

Living With Opposites

One of the qualities of a "mature individual" (not chronologically mature, but emotionally, psychologically and spiritually) is the ability to hold in consciousness, and reflect upon, polarities at the same time, e.g., "light and dark" together. Many refer to this state as enlightening — being in a state where one does not have to, or choose to, opt for one over the other and can entertain both polarities at the same time, without judgment, and with curiosity.

At work, at home and at play, we live in a world of duality: love/fear, right/wrong, negative/positive, doing/being, sickness/health, comfort/risk, inner/outer, self/others, powerful/powerless, safe/unsafe, etc.

For many at work, in particular, living with duality results in stress, overwhelm, and tension on a daily basis. Consider the tension some experience as they move back and forth on a continuum between: under budget/over budget, team cooperation/team competition; employees who are continuous learners/employees who are on "cruise control"; open and honest communication/hoarding information, secrecy and gossiping; bosses who are supportive, servant leaders, compassionate and nurturing/bosses who are bullies and overbearing; meaningful work/dull, boring and routine work; latest software that fosters effectiveness/legacy software that foster ineffectiveness; efficient processes and procedures/bureaucratic processes and red tape; integrity, honesty and transparency/phoniness, dishonesty and duplicity...the list of such continuums is endless.

Stress, overwhelm, upset, resistance, resentment and regret surface when we want to experience only one end of the continuum and reject the other. Many live their lives at work (and at home and play) believing that one side is good or right and the other is bad or wrong. In the end, much of their pain and suffering (mental, physical, emotional, social and psychological) results. When they view, and live life in, their world from this "right/wrong", "good/bad" mindset or world view, all they create for themselves is continuous pain and suffering in some way, shape or form.

When we put all our attention, and intention, on one end of any continuum of opposites, (it doesn't matter which end), our energy is out of balance. Accepting only one side of a duality and rejecting the other does not lead us to wholeness.

IMPORTANT: This notion is NOT to suggest that one "needs to engage in and behave" according to one end of a continuum that one views as "negative, unethical, out of integrity, or self-sabotaging", etc. IT IS about asking one's self why this other end of the continuum is in one's life experience, however. IT IS about asking one's self "Why is this behavior, event, person or circumstance in my life?"

In other words, asking one's self the all-important and powerful question, "Why is this experience happening FOR me?" (instead of TO me, which simply allows one to engage in a reactive, victim consciousness and blaming mentality). Exploring that "other end" of the continuum from this deeper "FOR me" perspective can move one to a level of inquiry and self-reflection that takes into account one's values, motives, life purpose, assumptions, preconceptions, etc., and can lead one to conscious personal and professional growth and maturation by looking at how one chooses to respond to the person, event or behavior that is "dark, bad, or wrong..." Such an exploration can serve to support us to clarify our own values, and ways of thinking, be-ing and do-ing.

For example, "Why do I choose to go along with unethical and illegal practices in my workplace?" "Why do I choose to go along with bullying bosses and gossiping that is destroying morale?" "Why do I choose not to speak up about how I can improve processes and procedures?" "Why do I choose to accuse another of being fake and phony?"; "Why do I chose to feel threatened, play small, be invisible and not allow my voice?" "Why do I choose to allow others to hoard information?" "Why do I choose to allow expenditures that are unnecessary?" "Why do I choose to allow others to be disengaged?" "Why do I choose not to ask others be the change they want to see in others?" In essence, why do choose to point to so many others

as being "wrong" or "bad?"

Many folks want to experience life from the "good" side of the continuum only or try to live life with a "positive mental attitude". The result for these many is more often that not an experience of struggle, frustration, resentment, and despair. Why? Because they are out of balance. There is no one end to a continuum and denying the other end is an exercise in futility. In our world of duality, any effort to focus all attention on the "light" only serves to increase the power of the "darkness".

We cannot live a life of balance by clinging to just one side.

So what is the solution? How do we work with the tension of the two ends of the continuum? How do we balance or resolve them?

The reality is that the contrast is important to experience. The contrast of the opposites gives each end its identity. We can't know "hot" unless we also know "cold", "dark" unless we experience "light", "good" unless we experience "evil." The two ends need each other to make sense. Like the back and forth swing of a pendulum, our experience of duality must include both the positives and negatives, like love and fear, health and disease, joy and grief. We can't swing in just one direction. To grow in consciousness and self-awareness, we must honor the integrity of both parts and seek the middle, higher path of experience and expression.

A next step is to find a new perspective that allows one to understand (not agree with, necessarily), acknowledge and accept both extremes at once. From this perspective, we can see the role that both ends play, if we choose to. If we can let go of our mind's need to accept one and reject the other, and the attendant opinions, assumptions, and judgments we have, (the ones we use to see the other as "bad" and "wrong"), we're more able to experience life as it is as opposed to what we want (or don't want) it to be.

From this place, when we bring together two opposites into a higher understanding, we grow in consciousness, self-awareness, maturity and the ability to self-reflect. We learn to inquire into and explore why these elements are in our life, right here and right now (since there is no such thing as "circumstance") and what these elements can teach us about our self, our values, our life, our choices.

We can inquire into these elements, the "other end", and discover what life's lessons they present FOR us. The result is learning how to move through the not-so-pleasant vicissitudes of life, and growing our self in the process, as opposed to living a life of overwhelm, stress and tension, always feeling like a victim, constantly blaming, finding fault, fearing, nagging, moaning, rejecting and denying.

The pearl in the oyster cannot arise without the grain of sand that serves as an irritant which spurs its growth. No irritant, no pearl. One may perceive the person or event that that appears at the other end of a continuum as an irritant (i.e., bad, wrong, etc.) The important questions are (1) "Why?" and (2) "How is(are) it/she/they supporting me to see more about my self through my reactivity, thus enhancing my growth?"

So, our \$10 food for thought questions are:

- What bothers you at work? Why? Why do you think this "irritant" is in your life right now?
- How are you choosing to deal with this irritant?
- Why do you think reasonable, rational and decent people do things that annoy you? (Or, do you feel everyone who annoys you is unreasonable, irrational and not decent?)
- What are the real issues that cause you to react to the end of the continuum that you see as "bad" or wrong?" Why do you think these people, events or circumstances are in your life?" To simply allow you to get mad, angry and reactive? If there were a deeper purpose, what would it be?

- When you see the other end of the continuum as "the problem", that thought of yours alone is the problem. What do think about that?
- Do you normally view the world, and the people in it, from a "right/wrong", "good/bad" perspective? If so, why? What would your colleagues and friends say?
- When was the last time you admitted to being "wrong?"
- Does ambiguity or conflict bother you? If so, why?
- Would you consider yourself to be a tolerant person? Would your colleagues and friends agree?
- Think of a situation or a person where you can't see the good, the truth or the beauty. What would you have to do or perceive to see the truth or beauty of this person or situation?
- It is useless to discuss harmony in our world at work, without first creating harmony in ourselves. Would you agree?
- What in your life do you resist looking at? Does this cause you tension? What would happen if you did look and allowed the tension to be there at the same time?
- When you accept the vicissitudes and challenges in your life at work (at home, at play), as part of life, do you experience more or less of sense of well-be-ing? Why?

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Peter G. Vajda, Ph.D, C.P.C. is the founder of True North Partnering an Atlanta-based company that supports conscious living through coaching and facilitating. With a practice based on the dynamic intersection of mind, body, emotion and spirit, Peter's approach focuses on personal, business, relational and spiritual coaching. He is a professional speaker and published author. For more information, www.truenorthpartnering.com, or [pvajda\(at\)truenorthpartnering.com](mailto:pvajda@truenorthpartnering.com), or phone 770.804.9125. You can also follow Peter on Twitter: @petergvajda