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Spend Time with Your Inner Child

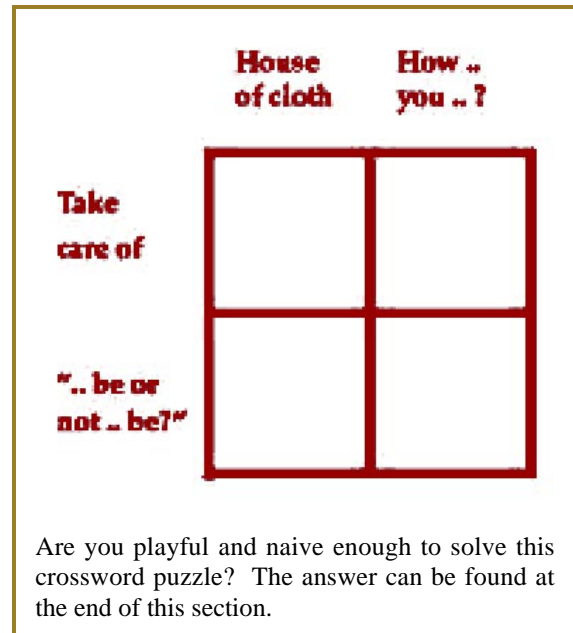
In the last section, I wrote about naivety as something negative, and that's how we usually regard it. We usually think of naive people as stupid, inexperienced and gullible. But cultivating naivety can in fact be of help sometimes, because it helps you create peace in your life.

With everything we do, we run the risk of getting stuck in a rut. A company that runs on routine finds it much more difficult to survive in today's changing world than does a more flexible organization.

Naivety to me means approaching everything you do with a child's eye – with a sense of freshness. It means seeing what is going on around you without looking through your preconceived notions. I remember experiencing this kind of freshness and childish eagerness 10 years ago when I started my own company. I sent out ads for my lectures and workshops and the response was actually fairly good.

The greatest interest turned out to be among one particular target group, so I concentrated my efforts on them. That's where I got work. But that was a group that I didn't enjoy working with very much. Gradually, the work became monotonous. I wasn't doing what I liked best. I was selling myself. I wasn't getting enough variety and was losing inspiration. This lack of inspiration carried over into my lectures and workshops. Routine took over, but economically, everything was looking fine.

I believe that we all run the risk now and then of getting swallowed up in routine this way, in both our professional and our private lives. It can happen in our careers and in our relationships. There is a false sense of security in the old standby: "Let's do it the same way we always have. It's worked fine so far."



Are you playful and naive enough to solve this crossword puzzle? The answer can be found at the end of this section.

Achievers have a tendency to take their goals too seriously, and their efforts may therefore turn out to be counterproductive. They lose the joy for their work, and their enthusiasm goes with it. This might be because they see everything they do as part of a struggle. They expect difficulty to come their way, and so they believe that each goal requires blood, sweat and tears to reach.

But this is not always true. You don't always have to use force in order to reach a particular goal. (But may the force be with you, anyway.) In any case, it does not always require blood, sweat and tears. You decide how to attain your different goals. In some cases, just creating a goal can be half the battle. Putting a goal into words means that you tell yourself where you want to go. It means making a decision. With that decision behind you, it is much easier to get moving. Sometimes you will even find things

falling into place of themselves. It doesn't always have to mean hard going.

About a year ago, I gave up. Practically speaking, I no longer take assignments for the money only. I try instead to ferret out jobs that seem genuinely interesting to me – work that will inspire and electrify me. This is the only way for me to reach excellence. As I work this way, the word spreads and I find even more good work...

It feels as if I've rediscovered the joy for my business. In certain ways, it feels as if I have been reborn. It's fun again, and now I feel ready again to go out and try new things. In his book *The Circle of Innovation*, management guru Tom Peters argues that today every company runs the obvious risk of their product becoming outdated faster than the blinking of an eye. The only way to survive global competition is to renew, renew and renew. You have to be able regularly to present something new to your customers that makes them say "WOW!" To do that, you have to reinvent yourself several times during a lifetime. That's the only way to stay at top.

This is why you need to cultivate a certain amount of naivety. Or call it childishness, if you like. My point is that children have a lot to teach us in this area. They have the natural habit of questioning everything around them and of observing everything freshly and without bias.

Naivety requires a certain amount of madness. One obstacle to living more madly can be your fear of what others may think. What if they think you've gone crazy? This happens to me often. People doubt my intelligence just because I use a wheelchair. And let me tell you, it's no fun being seen this way!

And yet I believe that we have to dare not to care what others may think. That should not be our main concern. Only we know why we're doing what we're doing and so we're the only ones who can give ourselves permission to be a little crazy.

Naivety also requires you to attempt the unlikely. It leaves no room for fear of failure. It leaves no room for cold and calculating prognoses. It requires you to trust your gut and your intuition. If you don't dare to do that, then you will never be able to enter unknown territory, and you will never create anything new.

It was frightening for me to realize that my workshops in fact grew worse with every year. It was frightening to realize that they had lost the freshness that had been there when I had first begun. The joy was gone, and what is left

if the joy is gone? If there is no joy left in what we are doing, then there is very little reason to continue doing it. Then we might as well start doing something else.

I am astonished at the great number of people who have so little joy for their work. When I started my business 10 years ago, I quit the job I had then. Since then, I've had a hard time understanding why people bind themselves to regular employment. It's not that I am unwilling to work. I hope you have understood that.

In general, the workplace today is inundated with rules of conduct, both written and unwritten. The work tempo has become so exaggerated that mistakes are unavoidable. People generally do not feel well at work, which results in inferior job performance. There is little room left for joy, creativity, flexibility or personal initiative.

I do not do well in such an environment. The fact that my last employer required me to spend eight hours each day in the same chair was enough to make me leave. Fortunately, more and more employers understand that where the work is done is not the chief consideration. It is becoming ever more acceptable, for example, for some of the work to be done at home.

This engenders greater flexibility and lessens thumb twiddling. It encourages such qualities as creativity and naivety. Creative ideas cannot be produced upon demand at predetermined times of the day. If you find that you are most productive at five a.m., then it is obviously best for you to take advantage of those creative hours. Employers who fail to grasp this will mostly likely lose their most creative workers.

Have you ever done anything crazy?

Have you ever thought of doing something crazy, but didn't dare?

Do you ever play? If so, with what and with whom?

Do you consider your childhood as more joyful than your adult life?

Do you ever feel a child-like joy at work or in your private life?



So, naivety is largely about openness and daring to welcome the unexpected. If a three-year-old, for example, were to see a pink elephant in the middle of street, he would just laugh, whereas an adult wouldn't believe his eyes. A pink elephant just doesn't fit into an adult's mindset.

Since our worldview is limited, we usually don't see the unexpected just around the corner. This may lead to our lives becoming utterly predictable and boring. Not much happens to keep us on our toes, to excite our interest, to really make us curious or even happy. Living in a world like this may turn into nightmare.

That is why we have to cultivate our child-like mind continuously so that we keep our eyes open for the unlooked-for. It is an essential method of finding new means to continue growing. As Jesus said: "Truly, I say to you,

whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it" (Luke 18:17, RSV).

Crossword solutions:

Across

1. 10d

2. to

Down

1. 10t

2. do