

Alexander: Money talks, but people don't talk about it

By Susan Alexander
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What would you rather talk about: sex or money?

Turns out more people would rather share their sexual habits with a complete stranger than they would their money habits. That's just one of the things I learned from a conversation this week with Ted Klontz, who facilitates a money-focused program at Onsite, a therapy and retreat center in Cumberland Furnace, Tenn., outside Nashville.

Here are a few more stats to consider:

According to a Stanford University study, 13 million Americans identify themselves as compulsive spenders. More than 12 million people filed for bankruptcy in 2003, according to the administrative office of the U.S. Courts. Six million identify themselves as having gambling problems, says the National Institute of Mental Health.

Where do these people go to get help?

That's where Onsite comes in. The center offers one of the few programs in the country for people with money issues.

I heard about it last month on "Good Morning America." Country singer Winona Judd was being interviewed about her overspending habits and the help she found at Onsite.

The program it offers is five-and-a-half days of therapy, meditations, small group meetings and other exercises intended to awaken participants to the lifelong "money scripts" that rule their behaviors, and then to address them for a positive result. For instance, if you've always believed rich people are evil and greedy, you may be undermining any effort you make to grow your own wealth because you don't want to be evil and greedy. Onsite would try to unearth that underlying belief and help you redirect your thinking, thereby impacting your behavior.

Klontz, who owned the therapy center for 17 years, started the money-focused program in 2004 and still facilitates it. He says there are so few therapists and centers that address financial behaviors because talking about money is so taboo in our culture. The survey he cited about sex and money revealed that 22 percent of participants said they'd discuss their sexual habits with a stranger while 17 percent said they'd discuss their money habits. Klontz says therapists don't want to talk about money, either.

"The counseling and therapy world just pretends money issues don't exist. They don't want to talk about money; they generally have someone else handle the money part of their practice," he says. "They have no training, there are no courses on the psychology of money. We're not supposed to have any issues. Well, the ducks have come home to roost."

Onsite's program pairs a therapeutic group leader and a financial planner to work with clients, some of whom spend too much. Others won't spend a dime. Some think they're entitled, others believe they'll always be poor.

Klontz and his partners also train other therapists and financial planners to address money issues, and they've recently published a book on the topic called "Facilitating Financial Help."

Onsite's money-focused programs are held three or four times a year and cost \$2,650. That's a pretty big number for someone struggling with money, isn't it?

"It's part of the truth: it costs money to get better," Klontz says. He goes on to say the center is associated with a foundation that offers partial scholarships to participants unable to pay the full price. For information, call Onsite at 800-341-7434 or go to www.onsiteworkshops.com.

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