

Trusting the Math

Although life for each of us is a trip on uncharted waters, my ocean and your ocean are not the same. By that I mean we may cross the same seas, but we experience them differently.

My wife, who is naturally outgoing, has a much better sense of people and their needs than I. Her personality can transport her into the hearts and minds of others. She functions well ... meaning she is very balanced ... when her ship of life is floating on someone else's ocean.

For me, an introvert, my ship floats better at home. It wouldn't do well on your water. I'd be in heavy weather on an uncomfortable ride. You might not understand me. You could take me to a football game to root for our favorite team, but then be surprised when I switched sides during half time for reasons incomprehensible to you.

I have navigation equipment and sometimes it works for me on my water. Sometimes it doesn't work anywhere. Unfortunately it's the only equipment I know how to use.

One thing I've learned in life is to not always trust finding my own way, or trust my own thinking. Just because a thought occurs to me doesn't mean it's true. A new direction isn't always a good direction. I seek advice from others because I know they might see where I have blind spots. And I've also learned that when I don't understand something ... when I'm having trouble navigating my seas or anyone's ... I can

instead go by the numbers. An engineer friend calls it "trusting the math."

For example, I've never been good at accurately estimating distances, either of the geographical or emotional variety. If I'm near a ship at sea and I want to travel completely around it in a circle while staying a mile away, my sense of things tells me the trip around will be about 3 miles. The actual distance is over six miles, twice what my intuition tells me.

There's a well known formula for calculating the perimeter of a circle and if I use it I'll come up with the right answer every time. I've learned to use the formula instead of assuming what I think is correct. My sense of distance is useless. If I want a true answer, I should do the math and trust it.

Sometimes the math can be very simple, such as when I watch evidence add up that shows I should be fixing a dripping pipe in the basement. I can kid myself, thinking I'll eventually get to the chore and all will be OK in the meantime, but when I count the number of days I've seen water on the cellar floor and trust the math, I'll know it's time to get out the tools.

The same simple math also tells me when I skip my morning meditation more than a couple times each week, I become selfish and petty.

It would be great for people like me if there was a type of math I could use for relationships. When I sensed trouble brewing with my wife, I could simply run the numbers and use the result to answer her needs. I'd plug all the factors into a formula, get out my old slide rule and solve the equation for an answer no one could refute.

With that kind of math, I'd be right all the time. But I wouldn't be as loveable.

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