

LUI - Driving Living Under the Influence

Most everyone understands DUI - driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or being influenced by a drug-induced capacity. We are well aware of the real and potential consequences for one who is driving under the influence as well as for those who are potential victims of the driver.

But what about *living* under the influence? How many of us live our day-to-day lives - at work, at home, at play and in relationship - *under the influence*?"

"What influence?," you might ask.

Well, there's influence and there's influence

The usual suspects

Of course, there is the influence of illegal drugs, legal drugs such as prescription drugs, and alcohol. These drugs influence some, not all, of the addicts in our midst. Often, these are "functioning" addicts – those who manage to pursue a career, get to work on time every day, pay their bills, be married and raise and care for their children, and do everything that society deems as moral.

Functioning addicts show up, but how effectively they handle the functions of their roles – inside and outside of work – is the question. On top of that question is the fact that while the functioning addict might be "handling" the outside aspects of their life, there's no doubt their "inside" is suffering and, perhaps, even dying – in their body, mind and spirit. Interestingly, the reasons they "use" are the same as for the "unusual" suspects.

The unusual suspects

So, who are those who never touch legal or illegal drugs or alcohol, but still are living life *under the influence*? And, what influence?

Influencers take many forms for the addicted: food (sugar, chocolate, caffeine, energy drinks, salt, or fast food, etc.), activities (work, sex, exercise, meditation, watching TV, sleeping, reading, shopping, computer games or social networking, etc.) and thinking (ruminating, telling stories, fantasizing, or daydreaming, etc.). These influencers reduce or eliminate the capacity for one to be real and authentic, and instead serve to support one to live life as a fake, or unauthentic shell, of one's True and Real Self.

These influencers allow us to experience a type of oblivion - an escape from the harsh, challenging realities of life. Oblivion is easily experienced when induced by drugs, alcohol, food, TV, overwork, over exercising, fantasizing, and the other influencers – they provide an easy means of escape.

Escape - denial and withdrawal

The single, solitary fundamental reason folks narcotize, numb or medicate themselves is this: they are uncomfortable with their immediate experience - physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, psychological, social, financial, etc. - and want or need an escape.

For example, there are those who protest: "I only drink when I go out so I can enjoy myself and have fun" or "I can't relax unless I get to the gym and exercise intensely for three hours" or "I watch TV so I don't have to think about my life" or "I need sugar and caffeine to stay alert at work." All of these can be translated as, "I can cope better if I'm living *under the influence*." The reverse is the reality: unless I am *under the influence*, I can't experience fun, joy, happiness, aliveness, or well-being and just be myself.

Why do we choose to be influenced?

Escape is the motivation. All of life poses challenges and obstacles – all of life. Many folks resist the pain and suffering of their life's challenges and obstacles. They resist the tension. Most of these tensions cause the average person concern, worry, sadness, fear or anger. Not wanting to, or being able to, experience what they don't like – their discomfort - they seek to balance it, or remove it, i.e., numb and medicate themselves from their experience with something that in the moment seems "pleasurable."

Their need to avoid is the basis for behaviors such as greed, pleasure seeking or escape (motives which, in themselves, can offer an insight as to what they are avoiding). The thought is that if I deny what I'm feeling then somehow I will have a different or better life, or different or better experience in this moment, a different or better "me."

Influencers are a wake-up call

In essence, influencers are a call for connection – connection to our authentic self, our True and Real Self. Unfortunately, these substitutes are anything but a connection to our True Self. Contrary to popular thinking or wishing, there is no way that influencers can give us an authentic experience of ourselves, or give others an authentic experience of who we are.

The antidote to *influence*

The antidote to *influencers* is taking an honest look at what we're trying to avoid and to explore what we're resisting with honesty, sincerity, humility, self-respect, dignity, and openness.

Only by exploring and moving through the discomfort, absent the influencers, can we evolve and transform as a human being, in the same fashion that a seed needs to struggle through its hard shell to evolve into a flower, the caterpillar into the butterfly.

Frequently our happiness is dependent upon the fulfillment of our desires – to be smarter, prettier, more spiritual, more loving, more relaxed, thinner, funnier, healthier, sexier, a better

manager, secretary, wife, parent, lover, sportsman or woman, etc.

When we are attached (obsessed?) to our needs to be bigger, better, faster, etc., we are controlled by them and in their control, we almost always feel "less than" in some way, shape or form. So, we reach out for the *influencer* to avoid experiencing our discomfort, our feelings and our emotions.

The need to feel good

Influencers serve to make us feel good for a while. Mind drugs and other influencers anesthetize us temporarily from the pain of separation from our True Self. When the influencer wears off, upon re-entry into our real life, we are back where we started - sand castles washed away - and we find ourselves back in reality. The short-lived euphoria is rudely interrupted by life – and our challenges are still there. Only the "real thing," i.e., the True, and Authentic "me" can heal our pain or discomfort.

Influencers rock our nervous system - creating artificial cravings, confusion about what we truly want, ping-ponging us from uppers to downers, over-stimulation and under-stimulation, and adversely affecting our psycho-socio-emotional well-be-ing.

How can we show up, real and authentic, when living under the influence? We can't. Rather we live from a place of abuse, violence, fear, confusion, and overwhelm, having no clear idea of "who I am."

When we resist allowing our emotional body to nurture us, to feed us, to enlighten us, we experience discontent, discomfort, dis-ease and despair. And so we try to satisfy this discomfort with our addictions. We'll continue to experience discomfort until we face it head on. Until we do, our addictions to our influencers will continue to grow - more drugs, food, alcohol, work, TV, spending, sleeping. It's a no-way-out proposition.

A dead end is a good thing.

Influencers, and our desperate need for them, will never bring a true sense of well-be-ing, love and peace – ever. Only by confronting our discomfort, going deep into our self can we find the space where angels reside. Escaping and losing the connection with our mind, body and spirit, only leads to greater and greater repressed insecurity, and frustration, and becomes our preferred mode of operation when we live under the influence.

Living under the influence is a dead end. The good news is that a dead end is the best place to turn around.

So, some questions for self-reflection are:

- What self-images, or materialistic wants and needs are you attached to that cause you suffering or restrict you in some way?
- What are your "influencers of choice?"

- What was life like around "influencers" when you were growing up - for you, your parents and your friends?
- From whom or what are you consistently trying to escape?
- When are you most uncomfortable with yourself? Why?
- How do you feel when your influencers are unavailable?
- What one or two small steps could you take to wean yourself away from your influencers?

Can you envision a world where you can be yourself without any need for influencers? How do you feel when you consider this idea? (c) 2013, Peter Vajda, Ph.D. and True North Partnering. All rights in all media reserved.

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