I am a lawyer who has allowed anxiety to debilitate and torture me for much of my life. Although I did not realize it at the time, I know now that it began to surface during childhood. Becoming aware was my first step to overcoming the paralysis. It did not surprise me to learn that anxiety disorders are the most prevalent disorders in our society. Further, when I think about my life, it did not surprise me to hear that it is not anxiety disorders that are most often treated by therapists. This lack of attention can have detrimental effects on our society. For us, it affects the way we live and represent our clients. Problems or consequences of
untreated anxiety?specifically, untreated social phobia disorder and avoidant personality disorder?can be profound. There are ways to prevent or overcome anxiety disorders or issues without medication.

Anxiety is defined as ?an abnormal and overwhelming sense of apprehension and fear often marked by physiological signs (as sweating, tension, and increased pulse), by doubt concerning the reality and nature of the threat, and by self-doubt about one?ís capacity to cope with it? (Merriam-Webster.com, retrieved from [4] http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anxiety). Anxiety is believed to be unique to humans, and unlike other animals, we are able to use our memory and imagination (The Free Dictionary.com, retrieved from [5]http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/anxiety ). Since we have that ability, it will take most of us more effort to live ?in the moment.? During a conversation with Kathy St. Clair, a psychodramatist from Roanoke, Virginia, she noted that ?fear is always ?future? related? (St.Clair, 2012). Fear about the future probably involves memory of the past and imagination of the future. Of course, some anxiety is normal and probably natural and necessary (Morrison, 1995, p. 247). Think about all the future-related issues that come with representing our clients. As an example, when we are overly anxious during voir dire, we are less able to listen to the jurors and respond genuinely. Instead, we may resort to the controlling cross-examination of the juror without any thought to how we are making them, or the other jurors, feel.

Anxiety is an element of almost all mental disorders, and it can rise to a level that requires treatment (Morrison, 1995, p. 247). Fear, and the anxiety associated with it, seems to be the main component of Social Anxiety Disorder and Avoidant Personality Disorder. Some of the criteria for social phobia are ?persistent fear of one or more social or performance situations . . .? (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th ed. text rev., 2000, p. 456). Some people with a social phobia may also have an Avoidant Personality Disorder, which is more severe than a Social Phobia (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p. 455). It involves a pattern of social inhibitions and abnormal sensitivity to feeling inadequate and possible criticism (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p. 721). Regardless of the level of anxiety, it has the likely potential to affect our ability to be present and in the moment at any given time in our life.

Jacob L. Moreno, psychiatrist and founder of psychodrama, has said that there is an inverse relationship between anxiety and spontaneity. As we become more spontaneous, the anxiety will decrease. Moreno defines spontaneity as ?an adequate response to a present situation? (J. L. Moreno, 1953, p. 336). But he also takes into consideration the novelty of the situation (Moreno, 1955, p. 108). Are we talking about a new situation or an old situation? As an example, I am walking down the hall and a friend says, ?How are you doing?? As many of us usually and automatically do, I respond, ?Fine, how are you?? I would call that an unnovel response to an unnovel comment and not very spontaneous or creative. Are we really listening and do we genuinely care? We all want to be heard. How does that apply to what we do?

When I first began looking at this issue, I focused on anxiety as being very negative and initially thought that if I had less anxiety, I would be more spontaneous. But, Moreno says to look at the cause of the problem. ?Anxiety sets in because there is spontaneity missing, not because ?there is anxiety? and spontaneity dwindles because anxiety rises? (J. L. Moreno, 1953, p. 338). Moreno originated the ?twin concept? of spontaneity and creativity as a part of all human beings and their relationships to others (Moreno, 1955, p. 105). Moreno views creativity not as a talent, but as a ?spontaneous-creative process? (Nolte, 2008, p. 106). Creativity is the potential we have had and will have. Spontaneity is what makes being creative possible (Nolte, 2008, pp. 107?108). Moreno believes that creativity applies to all things that have been created, will be created, and those that might be created, but will not be (Nolte, 2008, p. 108). If we are not reaching our potential because we lack spontaneity, how do we get it?

Even if we are generally spontaneous, there are many times in our life when we go through the routine and use very little, if any, spontaneity. I think about growing up in our church as a child listening to the long-winded men saying the same prayers, using the same fancy words and phrases that, inside, meant very little to me. Moreno gives an example of repeating a prayer that has been recited many times. The speaker can
choose to merely repeat it or give it life with his own spontaneity (Nolte, 2008, pp. 112?113). Spontaneity cannot be stored up like some forms of energy. It is available in the moment and the ?here and now? (Nolte, 2008, p. 114). The warm-up process is a part of the creative process and essential to being able to be spontaneous. Warming up is similar to an athlete preparing for or warming up for an event (Nolte, 2008, p. 128). Moreno uses the word ?conserve? to refer to a product of spontaneity and creativity. Anything that has been created is a conserve (Nolte, 2008, p. 120). Think about all the cultural conserves that humans have created that have separated us.

Many of our conserved ways have served us well, but the way we relate to our conserves can be positive and negative. The repeated prayer or song, like the ?Star Spangled Banner,? may be good products of the originator?s creativity, but if they are not repeated with the individual?s own spontaneity, they will probably come out dull, lifeless, and meaningless (Nolte, 2008, pp. 122?123). If we become controlled by the conserves, we risk becoming dull, boring, and mechanical people (Nolte, 2008, p. 126). Think about our conserves in what we do daily. How can we bring life and emotion to what many on the other side would like to remain dull and boring? Think about the PowerPoint presentation, which was a product of spontaneity and creativity and worked well the first time, but was different the next time on the losing end of the trial.

Looking back, I remember struggling with anxiety in my early teens. I suppose that I knew it was excessive, but was either too embarrassed to ask for help or did not think it would make a difference. Part of my reluctance came from feeling as though it was my issue alone. Initially, I tried to control it with alcohol. Later, I began to combat it by facing it, but it was not until I began to participate in psychodrama workshops that I was able to overcome it.

For many, psychodrama is a big part of the solution. Psychodrama was developed by J. L. Moreno and is considered a form of therapy by many, but it is creating a drama that can be therapeutic for the group. He defined psychodrama as exploring the truth by dramatic methods. We live in the same world with each other, but we all experience it differently. My truth or perception of this world is different than yours and anyone else?s. Psychodrama explores an individual?s perception of the world or universe (Nolte, Guide to Training, 2009, p. 1). Yes, some of us are leery and skeptical, but if we can get people past the name ?psychodrama? and into the action of a drama, potential critics will soon see the benefits. After all, we do not have a problem with the word ?psychology? even though it begins with ?psycho.? Getting past the closed minds in this world is important, but it is possible if we begin earlier in the life process.

For a lot of people, the older we get, the more closed minded we become. Many may be content living a controlled conserved life rather than a more spontaneous one (Nolte, The Psychodrama Papers, 2008, p. 126). Psychodrama is therapeutic and uses parts of many therapy theories. To me, psychodrama incorporates concepts of person-centered, existential, and Gestalt therapies because it promotes genuineness, empathetic listening, non-judgmental sharing, and the premise that most people have it in them to find the solutions to their issues. It could be the best way to become more self-aware of who we are, and why. When we become more self-aware of the unconscious awareness, or the dark side, or shadow, we are able to make better choices in life (Ken Wilber, 2008, p. 43). Using psychodrama techniques early would help people better understand themselves and others in the developmental process.

In addition, Carl Rogers? three conditions to creating a growth-promoting climate for our children might be key for causing change and growth earlier in life (Rogers, 1980, pp. 115?116). Imagine if we taught children that it is safe to be genuine with each other. What if our children had less of a desire to put up fronts or facades with each other? What if our children learned to accept and care for each other unconditionally? What if our children are taught to listen without judgment and really understand their classmates? I am thinking back about the possibility of feeling free to share my feelings of inadequacy and anxiety without fear. I am sure I would not have been the only one with those feelings. Instead, I kept them inside and felt alone in my struggles. Regardless of our individual fears or issues, we must deal with them so that we can
live a more joyful life, and then more able to reach our potential.

When we are free to express and share what we keep hidden deep inside, we build self-esteem and self-confidence, which will go a long way in preventing drug abuse and other destructive actions of youth and adults. Our ?insides? are unique yet similar to others?, so we are not alone. We cannot judge our insides on the others? ?outsides? since most of the outsides we see are usually not reality. Think about layers we wear on our outsides which appear in different forms. They might be flashy jewelry, fancy suits, and sometimes pretty matching handkerchiefs, or it might be the words we use to impress or the anger we express in court to hide or replace a feeling such as helplessness or inadequacy. When we can share our insides without the fear of being judged, we free ourselves from the chains of fear. Psychodrama provides a way to become aware of our individual issues and free ourselves from blocks to our spontaneity and creativity (Nolte, 2008, pp. 127?128). When we are more spontaneous and creative, our lives become more enjoyable and the people we represent will benefit.

Our society has it backwards. We are not preventative; we are, instead, more punitive. Money is not an issue when we jump on the punishment wagon. Put a bandage on it or kill him and go on with our lives. Our society does not have the ?we? attitude. It is more of the ?me? and ?mine? attitude. A more preventative society is extremely necessary, especially with identifying and treating anxiety and other issues. To do that, we have to be informed and educated in the mental health field. We have to be a more empathetic society. Teachers and educators should be those who genuinely care about our students and are more aware of the harmful effects of anxiety and the possible dangers of strict compliance with our societal conserves. Educators are in prime positions to influence our youth and should be valued by our society. When we help others to be more spontaneous and creative, they will be more able to overcome anxiety and reach their God-given potential. We do not have to be perfect lawyers or human beings. We have to realize that what we have to offer as lawyers and humans, right now in the present, if genuine, is good enough.

References


St. Clair, K., Personal interview. October 26, 2012.


