It would appear as though this year is getting off to some sort of transport theme. Not sure where this is coming from, but I’m going to run with it. So in the last couple of weeks I have been discussing passion and being driven, compared to being passionate and driving. Apparently, there is a huge difference.

For instance: Our passion to be successful at what we do can drive us to such an extent that we sacrifice our own health and relationships in our quest.

There comes a point though, where our lives are so amped up and we are stressed out that it is only something as significant as a medical emergency, the collapse of a relationship, or the collapse of our financial health that will cause us to take stock of where we are and where we would like to be.

I would like to suggest that if we are living lives at such a pace, then we are being driven, we are not driving.

It might look like we are being successful on the surface and we may have all the trappings of success, but we are moving towards a state of deficiency, where our reserves are depleted, and we are running on empty, or caffeine (or whatever is your medication of choice).

Let’s look at this differently...what might it look like if we were driving, rather than being driven?

If we are driving, then we get to choose the route, the speed, the number of stops along the way...all of it. So if you were actually driving your life, rather than being driven by your life, you might have some options that may seem unavailable from your current perspective.

Again, on the surface, it might not look as though much has changed between driving and being driven...you might still serve close to that same number of clients, teach the same number of classes, or produce the same amount of work, but the quality and grace of your effort would change dramatically, as would the nature of your boundaries.

First step in driving yourself: Decide where you want to go and how long you might want to take to get there. Take some time out to review your options, consider alternatives and select the opportunity that best fits your values and intentions.

The key of course, is recognizing that if you are in fact driving, then you get to make the decisions about how you drive. No-one says you must drive like everyone else on the road...and, if you are serving clients, be they students, patients or customers, then in some ways they are in the vehicle with you and will want to arrive at their destination feeling great about the journey.

So ask yourself this: How would your life change if you were driving your life rather than being driven by it?

What things would happen that currently are not happening?

When is “Now” a good time to start driving, and enjoying the journey in all its beauty?
All Stressed Up

So if you stop and think about it for a moment, we spend a good deal of our lives being stressed by ‘stuff’. Most of the ‘stuff’ in our lives, however, is transient, so I wonder how much the being stressed by it all actually serves us in the long run...of course that doesn’t stop me from getting stressed; it merely makes me curious about how I do that and what options I might have.

I have noticed over the years, that sometimes stress responds to a form of deliberate deconstruction and sometimes it responds to focusing on other things.

Using an example from my studies here in Oriental Medical school...tests come and go on a fairly frequent basis and sometimes with a tsunami-like intensity. I am not so enlightened in life as to look at these events as non-stressful...after all, I want to learn as much as I can while I have access to all my teachers on a near-daily basis and I want to reflect an accurate image of the knowledge that I am supposedly acquiring, during the tests that I take.

I will therefore willingly admit that school has been stressful and sometimes I have focused my attention away from the stress and sometimes I have focused on my perceived stress and asked myself what it is exactly that is ‘stressing me out.’

When it comes to stress, the thing of it is this: Where do I/we/you expend energy? Are the ways in which I/we/you expend energy bringing me/us/you closer to, or further away from a state of well-being in life?

During a martial arts class or during the learning process, or when I am coaching a client, there are times when stress is an inevitable consequence of the process. For instance, let’s say I am doing repetitions of a throw or a strike during my martial arts practice. When I focus on correct technique and appropriate use of power, I can work until my muscles are exhausted, should I choose to do so. During such training, I am stressing my physical body in a very deliberate way to build muscle memory. I am also training my mind and spirit to learn discipline, tenacity, resolve, persistence, endurance...and so on. There is positive gain to be made here, I am driving the technique deep into my awareness of fluid movement and into my muscle memory at the same time as training my mind to perform under stress. Ultimately, no other form of practice, short of actual combat scenarios, will achieve as much for the long-term assimilation of the action.

The same holds true for learning scholastic materials. There is a simple adage which states: “Repeat to remember and remember to repeat”. Tests of my knowledge are simply a way of driving the information deeper into my mind, so that it will be there when I want it. In many ways, the more times I am required to engage in active learning, performance or testing of the same material, the more likely it is to be driven deep into my long-term memory.

In similar fashion, when I am coaching with a client, we sometimes face seemingly intractable issues that have been with us for a long time and changing our response paths can be intensely demanding. Changing deeply rooted patterns of behavior can be stressful in a couple of ways: First identifying them as such, and second in seeing viable and constructive alternatives. Such times may not be physically stressful, but they do require many of the mental, emotional and spiritual aspects of learning through stress. All of these forms of stress respond to both deconstruction AND focusing our attention upon something other than the stress. The trick is to know when each of these responses is appropriate in the moment.

Let’s go back to my martial arts repetitions for a moment. When I am getting close to muscular exhaustion, the physical stress will tell me it is too hard, that my muscles are sore, quivering, and weak and it is time to quit. The truth of the matter though, is that the mind will quit long before the body. The real source of my stress is not therefore the work that I am doing, but my attitude towards it. It is here that we find the eternal argument between “I can” and “I can’t”, or “I will” and “I’ll try.”

The stress really isn’t what I think it is at all...that’s all smoke and mirrors. The stress is something that I have created in response to my perception of reality in the moment.

So yes, my muscles are sore, quivering and weak. Does that stop me from doing just one more repetition? And another one?

Until I reach a position of total muscular exhaustion, the only thing that really stops me from performing is my own mind. Yeah, right. Easy to say...doesn’t change how I feel though.

In part there is an element of deconstruction at work here. I can deconstruct what is happening and focus on the important part of the process so that I can continue to perform with efficiency and grace. In part I can also focus my mind away from the muscular exhaustion and focus upon the really important thing: the quality of the technique in the moment of performance. When I do both things simultaneously, I am much more capable of continued performance.

The same things hold true in competition environments, in academic testing, in building new behaviors. Ultimately what we do with stress is choice and a learned response. You can use stress in positive ways and you can use stress to undermine your ability to perform.

It’s your call
Still all stressed up with nowhere to go? What would you like to do about that?

“In order to understand the light, we must first experience the darkness”

Carl Jung
I Really Should

I should have written this article ages ago. Really, I should’ve planned more effectively.

Sound familiar?

Should is a really corrosive word, I really shouldn’t use it so often. I should find a better way to do things, to say things, to plan things.

Really!

So what does ‘should’ do to us?

To my way of thinking, ‘should’ is one of the most catabolic words in the lexicon, right next to ‘try’. Should, as a word, immediately tells us what we didn’t do, but at the same time it offers no viable solution as to how we might do things differently.

Before I dive further into this discussion, I want you to take a moment and do a written exercise for me: Grab a piece of paper and make a list of the ‘shoulds’ in your life. You know what I mean…

“I should take more time for my family.”

“I should change my diet.”

“I should go to the gym more often.”

“I should save more out of my pay check each month.”

“I should hand in my homework on time, get the project completed…”

Those are simply suggestions, you know the drill, you know what things you should do.

You should do the exercise…now!

Thank you.

You can carry on reading now.

So where am I going with this? Should is a conditional sort of word. It tells us what we might be able to do if we were to change a behavior, employ more discipline, or live with intention. Should implies that we know that something is out of balance, but for whatever reason we are unwilling to redress the balance. The hidden moment of truth here is that we say ‘should’ because we have yet to identify a compelling enough reason for making ‘should’ into something that actually happens. Ergo, there is some perceived value or benefit from not acting on the ‘should.’ Just because I should do something doesn’t mean that if I don’t do it, I’m being lazy; like I said, I may simply not have identified the reason for doing it that makes it more important than not doing it.

O.K. fair enough, now let’s try an experiment (actually, we are going to do three of them).

Take the list that you just wrote for me (see...that’s why I told you to do the exercise before finishing the article), and replace the word ‘should’ with ‘can’.

How does that change things?

Let’s take saving money each month from my pay check.

“I should save more money out of my pay check each month” becomes “I can save more money out of my pay check each month.”

How does that change things for you? In this instance changing ‘should’ to ‘want’ moves something up in the list of priorities. I want to save more money from my pay check, suggests that there is a reason to do so that has importance. Again, changing the word, creates a subtle shift in the brain. Perhaps I want to save more money because I want to travel or I want to build for retirement, or go back to school.

In the third experiment do both...I want to AND I can...now we are getting into some powerful motivations for change. Not only can I do something, I want to do it. No longer is it something that should get done, if I can do it, and I want to do it, nine time out of ten, I will do it.

Now, what should you do?

“it is not how much we give, it is how much love we put into giving”

Mother Theresa
In Transition?

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