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Encouraging Self-Discovery and Empowerment



The Intern

by Charlyne Gelt, Ph.D.

“The unexamined life is not worth living.”

– Socrates

Movies are a major part of society, crossing racial, socio-economic, and gender lines. That is why they are a useful tool in examining and discussing sensitive – and often uncomfortable – real life issues: aging, retirement, affairs, grief and loss, depression, and death.



The Intern, A recently released film starring Robert De Niro, Anne Hathaway, and Renee Russo, does just this, explore the issues. It’s the story of a 70-year-old retired widower, Ben (De Niro), who has fallen into a state of depression after the death of his wife. He spent his life as a CEO in the business world, chiseling out an image of the American dream which included an organized, affluent life-style. Ben now finds himself alone in an empty house, at loose ends. He realizes that all his success and material acquisitions have lost their luster.

Recognizing that he feels lonely and emotionally isolated is Ben’s wake-up call. It triggers his quest for personal change. He reaches out for something to fill his emptiness, embarking on a search for renewal, identity, and meaning. Through the eyes of the one who has been left behind, we see his grief and feel his sharp pain – “like a knife between the shoulder blades.”

Ben’s search for identity and connection after his wife’s death place him in a novel and often amusing work environment as a “senior intern” at an e-commerce company. His world becomes an ever-changing kaleidoscope, opening him to a host of new relationships, including a love interest. The primary new relationship is with his boss, Jules Ostin, a thirties mother desperately trying to balance her work, her marriage, and motherhood. Jules’ success has resulted in stress and marital discord. As “the intern,” Ben, who knows about loss, personifies the sweat to find balance in the realms of work, home, and family. Ben and Jules become unlikely confidants.

We see Ben struggle to adjust to a new tech-savvy world, alone. We witness his shift in consciousness from his former *win-lose* CEO mind-set, to a more co-operative *win-win* dynamic. Unlike *The Devil Wore Prada*, *The intern* is not about power and domination in a masculine world of the “rag” industry. Through Ben’s character, we witness the personal struggles and marital problems encountered along with success. We see that even *healthy* relationships can be bloody – but people can work things through. We see how issues develop because Jules and her staff, while tech-savvy, lack *emotional* intelligence and good communication skills. We witness Ben’s depression lift as he connects with those who appreciate his life experience and work expertise. Ben’s old-school wisdom paves the way for Jules and her tech-savvy, detail oriented staff to build self-confidence and emotional intelligence. Ben, seeing the bigger picture, takes the initiative and with steadfast support, finds ways to help in all areas of the business, including being a strong bearer for feminine empowerment.

The message of *The Intern* is to seek balance and be open to accept change. The dominant themes are transformation, co-operation versus power; sharpening one's emotional intelligence along with one's technological skills, and the importance of working things through in the face of a crisis (including death).

The Intern shows how change can occur, even outside the “psychotherapy” office. For example, when Ben sees Jules' driver sipping from the flask, he replaces the driver. The car (like the therapy office) becomes a vehicle for life change. Here, Jules feels comfortable talking about her stress, and where she learns to sit with anxiety and pain rather than act-out or withdraw from it, as does her husband.

Ben learned that “In the depth of winter, there lay an invincible summer” (Albert Camus). Why wait for death to knock at your door before you create change? The message in *The Intern* is clear: We need to be peaceful warriors championing for healthy relationships, self-reliance, and our own best potential. In times of crisis we may forget the wisdom buried *deep within*. The film illustrates ways crisis may be an opportunity to draw out the deadened aspect of ourselves. *The Intern* offers a more open and imaginative approach to reclaim aspects of ourselves that we have rejected or neglected to develop.

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