

Trust Thyself: Every Heart Vibrates to that Iron String

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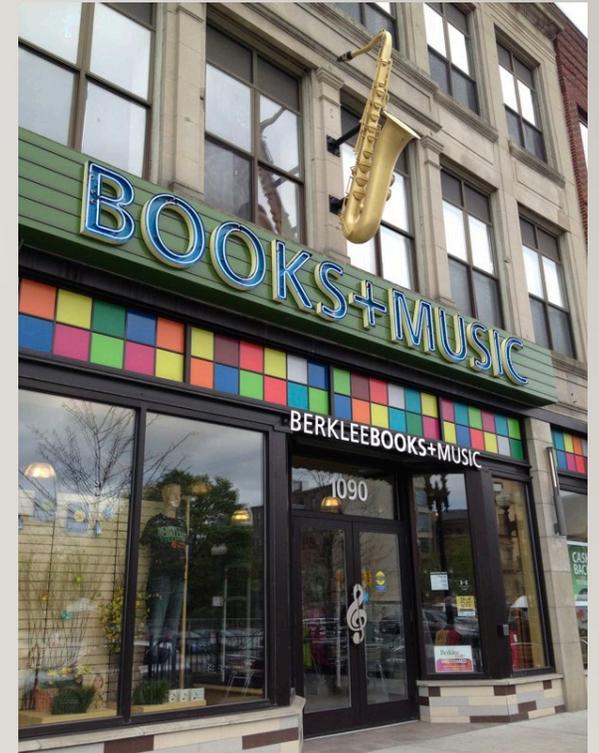
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Important Caveat about this Session

- Unlike many sessions you may attend, this one contains a great deal of personal information
- I will be discussing my life's journey in order to convey the main theme of this session
- My hope is that by the end of this session (if you stay with me 😊) you find that elements of this story that may relate to you. That it will inspire you or empower you to inspire someone else, whether that be a colleague or even a love one
- So thank you in advance for allowing me this opportunity to share these reflections with you in this welcoming environment

Ralph Waldo Emerson's Quote:

Years ago, when I was going through a very difficult time personally and professionally, my father wrote me a note to me that contained this quote.

“Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string.”

Normally, I would hear from him and other relatives were things like “pick yourself up by your bootstraps” or “I wouldn’t do that if I were you” ... But this quote was different and it took me a long time to fully understand it. My dad may or may not have even fully understood it himself—maybe he thought it just sounded like a cool quote. But I think it really came from a place of love. And as a father myself, I only now know how much love is possible when you have a child.





“Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string.”

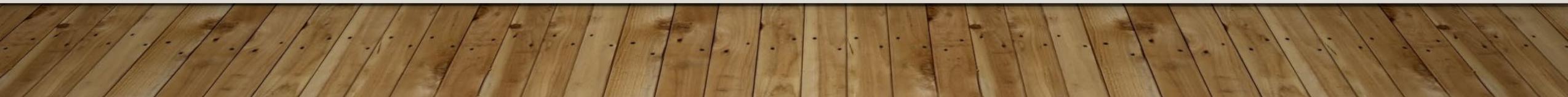
I researched what Emerson wrote after this quote and these were some of his additional thoughts: (paraphrased)

... Nothing is as sacred as the integrity of your own mind.....

... The power which resides in a person is NEW in nature...

... and no one knows what they can do until they have tried

What do this quote and these ideas mean to you??



A Little Bit About My Story

- I had to assume a “public role” at a very early age. My dad was the rabbi of the only synagogue in northern Rhode Island. A clergyman is often under the microscope of the entire congregation. And not just him --- but my mom, sister and myself all thought we had to “be” and “behave” in a certain way
 - be polite,
 - be appropriately religious,
 - set a good example in the community (i.e. don't be a troublemaker)
 - don't offend anyone (because it could lead to your father getting into trouble)
- In addition, I was somewhat quiet as a kid (especially around my peers), sheltered, lacking self-confidence, good at math, curious, musical, and very bad at sports – People in the community cared about me a lot, but in a very protective way

This pattern continued as I got older and affected many aspects of my life:

- Everyone had an strong opinion about what I should do for a career (**except myself**):
- People in the community suggested things like:
 - Be an accountant (since I was good at math)
 - Don't be a doctor (because I was not good at science)
 - Don't be a lawyer (because I was not good at public speaking)
 - Don't be a musician (even though I played the piano nicely, people were concerned I would starve)
 - And **no one** said..... “be a registrar” 😊

What happened next:

- Influenced by others as well as believing it himself --- my dad practically dragged me to take an accounting course at the local community college when I was 17

(Urban Legend: I have an image of him pulling me by the ear to go into that classroom, but I don't think that was true)

Why did I acquiesce to this situation? I never even expressed an opinion!

Was this predestined based on my dad's role in the community? I thought so but after further reflection...

- Not **all** Rabbi's children were obedient like my sister and I were
- Maybe there was just something unique that caused us to be obedient and non-confrontational

Maybe we were just natural “People Pleasers”!



People Pleaser (onto college):

- I went into college totally undecided, undeclared (or whatever other words you want to use) I basically did not really know myself (academically or interpersonally). I did major in music as an undergraduate because I did like music very much.... But., I was told subtly and directly that I should eventually pursue something that would provide a steady livelihood (family and friends were anxious and made me anxious that I would end up as a starving musician).
- So what would a people pleaser do in this situation????

Playing it Safe ?

- So to appease my family and to pacify my own considerable anxieties, I then went to graduate school, got a Master's in Accounting, became an auditor
- Auditing was a horrible match for my personality as a people pleaser. As an external auditor, I had to constant bother the accounting staff time after time. They hated when I showed up and I hated imposing on them. The auditor was the person they least wanted to see (short of getting a root canal)
- Even one of my accounting professors had a joke. The role of the auditor is to “stab the wounded. That was the last thing I would ever want to do.

A bold move?? or not???

- I decided to leave the world of accounting at around my 29th birthday due to the impersonal aspect of it. I never gave myself the chance to work as an internal accountant inside of a business. (I think I just needed a total change).
- I became a customer service representative at a banking call center earning \$9.62 an hour. But something about this work... resonated with me! I worked in customer service helping people to understanding their transactions, bank fees, etc. and giving them advice about applying for credit lines, and generally helping them as much as I could. **And I loved reversing bank charges and fees!** It felt rewarding and I often had nice conversations with them. I realized I was a **People Person** and wanted to **Help People**.

A bold move?? or not???

- I realize now in retrospect that it wasn't accounting itself that I hated, but rather the role of auditor.
- I can say this now because of the fulfillment I have had as a State/Regional Treasurer and as AACRAO's VP of Finance where I have learned to demonstrate expertise, but in a much more supporting and affirming environment. The knowledge I acquired in those years in Grad School eventually became a blessing when I could use them in a completely different way.

From Working at a Bank to Working in a Registrar's Office

- In 2001, after various people oriented positions, at the bank, I was caught up in a bank merger and lots of staff including myself were let go.
- I soon got a job at Berklee working in the registrar's office. (through a Help Wanted Ad. Remember those???) Almost immediately it felt like a **“playground”** for me – Getting to help graduating students with their degree audits, providing timely data for my colleagues, developing competencies, being a people pleaser, and making everybody feel genuinely safe and feel at home.

From Working at a Bank to Working in a Registrar's Office

- I really thrived at my job at Berklee for the first several years in the registrar's office...**UNTIL ...**

I Was Promoted to be a Manager/Supervisor of Staff

- I was only a successful manager/supervisor of people who were easy going like myself,
- I had great difficulty with certain kinds employees (confident, strong willed) who were not interested in my suggestions
 - Sometimes I would be disrespected by them when they continually showing up to work late,etc. They may have taken advantage of my non-confrontational personality

Backwards or Forwards?

- After several years of struggle in my role as a supervisor/manager in the registrar's office, a restructuring put my job back as an individual contributor. This was about 5 years ago
 - It was very hurtful and upsetting at the time...
 - Why would that be??
 - But....I did start to become much more successful at work again

The need for external (and internal) validation

- About one year ago, **A NEW OPENING FOR A SUPERVISING REGISTRAR RE-EMERGED** and (for some reason because I was valued so much overall) I was once again interested and driven by the desire to get promoted (**but I was suppressing with some nagging personal doubts about the idea**)
- **Why does it feel good to get promoted?**
 - Recognition from the organization
 - A pay raise
 - More visibility with the organization
 - Upward movement

The Most Important Conversation of My Career:

- **So I decided to apply for the job with HR!**
- But then came in a brand new AVP of Enrollment. I had applied for the job before she started. So what came out of this phenomenal meeting?
 - She told me that I was an amazing and invaluable employee with a unique skill set. That I was exceptional at what I did
 - But as a reality check she also told me....You are not a born supervisor and it is not something you were truly meant to do. Being a supervisor and delegating work to others are not your strengths. (I firmly agreed!)
 - **YET...** We want to promote you **anyway!!** We want to demonstrate how much we value you and what you uniquely bring to our office – We want you to be an Associate Registrar and an Individual Contributor at the same time!



Back to Emerson's "Trust Thyself"

- Did this new AVP know or “trust me” better than I knew or trusted myself? Do some people just have an extraordinary gift to understand and read people and understand them more than they understand themselves? **Did she know my “iron string?”**
 - Perhaps! Maybe these kind of people are here for a purpose to put you in touch with who you really are. They see and observe you in an objective way which is impossible for someone to do themselves. (These are rare people who I call **MENTORS** or **Life's Teachers**)
 - So a modified quote could be “Trust Thyself: Every Heart Vibrates to that Iron String. (but once in a while be open to occasionally trusting a wise, objective soul who can help you tune your string😊).

A Different Way of Thinking About Leadership:

- For someone who no longer officially supervises anyone, I have come to appreciate and identify how one can still be a impactful leader without being an actual supervisor or manager:
 - Mentoring others – Informally guiding others with your heart and with hard lessons learned
 - Affirming and sharing others people's contributions in public and private settings.

A Different Way of Thinking About Leadership:

- Ways to be an impactful leader without being an actual supervisor or manager (continued):
 - Getting involved on committees and in professional organizations .While there is no direct supervision, there are tons of opportunities to learn and develop wisdom, confidence and strategic thinking skills, while being able to help foster a warm and supportive culture in the organization (this is often called “**Soft Leadership**”)
 - Using diplomatic and people pleasing skills by “guiding” or ”helping” supervisors directors in a respectful and non-threatening way. To not make them feel you are “after their job”.

A Tool to Help You Know Yourself: The Clifton StrengthsFinder – 34 Unique Strengths

STRATEGIC THINKING

- Analytical >
- Context >
- Futuristic >
- Ideation >
- Input >
- Intellection >
- Learner >
- Strategic >

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

- Adaptability >
- Connectedness >
- Developer >
- Empathy >
- Harmony >
- Includer >
- Individualization >
- Positivity >
- Relator >

INFLUENCING

- Activator >
- Command >
- Communication >
- Competition >
- Maximizer >
- Self-Assurance >
- Significance >
- Woo >

EXECUTING

- Achiever >
- Arranger >
- Belief >
- Consistency >
- Deliberative >
- Discipline >
- Focus >
- Responsibility >
- Restorative >

My Clifton Strengths:

1. Harmony

People exceptionally talented in the Harmony theme look for consensus. They don't enjoy conflict; rather, they seek areas of agreement.

[LEARN MORE](#)

2. Empathy

People exceptionally talented in the Empathy theme can sense other people's feelings by imagining themselves in others' lives or situations.

[LEARN MORE](#)

3. Positivity

People exceptionally talented in the Positivity theme have contagious enthusiasm. They are upbeat and can get others excited about what they are going to do.

[LEARN MORE](#)

4. Adaptability

People exceptionally talented in the Adaptability theme prefer to go with the flow. They tend to be "now" people who take things as they come and discover the future one day at a time.

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5. Consistency

People exceptionally talented in the Consistency theme are keenly aware of the need to treat people the same. They crave stable routines and clear rules and procedures that everyone can follow.

[LEARN MORE](#)

Final Thoughts

- Understanding and knowing oneself is a constant, lifelong adventure. It can be difficult, but ultimately is rewarding.
- Trusting oneself is similar to exercise. The more one uses that “trusting oneself” muscle, the stronger it gets. But sometimes you need a special “coach”

Thank you!

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