

ME AND MY SHADOW

Shadow Work is a gratifying way of getting rid of all your pent-up anger, says
KAREN KRIZANOVICH. Just take it out on a helpless toy

Everybody loses their temper once in a while - but, for no apparent reason, I found myself flipping into a blind rage almost daily. Snapping at my parents? Screaming at my partner? That wasn't me. The obvious solutions - counting to 10, walking away, deep breathing, cutting out caffeine - did not work. I drank less, slept more and took three holidays. Nothing helped. Feeling like a walking time bomb, I started to worry. What was happening to me? Where would it end? So, here I am in Madison, Wisconsin, USA, beating up a little doll and feeling good about it. It's part of my one-on-one session of Shadow Work, a therapeutic process designed to root out all kinds of problems quickly, easily and, in many cases, permanently. Developed in 1990 by former minister Cliff Barry, Shadow Work uses role-playing and Jungian archetypes as short cuts to repetitive or deeply embedded troubles - or problems such as mine that seem to have no cause.

"Any time you say, 'I don't know what came over me,' or 'I just wasn't myself,' you were in your shadow," says Dmitri Bilgere, author of *Beyond the Blame Game* (Bioenergetics Press, from amazon.com \$8.76) and part of the Shadow Work team. The shadow is a term first coined by Jung to describe the repressed part of the self that has both good and bad qualities. For example, part of you knows you should visit your parents more often. Another part knows it isn't a barrel of laughs. What happens? On the way to your parents, you call in at a pub and stay there. That's your shadow for you.

Acting as a facilitator - a coach certified by the therapy's rigorous training programme - Bilgere hands me a muslin doll. It is featureless and squishy. "This doll represents people who make you angry. What are they like?" Under Bilgere's guidance, I begin to imagine that the doll has all the characteristics I hate in others - it is lazy, weak, a victim. I can feel myself going into a red-hot rage just looking at the doll's stupid little face.

Bilgere encourages me to direct my feelings at the doll's weakness. "What do you want to happen when you see this weakness?" "I want to beat it up," I say. "You can," Bilgere says. I grab a foam bat and give the doll a mighty thrashing.

"Most people have fun doing it and they feel free, powerful and happy afterwards," Bilgere says to me when my session is over. "Using the power of emotion is what makes this process so effective. There are things that happen to us in a moment - a traumatic experience, for example - that can make our lives much worse. What most people don't know is that it is possible to set up circumstances where your life can also get much better in a moment."

Shadow Work is more than simple role-playing. It is serious psychological work. "Psychiatrists attend workshops and they are astonished by what we can do. They'll say, 'Wow, we just did six to nine months' work in an hour,' " says John Kurk, who, with his wife Nicola, facilitates Shadow Work seminars in the UK, Europe and the States.

A workshop involves 12 to 24 people. The group gathers in a circle. Willing participants step out and describe their problems, which could be anything from yelling at the children to abuse and addiction. Under the facilitator's guidance, each problem is broken into parts that are then voiced through role-play.

Nothing in Shadow Work is forced; participants always understand what is going on and the logic behind it. They choose the level of their own participation. You can step into the middle of the group and start dealing with your own problems, help with someone else's or choose to observe.

What happened with my dolly? As I was thumping it, I began to feel sorry for it, compassionate even.

Through Bilgere's questioning, I started to understand why I hated weakness in myself. The rages, it seems, stemmed from me beating up other people's weaknesses when I really needed to come to terms with my own. It sounds daft, I know, but months after my session, friends still comment on a change in me. I am more relaxed, flexible, a better listener. I still get angry once in a while. But the blind rages? Gone. Funny that.

Written by Karen Krizanovich

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