

Replenishing the Doll-maker's Supplies

Like many of you, I'm self-employed. Actually, that's an illusion. It's probably truer to say that I'm *rented* by coaching clients; organizations I consult with; strategic partners with whom I have delightful roles; readers and listeners whom I may never meet; associations and other organizations for whom I make presentations and deliver workshops; and the like. It's no wonder I sometimes feel so scattered; I have a bazillion bosses!

One of the joys of this self-employment is that I get to have many offices: the condo I use as my "official" office; my home; the local Caribou Coffee shop; the Ashman Branch of the city library; the local Borders Books and Music; and a few others. I can place my body in any one of these spaces that calls out to me, depending on my purpose and mood. They're all my favorites, when I'm there. And if I sense that I'm in need of replenishing of ideas, I head for Borders for a couple of hours during the weekday, when it's inhabited by a manageable number of infants and their moms, retirees, a few students and, for all I know, a couple of people who, like me, suffer from delusions of self-employment.

Here's my Borders ritual: I get my tea or coffee, stake out a table, and then browse through the New Non-Fiction tables, the shelves containing Business, Psychology, Self-Help, and books on any other topic that beckons me. I scoop up five or six books that attract my eye and return to my table, amply equipped for the next hour or two. I never start at the beginning of a book; I open, seemingly at random, to various pages of various volumes. Invariably I encounter a cornucopia of delights, and I sometimes make written notes for future book chapters. And yes, I sometimes even buy one or two of the books, like I did this morning; I'm not (entirely) a free-loader, and I know that Borders' shareholders are counting on me. I consider the price of the books as rent on the space and furniture.

I thought it might be fun to present a bunch of quotes from one of this recent morning's books, and add my own free associations to each. The book is boldly titled, "Ballsy: 99 Ways to Grow a Bigger Pair and Score Extreme Business Success," by Karen Salmansohn, and was published by HOW Books, 2006. Here goes:

"Know thy limitations. Whenever possible, delegate what you suck at."

(Page 89.) The author's recommendation is exactly what I urge my coaching and consulting clients to do, although I typically don't phrase it that way. I often give them a simple criterion as to how to select and prioritize from among their many choices of activities; I tell them to assess where their greatest ROY is. (No, not ROI, or return on investment.) ROY stands for Return on You. They always seem to intuitively grasp that it refers to what they can uniquely do by virtue of their skills, passions, and position; so many of them know that they are spending large amounts of time on activities that don't provide substantial returns (however calculated) but in which they feel trapped. The ROY concept seems to serve as a bell of awakening for them.

"Use your mornings to get fired up, and aim yourself like a human cannonball at your goals!" (Page 114.)

I just love the image of a human cannonball being fired, and its inherent contradiction with how my body feels, most mornings. Actually, I've begun to think of it in terms of *hurtling myself towards my Destiny*. The point is that the only moment I can do something about is the present one; that's where I'm really accountable to myself. Salmansohn's advice, and the cannonball metaphor, remind me that I can aim myself in any direction in each moment; I have a choice. I've begun to focus on what it's like to feel *choice-full*, and what leads a person to feel that way. A lot of my coaching work has taken on that focus.

"When faced with a problem, substitute someone you trust and respect as being in your place -- and imagine what they would do." (Page 152.)

This is almost identical to what I touched on in the column entitled "Stumped for How to Handle a Situation? Ask Yourself, What Would ___ Do?" I've become familiar with this practice in the last few years, and have used it occasionally with myself. Sometimes, I substitute the Buddha; sometimes Jody, my wife; sometimes Ruth, my late friend and mentor. They're all wise people, and they never fail me. "What Would ___ Do?" is an amazingly appreciative question; it taps into the vision of our wisest, most effective role models that we can muster for a given circumstance. As I have grown to have a stronger sense of who I am, what I stand for, and what I *won't* stand for, I've modified the question: I now ask myself, "What would *I* do here -- if I had my wits about me?" It's funny, how quickly the right action springs into mind. I believe that people possess great wisdom, and that our job is to help them access that wisdom; apparently, by asking myself "What would *I*

do here (if I had my wits about me)?" I tap into my own inner gyroscope. Try it for yourself, and see if it works for you.

A note about the Salmansohn book: I was both intrigued and repulsed by its title. We simply do not talk that way in Wisconsin; it's not the Wisconsin Way. However, I was quickly won over by its medium *and* its message: the contents are not only true to its title, but they're very insightful and wise. And the book is gorgeously and creatively designed, with a lot of pizzazz and energy. I think you'll be delighted by its zany creativity, and you'll agree with my guess that it was designed by a delightfully deranged individual. Here's a post-script: as I was reading through the book, I realized I already own a book by the same author. You might love its title, as I do: "How to Be Happy, Dammit: A Cynic's Guide to Spiritual Happiness." (2001, Celestial Arts.)

You might be wondering about this column's title: "Replenishing the Doll-maker's Supplies." Anne Lamott, a wonderful writer about the craft of writing, believes there's no such thing as writer's block. She thinks it's actually writer's emptiness. In Bird by Bird, she likens the writer to a doll-maker living in the attic. When her production of rag dolls dries up, it's not because she's blocked; she's simply run out of rags. You don't need to send her to a therapist, have her go on retreat, or dispatch her to a doll-maker's camp. All you need to do is gather a new supply of rags, climb on a ladder, and hand them up to her; then wait for her to her convert them to riches. That's what going to Borders is about, for me. I do it for the rags.

Think about this: How do you replenish your supplies: physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and familial? What kind of gauges do you use to tell you when your supplies are running low? What practices do you have that keep up your supply levels, so that you're being continually replenished? In the coming week, tune into your inner gauges. Read them often, see what they're telling you, and replenish as needed.