



Six Reflections on Learning, Living, and Keeping Things in Perspective

Description

Each week now for several years I have written this column. I normally take one or two topics to address. This column will be different. It is a mix of thoughts, sayings, and/or advice that I have found and still find helpful. I hope you find these helpful.

When the student is ready, the teacher appears. I was never a good student in school or a good student of life. At 31, something clicked. An insatiable desire to learn came over me. In this journey, I have found out that while I once believed teachers and other resources were not available, they were and are. The issue was my inability to be a good student.

After this desire came about, I was in a situation in which a person mentioned a topic. I was fascinated and impressed with how smart the person was. I approached him and asked him how he had learned so much about the topic. He shared that he read a particular book. I said, "I have that book; I never read that." I said it as if it were the book's fault. I then asked where in the book the topic was. He told me the chapter and page numbers. When I got home, I opened the book to those passages. I had read them numerous times. They were highlighted and dated. Yet until that day, I could not comprehend them.

What had gotten in my way of learning? Many things: thinking I did not need to know the topic, reading for speed versus comprehension, or assuming I already knew it. Today when I work with an organization, we discuss how barriers like rationalization, quick judgment, denial, and comparing out versus relating in can block us from learning. Thus, when the student is ready, the teacher appears.

Use the words "get to" rather than "must" or "have to." That simple change makes a huge difference. For years, each week I would be on the road working. This meant lots of planes and lots of hotels. When someone asked what I was going to be doing, my stock answer was "I must go to _____" (and I'd list the places I would be traveling to). When completing a task, it was "I have to do this." When going to a meeting or to see a person it was, "I must go to this meeting" or "I must see this person." Once I started saying, "I get to do these things," it was life-changing.

We are alive today. That means we get to do things. Yesterday is over, tomorrow is in the future, and what we have each day is the present. The present is a gift, so enjoy it. We get to do this.

Ninety-five percent of what we worry about does not happen (and 4 percent of what does happen is not as bad as we think). It is my tendency to project the worst. My thinking is, *If I am prepared for the worst, then I will be fine if the worst does not happen.* I understand there are situations in which preparing for the worst-case scenario is good; however, it is not good as a way of life.

I was verbalizing all my worries to a person and they asked, "What were you worrying about one year ago?" My answer was, "I cannot remember, but I know it was big." That is when I heard the statement about keeping my worries more connected to reality. In a similar vein, I was walking to a meeting and sharing with a coworker what I was projecting. He said to me, "I think you're seeing ghosts." Today I must remind myself to pause and think, *Is it real, or am I seeing ghosts?* If I am not careful, I put myself through anxiety, and when the projected terrible thing does not play out, my body thinks it has due to the anxiety I have already generated.

You are not that important. That ego can get in the way and lead us to believe that people are thinking about us when they are not. Often I am talking to someone who thinks so many people know something they do not, or assumes that everyone is talking about them. When I hear that, I share that most often one feels they are a topic of conversation way more than they actually are.

I live in Escambia County, Florida. Some would think I have prominent name recognition. There was a poll three years ago. It asked respondents what they thought of people who were on the survey. Over the past number of years, I have been involved in a contentious legal battle to get a park built. I own a minor league baseball team and several companies. My last name sits on a children's hospital and a YMCA. Yet 23 percent of the people shared they had never heard of me. My point is that people have their own lives to lead. Live your life the best way you can. One cannot control people, places, or things; they can control only themselves.

Be careful not to buy into generalizations without specifics. In work and outside of work, this is a great lesson. At one time in my life when someone would say, "Everybody feels this way," I would react as if it were true. I have learned to ask for specifics. For example, I will ask, "Who is 'everybody'?" If they say, "We can't tell you," I move on. In the workplace, we may hear, "Everyone is unhappy," or, "Morale has never been worse." This may be true and it may not be. If you really want to know, take time to dig into specifics.

When I was president of Baptist Hospital in Pensacola, Florida, we had a program called *WOW*. It was a way to recognize employees. Some leaders came to me and said that the program was not working and employees did not like it and were tired of it. I said, "Before we change it, let's survey the employees." The results were overwhelmingly positive. The item that the employees did feel could improve was that some leaders were much better at recognizing staff than others. We kept the program and did additional training for leaders. Next time you hear a generality, ask for specifics.

The last saying for this column is from Herbert Spencer: **“There is a principle which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all argument, and which cannot fail to keep a man in everlasting ignorance. This principle is contempt prior to investigation.”** It is best not to assume. People who take time to learn the facts bring so much more help to a situation.

I hope you find these thoughts as helpful in your life as I have in mine. Thank you, as always, for reading.

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