

breakthrough

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THE POWER OF CHOICE

"We are not launched into existence like a shot from a gun, with its trajectory absolutely predetermined. The destiny under which we fall when we come into this world ...consists in the exact contrary. Instead of imposing on us one trajectory, it imposes several, and consequently forces us to choose..."

To live is to feel ourselves fatally obliged to exercise our liberty, to decide what we are going to be in this world. Not for a single moment is our activity of decision allowed to rest. Even when in desperation we abandon ourselves to whatever may happen, we have decided not to decide."

JOSE ORTEGA Y GASSET

By Patrick O'Neill

Story continued inside...

THE POWER OF CHOICE

Story continued from front cover

“The intellect has little to do on the road to discovery. There comes a leap in consciousness, call it intuition or what you will, and the solution comes to you and you don’t know how or why.”

ALBERT EINSTEIN

Recently, I spoke at a conference where I had the honor of meeting Lt. General Romeo Dallaire, the UN Commander in Rwanda during the genocide. He is a man of great personal warmth, courage and is a compelling speaker.

In his remarks, General Dallaire outlined some of the difficulties being faced by military commanders in the field who must make split second decisions with little or no information and no time for deductive reasoning.

General Dallaire posed an example of a woman in a top-to-toe burka running towards a checkpoint and not responding to an order to stop. What do you do, he asked? Is this woman being pursued and running in terror? Is this a woman at all, or a man in disguise? Is she/he concealing a weapon or bomb? Is she unable to hear or understand the order to stop? Do you let her approach and take the risk that she is a suicide bomber? Or, do you shoot and risk a violent response from the civilians you are trying to protect? Decide now!

In today’s “point-blank” world, leaders in all walks of life must make choices in environments characterized by growing uncertainty, ambiguity, confusion and paradox. How do you set a course in rapidly changing, even volatile conditions?

FOUR WAYS TO CHOOSE

There are four decision pathways: *evaluation*, *intuition*, *visualization* and *instinct*. Each pathway is unique, with its own set of distinctions and practices. However, in complex situations and volatile circumstances, one may need to work with more than one decision-making protocol.

Evaluation

Reason and analysis is the pathway of evaluative decision-making, and requires deliberation. Deliberation means the process of careful consideration, which may include dialogue and debate where different points of view are explored, to ensure careful study and evaluation is brought to bear on a problem.

Leaders work with reason and analysis when evaluation and logical deduction is required to ponder opportunities, problems, relationship issues, unfamiliar circumstances, conflicts and the wise use or distribution of resources... and when time permits such a process. Evaluative decision-making is most often applied to mid and long-term choices.

Indigenous people the world over consider the impact their choices will have on seven generations. This ensures neither expediency nor self-interest is the driving motivation for choosing and that due consideration is given to the possible impact of actions taken on individuals, communities and the environment. It also ensures that time is made for reflection, especially when complexity and ambiguity is present, before a decision is taken.

Most evaluative decision-making processes include the following steps:

- Identify the objectives, goals, and needs.
- Analyze the current circumstances.
- Determine what options and resources are available.
- Compare and evaluate the options in relation to objectives and circumstances.
- Pick the option that best meets the objectives, goals, and needs.
- Take action.
- Evaluate the results.
- Learn from the results and apply the lessons learned to new situations.

Intuition

Intuitive decision-making requires trust. One must be prepared to trust feelings, hunches, dreams, and insights, which many people dismiss or demean because they fail to respect a process they cannot track or control intellectually.

Intuition necessitates a deep faith in oneself. Can you remain open to possibility, and maintain equanimity in a decision-making process that may seem irrational, mysterious or fail to abide by a logic-based system?

Choices that cannot be made from inductive or deductive thought processes – including matters of the heart, unexpected circumstances that demand an immediate response and situations where there is little information, ambiguity or paradox – are common ignition points for intuitive choices.

To work with intuition, a leader observes the following cues:

- Check your feelings and stay attached to your gut.
- Pay attention to what is unfolding within you and around you.
- Pay attention to hunches, flashes of insight, and feelings of certainty that arrive without an inductive or deductive decision path.
- Read the atmosphere of your surroundings, including the mood and ambiance.
- Implement action and examine outcomes.



PATRICK O'NEILL

Visualization

Visualization uses evaluation and intuition to create mental simulations to plan a course of action prior to actually taking it. Reason is applied to assess, understand, and form a coherent strategy with regards to a situation or a challenge. Creativity and intuition are marshaled to build a visual scenario, or narrative, to examine and evaluate the courses of action.

Situations that are not routine, have some element of complexity, or may require a series of specific and sequential steps must be executed with precision, are often approached through visualization. For instance, an elite skier will run a race in his or her mind's eye over and over again to prepare the mind and the body for the course. To perform well, he or she must be able to anticipate handling the challenges and the conditions of the race course successfully before attempting the race itself.

Gary Klein, who studied decision making amongst fire commanders, tank platoon leaders, wildfire incident commanders, design engineers, battle command teams, and Navy cruiser commanders, identifies visualization, or mental simulation, as a common approach used when trying to "make sense of events and form an explanation."

In his classic book *Sources of Power*, Klein writes:

"Mental simulation serves several functions in nonroutine decision making. It helps us to explain the cues and information we have received so that we can figure out how to interpret a situation and diagnose a problem. It helps us to generate expectancies by providing a preview of events as they might unfold and by letting us run through a course of action by searching for pitfalls so we can decide whether to adopt it, change it, or look further."

For visualization, the following steps are typical:

- Picture the outcome you are committed to accomplishing.
- Assess the opportunities and challenges.
- Visualize a course of action.
- See yourself taking action.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the action plan.
- Course correct.
- Implement action.

INSTINCTIVE CHOICES

Instinct is a far older power than reasoning, intuition, and visualization. It comes from the earliest stages of hominid development, and is our connection to our animal and ancestral heritage.

Instinct is commonly held to be a natural, reflexive response to some external stimuli that prompts action. Many people don't regard instinct as a source of choice. It is seen as hard-wired, pre-rational, pre-determined behavior that cannot be over-ridden. From this perspective instinct is a form of predetermination.

However, if one accepts the responsibility implicit in free will, then even instinct must be considered a source of choice that can be exercised – or not – as instinct rises to consciousness. We have adequate resources at our disposal that provide a counter-balance to the primary emotions, which are the media of instinct. Neurologist and author, Antonio R. Damasio elaborates:

"At birth, the human brain comes to development endowed with drives and instincts that include not just a physiological kit to regulate metabolism but, in addition, basic devices to cope with social cognition and behavior... Moreover, out of the dual constraint, suprainstinctual survival strategies generate something probably unique to humans: a moral point of view that, on occasion, can transcend the interests of the immediate group and even the species."

Instinct signals to consciousness the presence of a potential danger, threat, a desirable mate, a child to protect, a nest to build for the family, and food to obtain. When the hair on the neck bristles, the skin tingles and goose bumps form, our instincts, in the form of body wisdom, are rising. Instinct is urging us to follow its cues.

“Be a good animal, true to your animal instincts.”

D.H LAWRENCE

Instinct is perhaps the most compelling of the modalities of choice and can override almost all the others, especially in matters of survival. Carl Jung suggests,

"The great decisions of human life have as a rule far more to do with the instincts and other mysterious unconscious factors than with conscious will and well-meaning reasonableness."

To work with instinct, a leader must track the following:

- Body wisdom, the innate knowledge of the gut, spine, skin and glands that are activated by internal, external stimuli.
- Primary emotions like happiness, anger, fear, and love.
- Drives and needs like hunger, thirst, flight, fight, territoriality, fatigue and survival.
- Pattern behaviors that are produced without thinking that produce consistent and predictable outcomes.

Story continued from inside

Even in the most difficult circumstances, leaders must never abdicate the power of choice. Choosing is an act of discernment, the ability to exercise judgment and set a course for action. Clear goals, courage, and an ethical framework are the source of wise choices, even in difficult conditions. Legendary basketball Coach Phil Jackson suggests: "You have to trust your inner knowing. If you have a clear mind and an open heart, you won't have to search for direction. Direction will come to you."

A clear mind and open heart are indeed prerequisites to work with the power of choice. But choosing wisely also demands that we take full responsibility for the decision-making process. Part of that responsibility is recognizing that even difficult decisions can be made with what Hemmingway called "grace under pressure." It is the ability to make wise choices under pressure that often spell the difference between the success and failure of our endeavors.

General Romeo Dallaire continues his important work advocating for those affected with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), war-affected children and less privileged children in Canada and Rwanda. To find out more please go to www.romeodallaire.com.

CORPORATE PROFILE

Extraordinary Conversations helps leaders generate breakthroughs in organizational, team and individual performance.

Since 1988, we have supported large, medium and small organizations to build environments where people can do their best work. Clear vision, commitment and responsibility, open communication, courage and the passion to accomplish meaningful goals lead to extraordinary results.

Extraordinary Conversations works with diverse industries including manufacturing, retail, financial institutions, entertainment and service companies. Our clients include Fortune 500 leaders, medium-sized national companies and small entrepreneurial enterprises. Our work has taken us to global corporations in North America, Europe, Asia and Australia, to the townships of South Africa and the peace process in the Middle East

Design: Adams + Associates

THE FLOW OF COLLABORATION

The Flow of Collaboration, a powerful 20-minute talk by Patrick O'Neill, identifies the six competencies that spell the difference between success and failure for any work group:

- Common Purpose
- Accountability
- Trust
- Proactivity
- Dialogue
- Mutual gain

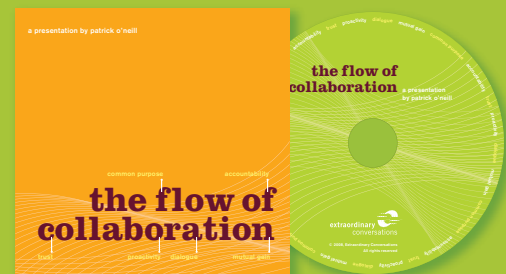
Beginning with an extraordinary conversation in a mine in Northern Manitoba, O'Neill recounts how "flow" – the effect of everyone working together toward a common goal – requires the careful stewardship of both **tasks** and **relationships**.

As well, O'Neill outlines the five conditions that sabotage enterprise and explains why the "dream team" approach so often fails.

Next, the skills and practices that lead to good team chemistry are discussed with clarity and precision.

The Flow of Collaboration finishes with an entertaining and insightful story from the Chinese tradition about the power of group work.

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