

A counselling case study

The following case is fictitious but does give a flavour of how the counselling process works.

John

John had been coming to see me for several weeks, struggling with depression and feelings of inadequacy and of being a failure. John appeared to be particularly driven to climb the ranks of management within the bank that he worked at, even though he struggled with managing people. His dad had been a top executive in the finance sector and he seemed desperate to follow in his footsteps.

Together we had explored John's 'drive' to succeed. He identified where it came from and the ways in which his dad had explicitly and implicitly given John the message that he ought to follow the same path. This is some of the dialogue from our 4th session together:

John: I didn't get the senior management job last week and my Dad was really upset. He told me that if I didn't shape up then I'd end up with nothing. He's always told me that to get where he is in life, I need to take control...be tougher. I really want to be like him but I don't think I can do it.

Me: That sounds like you feel there is no choice in the matter, that it is your dad's way and nothing else matters?

John: Yes, pretty much. I know that I am not him and really don't think I can be as strong as him so I'll always be a failure in his eyes.

Me: I'm hearing that you believe there is no choice and to do otherwise would make you a failure. A part of you wants to please him so that he will love and respect you yet the other part knows that you cannot be like that. Is that how it feels?

John: Yes, I feel really trapped, I just don't know how to...how to 'be' him I guess.

Me: So trapped and wanting so much to be almost a carbon copy of him?

John: (chuckles) Yes, a carbon copy I suppose. You know, the more I hear myself talk the more I realise that I am so fixated on being like him, like that is the only option, but in reality I kind of make that choice and I guess I have control over that decision.

John continued our sessions and began to realise and act upon the fact that he did have a choice, even though the control his dad had over him was very strong. With this realisation and, over time, he learnt to distance himself from the needs of his dad and start to live life the way he wanted to.

