



A Journey of Healing

BY: MAJ (R) Ken Landgren

FOREWARD

To the countless people around the world suffering from PTSD, depression or mental illness, endeavor to fight the good fight. May the radiance fall upon your lives again.

To my beautiful wife, LaDonna: You are my staunchest supporter and a constant friend.

To my parents who showed me how to live a good life.

To the multitude of mental health professionals I have met, who use their passion, skills, and knowledge to help patients.

To my lovely godmother whose spirit still shines bright in the universe.

To my friends who made me smile on non-smiling days, you carried and pulled me to the finish-line, and I truly want to give back to the society.

To the millions of Military Veterans, I have a soft spot in my heart for your sacrifices and the ability to change world history. Some of you are interred across this country, on foreign continents, and deep oceans in perpetuity. I salute you my quiet warriors.

INTRODUCTION

I do not carry fancy credentials and my qualification is simple, I experienced PTSD and severe depression while my personal and professional life crashed and burned. The onset of my mental pain and suffering was quick, I did not know what I was experiencing, and I surely did not know how to deal with it. However after much ruminating, I have thus identified many practical applications that can be used to fight PTSD and depression that are simple, effective, and easy to remember. I don't want to come as a braggart, but I have helped numerous people beat PTSD and severe depression.

I feel compelled to write this paper out of duty for those who are suffering immensely from PTSD and depression. This paper is the result of marrying my military experience, personal experiences, and the desire to help people. I have purposely sought out depressed soldiers when I was a soldier in a Warrior Transition Unit, and helped them overcome depression in a vast majority of cases. I endeavored to write a paper that is simple, comprehensive, short, and easy to understand. It is predominantly divided into Principles to live by, with an emphasis on visualization to help you understand.

I want to help you escape your mental shackles of depression. You might not be able to visualize victory now, but it can be achieved in the future. However, winning will require hard work, open mindedness, and visualization skills. Together we can reach the finish line, and you feel the warmth, love, clearer thoughts. You will start to live again.

Join me on this journey of mental health recovery. I will be your guide and present to you a route that is both difficult and easy to navigate. It is difficult as you are burdened by PTSD and depression, but it is easy because the route and concepts are easy to visualize and understand. ***I want to bring order out of chaos and several visualization models for your benefit. Good luck my friend as my thoughts are with you. Thank you for allowing me to help you get to your new normal.***

Listed Below are Seven Principles to Recovery that we will Focus on.

- 1. SURVIVAL**
- 2. LOVE**
- 3. PAINT THE PICTURE**
- 4. REDUCE STRESS**
- 5. MAINTAIN MOMENTUM**
- 6. RELATIONSHIPS**
- 7. RELAPSE**

PRINCIPLE 1: SURVIVAL

First and foremost you need to survive. Instead of thinking of reasons to die, find reasons to live. That will drive you in the right direction. In the darkest and loneliest moments ***do something!*** Listen to music or indulge in other activities like walking; something that will occupy your thoughts. As an example I chopped down many trees one winter in Kansas. I was on auto-pilot chopping with my ax, and I was not exclusively occupied by dark thoughts because of the activity.

Write down a list of all the people or organizations who you can contact at your weakest times. There is no shame asking for help, as people want to help you. These people or organizations are not limited to family, friends, superiors, emergency room, therapists, Veterans Organization, and psychologists. There can be other avenues for help. They will be more than happy to help you. When I was completely broken and afraid to drive, I called mental health or went to the emergency room.

PRINCIPLE 2: LOVE

Love Squared is a culmination of living several years with PTSD, depression, and anxiety combined with an inordinate amount of pain and therapy. ***Ernest Hemingway said this about depression, If you are in the dark, look for the light.*** Love is the light. Love is a peg from which everything hangs or is supported from. Love is your courage.

You might not know, but it is my imperative to convince you how important Love is for healing. Love supports hope, courage, energy, and passion – all of which are necessary to heal emotionally and mentally. It displaces the pain and becomes the basic tissue to recovering. I cannot emphasize love enough, as it can become a constant in a sea of variables. It gives you courage to keep striving during times you feel lost and alone.

Principle of Love might be the most important one out of the seven Principles. Love is an essential component to recovery from severe depression. Love is the rocket fuel and positive thinking that pulls and pushes you to victory. Complete victory is our goal, and we will not accept anything less. The next paragraph will explain how to harness love to your benefit.

Think about what you love in your life, and say good things about yourself, each and every day. It's that simple. I have used, "I love my wife, kids, parents, football team, pets, and the country. Ken you are a good person, husband, father, soldier, and citizen." I have offered this advice to many folks, and for a good majority, this is what they said to jump start their life again. ***This practice will do five things for you:***

- 1. It breaks the cycle of negative thinking.***
- 2. It gives you hope.***
- 3. It reminds you to see the beauty of life.***
- 4. It makes you think about gratitude for what you have.***
- 5. It helps counter racing thoughts.***

PRINCIPLE 3: PAINT THE PICTURE

Severe PTSD or clinical depression is caused by various events, conditions, and experiences. It often hits suddenly like a tidal wave with overwhelming force and speed. Often people feel anxious, scared, lost, and miserable. Depression is quite humbling as people feel incapable of controlling their mind and to an extent the body. Common symptoms are anxiety, pit in the stomach, lack of appetite, sleep, and racing thoughts, confusion, and memory loss, and a sense of defeat.

I want to tell you it will get better once you can visualize depression and given tools to take control of your life from depression. Just remember that every journey starts with one step forward. It will most likely be slow at the start, however, it matters most that you are moving forward albeit slowly.

Most of the causes of severe depression fall into the category of behavior, genetic, experience, and environment. The causes can vary dramatically based on different circumstances. ***Listed below are some causes of severe depression, although, this is not an all-inclusive list.***

Causes of Severe Depression/PTSD

PTSD	Genetics	Psychosis
Anxiety	Postpartum	Traumatic Events
Stress	Illness	Alcohol Abuse
Bipolar	Death of Someone Close	Drug Abuse
Moral Injury	Spiritual Injury	Lack of Sleep
Guilt	Shame	Divorce
Grieving Over "Old Self"	Accidents	TBI

Below is a depiction of a “depression paradigm or model” to describe the layers of depression in simple terms. This visual will help you understand the current and future mind sets. It allows you to visualize life in a new light, in order for you to determine the direction you seek to take. The paradigm facilitates recovery by making life more tangible and contributes to setting realistic recovery goals. It must be emphasized it is quite normal to go up and down the depression paradigm, and it is unrealistic for one to be happy 100% of the time.

Illustrated below is a mental map of PTSD depression, and consists of four distinct phases. Each phase is unique and have differing healing steps, however, ***there are common steps to each stage: * Use Love, Avoid Triggers, Use Coping Skills, and Reduce Stress.***

<u>New Normal</u>	
Description	Focus
Very Stable	Monitors Self
Has Hope	Spirituality
Feels Happiness	Driven by Passion
Feels a Lot Less Depression	

<u>Stable</u>	
Description	Focus
Stable Mood	Seek Happy Activities
Has Some Hope	Monitor Self
Feels Some Happiness	
Minor Level of Depression	

Numb

Description

Little Happiness
Little Mental Pain
Feels Little Hope
Has Some Depression
Minor Level of Depression

Focus

Continue Positive Routine
Monitor Self

Dark Deep Hole

Description

Feels Life is Out of Control
Has Racing Thoughts
Feels lots of Anxiety
Feels Detached From the World
Feels No Happiness
Severe Level of Depression

Focus

Do Not Hurt Yourself
One Step at a Time
Feels No Hope
Needs: Sleep, Food,
Grooming, Exercise
Survive

Severe PTSD and depression can be devastating as it weakens people emotionally, mentally, and intellectually. This renders the person in some cases incapable of prioritizing and categorizing stressors as truly a bona fide stress which needs to be addressed now.

This paper uses a pistol firing range as a “Stress Reduction Model’. Assume the range of the pistol is 25 meters, and each target is a stressor. The targets range from 25, 50, 100 meters. The 25 meter target represents goals or stressors that must be addressed in a few days, if not today. The 50 meter target represents targets several weeks to months away. The 100 meter target represents targets several years away.

I say focus on the 25 meter targets, put the 50 meter targets on the back burner, and forget about the 100 meter targets for the moment. This approach will reduce overall stress and help you prioritize goals. You will reduce stress and anxiety.

PRINCIPLE 5: MAINTAIN MOMENTUM

Do not take your hard work of mentally healing for granted, especially given the fact your mental disposition can be quite dynamic. Sustain your accomplishments and actively prevent relapses. ***Continue to apply all the Principles on a day to day basis, this will be a necessary preventive measure. Most of us have relapses, therefore, this Principle addresses Triggers and Coping Skills for you to fight back.***

Triggers are persons, places, events, and things that illicit negative emotional and mental responses like anxiety, anger, and fear. The responses can be subtle to debilitating. Triggers are to be avoided if possible, and others are to be overcome; and some require the guidance of a mental health provider. The following is a list of triggers:

Triggers

Illness	Taste	Memories	Drugs
Friends	Smells	Dreams	Blood
Hallucinations	Noises	Voices	Violence
Sights	Location	Alcohol	Music
TV	Movies	Public Places	Crowds

Severe PTSD depression is comprised of numerous emotional and mental challenges; it is not a singular event or condition. ***Coping skills are necessary to address triggers, stressors, counter or mitigate inherent conditions of PTSD and severe depression.*** Often a day consists of utilizing multiple coping skills to deal with the package emotional and mental challenges. ***Listed below are examples of coping skills.***

<u>Coping Skills</u>		
Stay Busy	Time Out	Avoidance
5,4,3,2,1	Intense Flavors	Music
Redirection	Electronic Media	Sleep
Play With Pets	Relationships	Family
Exercise	Meditation	Religion
Spirituality	Food	Confidant

PRINCIPLE 6: RELATIONSHIPS

People with severe PTSD depression often ask, “What is wrong with me?” The spouse or significant other often asks a similar question, “What is wrong with me and you?” Spouses often feel incapable of helping their partners due to the lack of communication, miscommunication, and general lack of understanding of PTSD and depression. Often the conditions are super charged like powder kegs ready to blow up. It becomes easy to avoid each other or indulge in minimal communication. This creates a divide when both parties should be united together, to fight one common enemy: PTSD or depression. It is imperative that this problem is addressed in a rational non accusatory manner or it will cause the relationship to further spiral out of control. Unfortunately, I have seen this happen numerous times because the couples were not able to “bridge the gap” necessary to work out problems together. They just give up.

The following information is for patients who are married or have significant relationships. Effective and ongoing communication is key to strengthening relationships. It is important for a couple to streamline life in order to strive for a common goal: recovery. Do things together. Find a baby sitter if you have kids. Go out on dates and enjoy each other’s company. Remember this is a date, not a forum for debating, arguing, or fighting. I have really witnessed couples fighting on dates much to their dismay. Sometimes it is prudent for the couple to attend marriage counseling to facilitate communication to rebuild their relationship. What one says is often misconstrued by the other partner. **Listed below are tips to maintain a healthy relationship:**

Tips for Relationships

Open Lines of Communication	Go to Marriage Counseling
Practice Empathy	Set Ground Rules for arguments
Go on Dates	Go on a Vacation
Go to Therapy Together	Make Major Plans Together
Reduce Stress	Monitor Tempers
Spend Quality Time Together	Show More Affection

PRINCIPLE 7: ACTIONS ON RELAPSE

Life is dynamic, and so is your mental and emotional health. Mild mood swings from day to day are normal, as life is not a linear. This is normal. Use coping skills, do not get excited, and ride out the small waves. Remember there are only a few constants in this universe.

However, pay extra attention to large shifts in your mental and emotional health. The swings are often attributed to triggers that are unanticipated and anticipated. Take a deep breath to think about what is occurring. Do not lose hope and do not hurt yourself. It is not the end of the world, and it is perfectly fine and suggested that you seek help. Use your coping skills to rationally approach this mood swing. This will give you an opportunity to dig in to your memory and experiences to gain the requisite perspective. ***In other words, if you have a relapse, go to your last known point of departure to frame the problem and attempt to fix it. Good luck my friend!***

CONCLUSION

We covered understanding the nature of severe depression, visualizing PTSD and depression, how to recover from it, and actions on relapse. This process might come across as foreign, but if you utilize the process, it will become like second nature. ***You will look back with more understanding and might even have an “Aha” moment with a review. You should strive for “New Normal” as you are forever changed. Do not grieve too much for the “Old You”.*** Keep plugging away and do not quit. There is much beauty and love in the world to sustain us. I hope that you will regain a semblance of who you were, and stand tall and confident even in the face of adversity. ***Remember that love is kryptonite to PTSD and depression.***

On a personal request, if you are comfortable and confident enough, then help people who have the thousand miles stare. You will be the ground guide who has conducted reconnaissance. They are lost, have broken spirits, and don't know what to do. You might have the knowledge to help people with PTSD and severe depression. You will solidify what you learned when you assist other people as well. It could require a lot of time and effort, but the dividend can be immense. It is a superb feeling to see people who could not smile, smile again, and relish in the knowledge that you are providing need service to mankind. Every journey starts with one step. ***I wish nothing but success for you and smooth sailing. If the sea is stormy, you would know what to do. Allow love and beauty to prevail in your life and fill it with wonder. Thank you for gracing this paper with your eyes; you are providing a needed service to mankind.***

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