

Mark E. Crawford, Ph.D.

Psychological Spring Cleaning



Mark Crawford

SPRING IS HERE at last. For many of us, that means doing some spring cleaning. Dana and I recently cleaned out our garage. I was amazed by how much junk had accumulated since last year. Most of it was worthless and went into the trash. After we were finished, I was pleasantly surprised by how large our garage appeared. (I could actually walk around the cars without tripping).

It made me think of how easily we let "junk" accumulate in another place – our belief system. I am referring to the set of beliefs, assumptions, and expectations that we all carry around with us. These beliefs are often unconscious, but they exert a powerful influence on how we act and react to things in our lives. Most of the time, our belief system contains healthy, reasonable, and true beliefs and expectations. Unfortunately, we can let unhealthy beliefs accumulate which cause us to behave in less than desirable ways. It is a good idea to occasionally examine our belief system and throw out or modify those beliefs and/or expectations that are unhealthy. By cleaning out our belief system, we eliminate the source of much of our distress, and it

makes room for more rational and healthy beliefs. To help start this "psychological spring cleaning" I thought I might suggest a few common unhealthy beliefs that are better off in the trash can:

- 1) **If I do everything right, everything will be all right.** Many of us want to believe this. It gives us a feeling of control over what happens to us. If I simply do all the right things, my life will turn out great and will be relatively pain free. Unfortunately, much of our life is simply not under our control. We can sometimes do everything right and still find that things don't turn out the way we had hoped. If we keep this unhealthy belief in our belief system, we will frequently hear ourselves say things like, "It's not fair" or, "This wasn't supposed to happen." These types of comments reveal our belief that we can avoid bad outcomes by doing the right things. I find that people get stuck on the "it's not fair" part and never move toward acceptance and coping. Of course, it is still a good idea to do what we know is right, but we should not expect that this will always protect us from undesirable outcomes.
- 2) **Being happy is the ultimate goal in life.** If I'm not happy, something is wrong. Now there's nothing wrong with being happy. I personally try to be happy most of the time. However, there's a problem when we start to believe that happiness is the most

important thing or that we should *always* be happy. I believe our society promotes this message. We see portrayals of "good parents" reacting to their child's poor decisions with the phrase, "I just want you to be happy." My thought is usually, "at what cost?" When happiness is the ultimate goal, we tend to forget things like commitment, integrity, honesty, self-sacrifice, and other valuable character traits that may be even more important than temporary happiness. The other problem with this belief is that it makes us unable to accept inevitable disappointments or setbacks. When we start to believe that we should always be happy, we are unable to accept difficult times or allow these times to change our character in positive ways. Instead, we scramble to "get happy" by making unwise and impulsive decisions or engaging in unhealthy behaviors.

- 3) **My child's behavior, progress, and success are a direct reflection of me.** As a parent, I know how difficult it is not to believe this. However, this belief can be dangerous. This belief often results in failure to place appropriate levels of responsibility on your child to own his behavior and choices. When a child believes that his behavior is more a reflection of him than you, he is more likely to own it. Viewing your child's behavior as a reflection of yourself may cause you to

push him to excel in areas that are of little or no interest to him in order to make you feel like a better parent. This is the genesis of major power struggles. This may also cause you to over-react to your child's failures. In extreme cases, you cannot allow your child to fail because (if you are honest) it would be too "embarrassing" to you. As your children reach adolescence, it is important that they feel ownership of their choices and actions (including the outcomes).

- 4) **It would be "awful" if my child failed.** This goes along with the last belief. However, even parents who realize that their child's behavior is not a direct reflection of them struggle with the belief that "good parents don't allow their children to fail." If a child is not allowed to struggle and even fail, how will she learn to develop necessary life skills such as persevering in the face of adversity, developing resilience, and not allowing failure to wipe out self-confidence? I know parents who believe that if a child fails it is because the parents and/or teachers did not do their jobs properly. This is nonsense. A child is the third leg of a stool in the process of education. If the child doesn't take on his responsibility, it simply won't work. I've seen far too many college freshmen come home after a disastrous fall semester. In many cases, someone held

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his hand through high school, and he did not develop ownership over the outcome of his studies. I can usually predict whether or not the student will be successful the next semester by his explanation of what happened the first semester. If the student blames everything and everyone for his failure, the safe bet is on another lousy semester. If the student looks me in the eye and says, "I blew it, and I need to get my act together," I feel better about the chance for a successful spring semester. Make sure your child knows you will hold him responsible for his part of the educational process. Also make sure he realizes that as a good parent, you will allow him to experience the consequences if he chooses not to fulfill his responsibility.

These are just a sample of the many types of unhealthy beliefs that find their way into our belief system. Try to identify the beliefs, assumptions, and/or expectations that you are "tripping over" and clean house. It's worth the effort. **W**

Lost and Found

Missing an article of clothing, a book, or other item? Please check the Lost and Found areas on campus by Friday, May 31. After that date, all items remaining will be donated to charity. Lost and Found locations are as follows:

High School

Campbell Hall (bottom floor)
Turner Gym
Campus Center (Broyles Arts Center)

Junior High

Scott Hall (bottom floor)

Elementary School

Love Hall (hallway near gym)

Lost books are located in the Bookstore (bottom floor of Pressly Hall). **W**

CLASS OF 2002

Final Exams and Events Schedule for Seniors

Friday, May 3 No classes for seniors

AP and Regular Exams May 6-10 and May 13-17

May 6 (Mon.)	English Literature German Language	8:00 a.m. 1:00 p.m.	Malone Dining Rm./Warren Language Lab
May 7 (Tues.)	Calculus AB & BC Art History	8:00 a.m. 1:00 p.m.	Warren Lecture Room Warren Lecture Room
May 8 (Wed.)	Spanish Language French Literature Statistics	8:00 a.m. 1:00 p.m. 1:00 p.m.	Language Lab—PH (Pressly Hall) Warren Lecture Room Warren Lecture Room
May 9 (Thurs.)	English Language French Language Computer Science A Computer Science AB	8:00 a.m. 1:00 p.m. 1:00 p.m. 1:00 p.m.	Malone Dining Rm. & Warren LR Language Lab—PH Leslie Seminar Room* Leslie Seminar Room*
May 11 (Fri.)	U.S. History European History Studio Art (portfolios due)	8:00 a.m. TBA	Malone Dining Rm. & Warren LR Malone Dining Rm. & Warren LR
May 13 (Mon.)	Macro Economics Micro Economics/Stats Alpha Omega Party	8:00 a.m. 1:00 p.m. 3:30 p.m.	Leslie Seminar Room* Leslie Seminar Room* Love Hall
May 14 (Tues.)	Biology Physics & C	8:00 a.m. 1:00 p.m.	Warren Lecture Room Warren Lecture Room
May 15 (Wed.)	U.S. Gov. & Pol. Environmental Science Sr. Luncheon (Alumni)	8:00 a.m. 1:00 p.m. 11:30 a.m.	Leslie Seminar Room Warren Lecture Room Simons Senior Patio
May 16 (Thurs.)	Chemistry Music Theory Psychology Baccalaureate Practice Sr. Brunch (President) LYNX Dedication Signing Party immediately following dedication • Parker Campus Center Honors Evening Proper attire: Gentlemen, conservative coats, ties, nice pants, dress shoes; Ladies, dresses of modest demeanor, appropriate shoes. A reception follows on the Love Patio outside of the Broyles Arts Center.	8:00 a.m. 8:00 a.m. 1:00 p.m. 11:00 a.m. 12:15 p.m. 2:40 p.m. 6:30 p.m.	Warren Lecture Room Language Lab Leslie Seminar Room McCain Chapel President's Home McCain Chapel McCain Chapel
May 17 (Fri.)	Latin :Vergil/Literature Spanish Literature Graduation Practice 5:45 p.m. Baccalaureate	8:00 a.m. 1:00 p.m. 11:00 a.m. Gentlemen report to Campbell Hall and Ladies report to Askew Hall for Baccalaureate processional. Gentlemen, conservative coats, ties, solid shirts, nice pants, dress shoes; Ladies, white dresses of modest demeanor, appropriate shoes. 6:30 p.m.	Warren Lecture Room Language Lab Front of Pressly Hall McCain Chapel
May 18 (Sat.)	9:15 a.m. Graduation Lunch	Gentlemen report to Campbell Hall and Ladies report to Askew Hall for robing and organization of Commencement processional. Same dress code as Baccalaureate plus caps and gowns. Gentlemen, no jackets. 10:00 a.m. 12:00 p.m.	Lawn of Pressly Hall Malone Dining Hall

*College Resource Room, top floor, Pressly Hall