

DIRECTION & FOCUS

Week #1 of a 3-Week Series, "How to Get Out of Your Own Way"

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So, what do you think is holding you back from living your best life and being your best self? What do you think your biggest obstacle is? And why do you think you're not attracting the things you would like in your life to experience?

Robert Cooper, neurologist and author, says the greatest barriers to our success are rarely outside of us and mostly always in us -- as hidden patterns deep within us. He said, basically, we are our biggest problem, we are our greatest obstacle, and we are what holds us back the most.

How many people would agree that our lives would be much happier and more successful if we learned how to get out of our own way? Anybody? I agree with that. He says that we don't fail because of a lack of talent or intelligence or opportunity or resources. We fail because there are unconscious mental habits, fears and outdated survival mechanisms that repeatedly sabotage and undermine us.

The amygdala is a part of the brain that scans for danger. If it sees anything that looks like a threat or might cause us harm or injury or kill us, that is what it does. It is constantly sending those messages from scanning. And so, some of the messages we would get are about, "Be careful," "Don't do this," "Avoid that." Almost like an overprotective parent, the amygdala is always looking out to protect us from harm.

That same mechanism that protects us also, interestingly, limits and resists growth and creativity and risking and daring and trying new things. The same one -- this mechanism that protected us from predators -- has now turned it into creating threats and fear of things like change or the unknown; or uncertainty; or risking our hearts in love; or starting a new business. Or even public speaking is seen as a threat and something for us to fear.

Now, if no one's laughing at your jokes, I can totally understand why that might be. [Congregants laugh]

But with the amygdala doing its job of protecting us, it's not surprising that often we can get stuck in a level of negativity where we're afraid to try. We're afraid to ask. We're afraid to take a chance and go after our dreams. And so, we end up playing it safe. We end up sometimes giving up or just settling.

You know, the amygdala -- while well-intended and it's an important thing to protect us to keep our survival -- also works against us in advancing spiritually and advancing and progressing and creating greater things in our lives. Our brains get in our way. It is a fact.

And so, it's our job to learn, to recognize, to understand, and honor how the amygdala protects us, and to recognize it when we get triggered in fear, or we're procrastinating, or we're avoiding. And to still honor and appreciate this great work is done, but just also to make sure we don't let it take over and take the lead. We appreciate the work that it does, but then we got to utilize it as an ally to help us express our own potential and to live the life and do the work that we came here to do.

And so, we're not just here to survive, that we are here to thrive. The Bible tells us in all kinds of ways how we are here to do amazing and wonderful things. In the book of Genesis, it says, "*Be fruitful and multiply.*" We are told we are here to bring forth the glory of God; that we are here to live life and live it more abundantly; that we are here to let our light shine; to do greater things. And we've also been told we've been given a spirit of power, love and self-discipline.

So how do we get out of our own way?

So, today we started a three-week series called "How to Get Out of Your Own Way" by Robert Cooper. And to find balance and not be fighting ourselves or being dominated by these fears. To find that place of balance and harmony between our brain and our spirit and our intentions so that we can create synergy, harmony and unity.

This morning, we're going to look at two ways that we can maximize our power and potential and how to get out of our own way.

The first one is **DIRECTION**.

Direction is being clear about where you're going and why it's important -- why it's meaningful and why it matters. And it's about direction; it's not about motion. It's not about just being busy and doing a lot. I think we've all had days where we've worked and done one thing after the other and at the end of the day felt like we've accomplished nothing. So, direction is about actively moving in the direction towards our highest desire and intention.

And it's an important thing for us to know where we're going. You know, the great American philosopher Yogi Berra [congregants laugh] said, *"If you don't know where you're going, you might end up someplace else."* But my favorite one -- the more sensible one -- is by a guy named Leonard Roy Frank. And he said, *"The world clears a path for those who know where they're going and are determined to get there."*

You know, when we have a direction -- when we have a destination and a purpose and a meaning -- It is an important thing for us and especially for our brains. Because when we have a destination, when we have direction, the brain kind of automatically starts filtering information and notices opportunities that are out there that support our vision. It allocates energy and attention towards relevant goals and creates neural pathways.

Let me give you an example. Remember when I mentioned about habits? And one of the best habits in the world is to make up your bed? And here's why. Because to start our day, when we make up our bed, we go from something disorderly and messy to something clean and orderly. When we make up our bed -- and that's the first activity -- we already feel like, wow: a sense of accomplishment. That all these good things. And the mind starts -- as it goes through its day -- it sees going from messy to order, and it just automatically starts doing those things. It is amazing how the brain can get programmed and start being like a heat-seeking missile for things that we plant that it begins to do for us.

And so, the other thing about having a direction in our life is that we don't get distracted. Anybody ever get just distracted? You were distracted kind of all day. Having a direction keeps us on course a little bit more.

And so, we need the direction. And our brain needs it even more, because then we are able to channel our energy and our creative power in a forward direction. And it also is able to support us spiritually with our greater awareness and possibilities and compassion.

He says that we need to do two things. He calls it "Horizon and Heart."

Horizon is our future. It represents our possibilities, our next frontier, the greatest version -- and a better version -- of ourselves and who we are becoming.

And he tells this story about his ancestors leaving Ireland in 1829. And they were on the ship and they were looking from the ship to the horizon, and they felt like that represented their future. That represented hope. It represented a new beginning and new possibilities for them. And the horizon gives our brain a destination of moving forward, harnessing our creative energies and powers. Knowing where we are going is important.

And to show you the flip of that -- how important it is -- is: when we don't have a direction, when we don't have a vision, that things don't work as well. In Scripture it says, *"Where there is no vision, the people perish."* And what it means is: our joy perishes; our creativity perishes; our motivation perishes; our drive perishes. Our ability to utilize our creative power and create greater things is diminished when we don't have a direction; when we don't have a destination; when we don't have a vision.

And so, that's the first important thing: is to have a horizon.

How many people have a goal set for the next five years? Anybody have a five-year plan? Okay, I can't quite see very many hands. Okay. And the interesting thing is: he says that it should be a five-year plan. Sometimes we like to think about six months or next week or two years as the max. But he said five years. To look at the horizon from that far away begins to harness all kinds of things, just like making up your bed. It begins to create and build a wonderful momentum and a wonderful level of intention.

And then the second one is **Heart**. There's horizon. And heart is your emotional feeling and your attachment to the value and the purpose of whatever your horizon is. It actually is where your heart connects, and you feel an emotional bond and sense of oneness from it. It is the emotional energy that connects with us to sustain this for the long-term.

Because when it's in our heart, we are willing to go through the struggles and the challenges. We know that we are being resilient and we need to endure to get this thing that's so important to us. And whether it's for our family, for our own career -- whatever it is -- we have to be connected to it in our heart.

You know, it says, "*As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.*" When a man thinketh is the thought; in his heart is the emotional feeling place. And those two have to be in there to create a real great sense of horizon and a direction and even a sense of vision for our lives.

And so, he says to create your horizon -- your five-year plan -- and then spend 15 minutes a day connecting to your heart and the vision and the direction that you want. See, when we create a horizon and a vision, we are actually giving our brains a target to begin to move towards to help manifest.

Here are examples of how we could state a goal or intention; how we could do it even more emphatically as a direction.

"I want a better job." -- It could be stated, *"I want to become a trusted leader who builds teams that solve problems."*

"I want to lose weight." -- *"I want the energy and vitality to fully engage in my family's activities and my purpose with great health."*

See, when we get a direction with our heart, the brain begins to organize things around it. And it is a powerful thing to not just let our brains kind of work against us. This way we actually can have it working for us.

And so what is the direction of your life right now? What is your vision? What is your five-year plan? And if you don't have one, would you be willing to create one?

You know, he says that dreams don't happen because of a lack of talent. They happen because of a lack of action. You know, when the brain -- which loves to just plan, plan, plan, you know -- the truth is that transformation can only begin when we begin to take action.

Sometimes we want to wait till there's certainty; until we all have all our ducks in a row before we take action. But we need to start with action first. To trust first; to move forward first.

Again, back to public speaking. We could read as many books as we want, but it's until you do it ... And there's so many things in life ... It's not until we do it do we begin to see change and transformation. The brain learns through experience; through movement.

I mean, Nike's thing is, "*Just do it.*" And the truth is we do! We just need to get out there. It would be better to go do something and have a horrible failure than to not do at all. Action is a powerful thing when we're moving towards our horizon.

And the second one is about **FOCUS**.

So, if I had two cameras -- one's a cheap little disposable one, and one is a really, really expensive one -- which one would you say took better pictures? Naturally, we would say the more expensive one. But I

would suggest if one little thing were different between the two of them, the smaller one would take better pictures. And that is: if the big one was out of focus.

And sometimes we think you have to have all these great advantages to succeed in life: higher education, greater connections. I would suggest to you that one person with great focus would do more than a dozen people who are just scattered and have no idea.

When you look at Martin Luther King -- didn't have any power. You know, he didn't have any weapons. He wasn't physically strong. He didn't get voted to anything. He was a man with focus ... and so focused was he that he literally not changed his country, but changed our world. It is a powerful thing: focus.

And my question for you is: How focused are you in your life? And how important do you think being focused is?

One of the things is: the brain has a negativity bias. It has a tendency to focus on the negativity, and will tend to focus on things that are threats, rather than things that are opportunities. It would focus more on problems than on possibilities.

And so, we need to learn: How do we focus our minds on the positive in our lives? On the opportunities, on the blessings, on the possibilities, on the things for us to give thanks for?

You know, Peter, when he walked on the water, was doing something that was impossible. Scripture says that when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened. And the problem wasn't the storm! The problem was that he shifted his focus. When he was focused on the Christ, he absolutely stayed above. He was above the water. He wasn't afraid. And that's where his focus was. But when he changed his focus to the wind, to the rain, to the storm, he went into fear and he sank.

And so the question for us is: Where is our focus? And are we practicing focusing our minds?

In Colossians 3, Verse 2, it says, "*Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*" And so, the first thing we need to learn and do focusing with is to focus on God! To focus on Spirit; to focus on our oneness; to focus on our divine essence within ourselves.

You know, one of the things he said that creates success ... He said it only takes 15 minutes of focused intention every day on connecting our heart to our horizon. And so, what he's saying -- how important that focus is. You don't have to focus for a long time intently, but even a little bit of focus. Imagine five minutes of focus on God or 10 minutes of focus on God every day -- the Source that makes everything possible -- what a difference it would make in our lives!

I mean, just even thinking of focusing on the positive or possibilities or opportunities. What greater difference would a spiritual focus make the difference in our lives?

Sometimes we focus on not messing up; focus on not making mistakes; focus on this ... And that doesn't get us very far in life. We need to look at the focus of the actions and ask ourselves: What is the best thing I can do today? What is the most important thing I can do today? And how about this question: What would yourself in the future tell yourself to do today that would be the best thing for you?

You know, Charles Fillmore said that your mind is a great and powerful gift, but the most important thing we need to do with it is to have it be guided by Spirit. He said the mind is a wonderful servant, but it's not a very good master. It's not a good leader, because it can run wild.

One of the things about all high performers: they seem to have an exceptional ability to lock out distractions and stay focused on their purpose. Stay focused on what they need to do. And whether it's an athlete or a musician or whatever it is of us trying to create our own business, the question is: How effectively are we using the power of our focus to move our lives forward?

Even 15 minutes of focus with connecting your heart to your horizon is powerful. But what about just 15 minutes about doing concentrated, important work to move your life towards your destiny?

Focus is a powerful thing. And the question is: Are you willing to utilize that focus?

Three construction workers were working on the 40th floor of a building, and they'd stopped for lunch. And one of them asked the other one, *"What do you have for lunch?"*

And the first guy says, *"I've got chicken parmesan, and my wife just makes the very best."*

He asked the second guy, *"What do you have for lunch?"*

And he said, *"Beef gyro with tahini and Greek salad. My wife knows how much I love Mediterranean food."*

And then they both ask him, *"What do you have?"*

And he says, *"I've got peanut butter again. A peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Every day, peanut butter and jelly. No variety."*

And then so the next day happens, and he asks again the first guy, and he says, *"Well, I've got barbecue ribs, coleslaw and potato salad."*

And he asks the second guy, *"What do you have?"*

He says, *"Well, I've got chicken shawarma and tabbouleh."*

And then they both ask him again in return, *"What do you have?"*

And he says, *"Peanut butter and jelly. Oh my God, I hate peanut butter and jelly so much. I'm going to jump off. If I have this again tomorrow, I am going to jump off of this building."*

And the guys say, *"Whoa, whoa, take it easy."* He said, *"Why don't you just ask your wife if she could make something different?"*

And the guy says, *"Wife? I don't have a wife. I make my own sandwiches."* [Congregants laugh]

Focus.

And the truth is: we make our own lives. You know, even with the brain kind of working against us, it is still our choice. It is our call. It is our decision.

I found a wonderful quote by John Shedd. It says this. He said, *"Ships are safe in the harbor, but that's not what ships are made for."* And every one of us can be safe. Play it safe. Never risk. You know, don't ever come out of our comfort zone. We could do that. But is that what we are made for

Jesus said he came that we may live life and live it more abundantly. That we're here to bring forth the glory of God! There is so much that we are all here to do and to express. And even with the amygdala working against us, we have such incredible power; such incredible potential to do amazing things.

And so, the question is: Are you willing to create a direction for yourself? To create a horizon at least five years apart and engage your heart in it? And are you willing to create a focus? To focus on God for 15 minutes every single day? And to focus your mind and your activity on the direction that you want to move forward through?

You know, I think this message is really about: How do you master the power of your attention and your focus? It is through using your direction and focus, because that's the first step in how to get out of your own way.

God bless you all!