Looking Ahead to Recovery Month

By Barbara Nicholson-Brown

While National Recovery Month is six months away, west the Art of Recovery Expo is excited to announce our 7th Annual event on Saturday, September 30, at the Phoenix Convention Center. As always the Expo is FREE to the public. Joining us this year is nationally recognized author John Bradshaw and NFL Football legend Herschel Walker.

For the past four decades, John, has combined his exceptional skills as the rule of counselor, author, management consultant, theologian, philosopher, and public speaker, becoming one of the leading figures in the fields of addiction/recovery, family systems, relationships, spiritual and emotional growth. He currently leads workshops around the country, and is a Senior Fellow at The Meadows treatment program in Wickenburg, Arizona. John has written three New York Times best-selling books: Homelessness: Reclaiming and Cherishing Your Inner Child, Creating Love, and Healing the Shame That Binds You. A much sought-out speaker, John has truly touched and transformed the lives of millions.

At the University of Georgia, Walker set an NCAA Freshman rushing record and helped capture the national collegiate football title. He earned consensus All-American honors three consecutive years, set 10 NCAA records, 15 Southeast Conference records, 30

Some Reflections on

By Jeffrey C. Freedman, MHS, LISAC

Psychology is an area of philosophical inquiry dating back to the civilizations of ancient Greece and Egypt. But in over two thousand years of psychological research, what seems to have most successfully resulted is organized investigation is any definition of the qualities of sanity — that which makes for soundness, rationality and healthiness of mind. For as long as the human psyche has been studied, psychologists have largely focused their energies mainly on cataloging, analyzing and generally finding out the myriad ways in which a person can be psychologically ill. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders of the American Psychiatric Association Fourth Edition — Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR), the standard reference for psychiatric diagnosis describes in clinical detail over 400 distinct syndromes of psychopathology. But when one searches the DSM or the even greater body of psychological literature for any unified theoretical or clinical description of the qualities of sanity, they will find little.

For readers of Together AZ, an essay on the characteristics of sanity may be of some interest since the readership of this publication are people engaged in the process of recovery — an ongoing and proactive passage from incarceration suffering to more optimal mental and behavioral health.

What is recovery but a journey to greater sanity?

But the sad fact is that many of the people on this journey are likely to be more familiar with the qualities of insanity than with those of sanity. At some point, we who dedicate our energies to improving our mental and emotional health might be wise to realize that if we would even recognize sanity if it came our way.

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Jeffrey C. Freedman, MHS, LISAC is a primary therapist at Cottonwood Tucson, a 30-bed inpatient behavioral health treatment center based in Tucson, AZ. He is a summa cum laude graduate of The School of Human Services of Lincoln University (PA), Jeffrey’s research at Cottonwood includes treating chemically dependent and disordered populations, focusing on the neuropsychology of addictive and mood disorders, and presenting on the rise of behavioral health issues as a concern to conferences throughout the United States, Europe, and Asia. His articles have appeared in Together AZ, Counselor Magazine and Addiction Professional.

But recognizing sanity is not as easy as it might at first seem. Ideas on sanity will differ from person to person. These differences are the natural result of our own personal struggles and unique life experiences. This is not only as it should be, but it is only can be. We would be the impoverished if we reasoned on the discussion of the qualities of sanity, I think, have served at least some good purpose.

So this is an article that will dwell more in the question of what is sanity? than in the answer. It is meant to be an inquiry into, rather than a definitive or comprehensive description of, the qualities of sanity.

But readers must be warned. Distilling the constituents of sanity is a process that contains several moving parts and is one that is constrained in several ways. Because of the lack of psychological research on the subject, there is little broadly accepted theory on what exactly constitutes sanity. Even societal and cultural norms appear to be of little help here. In his book, A Sanity Source, psychologist Erich Fromm pointed out, “The fact that millions of people share the same views does not make those views virtuous — and the fact that millions of people share the same form of insanity does not make those people sane.” We all seem to possess a mix of both sane and insane qualities, with the elements of sanity and insanity, like those of joy and sadness, may exist only in relation to one another. Artinian recognized this when he wrote: “No excellent soul is exempt from a mixture of madness.

One way to approach the task of describing the qualities of sanity is to start with a model of an ‘ideal person’ and work backwards. Dr. Dan Siegel, a Harvard-trained neuropsychiatrist and author of The Mindful Brain, offers a simple model for insanity, which he describes as ‘either rigidity or chaos.’ When Dr. Siegel uses this paradigm in his conference presentations, he uses the fingers of his hands and holds them a couple of feet apart, a line and sets his finger back. Dr. Siegel says that for anyone for whom the premise really feels right. Any finger that gives way or gives up may itself be a clue to the way. Many psychologists believe that all human beings have in innate attraction to what they instinctively experience as ‘safe.’ People seem to sense the inherenthealth in others. If it is this that a journey to sanity might be taken in the company of treated others — especially if those others are also trying to improve their own emotional well-being.

This premise can be turned into an exercise. Find a person you admire and experience as a particularly sane person (a personal hero, perhaps). Make a list of the personal qualities in that person that you most admire. This list might be the beginning of your personal template of sanity.

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