
“MEET THE PROFESSIONAL” RADIO INTERVIEW WITH PSYCHOLOGIST AND RELATIONSHIP COACH JACK ITO PHD.

JANUARY, 2008.

“DR. ITO, YOU ALWAYS REFER TO YOURSELF AS BOTH A
PSYCHOLOGIST AND A RELATIONSHIP COACH. IS THAT
IMPORTANT TO YOU?”

I think it’s important to let people know that I have the counseling qualification. Fourteen years doing marriage and family counseling is something a lot of coaches don’t have.

“WHAT IS THE REAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN COUNSELING AND
COACHING?”

Well, there are several important differences. Counseling has always been about helping people to overcome psychological disorders. Some people have so much baggage or emotional distress that that must be a primary focus. In such cases, counseling is most appropriate. Coaching, on the other hand, has always been about helping people to achieve goals and to have more success. Many people get stuck in their pursuit of what they want because they don’t have the skills, can’t sustain the motivation, don’t have the support, or take inappropriate actions. This is where coaching comes in.

“AREN’T THERE SOME PEOPLE THAT NEED BOTH COACHING AND
COUNSELING?”

Well, that’s exactly right. And that’s why I call myself a psychologist and coach. Even if my client doesn’t have a psychological disorder, they often have to deal with partners who do. Having a coach who is trained in both is a valuable asset.

“DO YOU HAVE ANY SPECIAL INTERESTS IN COACHING?”

Yes. I most like to help people who believe their relationship is almost hopeless. But, beyond that, helping anyone to have a better relationship is very satisfying.

“WHY WOULD YOU ENJOY WORKING WITH PEOPLE WHO THINK
THEIR RELATIONSHIP IS HOPELESS?”

Because such people have the most to learn. It is very exciting to see them make some progress when they thought none was possible. Oftentimes, they end up with a relationship better than they have ever had before. It is very gratifying.

“IT SOUNDS LIKE A DIFFICULT JOB TO HELP PEOPLE WITH SUCH A
SITUATION.”

I have a Christian background and have never been a fan of divorce. I made it my policy to never help someone to move toward divorce. I don't think a counselor or relationship coach can both help people to have better relationships and to break up sometimes. It's like a medical doctor assisting people with suicide. I never want to have divorce as a backup plan.

“BEING PRO-FAMILY HELPED YOU TO NOT GIVE UP ON
RELATIONSHIPS?”

Exactly. I am proud to say that I never gave up on a relationship. As a counselor I saw many couples who were advised to divorce by other counselors. They didn't want to divorce. We worked together, we found ways and we didn't give up. That's what it really takes to get through that.

“YOU MEAN THAT NONE OF THE PEOPLE YOU SAW EVER
DIVORCED?”

No, that's not what I mean. I never gave up. But some people have decided to divorce before they ever come to counseling or coaching. They are wanting the counselor or coach to tell them they should divorce so that they can feel better that they are making the right decision.

“I TAKE IT THEY NEVER GOT THAT ENCOURAGEMENT FROM YOU.”

That's right. I'm not going to encourage someone to do something that is bad for their relationship when there are ways to make it better. I respect their right to make their own decisions and to divorce or break up if they want to. They don't need me for that. A lawyer would be more appropriate.

“WHAT ABOUT IN CASES WHERE ONE OF THE PARTNERS WANTS
TO END THINGS AND THE OTHER WANTS TO WORK ON THINGS?”

If one wants to end things, but hasn't, then there is still something keeping that person in the relationship. That gives the other person time to take some effective actions for saving the relationship and for making a back-up plan in case their relationship ends.

“YOU BELIEVE THAT ONE PERSON CAN DO SOMETHING EVEN IF THEIR PARTNER DOESN'T?”

Absolutely! That is the premise of my coaching. One of the biggest myths in this whole area is that we are stuck as long as other people don't do something. I've helped people who had seriously problematic partners to take effective action and build their relationships. As family therapists will tell you, the most important person to work with in a family is the most healthy one. Usually, the sickest one has been given power by the most healthy one. When the most healthy one learns to take control of the situation, things get better for the whole family. The situation is the same for a family of two. Throwing a drowning person a rope is no good if no one is hanging onto the end of that rope. I help the person standing on the shore to have a good rope. Their partner can choose to grab the rope or to drown. Usually, they grab the rope.

“USUALLY?”

Usually. People in a bad relationship have three choices—keep things the same, leave the relationship, or work on making things better. Keeping things the same or leaving the relationship are 100% losing strategies. Working on making things better usually results in the recalcitrant partner also changing for the good. At first, they put a lot of pressure on my client to return to the way things were and to give up coaching. But, when my client continues to work on change, their partner also begins to change for the better in response. Sometimes, though, they break up rather than change.

“SO, WORKING ON CHANGE HAS SOME RISK, BUT OTHERWISE THERE IS ONE HUNDRED PERCENT RISK.”

That's right. There is risk in everything we do. Usually keeping things the way they are is the biggest risk of them all.

“WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST FRUSTRATION ABOUT COACHING?”

The people who never get help and waste their life and relationship. The people who just look and look for solutions without ever acting on them. I give a lot of credit to my clients who have made the decision to act. Unfortunately, for every person that gets help, there are 10 more who don't.

“WHY DO YOU THINK THAT IS?”

There is only one thing that keeps us from doing things and that's fear. A common expression in counseling is, “Everyone wants things to be better, but no one wants to change.” In coaching, we learn about our inner critic. That is that little voice that stops you from doing helpful things. You know, it says things like, “you know it won't work,” “what if it just makes things worse?”, “there must be a better way,” and so on. The job of our inner critic is to keep us in the same place even when we're miserable.

“WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO THOSE PEOPLE, IF YOU COULD?”

I would say, “Stop and think. How was your relationship a few years ago? A year ago? And now? What’s going to happen if you don’t do something now?” When people take such a perspective, they’re better able to evaluate the risk. Most of my clients are people who have seen the end coming if they don’t do something soon.

“WHAT IS YOUR TYPICAL WORK WEEK LIKE?”

I start every day filling out my planner and prioritizing activities. I check my schedule of clients and plan other priority tasks around those. Besides the coaching calls, I have my blog posts, new articles to work on and email to answer. My schedule is kind of crazy because I coach people from all over the world in different time zones. I also spend time every morning answering relationship questions that people email me.

“ARE YOU CHARGING FOR THE EMAIL QUESTIONS?”

No. I don’t want it all to be business. Coaching is very relational and people oriented. I want to be accessible and get to know people as much as I can. Sometimes people are not ready for coaching yet, but answering their questions help them to hang in there until they are ready to do something more effective.

“RELATIONSHIPS REALLY ARE IMPORTANT TO YOU.”

I can’t imagine anything more important. I love my job.

“THANK YOU FOR TALKING WITH ME TODAY.”

My pleasure.