

Early Intervention Can Defy the Status Quo.

In the May issue of Buffalo Spree, I wrote about our society's penchant for focus on the wedding party without much forethought and attention to the marriage. I posited a correlation between this unfortunate tendency and our high divorce rates. In the July issue of the magazine, I presented an argument for the importance of planning one's life on other levels.

Since then, I have been barraged by comments related to the details of this philosophy. People want to know how one accurately engages in the process of the kind of planning that "ensures" optimal life choices. I am challenged by skeptics, but I am also encouraged by outcomes, because I've seen the results.

"So!" demands Katie. "How the heck does one do this exactly?" "Where do I begin? I am twenty-seven years old, I have a career that I only think I like, probably don't love—I have no boyfriend, no prospects, and to tell you the truth, I wanted to be a mom by age thirty. I wanted it all and now it looks like I'm going to end up with nothing!"

Although we might consider Katie's response a bit over the top, we have known women like her. We might even have been there once ourselves, or are there now. Whether we are twenty or thirty-- even older-- there will come a time when we will choose:

How and why and whom to love? If and how, why and when and whom to marry. If or when and how to parent? What we will do for a living, whom to work for and why, even where?

Katie insists that "getting it all right" is a daunting prospect, and further, "It's impossible!" And then she looks up at me—"Isn't it?"

No. It is not impossible to live the life you have imagined. It is possible to get it right—even the first time. It all hinges on the one crucial element of self-knowledge. Once you own this, accept and embrace who you are and what all that means, you have all you need to select from among your option, and to make optimal choices on love, marriage, parenting and career.

"Being it first," as I have mentioned in previous article, simply has to do with how to set goals in the first place. You have to own part of who you are in order to do what you want to do and then have what you dream of having. It begins with this being. Just who in the world are?

I am not flippant when I ask this of Katie and so many clients with whom I have spent countless hours. Believe it or not, most of us get through a good deal of life without this kind of self-understanding—yet, it is the ultimate prerequisite to setting life goals that truly serve our unique selves.

My own brother Ed assures me that, while my proposal sounds like an ideal way to go about setting the direction for our lives, if someone had asked him at age eighteen who he was and what he wanted to do with his life, he would have had no idea. But that is just the point, we have no clue unless we either have very informed parents and trained professionals to guide us or we're fortunate enough to have had someone intercede with an evaluation that uncovers this in-depth insight.

I think that the easiest way to explain what commonly takes place in our lives is that at first when we are still very young, we do not know what we do not know. How do we graduate from the 'I do not know' to the 'I know what I do not know' so that we might pursue what is missing? This knowledge helps us make better decisions about what to get when we know what it is we need. In other words, knowing that we are lacking insight helps us in our discovery of those missing pieces.

I believe that Katie simply has the same issue my brother expressed. They never had the details in order to make appropriate decisions that served their true selves, so they simply went along and did what most people do, they made some decisions. Their choices might have been based on convenience, happenstance or parental insistence. Today they live with the consequences of those choices. That is not necessarily a "bad thing" unless Katie and my brother are unhappy and are now looking to be assisted with changed to improve their state. And yes, as Ed laments, it is more likely that with age comes some wisdom, but not necessarily the kind that clears up the confusion, because life gets too busy to stop and really think—to ask ourselves the questions and take the time to truly listen without judgment. Or perhaps we are terrified of stopping to think, fearing we may experience even greater unhappiness and regret (that is why we say that ignorance is bliss).

We do not need to search too far. Many noted psychologists have studied this matter on self-discovery for numerous years. I believe their work has assisted hundreds of thousands of people, personally and professionally, but from what I see in my work, there are still far too many that either remain unaware that these tools even exist or have yet to take advantage of them. I ask skeptics: what have you got to lose? If you are unhappy today, why not try to engage in a process to provide you with greater insight on your needs and motivations? You may find out why and where you're missing out.

The other point that I need to make is concerning confidence, another attribute I find so lacking in too many individuals and I believe that it is linked to this idea of self-knowledge and the way of encouraging self-acceptance. When we accept our true selves we are better equipped to embrace ourselves in a more confident manner. With self-acceptance comes the acceptance of other, which only adds light to the world rather than darkness.

Any scientifically validated instrument will reveal useful information.
The most common questions have to do with:

Where we derive our energies, focus our attentions—are we more apt to prefer the quiet of our own minds versus preferring to be in the outside world among others?

How we take in information—is it more through our five senses or with more of a big picture perspective?

How we prefer to evaluate and make decisions—do we place greater reliance on our heads, the facts, or on our "intuition," a gut feeling?

And how do we tend to structure our lives, is it in a more deliberative manner or with greater comfort in spontaneity?

An assessment of our underlying needs, our motivations—our preferences, as they are often called—is essential to equip us with the kind of self-knowledge and understanding that leads us to making optimal, satisfying life choices.

This process should be begun as early on as possible, but it is never too late to be informed and do something about it. That is a choice we have once we have the awareness.

The point is that, as long as we have choice, we may as well allow it to work for us in our lives rather than against us. When and if we choose to avail ourselves of resources that will assist us to this end, we benefit beyond measure. We get to accomplish our life's work, our mission, our purpose. We know when we are on the right track because we feel that sense of passion that eludes so many of us.

Knowing is a very good thing.

Knowledge about oneself can be life-giving, as Socrates pointed out and Plato recounted in the Republic...Such an insight forces you to recognize that there may still be more to learn and that you need to be mindful of the very human tendency to settle for the status quo. Awareness of this hazard increases your personal power.”

-I'm Not Crazy I'm Just Not You, Roger R. Pearman & Sarah C. Albritton, Davies-Black Publishing, an imprint of Consulting Psychologist Press, Inc. 1997

In future articles, I will address specifically what is involved in assessment, what are the questions in a general way, providing a cursory questionnaire and discussing how each piece of information translates in providing us with guidance on love, marriage, parenting and career.

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