

MIT OpenCourseWare  
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

PE.550 Designing Your Life  
January (IAP) 2009 - Spring 2009

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.

**Lecture/Discussion 2: How Your History Relates to Your Issues and Excuses**

---

***Goal of the day: Try to see how the following are all connected***

- Parents and their issues
- Our issues
- Our excuses
- Our confessions

***Participants' experiences with the homework***

- *Person 1:* Doesn't keep promises in her personal life, although she does keep them in her professional life (when other people are directly affected). She doesn't make personal promises a priority, which means that she doesn't do them.
  - *Lauren's response:* This is an excuse
  - You make up all the elaborate reasons why you're not doing something. Priorities are an excuse.
  - You have control. Don't put the bread in your mouth.
  - The hardest thing is managing the voice in your head that tells you what you will or won't be responsible for.
  - Say you have a theory that "it is really really difficult to stop smoking cigarettes." If you can't get over this, then you will never stop smoking. You need a change in theory.
  - This participant is looking at her life as a weather report.
  - *Person 1:* But I want tools to make keeping promises easy.
    - *Lauren's response:* You are going to have to deal with your mind telling you that it's difficult.
  - Watch out when you get fascinated by theories that don't pertain to your life. About people outside of you. They are a distraction.
- *Person 2:* My wife says that it's too much work to keep our marriage going. How can I work on myself in the relationship without working on both people in the relationship? Don't both have a say and input?
  - *Lauren's response:* How happy can I be with my husband if he says he wants to leave? Am I really sure that I am happy anymore, at that point?
  - *Person 2:* Say I want to keep the relationship, but she doesn't. How do I have control over that?
  - *Lauren's response:* You put everything out there. Tell the truth. "I see you doing this and this and I feel this and this and I am sorry for this and this."
    - In marriage counseling, each person makes a list of why the other person feels the way they do. This requires honesty and brings on empathy.
    - Caring about what someone else thinks is the best way to get them to care about what you think.
    - Trust the process. If it doesn't work, then your relationship with that person is not worthwhile.
    - "Protecting a relationship" with lies keeps you in a relationship with only yourself. You are treating the person as an object, and not as someone to have a relationship with.
    - You have a double agent that only lets certain thoughts through. You are leading double life: in your head, and with the person.
      - As a result, self-confidence will plummet.

- *Person 3*: How can you tell if you're avoiding something, or if it's just a matter of priorities?
  - *Lauren's response*: Don't trust any of your current thinking, because it's all twisted.
  - Start from scratch. What do I want to do? Make a list, have self-confidence, and follow through.
  - *Person 3*: How do you keep tabs on your greed? I want to chase down the exercise part of my life. I was great during the summer, and then "it dropped out" during the school year.
  - *Lauren's response*: Who is doing the exercising?
    - Self-confidence and happy lies every time you do something on the other side of your fear.
    - Decide to do it or not, and then execute your decision.
- *Person 4*: What about telling your boss that you're looking for another job?
  - *Lauren's response*: It's up to you. If you're willing to live with the consequence (loss of the intimacy of the relationship), then do it. It's a trade-off. Just know what lies on each side of the balance.
  - In the case of a romantic relationship, sure you can choose not to tell your feelings. If you're ok with divorce, sure. If you're ok with a relationship that is dead. It's all about what you want.
  - If you lie, you objectify and you can't experience the relationship.
  - Your life is a combination of believing in yourself and finding what you want your life to be about.
- *Person 5*: I promised myself that I would not break up with girlfriends because of long-distance concerns anymore. And then I broke that promise. Why is it so hard to keep?
  - *Lauren's response*: because it's hard to keep. My marriage is important to me. It's hard at times, but I stick with it because I am committed.
  - It's your right to break your promise. Do it with full commitment and awareness.
  - Face your choices. Admit that it is your choice. Period.
- *Person 6*: How do you tell if what your parents taught you is fact, or their perspective?
  - *Lauren's response*: Make a list of your parent's beliefs? What are yours? Why do you believe them? Where does it come from?
  - There is nothing more important than to pick your beliefs.
  - Example: Lauren didn't believe that Hollywood relationships exist.
  - Then she got brave enough to make a law. The next person she kisses will be Titanic.
- *Person 7*: How is it that liars and cheats do so well in the workplace?
  - *Lauren's response*: There are ways to tell the truth that don't offend people.
  - How can you be an agent for change without hurting?
    - Play politics so that you are honest and generous and great and not stepping over anyone.
  - Don't sell out, but don't get anyone in trouble.
    - Most people don't want to get caught, want a way out.
    - Calling them out in a respectful way gives them space.
- *Person 8*: I have a Starbucks addiction and want to get rid of it.
  - *Lauren's response*: The last thing you want to be is an addict.
  - If you want to stop something and can't, then you are an addict.
  - That is the last resort, then it's drastic.
  - Develop your personal integrity.
  - Put a consequence in to someone else who can hold you accountable.

- *Person 9*: How do you decide to give up and move on, or keeping going?
  - *Lauren's response*: your heart.
  - You are trying to make yourself seem like the good person. But you're not. Deal with it.
  - Be an author, not a reporter.
    - There is a profound difference in power between the two.
  - You can make the choice to not do something (e.g. drink water) and not feel bad about it. It's your choice. Shift into that relationship with yourself.

***Participants' examples of finding bullshit in the 19 areas***

- *Person 1*: My body has the tendency to gain weight.
  - But you put food into your body.
- *Person 2*: What about medical conditions?
  - *Lauren's response*: One of her clients had panic attacks. They discovered that she used the attacks to get help and sympathy. It all started with an episode at a lake when she was a kid.
  - With a lot of work and really taking it on, you can fix it.
- *Person 3*: Time will tell...
  - *Lauren's response*: That is bullshit. Using that language means that you are along for the ride, and you are forecasting the weather.
  - This is a way of avoiding calling the shots. They are avoiding saying how they really feel.
- *Person 4*: But you can't control other people
  - *Lauren's response*: We're only having a conversation about YOU.
  - If you say "I am unhappy with this choice," then you have the impetus to change.
- *Person 5*: But what if you are 60:40 or 70:30 with a decision?
  - *Lauren's response*: Call the shot and roll with it. Be committed to it. Be 100% or 0%. Make a choice.
  - Being confused is a way to get yourself off the hook.
  - Choices are scary because once you choose, then the other choices go away.
    - I am now living the life called "Married to David"
- *Person 6*: What if other people force you to make choices? That's tough.
  - *Lauren's response*: That's just your way of contextualizing your choices and justifying,
  - Don't stay in the land of tough. If you do, then you never have to own you choices.
- *Person 7*: How do you choose losing a child?
  - *Lauren's response*: This happens to all of us.
  - The choice is in how you deal with it.
  - To avoid the sad parts of life is to avoid a lot of what life is.
    - Feel it, love it, and make it work for you.
- *Person 8*: But sometimes choices are complicated and difficult. For me, it was 6 months of torture to decide X.
  - *Lauren's response*: It's perfectly fine that you spent 6 months to make a decision, but not fine that it was torture.
  - Put yourself in a timeline so that it's not torture.
  - Torture means that you don't believe you can do something. Once you believe in yourself, decision-making becomes much more fun.
- *Person 9* has a context for mistrust (father, himself), and lies and betrays trust. And yet he is devastated when someone cheats him out of money.

- *Lauren's response:* Hmm... maybe my history has something to do with my being cheated out of money?
- If you have been cheated, look at yourself. Have you been a cheater?
- If you stop lying and cheating, people will stop lying and cheating to you.
- It's a lot easier to see the traits in your parents than in you.
  - It's not about blaming them, but about choosing not to be them.
  - It's not that hard. You've been on the team of proving that things are hard. Join the team that you can.
  - I am a rat because I know I could do X in a minute, but I don't. I would do it for \$5000, but not for me. What a rat I am.
- *Person 10:* I blame my mom, and have made an effort to shut her out of my life. How do I fix it so I don't feel bad?
  - *Lauren's response:* You need to understand how she sees things. What was it like having you as a daughter?
  - You need to realize that you are just like her. Apples shouldn't hate apple trees.
  - You either can hate her, or learn how to love her.
  - Tell her all the truth. That is a way to create intimacy without changing her.
  - You make the conflict something else.
    - Example: Mom, you give me \$1 every time you make me feel small.
    - It doesn't injure her, or become as personal.
  - Don't assume that she feels a certain way.
  - There is a way to write the letter like you are honoring her.
  - *An example*
    - She was the sunshine to counteract her parents' darkness.
    - Family could talk about politics, but never about feelings.
    - The more she tried to talk about personal issues, the more venomous her mom became. But oddly enough, the more satisfied she became with her relationship with her parents.
    - During a therapist session with her mom, she realized that her mom is a "sick fuck". And it was a great revelation between the two of them. They laughed about it. Now they can talk about it, and now they see each other more clearly. And now they're on the **same side**. They are open and having the relationship they want.
  - You put your parents on a pedestal. You treat them as if you can't talk about certain things with them. Your relationship with them is static and unchanging.
    - Do you really know your mother?
    - Do you understand her?
  - It's not about good/bad/right/wrong. It's about what is her perspective on life. She can tell you.
  - Try a bunch of different tactics. It may not happen in a year. Maybe you need a 5-10 year plan.
- *Person 10:* What if you tell people how you feel, and they say "deal with it"
  - *Lauren's response:* It's all about how you say something. The way you phrase something determines the response you get.
  - Don't write off your parents because you feel like you have to. That is a lie because you don't *really* want to write them off.
  - What do you want your relationship with them to be? Get on a 10-year plan so you can work it out and be happy.

- *Person 11*: There's not enough intimacy in my relationship. I cheated on my wife. Work and kids undermine the opportunity for intimacy. I have health problems and have had erectile dysfunction.
  - *Lauren's response*: It's all an explanation so that you can keep things the way they are.
  - There is a lot of cause and effect between secrets and intimacy and dysfunction.
- *Person 12*: Mother was an alcoholic. Used to be fat. Gets sad after a big meal, and has Sunday blues.
  - *Lauren's response*: This is a pattern that is connected to the pattern of your parents.
  - Life is about resolving issues.
  - Example: Lauren broke the pattern of people in her family having business relationships with spouses.
    - Stop blaming your parents! They are just passing along the chain.
  - Look at what your parent's relationship looks like. If it was bad, why would you want something like that?
  - What if you were grateful for the baggage you are given by your parents because it gives you substrate to grow? Life is about evolving and breaking the chains of humanity.
    - You might as well deal with it because it'll be there.
  - Look at how your parents are. Example: My mom is cold. So I am going to put myself in a relationship that demands that I be warm and engaged.

***Here are some examples of language used by participants where they do not hear their own BS or excuses which justify their current rating.***

Disclaimer: It is important to have a sense of humor about the human mind and the lengths to which we go to justify our perspective on things. Thus being able to laugh at ourselves and the way we phrase things is a valuable tool in loosening the grip of our positions. The following examples are not meant to demean but to bring some levity to our common human "insanity" and the way we view our perceived predicaments.

- *On being overweight*: I put on more than 15 pounds in the past year, it happened very gradually, and I saw it happening but I could never intervene (*intervene in what? Where is the outside force that requires intervention?*)
- *On not keeping in touch with his family*: I do not like to make phone calls at home because we have a very small apartment and any noise carries throughout the whole space, which makes it hard to talk without bothering each other. (*weren't mobile phones invented for just this purpose?*)
- *On being single*: Very little flirting is directed my way, even though I seem approachable and available. (*as if flirting were something that falls out of the sky...*)
- *On a mediocre sex life*: I don't really know how to make this area of my life better, as it involves changing another person's physiology (or psychology, but I don't know how to do that). (*we have an expression "maybe it's you". Don't be so sure she's the weak link.*)
- *On not having found the ideal career*: There are too many options, and too much pressure to be 'successful.' (*some would say that options are a good thing in finding the right fit...*)
- *On not being able to refrain from swearing*: When I was younger, I never voiced my anger or frustrations. I was quiet and held everything inside me. I always say the anger built up until it ended up spilling over and the swear words were the end

result. (so when you said the word s\*\*\* a few minutes ago, it actually really originated decades ago, and is finally reaching us today? Like light from a star in a distant galaxy. The way our minds work is fascinating.)

### **Hiding secrets**

- How do we as human make something real? By keeping a secret.
  - If I can't tell you how I feel because I don't think you can understand, then I am not letting you know me. I am lying. This solidifies the theory that I can't talk to you and that you are a bad person.
  - Every time you keep a secret, you are solidifying the fact that you did something worth hiding. It stays fixed. You can't grow up about it. It doesn't work.
  - If you keep a lie, you will never have the intimacy.
  - "Let me pretend not to be me in this relationship."
  - Develop telling the truth.
  - The freedom of transparency is amazing.
  - If someone does something that hurts you, tell them.
  - Get rid of all the shit that you are hiding.
  - If you can't tell your friends the real you, then you need new friends.
  - If you already cheated on someone, you already blew it. On purpose. So what is the point of being a shell in a relationship?
- *Question from audience:* What if someone wants me to keep his secret but I want to tell my daughter? I don't want to be a fake to her.
  - *Lauren's response:* He's hiding from his life.
  - He doesn't have a say in your relationship with your daughter.
  - You don't have to keep any secret that you don't want to.
- By confessing, you will be surprised how emotional it feels. Because it brings up such a well of repressed feelings.
- There is nothing wrong with you. It is all part of your package. Everyone else has things they think are wrong with them. There is more in common than there is different.