

Local

We don't know what we don't know



SCRIBBLER'S NOTEBOOK

By Jamie Etheridge

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This week in the office we had a discussion about the dangers of swimming in the sea. I asked how many people here could swim and how many visited the beach. A show of hands survey revealed that around a quarter of our staff don't know how to swim but still might sometimes wade into the water at the shore of the beach. I then asked another question: How many people know about rip currents and water safety. Only one of my 20+ colleagues raised their hand. Even among the practiced swimmers who regularly visit the beach, almost no one knew what a rip current was or how to spot one from shore.

Every year thousands of people around the world lose their lives from ignorance. Whether it's swimming in a rip current, or vaping an unknown substance or carbon monoxide poisoning from incorrectly ventilated spaces.

We don't know what we don't know until it's too late.

"Successful negotiation of everyday life would seem to require people to possess insight about deficiencies in their intellectual and social skills. However people tend to be blissfully unaware of their incompetence," writes David Dunning et al in the introduction to 'Why People Fail to Recognize Their Own Incompetence (Current Directions in Psychological Science Vol. 12, No. 3, Jun., 2003).

This mindset is often labeled the Dunning-Kruger effect, a cognitive bias where people fail to comprehend or even be aware of their own incompetence. Incompetence doesn't always equal ignorance but there is significant overlap.

If one is wholly blissfully unaware of a potential danger—rip currents, for instance—then how can one protect themselves? The short answer is they can't and the longer, sadder, answer is that as a result people die from wholly preventable reasons.

As a mother, one of my most important jobs is anticipating danger and teaching my children how to protect themselves. When they were small, I had to show them not to put their hands into a fire or run out into the street without looking. As they grow older, I explain about the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning during the winter months, open the bedroom window before we go to sleep. Over time, I hope my children will learn enough of these survival skills and anticipate potential hazards in order to avoid them.

Society is meant to facilitate the transmission of knowledge from generation to generation. We are now in an era where everything can be found online – from detailed, illustrated information on how to escape a rip current, to the chemical substances likely to be found in vapes. But if we don't know to look for this information, if we don't know what we don't know, what good will it do us?

Multigenerational relationships are key because they help children not only to learn from their elders about life in what my daughters gleefully call 'the olden times' but also provide a forum for the transmission of important and necessary life skills.



The addiction spider web



JUST KIDDIN', SERIOUSLY

By Sahar Moussa

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Addiction is like being stuck in a spider web—you get friendly with the spider in the beginning but get stung by it at the end. It is a vicious dark circle, and only by a very strong will and a big support system, can you overcome it.

When most people hear the word addiction, they think of dependence on a substance such as drugs or alcohol. However, addiction can come disguised in so many forms including gaming, gambling, sex, shopping, the Internet, plastic surgery, smoking, eating and other risky behaviors. Addiction is a complex and sensitive subject that requires research and professionals who are able to discuss and inform us about it.

However, I can share two personal experiences with drug addicts I knew: one of whom made it, while the other is still stuck.

I have a friend that was introduced to drugs at an early age, and out of curiosity she tried it, unfortunately she became addicted. She tried a lot of different substances but mostly was hooked to cocaine and freebase. To make the story short, she got caught and sent to jail for one year for drug abuse. While in jail she decided that she wanted to quit the life of addiction and have control over her life again— after jail she went to rehab for a few months, where she got clean for good.

However, she could not have done it without the support of her family, friends and many people who believed in her by giving her a chance. She managed to continue her studies and earn a degree, found her dream job and established a family. She was given another chance to fix her life and she took it— she wanted to change her life so bad which gave her the power to fight, and win against addiction.

Unfortunately such was not the case for another friend of mine. He was hooked on heroin—one of the most addictive substances in the world. He also got caught, sent to jail for a few months, and was put on Methadone— which is a

synthetic opioid prescription medication used as a replacement for heroin as part of pharmacotherapy treatment. Although he had the support of his family, he could not quit his addiction. He couldn't hold a job and his life continued to spiral.

There are many factors that impact a person's likelihood of becoming addicted to something including cultural, social, emotional, genetic, etc. For example, the availability of drugs and alcohol and lack of awareness in the society or within the community can be a factor of addiction. So too can family history of substance abuse.

In Kuwait recently officials raised a red flag over rising rates of violence and crimes due to the use of drugs and psychoactive substances where there are more than 40,000 drug addicts and 65 percent of crimes that are linked to selling drugs or using them. According to head of Al-Sabah Medical Specialist Area Dr Ahmad Al-Shatti, the number of drug-related court cases in Kuwait was 9,787 in the past five years, with 327 related deaths.

Addicts in our society are considered outcasts, where they must be considered as sick people who need help the most. It is our responsibility as a community to give them a chance and opportunity to overcome their addiction, by doing that, you could be saving a life. As parents, we have a huge responsibility towards our children to raise them in a healthy and clean environment, to know whom our children are hanging with, what social media content they are watching, to be their friends and listen to their problems and enhance their trust in themselves.

I do understand the social pressure nowadays between teenagers and the bad effect of social media—the feeling that you do not fit or belong, or no one can understand you or the feeling that you are useless and pressured to constantly prove yourself.

However, drugs are not the solution, because drugs will only destroy you and hurt people around you. If you are depressed and need someone to listen to you, do not hesitate to reach out for professional help. Do not lose hope in humanity, because there are always friends or trusted family members that are ready to listen to you by giving you the appropriate advice and support. You can also admit yourself into rehab centers in your area, in Kuwait there is the Addiction Treatment Center at Al-Sabah Medical Area, where they can help. If you have an addiction problem, always know that you are not alone.