



Using Individual Psychotherapy and Couples Therapy to provide support for Executive Work/Life Balance

A Chief Operating and Financial Officer in an Investment Company, referred by his physician for depression, demonstrated that combining individual psychotherapy and couples therapy, provides the learning and support needed to:

- Find a balance between work and personal life
- Clarify work relationships
- Take on the responsibility of a new born
- Eliminate depression through healthy living
- Be more relaxed and intimate

SITUATION

I saw this 40 year old client, let's call him Ted, for two years for individual psychotherapy before seeing him with his 35 year old wife, let's call her Amy, for couples therapy. They met and married while she was working as a Department Head at the same Investment Company. I started seeing them together a year after their daughter was born. They both had work/life balance issues they needed to address using individual psychotherapy. I also saw Amy for individual sessions.

In terms of Ted's work/life balance issues, he was a thoughtful and serious man who was a steadfast leader in his organization. He had been in at the beginning of this company and as the right hand man of the President stood for all that was good and honest in the way this investment company operated. What was clarified in his individual psychotherapy was that Ted could not be considered to be a workaholic in terms of work/life balance. It was a more subtle issue that his identity was intertwined with that of the investment company's.

In his individual psychotherapy, Ted realized that to find a work/life balance in his marriage he needed to learn to loosen up so that he could more easily relate to his vivacious and dynamic wife. Amy, in her individual psychotherapy, was learning to be more self-nurturing as she made what was for her, the difficult adjustment from professional woman to full-time mother. Although devoted to their daughter, as was Ted, she was having considerable difficulty with the change in life style.

When I saw Amy for individual psychotherapy, we frequently focused on her relationship to her family of origin and her learning to establish good boundaries in relation to her emotionally volatile and needy, extended family. Her work/life balance issues called for Amy to loosen up as well so that she could feel more at peace with her new life style.

COMBINING INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOTHERAPY and COUPLES THERAPY

What Ted needed mostly in his individual psychotherapy to find a work/life balance was to talk with someone with whom he could download the many responsibilities of the day, learn to know himself on a deeper and more personal level, and be able to talk through and clarify the many different interpersonal dynamics at work. He also needed to talk through those glitches in relating to his wife that at times he felt stuck in.

In couples therapy, it became immediately apparent to me, and then over time, to Ted and Amy that a major part of the tension between them was coming from their being from such dramatically different ethnic and family backgrounds. Ted's was Eastern Europe and Amy's was Italian. They needed to learn to recognize and discuss those differences without irritation or rancor, no easy task for either Amy or Ted. Couples Therapy became the forum for learning to do so. Instead of chafing at their differences, they were learning to be curious about them and even appreciative.

RESULTS of COMBINING INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOTHERAPY and COUPLES THERAPY

In terms of work/life balance it had been easier for Ted and Amy to relate in the world of work where it was ethnically neutral for them. In their personal life the buffer of work was not present. Couples Therapy provided them with a context where they could slowly learn to make that adjustment. Both their individual psychotherapy and couples therapy sessions were spent with my coaching them on how to construct a framework for hearing each other that transcended their ethnic and family of origin differences. It was somewhat akin to working with a bi-racial couple.

As they began to speak and hear each other on a more personally satisfying and intimate level they both began to loosen up slowly but surely. There were increasing expressions of admiration and caring coming from both of them. This was a couple that was becoming less frustrated and more amicable as they continued to construct their own unique way of being with each other; discarding that which in individual psychotherapy and couples therapy, they learned was not desirable to carry forward from their respective family backgrounds, while embracing that which they loved and valued.

This was a couple that learned in individual psychotherapy and couples therapy that their work/life balance needed to be, not an afterthought, but an essential ingredient for the success of their marriage.