

Awareness Alone May Not Guarantee The Change You Seek

As an ARC therapist there have been many times when the new client confesses his sins. He may admit to me in shame and vulnerability, "I am an angry person," or, "I am always scared." To this admission I may reply, "So there is a part of you who is angry," or in the case of the other example, "A part of you is scared then." I wait for him to digest this. If he takes it in, if he hears and accepts my response there may be a sigh of relief. The relief is a re-identification occurring for this client. It may be that he has always seen himself as angry person. Maybe people have described him as the angry boy, man or woman all of his life. To have someone offer a different perspective to this can be liberating. This may be the first time that this person is willing to consider that he may be somebody more than an angry or a scared person, that this is just a part of who he is that perhaps becomes dominant, maybe inappropriately so from time to time.

Seeing himself in this way, that a part of himself is angry creates a witness state. If there is a part of this person who becomes overly angry then in the creation of the part there has to be another part of him who is now able to witness himself getting angry or afraid, and to potentially address, attend to it or put a stop to it especially if the behaviour is inappropriate.

From the very first ARC class you are encouraged to see yourself as the composite of many parts. We identify every behaviour, emotion or method of coping as an individual part of you. Thus my old pull to work too much becomes a part of me who copes by having me work excessively. There may be another part who chooses to have me watch television excessively in times when I feel lonely. Or another who advises me to sit and be still if I feel overwhelmed. Not all of these behavioural parts are negative forces. A part can be ascribed to any positive or not-so-positive behaviour.

The key word in describing your part is "who." Inserting "who" personalizes my parts. It makes them human and changes my perception of them and maybe my relationship with them.

When I was in my twenties I hated the fact that I smoked. It was a health impediment and a social annoyance. Although at that time I didn't have the consciousness to observe my self from the self-perception I am describing here, if I had have attached a part to smoking, I would have been very angry at the part who was making the choice to cope by smoking. For while I convinced myself that I needed to smoke for relaxation the reality was it was seriously affecting my health causing severe lung and chest complaints. And although I kept choosing to quit, the part who was choosing to smoke seemed to take an opposite stance and stubbornly insist on continuing doing so. Had I viewed smoking as a part

who was making choices for me I know I would have had a more understanding and maybe compassionate relationship with the part that chose to have me smoke as a way of coping with certain elements of my life. I may not agree with its choice, but to understand, see and observe its behaviour gives me more potential to negotiate with it and maybe challenge its choices it is making on my behalf. To possess this level of self-objectivity, to have a witness state allows me to respond to the part rather than react in anger to it. Since the anger is self-directed and the smoking part is a member of my inner-family, the anger is inevitably towards myself.

Reaction and response are two opposite ways of dealing with a situation. A reaction is an immediate response. It is adrenal initiated. Our adrenal glands are instrumental in our fight or flight response. If there were danger, I would want to react to it. Response is the ability to step back and consider the options. While the reactivity cares not about time, response will take the time out to understand, consider the options for change and if necessary negotiate with the forces that may be holding the system back. Response will respond instantly or even aggressively if necessary. However, response prefers the negotiated solution of one is possible.

When we view ourselves as a system of parts we generally find that we are not in command of our lives. We may discover internal programs set in place a long time ago, usually in our childhood, and that these programs are still fully functional. If I become stressed in my job, a part of me may decide the best way to cope with this is to have a tantrum and get moody and angry with all who live with me – just like my caregiver did when I was young. I may not be comfortable with talking with my wife because we didn't talk at home as a family. So let's say my wife wants to have an intimate conversation. In reaction, a part of me takes over and has me make the excuse that the conversation will have to wait until after this next phase of work is over. Maybe, when I was a baby I was left in the crib for extended periods of time. I cried because I was lonely. When I cried my parents fed me instead of picking me up and holding me. So now when I come home from the office, I feel that familiar emptiness inside. To cope with this inner feeling of loneliness a part rises up and has me eat junk food, because that is how it originally learned to cope.

There are a few commonalities for these old coping parts, the main one being that they make choices for us from events and sometimes traumas that have occurred many years ago. Invariably they don't trust any new ideas and if they have their own ways, will continue to have us cope in old styles. They are therefore limiting. And if sometimes you feel you are being held back in life, or you are bored with your job or you are not living your passion it is likely because there is a regiment of parts that are invested in keeping you "safe".

How to move beyond our inner limitations is something The ARC Institute has a lot to say about. If there is an underlying theme to all of our classes it is to move

beyond our limitations and experience freedom and fullness in our lives. However, if there are two initial recommendations to give within the limitations of this article they would be to become consciously aware and to respond.

As soon as we become conscious or aware of the behavioural part that limits us the power of that behaviour is reduced. If I know every time I feel afraid a part of me wants to eat junk food or when my wife wishes us to be intimate a part of me suggests I get out of the house and exercise, there exists the potential of, in these examples, becoming less afraid or to invite intimacy into my life. However, it is only potential. Awareness does not necessarily guarantee change. You have to act on the awareness. How do we act? One way is to respond to the part that is distracting us. In the above examples the part who is distracting me away from coping with my fear is the part who eats. Similarly, the part who distracts from greater intimacy is the part who wants to exercise.

So I get the chips out, the glass is filled with diet coke, the box of chocolates are open and ready to go...and then I remember when I eat this way I usually feel lonely. I stop. I check inside and sure enough there is that familiar empty feeling inside the solar plexus. It may be there because my friends at work all had something going on and couldn't go out with me tonight. I decide to approach this in a different way. I bring my awareness inside. I ask myself where might the part who wants me to eat this junk food live inside. I don't know for sure but I have a sense it may be in the pelvis area. I decide to respond to the part. I say to the part in my pelvis," I know you are helping me to feel less lonely but it never fully works. It distracts me away from the feeling for a while. I thank you for your assistance, but I am going to take charge here. I am going to cope with this in a different way. I am going to get out a recipe and cook a good, healthy, nutritious meal and then I am going to call the good friend I haven't spoken to for years and have a chat with him and then figure some other things to do in those times when I feel that empty feeling."

My wife tells me she would like to go out to dinner on Thursday. I find myself hugely tempted to respond to her in the usual way, "I have a basket ball practice that night." I have basket ball practices or games four nights every week. The other nights I have to work late. I resist the temptation to say it. Instead I acknowledge a fear inside me at the thought of talking with her in an intimate setting. I suddenly flash on the fact that I have never really talked to any woman for any length of time on a one-to-one basis. I remember learning about this part who impels me to exercise in my last ARC session. I recall the practitioner telling me you don't have to give up exercise here, just assess why you are exercising before you do. If you see it as an escape from intimacy respond to the part who is advising you to cope in this way. I pat my stomach. I know from my session the resistive part lives there. In that I pat I convey to the part I hear it, but I am choosing to do this different this time. I tell my wife I have a basketball practice that night. I see the beginnings of her anger. But then I tell her, "I don't need to go. Let's go out to dinner."

Yes, become aware. Learn how we may be limiting ourselves in our relationships, our careers in our goals. But if we are holding back from doing anything about this our awareness may have become our resistance. Respond. By personifying our resistant behaviours into resistant parts we can respond to these choices being made for us. This moves us into the realm of taking charge of our lives. How we wish to live our lives for who we are today and who we wish to become. It may mean us growing up and moving from how we operated as children in grown up bodies to adults willing to own our lives. A healthy question to ask ourselves is, do I really want to grow up?