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# QUOTES FROM THE EDGE OF NOWHERE

The Art of Noticing Unnoticed Life Wisdoms

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**“It is difficult to become the voice of reason in a crowded room when you can’t even remember why you are in the room.”**

Have you ever been invited to an event or meeting and not felt genuinely engaged with any of individuals in the room? I think most of us have been there and experienced the emotional discomfort associated with this situation. Worse yet, have you ever provided what you thought was a good idea early during a conversation only to have it ignored; but when mentioned later in the discussion by another participant, the majority of the people in the room thought it was a stroke of genius?

Voice of Reason... (Continued)

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At that point, you began to wonder what value your presence brings to the gathering. You are perplexed as to why no one heard what you initially proposed and why now, when proposed by someone else, the idea is brilliant. If they were not listening to the voice of reason [you] earlier in the conversation, who were they listening to?

I often go to meetings with certain preconceived notions regarding likely accomplishments based on my review of the program or agenda. However, once I have comfortably situated myself in my chosen seat, I begin to scan the faces of those in attendance. I wonder how many people are there, only for acknowledgement in the meeting minutes. They aren't mentally present. Yes, that's right. I said it. On many occasions, I have even been one of those individuals who drag my baggage of distracting random thoughts into the meeting room with me. I acknowledge that this preexisting baggage of mental distractions blunt my ability to be fully present in the conversation.

With that said, let's begin by doing some psychosocial science homework. Make the following observations the next time you go out to a restaurant or attend your next business meeting. At the restaurant look for a table with group of four or more people. Be careful not to stare too long, that would just be creepy; but observe how many of the people at the table are actively engaged in conversation. If someone is not participating in the conversation, what are they doing? Oddly enough, I have observed situations like this where everyone at the table was more involved in interacting with their cellphone than with the people at the table. Most often I observe at least one individual who seems to be deep in thought about something unrelated to the others dining at the table. They seem to have a certain "far away" look in their eyes telegraphing the fact that only their physical body is sitting there at the table.

Their mental spirit has swept them to the edge of elsewhere. I ponder to myself if anyone at this person's table is aware of the lonesome individual's emotional absence.

At certain meetings, I look around the table to see how many of those present are consistently maintaining eye

contact and responding with affirming nonverbal body language to the individual(s) speaking.

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**“If there was a sign at the meeting room door instructing all who enter to, “leave your nonessential outside thoughts at the door as you enter” how many of us would be capable of doing so?”**

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How many are checking email on their cellphone, surfing the web on their laptop, sorting through paperwork, doodling on the agenda, checking the insides of their eyelids for cracks (sleeping), or are obviously far away in thought unrelated to the meeting? We have all been there. If there was a sign at the meeting room door instructing all who enter to, “leave your nonessential outside thoughts at the door as you enter” how many of us would be capable of doing so?

This marvelous thing we call the human mind is only capable of completely focusing on one task at a time. However, the body's central control station – the brain – is also capable of controlling millions of delicately balanced essential autonomic biophysical functions of the human body beneath our awareness. These essential functions consistently keep us connected with the world around us. These executive functions are housed in what I refer to as the “up front and personal” control center of the human brain – the prefrontal cortex. This decision making portion of our brain is where our life planning and goal setting functions occur. Essential impulse inhibiting safeguards – our social police officer – are also housed in the prefrontal cortex. In contrast to the slower processing prefrontal control center are the rapid first responder centers of the brain called the amygdala and limbic structures. These species survival fail-safe structures are housed deep in the brain for rapid reaction to external fight or flight motivations.

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Frustration, fear, anger, threats, terrors, and sexual arousal are rudimentary biological accelerants capable of igniting these areas of the brain.

This delicate process becomes unbalanced when confronted with an enormity of spiritual or emotional distractions. These disruptions to our ever-present sentinels in the amygdala and limbic structures release subliminal doses of stress neurotransmitters to engage the body in a biophysical civil war within seconds. The collateral damage of this internal war results in a loss of our ability to effectively concentrate [memory lapses]; appropriately digest our food [digestive disorders]; feel energized [chronic fatigue]; experience rejuvenating sleep patterns [insomnia/sleep disorders]; prevent emotional burnout [anxiety disorders]; or experience genuine happiness [major depression].

It is virtually impossible to completely detach ourselves from our emotional brain and leave what is contained in our thoughts outside the door if besieged by a war of concealed emotions going on just beneath the surface. These distractions keep us from being the voice of reason in a crowded room when we feel hopeless, unwanted, unloved, or unworthy of being present. The result is we become one of the wandering corporate zombies who show up in the “C” suite but are never truly present.

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I seem to recall this quote falling into my conscious space when I was at a meeting and I was doing my social homework of human observation. One of those standard reoccurring monthly meetings that most of us attend out of obligation, there was no foregone conclusion that something of intrinsic value would result from the discussions. The meeting began several minutes after the designated start time. Several people with disinterested expressions

on their faces straggled in several minutes after the meeting began. As we lumbered through the agenda, I looked around to see who was paying attention. I knew that I wasn’t. I had genuinely tuned out about five minutes into my people-watching portion of the program. There was an element of quiet disengagement filtering through the room. Attendees were busy checking cellphones beneath the table. Heads bobbed as people forcefully snapped their necks to an upright position to prevent gravity from overtaking their cranial weight thus sending their faces crashing onto the table. During my observations, I reengaged to inject what I thought was a reasonable and pertinent strategic suggestion, but at some point during my comments it became obvious that the presenter was patiently waiting for my mouth to stop moving so his rebuttal could begin. Spoiler alert: I realized not only the agenda, but the meeting outcome had been pre-planned. Our job was to hear the message, “buy in” to the preconceived plan, and accept the inevitable.

This was the catalyst for the culture of quiet disengagement I observed fueling the mood in the room. Unlike myself, most of the veterans of these meetings knew the protocol of physically showing up and being counted as present. They had long since resigned the effort of bringing any emotional energy to these gatherings. If pressed, most in attendance probably could not effectively summarize the highlights of the meeting an hour afterwards, other than to state, “It was a meeting about “X” and I was required to attend.” Attendees had no idea why their mental presence was required in the room, so it was elsewhere.

This “C” suite situation can also happen at home with those individuals who we profess to love. Our sense of chronic disengagement provides subliminal evidence that loved ones are unworthy of our full attention. This is the emotional spark capable of igniting a delicate biopsychological civil war beneath the surface of any human being present in the room. When this limited attention happens to a young

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person, a lifetime of collateral emotional damage can result. Our youth have a limited array of personal life experiences at their disposal to make evidenced-based determinations on how to navigate their social environment logically. While their brain's higher executive cognitive functions are maturing, it is instinctive for our young to pattern their social behaviors after their trusted caretakers. Our human Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) provides each of us with a basic genetic blueprint of what we are capable of becoming. A child may desire to grow to 6 feet 5 inches tall, but if his/her DNA instructs the body to grow to 5 feet 7 inches tall, the outcome isn't altered by wishing it to be so. However, our human DNA does not imprint us with cultural norms, religious values, or political viewpoints. As we mature into young adulthood, we look toward those who have lived before us to provide the next generation with wise advice on how to use our basic DNA attributes to live a purpose driven existence. We desire their full attention. The assumption is that they are in our life to guide us through our turbulent years of self-discovery.

Out of our youthful observations flow boundless dreams of new opportunities never imagined by previous generations. During our somewhat limited appearance in the lineage of human existence, we each attempt to master the art of being in complete control of the culture surrounding us. Some of us attempt to control our lives by emulating others who appear to have been successful in manipulating social perceptions. Many unquestionably admire this illusion of control if it garnishes the individual with tremendous personal fame or fortune during their life journey. Other individuals study selected religious doctrine to provide them with spiritual clarity about how best to experience a joyful life existence.

Unfortunately, there are those who elect to dampen their senses with mood modifying agents to alter their perception of the joyless uncertainties of life. The best tool in any inspired individual's personal toolbox is the ability to free themselves from the shackles of biased traditions or cultural norms obscuring evidence of the intrinsic value of the nearly 8 billion other human beings temporarily sharing the world with them.

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**“Fact: Knowledge verified by objective facts is priceless, but random information without truth is worthless.”**

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As the years of my life pass, my opinions about a variety of social topics are more strident. I have also grown more acutely aware of the enormity of what I do not know. I sense we have dragged far too many 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century social biases forward with us into 21<sup>st</sup> century. The internet, social media, and a 24/7 news cycle saturate our lives and, as a result, it is increasingly difficult to filter fact from near-fact or fiction. Our amazing, but primitive, brains have not evolved enough to acclimate to this constant onslaught of sensory-media interference.

So many lessons I learned in my youth, and even in my latter days, have proven invalid. I have learned that it is the wisest of humans who knows what he/she does not know. Fact: Knowledge verified by objective facts is priceless, but random information without truth is worthless.

As I involve myself with more social outreach programs in my extended community, I reveal my spirit to a more diverse group of inhabitants of the earth. These individuals have their own personal view of the same world on which I am residing. These interactions with people unlike myself sharpen my understanding of the numerous social cultures surrounding me. While I am not obliged to believe in the world as others perceive it, I have become a better inhabitant of the earth armed with an improved understanding of other's points of view. I have also come to realize the potential liability of bringing real-world experience viewpoints to a discussion with others who have only confirmed their beliefs through “virtual” authorities. An opposing voice of “experientially” confirmed evidence will quickly silence a crowded room in disbelief.

Voice of Reason...(Continued)

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One of the many assets of growing older is the ability to tell a young person that what they think is an original idea, is no more original than it was when you thought it 30 years ago. I hated when an older person told me this when I was a teenager, but somehow it feels good sharing it with young people now.

Therefore, I encourage you to have the courage to share your personal life experiences with others. Tell them your story of how persons in your life inspired you by unselfishly giving you their full attention and devotion. Resist the temptation to have just an abundance of virtual acquaintances in lieu of seeking enduring experiential relationships with a diverse collection of true friends and loving family. The latter will bring fulfillment and an enduring joy.



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**“Always seek wisdom in alphabetical order.  
First be Aware of your lack of knowledge;  
Educate yourself to seek knowledge;  
Build on your Knowledge to arrive at the truth;  
When the Truth is confirmed, then and only then,  
will your journey conclude with a direct path to Wisdom.”**