

Director of ATC of Sacramento and Author/ Radio Personality Form a Therapeutic Partnership

Interview with Dr. Robin Zasio, Psy.D., Director of The Anxiety Treatment Center of Sacramento, and Jeff Bell, Author of "Rewind, Replay, Repeat" and a keynote speaker at the 14th OCF Annual Conference

Newsletter: You were featured in the Winter 2006 OCD Newsletter. For readers who might have missed that interview, can you give us a quick overview of your work at the Anxiety Treatment Center of Sacramento?

Dr. Zasio: Yes. In November of 2005, I opened The Anxiety Treatment Center of Sacramento. This clinic offers a daily Intensive Treatment Program, the only facility of its kind currently in Sacramento and the surrounding counties. We specialize in Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Social Anxiety, Panic Disorder, phobias, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, and related anxiety conditions, including Body Dysmorphic Disorder, Hypochondriasis, Hoarding, and Separation-Anxiety Disorder. We are also treating a fair number of individuals with Trichotillomania and Skin Picking. Additionally, we offer individual, group and family therapy services for those who have finished the Intensive Treatment Program or for those who are seeking help with more mild to moderate symptoms and can benefit from structured weekly appointments. We specialize in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy utilizing Exposure and Ritual Prevention techniques. We are also using Habit Reversal techniques with the impulse control disorders, such as Skin Picking and Trichotillomania.

Newsletter: Tell us about your Intensive Treatment Program.

Dr. Zasio: The program offers treatment for children, adolescents, and adults and operates five days per week, Monday through Friday, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. On average, most clients remain in the program for 4-6 weeks. Because we offer individualized treatment plans, each case is tailored to specific client needs and the length of stay may vary from person to person. Each day (after the initial assessment process) includes a combination of group work, journaling, one-on-one time with a specialized behavioral therapist engaged in exposure (or related) treatment, and homework assignments. Education and support is provided to fami-

ly members as well, helping them to better understand their role in the treatment and recovery process.

Newsletter: Anything else you would like to tell us about your program?

Dr. Zasio: Yes. We keep our program limited to six participants at a time, which allows "one-on-one" work with a behavioral therapist. Additionally, as may be the case in Hoarding, Panic Disorder, and Social Anxiety, our treatment providers are able to leave the Center and go where the patients' triggers are. This includes the community, their homes, and other areas where they need staff support.

Newsletter: Now then, tell us about your new partnership and what you hope to accomplish with it.



Jeff Bell and Dr. Robin Zasio

Dr. Zasio: We are very excited to announce that Jeff Bell, author of *Rewind, Replay, Repeat*, has joined our staff as a motivational consultant. As many of your readers know, Jeff's new memoir offers a truly inspiring OCD success story; and, in so many ways, his recovery is a testament to the CBT and ERP techniques at the very core of our treatment services at ATC.

Newsletter: How did you two come to link up?

Dr. Zasio: We actually met many years ago; so when Jeff's book came out, I was very interested to read about his journey. After hearing Jeff's keynote speech at this year's OCF Conference in Houston, I knew I wanted to find a way to incorporate his "Greater Good" message into our work here at ATC. We started exploring some ideas; and before we knew it, we had a plan in place.

Newsletter: We want to hear about that plan and how it's working. But first,

Jeff, give us some background on this whole "Greater Good" concept as it applies to OCD treatment.

Jeff Bell: Sure. The first point I want to stress is that we're not talking about a new treatment approach. Dr. Zasio and I are both strong advocates of CBT, in general, and ERP, in particular. That said, we also know that these evidence-based techniques often prove to be especially challenging; and that's where my "Greater Good" perspective can come into play.

Newsletter: So how does it work?

Jeff: Well, our professional friends, I suppose, would call it a "cognitive shift." Being a layperson, I simply call it a shift in perspective. At its core are the following key assumptions: (1) Because an obsessive-compulsive's world is black and white, so too are the "default" choices he/she weighs: "right" vs. "wrong" or "good" vs. "bad." (2) As seen through the distorted lenses of OCD, "good" choices are those that reduce fear and alleviate doubt; "bad" choices are those that increase fear and introduce doubt. (3) Because compulsions (temporarily) reduce fear and/or doubt, they are almost always seen as "good" choices in this default framework.

Newsletter: You've got "good" and "bad" in quotes here. Why?

Dr. Zasio: Yes! This is very important to note, by the way because we're talking about perceptions distorted by OCD in what we call the "Default" OCD framework.

Newsletter: There's another framework OCs can use?

Jeff: Right. I call it a "Greater Good" framework, and it acknowledges the perceived (though distorted) "good" of acting on compulsions, eliminates the "bad" choice (as impossible), and introduces a "Greater Good" choice – one that, in some way, serves purposes larger than OCD and tends to benefit others. And, because "purpose and service" tend to trump "fear and doubt" as human motivators (our contention!), this framework shift serves to lead OCs to far more productive decisions, including those essential to tackling traditional ERP therapy.

Newsletter: How about an example?

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Jeff: Sure. As a longtime OCD washer with harm obsessions, I predictably found myself feeling rather anxious at my early book signings. I remember one event, in particular, at which I wound up in a bookstore bathroom just beforehand, wanting to scrub my hands over and over again so I wouldn't "contaminate" the people who had turned out to see me. In my "Default" OCD framework, I had two choices: (1) Leave the bathroom and risk contaminating readers [the "bad" choice as seen through OCD's distortions] or (2) Scrub and re-scrub my hands again and again [the "good" choice as seen through OCD's distortions]. Fortunately, I was able to see at that moment that I had another option – namely, to write off the "bad" choice as impossible and instead add another choice.

Newsletter: A "Greater Good" choice?

Jeff: Exactly!! Even in the throes of panic, I could see the "Greater Good" served by my leaving the bathroom and meeting the people who had come to my book signing. Clearly, if I could help others understand what OCD is about and offer some hope to sufferers, I could be of service and act with a worthwhile purpose. Now I again had two choices: "good" and "Greater Good." Ultimately, "Greater Good" won out because – and again, this is my contention – "purpose" and "service" trump "fear" and "doubt" as human motivators.

Newsletter: Dr. Zasio, Jeff has just described a very clear "Greater Good" motivator. He's written a book and is giving inspirational talks. But what about clients who are not in that kind of position? How do they find "Greater Good" motivators?

Dr. Zasio: Great question. It's one that comes up frequently. "Purpose" and "service" can be as simple as freeing up time (that would have been spent on compulsions) to spend with family or tackle a self-improvement project, etc. There are infinite ways to introduce "Greater Good" options.

Newsletter: Okay, so it sounds like the concept here is to help motivate clients to make tough decisions when faced with OCD challenges. But what about proactive measures?

Dr. Zasio: Like doing ERP and sitting with fears? These are the ultimate goals of our

motivation efforts. When a client is faced with the basic question of whether to show up for the treatment program or stay at home, this very same "Greater Good" shift can help motivate him or her to get to the treatment center and tackle the ERP exercises.

Newsletter: With this as background, how then are you implementing this motivation framework at the Center?

Dr. Zasio: Jeff and I meet with the ATC's Intensive Treatment Program clients one morning every other week for 90 minutes. During this time, Jeff shares his story, including his successes with ERP and the motivational techniques he ultimately developed to get through the treatment. With the help of various worksheets and diagrams, Jeff and I then present his "Greater Good" framework and offer clients a chance to apply it to their own particular challenges.

Newsletter: What has the response been so far?

Dr. Zasio: Nothing short of phenomenal. The whole concept really seems to resonate with our clients; and by the end of our workshops, they too are applying "Greater Good" principles to their own decision-making. Because of this success, we are now offering this workshop to consumers, professionals, educators, family members, and others who are interested in learning how to apply these principles outside of the Intensive Treatment Program.

Newsletter: We understand that you've also set up a web site for anyone interested in learning more about this "Greater Good" framework. Tell us about it.

Jeff: We have, and we'd love your readers to visit us at www.YourGreaterGood.com. Right now, we're using the site primarily to publicize our "Greater Good" workshops in Northern California. Down the road, we hope to expand our outreach efforts and provide additional online resources for those interested in treatment motivation.

Newsletter: This all sounds great. While we've got you, Dr. Zasio, are there other changes at the ATC we should know about?

Dr. Zasio: Yes. Many of the people who enter our program come from out of town. Because of this, we now have housing to accommodate those traveling to our program. Although it is an added cost, it is significantly cheaper than if they had to stay in a hotel. Additionally, each patient has his or her own room and bathroom, and

the facility is located within walking distance to the program, grocery store, shopping, bus line, and other transit. There is Internet access, and the facility is fully furnished.

Newsletter: Tell us about your staff.

Dr. Zasio: In addition to Jeff and me, our clinical staff includes Felicity Sapp, Ph.D.; Jennie Gault, MFT; Satinder Gill, Psy.D. intern; and consulting psychiatrists, Mitchell Galerkin, MD, and Carlos Solis, MD.

Newsletter: How are your psychiatrists involved in the treatment process?

Dr. Zasio: We recognize that treatment may need to be augmented with medications. We work very closely with our psychiatrists, who conduct thorough evaluations to determine our patients' needs and how medications may help to reduce symptoms and thereby make the treatment process more manageable.

Newsletter: Can you tell our readers about how you use a "residential setting" at the ATC to help consumers with obsessions and compulsions that are centered in their home environment?

Dr. Zasio: Because so many of the people we treat get triggered or "stuck" in their home environment, it only seemed logical to simulate a setting in which they can engage in exposure exercises that replicate their home-based triggers. This helps significantly in the generalization process. Additionally, our facility is a very quiet and peaceful setting, allowing for increased comfort and support of the therapeutic process.

Newsletter: How about other changes?

Dr. Zasio: We are pleased to announce that we are expanding and opening The Cognitive Behavior Therapy Center of Sacramento. This program will operate in the same facility as The Anxiety Treatment Center, and will help us to serve a greater number of people and expand our services to those who are seeking treatment for their anxiety.

Newsletter: If someone is interested in getting further information about your program and the services you offer, how can they contact you?

Dr. Zasio: They can visit our website at www.AnxietyTreatmentExperts.com, or call our office at 916.366.0647. We'd also like to encourage readers to visit Jeff's website at www.RewindReplayRepeat.com and our new "Greater Good" partnership site at www.YourGreaterGood.com.