

WORRY REHAB

Where Worry Takes a Break



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WORRY IS NO
LAUGHING
MATTER.

But, sometimes laughing and a change of perspective empower and motivate us to deal with troublesome things like worry a little better. With that in mind...

WELCOME TO WORRY REHAB

Worry Rehab is not a real place per se, but instead, it is a mindset. It is us recognizing when worry is managing us rather than us managing worry. And, it is us then intentionally deciding to be proactive in our worry management efforts.

I've been to Worry Rehab countless times over the years and, as a professional counselor for more than 20 years, I've encouraged my counseling clients to do the same. I guess so many of us are what you would call Worry Rehab "regulars." I hope you, too, will become a regular until, maybe one day, you're fully rehabilitated and no longer need Worry Rehab.

This little booklet is not a comprehensive resource and not meant to replace professional services you may need if your worry gets out of hand. However, it is filled with several worry management strategies that you can use any time your worries pick up and you need a quick "how to" to help you regain some power over worry. Among the various strategies I mention, there is one that I spend the most time talking about—compartmentalization. And, because I'm encouraging laughter and fresh perspective to help you to and through Worry Rehab, I talk about the very technical-sounding term, compartmentalization, in a very everyday, relatable, fun metaphor. Here it comes...

WORRY IS LIKE LAUNDRY

When life gets “messy” with worry, it’s kind of like laundry. You know...we’ve washed our laundry but haven’t had time to fold it and put it away. It’s piling up! And, it’s piling up so much so that instead of taking it from our drawers, we have to pull it from the dryer or laundry basket. That’s if we had time to get it in the washer in the first place. Sometimes we’re pulling from the dirty laundry piled up on our floor or in our hamper. (Although we could get a lot of metaphor mileage from dirty laundry, we’ll just stick with clean laundry for now.)

To ease our load, or gain some sense of order, we finally have to fold the clothes and put them away in a what?....

In a dresser or chest of drawers...or whatever
you call where you put your clothes.

This is a picture of compartmentalization.
Compartments. Drawers. See where I’m going?!

COMMON WORRY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Now, back to worry. We often do the things we know to do to relieve our worry. In Worry Rehab, we often pray, talk to friends, take walks, try to remember how things worked out for the best in the past, etc. We may even visit with a counselor and check in with our doctor to see if our anti-anxiety medicine needs tweaking. These are all good worry management strategies that help us take a worry break.



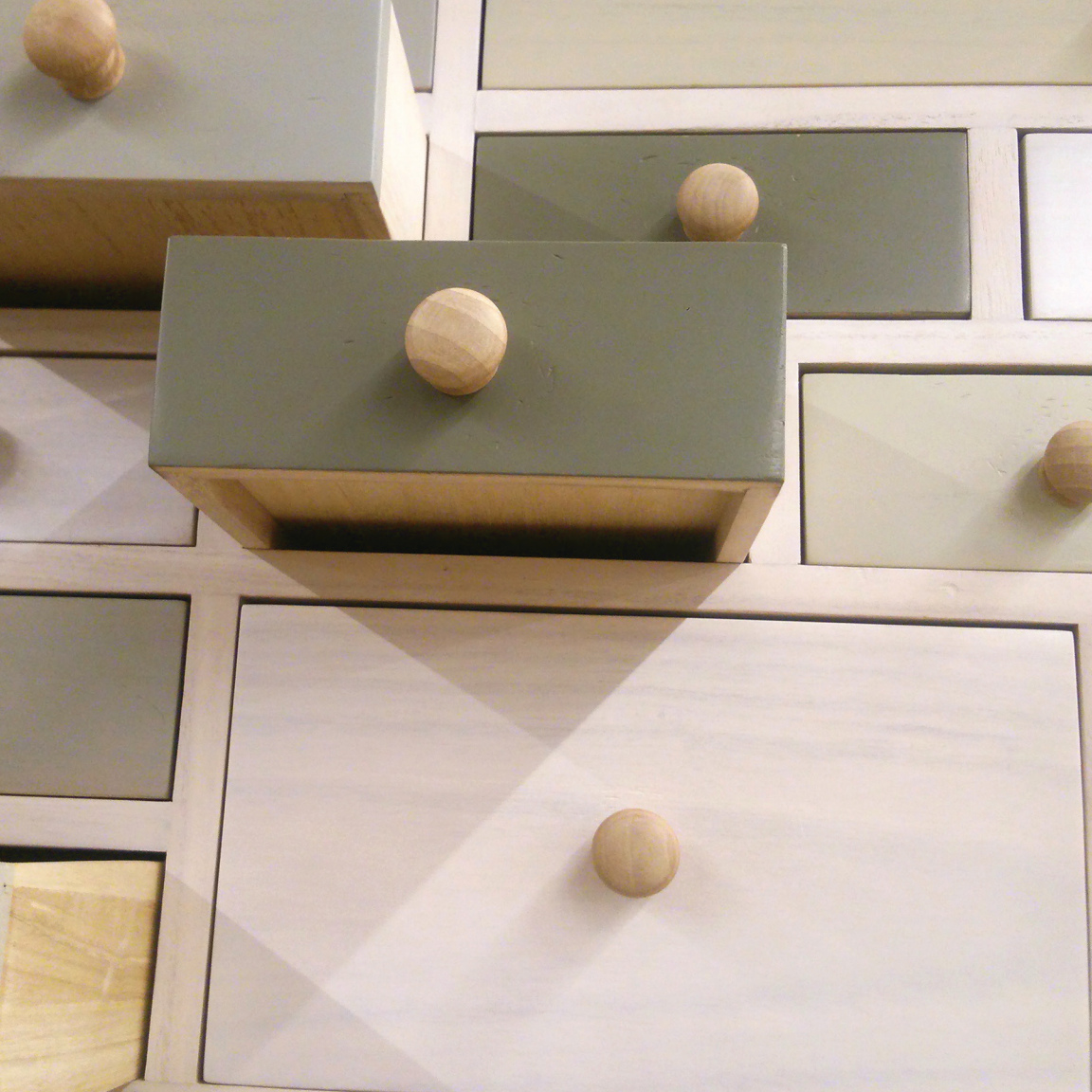
I suppose you could say, this is us “cleaning our laundry.” That is, we have taken steps to assess the situation and regain our calm, but we’re under greater stress than normal (those complications I mentioned earlier). Circumstances are more challenging now such that we take our usual measures but just can’t quite overcome the pile of worries that is piling up in our heart and mind. We know “this too shall pass,” but when?!

WHAT COMPARTMENTALIZATION IS

Along with other good Worry Rehab strategies, we need to “sort” our worries (get organized), “fold” them (regain basic control where that’s possible), and put them into drawers (separate the little, manageable worries from the bigger, more difficult-to-manage worries). This metaphorical process serves as a useful illustration of what it’s like to compartmentalize.

Let’s build on the metaphor a little more by returning to that dresser or chest of drawers. In one drawer are your normal, fairly manageable family matters. This drawer may include parenting and/or day-to-day home operations. We’ll call this drawer “family matters.” Other more challenging family-related issues might be sorted into drawers such as “teenager challenges,” “school struggles,” and “friend issues.” These temporary drawers will come and go, whereas “family matters” will be an ongoing drawer in your life.

Another ongoing drawer is your marriage or dating relationship, and in that drawer are the typical issues that couples face. That drawer tends to be pretty manageable for you. However, you and your person may occasionally experience



extra stressors that require their own temporary drawer or drawers. For example, you might have a drawer labeled “parenting disagreement” for the time it takes you and them to work through that particular issue. Of course, whatever more serious issues may occur or re-occur for you as a couple, compartmentalization may not be a powerful enough worry management strategy. Instead, you would want to seek the help of a professional counselor.

Your finances go in another drawer. Same here, maybe it’s not perfect, but at least you know what to expect in the area of finances. Thus, finances can be sorted and placed into the compartment, or drawer marked “finances.” Let’s say, though, it’s a time when two or three unexpected bills have occurred, then you might need a new and hopefully temporary drawer called something like “unexpected bills.”

You get my point. I recommend you adopt this Worry Rehab illustration to help you with compartmentalization. This gives us a common, visual way of shifting our chaotic, overwhelming worries into manageable categories. Otherwise, the chaos can build, further shut us down emotionally, and prevent us from being as effective at managing our worries.

As you continue getting organized, you may find yourself clearer about which circumstances are currently complicating your ability to manage worry. This helps not only separate the complications but also reassure you that “everything” is not, in fact, going wrong or terrible. Being able to separate the problematic from the not-so-problematic, in itself, can help you worry less and, thus, make progress in Worry Rehab.

BUT, WHAT ABOUT OTHER COMPLICATING FACTORS?

Obviously, complications vary widely. I'll give you a couple examples that come up in counseling often and require extra sensitivity and care.

For starters, perhaps you have a drawer labeled “past trauma.” A recent trigger may have dredged up some thoughts and feelings from the past. It could be that, in addition to my playful-but-productive Worry Rehab perspective, you need to do extra self-care right now, including returning to counseling to work through recent developments related to the trauma. Or, it could be that you've never been to counseling and may want to try it and see if it helps bring healing to old emotional wounds. Or, it could be that you're someone who is content to work alone but recognize this “drawer” as one in which you need to do some extra sorting and folding right now.

Maybe it's not trauma; maybe it's a new career endeavor. You're working hard and making great sacrifices to chase your dream, but in your heart, you're fearful that your best won't be good enough. This drawer may be labeled “uncertainties” or “career,” ...whatever label works best for you.

I don't know how you'd label your drawers, but you see where I'm going. I invite you to spend some time literally thinking about and even writing down what your current stressors and worries are. Label those “drawers.” Take note of which drawers are manageable and which need extra attention. This is an important step in regaining some emotional calm and mental control over your situation. Without organization (figurative and literal), so many of us easily get overwhelmed, and

those overwhelmed thoughts and feelings shake our confidence in our worry management abilities. Compartmentalizing can help restore a healthy sense of control, which in turn, helps to alleviate some worries. That's Worry Rehab at its best! There, worry takes a break!

THIS IS AN IMPORTANT STEP IN REGAINING SOME EMOTIONAL CALM AND MENTAL CONTROL OVER YOUR SITUATION.

WHAT COMPARTMENTALIZING IS NOT

Although compartmentalizing is a healthy way of organizing our thoughts and feelings and protecting ourselves from excessive worry, it is not an excuse for denying whatever is troubling us. Remember, compartmentalization actually helps us gain better clarity on our troubles; it helps us more accurately assess our circumstances and be more honest with ourselves.

Being honest with ourselves is important. When honest, we no longer suppress our thoughts and feelings. We, instead, through healthy compartmentalization, get better at acknowledging vulnerable truths such as, "I don't know what to do about all this worry I feel. I'm at my limits. I need help." Acknowledging our limits

is not a sign of failure; it's a sign of freedom. We're no longer willing to live with the chaos of worry but are increasingly sorting and organizing our worries so that we can better deal with them.

TEND YOUR DRAWERS

Sorting and organizing our worries helps us gain clarity about which worries are big and not so big. This Worry Rehab process, which sometimes is one that we need to engage in on a daily basis, also reminds us of which drawers in our lives need every day attention, and in which ones we can come and go only as needed. For example...

Your marriage may be fine, but most healthy marriages need daily attention and effort (i.e., communication, support, encouragement, love). So, as you work to be more intentional about how you spend your energy, you should prioritize your marriage, actively storing and using positive energy early and often before that energy gets used up by lower priorities. Same with parenting and work. These and any core areas of your life are drawers that you're in and out of many times every day. You know...like your clothes...some you wear regularly; others not so much. The more important the drawer, the more important it is to be proactive with managing those drawers, or compartments.

In contrast, some drawers are less desirable; they're where our most worrisome stressors are, and thus, where we go less often. These drawers also need attention. In fact, these drawers sometimes seemingly "slide out" on their own. That's how stress works. It creeps up on us or is especially overwhelming at times. Those

drawers open in our hearts and minds without us wanting them to open. We can't ignore those issues—they won't let us. Through healthy compartmentalization, we acknowledge these drawers, begin “sorting and folding” the worries that exist in those drawers, and work through those worries in productive ways so that they are hopefully less and less disruptive in our lives.

YOU'RE THE BOSS

Let's revisit the trauma drawer example I shared. Trauma and other long-running or otherwise really stressful issues have a way of making us feel like they're the boss of us. That, however, is a lie. You are the boss of that issue! You might not believe it right now, and it may take you a while to believe it, but you are the boss. By that, I mean you get to decide when it is that you work in that drawer. And, yes, you may need the support of a professional counselor to do the work you need to do in the area of trauma and recovery, but you get

to say when and how much energy you want to give to the work. When you feel those worries rising, you can even say, “I'm okay. That was in the past. I'm here right now, and I'm safe.” Or, you may think to yourself something like this: “I know I need to talk to someone, and I will, but right now, I want to focus on my job. I like my job; I need



my job. I will come back to these worrisome thoughts later today.”

These types of thinking and self-talk are examples of you being the boss of your drawers. In this case, trauma does not own that drawer, nor is it in control of you. You are in control! That’s what healthy compartmentalization is all about. And, this Worry Rehab truth is freeing! It doesn’t cancel the truth that you’ve been hurt in the past, but it does return power to you to decide right now what you want to do with any overwhelming thoughts and feelings.

Same with your career aspirations. With trauma, you’re understandably still dealing with the past’s effects on you right now. With career, you’re understandably dealing with the unknowns of the future. Either way—the anxiety can be paralyzing. And, so with your career-related worries, you say to yourself, “I’m going to be alright. I’m doing all I can do right now. I can only live in today, not tomorrow.”

MY DRAWERS

Trauma and career are just a couple troublesome drawers I regularly encounter with folks. I thankfully have not endured the trauma that so many have. But, as I’m writing this booklet to encourage you (and myself), I am working to reduce my career-related stress. Here’s what my current drawers include...

I have a marriage drawer, parenting drawer, and finances drawer. Among other typical drawers, I am battling some sort of sinus situation (short-term health drawer), and I am concerned with my current and long-term physical fitness (long-term health drawer.)

Career-wise, it's helpful for me to break my work into a few drawers: counseling drawer, teaching drawer, and writing/ministry drawer. Breaking career into a few different drawers helps me keep my career-related worries more manageable. However, right now, they're all stressful in their own right. I am in each of these drawers many times on a daily basis, but I sometimes have to close these drawers. Specifically, this means closing my computer when I'm tired, letting emails wait, meeting the deadlines I can meet without feeling like a failure when I can't meet every deadline, and reminding myself that these are the tasks God has given me and that He is helping me every step of the way.

IT MAY BE TIME TO SORT, FOLD, AND “PUT AWAY” YOUR WORRIES IN A HEALTHIER, COMPARTMENTALIZED WAY

These are worry management strategies that work for me, a Worry Rehab regular! These strategies are also ones that I recommend you try if you're not already using them.

Again though, whatever your drawers are—they're your drawers—you get to decide how you want to make them work for you. If you catch yourself dealing with more worry than you prefer, examine your drawers. Are your worries piled up in

disorganized, chaotic ways; are they clouding your thoughts and feelings such that you aren't as effective as normal in managing your worries? If so, it may be time to sort, fold, and "put away" your worries in a healthier, compartmentalized way.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Sometimes those dang drawers just have a way of sliding open all on their own. Or, we may forget to close a drawer and accidentally "run into it." Ouch!

You could try ignoring the drawer, but it won't let you. Instead, notice it. Spend time reflecting on why a certain drawer or certain drawers need attention. Perhaps an opportunity for improvement or for healing are getting ready to open up, and by noticing rather than ignoring your issues, you can capitalize on the opportunity. This is all advanced Worry Rehab, so allow yourself some practice!

Next, decide whether now is a good time to be in that drawer. If so, do some sorting and folding. If now is a bad time, consciously decide, "I can't be in that drawer right now. I'll come back to it later." And, then, later, when you're ready, return to do some work in that drawer. Just be intentional so that your "later" doesn't become "never."



SUMMARY OF WORRY REHAB TIPS

In talking about compartmentalization, I've actually shared several additional worry management strategies:

> **Pray.** The Bible is full of verses that provide hope and direction for overcoming worry. I especially love 2 Peter 5:7, which says, "Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares for you." Meditating on scripture and letting it guide our prayers can help us feel more connected to God and less worried with all the things we tend to worry about.

> **Walk.** Physical activity is known to reduce stress and improve our outlook on worry. Slow, thoughtful walks may do you a lot of good. And, yes, you may have to give up something less important to get in more walking time, but as the old saying goes, "nothing ventured, nothing gained."

> **Remember past successes.** Current worries sometimes make us forget how we survived and overcame past worries. Through remembering and celebrating past victories, we can feel encouraged and become more motivated in facing and overcoming our current challenges.

Consider the possibility that, in the case of some worries, "this too shall pass." However, avoid dismissing important thoughts and feelings, as they truly are worthy and deserve care.

> **Seek counseling as a source of support.** As a professional counselor myself, I'm obviously partial to counseling. But, research shows that it truly can

be a great resource for navigating worry. You may be very insightful and balanced, but counseling may still help you gain perspective, renewed confidence, and new strategies for dealing with worry. Consider this Worry Rehab with a rehab professional!

> **Get a medical evaluation.** This will help to identify and treat health-related issues. We can be top-notch problem-solvers, but if our bodies are not functioning optimally, our good emotional, psychological, and spiritual efforts won't be enough to counteract physical deficiencies we're battling. A medical check-up can help you figure out what physical steps you need to respond to the physical origins of stress and worry.

> **Other measures** include relaxation training/deep breathing, journaling, doing a book study (either solo or as part of a small group), and participating in support groups. You may find information on these and other types of worry management tips via a search of the internet (be careful to choose credible sources of information) and/or by consulting with a professional counselor.

ONE LAST DRAWER

One very important drawer in mine and many people's lives is a faith drawer. The older I get, the more grateful I am for this drawer. This is more than a great self-care or self-compassion drawer (and those are awesome drawers). Faith is what makes it all make sense for me. I trust and believe that God loves me and is working things out for my good. So, when I return to my faith drawer, I find comfort, rest, and peace there like nowhere else. Like me, maybe you already visit that drawer multiple times a day. Or, if not, maybe it's a drawer you may want to consider for the future.



CLOSING

You and I both know that worry is “for real.” We also have a lot of strategies for coping with worry. My hope is that this booklet has reminded you about strategies you’ve used or are using and that it has encouraged you to keep growing in your worry management insights and abilities. I also hope you’ve had fun reading my laundry/drawer metaphor for illustrating compartmentalization. I enjoyed writing it for you! See you in Worry Rehab!!

For more resources and encouragement, check out my website:

www.shannonwarden.com