

## What's in a Name?

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I have an occupation that requires me to spend an inordinate amount of time *explaining* what I do for a living. As a Health & Wellness Counselor, I get a lot of blank or puzzled looks when asked to explain my profession. There are, after all, few others out there doing what I am doing, and my job title therefore certainly begs explanation.

All of this explaining has led me to fantasize about what I will be in my next life, if in fact there is a next life. The possibility of having an occupation that needs no explanation is so very enticing. Here are a few choices I have considered – tightrope walker, brain surgeon, baker, or maybe even the next Dalai Lama. Then I come back to reality and continue working on my “elevator speech”: explaining what I do clearly and concisely so the inquirer won't exchange puzzlement for boredom.

Given the opportunity to write a regular column for this magazine, it dawned on me that here I have the perfect solution to my dilemma. I will introduce myself to you with an elegant, beautifully crafted explanation of what the heck I do in my work. Then when my inner voice is groaning, “I don't feel like explaining myself *one more time*,” I will whip out a copy of this column. Voila! Problem solved. I am so proud of myself for coming up with this brilliant idea. The only problem now is to actually do it. So here goes.

First, I have to back up and explain a bit about how I came to this unusual career path. A few years ago, when my younger child began high school, I realized it was time to start thinking about what I was going to do with the rest of my life. I had loved focusing my attention on being a mom, but those days were nearing an end. I went through what I think of as “my year of discernment,” which sounds loftier than “my year of deep puzzlement and confusion.” I had many intense conversations with friends, acquaintances, family, and my minister – basically anyone who would hear me out. And I surfed the Web endlessly, looking into different career paths that interested me.

What I ended up with was a realization that I still held my earlier love and fascination with health issues. I had started out many years ago working in public health education, and now I realized I wanted to focus my attention on working on a more personal, individual level. Also, my own health care had evolved in a more natural, holistic direction and I wanted to incorporate this perspective into my work.

This all resulted in my going back to school to become certified in health counseling and education. The school I chose has a very holistic perspective, which of course was a perfect fit for me.

Still you ask: okay then, what *do* you do? Let me try to explain. Part of my practice involves working with individuals who have reached a point in their lives where they are ready to get serious about moving toward a healthier lifestyle. They may come to me for my “Stress Free

Healthy Eating” program, or to learn stress reduction skills. Other clients are going through a health crisis of some sort. They may be facing surgery, going through cancer treatment, or dealing with a chronic health problem that significantly affects their quality of life.

In each case, I help them to take a step back, and look at their health issues within the context of their whole life. My approach involves looking at the physical, emotional, environmental and spiritual aspects of life because my belief is that illness does not occur in a vacuum. Food issues cannot be solved by focusing only on what you are putting into your mouth. Stress reduction skills work best when they are incorporated into the normal rhythm of your day, rather than spending ten minutes mediating before you rush off to work.

Although some of my work is very structured, as with the program I coach for surgery or cancer treatment, most of what I do is highly individualized within a structure. So while my Healthy Eating program follows a ten-week format, within that framework I will make many adjustments for each client, depending on what works best for that person. This is what I love about my work – the creativity it allows me to bring to the table, and the opportunity to see each person as a unique individual. My toolbox includes a wide range of mind/body skills such as guided imagery, hypnosis, journaling, and breath work. Most of the techniques I teach are elegantly simple, but powerfully effective. The bottom line is to recognize the connection of mind and body, and to utilize that to your advantage by tapping into the healing capacity of a positive approach to life. You don’t have to be a yogi or a Buddhist monk to achieve amazing results. And I don’t need to become the next Dalai Lama to show you how to do this within the context of a normal, hectic Fairfield County life.

I welcome your comments and questions and suggestions as I continue to explore different aspects of my work in this space.

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