



*Interview with Leo:
November 2012 and
Update: November 2017*

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1. How long have you been with your partner? When did you get engaged? Married?

We've been together for about 2 years now. We got engaged fairly early, at about 1 year, and got married 9 months later.

2. Tell me about your relationship anxiety and what you were struggling with when you first contacted me?

As soon as I knew that this is someone who I could marry, I felt the weight of the decision more, and while I was happy about being with her, there were all these *other* feelings too. Being a very introspective person, immediately I began searching inside for "what do these feelings mean?" "Am I making a mistake?" "Oh God, what did I do, I lied to her", and quickly spiraled into a frenzy of anxiety. The fear and anxiety made distant any sort of warm and loving feelings, which added to the "oh no, I deceived her and myself, I made a terrible mistake" feelings. It was all very confusing, as I knew I loved her, but I began to experience severe projection towards her. In my rational mind I knew that things that bothered me a lot were not a big deal, but for some reason I could not let it go. It was a very confusing and very uncomfortable time. There was a lot of frantic soul searching, no sleep, no eating, and one late night on the Internet I made my way to the the first place that offered something other than ubiquitous "doubt means don't". And that's what I wanted to hear. I knew that I wanted to be with my partner, and that whatever I was experiencing couldn't be true. I wanted to fight for what we had, despite a strong urge to protect myself and run away. I immediately purchased the e-course and then set up sessions with Sheryl and began a few months of really intensive work.

3. Were these issues that you struggled with before? In other words, what was your experience with anxiety before the relationship anxiety took hold?

I struggled with OCD and intrusive thoughts about health and mental health many times in my life, but never really classified myself as anxious. In the beginning of our relationship with my now wife, I had a big bout of anxiety about my health, and about my personality being able to be a good partner/father/husband, but those had faded a bit towards our engagement time. Until the e-course, I didn't realize that I had anxiety, or that's what it was called, and I definitely didn't know that I was a "sensitive person". Once I learned that in the

first few lessons, the larger picture of myself started to form and things that I had experienced all my life started to make sense. Coming from a high-stress, fast-paced corporate world, and fairly cool and strict upbringing, being scared of anything and failing was not acceptable, so after years of repressing those feelings I had a lot of anxiety built up that is taking time to undo. There are a few good lessons in the e-course that deal with that, specifically the first lesson and lessons on managing anxiety.

Specific to relationship anxiety, I had experienced it once before, in my first ever relationship. As soon as it became “secure”, I felt something utterly weird (what you will call projection, and transition) and being a completely ignorant young man, guided by other ignorant young men, I ran from that relationship, having believed the projections and fears meant that I simply “fell out of love” and it was time to move on. I came back to those memories many times during my engagement anxiety and my work through the e-course.

4. How did the e-course help you? What was the most helpful part of the ecourse? Another way to answer this question is to describe your main insights/realizations and how they've helped you along your healing journey.

The e-course was very helpful. It really is key to go through the exercises, daily, hourly if you have to. Some of the most valuable lessons were the lesson on Projections and “being annoyed” at your partner, and the lesson on real love versus infatuation. I think these are really important lessons, not only for relationships and rough patches, but generally in life and in long-term relationships. Learning that your feelings of unhappiness with whatever topic in life are your own responsibility and not blaming them on those close to you was an eye-opening experience. And even if you don't think you do that, everyone experiences projection and I've witnessed a profound change in my thinking and ways to look at life. We as a society are really poor at taking responsibility for making ourselves happy, and we gladly shift it on others, our partners, our families, and think that “well, if only I could change that” or “if only she/he was a better at this/that” then I would be happy. So learning to step up and realize that in every situation there's a good portion that is your own responsibility was and is an ongoing profound lesson. The lesson on recognizing real love versus infatuation is incredible. You can listen and go through it a dozen times and each one you'll learn something new. I've gone over it a few times during different stages of my own work, and it has provided good back-up for the times when you're not feeling all that “in love”. As well, throughout the e-course there were a lot of examples, interviews and lessons from other people provided as part of the e-course, and those are extremely helpful. Even just knowing that you're not

alone that experiences this will alleviate a lot of anxiety. Others have gone through this and made it work, so you know you can as well.

Throughout the course, Sheryl teaches several tools for managing anxiety, and when I learned the dialogue process it started to change my life. Dialoguing is a tool that's really good at getting to the deeper layers of your own mind and it's really good at identifying the underlying issues. There's a lot of work that you have to do even with the tool and it's not a "pill" for anxiety, but once you practice using it a few times, it's very helpful. What I truly like about it is that it's not a meditation, or a religious tool, although there's a bit of spirituality and higher guidance as part of it, but you can be anyone to use it, and to be able to apply in your situations. I use it frequently now, not only for relationship anxiety, but also for more everyday things in life. It's something that's really good to keep you grounded at times when it's hard to find structure in life.

5. Men are sometimes reluctant to sign up for the ecourse because some of the language on my site and earlier work is more geared toward women. What would you say to a guy who's struggling with relationship anxiety but on the fence about purchasing the course because he's concerned that the material won't apply to him?

The course material applies no matter who you are. As a man, this topic, anxiety, fears, feelings are hard to speak about and it's very hard to breach that built up barrier. I think women are more accepting of feelings and concerns and external help, and for men, it's harder to find this kind of support, and it's even harder to accept it once you find it. All I can say is that I had to come to the last resort to try this, to speak to someone about what I was going through, to go through the e-course. It's much more socially normal for men to try to "shrug it off", walk away, blame someone else, but if you're reading this, I am sure that this is not what you want to do this time. And this course can help. It will not tell you to walk away or that you're making a mistake.

The following is a thread started by Leo on the e-course forum that reveals the depths he's willing to go to uncover the root causes of his anxiety and projections. As you can see, he's still working through his projections, but he approaches his anxiety from a place of consciousness and responsibility, which allow him to move through the anxiety and find his inner peace and his love for his wife.

End of fantasies - confessional?

November 7, 2012 6:55 pm

Member Forum Posts: 22

Member Since: May 31, 2012

Continuing on the path of work through all of this, this is the metaphor that has been on my mind for days, so I really want to voice...or type it out. After months of struggling through the dark...DARK forest of anxiety, I came to the clearing. In the clearing I could see through the projections and the wild anxious fear to the truth that I am making a loving and good choice. I was on the shore of the river of change, and there on the banks of that river, I made the best choice of my life and married my fiancé. It has been both amazing and enlightening in that scary, life-revealing way.

Now I feel like I am crossing that river of change into the next chapter of life, but it is hard. It is scary, and like I posted before, waves of fear, of the largeness of life and world keep hitting me.

Here's the confessional part. I finally understand what the e-course lesson on letting go of "fantasies" and of "all other options" mean. Maybe it's just the typical "fear of commitment" – but I always thought, "I would be different than the rest. I will never be anxious or fearful of life. I don't need rest. I will meet the supermodel scientist artist partner and that our life will always be perfect, unlike all the gray mundane and hard life I saw around me. We will never fight, and we'll have amazing 100% all the time attraction. we'll catch it on top of the ebb and never let go." Realistic, right? I had a lot of fantasies that helped me through some hard years and into my 20's. And then when the real world started to break them apart, I began to "run from myself" about 5 years ago. I began to keep so busy and to keep life "ebbing good", that when I met my partner-to-be, I was an anxiety, ocd-ridden wreck. Any time I would try to relax, I get an anxiety attack. I wish I gained this understanding before, but better now than never!

These fears, and these fantasies, and the really unrealistic expectations and ideations about life need to stay on this side of the river. I feel like I need to cross that river and gain a better understanding of life and my new role, phase of life. To embrace the commitment, and responsibility, to learn what true love really means.

But, it's not easy. After the wedding was done, all of a sudden, the projection hit again – but I knew how to deal with it this time. Then irritations and such hit – again I was able to undo them. And I found a lot of sadness under it. So sad to have to become responsible. Scary to have a responsibility of a family now, to be fiscally responsible, to no longer have the need for the fantasy of that perfect *future* partner (I am very confident in my partner though and that I made the right choice), and all the other lives I cannot live. All the other things I cannot be. The liminal stage and sadness of growing up and choosing a life path has been

pretty hefty. I almost feel existentially depressed. I SHOULD be happy now. I have a great career, I have a great partner, but I keep wanting the life to just pick up and keep me excited.

I am realizing that I'm really scared to take responsibility for my own feelings of excitement and life interest. I think this is why romantic infatuation is so addicting – it happens on it's own. you don't need to do anything, it just hits you and you ride the waves of euphoria. And why it's so anxiety provoking when it ends. It's like going off the drug and facing the at-times harsh reality – fulfillment comes from within, and no one can do it for you.

I recently reached out to Leo to ask how he was doing and if he would be willing to write an update for this Sampler. Here's his response (November 2017):

To update you on what things are like 5 years after, I must say that marriage is and has been great. More than great, really. It has grown and evolved beautifully, just as we did over time and through the challenges, victories, losses and changes of life. It's something that takes two people to nurture, but provides such infinite rewards.

In our short 5 years together, we experienced many happy days and our share of dark periods of despair, but what's important is that every morning I get to wake up to a person I love more and more. Love is indeed not just a feeling, but an action, a choice, and a decision, and it takes time to fully understand that. And this is what the e-course helped me do. This doesn't mean that occasional projection doesn't strike, but when it does, it is so much easier to disarm than I ever though possible, using well-practiced tools.

When I found the Conscious Weddings E-Course course, I knew right away that this was the approach and the tools I needed. And so I did the course, then another, and then a number of sessions with Sheryl, because I wanted to truly understand it. This work is not a one-time shot, and I don't think it's meant to be something you do for the rest of your life over and over, but it's almost like learning how to drive, or learning a new language. Once you invest yourself into learning it, it becomes a part of your life toolkit, and a part of who you are. Then it becomes simply a matter of practicing it. It took concentrated effort at first, but after some practice it became an ongoing part of my self-care. It is almost like having an owner's manual for a sensitive mind.

The tools I learned helped me with many other highly stressful transitions: switching jobs, moving, buying a house, infertility and pregnancy loss, and providing care for my extended family. They also helped me to understand other people, to recognize other sensitive minds, some of whom like me once, don't understand or refuse to acknowledge their own sensitivity. I came into this work just wanting a quick fix to my projections and pre-wedding anxiety, but ended up learning so much and healing so much of my inner self. Breaking free from anxiety let me reconnect to my sensitive inner being, and to enjoy life, love, pursue my hobbies and interests instead of spending days ruminating and projecting. Doing this work has been one of the most important things I've done for myself.