

How to Regulate Intense Emotions - Through Grounding, Presence, and the Power of Choice By Glen Rowe, BA, BEd

Wanda snapped her cell phone shut, her heart racing. Mom could push every one of her buttons in seconds. Wanda dropped the phone on the sofa and reached for her purse, scrambling past discarded receipts and crumpled Kleenex for the familiar square box. Not there.

Oh yeah, she'd quit. She'd gathered up all her smokes and put them in the trash in the... bathroom. Two strides and she was rooting through the basket, pulling out the battered box. Her lighter was still in her pocket. She breathed in the smoke, hands shaking. Better already.

Oh yeah. She'd quit.

For recovering addicts like Wanda, that moment when emotions take over and old patterns of behaviour kick in is a crucial moment for recovery. In order for an addict to respond to a triggering situation in a new health-promoting way, she has to notice when the thought patterns emerge that drive the emotions behind her problematic behaviour, and to engage the new self-talk that

will inspire healthier choices. That is, she needs a way to be fully mentally present in the moment of choice. And for that, she needs a grounding technique.

First, though, it is important to understand how the addiction takes over so easily. Patterns of thought and behaviour that have been practiced frequently become habitual and automatic. You do not need to be fully present; in fact, you can be mentally absent. For example: After driving your car to work at your office job by the same route for several years, you no longer need to figure out which turns to make and which lane to be in at what time, nor do you need to consciously think about the physical movements involved in applying the accelerator, brake, turn signals, gear shift, etc. This thinking is so automatic, you are not even aware that it is happening.

If you were told to leave your car at home and instead drive a five-ton truck to a new workplace, you would have to focus your full attention in the present moment throughout your drive, in order to manoeuvre

the truck, use its unfamiliar controls, and make the correct turns and lane changes to get to the new location.

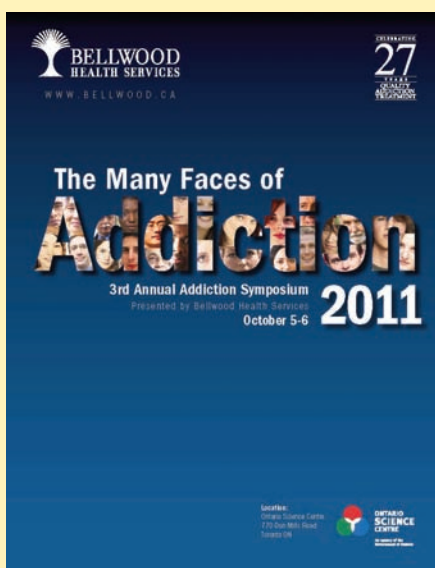
The automaticity of well-practiced thought and behaviour can lull people into an exaggerated sense of confidence in their ability to respond to unexpected events. So they use their cell phones, eat meals or apply make-up while they are supposed to be paying attention to their driving. The same unconscious automaticity happens in other aspects of daily life as well.

For people working on altering more complex and deeply ingrained patterns of thought and behaviour – which includes

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Join us for Bellwood's 3rd Annual Addiction Symposium

October 5th and 6th at the Ontario Science Centre

Whether you are a healthcare or corporate professional, or an individual whose life has been touched by addiction, this symposium will provide education, training and information about new tools and emerging practices to help people heal from addiction. See page 6 for speaker and registration details.

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anybody in recovery from addictions, post-traumatic stress disorder, and many other mental and behavioural health conditions – the skill of being fully present is even more important than it is for the new driver of the five-ton truck. Unlike the truck driver, the person in recovery does not reach their destination in a single day. They need to practice making new choices and acting on them for a much longer time; learning to drive a new type of vehicle is vastly easier than learning to think differently in fundamental ways. Therefore, people in recovery benefit from having specific methods for bringing their awareness into the present moment of choice.

To make new choices, the person in recovery needs to notice when their problematic thought patterns emerge. They need to be mentally present, or the old pattern takes over. Being present in the here-and-now is critical because it is the only point at which one has the opportunity to take action on consciously made choices. The past exists only in memory, and the future exists only in imagination.

One of the big challenges for people working to change patterns connected with anger, anxiety, stress and other intense feelings, is that such emotions make it extremely difficult to remain mentally present. Although triggered by something in the present, these emotions grow out of proportion to present occurrences as similar past events or imaginary future effects are invoked in the person's mind. These are the "buttons" that Wanda's mother metaphorically pushed. To make any headway in changing their lives, people in recovery need to have methods to regulate intense emotions and bring themselves more fully into the present.

And that's where grounding techniques – sometimes called "centering" or "self-regulation" – come in. These techniques both effectively regulate emotions and bring your awareness into the present moment. On the physical level, grounding brings

your awareness into the body, and helps you to reduce and release bodily stresses and tension. On the mental level, grounding techniques comfortably bring your awareness out of a focus on remembered or imaginary events into the reality of the immediate present.

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The practice of self-regulation has ancient roots. It is a fundamental principle in the techniques of T'ai Chi, Yoga and Mindfulness, as well as other meditative disciplines and martial arts. There are many individual methods of grounding. This makes it easy to choose a method that fits your individual needs, or even develop your own methods once you understand the basic principles.

The most widely known, most easily learned and most readily useable grounding methods focus on the breath. The following are examples of breathing techniques for grounding:

1. **Simple Relaxing Breathing:** Pay attention to your breathing, allowing it to become increasingly slower and deeper. Gradually slow your exhaling relative to your inhaling, until each exhalation is about twice as long as each inhalation. Continue in this way until you feel relaxed and calm.
2. **Triangular Breathing:** Inhale for a count of, say, six; hold the breath for the same count; exhale for the same count; then immediately start the next inhalation. The length of the count should be whatever can be done without strain; the key point is that the count remains the same for each of the three phases of the breath (inhale,

hold, exhale). You may notice the count naturally lengthening as you continue to practice, due to the resulting relaxation and calming.

3. **Breathing Meditation:** In this almost universal meditation technique, the main practice is simply to pay attention to the flow of the breath without controlling it. Sitting in an upright posture, start by exhaling fully. Then whenever the breath naturally starts to flow in, mentally say "in" for as long as the inhalation continues. When the breath naturally starts to go out, mentally say "out" for as long as the exhalation continues. If the breath naturally pauses, concentrate on the feeling of peace.

In any of the above methods, the breath is a focal point for the practitioner's attention. Because the breathing is happening in the here-and-now, these techniques bring the attention into the present. This is the basic principle of Mindfulness, a term that describes attending fully to the present moment. Any activity can be done mindfully. The Zen ritual of making tea mindfully is one example. Here are two mindfulness techniques for grounding:

1. **Mindful Walking:** This practice can be done at any time, especially if you happen to be walking somewhere anyway. Start by standing and intentionally relaxing your upper body, your head, neck and jaw. Focus your eyes on the ground a few feet ahead of you, and bring your full attention to the sensations in your feet as you begin to walk. Notice one foot rise while the other maintains contact with the ground; notice any sounds that your walking makes. To more fully engage your mind, try paying attention to the way your legs, hips and upper body move as you stride. Perhaps also bring your breathing into synchrony with your walking, so that inhaling begins

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Bellwood Founder, Dr. Gordon Bell Remembered

By John Blick

Introduction and closing remarks by M. Linda Bell



On July 11, 2011, Dr. R. Gordon Bell would have been 100 years old. He died at the age of 94 and left a legacy to hundreds of thousands of people, individuals and families whose lives were changed because of Dr. Bell's addiction treatment methods. His holistic approach to addiction treatment began in the 1940s, and his concepts continue to be on the leading edge of evidenced-based care today. At the age of 80, he retired as President of Bellwood Health Services and became Senior Consultant. However, the title on his job description was "Sage".

The following article was published in March 2011 on www.actionablebooks.com.

"I knew with utter certainty that this was something I really had to do, and I would not budge." - A Special Calling

Being at the forefront of an unpopular branch of medicine was no easy task. A pre-eminent researcher into alcoholism and mental health, Dr. Bell was forced to fight the Canadian medical establishment. Eventually he was taken very seriously and was appointed an Officer of the Order of Canada. I have a personal connection in that Dr. Bell was my wife's grandfather. He was a humble man who built his life from a sense of contribution.

Gordon Bell came close to not being a doctor when he flunked out of medical school after the death of his first love. Utterly depressed, defeated and ashamed, he returned to the family farm. A few years later, he had an experience that he could only describe as transcendental. He lost his fear of not being able to succeed and acquired a new sense of direction in personal fulfillment. With new determination, he reapplied for medical school where he was given the clear message that he was not wanted.

GOLDEN EGG: Persevere

"Can you not appreciate that you have neither the intelligence nor the emotional stability to graduate in medicine and succeed as a physician?" - A Special Calling

....said the increasingly exasperated assistant dean as Gordon Bell stood before him. Dr. Bell wouldn't accept "no". In frustration, the assistant dean arranged for Gordon to see a professor of psychology in the hope that the psychologist could make Gordon understand his inadequacies. Gordon saw the meeting with the psychologist as another opportunity to make his dream happen and made the best of the psychologist's open mind thereby gaining a valuable ally who intervened in his application process and ultimately championed his acceptance into medical school. Gordon turned his lingering anger at the assistant dean into a powerful motivator; "I'll show him if it's the last thing I do!" His study habits improved and he received his medical degree in 1943.

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with one step, and exhaling begins with a later step.

2. **Awareness of Surroundings:** Another method for practicing mindfulness is simply to pay deep attention to what is around you. Slowly identify and name three or four things you see, three or four things you hear, then three or four things you feel on the outside of your body. Then name two of each, then one of each. Finally take a deep, mindful breath, and feel a sense of relaxation as you exhale.

The examples of grounding techniques given in this article represent only a small fraction of what is available. Whichever

techniques you choose, the most important principle of grounding is regular and frequent practice. Wanda, for example, might have practiced Mindful Walking before calling her mother, or Simple Relaxing Breathing as soon as she heard her mother's voice on the line. Many people in recovery make the application of grounding techniques a regular twice or thrice daily event, whether they feel triggered or not. In this way, they develop a habit of being grounded and present as they set about acting on new choices in their lives. Eventually, they can create entirely new lifestyles.

Glen Rowe is an Addiction and Trauma Counsellor at Bellwood Health Services.

Originally published in the Spring 2011 issue of Moods Magazine, www.moodsmag.com.

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GEM #1: It's never too late to start over

“people rarely live to the limit of their abilities, and ... they possess powers that they habitually fail to use.” (William James) - A Special Calling

In the early days, Dr. Bell opened his home as a clinic for people with mental health problems. To his surprise, the first people to arrive were alcoholics. Their alternative was jail or the locked psychiatric wards. Alcoholics were considered moral degenerates and hopeless cases by the medical community of the time. Dr. Bell became determined to help these people and soon became tarred with the same stigma; the attitude was, “you can disregard him; he treats drunks”. He was even investigated by his own medical association as his pioneering work was regarded as disreputable and suspicious.

Dr. Bell would tell the chronically drunk offenders *“that they had important reservoirs of unused abilities, and that when combined with their friends, their families and their associates, this currently unused power could provide them with a strong new start in life.”* - A Special Calling

Dr. Bell applied the words to himself as he endured personal tragedies, professional setbacks and a chosen profession that was determined to pull him down.

GEM #2: Learn from the students

“Remain a student for life.” - A Special Calling

Two themes had a profound effect on Dr. Bell's life: 1) The need to “remain a student for my entire life, and not to be satisfied only with what I learned during my school years” and 2) The golden rule – to love your neighbour as yourself, but “no better than yourself”. One needs a balanced regard for oneself and others as the basis for productive interaction with people.

Canadian medicine had few resources and no training on how to treat alcoholics. Dr. Bell had to learn from his patients. His patients became his teachers. These men and women were some of the most intelligent people he had met and gave him unrivalled insight into the causes and effects of their condition; they would even alert him to the tricks they would play while drunk. Dr. Bell simply listened, learned and developed an effective treatment strategy that thrives to this day.

After 18 years of searching for property to build a new centre, we found the perfect site on July 11, 2009. It may be a coincidence to some. It is certainly worth pondering!

Originally published in www.actionablebooks.com. Actionable Books is committed to delivering the core messages from leading business books through summaries, interviews and workshops. Learn more at Actionablebooks.com.

A Special Calling: My Life in Addiction Treatment and Care, by R. Gordon Bell, MD and Stan Solomon, was published in 1989 by Stoddart and is available at book stores including Chapters and Amazon.

CBC Radio Looks to Bellwood's Expertise

On March 17th, Bellwood's Clinical Director, Susan McGrail, provided the clinical expertise for a CBC Radio One Ontario Today feature dealing with mental health and addictions. Bellwood continues to be a sought-after resource for addiction-related media stories across Canada.



Susan McGrail at the CBC studios in Toronto.

Who's New At Bellwood

Bouchra Arbach – RN; Marie Cooper - Marketing Administrative Assistant; Monique Corson – RN; Heather Dunlop – RN; Leah Hartman - Research Assistant; Suzanne Jeremiah – Receptionist; Hughen Smith – PA; Heather Windecker - RN

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If you have comments, or wish to have your name removed from the mailing list, please contact (416) 847-0752, or email jezcano@bellwood.ca.

2011 Gordon Bell Journalism Award Presented to Joe Fiorito

On May 30th, Toronto Star columnist, Joe Fiorito, was awarded the 2011 Gordon Bell Journalism Award. Mr. Fiorito was selected for this award in recognition of his continuous advocacy on behalf of the many people in our communities who are struggling with mental health and addiction issues, as well as other social and health problems. In his Toronto Star column, which appears three times weekly, Mr. Fiorito tells the stories of those in our communities who are struggling with issues of poverty, addiction, homelessness and more. He gives voice to those who have no voice, and helps to de-stigmatize very real issues for so many people.

The Gordon Bell Journalism Award was established in 2006 by Addictions Ontario, in remembrance of Dr. Gordon Bell. The award was created to pay tribute to journalists and writers who step forward to promote understanding and action in addressing issues related to addiction and mental health.



Joe Fiorito and Bellwood President Laura Bhoi.

Mr. Fiorito received his award from Bellwood Health Services' President, Laura Bhoi, as part of the annual Addictions Ontario conference.

Bellwood's Research Team's Latest Outcomes Published

Predictors and Outcome of Aftercare Participation of Alcohol and Drug Users Completing Residential Treatment

by
Simone Arbour, Ph.D.
Janice Hambley, Ph.D., C.Psych.,
Victoria Ho, BA.

Published in *Substance Use and Misuse*,
Volume 46, Number 10 (2011)

Abstract: This study attempts to identify factors associated with greater aftercare participation for 367 adults who completed abstinence-based residential addiction treatment between 2004 and 2007 at Bellwood Health Services in Toronto, Canada. Pre-treatment substance use, number of days spent in residential treatment, motivation, treatment satisfaction, and demographics were used to determine which characteristics predicted greater aftercare participation. The duration of residential treatment and treatment satisfaction emerged as significant predictors of aftercare attendance. Regular aftercare attendance was associated with lower levels of substance use at 6-month follow-up. Results suggest that a longer duration of residential treatment can influence continuing care engagement and highlight the importance of initial treatment retention for long-term recovery.

Professionals in Residence Days

Are you a healthcare or corporate professional who wants to learn more about addictions and how Bellwood can be a resource for treatment and education?

Join us for a complimentary Professionals in Residence Day. Meet our staff and learn about our comprehensive range of services and treatment programs for addictions.

To register or for more information,
contact Jennifer Lezcano at :
jlezcano@bellwood.ca, or call
(416) 847-0752, toll free (800) 387-6198, Ext 302.

2011 Dates

October 18
November 15

Can't make these dates? Call us to arrange a tour and meeting on a day that is convenient for your schedule.

Bellwood Alumni Corner

Celebrating the Freedom of Being Well

Continuing Care Mini Treatment Programs

2011 Dates

June 19-21

September 25-27 November 20-22

For more information or to register for an upcoming Program, call 1-800-387-6198, Ext 119.

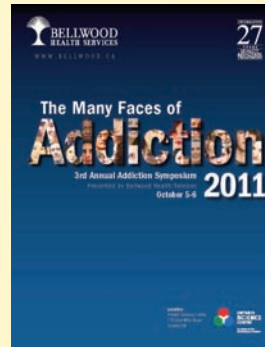
I'm very glad to say that I am in my fifth year of abstinence from both alcohol and drugs and I have a very simple and positive life and lifestyle. A keystone to my present life was the stepping stones to a path that was provided to me by Bellwood and its program. Despite the passage of over 5 years, it is very comforting to know that Bellwood is still there for me.

- Bellwood Alumnus

Join us for the 2011 Alumni Christmas Party

Thursday, November 24th

Watch the Bellwood web site and your email for more details.



The Many Faces of Addiction 2011

October 5th & 6th

Speakers & Topics

Keynotes

- **Dr. Mark Menestrina:** Addiction Treatment in the New Millennium
- **Dr. Carolyn Coker Ross:** Integrative Medicine and the Power to Heal
- **Dr. Peter Selby:** Smoking Cessation in Patients with Addiction
- **Judge Robert Philp:** From Hope to Help: A Journey of Recovery. 30 Years of Personal Experience Assisting Lawyers and Non-Lawyers in Recovery
- **Susan Stewart:** Live Well, Laugh Lots

Clinical Sessions

- **Dr. Mark Menestrina:** Addicted, Crazy or Both? The Challenges of the Dual Diagnosed
- **Dr. Carolyn Coker Ross:** Integrative Therapies for Eating Disorders and Substance Use Disorders
- **Dr. Karen Minden:** Teens, Drugs, and New Approaches to Treatment
- **Dr. Mark Weiss:** Distress Tolerance Skills in 15 Minutes

Corporate Sessions

- **Dr. Ray Steinman:** Understanding Addiction in the Workplace
- **Penny Lawson:** Intervention in the Workplace
- **Fred Hornsby:** Oh No, Fred's Back to Work Today! What Do We Do Now?

***For registration details and to view the
full symposium brochure, visit
www.bellwood.ca.***