



LEVER COUNSELING
MAKING THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE

Reverend James R. Squire



INTRODUCTION

If I purchase an item that comes with page after page describing how to use it, I tend to look for the “getting started section” that makes the complicated more accessible to me. Most of the time I don’t go back to the long explanation.

Since I want everyone to have access to Lever Counseling, I decided to attempt to make the complicated as user friendly as possible so that you, the user, would use this approach to enrich your helping skills now.

“This Getting Started” is a compendium to my book, The Times of My Life. If you read it either before or after this piece on Lever Counseling, you will be able to see how this form of counseling works in real life.

THE BIG QUESTIONS

Why was I lucky enough to be born in a nation with such riches while others around the globe struggle each day with poverty and hunger?

Why do bad things happen to good people?

Why does evil seem to win when good should prevail?

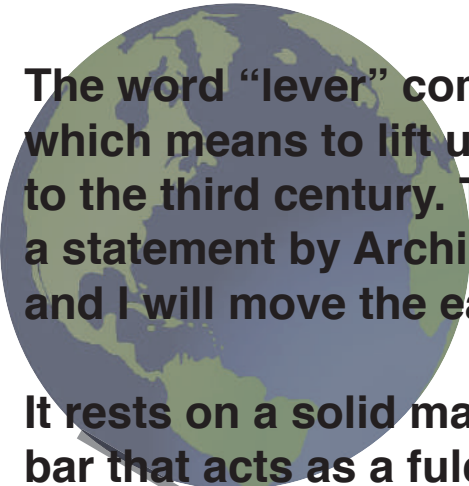
These are imponderable questions without definitive answers. Among the many imponderable questions, however, is one that can be addressed:

Why, as St. Paul reflected, is it true that “the good that I want to do, I don’t do and that which I don’t want to do, I do?”

We should be grateful for the above four questions if they propel us to action. The question posed by St. Paul requires us to do the hard work of positive change in our own backyard as we try to make a positive difference in the world.

Lever Counseling may help us to do good in the world by helping us and others to not be afraid of the seemingly impossible. We can make our lives better so that other lives are made better.

A LEVER



The word “lever” comes from the French word, levier, which means to lift up. The use of the word dates back to the third century. The word, lever, was referenced in a statement by Archimedes: “Give me a place to stand and I will move the earth with it.”

It rests on a solid mass placed under the middle of the bar that acts as a fulcrum for the lever.

The Egyptians used a lever to move stones that were impossible to move in the building of pyramids. Levers made the impossible, possible.



RESISTANCE

Let's look at the impossible. Resistance to change is part of human nature, sometimes referred to in the Christian tradition as original sin. Resistance likes giving a little and getting a lot. As someone once said, "maturity is the ability to put another person first". We are at our best when we can do this. As the saying goes, "We only get to keep what we are willing to give away". It is difficult for us to push through our self-centered nature.

Everyone is getting something out of his or her behavior. Think of your acts to help others as a primary motivation. In this case the secondary gain is happiness.

This primary motivation resists helping another because of our basic concern for self. Even though we want to be a giver and not a taker, we sometimes resist this state of being because we fear we won't benefit from an altruistic gesture.

We feel this resistance when we don't feel the force down on the lever is strong enough for change to lift the impossible burden at the end of the lever.

At times people will come to you angry. Anger is often based in expectations of self or others. Ask them to identify a person or situation that didn't meet their expectations. If they are angry about their expectations of themselves ask the same question of them. This will help them to move forward.

We strive to have no strings attached relationships in a world where strings are attached in various gestures. Lever Counseling helps us to do good so that we may experience gratitude and enduring happiness as well.

We tolerate what we understand. Once we understand a person or situation, we are able to move forward. Even when we don't agree with a person or situation, understanding helps us to resolve the dilemma and combat resistance.



THE START

The individual states what is wrong and what seems like an impossible thing to lift for them.

What is the reason that they have come to see you?

Reflect back to the person the nature of the problem by making the following statement: *“What I hear you saying is _____.”*

Repeat this as many times as needed so that the person fully feels that you have heard their problem. You understand what is wrong.

Listen for what the person is not saying about their challenge. That can tell you a great deal as well, sometimes more than the spoken word.

Listen carefully while waiting for the person to finish before you respond in a thoughtful way. It is unhelpful to be thinking about your response before the person has completed his thoughts.

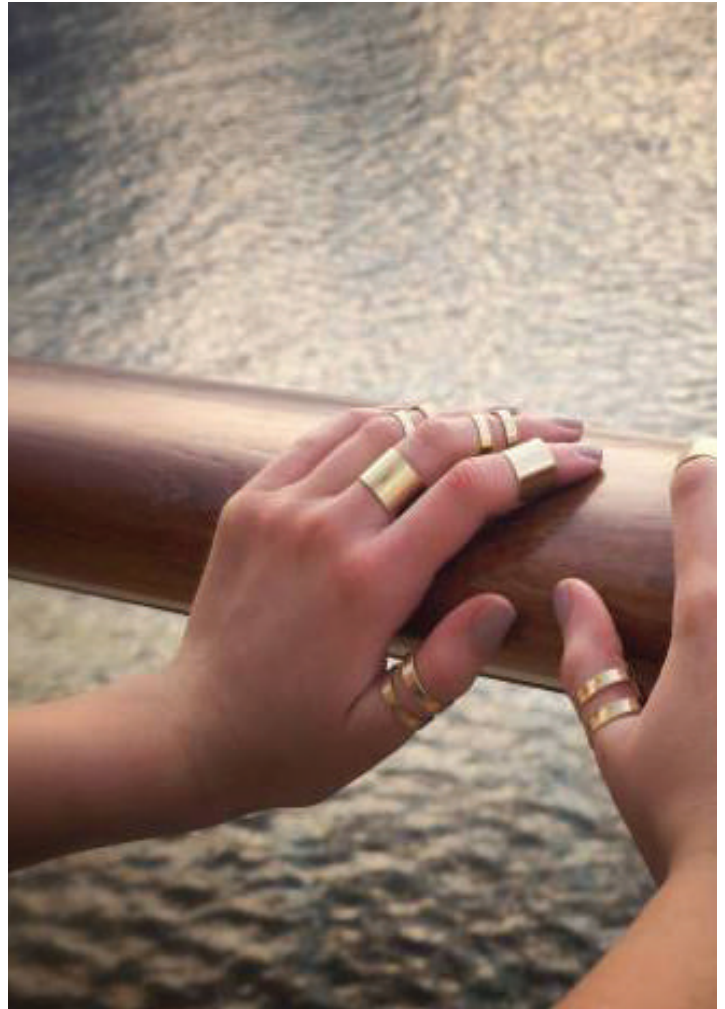
WHAT IS RIGHT

Put your hands on the end of the bar you will use to push down on the lever so that the impossible burden is lifted.

Begin with the desired outcome that the person can articulate. This can take the form of goals.

When looking at the person, communicate that we can lift the heavy burden together.

Form an alliance so that the person “feels” that you are on their side.



What is the fulcrum that balances the iron bar to lift of the lever? The movement begins when you move the conversation from “what is wrong” to “what is right” with the individual. Move the conversation as well from considering the problem as permanent to a realization that it is temporary.

What are the individual’s strengths? Most importantly look for what we can “leverage” about the person to find a solution. What do they have going for them? The strengths are the fulcrum upon which the lever sits. The identified strengths will be critical to act as a leverage point that will be helpful for the person to work toward a solution.

Encourage the individual to write down three things that went right for them on any given day, and to think about them before they go to sleep. Be grateful.

All of the above serve to move the lever. They are parts of the fulcrum upon which the lever will be poised to help another.

The Force That Is Needed To Push The Lever Down Helpful Communication Skills

Encourage conversation with the individual who has come to you for help by avoiding “why” questions which tend to put the other on the defensive. “Why” questions cause the other to feel that he must defend a feeling or way of thinking.

You should never have to justify your feelings. How you feel is how you feel. However, thinking comes in two ways. Could you do something is option one. Should you do something adds the moral dimension and is option two.

Encourage conversation by using phrases or words such as when, how, or what happened next.

Never let something that was said that you don't understand go by. Ask for clarification.

Remember that the two things that generate growth in another are empathy (getting into the world view or shoes of the other) and suspending judgment referred to as unconditional positive regard.

Helpful Communication Skills -continued-

Therapeutic communication is not one size fits all. You may have to try different approaches. This also communicates that you don't have all the answers. They do.

Keep in mind as you talk that challenges can be derived from two powerful sources. We need to examine the other's need for control as well as the expectations that the individual has of others. Make sure that he is not working toward the self-destructive ingredient of perfection.

As you are talking with the person pretend that you have eyeglasses on. As you look through one lens you are assessing the person's self esteem. The other lens is the assessment of how much the person feels they belong and are a part of something bigger than themselves.

When someone comes to you for help, they are in a one down situation. People stay in that position because they secretly want someone else (you) to rescue them. If they enter into relationship with you, they could also be one up, such as the know it all. No one wants to be around them. Move the relationship so that the person and you are equal.

How does this person handle rejection, vulnerability, and regret?



NUDGE:

The Power To Move The Person To Their Goal

Nudges create a change in behavior. An example is when we are driving on a highway and see a flashing sign that indicates our speed is above the limit. We tend to slow down.

What bridges the gap between awareness and action? We can look at the treatment for alcoholism. The motto is “one day at a time”. People check in with their AA group to get a nudge in the direction of continuing to be sober. There is a sponsor as well who the person can call to get a nudge in the right direction. Every support group uses nudges to help people no matter what the issue. A person’s experience in support groups is a place to go to be nudged into more happiness, meaning, and coping skills.

Second chances can uplift and provide a nudge. Nudges also enable people to feel better.

Prayer can be one of the powerful nudges available to us. If the person is religious, the question of what would you like to pray for can point to challenges that they are having.

What would nudge the person you are trying to help?

SUCCESS

A woman in a red and white athletic outfit is running on a track. The background is a solid light blue color with a bright white diagonal line running from the top left towards the bottom right. The woman is in profile, running towards the right, with her head tilted back and arms in a running motion.

We desire to love and to be loved.

We want happiness that is enduring and not pleasure that is short lived.

We can become whole by integrating past, present, and future to answer the question “How did I get here from there?” Know how your past has shaped you, how your present state nourishes you in the “now”, and also points the way to future happiness.

Resources For Additional Reading If Desired

Pausch, Randy. The Last Lecture. You Tube.

Sunstein, Cass. R.; Thaler, Richard H. Nudge. Yale University Press, April 8, 2008.

New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. National Council of Churches, 1989.

Seligman, Martin. Authentic Optimism. First Vintage Edition, Simon and Schuster Avenues, New York, New York, 2006

Seligman, Martin. Authentic Happiness: Using The New Positive to Psychology To Realize your Potential For Lasting Fulfillment, First Vintage Books Edition, 2006.

Shahar, Tal Ben. The Pursuit of Perfect: How to Stop Chasing Perfection and Start Living A Richer, Happier Life. McGraw-Hill, 2009

Shahar, Tal Ben. Happier: Learn the Secrets to Daily Joy and Lasting Fulfillment. McGraw-Hill, 2009.

Dweck, Carol. Mindset: The New Psychology of Success. Random House Publishing Croup, 2006.

Brooks, Arthur C. Love Your Enemies. Harper Collins Publishers, New York, New York, 2019



The Reverend James R. Squire has spent 38 years teaching Ethics as the Head Chaplain at the Episcopal Academy in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He specializes as well in bioethics, faith development, positive psychology, diversity work, and the development of student leaders. He was Chair of the Religion Department. After the 9/11 attacks, he created a national conference on “Understanding Islam.”

Squire has served as chief pastor to thousands of people who make up the school community. He was a founding board member and counselor at the Marianist Counseling Center in Chester, Pennsylvania. He has served on the board of the Middleton Counseling Center in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania.

He holds degrees from West Chester University, Berkeley Divinity School at Yale University, and Duke University where he was the Jarvis Traveling Fellow to Duke from Berkeley. He was among the first in his family to attend college and believes his work as a laborer in a steel mill to pay for his college education was one of the most valuable learning experiences of his life.

His first book, published in the spring of 2017, is Watch Your Time: An Interfaith Spiritual and Psychological Journey. His second book is The Times Of My Life, a memoir, published in the fall of 2019.

He is a consultant at Social Impact Commons based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.