



It's Good to Talk!

Dear

I didn't realise it at the time, but in the months leading up to my burnout in 2006, I had really shut myself off from my wife Jules. I would come home from work, eat my meal without saying much. Getting conversation out of me had become like trying to get blood out of a stone. Then I would disappear to a meeting or into my study to work on something or anything. Jules could see what was happening and from time to time she would gently try to say something, try to get me to talk. I wasn't ready to. At that time, I didn't know how to.

My habit of withdrawal

Looking back, there had always been a pattern of me going quiet when things weren't going well inside my head. If I felt criticised or judged, or if things felt difficult at work or at home, or if Jules and I had a difference of opinion (we've never really argued)... I would withdraw.

Sometimes I just went quiet. Sometimes I physically withdrew. I would withdraw to figure things out in my head and once I had figured them out or felt better, I would emerge from my cocoon. This could last for days and as my burnout got closer things got worse. My withdrawals happened more often and lasted for longer. Days of me being quiet became weeks and months. My solution was to bury myself in anything that didn't require me to talk about what was going on in my head.

Turns out that wasn't sustainable. It was very difficult for Jules. It was also seriously impacting me and my effectiveness in work and many other areas of my life ... but I didn't know that until later.

Talking made me feel better

One of the things that became clear soon after I started therapy was that I needed to learn to talk about what was going on in my head. Every time I spoke to my therapist Jim, I felt better. I started to reason that if I felt better when I talked with Jim, maybe the same would apply if I started talking with Jules when things weren't going well in my head.

Starting to talk about what was going on in my head didn't just help me, it helped Jules because she wasn't spending as much time wondering what was wrong with me and the result of this ... our marriage got better because we felt more connected and closer.

It took time but over the next couple of years I learned to talk sooner about what was going on in my head. Instead of me bottling things up for weeks, that reduced to days and eventually hours.

It wasn't that talking necessarily solved my problems. But talking about how I felt always, always made me feel different or better. I started to see that speaking about a problem out loud often allowed me to see that my thinking about what was going on for me was not helping. Seeing that often helped me to connect to new or better or helpful

thinking about the same problem. What I didn't know back then was that my problems were always being created by my thinking about my circumstances and not the actual circumstances. More about that in future editions.

My operating system upgrade

What I knew for sure was that my operating system was getting an upgrade and that was changing me, changing how I communicated, changing how I felt. I was spending less time in my head figuring things out and more time in connection with Jules. That was good for me, it was good for us, and it was good for our kids.

Even as I write this, I know the lesson I got from all of this has stuck. Just yesterday, something happened that led me to feel pretty frustrated. I was quiet over our meal last night and then we took the dogs for a walk. On the way to the park Jules asked me if something was wrong. I said 'Yes, but I don't want to talk about it.' ... I caught myself and by the time we got to the park two minutes later, I was talking about it, and already feeling better. More importantly I was feeling connected with and closer to Jules and that is always a win.

It really is good to talk.

Have a great weekend!



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