



Photograph by Olivier Pascaud

PSYCHIATRIST

Beverly Hills shrink Terry Eagan on knowing your limits—and when to exceed them

By Ed Leibowitz

IT'S A NEW YEAR, and there's no better time to shed those old habits that are holding you back. Don't know where to start? Pay heed to Terry Eagan, a Beverly Hills-based psychiatrist who treats mood and anxiety disorders, chemical dependency, and depression. A former professor at USC's Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Dr. Eagan now serves as medical director of Moonview Sanctuary, a Santa Monica treatment center cofounded by former Time Warner CEO Gerald Levin, which offers a team of neuroscientists, physicians, and holistic therapists to treat patients.

Rein it in: Sometimes in arguments we get so focused on “I need to get this off my chest.” But what you may need to say and what the other person may need to hear can be very different. Feed your family member the answer that you want them to come up with, make them think they came up with it, and then praise and support them. Delivered from another agenda—“I'm going to be honest with you right now because I want to poke you in the eye and hurt you”—that's always going to bite you in the ass.

Pace yourself: I would prefer that family members have less contact that's successful than more frequent contact that's not successful. If people say, “I can only be with my family for one hour and then it goes downhill,” then I say, “You need a 55-minute visit.”

Tread lightly: The best way to avoid screwing up a relationship early on is to be genuinely curious, be kind, speak tenderly. Approach it like a seedling: It needs tenderness and light and water and attention. It needs time to grow. It doesn't need to be overanalyzed.

Take power: For people who are overwhelmed by the state of the world, I'll ask, "How are you involved in the solution?" I ask people to find a position of power. If they've never done charity, I will tell them to go to Kentucky Fried Chicken and buy a \$3 box and give it to somebody on the sidewalk. When people take positive action, they feel a sense of connection. There's nothing better at building a sense of value inside than looking into the face of someone who has received charity from you. It's hard to be impermeable to that.

Snap out of it: When people are having a pity party for themselves, I tell them to go to the burn unit at the hospital. Go to an orphanage. Go to a children's hospital cancer wing. It's not like you're going as a looky-loo, but these things are perspective builders. Sometimes we need a reality check.