

# How to THRIVE – An Inside Out Job

By Pam Moore, LPCC

**G**et eight hours of sleep. Exercise for at least 20 minutes most days of the week. Eat a healthy diet. Minimize sugar intake. Have a strong social support network – connect. Take multiple day vacations away from work more than once/year. Don't answer work emails after 8 p.m. Laugh more. Reduce stress. Spend time on activities that give you a sense of purpose. I could go on and on, but you get the general idea and you've heard all these recommendations before. Have you employed them? Did it make a difference in how you feel.... on the inside? Did they reduce or diminish anxiety, stress, depression, negative thought patterns, chronic bad habits, etc.? The reality is that we can do all these things and from the outside, we look.... well, like we've "got it together" and are doing great. I'm fine, everything's good. These are the answers you get when you ask somebody, "How's it going?" or "How are you?", but in reality, the person is wearing a mask. Their inside and outside is not congruent.

Truth is, you can do all those things (get eight hours of sleep a night, eat a healthy diet, connect with friends and family, take a vacation, etc.) and still be miserable and struggling on the inside. This is because, to feel truly okay, good, fine, great or dare we say, at peace and confident in your own skin, requires effort/work on the inside as well. Looking successful on the outside, by western standards, does not always equal success felt on the inside, hence enter wearing a mask. So, let's break this down....

"Success is often defined as the ability to reach your goals in life, whatever those goals may be. In some ways, a better word for success might be attainment, accomplishment, or progress. It is not necessarily a destination but a journey that helps develop the skills and resources you need to thrive." <sup>1</sup> I love that last sentence that intimates life is a journey and we all truthfully walk it alone, gathering and employing the skills and resources we need along the way to not just survive but thrive.... if we choose.

To me, surviving is basic breathing, going through the mandatory daily motions just to inhabit a body on planet earth. Thriving is a deeper, personal drive toward



a different level of living, and it starts with awareness that there is more, and I want different. On this quest of "How do I thrive?"; questions bubble up from within - what is possible for my life, what experiences do I want to create for myself, what brings me joy, what do I need to let go of to feel at peace, how can I be loved and love more? And, more questions – how can I turn down the volume on the critical voice in my head, am I holding on to guilt or shame that could free me if I chose to let it go, what resentments do I need to surrender, where do I need to shine the light and take responsibility, and what could open up for me if I wholeheartedly engaged in this exploration?

Engaging in this type of work is hard because you are digging into your baggage that is weighing you down and keeping you from experiencing life at a certain (higher) level. However, the work is well worth it because your freedom, confidence and inner laughter and playfulness with life are at stake. Doing this type of work is better done with a trusted, non-judgmental person, someone other than by yourself. It's what you don't know that you don't know, that stunts your growth and expansion. And believe it or not, there are blind spots or shadows, i.e. what we don't see that we ALL have in our life.

For the last 15 years, an older family member and myself take a short trip once per year. This once per year

occasion started out as a way to catch up and connect with each other, enjoy good food, shop, relax, enjoy the outdoors, and just get away. What it quickly (within 5 years) turned into is a one-sided (her) gripe-and-growl fest, or, as I like to call it.... spewing venom. The entire day is spent with her verbalizing all the negative things in her life currently and past tense. I have heard the same stories over and over again about who wronged her, who is not living life “right”, what somebody did to somebody else, how she tried to be a good partner, daughter, parent, sibling, but the other person was bad or wrong. Then she will turn the attention to herself and beat herself up for not being.... better, stronger, smarter. “I’m so stupid” is a favorite line of hers. It is very hard to hold the space and listen in a compassionate way for hours at a time when you’ve heard the caustic, negative stories multiple times with no movement towards change. Do you know somebody like this? Being around them is exhausting, it sucks the life and joy right out of you.

Me: How does it benefit you to spew venom on the same stories year after year?

Her: It doesn’t.

Me: Then why do you do it?

Her: I don’t know.

Me: How do you feel when we get together and you spew venom all day?

Her: Not good.

Me: Then why do you do it?

Her: Because you are the only one that will listen to me.

Honestly, I don’t know.

This family member bottles herself up and puts on a mask until that one time/year when we get together and then a volcano erupts. It makes me sad. Sad that she chooses to live with the anger, anxiety, sadness, fear, guilt, shame, etc. bottled up inside of her and either doesn’t want to or doesn’t know how to start the work of freeing herself from the daily onslaught of pain and suffering. And, it’s not the onslaught of pain and suffering outside of herself, this is an inner voice that destroys, it is the evil monster within that talks to us and about us (and others) in a most critical and demeaning way.

So, here is where we get down to the nuts and bolts. Life is not about rainbows and unicorns (feeling happy, happy all the time), but it is also not about evil monsters (feeling bad all the time). We feel a mix of both, usually on a daily basis, and that is **normal**. Life unfolds in front of us humans and we choose what we make of the situation – how we view it, what we tell ourselves about it, what we let go and what we keep. Note I said “CHOOSE”, not blindly react, which is what most people do. CHOICE is freedom, reaction is prison.

You choose your perspective on life, meaning you choose what you tell yourself about your life experiences, and ultimately, this determines how much the monsters affect you. Not IF they affect you, but HOW MUCH. And how much depends on the inner work you do.

Exploring what you feel, where the feeling came from, your beliefs or story about it (this is really where you have to peel those layers off the onion and get to the core), and asking if you want to hold onto that story or change it (to what serves you better), is most important to shining a light of awareness on “it” (the yuck feeling) and being able to CHOOSE how to move forward. Sometimes moving forward presents as doing nothing, but it can be **awareness of and accepting** this is where you are, that all will be okay, and being at peace with that. This too shall pass, and this is a powerful choice.

You have the longest relationship with yourself. Do you know you....really? Can you identify throughout the day what you are feeling and the underlying message behind it? Do you have a perspective on life that serves how you want to show up in the world? Are you that person that looks like you “have it all together” because you make money? Maybe you do get eight hours of sleep at night, exercise for at least 20 minutes most days of the week, eat a healthy diet, have a strong social support network, take multiple-day vacations away from work more than once/year and don’t answer work emails after 8 p.m..... but is your inside messy? Are you an Outside-In person or an Inside-Out person? ■

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> 9 Tips for How to Find Success in Life, How Success Is Defined and How You Can Achieve It, by Kendra Cherry, July 2022, Verywellmind.com

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