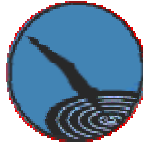




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World of Personal Spirit

FACILITATING A BETTER YOU: THE GIFT OF PERSONAL CHANGE

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Abstract

If it is true that as facilitators, we are our own best interventions, our success as practitioners then, is dependent upon our own ability to regularly be at our own personal best. A regular personal "tune-up" is highly important to our longevity and livelihood. Since we can often be guilty of tuning up our cars more often than ourselves, this article links the two activities as a refreshing way to help us focus on (a) our perspectives as facilitators, (b) the support we get from others, (c) the energy we bring to our work, (d) the self-imposed limitations we bring to our work, (e) the balance we maintain in our lives and (f) the attention we invest in our own improvement.

A Warning Light Comes On

If you're like me, the red warning light flashing "engine trouble" or "check oil" is one glaring way I find out that my car isn't running as it should. Similarly, red flags such as snapping



at a colleague, dissatisfaction with my work or an inability to sleep often signal to me that it's time to pay more attention to myself. If my car gives me the warning, I ignore the light...and eventually take it in to the auto service center. When I finally catch the warning about myself, I sometimes sit down with a supportive colleague or friend to do some diagnostic work. Or, often, like now, I'm sitting by myself and reflecting while I wait for my car to get "fixed" by the auto shop.

Reflection:

1. What are the signs in my life and work that indicate I need to do some maintenance?
2. What's the most likely way I could take time to figure out what is going on?

Checking the Plugs, Points and Oil

I know that for the most part, getting new oil in my car and cleaned spark plugs will help the car run more smoothly. The technician has already shown me the very dirty oil while shaking his head as if to say "how could you let it get this way?"

I begin to think about the beliefs and assumptions I have been operating under the past few months: This project would take less time than it did. The client would be more appreciative. I really could juggle two projects and a graduation over the same weekend. And four cups of coffee is as good as breakfast any day. Maybe you have been operating under some assumptions too. The key is: I was on auto-pilot for too long, operating with quite a few limiting assumptions.

The beliefs, assumptions, habits and people that make up our environment I think of as the oil in the car: they really can help me operate smoothly if I pay attention to them. I can even spend some periods of time not worried about them...but not forever. My personal energy reminds me of the spark plugs in my car. If the plugs aren't all firing, the car isn't working

efficiently. The same is true with me: if I am tired, overworked, un-focused, under nourished, over-fed or spend too much time abusing my energy...I'm in desperate need of a tune-up.

Reflection:

1. What are some ways I think about my work (beliefs / assumptions) that might be limiting my capabilities?
2. In what ways can I improve my energy level? What things do I do that depletes (wastes) my available energy?

"Your Transmission Fluid is a Little Dirty"

I know that the place I get my oil changed really starts to make it's money when they can perform additional services. Therefore, I have anticipated the guy who is now standing in front of me with a sample of my transmission fluid. We can both see that, compared to new fluid, it really is dirty, with tiny specks of engine metal in it. I'm just not ready to have that done. So I tell him "Hmm...yes it is a little dirty. Not today, though I'm going to get that done in the next couple of weeks."

It really is taxing to change gears often. The more I do it, you know, "meeting yourself coming and going," or "It's Tuesday, this must be Chicago." Or "now what group is this again?" Each shift really does put stress on us as people. Paying attention to these shifts occasionally, as we need to pay attention to the same in our cars, helps us to avoid the grinding of the gears which leads to us being unfit to facilitate well in any gear, in any arena, with any group. Unchecked, the constant shifting could leave us stuck in one gear, and not very happy limited to 12 miles per hour.



Reflection:

1. How much time do I spend shifting gears in my work/life?
2. What is my focus or organizing framework for my priorities?

"How Much Air Do You Want In Those Tires?"

Air and wiper fluid are just a couple of "freebies" (or at least included in the price) that I get when the oil is getting changed in the car. I smile as they perform these added services--I really feel like I'm getting something important included in the deal, even if it has taken only a few extra seconds. It makes for a rough ride when the tires are losing air and can lead to uneven wear if I don't get it checked.

Just as the tires support the ride of the car, I think about the people and things that support my work as a facilitator. My calendar provides great support, as does my computer to help me get the job done. Countless other resources such as software, web-sites, books, office gadgets recommended by others have supported me in my work. But most of all, there are friends, clients, family, colleagues and new acquaintances who have become a part of my ever-evolving support network.

Reflection:

1. What systems, tools or resources would dramatically improve my ability to work effectively and efficiently?
2. Who are the people I can count on to support me in my work? Who do I need to seek out for additional support?

Topping Off the Radiator

Looking through the glass into the service bay, I can see a technician topping off the anti-freeze in my radiator. We both know it has plenty. The car won't freeze up in the winter and won't overheat in the summer. It has what it needs to keep somewhere in the middle of the temperature range.

I think about the balance I'm trying to keep in my life. Too much work can mean me overheating at the wrong time: in front of a client, with a co-worker, during the conflict in a session. Too much work can also mean a very cold reception at home. If I'm thinking about any of this kind of imbalance while I'm facilitating...it logically means I'm not bringing the best of myself to the work. I'm bringing the off-balance, stressed out me to the job. My clients, and everybody in my life deserve better than that.

Reflection:

1. What boundaries could I establish among priorities that might be helpful to my balance?
2. Where am I hungry in my life right now? In what areas am I "stuffed" full?

Cleaning Out The Clutter

Although the guy suggests I have three options: cherry, vanilla, or "new car smell" for an air freshener, I choose option #4: nothing. I am eager though, to have them vacuum the inside of the car (no charge). Lot's of little things have managed to land on the carpet and seats. Soon they will be sucked away.

I am reminded that almost always when a red flag pops up for me in my work, I discover that I have managed to attract all kinds of baggage and clutter and trash into my work or life: the phone tag with the prospective client that is very unlikely, the stack of books for the article I



have lost interest in writing, the stack of worksheets from last month's presentation I will never give again, the offhand comment a disgruntled employee made three months ago. I use the file cabinet, outbox and waste basket as my friends and upon ridding myself of all this, suddenly see my work with a little more freshness.

Reflection:

1. What finished and unfinished clutter am I carrying around in my life right now?
2. What is my usual style for clearing out the clutter? Is that adequate?

Don't Wait So Long Next Time

As I am paying the bill, I notice another technician doing one last thing inside my car. He affixes a sticker in the corner of my windshield, reminding me to return and do this again in three months or 3,000 miles. As I get in my car to leave, I think to myself that three months doesn't seem that long, and the tech says, "don't wait so long next time, and take care."

I make a note to myself to figure out a way to pay attention to my best investment more closely (me). Like anything else I want to get done, I get it on the calendar for the future. I jot a note for three months from now:

3 Month Scheduled Maintenance for Me:

- Check my perspective
- Check my current assumptions / beliefs
- Check my energy
- Check my balance
- Check my support system
- Check my regular attention to my own personal development

The Presenter

Tom Plake is Director of Strategic Enthusiasm for Creative Resources, Inc., a US-based consulting firm that focuses on improving organization quality and performance through leadership development, teambuilding, creativity and organization development. He coaches leaders and teams to realize new possibilities for themselves in their lives and work. His Chevy Blazer is scheduled for regular maintenance.