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*Facilitating Connection.
Empowering Hearts.
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On Choosing: Life is Like a Banquet

(Or, how do I end this feeling of overwhelm and scattered-ness from all these possibilities?)

By © Bob Pileggi 3/7/12

My client started off by saying he felt scattered. “There are so many things to choose from – I feel scattered.” He went on to describe all the “things” available to him – starting a support group for people who want to enter his profession; doing a charity ride; being a part of a community garden; starting a masters degree program; exploring a newly discovered passion. And the list went on. But as he talked he also indicated that his current work, his relationship, and his creative self-expression were already taking time and attention, and really important to him.

I reflected back to him that it sounded like he had a big dinner plate in front of him. On that plate is his work, relationship, and creative project. That’s really all that’s on his plate right now. And then around that plate are bread plates, each with another opportunity available to him: The group; the garden; the ride; etc. None of these were actually on his dinner plate – yet.

Just because it’s in your field of view does not mean it’s “on your plate” yet.

Asking him to check in with that “scattered” feeling, he said it had dissipated. The separation of the “possibilities” from “what-currently-is” was enough to help him experience a greater sense of focus.

He already had the dinner plate; he already knew it; and he was already digging in to it. I just helped him see that he hadn’t yet chosen a bread to accompany the dinner.

[This is mindfulness in action. Mindfulness invites us to notice what is present in our field of awareness, but to maintain focus on one thing – often, the breath. The other things don’t go away, we just focus our attention.]

And if it’s not on his plate, it doesn’t need to be consuming his energy yet. He doesn’t need to “scatter” his attention with it.

And you’ll know when it’s time. Once you’ve got a sense of what’s on your plate, how long it will take to “eat” each thing, the qualities of them, how much energy you have left and want to share... Then take a closer look at the bread plates. There may be wheat bread, sourdough, pita bread, nan, croissant, etc.

Why are you picking up the bread?

You might want to pick up the breadplate and make that your “diversion” from the dinner meal. Focus on the bread for a few moments, and then put it down.

Or perhaps you want something that complements what’s on your dinner plate. Perhaps a baguette that will soak up the sauce with dinner, blending things together in a way that tastes oh-so-good – and is actually helpful. You can get every last drop of that sauce with the bread – and a fork would do that.

What's a real-life example? Perhaps I have on my plate a commitment to take care of my body, including exercise. Let's say that I really love sports. One of my options may be to join a professional sports team, to train 7 hours a day, etc. But that would take over my time to do things already on my plate. So instead, I choose the bread plate with an intra-mural volleyball team. I get to take care of my body in a way that satisfies my love of sports – but it doesn't have to become the entire focus of my life.

But a foundational step is choosing why you're selecting this additional "thing" to do in your life.

And once you've chosen why, the question of "which?" may be more easily answered.

What if the bread could get emotionally "hurt" by you not choosing it?

Deciding to partake of one bread does mean that the other go back into storage – for now. And it may mean that people associated with those other choices may get hurt.

When you're deciding on which bread to eat, do you worry about its feelings getting hurt? No. You check in with yourself about what you want to eat and why. And you choose. The other breads will survive. And perhaps be chosen by someone else.

Let's make it real again. My client's choosing the community garden means he might not have time to start the support group. Others may be disappointed. But if the leader of the group is facilitating more because he doesn't want to disappoint others than he's doing it because he loves it and it's what's right for him in his life now, then the experience doesn't have integrity and everyone could end up being dissatisfied. Perhaps better to express sincere gratitude to the others for the opportunity, and to compassionately decline, than to say "yes" because of inner coercion...that voice saying "I have to hurt myself rather than disappoint others."

Possibilities lead to possibilities, even when you're letting go of some possibilities.

My client could also offer alternative facilitators or opportunities for those individuals to learn more about the topic they wanted to explore – and who knows what treasures or discoveries they could then make!

So I'm not saying to heart-less-ly reject some choices and people, treating them like you would a pita pocket. I am saying that listening to your heart and acting with integrity serves everyone (at least that's what I've found, generally speaking). And that you can do this with compassion in the way you treat others.

Now that you're eating at a comfortable pace, check-in with your level of satiation.

You've got your meal and your bread. Remember to check in with your body's level of hunger being satisfied. Maybe have a few more bites of the veggies before eating more of the bread.

Life and circumstances and tastes change. It's important to check-in with yourself occasionally to make sure the bread you've chosen is still working for you – or maybe it is and you just need to adjust the portion size.

We often get excited about adding a new thing in life and dive in, biting off more than we can actually chew, so to speak. It's ok to self-regulate! Adjust your commitments appropriately.

Life's a banquet of choices. But you've got to pick up some food to be able to eat.

The rosemary-dusted ciabattia isn't going to jump into your mouth by itself. You've got to pick it up and taste it to enjoy it. Or to hate it. You won't really know until you do something – like pick it up and put it in.

I have found that sometimes I get overwhelmed with the possibilities in front of me. I can feel scattered, too. I used to think that I had to make the "right" choice. Or the perfect choice. What I know now is that it's most important just to make "a" choice. To be with the experience of my choice. And then to make another one as appropriate. Maybe that's continuing with the ciabattia. Maybe it's choosing to put it down and selecting another bread to see if that's a more appropriate complement to my meal.

Sure – survey the choices. Let the mouth water a bit, delighting in the possibilities of each. Then choose. And act. That's how a meal is built. That's how a life is built. That's how a felling of fulfillment is built over a lifetime... Choosing what's on my dinner plate – and then choosing things that complement it... knowing that occasionally it'll be time to switch from dinner to breakfast, or lunch. But that's a whole 'nother story about life transition.

A whole 'nother meal?

Even so, similar principles seem to apply, in my experience. Here they are, as I see them. Perhaps they'll be helpful to you as you work with the banquet of possibilities before you. Whatever you do, I suggest keeping gratitude part of your focus. You have possibilities. There are ALWAYS possibilities, even when you don't see them yet. Sometimes we just need a change of perspective or help from someone else. But life is always full of possibilities. And if we let gratitude for these gifts of life be at the forefront of our consciousness, then the whole process of creating our meal and eating it can become a joyful adventure of exploration and sharing with others we care about.

So What Actually Happened Here?

(These are all just helpful ideas – not a "rule book" or even a "recipe" which necessitates including all the ingredients. Use what's helpful to you now. There we go again – choosing from among the possibilities. Don't get stressed! Breathe. And get tasting.)

- ***Get some perspective.***
 - Calm your body-mind with some breaths or exercise. Then...
 - Lay out the possibilities so you can actually "see" them. Be it writing them on post-it notes or telling someone else.
 - ***Choose what's on your dinner plate.***
 - What is essential to your living now? This is on the dinner plate.
 - Perhaps put those post-it notes on an actual dinner plate, or draw a circle and put them inside.
 - ***Differentiate the things on the bread plates.***
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- All the other possibilities for how you could be spending time – they're on post-its around the dinner plate.
- **Know why you're choosing the bread.**
 - Is it to enjoy something completely on it's own, perhaps like a croissant?
 - Or is it to complement/support something you're already eating as dinner? (Can you say, dinner roll to sop of that last drop of soup?)
- **Choose the bread.**
 - Choose the bread. There's not much more to say about that. Except...
 - Choose with integrity. Is the choice a true expression of who you are and what you want to create in the world? Now? Only you know.
- **Taste.**
 - Taste the bread. And commit to it or choose again.
 - Once you've committed, commit whole-heartedly.
 - Notice the taste of every last crumb!
- **Let the other choices go back into the bread case, for now.**
 - Just let them go, for now.
 - Some may disappear. Someone else may eat the choice you're not making right now. It's ok. There'll be more choices for you when it's time to make a new decision at a later time. Life changes. And so will the possibilities. So don't fret over the bread that never comes back. Focus on the banquet of choices in front of you now.
- **Be grateful.**
 - There's a reason we say "grace" – to remember that we have a gift of life, and we have choices. Always. Even when it seems like we don't. We do. Really, we do. Even if we can't see them, yet. They're there. And our choice to be grateful for knowing that possibilities will arise – that may be the opening of a door to see them.
 - Be grateful before eating, during eating, and after eating. When gratitude is at the forefront of our attention, compassion, fulfillment, connection also tend to be close at hand.
 - Notice the overwhelm. Notice the "scattering." And choose to focus on gratitude. This tends to put the whole meal in perspective.

Bon appetite.

With love and admiration for the chef that you are,

Bob.
