

Versatility: The New Necessity

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(Published in a Florida based Association Executive Magazine)

*“Your first and foremost job as a leader is to take charge of your own energy
and then help orchestrate the energy of those around you.”*

Peter Drucker

September 11th, anthrax in the mailbox, and the real possibility of more terrorist attacks has changed the world we live in. There are no longer any clear models or bench-marking to know how to act when the next attack comes. Training for versatility, which used to be seen as a luxury, is now a necessity.

Who we really are shows up when the pressure level hits maximum. When the tensions are high and the conflicts are concrete who we are beneath our stories takes control of the situation. At these times, and now is one of them, our ability to balance and flow with seemingly paradoxical qualities is essential. Now we need to balance strength and sensitivity, confidence and humility, contemplation with decisiveness, and control with spontaneity.

As John Naisbitt said, “Versatility (the ability to shift your style, behavior or state of mind to fit the situation) is a necessity, not a luxury.”

A series of interviews with association executives about their reactions on the day of September 11th and during the ensuing four-week period revealed that overall, leaders did not know what to do; they felt helpless and inadequate.

One executive said, “I insisted we focus on our work.” Another said, “I sat immobilized at my desk day after day.” A third said, “I started bossing everyone around.” A fourth said, “I called everyone I knew.” In every case, it became apparent they found themselves doing more of what they usually do.

Strategic Consultant and Martial Arts Psychologist Stuart Heller, Ph.D., 6th Degree Black Belt, in his book, *Retooling on the Run: Real Change for Leaders with No Time*, talks about the powerful influence of our unrecognized habits of responding to stress, conflict, and danger.

“When we were children we began to build a structure of habits for handling the shifts and changes that the world presented us. Over time, our simple responses became intertwined with habits of belief, mood, muscle tension, and behavior. This personal infrastructure or bureaucracy of habits is a source of profound power when used consciously and a source of sabotage when used poorly.”

In the *Knowing-Doing Gap: How Smart Companies Turn Knowledge into Action*, authors Jeffery Pfeffer and Robert I. Sutton interviewed hundreds of executives, both Western and Eastern, asking the fundamental question: why do leaders and their organizations have trouble doing what they say they know?

For the Western executives, knowing is held as fundamentally different than doing. For the Eastern executives, whether from China, Japan, Korea or India, knowing and doing were not separate. In other words, if you are not doing it, you don't know it. Doing proves you know it.

Returning to the question: how can you do what you say you know, Pfiffer and Sutton emphasize that knowledge that is actually performed is more likely to be fully implemented than if we invest our time reading, listening or thinking.

This idea is also found in *A Book of Five Rings*, the classic work on strategy written by Miyamoto Musashi in sixteenth century Japan. After describing the four major strategic principles that underlie all successful action, he offered a method for the rapid acquisition of this practical knowledge. He said, "to realize the principle in your own heart, do not just read, memorize or imitate, instead, study hard to absorb it into your own body."

In simple terms, everything you do you do with your whole body. You think with it. You feel with it. You act with it. To the degree that all of your (bodily) self is included in the learning process, you will attain your goals, faster and with greater depth. As Heller puts it, "You are the first organization you must master."

Musashi gives us an additional secret when he advises us to "honor the insignificant." He suggests that what seems to be insignificant may hold the key to a deeper way of knowing — a knowing that can lead to a more effective way of doing.

The body itself in Western thought is viewed as insignificant. How I move my arm, my leg, my head; these are not given much attention unless we are learning a sport or how to dance or are being media-trained and we want to appear a certain way for the television audience.

In the West, we train for specific skills. People will take golf, tennis or swimming lessons in order to learn golf, tennis or swimming. They have no expectation that they will become better leaders as a result of what they have learned. This view shapes the way they train, hence their results.

A comparison of scenes from movies will demonstrate this. The first is a samurai film set in feudal Japan.

The scene opens in a rice and sake shop. A ronin or we would call him an unemployed executive, is sitting at his table eating dinner. He is older, his clothes are dusty and worn and he is keeping to himself. Three young samurai, or as we'd think of them, ambitious young executives, come into the shop and notice that he has a very fine sword. They decide to pick a fight with him to have an excuse to kill him for the sword.

He doesn't react. The insults increase. Suddenly the ronin takes his chopsticks and plucks a fly out of the air. The three samurai look at each other, turn their backs and walk out the door, feeling that they are lucky to leave with their lives.

This contrasts with a Western film. A drifter, another unemployed executive, is sitting in the corner of a saloon. He is older, his clothes are dusty and worn and he is keeping to himself. Three young cowhands strut in, full of themselves. After ordering drinks, they notice the old

man has a very fine set of guns. They figure those guns are too good for him. They want to get a fight going so they can get the guns for themselves.

He ignores them. The insults increase. Suddenly he reaches up and plucks a fly out of the air. The cowhands react by saying, “So what if you can grab a fly, can you shoot a gun?” and go for him, not realizing he is a famous gunslinger.

This illustrates the fundamental difference in training philosophy between East and West. In the example of the Japanese samurai, it was inconceivable that an accomplished swordsman was not also an accomplished with his brush pen. In the West, it seems inconceivable that there is any connection at all between the skills of swordsmanship and penmanship.

In the Eastern way of training, your entire body and mind are involved. In computer terms, you are working to both upgrade your operating system and develop a specific application program. This is what makes the learning inherently generalizable.

Interestingly enough, Western science is starting to echo this understanding. No longer is the brain held to be the primary source of thoughts, feelings, or actions. Deepak Chopra, in the preface to *Molecules of Emotion*, by Candice B. Pert, Ph.D., points out that Pert’s “pioneering research has demonstrated how our internal chemicals, the neuropeptides and their receptors, are the actual biological underpinning of our awareness, manifesting themselves as our emotions, beliefs and expectations, and profoundly influencing how we respond to and experience our world.”

This research validates the premise that there is no real separation between our cognitive functioning, our emotions, and our movement through space. Therefore, overcoming the knowing-doing gap and developing versatility “is best learned with a **whole body approach.**”

According to Dr. Heller in the introduction to *Retooling on the Run*. “Your words are not the only source of your meaning. You telegraph your attitudes and beliefs with every inflection, gesture, and movement. You think, feel, move, communicate, and interact with your body. What you learn when you use your whole body directly transfers to your daily life.”

Dr. Heller spent over thirty years developing a whole body method that integrates Western and Eastern approaches to cultivating versatility. His background in mathematics, operations research, and psychology along with his mastery of two forms of the martial arts enabled him to find four strategic keys to bringing about personal change.

Strategic key #1: *Use every daily activity as the training ground for your learning.*

As the Japanese Zen master Taisen Deshimura, said, “Every day becomes the contest. There must be awareness at every moment: getting up in the morning, working, eating, going to bed. That is the place for mastery of self.”

This strategy implies that you do not separate your work life from your home life. It simply asks that you remember to give equal attention to all parts of your life. Heller put it this way: “The capacity to act with awareness is directly correlated with our sense of presence. When we are present we can respond to which is **around** us while we maintain attention to that which is **in** us.”

Strategic key #2: *Consciously shift your attention between what you are doing, **externally**, in the world and what you are doing, **internally**, to organize yourself to accomplish that activity.*

This is not the same as splitting your attention. “Rather it is a gentle and brief shift or oscillation...consciously shifting your attention back and forth between your external and internal actions enhances both your awareness of what is going on and your ability to respond.”

Strategic key #3: *Consciously increase your awareness of the habitual internal actions you make during the course of your daily activities.*

If you are unaware of something, it is virtually impossible to change it. Therefore, it is important to become aware of five dimensions: thinking, feeling, movement, posture, and attention. “All of these components are connected, contrary to common belief. What happens to one, impacts all of the others. When we think of them as separate, the process of change is slowed. Conversely, working them as connected, speeds up the process.”

Most of our focus has been on thinking, a secondary focus has been on feeling. Movement, posture and attention are often neglected. Increasing awareness is key to developing more versatility. In many cases we may not even know how we habitually respond. Frank Pierce Jones in his book *Body Awareness in Action* said, “Many people are caught in the trap of unconscious habit. They cannot escape because they do not perceive what they are doing as they are doing it.”

However, by becoming conscious of ourselves, change can happen. For example, a district manager who had been habitually assessed as weak by her boss noticed that when she sat in a meeting with her boss, she collapsed back into her chair while he spoke. A CEO noticed he got a backache every time he gave a speech. By becoming more aware, he realized he has been arching his back in his attempt to stand up straight.

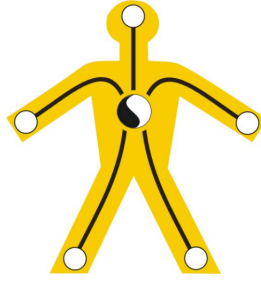
Strategic key #4: *Learn to cultivate Centered Presence as a touchstone in the midst of action.*

Centered Presence is a powerful practice that helps “expand the field of attention to your entire body.” Most people have developed kinesthetic habits that leave out or over-emphasize certain parts of the body. For example, some of us are less aware of our feet and might feel ungrounded.”

By remembering that your body is involved in every act of thinking, feeling, and responding you are empowering your inherent capacity to resist the pull of habit and access your true source of wisdom and power.

It is a fact of nature that if you try directly to change a specific habit, the defense forces of the bureaucracy of habits somehow acts to sabotage your intention. In the case of the district manager, when she tried to avoid collapsing (both physically and mentally) when with her boss, by forcing herself to sit up straight, she lost her train of thought. When she began to cultivate a sense of center, however, she changed from the inside out and found a natural way to stay upright and was now able to speak directly. Her effectiveness changed and her boss began to see her as much stronger.

Exercise:
Centered Presence



As you practice Centered Presence, you will begin to notice more and more around you and in you. You will be able to catch yourself when you respond out of your habits and change yourself in the moment.

With this you will be able to step up to the leadership required in the 21st century.

THE EXERCISE:

- 1. Pause in the midst of whatever you are doing.**
- 2. Find your feet.** Feel them touching the floor. Feel if you are balancing more toward the front or back or outsides or insides of your feet. Feel the muscles and bones in your feet and legs. Let the sensations spread through out your body and then let a new breath emerge.
- 3. Find your hands.** Feel your fingers and if they are touching anything. Feel in the insides of your hands. Feel the muscles and bones in hands and arms. Let the sensations spread throughout your body and then let a new breath emerge.
- 4. Find your head.** Look and listen around and within you. Tune in to your sense of smell and taste. Notice how your head balances on the top of your spine. Let the sensations spread throughout your body and then let a new breath emerge.
- 5. Find your breath.** Inhale and exhale on purpose. Focus your attention on the middle of your torso. Relax and breathe naturally. Let the sensations grow in strength and spread though out your body.
- 6. Return to what you were doing.**