

Why We Should Move With The Flow

Last month I wrote about the value of living life on the edge and how taking risks enables us to feel truly alive. Many people who seek psychotherapy are not living on the edge. Fearing failure or rejection, they are sticking with lives they have outgrown. Part of my role then, is help these folk gain what the theologian Paul Tillich called "the courage to be": to be themselves; to be courageous; maybe to be angry, perhaps even to have the courage to openly despair and yet stay engaged in the enterprise of life.

Jeanette Burden, has written to me suggesting that I might be setting an uncompromising deadline by suggesting that a life worth living is one where a person is on the edge full time. This response has prompted me to think further on the issue of a life lived safely versus a risk. I think Jeanette is right. There is an ebb and flow to all human experience. Just as our breathing involves an inward and outward movement so our psychological life needs periods of expansion followed by rest for recuperation and reflection. There is a difference though between resting and being caught, frozen, fixed in the headlights of life. If the traffic lights of your life are permanently on red or green you are not fully alive. I have written before of how compulsive sensation seeking and activity can itself be a way of people avoiding what is truly important to their growth and development. A life fully lived is not a life lived permanently on the edge, but rather one in constant flux towards and away from that boundary where learning and new experiences happen.

Of course the edge can be more than the point of big decisions and major risk taking. I always offer my clients a drink, usually tea or coffee. When asked what they would like one person said "Coffee please, your coffee is really nice," then she paused and said, "but then, maybe your tea is really nice too". By sticking to what we know we like, even in the very small matters of daily life, we cheat ourselves of new experiences. People who choose not to go to the edge with the big issues are often those who know what they like and like what they know with regard to the small stuff too.

When was the last time you did something you have never done before?

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Responses to this article are warmly welcomed.

[This article was printed in Network News.](#)