

# Seven Navigational Tools for New Waters

## Introduction

On one hand, I don't make a whole lot of recommendations or write "prescriptions" in my day to day work. On the other hand, there is something about the "tools" below that I feel pretty strongly about sharing. My opinion is that navigation is a whole lot easier with them than without. You get to choose, of course...

Take your time getting through these offerings. No rush. I have no attachment to whether or not you adopt any of this, and while this is my version and these are my words, I'm not the first to think of this stuff.

Consciously engage with the ideas that speak easily to you, and give some extra time and attention to the concepts that seem to rub you the wrong way, because sometimes those things are more representative of what's needed. Have fun exploring!

Cheers,

Ken

- **Disengage the Autopilot**
- **Re-familiarize yourself with the world of emotions**
- **A body is a good thing - be aware of yours**
- **Remember who you were as a kid**
- **Take the time to do the stuff you love to do**
- **Listen to the people around you - and notice when you aren't**
- **Be wildly curious - start asking questions**

## 1. Disengage the Autopilot

Autopilot was first developed by Sperry Corporation in 1912 and came into use in commercial aircraft in the early 1930's. Very cool invention, because once programmed, it enabled folks to fly (even take off and land) or sail without additional input from the pilot. We don't really know when the first Autopilot was installed in a human, but they sure do seem popular...

The trouble with being on autopilot is that you miss stuff. Life passes by unconsciously, replete with a full list of shoulda, coulda, woulda's...

Another way of putting it: You happened and, oops... you missed it!

# Seven Navigational Tools for New Waters

Don't you hate it when that happens..?

A few tips to help remove the "auto" part of autopilot:

Make the unconscious conscious. The easiest place to start is the practice of simply paying attention to and reporting where you are and what you're doing there. This, I promise, sounds far easier than it is...

Ask yourself, over and over again: "Where am I? What am I doing?"

Even if your answer seems as inane as "I'm in my car. I'm driving and listening to the radio," it's a start.

If you care to take it a step farther, every evening for a full week catalogue your day prior to going to sleep. Where did you go? What did you do? How satisfying - or not - was each day?

Keep track of any shifts that occur as you begin to pay more attention.

Hint: Count everything.

## **2. Re-familiarize yourself with the world of emotions**

If you read the above as "turn in your Man-card and become a Highly Feminized Sensitive New Age guy," then settle down and hold on. That's not where we're headed...

Humans arrive as pretty complete packages, emotions included. While there is certainly lively debate about the plusses and minuses of tattoos, piercings and the efficacy of circumcision, the very notion of painting over or snipping off your emotions should have you bent over, protectively clutching yourself...

Yet it isn't unusual to be asked (or ask others) to curb the enthusiasm, keep a stiff upper lip, stop crying, be happy, (but not too happy) think instead of feel, "man-up..." No matter how you slice it, if and when you follow through on any of the above, *something* is bound to get cut off.

Ouch!

There is a wealth of information and wisdom to be found in the emotional realm. Developing one's emotional intelligence, literacy and fluency provides the keys to a rich, full kingdom. Emotions are not the enemy or opposite of logic, rather they are important and equal partners in any well-rounded, grounded, whole person. Emotions, like it or not, are present everywhere humans show up.

# Seven Navigational Tools for New Waters

Re-familiarizing yourself with emotions doesn't mean forcing yourself to cry at chick-flicks, pasting a fake "have a nice day" smile on your face or - on the other end of the emotional continuum - acting out, screaming and resorting to fisticuffs with your compadres in the board-room.

We are always in one emotional state or another. Might be calm, might be agitated, angry, joyful, resistant, or simply "steady" or "bored." A beginning practice is to check in with yourself and name whatever emotion is present. If you don't have a name or you're just not sure what it is, begin by noticing what physical sensations are present. No need to do anything with it beyond experiencing and noting what's so.

We've all experienced loads of cultural, even academic, conditioning aimed at finding meaning and/or causality behind emotions. While that level of analysis can be useful now and again, it can also turn just about any experience into a flush down the analytical toilet.

Sometimes you just feel what you feel, and happy is, in fact, just happy, sad is just sad. Emotions come and go quickly when given time and space, so don't be in such a rush to analyze, qualify, interpret or escape from them. Simply notice, take a few conscious breaths, and leave it be.

Hint: Notice when you are judging or assigning a value to any given emotion. Classifying emotions as "good" or "bad" or "positive" or "negative" is not terribly useful. Do your best to name emotions clearly, ie: excited, bored, confused, hurt, thoughtful, angry, sad, etc, and like I mentioned above, if you aren't clear, be patient and give it time.

## **3. A body is a good thing - Be aware of yours**

First, if you're noticing that the words "aware" and "awareness" keep popping up, you're right... and you're on to something important...

I remember reading a statistic years ago that I found fascinating: While only about twenty percent of the adult male population polled exercised regularly enough to maintain or improve their overall health and fitness levels, about seventy-five percent of those very same respondents considered themselves "athletic."

Huh..?

I think those statistics say a whole lot about the gap between *having* a body and the awareness of what's going on with, around, and within required to consciously occupy and *live* in the body one has.

Just because you can feed yourself, brush your teeth, and meander from point "A" to point "B" throughout your day doesn't mean you really know your body well. Nor

## Seven Navigational Tools for New Waters

does it imply that you are skilled at paying attention to your body from moment to moment.

Here's the deal: the body is incapable of lying or, for that matter, living in either the past or the future. The body simply *is*. Here. Now. Present. In short, the body is the perfect vessel through which to explore life, because life only happens in the here and now.

Yes, we've all been taught to over-ride the body's messages - to complete tasks before taking care of nourishing, resting or relieving one's self, for example - but whether we pay attention or not, the messages are still being transmitted and won't be turned off.

The trick is to begin to still and silence the other chatter and begin to listen to those messages again. The place to start is simply noticing. For instance, if you are sitting as you read this, what sensations are you aware of? What's it feel like to have your rear-end in a chair? What are your feet doing? What does the air feel like on your skin? What are your eyes doing as they move across the page? Is your breathing shallow or deep, rapid or slow? Which muscles are tight and which relaxed..?

If you've been at your computer screen for a while, might your eyes, neck or back be in need of a break? What information are they transmitting right now?

Looking deeply and honestly, what's true about your current state of physical wellness. How are you *really* doing in terms of strength, endurance and flexibility?

But wait! There's more!

As an adult male living in a culture that elevates youthfulness to ludicrous heights, there is a tremendous pull to imagine and model one's self after an eternally athletic, Adonis-like, seemingly ever-virile masculine ideal... And while there can be no logical argument against staying as healthy and fit as possible regardless of one's age, denying or resisting one's age in pursuit of the good old days or eternal youth is just plain delusional.

Both you and I, my good man, are getting older.

Acceptance of, embracing of, and working creatively with one's location on the arc of life is one mark of integrated, mature adulthood. There is wisdom in it.

Running from what is so, telling yourself it'll never happen to you, and pretending your body is impervious to the changing years is a game played from a fearful adolescent mindset. It's a game that has ruined relationships, torn families apart, and caused injuries both psychic and physical. Playing the game, after all, doesn't stop the truth, the player just pretends it isn't so.

# Seven Navigational Tools for New Waters

Best to stop the game... Even better not to start.

By the way, I'm not advocating kissing your competitive nature or love of sport good-bye. That's good, healthy fun! Pursued with equal parts passion and common sense, those activities pay huge dividends in health and personal fulfillment. What I am asking you to do is say sayonara to the lingering adolescent notion that you're beyond aging and your chronologically-advancing ass (to say nothing of your heart, joints, tendons, muscles, etc.) is indestructible.

Train well and train hard, if that's what calls to you, and call on the wisdom you've gathered over time to inform that training. (If you've never worked out, you're playing another game that's just as delusional and even more dangerous... but that's another conversation.)

One way or another, take the time to get re-acquainted with your body, it's functions, it's ability to experience the moment, and it's messages.

## **4. Remember who you were as a kid**

You were a kid once, weren't you? (If your answer is "no," feel free to disregard this entire document. It won't help...)

Kids are full of vital creative energy. As children, we all had ideas and dreams like nobody's business. We built fantastic futures internally and occupied them without reservation. We knew what we liked and what we wanted and pursued those things with a powerful combination of innocence and authority.

OK, so maybe you don't want to be President of the World anymore. Chances are, though, that there are a great number of dreams and activities from your childhood that are well worth looking at - maybe even worth getting excited and serious about - again.

What activities and ideas lit you up when you were a kid? Think back to when you were 8, 10, 12 years old. What captured your imagination? What did you like to do?

In conversations with clients over the course of the last dozen years, it's pretty typical that dreams reappear after having been shelved or moth-balled for years or, in many cases, decades. We get busy, things get complicated, and inspiration gets shoved aside in favor of pragmatism, obligation, or both.

The trouble with dreams, childhood or otherwise, is that if they have any congruent teeth, (as in "consistent with who you really are...") they don't go away. In fact, they tend to come back and bite you in the rear. The longer you put them off, the sharper and larger their teeth get, and the more likely you are to pay frequent visits to the land of "if only..."

# Seven Navigational Tools for New Waters

All this leads to our next item:

## **5. Take the time to do the stuff you love to do**

Stephen Covey says “sharpen your saw.”

Savvy entrepreneurs know how important it is “pay yourself first.”

“Take time for number 1!”

How many different ways do we need to hear it? How many 2 x 4’s do you really need across that thick, bruised forehead before the message gets through..?

Hopefully, not too many more...

Here’s a short true story:

One of my clients was bored with his work, sort of snippy with his spouse, and generally not digging life in a big way. He was seeking all manner of distractions, which we really needn’t get into. The bottom line is that he was flat-lining in the fulfillment department and it wasn’t pretty...

In conversation we hit on an important missing piece. Tennis.

Yup. Tennis. As in courts. Long net. Fuzzy yellow projectiles...

Who knew..?

Turns out he did.

Tennis was an important creative and competitive component that went a long way toward feeding a hungry part of his self. Without it, something was missing and, like anyone who goes hungry for a while, that hunger was expressed in some not so healthy or useful ways.

He returned to the tennis court after years away, and a week later was alive again - vital, re-invigorated in his work, laughing and joking, connecting with his wife - a re-engaged man.

Will one man playing competitive recreational tennis change the world for the better?

Well, I haven’t spoken personally with his co-workers or his wife, but my guess would be “yes.” I’d argue (strongly) that the world is made ever-so-slightly better each

## Seven Navigational Tools for New Waters

time someone makes a decision and follows through with an action that brings them more joy and satisfaction.

Yes, we all have things that really need our attention. Yes, there are “bills to pay... mouths to feed,” as the song goes. At the same time, each one of us is responsible for creating our own enjoyment and fulfillment. It ain't up to our friends, family, spouse, company, kids, the government, the media or anyone else to heap happiness upon us.

Don't get me wrong - being miserable is always an option, and we all know what kind of difference that makes. I have a sneaking suspicion that if you were really committed to misery, you wouldn't be reading this.

The bottom line is that if you have something you know you enjoy doing, and you aren't doing it, you're paying some sort of price, subtle or otherwise. If that's the case, then get started - or re-started - doing it, and get after it with all you've got. It'll bring you back to life, and that makes a difference...

### **6. Listen to the people around you... and notice when you aren't**

Study after study of job satisfaction shows that people get more long-term fulfillment from recognition and the occasional sincere pat on the back than they receive from financial compensation. Being recognized let's folks know they - and their efforts - are seen and appreciated by others. You don't need a degree in psychology or communication to have a gut-level understanding of the simple fact that being seen and heard feels a whole lot better than being ignored and invisible.

Does it not stand to reason, then, that the folks around you - say family, significant other, co-workers - might also enjoy an occasional dose of the warm fuzzy goodness of recognition?

If you feel like you aren't getting much in the way of recognition or props, try dishing some out for a while and see what happens. The first step, of course, is paying attention to the folks in your own circle. Start by listening. Really listening.

Here's a hint: contrary to popular belief, listening is not really achieved by gazing with cow-eyed faux-sincerity into the eyes of another, trying to convince them (and yourself) that you are oh-so-interested, hanging on their every word. That's just plain scary.

Engage your ears. Listen and observe. What do you notice about the other person? What are they really saying? What's their emotional state? What's important to them? What do they want? What sort of recognition would not only let them know they are being seen and heard, but nourish them as well?

# Seven Navigational Tools for New Waters

If, when you attempt the above, you find your own head flooded with judgements, assumptions, “good ideas” or solutions for the problems they clearly have and will continue to have without an injection of your obvious brilliance, congratulations! You are no longer listening! Give your head a shake and re-open your ears, for as surely as day turns to night, thine auditory receivers hath closed and thou hast transformed into the Solution Savior.

If you do go into “solution savior” mode, don’t sweat it. Listening is a skill, and like any other skill, takes practice.

So get to it and practice listening to those around you. And when you’ve practiced a little, practice, practice, practice some more! See below...

## **7. Be wildly curious**

If you’re feeling brave and want to go for the all-out advanced program, take a breather from being so damned smart and begin to develop (reclaim, really) your wild curiosity.

Here’s the deal: we place a huge premium on answers. We want them, we want them right, and we want them right now. Got a problem? Find an answer! Figure it out, for goodness’ sake. You’re either part of the solution (answer) or you’re part of the problem!

Huh..? Excuse me..? What has “part of the problem or part of the solution” be the only options?

Let’s face it, from the instant we enter the world of formal education - wide-eyed, eager and just about as full of questions and curiosity as any big-brained, bipedal critter could possibly be - we’re patted on the back for pumping out those answers. Sure, we’re told over and over again that “there are no stupid questions,” yet the culture at large seems to have a tough time walking that particular talk, more often giving the more visible high-fives to those who bring forth acceptable answers.

Great leaders, scientists, teachers, philosophers and coaches ask great questions. They challenge the status quo, heighten engagement and performance, and inspire innovation and change by stimulating creative thinking.

Ever notice how questions open and deepen conversations, while answers often shut them down? What do you suppose is up with that?

Staying curious in a world that places such a high value on answers takes courage. Asking any questions, particularly the big, challenging ones, requires presence, attention, a willingness to be pushed against, sometimes even ridiculed... It



## **Seven Navigational Tools for New Waters**

takes a strong heart and some hefty stones to carry and swing the sword of inquiry amongst tribes of know-it-alls...

If you're up to the challenge, practice asking open-ended questions that begin with the word "what." "Who, when, how and why" may have their useful moments, but "what" questions often require deeper thought and reflection. Closed-ended, "yes" or "no" questions can nail a lid down on a conversation, (Did you brush your teeth this morning?) so best to use them sparingly, if at all.

Practice applying your curiosity to just about everything. Be as curious as a 4 year-old about what, and who, you agree with - and equally curious about what, and who, you disagree with.

Want some extra points..? Then ask some tough questions of yourself, too. Here are a few to get you started: What are you about? What do you want? What lights you up? What upsets you? What do you really want to be when you grow up? What are you hiding?

Keep asking, and don't be afraid to have fun doing it... Your secret is safe with me...

### **Ready for More..?**

If you've found any of the above useful, if this sort of exploration speaks to you - or scares the daylights out of you, for that matter - and you're ready to take a deeper dive and see what this whole coaching thing is all about, then drop me a line! I'm happy to speak with you:

Here's how to get ahold of me:

**Email: [ken@cirruscoaching.com](mailto:ken@cirruscoaching.com)**

**Coaching line and voicemail: 518.580.0550**