develop Your Own Board of Directors, and may steer you to useful books and resources, such as *Who's Got Your Back*, by Keith Ferrazzi.

**Other issues coaching might look at:** What do I need to unlearn? What new information and knowledge do I need? How can I become more competent? How can I invest my values in leadership roles? What are my best learning environments? Who are my best teachers and mentors? (Hudson and Mclean, *Lifelaunch*, 1995).

If any of these questions are of interest to you, or to someone you know, please contact Denis Boyd & Associates at 604-931-7211 to book a coaching session.

## **Upcoming Workshops**

### **Girls Issues**

Date: April 19, 2017

Location: St. Thomas More Collegiate, Burnaby

### **Stress, Marriage & Rock 'n Roll (Faith & Family)**

Date: April 20, 2017

Location: All Saints Parish, Coquitlam

Pre-registration is required by calling 604-931-7211.





# Nature Is Good For Us

by Alivia Maric, Ph.D., R.Psych.

How fortunate we are to live in a rainforest! Even as I'm sitting at my computer, looking out the window at snow, sleet and grey skies, I'm grateful. Not for the grey skies, but for the trees surrounding us and a climate that allows us to get outside and be active year round.

Regular physical activity is important at all ages, but as we grow older being active becomes increasingly important. There is a significant and growing body of research showing that physical activity is beneficial in many ways. Exercise gives us energy and strength, increases metabolism and reduces the risk of chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease. It reduces bone loss. Research is also showing that regular physical activity can improve brain functioning too and may protect against dementia in later life.

Regular physical activity has psychological benefits too. It lifts our mood, reduces stress and decreases anxiety. People with mild to moderate depression derive significant benefit from regular physical activity. Our sleep improves; our ability to cope with stress (resilience) improves. We gain a sense of self-satisfaction and confidence when we are fit and strong. We can achieve a better balance between work and relaxation. If our work involves lots of thinking, computer work, and sitting at desks, it's especially important to make time for physical activity.

But does all that research about the physical, cognitive and psychological benefits of exercise motivate me to go to the gym, to sweat, lift weights, run on a treadmill, or pound the pavement? Well, not really. What does get me motivated to move is the opportunity to be in nature, among trees. Several times a week, I hike or run the trails in the mountains or parks. No music or counting kilometres to distract me, just moving. And looking, listening, smelling, sensing. It's meditative, it's relaxing, it's stress busting. On sunny days, the rays of light shining through trees trunks and the green glow of the tree canopy are magical. On rainy days, moss covered rocks glow brilliant lime green while decaying cedar trees on the paths glow in red orange contrast. The sounds of birds are captivating. On windy days, the trees squeak!

I recently came across some research showing that being in nature is good for us whether we run, hike or walk. While walking in nature may not give us cardiovascular fitness, it does provide some important benefits, just like we get when engaging in more intense activity. Studies are being conducted, especially in Japan and South Korea, in which people walk quietly in the forest. This activity has been given the name shinrin-yoku ("nature bathing") or Forest Therapy and it's being touted as the latest fitness trend. Shinrin-yoku means taking in nature, using the five senses: seeing, hearing, sensing, smelling, tasting. (Please note: tasting doesn't mean nibbling on unknown plants, which may or may not be poisonous!). At it's simplest, forest therapy involves quietly walking and attending to the environment around us rather than thinking about other things such as that work project or the week's schedule waiting to be sorted out. It doesn't include listening to music, checking emails or talking on the phone. Being in nature in this contemplative way is showing benefits such as reduced blood pressure, relief from depression and anxiety, improved cognition and reduced stress.

Walking quietly in nature gives our brains a rest. This can be vital to our well being when we consider how much time we spend on our devices and computers, working, checking social media, texting, playing games and so on, and sometimes all at the same times. Our brains are stimulated throughout the day. And our busier lives require more planning, organizing, scheduling and problem solving. How refreshing to put away the phone, turn off

**Walking quietly in nature gives our brains a rest.**

the pings and buzzes alerting us to incoming messages, to stop multitasking for an hour or so to just walk, breathe, look, listen, notice. This is what one

researcher refers to as "soft fascination".

Soft fascination requires that we feel safe and relaxed. For example, if I'm walking near a cliff edge my brain is on high alert. I can't engage in soft fascination. But walking on a well travelled trail that's familiar, with no cliff edges in sight, I can attain that sense of quiet interest in my surroundings. It's restorative and rejuvenating. I come away from the forest happier, calmer and more grounded.

Here's some more good news. If you're unable to get to the woods, or have mobility issues, it turns out that looking at images of nature can provide stress relieving benefits too. So, whether



# Get More Out of Life

by Tena Colton

Do you want more out of life, something different, a new way of doing things and yet you do not have a clear idea of how to bring this about? Perhaps you have tried everything you can think of but things are not improving. You may be feeling overwhelmed by the events in your life. You may have experienced a catastrophe, loss or trauma (recent or buried in the past) and your coping skills have been stretched to the limit.

Have you considered speaking to a counsellor? It's a way of building on assets you already possess. Courage, openness, clearly defined goals, accepting personal responsibility, hope, belief that things can change and a support system are some of the assets that a client can bring to counselling or learn during the counselling process.

It takes a great deal of courage to approach a stranger and ask for help. It takes courage to try new strategies and courage to be willing to make mistakes, evaluate what has happened, make adjustments and move on. It takes openness to discuss problems; listen to new ideas; try new behaviours; think about yourself and your life in new ways.

Knowing where you want to go is an important part of ensuring your arrival. You may start off with general goals such as wanting more out of life, wanting someone to change, wanting to be happy, wanting to be a better parent or wanting a better marriage; perhaps you may not have any goals in mind at all. Your counsellor will ask you questions that will help you understand how you will be behaving and thinking differently when you reach your goals. When you begin with the end result clearly stated and understood, the way to move forward becomes clearer and helps ensure that the results of counselling are what you really want.

In order to effect changes in your life, it is necessary to accept personal responsibility for bringing about those changes. When you wait for circumstances or another person to change, you adopt a "victim" stance. Accepting personal responsibility for discovering how you can change your life and implementing those discoveries removes you from a "victim" stance to a stance which is proactive and empowered.

When life is tough, hope helps you believe that somewhere there are answers that will stop the pain and help them obtain the life you desire. You may believe that it is only desperation that drives you to seek help, Yet, the fact that you are considering reaching out speaks to the fact that you have not given up, that you are still willing to try at least one more thing.

**It takes a great deal of courage to approach a stranger and ask for help.**

Belief, like hope, can be faint when you approach your first session. As counselling progresses, you will develop the belief that you will be able to effectively use their newly obtained knowledge to bring about the changes you desire.

Lack of a support system can be a major drawback to success. Counselling will provide support and can be the first step in building a strong support system. Belonging to a support group helps you begin to lose their sense of isolation. It can be a great encouragement to realize that others share the same burden, but survive and move on in life. Belonging to a

church, athletic association, social group, or volunteer organization can also provide support. I usually discourage the use of the internet for finding support. There are just too many pitfalls and landmines!

Counselling helps you to modify behaviours and attitudes, find solutions, develop skills, and access your inner resources in order to move toward your chosen goals. If you believe the therapist understands your problems and has the skills to help, and you are ready to build on your personal resources, counselling will probably have a successful outcome.

*This article originally appeared in our PsychHealth newsletter, Winter2007 issue.*

## Our beloved colleague, Tena Colton, died on February 23, 2017.

Tena was a model of courage and perseverance as she dealt with the ongoing effects of cancer for the past nine years. She was wise, compassionate and intuitive in assisting her clients to deal with their personal challenges. Thank you, Tena, from all of us. We miss you!



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