

GENTRY



THE GENTLEMEN'S ISSUE

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THE HEARTS & MINDS OF SILICON VALLEY

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The Running Therapist

Daniel Sapoznick hits the pavement—with clients in tow.

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The proverbial ideal of a sound mind in a sound body may have come down to us from ancient Greece, but it is also a contemporary and quintessentially Californian goal.

Therapist Daniel Sapoznick, who is both a licensed clinical social worker and certified running coach, is guided by the holistic principle in his daily work. Part of his challenge, he says, is smashing the stereotype of psychotherapy as an activity that needs to be conducted “in a quiet room with boxes of tissues and a benevolent inquisitor.” Instead, he takes each client outdoors and on a light jog, discussing life challenges and how to navigate the path ahead.

His practice is called “Your Pace Psychotherapy.” Who are his clients? C-suite executives with public personas who, despite notable success, suffer feelings of inadequacy. High-school students with attention issues. Tech workers having difficulty creating genuine social and emotional

connections in an era of ubiquitous screens. Strong, driven professionals who have a healthy skepticism about traditional therapies. People facing life-crossroad dilemmas surrounding a job change or a decision about when to start a family. But Sapoznick, a California native whose experience included running a parental stress crisis hotline after earning his Master’s in Social Work from Smith College, stresses that each individual is unique.

Initial meetings are held in his office, where he can conduct a first assessment. “I need to get a basic understanding not only of psychological and emotional health, but also their ambient level of physical fitness,” he explains. “For some of my clients this means we



spend the first couple of months just walking, gradually introducing a slow jog when they're ready for it." He is used to dialing back his own pace: Sapoznick has qualified for and run the Boston Marathon four times and completed several 50-mile "super marathons." He holds an official coaching certification from Road Runners Club of America.

Although he disavows stereotypes, when asked about generational differences, he admits that "it does seem that younger generations of men here in the Bay Area have

fewer inhibitions about seeking out a therapist than older Gen Xers and Boomers." He finds that physical activity is often the sort of distraction the conscious mind needs in order to bring up deeper feelings and less commonly recollected experiences. In addition, he surmises, guys are doers. "There's a sense that intentionally moving into—and through—the unwanted feelings with a trusted fellow runner helps to amend them," he says.

Early in his work with each client, Sapoznick maps out so-called

SMART goals: agreeing to a plan of action with milestones that can be reasonably achieved. He uses a celestial metaphor to explain how individuals are always moving through a greater cosmos of different spheres in motion, from romantic and sexual relationships, to work functions and career paths, to the socio-political environment including gender roles. All that fluctuation, he says, "is tremendously fraught and problematic but there's also great opportunity there. They are all up for inspection and, to some extent,



a change in our approach to how we are relating to them.”

At San Francisco’s Crissy Field he’ll meet his client at the building called the Changing Station (“because we’re changing,” he jokes) to gear up before a session. Another spot conducive to his work is Redwood Regional Park in the East Bay. He strives to balance the distractions inherent in outdoor sessions, such as cyclists and other joggers passing by, but says that as the walking or jogging cadence sync with the conversation, most of those surrounding elements fall away and become no more distracting than art on the walls of a therapy room:

sometimes worthy of comment or evocative of a memory but otherwise unremarkable.

In college Sapoznick was drawn to the field of psychology partly as a way of understanding his own mother’s challenges with identity and later alcohol and substance abuse during his youth in rural Mendocino County. In addition to majoring in psychology, he minored in Theater Arts, a mind/body combination that he sees as a precursor to the work he does today.

Before entering graduate school, he worked at The Edgewood Center for Children and Families where he

dealt with kids who had experienced abuse. It was difficult work, he reflects, “but it helped cement some of my core values of what’s important in life.” What he values, he says, “has little to do with the stuff we have; it has most to do with how we can be helpful with each other, both in a personal way and in a larger environmental way. That lesson was not cheaply earned.”

Paragliding and beekeeping are hobbies in his spare time, a commodity Sapoznick will soon have less of, as he and his wife are expecting their second child. ●