

Rationalization-The Language of The Ego

Cutting off My Own Escape

By Rick R.

The longer I progress in the program the more I understand how all the words I read and hear in the Big Book, The Twelve and Twelve and in the meetings that I attend, have applied to me and I see negative behaviors that were not that obvious for an awfully long time. I understand that it takes time to process the simplest of our objectives in the beginning and as new shortcomings keep popping up, we deal with them as we continue to grow, and it's clear to me that I will never consider myself finished with this process until I consider myself perfect. (Yea right) They say that "Selfishness-- Self-centeredness! that, we think, was the root cause of our troubles", (B.B.pg 52) but why did we have those symptoms? That was the question that eventually caused me to look deeper, since it became obvious to me that I still displayed those behaviors after years of sobriety and did not seem to bother me that much (at the time).

Rationalizing is a word that does not get much airtime in the meetings I attend, and I do not like to share something that would appear to be calling out someone else when they share. I try to confine my comments to my observations of my own behavior. Rationalization, as I understand it to mean: Making a socially acceptable excuse for a socially questionable action, such as: I do not put my shopping cart back in the rack because they hired a person to do that, and I do not want him/her to lose their job (Yea right). Being critical of other members of the program seemed to be acceptable in my early days of sobriety when talking with other members who, like me, were insecure and needed to prop themselves up. We labeled it, Construction Criticism (Yea right).

My life before Alcoholics Anonymous was full of that type of reasoning and it was commonplace in my circle of friends. After being divorced from my first wife for about two years, I told my current wife, of fifty two years, that I was going to stop bad-mouthing my first wife and that she was not my problem, that I was my problem, and I did not want to be her problem and I have kept that promise to this day. Divorce leaves, in its wake, Anger, Humiliation, Economic fear and a perfect Rationalization to point out the faults of the other and it could go on forever.

After ten years of keeping that promise, I started sharing, in meetings, what I had promised and I had another earth changing revelation when it occurred and I shared That: IF I could brag about never saying anything bad about my first wife and can still be gossiping and critical about other people, wouldn't that make me a hypocrite? That statement has been the biggest influence in my later term development. For the last fifteen years, or so, I have stopped being judgmental about anyone based on their outside behavior as they are all symptoms of the deeper-rooted emotional problems of alcoholism. This mindset is my way of Cutting off My Own Escape when it comes to those other people. All my motives today are of compassion and empathy and I become their biggest advocate.

To add a little levity to this subject at a meeting I describe it as follows: My criticism of another alcoholic's behavior would be like two patients in a convalescent home hitting each other with their canes because one was not walking fast enough for the other. Silly but true. I can care for and wish for the best for every human being I know even when they do not have the capacity to return the sentiment. As I look back at the habit of rationalizing, I refer to it as The Language of My Ego and over the years, I have learned a new Dialect and I refer to it as, The Language of My Conscience and it leaves no damage in its wake.