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Quotable Quotes

"Knowledge speaks, but wisdom listens." ~ Jimi Hendrix

"There is no innovation without insight and there is no insight without reflection." ~ David Rock

"We must listen with a willingness to be changed." ~ Alan Alda

"Optimism is a choice in spite of evidence to the contrary." ~ Joel Henning

"God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference." ~ The Serenity Prayer (Reinhold Niebuhr)

Dear Jean,

Our featured writer this month, John Ledwith, is a professional colleague and dear friend who has taught me to expand my view of the human spirit and their gifts. I am intrigued by his choice of topic this month, wisdom, as I love to ponder what others have to share and teach. John and I spoke about this topic at length at the close of 2013 - such an enriching conversation and a chance to reflect on what each of us have grown to acknowledge as our wisdom within. I believe you will discover that John's insights on wisdom provide us an opportunity to reflect on what we know and what we teach. I know that John's wisdom is selflessly shared in his teaching and in every conversation he engages in. What do you know? What is your wisdom? I invite you to share this with John ... why not share your wisdom with all of us.

John is an Executive Leadership Coach and OD Consultant with a strong passion for working with bright leaders to make a significant difference in their organizations. John's clients report greater focus, awareness and insight, whether Senior Executives of billion dollar companies needing new strategies for a changing world, a non-profit board seeking to better change the world, or individuals

ready for a change. John helps leaders expand strategic, operational and behavioral options when faced with complex challenges. With more confidence and new approaches, clients report greater impact and success with organizations, customers, and employees. John has 30+ years of experience in helping organizations:

- Develop Strategies, Leaders, & Teams
- Align Strategy with Business, Culture, & People
- Manage Change, Transitions & Succession

His clients span science, engineering, research, development, defense, manufacturing, financial services, education, government, government contracting, healthcare, and social services. Prior to founding his own consulting firm, John held senior roles at Sandia National Laboratories, Digital Equipment Corporation and Citibank, NA. John is adjunct faculty at Pepperdine University, where he earned his MSOD. His BA is in Sociology and Education from City University of New York. He is a Professional Certified Coach with the International Coach Federation and has over a decade of Gestalt training and study in leadership, strategy, culture and personal change.

You can learn more by visiting his website at www.johnledwith.com. Thank you, John.

In the spirit of sharing our gifts,
Jean

What is wisdom? How can it be developed? Can it be taught? *by John Ledwith*

A few months ago, a colleague asked, "What is wisdom? How can it be developed? Can it be taught?"

I was reminded of her question on Christmas Morning as I reflected on the 3 wise men seeking the Messiah over 2,000 years ago. And then my mind leaped forward to the recent passing of Nelson Mandela, who developed enough wisdom to guide his country peacefully through what could have been a very volatile transition ending apartheid.



What is wisdom?

So when pondering my colleague's questions, I searched the web and found that Wikipedia provides quite a few different perspectives on wisdom including, philosophical perspectives from ancient civilizations, the spiritual perspectives of major world religions, and even some psychological ways to measure it. It also provides a few definitions, including:

Wisdom is a deep understanding and realization of people, things, events or situations, resulting in the ability to apply perceptions, judgments and actions in keeping with this understanding. It often requires control of one's emotional reactions (the "passions") so that universal principles, reason and knowledge prevail to determine one's actions. Wisdom is also the comprehension of what is true coupled with optimum judgment as to action. [i]

While a comprehensive perspective, making meaning from the word "wisdom" still seems somewhat elusive to me. My reflection lingers on the word "action." Without action and courage, would anyone have recognized the wisdom of King Solomon, Jesus Christ, Muhammad, Cleopatra, Elizabeth I, Marie Curie, Mahatma Gandhi, Indira Gandhi, Eleanor Roosevelt, Mother Theresa, Nelson Mandela, Dalai Lama, or countless other great people who have shaped the course of history? Action allows

us to see wisdom in practice, but it seems is frequently only recognized by results after the fact. I'm curious if these wise people were aware that they were wise or were they just more focused of what was truly important, while developing better choices as they faced difficult challenges.

Mini-Reflection

Can wisdom be noticed without results? Can it be achieved without focus on what is truly important? Without developing better choices? Without courageous action? And without facing difficult challenges?

How can wisdom be developed?

Setting aside the wisdom of others, I then just reflected on my own life experiences and remembered that wisdom is something I have prayed for many times. When my son was stricken with leukemia, it was the serenity prayer that offered me support and guidance. I prayed for the wisdom to know the difference between what I could control and that which I could not control. I also prayed for the courage to act on the things that I could control (assuming I would get the wisdom I needed). And I asked to be granted serenity. The serenity prayer was once again my guide and solace when he lost his battle five years later. At that time, I must have said it hundreds of times a day. And it was my plea, my focus and my support during other less tragic life challenges. I have also prayed for wisdom when facing big decisions, e.g. should I retire and should I start my own consulting practice. It is interesting that I never felt "wise" or "courageous" through those challenges. And yet, I have become more aware that somehow I have been blessed with more moments of "serenity" in spite of those adversities and big life choices. An interesting connection to ponder: serenity, courage and wisdom.

AND now back to WISDOM?

Trying to develop wisdom seems even more elusive to me than trying to define it. I wonder if the questions about wisdom are similar to the classic questions of "What is real" and "How does one become real" in the Velveteen Rabbit. When asked these profound questions by a young boy, the Skin Horse in the nursery responded:

(Real) "doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in your joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."^[ii]

So what wisdom might I garner from the Skin Horse? Could becoming REAL be similar to becoming WISE? I know there have been times when I felt like I would "break easily", yet I am still here and mostly whole. At other times, it has been brought to my attention that I can have "sharp edges" even though I have tried hard to soften them over the years. And I know there have been many times when I have yearned to be "carefully kept", yet found it too difficult to ask for help. And while I have been loved, I still have my "hair". My eyes are kept from "dropping out" by my glasses and my joints are getting stiffer not "looser" as I age! So I implore you Skin Horse, does this mean that I cannot hope to become real? Does this mean that I cannot hope to become wise? I know I am well aware when I have been "unwise." That awareness seems to come very easily. I am much less aware of any times I have been "wise."

Mini-Reflection

What am I doing to nurture any wisdom developing with me? When do I take some time to notice any of my positive results in the face of difficult challenges? How aware am I about what is truly important? What am I doing to develop better choices? How willing am I to take action, fully knowing there could be undesirable results if it doesn't work?

Can wisdom be taught?

David Rock in his book Quiet Leadership ^[iii] informs us that: Change requires new behavior. New behavior requires new thinking. New thinking requires new insights. New insights require new connections. New connections require reflection in order to compare, associate, and match new

ideas. And that reflection requires awareness. And I suspect that thinking is a key element for developing wisdom. The paradox is that we cannot actually change someone else's thinking, but we can create the environment for discovery, reflection and the development of new thinking. So while we probably can't teach "wisdom," we can initiate questions, an engagement and an environment that facilitate awareness, new connections, insights, new thinking and perhaps a little wisdom along the way.

Mini-Reflection

Can we facilitate awareness leading to wisdom without becoming more aware ourselves? Without developing our own insights and thinking on what is truly important? Without nurturing our own capability to develop better choices? And without ever having the opportunity to have our courage tested or to learn from difficult challenges? And without ourselves being willing to be influenced by others?

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wisdom>

The Velveteen Rabbit (or How Toys Become Real) written by Margery Williams and illustrated by William Nicholson, 1922.

Quiet Leadership: Help people think better - Don't tell them what to do by David Rock (2006)

Tools and Resources FROM THE BOOKSHELF

The Velveteen Rabbit (or How Toys Become Real) written by Margery Williams and illustrated by William Nicholson, 1922

iii) Quiet Leadership: Help people think better - Don't tell them what to do by David Rock

THE INTERNET CONNECTIONS

[Wisdom](#) entry on Wikipedia

Reflection

So after all, "What is wisdom? How can it be developed? Can it be taught?"

As you can see, I have more questions than answers, which leads me to ask you to take the time to reflect on:

- What new awareness, insights and thinking might this stimulate in you in regard to:
 - Nurturing your own wisdom?
 - Allowing yourself to be influenced by others' wisdom?
 - Developing yourself as an "instrument of awareness"?
- And how might you use those insights?

Choose To

... consider what new awareness, insights and thinking might this stimulate in you ... will you choose to nurture your own wisdom? ... allow yourself to be influenced by others' wisdom? ... develop yourself as an "instrument of awareness?" ...choose to share how you might use those insights!



Administrivia

My Constructive Choices Audience...

- * Professionals wanting to be at choice in their career and daily work,
- * New managers (and aspiring leaders) transitioning to establish a leadership role in their communities,
- * Individuals wanting to sort through the choices, build a more fulfilling life, life their voices, and...
- * Coaches who choose to step out, show up, and say - YES, it IS all about YOU!

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