Organization's Effects With Schizoaffective Disorder

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Throughout my episodes of schizoaffective disorder and even afterwards I have had an obsession with organization. During my first episode, I heard a professor speaking of a writer as "an organizational genius." The idea really resonated with me. I started looking at the various ways that people organize their possessions. For instance, things might be arranged alphabetically or numerically. I finally settled on utility as an organizing principle. I wanted everything I owned to be organized in ways that would save me time, or make things easier to find, or create space. Although it may have been a good idea to get organized, I did it for all the wrong reasons.

Having often been ridiculed in grade school and in high school for my supposed lack of intelligence, I felt the need to show signs of my intelligence whenever possible. My being made fun of was very salient for me as it nearly led to suicide in seventh grade so I also had a strong subconscious motivation to want people to see me as intelligent. I felt that being organized would be a sign of intelligence to anyone who met me. This gave me hope that people would be more respectful of my intellectual abilities.

Having schizoaffective disorder was a very precarious situation. My mind was scattered in a million places and my thoughts were constantly racing. I struggled to find the slightest bit of regularity and/or dependability upon my surroundings. Having the symptom of racing thoughts is similar to watching an old film reel being clipped by quickly. It's difficult trying to piece together everything happening and make sense of it. I thought if I could keep things organized externally then that would create internal organization. Also, I thought it would help clear up racing thoughts. Schizophrenia makes it difficult to discern between what is internal and what is external. Putting everything in its proper place was an attempt to clear my mind.

Organization gave me a sense of comfort and security; I could come home to my apartment and know exactly where everything was. I felt control over the possessions I owned, which gave me a sense of control over my life, something I completely lacked.

I once heard an existentialist quote which said, "There's no guarantee that everything is going to be in the same place where it previously was" I believed in this quote to a

T and thought things weren't going to be in the same place all the time. Even the things I thought were the most stable and unchanging felt as if they had changed. The sense of control that organization gave me was pacifying but it is possible that part of the calming effect was not having to interact with other while I was at my apartment. Most of the emotional difficulties brought on by schizoaffective disorder came when I was interacting with other people. Though it felt as though the organization inside my apartment created a sense of safety, it may really have been just the fact that I was isolated and I did not have to deal with the adversity of social interactions while I was there.

Still I felt that if I could resolve the problem of organizing my possessions it would leave me one less problems to face. I felt that having found suitable places for all my possessions would clear space in my mind to think about and resolve other, more important issues. My mind felt like a crowded space at the time because of all the sleeplessness and other symptoms I was experiencing. I felt if I had more space in my apartment it would create more space in my mind and my mind would be able to function better.

Despite the false expectations I brought to the task, practicing organization critical thinking skills was a way learning useful concepts in a low stakes environment. The practice of organizing and bringing "chaos to order instead of an order to chaos" (Vonnegut) provided guidance for my thoughts and actions, but getting things organized didn't necessarily organize my mind. Organizing my mind in a better way was more a result of practicing prioritization, which is the organization of events. It was that constant practice of thinking about what I was doing which was most helpful for my cognitive development.

When things were disorganized I used to always feel that I had to organize them, but that's not necessarily the case anymore. My mind's functionality and clarity isn't dependent upon how well my possessions are organized externally. Using critical prioritization skills to make life easier is a practice that has helped to improve the way I think, which has little to do with whether everything I own is in the "right" place.

To read Steve's memoir and more of his work, please visit SteveColori.com.