

**A Jumping-Off Point™**

***“Stuck?”***

“The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.” – Albert Einstein

There is a scene in the movie “A Christmas Story” (an adaptation of childhood stories of the late writer/humorist Jean Shepherd) where a boy, Flick, is bragging to his friends that his father said that if you stuck your tongue to a frozen flag pole, it wouldn’t get stuck. (By the way, they were 8 year old boys, if you are wondering who would think of such a thing.) On a “triple-dog dare” from Schwartz, one of the other boys, Flick proceeded to do so, armed with his belief that his self-proclaimed infallible father was always right. Well, the laws of nature - and of winters in Indiana - dictated otherwise. As Flick’s self-satisfied “See, I told you” soon turned into the realization that he was indeed stuck, he flailed, cried, screamed “Stuck! Stuck! Stuck!” and implored the help of his friends. His friends, driven by a higher imperative – the bell that signaled the end of recess and a return to class or “you’d be in big trouble” –knew only one solution, i.e., running back to the classroom, and abandoned their friend to his “stuck” fate.

Now, poor Flick was only going by what he knew and believed, reinforced by the belief he had in his father’s infallibility. And he knew and believed only one solution - flailing, crying and screaming - to try and resolve it. Getting into this problem was easy...getting out of it was far more difficult. It took the resources of not only one observant teacher but that of the local police/fire/rescue personnel.

Inevitably, there comes a time or times in our lives when we get stuck and we flail around trying to get unstuck. For example, while writing a manuscript or informational product to sell, while staying in a job that we are intellectually and emotionally done with, while not being able to attract new clients and customers for our business, while being in a relationship that’s ok but not going anywhere, while having to make a choice “between a rock and a hard place”. And it seems that no matter what we do to resolve it, no matter how much we flail about, we inevitably tend to rely on what we already know to resolve it...and the “stuck-ness” only persists. The truth is we will not solve any significant problem we face by doing things the way we have done them before.

Which brings me to the quote by Albert Einstein that I ran across again the other day while researching another topic: “The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.” Now, as I am in no way scientific or mathematical, I turned to an expert – physicist Frank Kearly – for an explanation of what went into Einstein’s thinking when he said this (reportedly in response to the world’s social ills). Kearly said:

“The most obvious significant physics problem that Einstein tackled which falls in line with this quote was the one that brought him his early triumph as an original thinker. As you may have read, all of science thought that light waves were the product of a vibration of a substance they called the "ether". But, no one could detect its presence. The puzzle was really confounded when light speed measured "along" the ether's motion was found to be equal to the light speed opposite its motion. Surely the speed of the wave must be different when the waving stuff is moving toward you, versus away from you. But it wasn't. Einstein said, maybe the speed of light never changes, no matter how fast or slow you are moving. This was revolutionary! We now call it the "special theory of relativity" and it represents a total departure from the way people were used to thinking about the world.”

Einstein’s original thinking solved a scientific puzzle and changed forever how people thought about the world. Kearly referred to it as revolutionary. Now, true genius is a rare phenomenon. Answers seem to come to them from a region far beyond what we average-to-above-average thinkers rely on.

The brain, the marvelous computer that it is, has a glitch. When faced with a problem, it searches the data banks for existing information and knowledge. It will not automatically go to the thousands of bits of new information it has been exposed to on a daily basis but to the information that lies inside its immediate and very narrow bandwidth of consciousness. But it is in this outer region that the answers lie. How to access these bits of information? There are many ways, several of which we will explore in upcoming issues of the Ezine. Today, let me suggest two very simple things you can do to implement a different level of thinking.

First, if you don’t already know how to, learn how to Mind Map. If you are not acquainted with Tony and Barry Buzan’s incredible book [The Mind Map Book](#) (1996), click the link listed below in the Vivacity Recommended Resources section to learn more about it and to order it. The publisher of this book says “[The Mind Map Book](#) is the only book that both explains the fundamental operation of the brain in terms of its thinking processes and explains how to unleash and harness its power.” I heartily concur; I have found Mind Mapping to be an invaluable tool to expand my bandwidth of consciousness.

Second, form a “brainstorming” group. Invite 4 or 5 people you know with diverse backgrounds; e.g., if you are in sales, try and invite someone from totally unrelated fields such as library science or technology. Remember my article on “The Strength of Weak Ties” in the February VivaNews™ Jumping-Off Point? Don’t invite close friends and family. Though they love you and support you, they may think a lot like you or may try to protect you from further problems and this is not to your advantage in solving your current significant problem. At this brainstorming session, have a flip chart or large pieces of paper adhered to the wall. Present your problem to the group and have them say out loud all the things that come to their mind as a solution to the problem. Write these ideas down on the paper so everyone can see. One idea will spark another. Do not judge, “pooh-pooh” or negate any idea during this process. Take down the papers (hopefully you have many) and review them at another time soon after the group. You

can have a more critical thinking acquaintance help you prioritize the ideas you did get and/or blow holes in some of them. Add the ideas to your Mind Map or keep a running list of possibilities. Don't forget to do something to show appreciation and return the favor to your brainstorming group.

Thinking at a different level than what got us into a problem (using Mind Mapping, Brainstorming Groups or the myriad other possibilities) is a true jumping off point for our growth and success.

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