

Janelle Cameron



Born in Brisbane, Australia in 1961. I am genuinely flawed! I'm also grateful for all of my unique experiences that have led me to be able to accept myself today as a totally awesome human being. In fact, it is the flaws that allow me to be in this position to inspire and support so many to become who they were meant to be...in every area of life!

My family of origin didn't get the memo about, *The Times They Are A-Changing* and certainly not about the increased acceptance of *Sex, Drugs, and Rock N' Roll*. Hence, I was trying to straddle two worlds. I entered my adulthood full of fear and without a useful set of values and strategies for success.

The results of this part of my life caused great pain and suffering. One way this played out was my attraction to anything that would numb my emotional pain. I had the conditions for the perfect storm to tear through my life in the form of alcohol and other addictions. Short words here can't explain the horror of that part of my life. I had it all, a beautiful house in the suburbs with a husband and two beautiful children. However, I came very close to losing it all.

Fortunately for me, while at high school, I stumbled on to a learning strategy that worked for me. I've always been a successful learner, teacher and leader (1985 - 2020 Education Queensland).

It was in fact a colleague's words that cracked through my denial. That moment gave me the courage to utilize a way of life that has allowed me to go from Despair to Daring to Live my Dream!

Challenge Culture with Compassion

By Janelle Cameron

My colleague's words cracked through the denial of the reality I had built to protect myself. This occurred as a result of me saying, "You could tell she had a liquid lunch today". He swiftly said in his best Canadian accent, "Janelle, that's what people say about you." My delusion was shattered in that moment. I sought help for my drinking problem within a week.

The first step towards the prosperous life I have built began in that moment. I was shattered because I thought I was doing a great job of keeping my drinking a secret. I learnt from an early age about how to protect myself. One strategy I had been unknowingly using was to avoid disclosing my feelings, thoughts, and actions. Why did I not feel safe to openly share parts of myself and how and why did these self-protective, yet destructive behaviours start? I can look for clues in my upbringing. In fact, all my adult life up until the age of thirty-nine, I blamed my family and the life we lived controlled by the "regulations" handed down through the doctrines of the Salvation Army. Some facts related to my upbringing, did contribute to my state of fear and sense of being overwhelmed. Instead of drawing a line in the sand and acknowledging my family for doing the best they could with the tools they had at the time, I drank alcohol to bury the pain. I needed to have taken 100% responsibility for how my adult life could be. So, the amount of alcohol I drank fed my victim story and further warped my thinking. This dysfunctional pattern of thinking and behaviour continued for many years.

Once I started taking 100% responsibility for my thinking and therefore my behaviour and actions, I went from victim to victory. I have experienced deep forgiveness for myself and all of my imperfect parts. I am able to connect with the reality of my life by concentrating on what is in front of me and being mindful and laser focused; one thing at a time. Cracking through the denial was the first step to the "rich" life I have today. I started telling my secrets and began to have compassion for myself. I was then able to take the second step to changing my life. This involved changing the narrative. The story I told myself had to change as I awakened to the actual reality of my life. Once sober though I felt that I needed to keep my sobriety a secret. This was not caused by propensity to keep secrets. It was the stigma of being recognised as an alcoholic. There is still a stigma attached to being an alcoholic, whether you are two days or twenty years sober. Today my mission includes breaking down the dominant culture's ideology about people with active addictions and those in recovery. My aim is to work with business and community leaders to highlight how to create spaces where people in and recovering from addiction can be compassionately understood and supported to recover.

On the cusp of the global pandemic, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. As lockdowns began, I visited the hospital daily for treatment. I had been retired from my thirty-five-year career with Education Queensland. I had been searching for my 'next' when I was originally diagnosed. I did not have the sense of urgency that I have post cancer. I am eternally grateful that I found The Coaching Institute. (Remi Sharon Pearson's Founder and owner, Melbourne Australia). As a student I have access to world class teaching, modelling and researched and scientifically proven models to apply firstly to my own life and then to help others. My next was born, Nextthought. One such model is The Critical Alignment Model. It has four parts. I am following this model and am 100% clear about the legacy I am building. I am gaining a platform to spread my message. My values, attitudes and beliefs are again aligned, and I can create structures to effectively implement

these systems. It is a replicable system, so I can teach others to either do this in their own life or business from scratch or fill in the gaps to be more effective. This model and my own teaching experience and IMPACT framework, combine to assist me to shine an even brighter light on awareness of mental health and its importance to the health of our global community. My story is not unique; however, it does prove that it is possible to recover. With support from many beautiful and patient people I have been able to go from 'Despair to Daring to Live my Dreams'.

The Critical Alignment Model insists that we are clear about our mission first and foremost. How many of us learnt this during the formative years? As an adult, I needed to develop my own Mission in life, my own values and beliefs and standards as they were at best confused. For example, one of my first memories is begging other kids to play school with me. I always had to be the teacher. In Brisbane in the early 60s there was black and white television and only a few programmes on one of three channels. This was my only 'worldly' source of ideas. My other source was Sunday school and church. Some people have fond memories and ideas about the Salvation Army helping and supporting people. While this is factual it is often not known as a 'religion'. It was founded by William Booth in London in a response to the poverty and misery caused by the industrial revolution. Its structure is developed along military lines and there are regulations. My father was a 3rd generation soldier in this army. It formed my parent's identity and gave a set of rules to live their lives by. It was an upbringing that did not encourage me to be a healthy confident independently free thinker. For example, being a girl, I had to stand in front of the band and play the timbrel, a tambourine. I did not have a rhythmic bone in my body and was temperamentally extremely unsuited to playing in this way. When all of the other girls finished with their timbrel down by their side, mine would be up in the air or vice versa! You get the picture. Also, imagine my horror when the decision was made to build a new church on a vacant block right in the middle of where many of my fellow classmates lived. To survive, I convinced myself I was invisible to these kids. Of course, I wasn't. My state school experience was brutal. I desperately wanted to fit in. At a twenty-year reunion, my fears were confirmed when a fellow classmate made a bee line for me and told how he and his friends used to hang out of his bedroom window and laugh at me dressed in my soldier's uniform which included a hat! By the time of that reunion, I was in the last throws of my active alcoholism. To this day I have no knowledge about how I arrived home.

I know I did not have a healthy thinking pattern and I am still not clear why I told the first lie. I do know that secrets were necessary for my daily survival, for me to feel safe. Like the way at eight years of age I lied about being sick and stayed away from school for three months. The reason for this lie is still very vivid in my mind. I could not face the "fail" mark on my maths sheet. I could not manage to ask for the sheet to be signed by my parents, so I pretended to be sick. This evolved into guilt and then paranoia. That pattern of paranoia about people finding out about my truth has taken me to some dark places. Lies permeated my life. They became entrenched and habitual. It was years later in my early years of sobriety that I finally found that I could forgive myself and was released from the burden of guilt and shame.

The second and third parts of the Critical Alignment Model include Structures and Implementation. It is possible to create thinking that pushes us to the edge of our comfort zone where all positive outcomes are possible. The person who is 'stuck' in addiction or any unresourceful thinking does not have these set up in their life. People are the fourth part of the model. By reflecting on all my relationships, I was looking to be rescued. This caused me to be vulnerable to being groomed during my teenage years. People are at the core of every successful outcome. By ensuring that the culture is set with aligned systems and processes focus can be on people. It is within workplaces

and communities that rich relationships and connections that are healthy can identify and assist people if they need help to get back on track in their thinking. It is widely reported that the use of substances and alcohol has risen during the pandemic. Therefore, this awareness and action is everyone's business.

A particularly difficult part of my journey from 'Despair' has been to confront the reality of some decisions I made in my life. I am not responsible for such behaviours from my childhood. I was a kid trying to survive. It becomes less clear cut when I reflect on my teenage years. An example of this is an experience I had with a Salvation Army Officer my father sent me to for Career advice. There was a drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre associated with our corp. (Church) The Salvation Army Officer groomed me from the time I was fourteen to seventeen to have a sexual relationship with him. As an adult I reported this to the police and put in a complaint that was investigated. No financial compensation was awarded as I was older than the age of consent. Again, I slipped into blame and shame. This relationship in my formative years did impact my life in many negative ways. Part of the healing process was to change the narrative I told myself. I needed to take myself out of victim mode by having compassion for that adolescent girl who felt she had nowhere to go and no one with whom to share the story. I have learnt that secrets have the potential to kill. My drinking story is typical of any practising alcoholic woman. My first drink was at a school party, and I remember coming to, out of a blackout as I was walking home. I had no idea blackouts were not normal as I always experienced them. As anyone who has experienced a blackout is aware of the horror of not knowing what has happened. To wake up in the correct place is such a huge relief. This is followed by the habitual checking for evidence of the missing hours.

Another way I have found to not regret the past is to tell my story honestly and share how I have healed. It is inexplicable to me now, that at the age of twenty-six I had an abortion as I

was unable to tell my family I was pregnant. At the time this decision and action exacerbated my debilitating fear of confronting my truth. The most difficult part has been to forgive myself. I am a product of the environment in which I grew up. The power of my family, because of the indoctrination of the Salvation Army, was real. The only way I have been able to be reconciled with the decision to have an abortion has been through a spiritual path. To find forgiveness I needed to find connection with something outside of myself. I needed to open my mind to spiritual possibilities in contrast to religious doctrines that I had rejected for many years. As hard as I had desperately tried to make a connection with God from an early age, I felt nothing. Sunday night I would be full of fervour to do God's will in exchange for help through my days at school. I had searched for a magical source outside of myself to rescue me from reality. Today, I have a connection with the source of universal love deep within myself.

Confronting my reality required a great deal of support for which I am extremely grateful. I have accessed professional and community services and support from people who showed up at the right time with the exact message I needed. These invisible threads to my recovery are still present today. I started to build trust in myself. I became the person I was always meant to be. The greatest paradox of all is the knowledge that as a little 7-year-old child I pledged to God to never drink alcohol and within nine years I was a practising alcoholic. Subsequently I did go to hell on earth. Today, I know that it was not me breaking that promise that caused this trip to hell. I have learned to have compassion for that seven-year-old and understand how my journey can help others 'Dare to Live their Dreams' as well. I'm so grateful I got to crack the rich code.

I have shared the HOW of my sobriety with many women and have so much gratitude for the life I have built over the last twenty years. I have found the greatest peace in the connections that I have learned to build with people. Even though I surrendered to not being able to manage my drinking and that was the defining moment of my life; it was not enough. I had to find a way to drive past the bottle shop on the way home. I love sharing the HOW this happened. I needed to start to meet my core needs and overcome the three universal fears. Philosophers, psychologists and sociologists, discuss how we must have our physical needs, including safety, met before we can advance to other needs on a hierarchy. Practising addicts and alcoholics have precarious access to meeting this core need. There are many who would say of my story that you had all of your physical needs met and that it is your own fault that you drank. You were delusional and do not deserve to be loved or included and you certainly do not deserve to belong. In fact, you are a fraud! These are all comments thrown at me. They are well known the three universal fears. It is hard enough to claw our way back from the pit of despair without this type of real commentary. Destructive self-talk is hard enough to overcome. It is only by having the first faltering days of recovery that these turn into weeks, months and years that turn into decades. This experience informs my work and my mission.

To minimize the devastation an active addict and alcoholic causes in society it is imperative that we change our attitudes and develop compassionate hearts. It is my philosophy that substance and alcohol addiction is a disease. By the time physical dependence has occurred it is a medical problem that requires medical intervention. The use of the drug is a symptom of deeper emotional problems that need to be healed. It is also I mental problem. The brain's function is severely impaired by lack of nutrients and limited unresourceful thinking patterns. The work in neuroplasticity informs this work as well. There are many freely available programmes for addicts and alcoholics. My work does replace or interfere with those. My mission is to change the stigma attached to addiction and alcoholism.

I also am calling on leaders in our communities to hear that I was successful in my career and yet I am an alcoholic. I had to continue my lifelong habit of keeping secrets in order to be recognised as a true professional, unencumbered by the stigma attached to alcoholism. It is still judged by many as caused by weakness and lack of morals and good standing. I stand against shaming and ostracising addicts and alcoholics, using or recovering. I am a voice against the dominant culture that condones use of alcohol but does not take personal responsibility for its links to injury and death. Maybe I had to crack the code for myself!

As Australian schools embarked on the Digital Revolution, I travelled throughout Australia delivering a workshop that was part of an online and face to face training to assist teachers with integrating digital pedagogy into their classrooms. It was during this time that I developed a digital framework. After many years of developing effective teaching and learning strategies and utilising my knowledge of learning theories, I constructed a framework that was later widely developed and used by Education Queensland. It is the IMPACT framework that I now use as the methodology in my coaching, mentoring and tutoring work. It starts with to Inspire. My story From Despair to Daring to Live my Dreams is an inspiration to anyone who wants to overcome obstacles in their life. This includes anyone stuck in their own victim story who is having trouble moving forward. To inspire someone to trust in themselves enough to do the work to transform their own life is an amazing gift and privilege. New learning or thinking requires Modelling across all learning styles. For effective teaching and learning to occur the person's preferred or dominant learning style needs to be identified then utilised. I also believe that the person modelling excellence needs to be

authentic. They need to have travelled the journey and thereby have compassion for the person undergoing the transformational work. This new way of being must be supported in a non-judgemental environment. With success, their confidence will grow. By Practising proactivity instead of reactivity, the person will build competencies and confidence. This in turn provides an opportunity to incorporate the new thinking into their lives. There needs to be an awareness and acknowledgement that while willing to change this new learning is being incorporated into sometimes a chaotic life. There is such a need for people to have a supportive network outside of this coaching relationship. For example, when I became sober, I knew I was trying to learn to change my self-talk and live responsibly. My life though, had been built on fear and my victim narrative. To consciously change this way of thinking required laser focus. When applying this new way of thinking and behaving to their life, they need to be supported. My e-learning background enables me to support people from all over the world via Zoom. For example, from a classroom in Brisbane I have taught students on yachts in the same class as a student in the back seat of their family's car travelling around Australia. Other students have been sitting under gum trees on their family's remote property or perhaps they are sick in a hospital trying to have a normal part of their life in school. To Communicate this learning in a new context is essential. To Transfer the learning into all parts of their life is a challenging time. They are often working out for the first time who they can truly trust. All of the 'people pleasing', and co-dependent behaviours are decreasing. I use a variety of questioning techniques to help people realise they are not using resourceful ways of thinking to change their own lives.

Transformation and personal empowerment are becoming a new reality. To witness this transformation is such a gift.

I am also inspiring business owners and leaders to use The Critical Alignment Model to check the culture at their workplace. By fully utilising The Critical Alignment Model's four parts I can assist people to find their own mission in life. Employers can check if they are providing a safe work environment for all people. Employers have a great opportunity to **impact** the acceptance that society, in general, has on alcohol. It is insidious and destructive and goes against so much of the great advancements we are making towards mental health. It is a fact that drugs and alcohol can lead to personal and societal destruction. I believe it is every individual's responsibility to check if they are consciously working towards promoting a resourcefully rich environment that is inclusive of addicts and alcoholics, using or recovered. It is my privilege to be working in this space of cracking the code on this destruction. I trust you will join me.

To contact Janelle:

<https://www.facebook.com/janelle.cameron.77>

<http://linkedin.com/in/janelle-cameron-7b515595>

www.nextthought.com