**I’m Not in Denial!**

**Five Minutes to Thrive: 12-16 Nov 18**

Remember a few weeks ago when we talked about positive affirmations? The idea behind the encouraging self-talk was that if you reinforce yourself with enough positive statements, you’ll eventually come to act in accordance with them and make them true. The problem is, we can also apply this same principle to other areas of our life in a somewhat “unhelpful” manner….

I’m sure we’ve all met the former high school football star who is convinced he would’ve gone pro and become a perennial NFL starter, if not for that nagging knee injury. Or the person who’s learned to justify their bad habits based on the things which have happened to them in the past. Or the person who has an unrealistic view of themselves based on what they *wish* were true.

These people are all suffering from various forms of **Denial**, a Freudian defensive mechanism designed to protect our fragile egos and to convince us to believe in something which simply isn’t based in reality. Oftentimes, denial helps support our self-esteem by reframing failures as outside of our control, or blaming another person for our ineptitude, or creating an alternate reality more in-line with how we see ourselves and the world around us. And this would be fine if we all lived in our own little self-contained bubbles; the main problem is, when we’re inevitably faced with evidence to the contrary of our denial-manufactured false beliefs, it can create a catclysmic dissonance which threatens to destroy our sense of self and bring our whole self-tailored world crashing down around us. While you might be able to tell a lie to yourself (and others) for so long that you eventually begin to believe it, ignoring a problem doesn’t make it go away.

Furthermore, denial uses a lot of mental energy and can be *exhausting*. Keeping up a false façade and trying to remember what’s real and what’s not can wear on you as well…and this mental preoccupation can negatively impact your ability to regulate your emotions, particularly when your constructed image becomes threatened! So what do we do? Let everyone see our vulnerabilities and those things about which we’re ashamed? Not quite, but you *could*:

- **Start with an honest conversation with yourself.** Identify the things, either from your past or your present, about which you’re embarrassed or ashamed. Label them explicitly, and try to figure out what you believe they say about you; this helps sap them of their power over you.

- **Evaluate the evidence.** Try to take a step back and evaluate the reality of the situation, as if you were an outside observer. What would someone else not close to these circumstances think about it? Would they have a different opinion or be more understanding (or forgiving)?

- **Accept your shortcomings, and then address them.** We all fall short of our own expectations at some point; it’s a part of being human. Use these lessons as opportunities to grow and to improve yourself. In doing so, you construct a new narrative that goes like this: “Yes, I messed up before, but I’m taking steps to address it.” And always be true to yourself!

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