Overcoming Adversity

One of the things I have been asked is how I got involved in counseling. The answer is a bit long-winded, but I think it may give a little insight into my approach to treatment in working with clients. So here goes…

Many years ago, I decided that I wanted to be a police officer. Ultimately, I was able to find a department that hired me and after a bumpy start learning that career, I settled in to what I expected to be a long career. Unfortunately, that career path was altered 11 years in when I had an occasion to be on a traffic stop with an individual who was, putting it nicely, unstable.

The end result of that stop was that I was seriously wounded in the resulting gunfight. From that situation, I began to notice many unexpected things as I tried to reclaim my old life. To begin with there were significant injuries that made my return to law enforcement uncertain, and I had to learn to adapt to those changes in my appearance and ability to function. My mood, not surprisingly, grew darker and I pulled away from many of the people I used to spend time with. Panic attacks and anxiety were now a part of my daily life and affected my motivation to leave my home. On top of that, I was often angry for no clear reason. There was not a lot going right for me at that point.

One thing I did have was an inherent sense of curiosity, which led me to ask questions about why these things were happening. Things like why my mind seized on some aspects of the traumatic event but omitted others; why friends and peers behaved the way they did; where the anxiety and panic attacks were coming from; and what was the source of the anger.

While the internet gave me some ideas on the answers, it was not enough. A return to school seemed to be the best option for me, really on two fronts: First, it would help prepare me for a new career if I could not return to my police job, and second it would hopefully answer some of my questions. Eight years later, I earned my PhD in clinical psychology, and along the way I learned a lot about my earlier questions. I was also able to fill in the gaps with my EMDR training, which provided insight into why not everyone exposed to a traumatic event is traumatized by it and learn how the brain makes links to certain events and how to work through those negative thoughts.

I did get to return to the police job for a few more years, which was important for me in terms of having a sense of closure. Along the way, however, I realized that I could help more people who were likewise struggling to deal with things by fully investing myself in the psychology career. The losses and struggles I endured on my road to recovery allow me to understand a little more what my clients are going through. While we may all experience things differently, I think it is important to have a basic understanding of what it takes to overcome adversity and reclaim a sense of self.

If you read through to the end, I hope it was of some help.