

Severe Anxiety & OCD: Daniel



OVERVIEW :

Daniel came to see me in 1998 for severe anxiety and OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder). In the beginning we worked on developing new skills and on increasing his resources. After two years we turned these skills and resources toward renegotiating his relationship with his personal “Demon” and with the trauma of his childhood and his family of origin. Daniel demonstrated a remarkable tenacity coupled with a deep longing to live a healthier, more peaceful life. After five years of hard work, Daniel reached a place where he was able to make real, sustained changes in his life. This included a total financial restructuring and moving out of the city where he grew up to a country life in a different state. While he still struggles periodically with the ghosts of his former condition, he has the knowledge, the skills, and enough success dealing with them to be able to live a life which gives him joy and richness.

For my first session I came in absolutely terrified and we spent the entire session with me alternating between sobbing deeply and laughing. I think that this says more about our work together than anything else, because Doug never scared me. He never compounded the illness which happened every time I visited a traditional healer. Every time they made it worse. It was because they had not dealt with their own fear and they were disconnected. So I just kept getting convinced that I was broken beyond repair. And then I sat down with Doug and he just defused that whole paradigm. Doug was deeply compassionate. I felt his openness and love but he also was completely himself and he steadfastly refused to buy into my drama.

THE DETAILS :

In terms of healing, Doug is a teacher first. The richness of my time with him was contained in the sharing of his knowledge and experience as well as his energetic healing gifts. So much of what Doug gave me was his experience and the way that he looked at the world. Doug never tried to impose any of his perspectives but he was courageous enough and open enough to share them with me.

SKILL BUILDING / RESOURCING:

When Daniel first came to see me, he was deeply engaged with some extremely difficult material without the necessary tools and skills to succeed. He desperately wanted to change

the patterns and beliefs that were causing him so much pain; he simply didn't know how to make that happen. We worked on developing his skills and increasing his resources for two full years. Here are some of the things we covered:

Orienting skills: We explored a variety of ways to down-regulate his activation and help him shift out of chronic crisis mode (sympathetic activation).

Naming and Acknowledgement: We used these tools to get a handle on what was happening and to gain some purchase or leverage on the overwhelming volume of input into his system.

Speed control: Daniel learned how to slow himself down when overwhelmed and how to speed himself up when stuck.

Size control: Some of his patterns appeared to be monstrous in size and regularly crushed him beneath their weight. Daniel learned how to shift his perspective and change his perception so that what he was dealing with in the moment revealed itself in its actual size.

Energy building: Historically Daniel used fear, the stress of transitions, guilt, shame, etc. to get energy into his system. This worked, but at a terrible cost to him. We shifted his energy input skills so that he could become energized by curiosity, inquiry, safety, etc. In this way he could feel alive without sponsoring or supporting his negative patterns.

Essentially what Doug has to offer is water in the desert for anyone who is really thirsty, anyone who is truly suffering. The truth of the matter is that Doug works in a different paradigm that our culture has not yet caught up to.

REFRAMING:

Doug transformed me by helping me define what Health was for me. I initially thought that Health meant a complete absence of symptoms. I now believe that Health is how one looks at the world, how one frames his or her own experience. Health is a matter of perspective; everyone needs to define what Health is for himself.

Daniel had been deeply entrenched in his way of looking at his condition, his life, his relationships, etc. It was a great help to have me provide him with some other options for looking at these things.

Shame: Daniel's deep feelings of shame were clearly the product of his family of origin, ancestral belief systems, etc. and not an appropriate sense of shame for his poor behavior. We worked to help him navigate and negotiate his relationship with historical shame and his present behavior.

Discipline: For Daniel, discipline had always been an addictive, obsessive, dominating, overbearing enemy. He was shocked to hear that my daily disciplines supported and enriched my life. Since change doesn't happen without some form of discipline, we worked to help him find the direct experience of easy, light, supportive, effective discipline.

Nourishment: Daniel had loads of successes in many areas of his life, but his attention was so dominated by his suffering and struggles, that these successes didn't help him. We slowed things down and took the time to let him actually receive nourishment from his successes.

Doug's capacity for deep presence was so healing; I learned a tremendous amount from him about healthy intimacy. I was very sick because I was so afraid of unhealthy intimacy that I couldn't touch anyone both literally and figuratively. Doug touched me right away but it was absolutely appropriate; there was never anything confusing about it. It was just Doug being authentic which was an extraordinarily courageous way to work. Over time I learned to just be authentic in the present moment and to not buy into the drama of my life or anyone else's. During a recent crisis, I simply refused to go to a place that wasn't authentic for me; that's all it took. I didn't have to do anything else.

RELATIONSHIPS:

My five years of working with Doug was a bargain. I reconciled myself long ago to the fact that I could never pay Doug back for what he's given me. I could only pay it forward and share with others what I've learned. And I do that a LOT.

Most of our work together was done in the context of relationships, both internal and external. This relational approach allowed Daniel to renegotiate, opt out, set boundaries, and much more.

The Demon, Obsession: At the start of our work, this obsessive component was huge, terrifying, and the dominating force in his life. After the two years of skill building and resourcing, we started to come into relationship with his Demon in a different way. We looked at the power behind his obsessions and were able to change the way Daniel worked with and responded to this power.

Self: It took some doing, but we did find a way for Daniel to include his own value and worth in his relationship with himself instead of just the fear, loathing, judgment, blame, guilt, etc.

Family trauma / Family beliefs: These are present in all of us and Daniel was smart enough to know that these would always be a part of him. However, he did some wonderful work with such things as

- Opting out of his role as victim
- Declining to use the family definitions of success, failure, etc.
- Ending his participation in dysfunctional family systems
- Cultivating his own way of being emotional, disciplined, etc.

Fear: When we started, so much in Daniel's world absolutely terrified him. And paralyzed him. And fed his obsessions. His relationship with his fear was that it crippled him. Some of his best work came in renegotiating his relationship with his own fear. Certain fears were appropriate and reasonable; indeed they served him. Others were distorted, disproportionate, and out of control. A lot of sweat equity went into redoing this fundamental relationship. Fear is still a big issue for Daniel, but his relationship with his own fear is more balanced, more constructive, and far less violent.

Doug modeled for me being present with people in their severe pain and grief. When I first saw him, I was as broken as any person I've ever been around in my life. I didn't know that a person that broken could be alive. Doug just hung in there with me and I didn't have to hide any of it or apologize for any of it. It was just Doug being authentic, witnessing me being authentic. I came to understand that my truth, thank God, wasn't his truth. With Doug there was never any doubt; it was that martial arts kind of stability. He just didn't go anywhere. While he articulated everything really well, it wasn't the words as much as the energy and the quality of his presence.

CONCLUSION:

Over many years as my wife and I engaged in a full time search for help with our suffering, together we have met, interviewed, and worked with over 100 healers and Doug was at the top. I draw on my work with Doug every day and I'm grateful to Doug every day!

Daniel and I had a remarkable journey together. Faced with enormous challenges, we kept struggling and working until Daniel found a way to a much greater portion of happiness, health, and peace.

When I first saw Doug, I would describe myself as being “near death.” Now, I feel very good, very lucky, and very blessed. I feel like every day is a gift; it’s not a cliché with me. Every day is gravy because I gave myself up for dead, not only because all of my systems were shutting down, but because I couldn’t even get out of my house to do anything. At the time it was a huge production to just go have one session with Doug; I had to build my week around it. Since then, my health has shifted pretty dramatically.

FINAL NOTE: When I was interviewing Daniel for this case study, there was one defining moment for me. Oddly enough it happened at the very beginning of our talk when I asked him how he was doing. We hadn’t spoken for more than two years and his answer delighted me. He paused for a moment and really checked in with himself and said, *“I feel pretty darn good right now.”* Given his history, his level of suffering for much of his life, and how many significant obstacles that Daniel has had to face and overcome, I found it a remarkable response. My tears are flowing as I write this; I couldn’t be happier for him. **WELL DONE DANIEL!!**

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