

The Psychology of Loss

by Barbara Roy

Summary: According to a report by the International Federation of Red Cross, there were a total of 326 natural disasters last year in the United States alone, with a reported 19,684 affected people. That speaks nothing of the approximately 2 million routine residential fire calls fire departments in the U.S. respond to each year, totaling millions of dollars in loss. This article explores how individuals cope with large losses, and how service professionals such as fabric restoration experts who are often the first points of contact on disaster scenes, can better interact with loss victims.

Hayward, Calif., (PRWEB) Wednesday, October 05, 2022—As the fabric restoration job coordinator climbs the steps and rings the doorbell of the recently fire-ravaged, then reconstructed two-story colonial, a small child pushes open the screen door, reaching joyously for his stuffed teddy bear whose once-soiled, blackened fur now glistens spotlessly. The broad smile of the child, and the relieved expression of the parent—happy to see her fully-restored vintage wedding gown and designer window treatments—tells the restoration expert she’s a part of something greater than just cleaning material items—she’s restoring order and peace of mind. This is the scene on any given day at national franchise, FRSTeam, based in Hayward, California, who specializes in restoring wardrobe and textiles damaged by smoke, fire, water and mold.

According to a report by the International Federation of Red Cross, there were a total of 326 natural disasters last year in the United States alone, with a reported 19,684 affected people. That speaks nothing of the approximately 2 million routine residential fire calls fire departments in the U.S. respond to each year, totaling millions of dollars in loss. There are, of course, also huge indirect costs associated with fires: need for temporary housing, lost businesses, medical expenses, and the less quantifiable aspects like psychological damage resulting from the trauma.

“The public, the media, and local governments are generally unaware of the magnitude and seriousness of the fire problem to individuals and their families, to communities, and to the nation,” states the U.S. Fire Administration. As one of the very first service teams on a disaster or loss scene, fabric restoration specialists uniquely understand the consequences associated with fire and loss. With over 20 years experience, and now, 45 nationwide locations, franchise owners, Jim and Courtney Nicholas know firsthand that their business of fabric restoration is about much more than just cleaning materials—it’s about restoring lives.

As a family-owned business, originally established in 1988 as Custom Commercial Fabric Restoration Services (and at a time when specialty restoration services weren’t considered in any way a mainstay of expert cleaners) a family-values approach of “doing the right thing” to help individuals in a time of distress was already a firmly established practice within the Nicholas’ business. Over the years, it has come to be a foundational, underlying philosophy as the team has expanded, licensing franchisees—most of whom also come from experienced, multi-generation operations—across the US and Canada.

“In a loss, homeowners have a feeling of being out of control and overwhelmed,” shares one front line FRSTeam Job Coordinator, “They have to deal with insurance companies, looking for a place to live, where they are going to sleep and if their children are okay. They are pulled in so many different directions that you may

have to just wait your turn.” FRSTeam has protocols for everything from documenting the loss site with detailed inventory lists and photo image captures to special handling of contaminated content. But their approach to dealing with the actual loss victims is fairly simple—to treat them like *family*.

Dr. Arlene Houldin and Dr. Anne Keane of the University of Pennsylvania's School of Nursing have studied the psychological effects of losing a home to fire. In their research, they found that the personality of the victims and the way in which some people look for control or for a cause for their loss are indicators of how they will cope with the loss. Fabric restoration experts are in a position to restore some control, or at least some normality, by quickly removing clothing and important items from the loss victim's home, and returning them as an emergency order so those persons can have something of their own back and in usable condition.

According to well-known psychiatrist and author, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, creator of the Kübler-Ross model, there are five discrete stages that define how people deal with grief and tragedy: Denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance or, positive outlook. While Kübler-Ross originally applied these stages to people suffering from terminal illnesses, she later determined they were equally applicable to any form of catastrophic personal loss. Kübler-Ross claimed these steps don't necessarily come in an order, nor are all steps experienced by all people, though she stated a person will always experience at least two. “Because how people cope with grief is highly personal, it shouldn't be rushed, nor lengthened, on the basis of an individual's imposed time frame or opinion,” according to Kubler-Ross.

What this ultimately suggests is that accepting the change associated with loss is a process, the acknowledgement of which may not always be simple or immediate. “Accepting the unacceptable and participating in the challenge life has brought you is how to begin the productive change process,” according to California-based Psychologist, Will Joel Friedman, Ph.D., whose specialty areas include anxiety, stress, panic, and trauma recovery. “Alternatives like denial, fighting, avoidance, rebellion or resistance to change are usually counter-productive,” says Dr. Friedman.

Interacting with those vulnerable persons who've experienced loss or trauma is a substantial responsibility for those in a position to impact or influence. As a service industry that provides one of the first touch points of human contact to loss and disaster victims, Dr. Friedman recommends a few attitudes and practices fabric restoration experts can adopt to further ease the difficulty of the situation for those experiencing the changes associated with accepting a major loss: “Recognize the context of their lives and that they may not be real “available”; empathize with them and acknowledge their situation, hardships and challenges; be patient and helpful; be task-oriented.”

Fabric restoration service companies like FRSTeam understand that a soiled, blackened, stuffed teddy bear is but one symbol of a family's life disrupted by disaster that speaks to many levels of loss: loss of safety, loss of comfort, and loss of security. A fire will create these and other kinds of instability for a family, wherein each member has to confront, cope and recover within the means available to him or her. Ultimately, families experiencing loss need special treatment to feel restored as much as the house and its contents.

For more articles on acceptance and managing change, visit <http://www.willjoelfriedman.com/listTopic.html>. For more information on fabric restoration franchise, FRSTeam, visit www.frsteam.com.

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