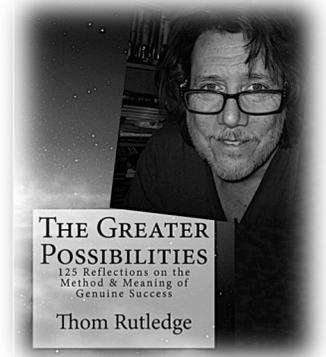


FRONT & BACK

A THERAPY CONVERSATION WITH THOM RUTLEDGE

The following conversation can apply to struggles with addiction, eating disorders, perfectionism, self-condemnation -- whatever self-destructive messages you need to face.



Thom: Write a strongly worded letter to the big bully in your mind, the voice that constantly insults you, belittles you and tells you how, no matter what you do, it is not enough. Tell that big bully how exhausting it is to listen to it day in and day out. And then gather your courage, brace yourself and tell the bully that you are quitting.

Tara: Quit what? Believe me, I have thought about quitting many times through the years.

Thom: No, really I am talking about the opposite of that kind of quitting. The kind of quitting I am talking about is a declaration of life, absolutely nothing to do with giving up. So with the letter I am asking you to tell the bully you are going to quit listening to it – most importantly, you are to quit basing your self-image on what the bully says and that you are going to stop obeying its instructions.

Tara: I understand. I can't write that letter now; I'm not there yet. But I hope to write that letter someday.

Thom: You don't wait to "be there." Only through action/new behavior will you ever get there. In other words, write the letter NOW. Recovery does not happen in the future; it can only happen in the now.

Tara: Okay. I really will try. I know that this will be the death of me soon if I do not get it under control.

Thom: Tara, if controlling it was going to work, it would have already worked. We learn about what/who that is in our heads controlling us --- so that we learn to not be controlled. We learn to identify the destructive inner culprits so that we know who to ignore and then we spend each day looking/listening for the messages of recovery.

Think of it this way: there is someone behind you screaming insults and rules and orders constantly. That might be an addiction voice or an eating disorder voice or a self-hating voice. For now we will just call it the bully voice. Don't just hear this exercise in concept, practice it. Really imagine that bully voice, that self-condemning voice, behind you.

Okay? Are you doing it?

Tara: Hell yeah – that is not hard to do. It's right there.

Thom: Can you hear that voice?

Tara: Loud and clear.

Thom: Excellent. Now...

There is another someone standing in front of you. That is the unfamiliar voice of self-compassion and of positive expectation. Pay close attention: trust your gut instincts here and notice specifically where that voice is standing. Directly in front of you? To one side or the other? And notice how far away that voice is – or how close. This may seem strange but I promise you that in this kind of work, details matter. Can you do this?

Tara: Yes.

Thom: Are you doing it now? Experiencing it now?

Tara: Yes.

Thom: Excellent. Now...

The voice in front of you cares about you and it will not scream at you. This one will not grab you by the collar and tell you how you are screwing everything up and what you SHOULD do. But if you ask this voice a question and sit very still, listening, it will respond. Let's consider this as your Recovery Voice. (Of course you can name it anything you choose if you want to personalize it.) Your Recovery Voice will remind you that to try to quiet the voice behind you is a waste of time and energy. Instead, your challenge is to focus your full attention on the voice in front of you. Can you do that? Can you imagine that pro-Tara voice in front of you?

Tara: This is much harder.

Thom: Of course it is. This is very unfamiliar territory for you. And to make it even harder, the voice behind you is probably already

fighting to keep your attention away from the Recovery Voice. But just because something is hard doesn't mean we can't do it. The only way for any of this to get easier is through repetition --- repetition of new thoughts and new behavior.

Tara: I'll try.

Thom: Do more than try. Make a commitment to practicing this imagery (voice behind, voice in front) and a commitment that when you forget and/or slip up, that you will brush yourself off and start again.

Tara: This is going to be very hard.

Thom: I think you might have mentioned that before.

Tara: Smart-ass

Thom: At your service. So here is where we will leave it today:

Just walk through one entire day with this simple image in mind. You choose the day. One day being mindful of the screaming asshole insulting and demanding behind you. And the kind and wise Recovery Voice in front of you, in the specific spot you identified earlier. Remember that your Recovery Voice will not push its advice and guidance on you but that it will respond whenever you ask.

Tara: Okay. And what will this do for me?

Thom: This won't fix anything but it can give a new perspective that can help. There will be exercises in the future that will call for you to make specific changes in thought and

behavior. But none of this will help without full and accurate awareness of what specifically is going on. This exercise does challenge you to identify your Recovery Voice, identify specifically where that voice is in front of you. But for the most part this is an exercise designed to bring up the lights of your awareness. For both of us to see more clearly exactly what is going on between your ears.

Tara: You are asking a lot. I don't know if I can do it.

Thom: We didn't just jump on and ride the first time we got on a bicycle. Or even better, when you were learning to walk, how many times did you fall down? We know one thing for sure: you got back up one more time than you fell down.

Tara: Sometimes I don't like you very much.

Thom: Yeah. I get that a lot. But remind me next session --- I'll show you a card trick.

Thom Rutledge is the author of several books, including *Embracing Fear* and *The Self-Forgiveness Handbook*. His most recent book is *The Greater Possibilities: 125 Reflections of the Method & Meaning of Genuine Success*. More information about Thom and his work: WWW.THOMRUTLEDGE.COM.