

MIND Morsels

By Michael Wiederman, PhD

www.mindmorsels.com

Lopsided Love

*We met over a shared view:
She loved me and I did too.*
— Mike Skinner

How many times are romantic relationships lopsided? One partner is crazy about the other. The second partner—not so crazy about the beloved. Still, being adored is a wonderful feeling, and a very tempting one. It's easy to mistake a sense of being loved for actually loving the other person. Often this only comes to light over time. As we begin to take for granted the other person's adoration, it's not so powerful, and we grow bored, or stifled. Unfortunately the adoring partner may be blind-sided. "I thought everything was fine."

A Good Offense is a Lack of Defenses

*It is better to name it and claim it
than fear it and blame it.*
— Clifford and Joyce Penner

It can be so difficult not to fear imperfection. We pay lip service to being imperfect, but at the core we're afraid of our own weaknesses. To maintain the illusion of near-perfection, we blame and project and deny. There are a million reasons for the imperfect in our lives—but none of them are us.

What might happen if embraced our imperfections—extending them a warm handshake and a smile? Perhaps they would turn out to be similar to imagined monsters in the dark closet—simply dissolving when we turn on the light rather than keeping the door shut and closing our eyes.

Indecision is Still a Choice

When you come to a fork in the road, take it.
— Yogi Berra

How many times are we paralyzed when faced with a decision? More than ever, we have many decisions to make and many options from which to choose. Add to the equation the fear of making the "wrong" choice, and hesitation and worry seem the natural result. What else can we do?

We can remind ourselves that often there is more than one good option, and that even a "wrong" choice might not be disastrous. At forks in the road, sometimes there aren't clear signs, and often it's impossible to see far enough down each path to learn where eventually it leads. That's okay. Making a decision based on the present situation is all that can be expected of us. If the choice leads to a negative outcome, it's easy to kick ourselves. But actually we'll never know whether choosing the other path might have led to a worse outcome.

Mistakes Made the Right Way

*The successful man will profit from his mistakes
and try again in a different way.*

— Dale Carnegie

We've all heard that mistakes are okay—they're to be expected. That's how we learn, and no great achievement is accomplished without mistakes. That's fine when we need to lighten up on ourselves, or deal with our fear of making a mistake. Often, however, we forget that mistakes have positive outcomes only if we learn from them. Even then mistakes are worthless if we don't have the courage to try again.

So, realizing we made a mistake is simply the first step. Then it's time to examine what went wrong—not to assign blame or make excuses, but to figure out what might be done differently. Last, the mistake is only redeemed if we try again. If the new attempt doesn't work, see step one again.

Measuring Success

*The trouble with the rat race is that
even if you win you're still a rat.*

— Lily Tomlin

It's easy to get caught up in the rat race. Most of us were born into it, and many of us never question it. The rules vary somewhat, and even change over time, but most people are in the same race more or less. Who are the winners of the race? How can you become one of them? What are the prizes? These are the questions most often asked.

Perhaps the more important questions are the ones fewer of us ask: What is the ultimate point of the race? Are the winners actually happier and healthier than the so-called losers? Who is hurt by doing what it takes to be one of the winners? Ourselves? Our loved ones? If it weren't promoted through everything I hear and see, would I choose to enter the race? When does it end?

Responsibility

*A man said to the Universe, "Sir, I exist."
"However," replied the Universe,
"the fact has not created in me a sense of obligation."*

— Stephen Crane

Each of us is important—at least to ourselves, and hopefully to some others. That fact can easily lead to the feeling that the world owes us something. Isn't being a generally good person worth something? Isn't there some grand order in the universe such that good people get good lives, and bad people bad?

It's difficult to imagine that things might be entirely random—that we don't "deserve" a good life. Does that mean we won't have a good life, or that we shouldn't do what we can to improve our lives? No. But, it might be helpful to remember that our existence doesn't oblige the universe to provide for us. In the end, it's up to us. What are we doing to make the life we want?

No Wasted Time

Everything is practice.

— Pele

From an early age we're trained to judge whether each experience is good or bad. Often those that are deemed "bad" are considered a waste of time at best, and harmful at worst. It can be difficult to appreciate that all of our experiences—both "good" and "bad"—make up who we are. Without each, we would essentially be someone different. Even negative experiences help us learn how to better handle "bad" experiences in the future. In a sense, then, everything we do and experience is practice for life. How can practice be a bad thing?

Motivation is Key

*We can do whatever we wish to do
provided our wish is strong enough.*

— Katherine Mansfield

People often say, "I want to X" or "I want to have Y." There are many things that can (and do) fit into the X and the Y. Few of these desires are fulfilled. Why? Motivation is often the determining factor.

Motivation is simply how badly we want something. If something is truly important to us, we'll do a lot for it. So, when we say, "I want X," the important question is, "How badly?" Many of our wants and goals are not really important enough to warrant the effort it would take to achieve them. That's okay. There's only a certain amount of time and effort to go around. However, we do need to remember that many wants and goals aren't really that important to us. So we shouldn't despair, then, when they aren't fulfilled.

Instant Success

*It takes twenty years of hard work
to become an overnight success.*

— Diana Rankin

When we notice other people's successes, it often seems as though success came quickly and easily. "They have such talent," we say. Or perhaps, "They were so lucky." It seems this way because we weren't there to witness the pre-success period—the effort, the practice, the disappointments. Luck might have been a factor, but typically behind an "instant" success is a long trail that isn't so pretty.

What does it hurt to think of success as an overnight achievement? Doing so implies that unless we have some inherent talent, or a streak of good luck, we won't be as successful as these other people. Such thinking may keep us from tackling the effort, practice, and inherent disappointment that leads to success. Then our beliefs about the nature of success will become a self-fulfilling prophesy. We will indeed never be successful—not because we couldn't have, but because we never even tried.