Rhetoric and Recovery

Steve Colori

Experiencing 2 episodes of schizoaffective disorder from ages 19 to 24 and living in complete isolation left me completely inept socially. I had a strong adherence to morality and I felt even the slightest deviation from my morals, such as even speaking about bad morality, was a betrayal of who I was. This stringent code led to a lot of arguments and confrontational conversations during the early stages of my recovery. I had been isolated from the modern world for 5 years, having talked to barely anyone, and I needed to learn how to reassimilate into modern society.

Getting along with others was initially an extremely difficult task. A great deal of people like to joke about doing the wrong thing knowing they'll still do right and other times they just aren't going to do the right thing. At the outset I felt it was my responsibility to teach them right from wrong, but I soon learned that my words were falling on deaf ears. My inability to joke and go along with a conversation created contention and I realized that I had to learn to let things go. There are a number of times throughout the day that I simply have to just stay quiet and allow people to say whatever it is they're going to say. Other times I learned it's important to just go with the flow and carry a conversation with someone where I allowed them to think whatever they wanted to even if I disagreed with them. After a number of contentious conversations I finally learned that the only way someone is ever going to change is if they personally make that decision. I also learned that there were a number of people whom I felt needed to change when in fact they were fine and I was the one who needed to improve and adjust.

I also had a strong adherence towards only saying things and exposing myself to concepts and ideas that I wanted to put into my mind. Schizoaffective disorder was a very precarious illness where I had completely lost trust in my ability to make decisions, carry out actions, and have any sort of agency. I simply felt an utter lack and loss of control in my life from the deterioration of my mental health. To counter this I had felt if I only had good material in my mind then good things were all that I would be able to do. However, I soon realized that I needed to be able to openly talk about and address any and every subject. Simply mentioning and talking about bad actions or ideas doesn't create

any inclination towards doing them because we are assigning meaning towards the ideas while we're talking about them. This meaning that is being assigned is many times a denunciation of negative ideas, thoughts, and actions. It was very important in my mental development. Speech is also a wonderful thing because we're allowed to make mistakes that usually don't carry serious repercussions. Talking serves a number of purposes. There usually aren't any negative repercussions for projecting ideas in an effort to better understand our lives. Realizing that I can talk about anything because I am able to assign meaning to it was helpful because it also taught me that the more I assign the correct meaning to it the more apt I am to carry out the proper actions. It liberated me from a state of mind where I was afraid to say even the slightest of negative things. This also made me realize that I can make mistakes in speech without them leading to any negative actions and the same goes for thought. I also learned that I can say just about anything I want whenever I want and I'll probably be all right. Speech is just a device to sort through ideas, it's not a final verdict.

Understanding rhetoric took a great deal of time but reading literature was extremely helpful. Studying language and constantly seeing different ways of articulating ideas opened some doors. Once I began seeing how people in real life were using rhetorical devices to joke and laugh and have a good time I began understanding what these people were truly saying. This helped me to get along much better with others. I soon came to understand that you can say a lot of terrible things but if you're joking or using rhetoric the underlying meaning assigned to the ideas is that they're ridiculous. In sarcasm, the opposite of the norm is stated to express ridiculousness towards the idea. The fact that this ridiculousness has been expressed is the underlying meaning. I had to learn that the meaning of the message isn't always conveyed literally, many times it's conveyed through emotional cues and other times through tools of intuition.

People tend to use a great deal of sarcasm and this was initially extremely difficult for me to pick up on. I had become so literal from years of isolation that I sometimes missed the emotional cues in their voices that were supposed to indicate that they were joking. There were other

times where I couldn't discern whether they were serious or joking because I had been so accustomed to their norm consisting of ridiculousness. There are still times today that I completely don't understand sarcasm but my family,

friends, and coworkers are aware of it and we always have a good laugh after they quickly explain that they were joking.

To read Steve Colori's memoir and more work please visit SteveColori.com.