

Anxiety over Trying to Balance Work and Family

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In what follows, I present the dialog I had with my client:

I: Anything you want to address today?

S: I work all the time; my life and work are very stressful. My coworkers all leave our company after about one and a half years. We can't keep good workers.

I: What challenges is this creating for you?

S: We have employees but no team. We have a lot of work to do, and I can't just let it go. I am responsible for everything, because I am the supervisor. My husband thinks I don't pay attention to our family life. I haven't built a team yet. I feel so tired. That's the situation. If I have no team to help me then I have to spend lots of time on my job. My husband handles all the chores. I have to deal with all these things at work, including extra work and extra things. It's a vicious circle.

I: Let's write down what you said, OK? [Writes the following on the board]

Rule: If I don't have a team then I can't balance my job and my family.

Report (real situation): I don't have a team.

Conclusion: I can't handle my career and my family situation.

I: What is the real situation?

S: I have some co-workers, but no team.

I: Would you read your own description on the board?

S: (Reads it once) A little irrational.

I: Which part?

S: That it's just because I don't have a TEAM. That's strange...

I: Is there anything you can handle without a team?

S: Yes, when I was an engineer, I did reports all my own. But that's really tiring.

When my husband is on a business trip, I can pick up children at school, arrange their dinner, check their homework, wash them, let them go to bed quietly...etc.

AND [looks confidently] I have planned and run a major activity myself, when

one of the area officers abandoned ship before deadline.

I : So, in some parts of your life, you can do really well without a TEAM, right?

S: Yes.

I: So here is the *real* situation: Even though you don't have a team yet, you can still do some things very well.

[writes down the following on the board]

- Finished report by herself;
- Arranges children's stuff when husband is on a business trip;
- Planned and run a major activity .

S: Okay, so the problem is NOT really that I don't have a team, right? It's not because I lack the capacity to hand things. No, I just need more time because I have too much work to do.

I: Please tell me more about your meaning of the word, "team."

S: My office has to deal with the government, and the officers always ask us do many extra things. That takes time. Without a team, no one can help me. And then I don't have enough time to be with my family.

I: You mentioned the word "team" many times since we started. Could you define this term?

S: Everybody has the same goal.

I : What does that mean?

S: The feeling of working cooperatively together; we have to work cooperatively together!

I: What is that feeling?

S: We are in together, committed to the cause, through thick and thin. Seems confused, right?

I: What do you think? I will write down your thoughts and you can tell me. [Writes down the following]

Rule: Team members MUST always be in it together, committed to the cause, through thick and thin. That's what being a team really means.

Report (real situation) : No members share such a commitment with me right now.

Conclusion: I have no team.

S: The part about being "committed to the cause through thick and thin," seems somewhat irrational.

I : Do you agree that you can do many things very well without team members?

S: Yes, I can do some things well, such as kids stuff.

I: OK, so you and your husband are a sort of family team. And you still can take good care of your kids on your own too. In business, your co-workers and you are in the same company, but do different projects. Does that count as a team?

S: I worry about what my workmates think of me when we work together for a period of time. I think we must take care of each other's feelings.

I : So, is it possible that your definition of "team" is different from theirs? Is that possible? Maybe they worry about their kids, husband, mortgage, parents... and they think that, if they can finish their part of the work, then they have satisfied the meaning of "reaching the same goal" with you. And maybe that is their meaning of "team." Is that possible?

S: So? I am insecure?

I : That's a good point. In Logic-Based Therapy, there is a virtue called "Metaphysical Security," which relates to your point.

S: What is that?

I : It means that you can recognize that things are NOT PERFECT. And you can accept that you really did some part of your job or duty VERY WELL, too.

S: There are five area offices in Taiwan. Two of them did really well. We are not one of them.

I : 2/5 means ALL? (writes down 2/5 on the board)

S: They have low turnover.

I : So, can we change your definition of "team" to "Low turnover = good team"?

S: Yes, that is what I mean. I just want to reduce our turnover, so that employees stay longer and we can work together better. And my family situation is really not the same as a work team. What is Metaphysical Security? I am curious.

I: There is nothing on earth called "Perfect Being." For example, you feel a little uncomfortable when you drive in Taiwan because of a hole in the road. But in some countries, they only have gravel roads. They may think our roads are wonderful.

S: Am I being too inflexible?

I : What makes you think you're being too inflexible?

S: People come and go and come and go... I don't like that!

I : What can you do to solve this problem?

S: Keep searching for employees.

I : Have you already done this or advertised online?

S: Yes, we already interviewed a few people.

S : Do I ask too much from my workmates? I'm always wondering if they like me. Do they like the way I make decisions? It seems I think too much and do too little.

I : I don't know. What do you think?

S: Seems like that! ... It's amazing, I feel different.

I : Did you ever consider that our willpower is just like a muscle. It needs exercising by means of acting and practice. Through such exercise, it will become stronger.

S: Mmm... How do I practice?

I : You can try to write down things when they bother you. (Rule, Report, Conclusion/Feeling) That allows you to rearrange your thinking, and to identify the part of it that is faulty. If you find the mistake, do the same thing we did today. Find a more rational way to think about it. Then, like what you do to hire new members in your company, act accordingly.

I : Did you learn anything today?

S : I have to look on the brighter side. And act when I need to. Don't think too much, just do it.

I : And anything else?

S: The way I think, to find the problem. People may think differently than I do. And I may think differently than they do. [Smiles]

I : Yes, you can respect your views and meanwhile respect the views of others. You don't have to think the same way as others. And others don't have to think the same ways as you.

S: Amazing. I feel better. I am going to have dinner with my husband. I haven't had dinner with him for a long time.

I : Congratulations!

What I Learned from this Experience

My client demanded perfection about her relationship with her coworkers. I tried to guide her to think about her situation but not tell her what to do. When she said she was "insecure," I was able to introduce her to the idea of "Metaphysical Security."

I can improve my explanation of "Metaphysical Security". The metaphor of gravel road is fine. I could have given her more relevant examples.

What I Will Do Differently Next Time

I will let my client talk more, describe more, and evaluate more about her situation. I would let her practice constructing her syllogism once on her own. That way she can find out the fallacy and fix it herself. Then she can analyze her fallacies on her own.

What My Client Learned

My client said she learned much from LBT. Especially, she realized that we can disturb ourselves, and she is willing to write down what she thinks when she feels upset. She is now better able to find out the fallacy and overcome it.