

Check the Wiring

September 3, 2008 by [lifeshifting](#)

Yesterday I had one of those classic moments with a client that never fail to bring the conversation to a dead stand still. He was sharing with me his tendency to, as he put it, “always feel anxious and worried about everything”. Like many of us in these economically and politically unstable times, he finds himself constantly fretting about his job, his relationship with his boss and peers, his health, and any number of additional factors that feel “outside of my locus of control”. His habit, which many of us can relate to at various times in our lives, is to over think and over analyze just about everything. Of course, hiding out under the guise of worry, anxiety, and stress, is FEAR: fear that he may have screwed up somehow with his boss or co-workers, fear that his job may be in jeopardy, fear that his economic future may be bleak, fear that change is in the works.

The truth is, of course, that change IS in the works. Always. And there’s the rub. Yet, recognition of this fact, rather than being the beginning of a conversation about how to move with greater ease through the inevitable shifts that accompany the cycles of life, seems to shut us down. His response to the situation was to declare, in a very off-hand manner—as so many of us do: “oh well, maybe I’m just hardwired to be anxious. I’ve always been this way.”

Really? Hardwired to be anxious, worried and fearful? Have you looked at a baby lately? Or hung out with small children who are living in a secure home with at least one loving parent? In general, well-fed kids (poverty is another thing entirely) are relaxed, spontaneous, playful, and full of life. Since when did it become in vogue to blame our adult anxieties, fears and worries on so-called “hardwiring”? What does “hardwiring” mean anyway?

It seems that with the advent of “clinical depression” and other psychologically-based ailments (e.g. anger-issues, addiction, childhood attention dis-orders, etc.) more and more often getting blamed on biology, just about every mysterious ailment has become hereditary. In the great arc of the endless debate between nature versus nurture, nature is by far away taking the causal lead on just about everything these days. I have no doubt that the pendulum will swing back over time, and that recognition of environmental, cultural, and developmental factors will once again be recognized as playing a significant role in bringing us to whatever sorry state we may find ourselves. But, for now, at least, most of us seem to take umbrage in labeling our issues, challenges and deficits hardwired—hence, unchangeable.

Ironically, it is science itself, which may restore the nature/nurture conundrum back towards a more nuanced and balanced approach to human behavior. Science has a wonderful habit of de-bunking its own theories as a matter of course, and today it is rapidly re-discovering what Freud, even with his limited purview on the human mind, understood implicitly with his theories of the unconscious and developmental

psychology: the brain itself—the supposed home front of “hardwiring”—is malleable, adaptable and changeable.

Brain scientists are beginning to understand that the neuronal pathways, nerves cells, and the web of synapses that comprise the deep cellular structure of our brains, is always evolving, re-organizing, re-aligning and being re-born anew—even well into adulthood and beyond. New research bringing together the best knowledge of neuroscience and psychiatry, such as, [“The Brain that Changes Itself”](#) by Norman Doige, MD. relates amazing tales of human adaptability that truly call into question the notion that the so-called “wiring” in our brains is “hard” in any way, shape or form.

So if the latest research is accurate, and our brains ARE quite adaptable and changeable, what are we to do about this tendency to default to the “hardwiring” narrative?

In the context of my work around “Life-Shifting”, what I’ve come to see is that these kinds of expressions, especially when spoken in the context of anxiety, stress and worry, are usually a cover-up for FEAR....and fear, in this case, is a very understandable response to CHANGE IN THE WORKS. In other words, when you find yourself defaulting to “I’m hardwired to be _____”,(e.g. anxious, fearful, worried, fill-in-the-blank with your favorite), it usually means that some aspect of your life is ready to shift, ready to release, ready to be, in fact, renewed. BUT, because change is uncomfortable even for the most adaptable of us, our minds will resist the pull towards change, and in an effort to “protect” us from the unknown, hold us hostage for a period of time—until we just LET GO.

Life is a continuous cycle of renewal—birth, growth, decay, death, re-birth—and we are not immune to nature’s ways. What we find discomfoting is the reality that we can’t control when, how, or in what manner change may arrive. Life is a joy, yes, but it is also a mystery.

So the next time you find yourself feeling down, distraught, anxious or depressed, and you begin to ask if perchance you’re “hardwired” for misery, try asking yourself a different question:

What pattern might I be stuck in—at work, in my relationships, in my life? in the case of my client above, when he stepped back, took a deep breath, and contemplated the change that might be in the works for him, he realized that he was BORED with his job, his living situation, and many aspects of his life. He actually DESIRED change...but feared it....and worried about it. As do we all. That is nature’s way...but it is not hardwired to any circuit that can’t be broken...with a deep breath, a shift towards recognition that change is inevitable, and an opening towards releasing that which no longer serves us.

So check your wiring...and don’t be afraid to blow a few circuits now and again...you may just re-wire the system...and light up your life!

Dr J

