

Discovering Self, Leadership and Service

Spirals, Edges and Traverses

Experiences of Personal Growth and Developing (Self) Leadership

"WE FAIL TO REALIZE THAT MASTERY IS NOT ABOUT PERFECTION. IT'S ABOUT A PROCESS, A JOURNEY. THE MASTER IS THE ONE WHO STAYS ON THE PATH DAY AFTER DAY, YEAR AFTER YEAR. THE MASTER IS THE ONE WHO IS WILLING TO TRY, AND FAIL, AND TRY AGAIN, FOR AS LONG AS HE OR SHE LIVES"

George Leonard



National Geographic

FINDING AND SHIFTING TOWARDS A SENSE OF PURPOSE, PROGRESSING TOWARDS A CAPACITY FOR AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP MAY NOT BE A SIMPLE LINEAR ACTIVITY. THE LATEST TOP 5 OR TOP 10 "MUST HAVES" FOR SUCCESS SIMPLY DON'T CAPTURE THE DYNAMIC, PSYCHOLOGICAL, AND OFTEN CONFLICTING EXPERIENCES THAT MANY PEOPLE WORK THROUGH. MY OWN EXPERIENCE, AND WHAT I'VE WITNESSED IN MANY CLIENTS, IS MORE COMPLEX, MORE MULTI-DIMENSIONAL.

"NOTHING IS SECURE BUT LIFE, TRANSITION, THE ENERGIZING SPIRIT"

Ralph Waldo Emerson

THIS PAPER SETS OUT A FRAMEWORK OF WHAT I'VE SEEN MANY TIMES, SUGGESTING SOME OF THE KEY DEVELOPMENT AREAS TO CONSIDER, AND SOME OF THE MAJOR CHALLENGES, THAT IF ADDRESSED WILL LEAD TO REALISED POTENTIAL. I OFFER ELEMENTS OF A MAP – NOT A SET OF DIRECTIONS, BUT A SURVEY OF ORIENTATION AND NAVIGATION POINTS, EXAMPLES OF WHAT I AND OTHERS HAVE FOUND IMPORTANT. THESE COULD ILLUMINATE THE TERRITORY YOU MAY FIND YOURSELF IN, ALLOWING YOU TO NAVIGATE YOUR OWN PATH, TO UNCOVER YOUR OWN ANSWERS, TO BE THE EXPERT IN YOUR OWN LIFE. I HOPE THIS IS USEFUL TO YOU IN UNDERSTANDING SOME OF THE DIFFICULTIES AND OBSTACLES YOU MIGHT BE FACING, IN OVERCOMING YOUR OWN HINDRANCES, AND IN GUIDING YOU TOWARDS THE RESOURCES YOU WANT TO FOCUS ON.

The context of this paper is the individual experience, not the group. I believe that the experience of team and organisational shift has many similarities, but there is so much in addition that it will be addressed separately in a subsequent paper.

A Spiral Model of Development and Growth

"PROGRESS HAS NOT FOLLOWED A STRAIGHT ASCENDING LINE, BUT A SPIRAL WITH RHYTHMS OF PROGRESS AND RETROGRESSION, OF EVOLUTION AND DISSOLUTION."

Johanne Wolfgang von Goethe

Several years ago I was looking for a robust development model that I could use to guide my move into a career in coaching. I came from the world of technology and business where we had any number of frameworks and measures to use to map out fixed paths to glory. My move into coaching was not simply about a different career, with different skills and competencies to learn. For me it was manifesting a journey of discovery of self, of service, of being who I could be and doing the work I was called to do. This is similar to those seeking to find their own, authentic leadership path, that sense of looking to start a new and exciting venture, being promoted to their first significant leadership position, experiencing a call to something more. In my own and these similar situations, linear, structured, metric, competency type models were just not suitable.

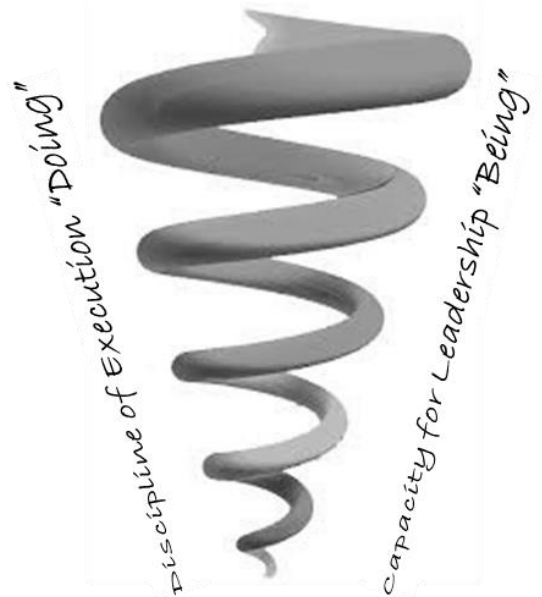
One day I came across a spiral development model and it clicked. Seeing that picture brought into conscious awareness what I knew was my own experience. Leadership development and many other kinds of complex development, does not proceed in a



pre-determined linear path, with a succession of named tiers and levels, and well defined competencies. Leadership development, the exploration and development of self, answering fundamental questions - **Who am I? What is my work?** –more naturally follow a spiral path.

In each cycle of the spiral you revisit the previous territory, the questions and the ground from before, with increased knowledge, increased awareness, increased experience and capacity for more. You do not throw away or alter what has gone before, rather there is a sense of transcending and including. You have more of what you had before, and what you had before remains valid, complete, and useful. Each turn around the spiral is broader than the one before. The spiral grows up, and out. With this growth you have greater awareness, and you are able to engage with greater complexity.

The original diagram I saw had two dimensions: awareness and complexity. I believe they are pretty universally useful. What I saw in the three dimensional potential of that simple diagram, was for many more dimensions depending on the individual situation e.g. assimilation-differentiation, tools-intuition. Two particular dimensions that I believe are relevant to personal growth and leadership development are *Capacity for Leadership "Being"* and *Discipline of Execution "Doing"*. Progressing these in tandem results in both a sense of purpose and potential realised.



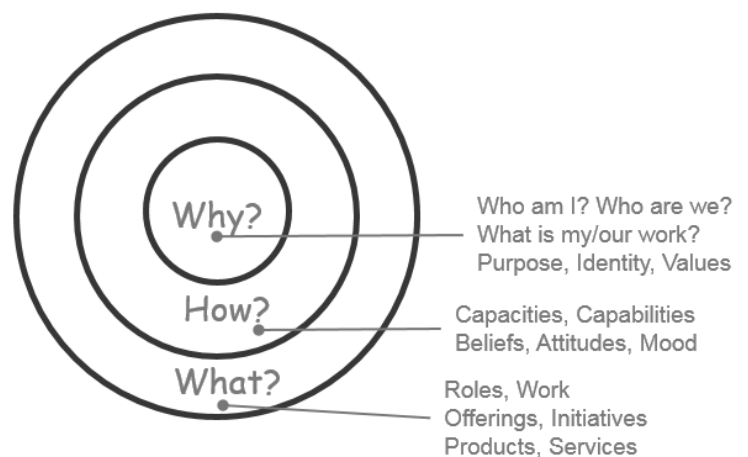
Before looking at them in more detail, let's consider the nature of the spiral journey itself – what is that territory, where to start?

Start with Why

"IF ONE ADVANCES CONFIDENTLY IN THE DIRECTION OF HIS DREAMS, AND ENDEAVOURS TO LIVE THE LIFE WHICH HE HAS IMAGINED, HE WILL MEET WITH A SUCCESS UNEXPECTED IN COMMON HOURS."

Henry David Thoreau

Simon Sinek's work in *"Start with Why"* helps us see the importance to organisational success of a developing a solid, compelling, and inspiring sense of purpose. Sinek's work echoes much of Jim Collin's earlier research documented in *"Built to Last"* and *"Good to Great"*. Leaders of all kinds who start with *Why* tend to build more engaging and enduring success.



On an individual level I have found that the same principles apply. Rather than latching on to current and potential *What's*, start instead with your own *Why*, seeking your own sense of who you are, what your work is, your own guiding purpose.

Other than in hindsight, however, rarely have I seen instances where the *Why* was so clearly understood at the outset that it never had to be re-visited. Rather an iteration of *Why-How-What – Why-How-What – Why-How-What-...* – is what it seems to take to uncover a clear and compelling sense of *Why*. In that way then, it becomes about starting the journey in order to uncover the destination. Staying in one place, trying to completely figure out the destination is likely to lead to stasis and extreme frustration!

And so the cycle of *Why-How-What – Why-How-What* becomes the turn of the spiral. Looking down on the spiral from above you see a continuous and growing cycle of increasing clarity of purpose, and increasing discipline of achieving the vision.

Now that you have a start point, and a continuing point, let's look in more detail at those two key dimensions of *Capacity for Leadership "Being"* and *Discipline of Execution "Doing"*. What is the nature of those paths? What are they about? What is meant by *"Being"* and *"Doing"*? What are the landmark and orientation points – the important "stuff" - in these areas?

Capacity for Leadership “Being”

“LIKE ALL JOURNEYS, THIS ONE MOVES THROUGH BOTH THE DARK AND THE LIGHT, THE TERRORS OF THE UNKNOWN AND THE JOYS OF DEEP RECOGNITION. SOME SHAPES AND LANDMARKS ARE ALREADY CLEAR. OTHERS WAIT TO BE DISCOVERED. NO ONE CAN SAY WHERE THE JOURNEY IS LEADING. BUT THE RELATIONSHIP PROMISES TO BE FRUITFUL, AND I CAN FEEL THE EXPLORER’S BLOOD RISING IN ME. I AM GLAD TO FEEL IN AWE AGAIN.”

Margaret Wheatley

A common experience of leadership and self-growth is the sense of a journey, and more particularly *The Hero Journey*, drawing on the work of Joseph Campbell. Campbell explored the world of myth and legend, across many cultures and ages and uncovered what he called the “*monomyth*”, the archetypal journey of discovery and growth.

Classically The Hero Journey begins with an event, a crisis, a “*Call to Adventure*” – the village needs to be saved from the dragon, the fair maiden needs to be rescued from the tower, the evil empire needs to be destroyed, the magic ring needs to be returned. It need not be all magical metaphor – the young must grow up and become an adult alone from parents, the opportunity for leadership is presented, a sense of purpose stirs.

There is an opportunity – a need, a call – however it comes about. The call of course need not be heeded, it can be refused. And it often is. Just as often it will come back and bite us! Refusals are rejected by the world that calls.

You must actively and consciously accept the call by crossing the threshold of adventure, the threshold from your known world, a world that is understood, predictable, current reality and comfortable, to cross to the unknown, future, emergent reality. At these times often you find guides and mentors come to encourage you and help you on your journey. These figures may even be the ones to offer the call. They see in you gifts and potentials that you had not previously been conscious of. They act as an awakener or sponsor.

What follows then is the journey – on a path that you cannot see. It has not been taken before, because it is your path, you have to take the first step. A series of tests and trials follows, confronting assumptions and resistances, leading to increased awareness and so growth. You may experience an initial level of struggle, followed by the elation

of new achievement. Yet these tests are only building your strength and capacities for the next stage.

In the myths there is often a great dragon beast or evil lord to slay. In personal growth and leadership development, the beast is often of a psychological or inter-personal nature. You must let go of your ego, of the masks you have built. You may need to confront and accept those dark parts of your own personality, those assumptions you have told yourself, the things you have hung to for survival, without which you somehow imagine you will die. There is a stripping away of so much of the façade you have built.

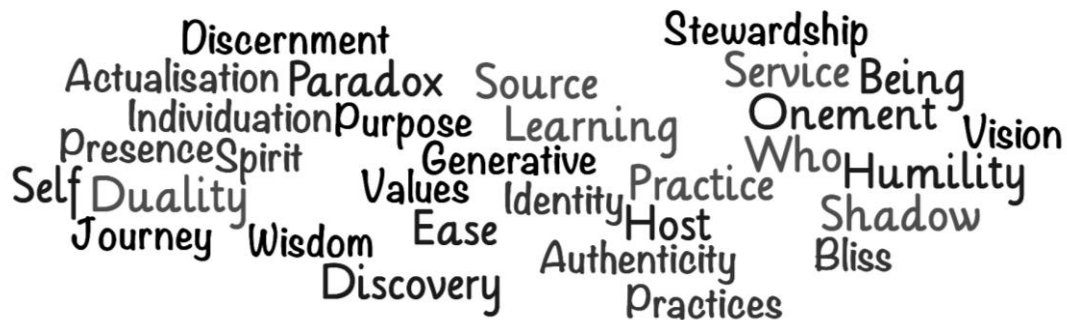


This can be a confusing and uncomfortable time, often described as going through the *"eye of the needle"*, *"going into the abyss"*, and *"finding the treasure in the place you most fear to go"*. It seems to be about truly confronting and so finding your "Self".

While troubling and uncomfortable, stay with the experience. It will take you through to moments of profound insight, sight of who you are and what your work is. Insights like this are developmental and offer the potential for transformation. What emerges is clarity and humble certainty, self-sponsored-assuredness, embracing your whole Self with all of its potentials.

There is one final threshold before your journey is complete. You have a choice again. You can choose to stay in this new world, living solely with this transformed, enlightened self. Or, if you wish to truly live and lead in the world, then you must actively take your new gifts back to those you seek to serve, you must return anew.

Our journeys are unique and individual. So too are the factors that become important. The tests and challenges that you confront, hold the gifts and treasure that you uncover for yourself. This is a survey of those understandings and experiences that I personally have found important, and that I have seen in others. It is not meant to be directive, nor exclusive, but a set of landmarks that I hope will guide and prove useful.



The journey need not start through some external event. Many simply make the decision to do something different e.g. a young graduate taking a gap year travelling the world. Similarly, moving to mastery often involves repeated choices to take another journey of tests, trials and growth.

Is there one journey, or many? The sense of my own experience goes back to the spiral. There are many journeys within one much larger, more profound journey. With hindsight we can see the whole thing unfolded. The experience, though, is not linear but cyclical.

Discipline of Execution “Doing”

“START BY DOING WHAT’S NECESSARY; THEN DO WHAT’S POSSIBLE; AND SUDDENLY YOU ARE DOING THE IMPOSSIBLE.”

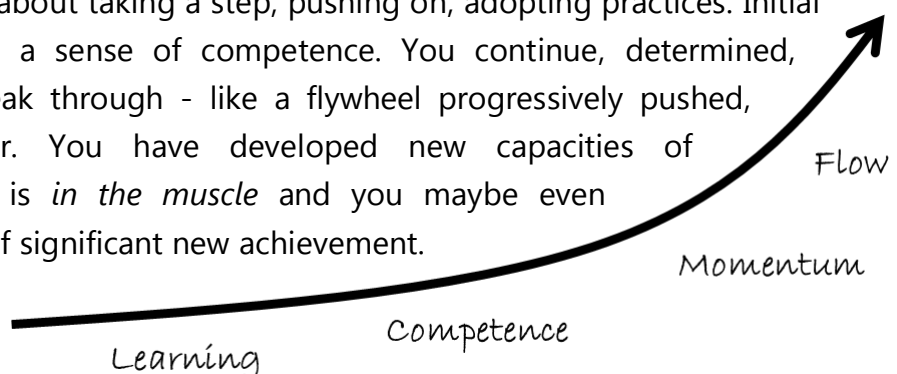
St Francis of Assisi

Many of us are brought up with a strong focus on doing, working, delivering and in a pretty traditional linear and hierarchical way. From our education and early work experiences we get used to a world of lines, boxes, structures, lists, spreadsheets, project plans, progress reports. These methods and approaches work well with very transactional, repeatable, problems and tasks you’ve seen before.

With personal and leadership growth these traditional approaches will disappoint at best, and often fail. Why? Well, because you haven’t seen the nature of the problem before, you don’t actually know the solution. You must find and master new ways of thinking, new ways of seeing the problem, paying attention to relational and systemic factors.

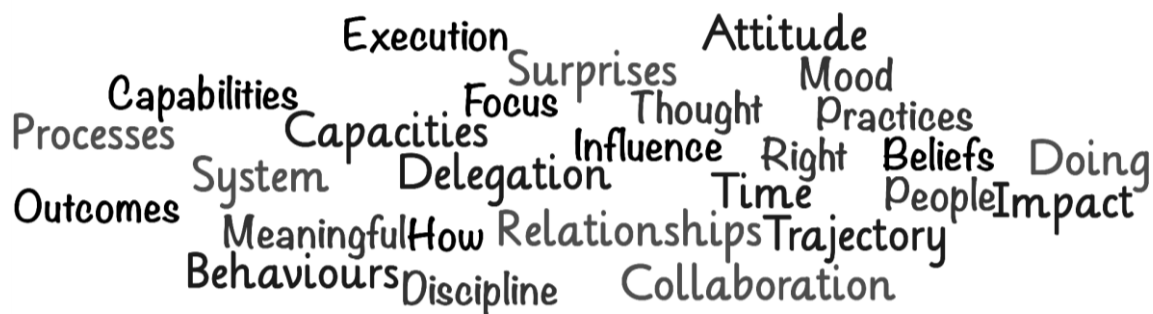
If you think back though, you’ve probably met these circumstances before and probably mastered how to work through and be successful. Most of us have learnt to drive, and if you were like me, it wasn’t a straightforward process. It’s often a struggle, a multi-faceted challenge that needs a synthesis and coordination of tasks. Invariably you seem to fail (stall, go too fast, veer off road position) and that gets frustrating and demoralising, you feel awful. Though with persistence, focus and guidance, a level of competence comes and by consolidating this early progress, a level of mastery is achieved. You may even choose to go further – advanced motoring, grand prix!

What’s important is realising that you’re learning something brand new for you. Firstly discipline and focus are required. Then the nature of this path to growth is continuing, incremental change. It’s about taking a step, pushing on, adopting practices. Initial learning is followed by a sense of competence. You continue, determined, sustaining, and you break through - like a flywheel progressively pushed, momentum takes over. You have developed new capacities of achievement. The shift is *in the muscle* and you maybe even experience a flow state of significant new achievement.



You will most likely encounter difficulties, and unexpected hurdles and obstacles. Linking back to your guiding purpose, vision, the “Why”, allows you to see these as opportunities to act in a different way and to progress with your achievements. Surprises will come too, and if you can be open to receiving them, you may even progress in leaps and bounds through the power of these meaningful coincidences.

Below is second survey of those understandings and experiences that I have found important to effective “doing”, and of the considerations that are important not only to growth, but to realisation.



In team and organisational contexts, the leader on their inevitably individual journey, will have to equip themselves with an understanding of the systemic and relational forces that play so large in groups. These points are for a subsequent paper, although you can read more in some of the suggestions given for further reading.

Developing a Manifesto

I now find that traditional goal setting simply doesn't work in the context of this kind of growth, and is pretty much useless when it comes to transformational change. For the last few years I've adopted a Manifesto approach - *"a written public declaration of the intentions, motives, or views of the issuer", "To Make Manifest"*. Here's how it works:

First create a statement representing a trajectory, a sense of travel, a sense of what the future will be like from the perspective of being there. This is not a fixed goal or destination, which can be immovable, unrealistic, un-adaptable, and intransigent.

With the manifesto stated, it is then useful to explore and identify:

- Themes - what themes might be encountered and considered in advance
- Developments - specific development activities or projects to support realisation of the manifesto; Habits - to be formed or dropped
- Additional resources and support that you will need
- Orientation and Navigation points - where it makes sense to see where you've gotten to, and where next; Inflection points - key points of opportunity, challenge
- Milestones - are there any critical targets that you want to commit to for yourself or key stakeholder? Accountability - how will you hold yourself to account
- Edges thresholds, immunities, resistances; "the excuse mechanism"

Now give yourself an "A". In their inspiring book *The Art of Possibility*, Ben and Roz Zander talk about one of Ben's classes in which he gives all of the students an **A** at the start of the semester. He does this partly in reaction to the less than helpful practice of fitting performance ratings to a curve. Zander quotes Michelangelo who apparently said that *"inside every block of stone or marble dwells a beautiful statue; one need only remove the excess material to reveal the work of art within"*

Zander gives his students an **A**, to *"transport ... from the world of measurement into the universe of possibility"*. He has one condition, within the first two weeks, students have to write him a letter dated months later. In this letter they have to *"tell, in as much detail as you can, the story of what happened to you ... that is in line with this extraordinary grade"*.

So, first give yourself an **A** for delivering your manifesto, now. Then write yourself a letter, from the perspective of the future, looking back, reporting in really specific detail all of the insights acquired, and milestones attained. Write everything from the future position, in the past tense. There should be no hope, or intend to or will. Write it all from the tense of what you did, and most importantly who you became. Now go, and discover, and be, and do.

Edges and Traverses

"WHEN SOMEONE MAKES A DECISION, HE IS REALLY DIVING INTO A STRONG CURRENT THAT WILL CARRY HIM TO PLACES HE HAD NEVER DREAMED OF WHEN HE FIRST MADE THE DECISION."

Paulo Coelho

You may experience a deep resistance to starting your journey, to taking the first step. Or you may be building a good sense of what you want to progress on your journey of *Why*, working towards new potential and achievement. And yet you may discover hindrances and fears that act to hold you back. They are stopping you, preventing you, confusingly and paradoxically, from taking the steps to freedom and potential. You may even have the enormous frustration of self-sabotage as you see what you want and at the same time are aware of preventing yourself. Whether conscious (or most often not), there are forces that will hold back even the most determined sense of purpose.

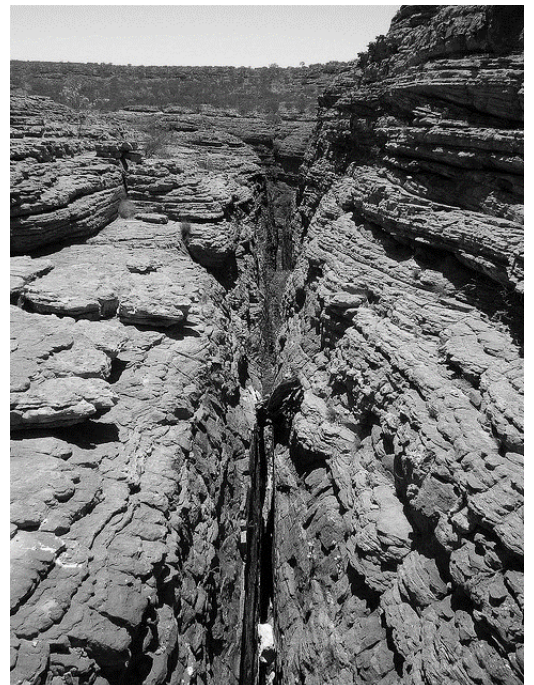
In their more subtle form these forces are experienced as a sense of *edge* or *boundary*. More substantially they confront as a crossing point – a *traverse* or *threshold*. *Edges* and *Traverses* come with a sense of discomfort, of the next step being too much, of something holding us back, with a fearful anticipation of what lies ahead.

You might meet an *edge* (**there and no further**) when:

- You are about to go beyond your current range of experience
- You have stretched to the tolerable maximum of change and discomfort
- You are about to leave the predictable, where you know success
- You are going beyond already mapped out steps and fear failing
- You uncover a competing commitment to what you say you want

You might meet a *traverse* (**things will be different forever**) when;

- You have a sense of moving from the known to the unknown
- You are moving from a land of predictability to one of emergence
- You are about to leave behind the script story of your life thus far



Building on Bob Anderson's analogy of a zone of tolerable conflict and a boundary to what you want, for some it feels as though a rubber band is attached to you at one end and at the other end is your central comfort zone. As you stretch out and experience the conflict, you allow yourself to go so far. Then as you approach the boundary to what you truly want, "Ping!" you snap back into your comfort zone. A life experienced this way is like driving with one foot on the accelerator and the other on the brake at the same time! The boundary consists of those beliefs, assumptions, life patterns and stories that must be transformed or let go if you are to make it across to what you want.

At times you may not even fully stretch. You see what you truly want over the horizon, that which represents all your hopes and ambitions, and then immediately experience the counter fear:

- *"that's big and scary, no thanks",*
- *"oh gosh if I go there, then I have to give up what I have now",*
- *"oh, no! If I truly have that, I can no longer define myself as aspiring to it. So how will I define myself?",*
- *"if I go there, then I actually have to be that person, and that's too much for me".*

And so your personal procrastination and excuse mechanism kicks in and you step back, never fully realising your potential, continuing to live on the hope for an unrealised tomorrow,

"UNFORTUNATELY AS LONG AS WE FAIL TO 'DEMYTHOLOGISE' OURSELVES, WE WILL CONTINUE TO FALL SHORT OF THE ARBITRARY STANDARDS WE ARE APPLYING TO OURSELVES."

Julie Hay

The paradoxical struggle is that what you know, makes you strong and keeps you safe, is what you often have to put aside, transform, or give up. Only then can you find and own what you desire. You may even secretly loathe those current strengths and attributes that others recognise. You would like to shed them, but fear what you might (not) have and what you will be without them

If however you can meet the experience of edge and traverse with joy, as a path to new experience, then the opportunity for a transformed integrated whole awaits you, a place of freedom and of potential. Rather than closed doors to be turned away from, or to battle down, can you see these points as opening gates? Examine the experience. Examine what it is about the experience that brings back the sense of edge or the sense of "there and no further". Maybe it's been a pattern all your life. Maybe it's a set

of beliefs and assumptions that no longer serve you. What is this experience a metaphor for? As you build more and more awareness, then the power of the blocking force will dissolve and may even in that moment of clarity, illuminate and provide guidance and resource for the steps ahead.

"A BIT OF ADVICE GIVEN TO A YOUNG NATIVE AMERICAN AT THE TIME OF HIS INITIATION:"

'AS YOU GO THE WAY OF LIFE, YOU WILL SEE A GREAT CHASM.

JUMP - IT IS NOT AS WIDE AS YOU THINK'"

The Joseph Campbell Companion

An *edge* is the experience of knowing what lies beyond and simultaneously being conflicted by the desire for it, and fear of what it means. At this point let the ego go. Take another step.

To cross a *traverse* we acknowledge, accept and integrate those parts of us previously hidden in shadow. In accepting, we cross a psychological threshold, becoming open to transformation,

Stepping beyond, across, outside, can come with a sense of loss of belonging, bringing feelings of guilt for leaving and not complying. If done "disrespectfully" this can lead to blame and repeating patterns of what you want to leave. Handled respectfully and with compassion (for self, for others), it can lead to freedom and growth

As you notice your own experience, you begin to become aware of the sense of resistance, reverting or fear. You may have old familiar feelings and thoughts at these times; possibly strong emotion: anger, shame, fear, tension etc. So at first, just notice and become curious. Reflect and explore. What is the structure of your experience? What choices have you made in the past? What different choices do you want to make now? Then see if you can just take the next step.

As you look at the structure and patterns of these experiences, you may begin to notice the story of your life: never achieving satisfaction, always doing what you don't really want to do, having to finish something else first, leaving important work until later, repeatedly starting and not quite finishing, not being sure about what next. These stories can be like movie scripts. The point is do you choose to let the script be deterministic of your future life, or do you choose a different story, a developmental path? The developmental path is open to all of us if we make that choice.

With each turn of the spiral, the rubber band experience becomes less and less. You may still feel discomfort and a desire to go back, but not a pull. You are aware of the discomfort and yet you can live in that experience and go on.

Some have asked is the boundary is fixed, solid? I don't think it necessarily is and certainly it becomes less so as you revisit this place. While some will see the boundary as immovable and having to be stepped over to the different place they want to be, others will meet it as steadily, incrementally expanding. Yet others will have an experience of it gradually weakening, becoming permeable and so they move seamlessly to where they want to be.

Whatever your case, if you begin to build an awareness of the experience of this boundary, and what hinders you from being on its other side, then you will be taking the first steps to get you there.

Conclusion

"UNTIL ONE IS COMMITTED THERE IS HESITANCY, THE CHANCE TO DRAW BACK. CONCERNING ALL ACTS OF INITIATIVE (AND CREATION), THERE IS ONE ELEMENTARY TRUTH, THE IGNORANCE OF WHICH KILLS COUNTLESS IDEAS AND SPLENDID PLANS: THAT THE MOMENT ONE DEFINITELY COMMITS ONESELF, THEN PROVIDENCE MOVES TOO. THIS RAISES IN ONE'S FAVOUR ALL MANNER OF UNFORESEEN INCIDENTS AND MEETINGS AND MATERIAL ASSISTANCE, WHICH NO MAN COULD HAVE DREAMED WOULD HAVE COME HIS WAY."

W. H. Murray

Most of all I hope that you will take the first step. The core of my work is to awaken the potential in those I am lucky enough to meet, and have the privilege to work with. I encourage you to take the first step, then the next, and to repeat that simple pattern.

The stories of great hero's and great figures from history are in these words. My own story is in these words. The stories of the many hundreds of clients I have worked with are in these words. Growth is found from within. Leadership starts with "Self". The journey may be iterative and developmental, it may be transformational. The only thing that matters is that when you hear the call, take the first step. Go on the journey, embrace the wonders of helpers and guides, look out for those magical moments of synchronicity, bring yourself back to the world and use your gifts in service.

In my own case I didn't pay attention to the first call. The second time I had no choice. I have seen several turns of the spiral, had a sense of *"going through the eye of the needle"*, had the joy of clarity of purpose. You can read that clarity at [My Purpose](#), and watch elements of my own experience and a major point of return in this short video story [Steps Towards Bliss](#). As my own journey continues around the spiral I become more aware that my experience of life is of being in a field of forces and energies. A field of possibility where I can design the stage on which my life plays out. So more excitement to come, I hope.

For you now, the set is dressed, the audience is seated and waiting, your place is marked out on the stage ready for you to fill. Hear your cue, step on, and find your character as the story unfolds. As I heard just the other weekend *"step off the edge and let your wings grow as you fall, then fly."*

Go well and enjoy the experience of being alive.

Alastair Kidd

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Transformational Coach and Futures Facilitator

alastair@alastairkidd.com

www.alastairkidd.com

Influences and Further Reading

There are many who have contributed to my own experiences and to the thinking presented in this paper. I want to be honest about those sources and models that have influenced me, and that may also be useful to you in your own learning. The following works stand out.

- Graham Lee and Ian Roberts – *Coaching for Authentic Leadership, Chapter 2, Leadership Coaching*
- Joseph Campbell – *The Hero with A Thousand Faces; Pathways to Bliss; The Joseph Campbell Companion*
- Robert Greenleaf - *Servant Leadership*
- Joseph Jaworski – *Synchronicity; Destiny and the Leader*
- Senge, Jaworski, Scharmer, Flowers - *Presence*
- Robert Dilts and Stephen Gilligan – *The Hero's Journey*
- Simon Sinek – *Start With Why*
- Jim Collins, Jerry Porras – *Built to Last; Good to Great*
- Richard Barrett – *What My Soul Told Me*
- Robert Kegan and Lisa LeHay – *Immunity to Change*
- Margaret Wheatley - *Leadership and The New Science*
- Richard Moss - *The Mandala of Being*
- Bob Anderson - *Leader Sense; Mastering Leadership*
- George Leonard - *Mastery*
- Julie Hay - *Working It Out At Work*
- Michael Neil – *Inside Out*
- John Whittington – *Systemic Coaching and Constellations*
- Rosamund Stone Zander, Benjamin Zander - *The Art of Possibility: Transforming Professional and Personal Life*

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