

Isolation Nation - Supporting Mental Health Through COVID-19

Post-session communication from Michael Landsberg

To the NCTCA folks who honoured me with their presence- THANK YOU!

To the NCTCA folks who didn't honour me with their presence- maybe next time!

As I said in advance- thank you for the chance to talk with you today. Every time I get to speak to a group like you- I realize how lucky I am to have found a way to use the worst thing in my life- as one of the best!

I wanted to leave you with some thoughts. Some of these I expressed to you in my talk- others will be fresh and new to you. These are original thoughts of mine- all created through two decades of battling an enemy. You get to know the enemy really well- when you fight him/ her every day. Every single day.

I am writing these in short, portable bites. Please share these with people you believe are battling.

Mental illnesses, like depression, are NOT self-inflicted, they are not choices, or weaknesses. They are as real as a tumour, but since we can't scan them or biopsy them, many see them differently.

I shared a few hashtags with you that I believe will serve you well if you feel overwhelmed by the illness.

#SickNotWeak. It's the simplest way I can think of to battle the stigma. I am sick, but I am NOT weak. YOU are sick, but you are Not weak!

#ProudOfTheShower. When you are finding getting out of bed really tough and a shower seems an impossibility- be proud of any and all steps you take. A shower would be one of those steps that others would see as meaningless, but with depression it has to be celebrated! Remember- "that's one small step for another man (or woman), one giant leap for our kind."

#F#ckTheWalk. A personal favourite. 'The walk' represents all of the suggestions the healthy brain makes to us. "Michael- why not go for a nice walk- you'll feel better!" "Michael- why not appreciate the good things in your life instead of moping around?" "Michael- are you drinking enough water?" Ugh. That's why we say 'F#ckTheWalk.'

a few others I didn't mention:

#FightForYourHappiness. Mental illness is an enemy that will not let up. You have to see this as the most important fight of your life. No one can do it for you. People can help you, encourage you, but the fight has to come from you.

#ChangeIsHope. If you have woken up every day in pain for the past months, year, years- then we both know with certainty that you will wake up in pain tomorrow. That feeling is crushing. The hopelessness takes all the fight out of us. To find hope- you must change something. Often it's as simple as making an appointment with your family Doctor. Change, brings the hope for something better. Change is Hope.

#IWinBecauseIFight. if you only define winning as beating the illness, then you can end up feel like you are losing far too often. The fact that you are fighting, is a victory in itself. That's why even on a bad day- I say "I win because I choose to fight."

Each of those hashtags conveys a really important thought.

Okay, let me make the rest easy- I will answer the questions I think you might ask. Of course, I will ask the questions as well.

Is mental illness a choice? **No one chooses mental illness, it chooses us.**

Is depression the same as sadness? **No! Some people with depression are sad. And some people who are sad are depressed. But sadness is not the same as depression.**

Give us an example: **My mom dying makes me sad, but not depressed**

Do you have an oath? Every cause needs an oath, right? **Our enemy is mental illness. "I will fight this enemy to the day of my death - but the enemy will not be the cause of my death."**

Michael, you say you are still sick, does that mean you've lost the battle?

**Winning is not always beating the enemy- winning is fighting the enemy.
We win because we choose to fight.**

You always refer to depression as being the inability to experience joy. Please explain.

You know, when you have a cold and can't taste food? Apply that to feeling joy.

Michael, I know suicide is a huge problem. Why can't I understand it? **Suicide makes no sense until it does.**

Name a way to prevent suicides? **There is no one way, but we know suicide prevention starts with one word- HOPE. Finding a way to provide hope saves lives.**

Why would someone I love want to leave me? **That person would tell you, 'suicide is not about you- it is about me. I don't want to get away from you- I want to get away from me.**

Is talk important in the area of suicide and mental health in general? **Never stop. Never shut up. Talk normalizes what feels abnormal to many. Talk desensitizes the sensitive. Talk disarms the armed. Talk puts the spotlight on the absurdity of the stigma. Talk shuts up the fools. Talk saves lives**

What about the stigma? Why is it still a problem? **That's a complicated question, but no one ever sees themselves as part of the problem. Tough to beat a stigma that many won't admit exists.**

Someone asked me a few months ago- hey Landsberg, what do you think of yoga as a treatment for depression? **My response: "if yoga helps you, then yoga is a good treatment for your depression." A sick mind shouldn't mean a closed mind.**

Today I woke up, got up, didn't give up.

That's it for now. I have just shared with you only about 10% of the portable thoughts I have on this subject.

One final thought:

Mental illness isn't a choice. But choosing to see it as a choice IS a choice. It's 2021. Your choice may be crushing a person you love.

Damn, one more thought. At the heart of the stigma is the perception of weakness. That's why we started a charity called and called it Sick Not Weak. I am sick, but I am not weak (but you already knew that).

Final parting word and then I'm done: **"Do not abandon a person with a mental illness when they act like a person with a mental illness."**

Okay, I'm finished. Let's talk again soon!

For more, check out my website: Michaellandsberg.ca

Follow me on Twitter: [@heylandsberg](#).

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