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FEELING ALL AT SEA?



A CHANGE-MAKER'S GUIDE
TO REMAINING COHERENT IN
TURBULENT TIMES

It's clear that we are living in volatile and complex times... The US Presidential campaigns and election result have filled many with shock, anger, frustration and fear driven through a deep sense of uncertainty.

When there is a high level of ambiguity about how things are and how they might progress it can be easy to adopt feelings of disempowerment, resulting in potential stress and reactive aggression or at the other end of the energy-scale experiencing lethargy and a sense of resigned apathy.

The fallout from "fighting to win" is that we "lose sight of ourselves and our inter-connectedness. We become less conscious of the fact that we have true influence over our own thoughts and actions falling victim to what we perceive as negative external influences.

It can help to remember that it is this very same systemic nature of society that means that each wise decision we make can in turn send out productive ripples far and wide... and our actions can therefore create positive external influences.

I've been known to use the term "you are the traffic"... when I hear people complain about traffic, workload, physical and emotional congestion... and this analogy goes so much further – since we truly are the environment we inhabit.

SO WHAT ARE WE AS CHANGE MAKERS TO DO?

Well of course firstly we aim to take fully considered action in relation to where we place our support, when it comes to electing our leaders.

We can encourage others to make the wisest choices they can for themselves, whilst acknowledging freedom of speech and choice.

Votes cast and decision made - it really is a case of... Keep Calm and Carry On! Sounds facetious doesn't it... It really isn't meant to be, so please hear me out....



A REALITY CHECK

Let's face it.... The US election result will create a huge wave of change, and when big waves come along - you align, paddle, make the choice, twist, turn and adjust to maintain a positive trajectory.

We can only have meaningful influence on the world if we each come from a place of deep alignment. At times like these, mindless action and **single-mindedness** just won't do... Fluidity of spirit is required.



So... What might be useful to consider when it comes to maintaining alignment?

OUR BRAIN IS DISTRIBUTED

We might want to ask ourselves are we thinking straight...

Neuro-scientists have proven that we have neurons distributed throughout our body. It is a fact that three larger clusters of neurons reside in our head, our heart and our gut.

These are complex and adaptive systems and each cluster has the ability to select, process and respond to signals from the environment – it is these qualities that traditionally acquire the coveted label of “brain”.

The laws of neuroplasticity show us that neurons fire and wire together, creating thought patterns which result in behavior tendencies.

If we avoid accessing neural paths they stop wiring together and much like an un-tended garden our networks die back - requiring greater attention to regenerate. Good news when it comes to pattern interrupting unhelpful habits, but less healthy if we habitually and more generally reject the reality of this distributed nature of wisdom.

Imagine shutting off your heart intelligence, disregarding it over time, you may develop a dispassionate coldness in your personality or even experience very real cardiac health challenges.

Conversely, think about something or somebody you truly love... chances are you experience a sensation in your chest... this is your heart centre lighting up.

Think how it would be if you bottle up gut instinct, holding back, smothering and failing to act upon a deeper sense of internal knowing through overriding these feelings time and time again. The likelihood is you will experience a very real and persistent unease, a stuckness, or sense of not quite bringing your full self to your experiences, again potentially resulting in physiological digestive disorders.

Now bring your attention to your deepest sense of knowing, something that connects with who you are and your place in the world, a memory perhaps of a time when you felt instinctively grounded yet flexible. These sensations most often reside below the solar-plexus, they are discovered through accessing the enteric nervous system for gut related intelligence.



In fact you have the same number of neurons in your gut as a cat does in its (head) brain – a lot of processing potential.

You may well think you are super rational and that you rely solely head-based data... Wrong! Behavioural modeling shows that pro-social and pro-environmental actions require alignment of the full nervous system. You care about something within your heart, you can be creative with ideas in your head and you take courageous action from a deeper sense of self, which resides within the gut. In addition you do this from a place of balanced energy.

We have all experienced times when our heart and gut both knew exactly that we were on the right track and our head was aligned and on board, offering creative solutions... likewise we have each experienced times of misalignment and inner conflict.

So how do we go about establishing balance in order to maintain wisdom during turbulent times? Here are some ideas to help you stay coherent and connected, to express yourself fully and to ride the waves that are coming.

5 STEPS FOR PERSONAL EQUILIBRIUM

1: Embrace the Ambiguous...

Stop striving for certainty. Whilst grasping for control we forget that the world itself is in continual flux...

We live on a water planet - hardly an element known for being static and fixed, yet many people resist personal fluidity. Learn to embrace ambiguity.

Certainty is not synonymous with choice. Thanks to discoveries about neurogenesis, we know that cell-by-cell we are continually adapting moment to moment; each of us is in effect “a process” as complex and adaptive as an ocean. Acknowledge “the process that you are” and ask yourself: In this moment, am I MEing authentically: with compassion, creativity and courage?

2: Learn to Dance...

During my masters I researched *leveraging ambiguity for productive outcomes* modeling those who were at ease with: creating, holding or closing down ambiguity. These exemplars appeared to intuitively be able to recognise how and when to usefully *dance with opacity*. Each possessed a number of qualities and skillsets... here are some:

Being cognisant of context – When your attention is sharply narrowed there is potential that you could be missing something. Widen your awareness and soften your vision. Slow down. Really take in both your internal state and your external surroundings. Separate myth from fact.

Listen, observe, be fully present and receptive in order to gently notice. Acknowledge the relationships between... not only the component parts... tap into the collective gestalt. Ask yourself: are you showing up in the here and now... and are you aware? Getting your *Blue Mind* on will help you with this (more follows).

Remaining fearless of climate – Caution can exist without fear. Questioning is of course essential to assess a variety of potential realities. Recognise the transitional nature of the moment and your systemic impact within it (much like in point 1 above).

Curiosity, hope and fluidity of mind and body are far greater facilitators for progressive change than fear, guilt, blame and shame.

Being doubtless of self – Far from being complacent or over-confident, this quality relates to being “without doubt” that whatever arises, you will have some internal resources to draw upon to deal with it.

Blow on the embers of your internal smug... it is after all worth acknowledging that you are in fact pretty awesome and highly capable! This is not advocacy of externalised egotistical smugness... more an invitation to build a quiet awareness of your resilience and resourcefulness.

A lightness of spirit – Humour and playfulness reduce tension, so find time to laugh.

Contrary to this being a recommendation of approaching serious and critical decision making with flippancy... this is more a reminder and recognition that the act of laughing rebalances neuro-chemicals and shifts your autonomic state to better equip you psychologically and physiologically for those more challenging moments. Laughter also impacts breath (see below).



3: Internal Balance...

Are you breath aware? When did you last make an excellent decision from a place of deep stress, panic and breathlessness? Sure you might have made some good choices to remove yourself from deeply toxic situations... but I will bet, that at the precise point you made your most intelligent decision you had momentarily paused, breathed, reflected and widened your perspective.

When did you last take positive action from a place of lethargy? Again you may have examples of turning your energy around, but at the point you did this you had already engaged your thoughts, your emotions and your physiology in order to re-balance and integrate your intention, attention and action.

Breath is a route to managing your heart rate variability; there is a direct relationship between breath and the rhythm of your heart. If you are in a fight / flight place the neuro-chemical composition of your body and even the oxygen provision to enable your distributed wisdom to emerge is restricted.

Practice balanced breathing for five minutes morning and night 5-6 second inhale and 5-6 second exhale, sit quietly simply attending to the breath. This will train your body to return to this place of coherence more often and more readily.

Notice after your five minutes how you feel: aware, attentive, prepared to approach decisions with clarity. Wisdom traditions have known the importance of the breath and stilling the mind for centuries, science is catching up.



4: Noise on the Line: Blue Mind, Food and Exercise...

Attention restoration helps reduce interference and cognitive load (a busy mind). Go outside and spend time in nature. Particularly blue space to reduce the mental noise on the line. Activities such as wave watching have been proven to promote an indirect focus, creating a less intense level of forced concentration, providing space for creative thought (as explored within *Wallace J Nichols book: Blue Mind*).

Awe provoking experiences – such as those provided in breath taking natural locations, increase levels of empathy and gratitude leading to pro-social behavior - as explored within the work of *Dr Paul Piff*. Through collective intelligence and a sense of belonging we increase our sense of empowerment and our level of positive systemic influence exponentially.

Create deeper connections with others and with the environment allowing communication to flow more freely. I have already alluded to the importance of the heart and gut. Take that aim of noise reduction internally... Eating well and engaging in exercise reduces internal noise on the line enabling the heart and gut “brains” to function in a healthy way. In order to establish clear channels of communication it stands to reason that we aim to minimize inhibitors of the body systems housing our intelligence centres.

5: Connect and Align...

Take your (now) regular balanced breathing exercise further... tuning into your heart, your head and your gut– one by one. Really connect with each space within you and check in...

i) Acknowledge your heart and send gratitude for all wisdom it offers. What does your heart desire? What is truly important? Where does your compassion lie?

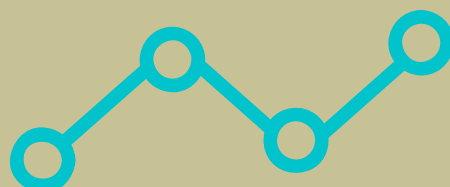
ii) Notice and admire your head's creativity. What do you really think - not the stories you tell you yourself? How creative can you be in finding possibilities and options to navigate challenges? Which ideas support your heart's desire and have potential for gutsy action?

iii) Connect with warmth to your gut, your very core. How will you bring yourself fully in to the day? Which boundaries serve you and which are no longer relevant? What action are you ready for?

One of a few things will happen... You may well gain real and specific insight from these centres! You may notice misalignment and inner conflict - this in itself is great insight to work with! You may gain no information from one or more centre – this is a sign of blocking and provides an opportunity to reflect more fully.

There are of course techniques to work with resolving blocking and misalignment, but for an introduction to these tools there is plenty to be working with for now and I truly hope that this article has provided some useful tools to explore.

Slow down, breath, align, laugh and dance... from a place of coherency - you are more influential than even you know.



GoingCoastalBLUE

About Lizzi Larbalestier MA, ICF:PCC...

Lizzi is an executive coach working in the littoral zone and is known for her playful yet proactive approach leadership facilitation. An ocean advocate and environmental activist, many of Lizzi's corporate client organisations target conservation, sustainability and renewable energy.

She coaches globally via Skype and her consultancy Going Coastal Blue specialises in working with senior business leaders to develop what she describes as: Liquid Ontology for a Fluid World.

Also an independent researcher she is currently studying the intuitive cardiac / respiratory and affective influence of exposure to virtual blue space in partnership with Plymouth University and hopes this research will inform policy changes in support of the Blue Health Agenda.

Training with Lizzi...

An *mBIT* Trainer and Master Coach, NLP Trainer, Coach Trainer and Keynote Speaker: Lizzi will be delivering Certified *mBIT* Coach Training in California in February 2017 - with 50% of profit from this course going directly to **Blue Mind Fund**. Lizzi is inviting you to get in touch if you would like to explore *mBIT* coaching and / or attending this programme.



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