

JD, Project manager, Silver Springs, MD

What was going in your life that caused you to seek Emily's support?

I was suffering from anxiety and depression about my work, my relationship, my parenting. It was affecting everything in my life. I felt completely adrift. I lost trust in myself for a long time. I didn't know what I wanted out of life, and even if I did, I didn't know how to go about getting it.

The Inner Relationship Intensive program taught me a whole new way of looking at myself and my feelings. It was more than just a paradigm shift or a new perspective. It changed my outlook on life.

Can you describe how this change of outlook affected you?

Yes. At work, for example, I was terrified of failure. Let's say I'd get assigned a new project. Even though I had never screwed up and the project was actually a feather in my cap, I'd start freaking out about everything that could go wrong.

At best I'd procrastinate doing the very things that would prevent anything from going wrong. At worst I'd be almost paralyzed with anxiety.

And how is it now at work?

Now, I live in the present instead of worrying about the past and the future. I'm OK with where I am right now. I have clarity what I can control, and what I can't. I've learned to trust myself again.

Also, I'm usually able to focus on a task and get done what I need to get done. It's part of my job to think about things that could go wrong and plan for them. It's a relief to be able to think about that as needed, without getting on the hamster wheel of obsessive worrying. I used to get on that wheel every day. Now, I can't remember the last time it happened.

That's a big change...is that true in other areas of your life?

Yes. For example, the fact that I no longer feel overwhelmed about planning and shopping for good meals came from this program: I now have the wherewithal to plan and shop for good meals. My son has commented on that. He also commented that I've been a lot less cranky since I started doing this work!

I wasn't a bad parent before, but the way I was modeling living life was not how I wanted him to live his life. I'd been worried because I didn't know how to set an example of someone who knew how to have a healthy relationship, how to go through life without living in fear.

How would you say you've changed as a parent, besides being less cranky?

Now I'm more empathetic. I listen better without telling him how to fix it. And just as I was holding myself to unrealistically high standards and not recognizing my

achievements, I was doing the same to him. I was pretty hard on him, though I didn't realize it at the time. I wasn't yelling when he did things wrong, because he's a good kid and doesn't do much wrong, but I wasn't celebrating when he did things right either.

Have other relationships in your life been affected?

Yes. A big reason I started working with Emily was to get clarity about my relationship. I was about a year into a relationship with this amazing woman, but I kept questioning it. If any small degree of uncertainty came up, I'd start thinking, "What if that gets bigger and blows the whole thing up?!"

I'd get scared and push her away. Then the distance between us would send me into even more panic

How are things now with your partner now?

Now, I just enjoy being in love with her and being with her. I can't wait to see her! I've broken the cycle of panicking whenever some possible future problem came up., so now we talk about the future freely, and it's OK knowing it won't all necessarily turn out according to the plan, because we are confident that however it goes, we'll work through it together.

The three of us feel like a family. It feels really good.

Can you describe how Emily helped you make this change?

I was so afraid to repeat the mistakes I made in my first marriage where there were problems early on but I didn't see them or ignored them. I promised myself I'd never do that again, but I didn't trust myself to know how. A major problem was that we had no effective way to talk about our problems. Because of that, all our issues were insurmountable. That was my only experience of long-term intimate relationship.

Emily helped me learn how to talk my way through problems in this new relationship, without freaking out. I learned how to stay in the present instead of letting my fears run into the future, and how to express myself to my partner, and have her hear me.

The more I learned to trust myself, the easier it was to trust my partner and to trust we could work things out. Before, I was either "all in," or nothing, because I didn't know how to deal with the uncertainty of being in a relationship with another person. Emily also helped me be with the fear of trusting that came up for me so I could stay "all in" while building the trust.

So do you no longer have any fears about the future?

The difference is that I'm not afraid of those thoughts any more. Some part of me still says, "Oh, but what if it DOESN'T work out?" But I don't try to squelch those thoughts any more. And I don't fight the feelings they kick up in me. As a result, the

feelings no longer overwhelm me. It's like I'm the dad, they are the kids...they can do things I don't like sometimes, but I'm not going to kick them out of the family!

I have more of an unconditional acceptance for myself. I understand now that all of my feelings, even the ones I don't enjoy so much, are real and a part of me, and that I can have them without them running my life.

How would you describe the experience of working with Emily?

At first I was afraid to trust her. I would have been afraid to trust anyone. I felt like I was jumping off a cliff! But Emily is very insightful, funny, warm, and friendly. Over time, the process itself showed results and I began to trust it.

When Emily was explaining something to me, she'd find the wording that would make it clear to me. She'd make sure I got things. To me, that's the core of a good teacher or guide: they won't give up until you get it. At the same time, she never tried to force information down my throat.

I've worked with therapists who did more talking than I did in sessions or who felt like they had an agenda, with diagrams, and plans, and goals. It felt like the therapist had a structure for the way the therapy was going to go. With Emily's program, it felt like, "Let's open up the can and see what is in there."

It's interesting because this program does have a structure, with reading and writing...but to me, it didn't feel like a structure. It was more about was learning how to create a space for my feelings, how to acknowledge them being there, and how try to figure out what they needed.

A lot of what we did together had to do with her knowing which nudge I needed. That's how I'd describe the program: it's like a fluid structure, guided by her intuitive relationship with the client.

So it felt very personalized.

Yes. And the Key Learning articles she sent me each week built on each other in a way that felt helpful and natural to me. She'd guide me in a session, then I'd read the Key Learning, and I'd say, "Oh! That's what we were doing!"

It sounds like there was a learning synergy between the sessions and the Key Learning materials.

Yes, that's very true. The sessions deepened my relationship with myself, and the Key Learnings clarified what was happening in the sessions. They progressed in tandem. They really enhanced my ability to take in what happened in the sessions, and my understanding of the whole process.

Is there anything else you'd like to add about your experience in the 6-month program?

If someone had doubts and wanted to talk to me, I'd be glad to talk to them.

That's great. Thank you so much for taking the time to share your thoughts and reactions with me.

You are welcome!

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