

Why do you do, What you do, When you do, What you do

By Calvin Weisberger, MD

I'm getting older. I'm physically slower; my reflexes are not what they used to be. My eyes are worse, my hearing is diminished, my hair is graying, my joints ache sometimes, and I'm not as quick or precise at remembering as I once was. As great as the gradual changes in my physical performance are, my personality changes are perhaps more significant. My type A, aggressive personality has mellowed. Time has been a great teacher. Experience has been a great teacher. Success and failure have taught invaluable lessons.

Once quick to argue, firm in my intellectual stances and convinced of the correctness of my position, I'm different. After overwhelming others with "forceful" arguments and later being proven wrong, "I know that I don't know what I know." "Today's truth is tomorrow's error," is a mantra. Tolerance of other viewpoints and intellectual stances has evolved. Having made many thoughtless or careless mistakes myself, the willingness to forgive has appeared. I try to lead by facilitation. One doesn't need to have the answers as leader; but one must allow them to come from others. Even when a solution seems obvious, it's good to let someone else suggest it. When solutions come from the group rather than from the leader, the solutions are more readily accepted.

Having the brightest light in the fixture may unbalance the total illumination. Historically impatient, a certain phlegmatism has evolved in me. Suppressing colleagues when chairing a meeting causes serious conscious and subconscious resentment. Once quick to rush to combat, I pick the battles that can be won, avoiding the battles that will inevitably be lost. The wisdom of the "win-win" scenario seems powerful. When you create a loser, you fertilize the field of revolution. Sharing victory encourages the growth of comradeship. Somehow the "team triumph" seems to produce longer-lasting joy than the individual achievement. Whatever team I have been associated with, the successes always seem to live on in the members.

My youth's compulsion to always be right has morphed to the acceptance of personal fallibility. I am quick to apologize. Although cavalry Captain Nathan Brittles in a John Wayne movie¹ said "Never apologize, Mister. It's a sign of weakness!" I don't ascribe to that belief.

Though capable of inflicting pain, I do so most often inadvertently. When guilty, I apologize profusely and sincerely and try to make amends. Earlier in life, I lacked the courage to be wrong

or to admit the error. There was fear that either would diminish me. Time and pain have corrected that misconception.

Without wishing it, there is less sensitivity to others' feelings than I might desire. I've learned to compensate by observation but understand that observation is a poor substitute for true empathy. Having become more sensitive to my own failings, I am better able to see when I'm tiresome to others. I've seen my arrival put disappointment on faces. This has made me willing to walk away rather than to inflict myself on others.

I am quick with a complement when it is deserved. I am slower to criticize, perhaps not as slow as I should be but better than I once was. After a leadership course, I spent a lot of time distributing compliments to colleagues. This was met with suspicion. I persevered. What once was met with mistrust is now met with appreciation.

I've learned to value friends and to mourn the acquisition of enemies. It is said that one can never have enough friends but that one enemy is too many. I adhere to that belief, though I remain too adept at antagonizing others and producing animus.

Patience has evolved. I have learned to plant the seeds of progress and fertilize them for years until they are ready to germinate and grow. Sometimes when they grow, no one remembers who did the planting. This omission no longer bothers me, as the fruit of the progress feeds my hunger for recognition. I accept both compliments and criticism with grace. Both once embarrassed me, but that too has passed with advancing time.

I've learned the value of communication. Missed communication, late communication, inaccurate communication—these are root causes of many of the problems we face daily. The ability to communicate truth and to avoid communicating untruth must be constantly regenerated. We are constantly tempted by the power of the lie. It is like the "power of the dark side." I am as prone to "spin a tale" as the next person, but generally succumb reluctantly and with remorse afterward.

All these things and more contribute to my behavior. My personal evolution is a daily ebb and flow of experience.

Why do I do what I do when I do what I do? I do what I do when I do what I do, because I am still learning. ❖

Reference

1. *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*. RKO/Warner Bros Video 1949.

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