



talking about...

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... *designing better relationships for better outcomes*

A newsletter for those interested in ontological coaching

Creating Awareness

"Not choice but habit rules the unreflecting herd."

... William Wordsworth, 1770 – 1855, English Poet

A while ago, we discussed the challenge of changing our deep-seated habits. In that article, we also identified that creating awareness of our habitual behaviour was the first stage of achieving the elusive goal of permanent change, for without awareness about our actions we cannot choose different ones.

Being aware of our actions may sound easy, but it is not. Our capacity to focus our consciousness is quite limited and if it were not for the actions we take without awareness of them, we would not be able to function. For example, we can walk and talk at the same time. Whilst we are doing so, we are generally not very focused on our walking, we are just doing it; rather we are focused on the conversation. This is all well and good for if we had to be consciously aware of every action we took then we would not get much done.

Since our habits are done outside of focused consciousness, if we want to change them then we must find a way to bring them into consciousness. The most obvious way people employ to be aware is what we term "intentional awareness". Say you wanted to be less defensive in meetings. A way of dealing with this is to choose to go into a specific meeting with an intention to act in a constructive rather than a defensive way. This often works provided you remember to create intentional awareness in the first place. This is generally what people attempt to do when they make a New Year's resolution. However as you know, most of these declarations last for a short period of time before we fall back into our old habits. Hence, just applying intentional awareness is generally not enough for us to change a habit. We need more.

We can support intentional awareness through "reflective awareness". This is a process of regularly reflecting on our behaviour, identifying what happened and looking to what other actions could have been taken and what we will do if a similar situation arises in the future. We find that this is best done at a certain time each day to develop the habit of reflection. However, as with intentional awareness, reflective awareness is generally not a habit people have and as a result they may begin the practice but find they fall out of it after a period of time.

One way of maintaining intentional or reflective awareness is to utilise "triggers" or memory aides. This can take the form of reminders on your computer or stickers on a folder or an item that you see on a regular basis such as a photograph. As long as the item has some meaning for you and that meaning can be created when you might need awareness, then the trigger can help generate awareness.

Whereas the first three strategies are self-oriented, the final strategy involves ongoing feedback from others. We can let a colleague or a friend know that we want to change certain behaviour and ask them to let us

know when we have fallen back into our old habits, either in the moment or after the event.

These are four strategies we employ to support change with our clients. We find the best results are achieved when you combine these strategies rather than relying on just one or two. If you want to change your habits, then give these a try, you may well be pleased with the results.

"A hunch is creativity trying to tell you something."

... Frank Capra (1897 - 1991)
US director

1000 marbles ...

This one was sent to us by a friend. We don't know its origin but it gave us a poignant message.

The older I get, the more I enjoy Saturday mornings. Perhaps it's the quiet solitude that comes with being the first to rise, or maybe it's the unbounded joy of not having to be at work. Either way, the first few hours of a Saturday morning are most enjoyable.

A few weeks ago, I was shuffling toward the garage with a steaming cup of coffee in one hand and the morning paper in the other. What began as a typical Saturday morning turned into one of those lessons that life seems to hand you from

Talking About Pty Ltd

PO Box 6652,
St Kilda Rd Central,
Victoria, 8008.

Ph: +613 9507 2464

info@talkingabout.com.au
www.talkingabout.com.au

time to time. Let me tell you about it.

I turned the dial up into the phone portion of the band on my ham radio in order to listen to a Saturday morning swap net. Along the way, I came across an older sounding chap, with a tremendous signal and a golden voice. You know the kind; he sounded like he should be in the broadcasting business. He was telling whom-ever he was talking with something about "a thousand marbles." I was intrigued and stopped to listen to what he had to say.

"Well, Tom, it sure sounds like you're busy with your job. I'm sure they pay you well but it's a shame you have to be away from home and your family so much. Hard to believe a young fellow should have to work sixty or seventy hours a week to make ends meet. It's too bad you missed your daughter's "dance recital" he continued. "Let me tell you something that has helped me keep my own priorities." And that's when he began to explain his theory of a "thousand marbles."

"You see, I sat down one day and did a little arithmetic. The average person lives about seventy-five years. I know, some live more and some live less, but on average, folks live about seventy-five years."

"Now then, I multiplied 75 times 52 and I came up with 3900, which is the number of Saturdays that the average person has in their entire lifetime. Now, stick with me, Tom, I'm getting to the important part."

"It took me until I was fifty-five years old to think about all this in any detail", he went on, "and by that time I had lived through over twenty-eight hundred Saturdays. I got to thinking that if I lived to be seventy-five, I only had about a thousand of them left to enjoy. So I went to a toy store and bought every single marble they had. I ended up having to visit three toy stores to round up 1000 marbles. I took them home and put them inside a large, clear plastic container right here in the shack next to my gear."

"Every Saturday since then, I have taken one marble out and thrown it away. I found that by watching the marbles diminish, I focused more on the really important things in life. There is nothing like watching your time here on this earth run out to help get your priorities straight."

"Now let me tell you one last thing before I sign-off with you and take my lovely wife out for breakfast. This morning, I took the very last marble out of the container. I figure that if I make it until next Saturday then I have been given a little extra time. And the one thing we can all use is a little more time."

"It was nice to meet you Tom, I hope you spend more time with your family, and I hope to meet you again here on the band. This is a 75 Year old Man, K9NZQ, clear and going QRT, good morning!"

You could have heard a pin drop on the band when this fellow signed off. I guess he gave us all a lot to think about. I had planned to work on the antenna that morning, and then I was going to meet up with a few hams to work on the next club newsletter.

Instead, I went upstairs and woke my wife up with a kiss. "C'mon honey, I'm taking you and the kids to breakfast." "What brought this on?" she asked with a smile. "Oh, nothing special, it's just been a long time since we spent a Saturday together with the kids. And hey, can we stop at a toy store while we're out? I need to buy some marbles..."

"If a man will begin with certainties, he shall end in doubts; but if he will be content to begin with doubts, he shall end in certainties."

... Sir Francis Bacon, 1561 - 1626

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Talking About Pty Ltd
ACN 112 307 892
info@talkingabout.com.au
Telephone: +61 3 9507 2464