

Pathways

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*All men dream, but unequally.
Those [who] dream at night
in the dusty recesses of
their minds awake the next
day to find that their
dreams were just vanity.
But those who dream during
the day with their eyes wide
open are dangerous men;
they act out their dreams to
make them reality.*

T.E. Lawrence

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Get SMART?

I've been doing a lot of reflecting about life recently, and I would like to chat with you this month about some more fallout from my recent life changes.

I suspect that we have all been taught to be SMART in our planning and goal setting. But let me ask a not so rhetorical question...just how SMART is that?

Let's look at the acronym for a moment:

Specific,
Measurable,
Achievable,
Reasonable and
Time-Bounded.

So I wonder how SMART Columbus was being? Or the Wright Brothers? Or Henry Ford when he told his engineers to come up with a shatterproof glass for windshields?

If you stop and think about it for a moment, a significant percentage of humanity's greatest breakthroughs weren't that SMART at all.

Think about it. Columbus wants to get to the East by going West. The Wright Brothers want to build AND fly a heavier-than-air machine. Edison and light bulbs?

How **Specific** is that? Well, alright I will concede that it is, at some level quite specific, but at another level, doing something that has never been done before is only specific at the grossest level. There are no details about exactly how to do it, because...well, it hasn't been done before, so you can't get really specific. At one level you know what you want, but at another level you have no idea what it actually looks like.

All you can do is forge ahead, Edison-like and fail your way to success, eliminating one wrong answer after another.

So then, at the first hurdle of Specificity, true explorers and pioneers are not that SMART at all...they know what they want to achieve but have no idea how it will be done, or even what it will look like once it is done.

So how about **Measurable**? Just how, exactly, do you measure success? The Wright Brothers measured success by achieving powered flight for a short distance. But let's say you are sitting in an airplane on the tarmac at Hartsfield in Atlanta and it flies for 120 feet in 12 seconds, and lands again. How successful was that? Somehow, I don't see the crew leaping about and cheering.

Yes, I'll concede that Orville's goal was not your goal, but that's not the point I want to make. Measurable success will be different things to different people according to their abilities, talents, experiences and tools.

Of all the letters in the acronym SMART, 'measurable' is the one I am most willing to accept. Generally, you know when you've got it done! There's something tangible about it. The light bulb either worked or it didn't.

But you don't stop there do you? You move on to a higher level of difficulty. Which, of course, neatly brings us to **Achievable**. Once something becomes achievable it is no longer a challenge. Prevailing wisdom tells you that when you take on something challenging, you take nice little bite-sized chunks out of it, to achieve ultimate success.

....Getting Less Smart....

If you take on too much, too soon, you'll get discouraged and quit. And there's merit to that argument. Absolutely there is.

But I'm not convinced that that is the way the world works.

There is a concept of Gradualism, which states that change occurs by accumulating in small increments. There is also (what is often seen as) an opposing concept known as Punctuated Equilibrium that in its essence says that change is abrupt and saltative in nature. For those of you who have a deeper knowledge of the arguments here, I apologize.

Again, the point I want to make here is that you can't be a little bit pregnant. Say what?

I'm a palaeontologist by training, which means that I deal in the fossil world. If we look at the progression of life on the planet over time, we see an amazing array of species that have existed, gone to extinction and been replaced by new species.

In my world view of that process, fish didn't wake up one morning, get together, set a few SMART goals and decide to become amphibians. The story of life didn't work that way.

We can see the same thing at the dawn of the Industrial Age, or even the current Age of Information. Or, if you want a really dramatic example, think about the great European Cathedrals of the Medieval Age.

In each of these cases, the outcome has been something that could not have been predicted from the starting conditions. Something way more

complex emerged from the starting conditions than could have been imagined at the outset.

Such things are called Emergent Systems. Life is an emergent system, the great Cathedrals of Europe are emergent systems, the World Wide Web is an emergent system that could not possibly have been imagined by the code-breakers at Bletchley Park during the second world war, working with simple computational devices.

The point here, (just to hammer it home) is that none of these examples was achievable from the starting position and the outcome was way bigger and more complex than the original starting goals.

Which of course, brings us to **Reasonable**. 'Nuff said. Real goals are totally unreasonable. Big goals set out to do something that has never been done, frequently in the face of derision, ridicule, criticism and possibly even censure. Big goals aren't neat, tidy little things. Big goals disrupt the *status quo*, they disturb our ways of thinking, doing and even being. They cause us to re-evaluate who and what we are. Particularly, really big goals cause us to establish new parameters for what we are and what we can do. Look at any of the examples I have given so far...from Columbus to the Cathedrals, all of them were totally unreasonable. Good.

Lastly, **Time-bounded**. As I have gotten older, I have realized that creating Time-Bounded goals is actually the kiss of death.

Think about it. How many 'Lose 50 pounds in a week' crash diets fail? The set-up is the time-line. The implication is that if you don't do it, you failed. So what do you do?

You have a couple of choices: You can quit. You can do another fad diet and repeat the event when that one tanks. You can move the time line. Eventually, you can get rid of the time line altogether and go back to a resting state again.

So where's the middle ground? To my way of thinking it's not about setting a hard and fast deadline to a successful outcome, it's about not quitting, regardless of how long it takes to achieve your goal.

Let's take an example:

Question; How long does it take to get a university degree? Answer: Four years.

Wrong.

It takes as long as it takes. So if an undergraduate student goes to school for five years and hasn't graduated yet, is s/he a failure? I don't think so. You will want to examine all the parameters. Let's say my example student is carrying nine to twelve hours per semester, sometimes taking an entire semester off, but he's also a single father of three children, whose wife was killed in a car wreck and he's holding down two part-time jobs at the same time. Changes the picture doesn't it?

Time is irrelevant, moving forward is not. It's not about being time-bounded, it's about making progress. Sometimes progress may feel like

Know when to be SMART: 1. When you control (most of) the variables. 2. When something is within the normal range of experience (like preparing for a competition, test, planned event, organizational structure). 3. As a component of a larger project or undertaking.

....Not at all SMART...

nothing at all, like we are spinning our wheels. Sometimes we are an unstoppable force.

So let me put this all together for you, giving myself as an example.

I am a geologist by training. I have spent nearly thirty years in Academia teaching, advising, and doing some research.

If you had looked at my undergraduate record you would have said that a PhD was unlikely, but I was determined. (Some might say bloody-minded).

When I 'failed' to gain acceptance to a PhD program in England, I applied to almost every English-speaking, PhD-granting institution in the world, that offered a program in paleontology.

I kid you not.

I had not the slightest clue what I was doing except that I wanted a PhD and an academic job as a geologist.

So I got the degree after a series of adventures and ended up in Mississippi for 28 years.

How likely was that? I certainly didn't set a SMART goal for that. I just knew that I wouldn't settle for anything less than an academic career. And living in Mississippi opened opportunities that I could not possibly have imagined at the outset.

So now I have retired. Who would have thought I would then go to oriental medical school? That was totally unpredictable, unless you look at the undercurrent that motivates my life.

At one level I am driven by the desire to learn and to grow.

At a much deeper level, all the learning in the world is for naught if it is not used in service. So at my core, I am also driven to be a catalyst for success in the lives of those around me...that's why I became a university professor, that's why I teach martial arts.

I get no greater thrill than seeing my students succeed. So just suppose that I could achieve even more if I could bring the mental, the physical and the spiritual all together in some way and still reach my goal of catalyzing success?

So let's bring in the martial component of the equation. I have been a martial artist for forty years, and in most of that time there has been (at least in my mind) an undercurrent of something missing.

We learn how to resolve our inner conflicts, to defend ourselves, to compete as warriors in tournaments, to train with an 'us' and 'them' mentality, but there is so much more to it than that. Ultimately there is no 'us' and 'them', there is only an outer reflection of inner conflict. The founder of Judo, Jigoro Kano, and the founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba, both saw this so clearly.

For me the bit that was missing was the healing component. I wanted it. I have wanted it for a lot of years.

At that point a whole new set of options open, and all the steps beforehand can be seen as little steps that get you ready for a big jump.

But...I didn't set a SMART goal for

any of this.

I'm simply not that SMART.

All I did was set an intent and take a step forward, and another.

All the time I charted my progress towards the objective of the moment and made significant course corrections along the way.

My only time limit was to get it done, somehow.

Did I know what I was doing? At a conscious level, probably not.

Did I know where it would lead me? Not in the slightest.

Did I know the price tag? Not at all.

So for me it's not being SMART at all.

My goals have not been Specific, or at the outset, Achievable, Reasonable or Time-Bounded. My goals have been kinda Vague, Frightening, Unreasonable and Open-ended until completed.

I will concede to some extent they have been measurable, but the yardstick kept changing over time. At one point in my life I set my measure of success as a martial artist as achieving Third degree black belt in my lifetime. So much for that one. Once you achieve something you will want to acquire a new standard by which to measure.

In some ways, I still don't know where I am going, or how it will manifest. I'm just not smart enough. But life is an incredible adventure, full of opportunity and new horizons.

Remember, we are greater and wiser (smarter) than we think we are. ☺

**Don't be afraid to take a big step if one is indicated;
you don't cross a chasm in two small jumps**

David Lloyd George

One Eye Open

Do we dream with one eye open?
Or live with one eye shut?

Dare we risk to dream of what might be?
While we cling to what we think is?

To truly dream,
Is to abandon the rock of reason;
And allow that the impossible...
Is not.

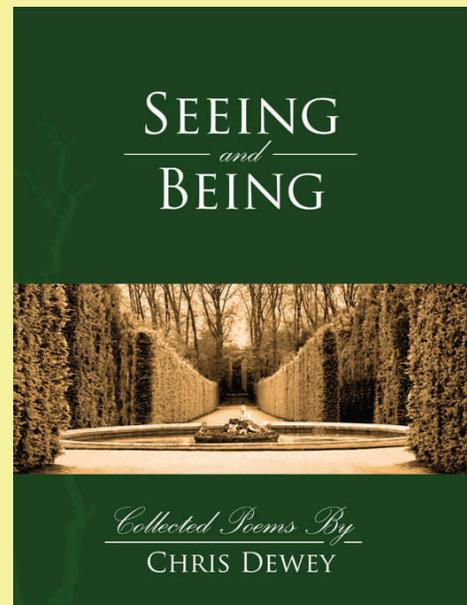
And,

If, perchance we might awaken,
Are we afraid of what we see?

Do we cling to the delusions
We created?
And in that comfort,
Do we then dream tepid dreams?
And let them go
As fancies of the night?

And when we live in daylight,
Is it really light?
Or are we really half asleep
Afraid to truly wake.

Poem excerpted from:



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