



The stories of four men who decided to change

We'd like you to meet four men. They are ordinary men who grew up with a clear set of guidelines about how to act or react in certain situations. As you read their stories try, as they have done, to make sense of what's happening in their lives.

1. John

John was stopped one day by a traffic officer for speeding. He works as a sales rep so is out on the road a lot. He covers a lot of kilometres and at times makes a decision to exceed the speed limit. On this occasion, John felt really angry and was confused about how to respond when stopped and given a ticket.

2. Harry

Harry had started playing squash with his partner, Jane. They often arranged to meet after work and have a game on their way home. On one occasion Harry was late. He chose to ignore Jane when she tried to express her annoyance at having to wait for him. After getting tired early in the game, Harry got Jane in a headlock and jumped up and down in the middle of the squash court.

3. Steve

Steve was at a party with his new girlfriend, Suzanne. He saw Suzanne talking to Alex, one of his friends. Suzanne was chatting away, obviously enjoying her conversation. Steve went quiet. He felt jealous, made a choice to drink more and became drunk, created a scene, and told Alex to step outside. Suzanne was embarrassed and went home alone.

4. Henry

Henry went to his local office of the Department of Social Welfare to see what income assistance he could get since he had been made redundant. After waiting for what seemed like an eternity he was seen by a young person who treated him rather rudely. Henry became abusive in the interview and stormed out.

John, Harry, Steve and Henry were struggling to understand and find acceptable ways to sort out issues important to them. Each made choices that made a difficult situation worse. Each could have made other choices that would have moved them to some level of resolution of the problem.

Each man's story is different, but there are areas of similarity. Behind the obvious story are many less obvious stories. John, for example, had just left his family yet again to go on the road. He had just argued with Jackie (his wife) about missing their son's birthday party. John's job meant he missed a lot of family occasions, something he felt guilty about. The argument had made him late for his first appointment in another town. His anxiety about being late, and his unresolved family issues, were preying on his mind when he heard the siren of the traffic officer's car behind him. The traffic officer seems in many ways to be the least of John's worries. The traffic officer may, however, be on the receiving end of John's

anger and frustration – his failure to be the kind of dad he wants to be, his sense of failure at not being able to keep his appointment, the fears that had arisen from his last argument with his wife. John wanted very much to have a good marriage and feared that Jackie would leave.

Harry hated to lose. He had grown up in a family where the men always won or they were wimps. From his father he also learnt that men are clearly in charge and that wives shouldn't complain. Harry hated his father, and whenever he saw him there was a disagreement over something. Jane could see the similarities between Harry and his Dad. Harry did not want to hear Jane when she pointed these out. His anger at being like his father was therefore directed at Jane.

Steve's last girlfriend had gone off with his best friend. He wasn't taking any chances this time. He had trouble putting his feelings and thoughts into words. Steve was afraid that Suzanne would not stay around because he didn't see himself as very lovable. Although Suzanne had told him she liked his quiet caring, Steve had trouble believing her comments. Steve's mother had been killed in a car crash when he was eight and he had gone to live with his aunt and always tried hard to protect himself from the possibility of being abandoned again. He ended up behaving in a way that would result in destroying his relationship with Suzanne, the very thing he was desperately trying to avoid.

Henry was made redundant from a job that he had worked in for 25 years. Given his age, he had difficulty finding another job and had set himself up in his own business. This was not going very well, as business in his line of work was very quiet. As a last resort Henry went to the local Department of Social Welfare. He felt like a failure in not being able to provide adequately for his family, something he had done well for the past 25 years of his working life. The combination of having to swallow his pride and ask for assistance was hard enough for Henry. How he was dealt with added to an already difficult situation.

What can we learn from John, Harry, Steve and Henry's stories?

Each man identified his anger as part of the problem; in fact, each of these men came through one of the programmes we have run. Clearly, each situation was much more complex than first presented. The question is not why John, Harry, Steve and Henry acted in the ways they did, but rather what were the ideas or beliefs and patterns of behaviour that stopped them from acting differently? Each of them came to learn about being responsible for their issues and decisions and gained skills to deal with the difficulties of life for which they felt ill-prepared.

Get aware and get real about family violence and what you can do to help! Would you like to become more effective when working with family violence offenders and become an advocate for those who need help the most?

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