



GROW YOUR COLLECTION OF “USED-TO-THINKS”

If you judge people, you have no time to love them.
—Mother Teresa

Tell me about your collection of “used-to-thinks.” You know what I mean—“I used to think that _____, but now I don’t.” Or “I used to think every _____ got _____, but now I see it the other way.” That’s a “used-to-think” (U2T).

The older I get, the bigger my collection of U2Ts becomes. In fact, my collection seems to be getting exponentially larger as I age. What about yours?

If you’re like me, your U2T collection started growing somewhere in your late teens or early 20s. Prior to that age (again, if you were like me) I had nothing in my collection at all. This is because I was the typical (or maybe even a bit of an extreme example of a) full-time know-it-all when I was young. Some people might say “insufferable” would be a good adjective to describe me back then. What about you? Were you insufferable too? (Let’s start a focus group—recovering, insufferable, full-time know-it-alls, or RIFTKIAs. Ha!)

I’m convinced one of the areas of serious and continuous conflict between parents and their

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insufferable, full-time know-it-all children, and between managers and their “problem employees,” is one of “used-to-think dissonance.” (OK, the psychologists in the world are cringing—but I like this term I just invented. I’m going to keep using it!) When we haven’t developed enough U2Ts, we tend to operate with a limited perspective that’s characterized by our “need to be right.” Unfortunately, rather than remembering (and honoring) the process by which we as parents and/or managers have acquired our U2Ts (trial and error, mistakes, epiphanies, etc.), we try to *prove* to our kids or employees that they don’t know it all.

So, how does the need to prove we are right work for us? It’s often like having “nitro” meet “glycerin.” *Boom!*

Within the past few years, I have added a *big* U2T to my collection: I used to think that achieving balance was the key to a successful, happy life. Now I know that’s not true. This was a hard-fought lesson, and my learning went this way: The more I strove to find balance, the more elusive it became. It was as if I was trying to hold smoke in

my hands—each time I “thought” I’d achieved balance, the scale would tip the other way, and I’d be back out of balance. Further, it didn’t matter what I was trying to balance. Work and family. Employee satisfaction and a strong bottom line. Weekend getaways and home repair. My work as an author, a speaker, and a consultant. Whatever I was trying to keep in balance just kept shifting out of balance.

It was frustrating. And as I learned later, pointless.

Why is it pointless? Because balance *never* happens, at least for long. You may be in balance for that split second when the scales go in opposite directions, but that’s it. And trying to “stay” in balance means you’re constantly trading-off one thing (e.g., employee satisfaction) for something else (profit). Trade-offs represent “lose—lose,” or “win—lose” thinking, and that’s just not a powerful way to operate in the long term.

Instead, making choices by *being centered in principles* means there’s no need to try to balance anything. They might be principles such as “I’d rather be joyful than try to prove to anyone that I’m right”

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or “I will be the change I want to see in the world” or “I choose to be an indispensable member of my team” or “I choose to be responsible and effective related to driving profit so I’m able to do the volunteer work that I love.” As a result, the typical “I can’t keep things in balance” symptoms like frustration, resentment, and anger just disappear.

And—we can relax (deep cleansing breath).

So, to summarize, here’s my new thought to replace my U2T: Balance (looking for trade-offs) is not the answer—being centered (grounding my choices in meaningful principles) is the answer. Let me say it again, balance is not the answer—being centered is the answer.

Here’s an example from my personal life related to the difference between “balance” and “centeredness.” I’ve been asked this question before:

“Bob—you have four children. Do you love them equally?” Pause. (How would *you* answer this question?)

Here’s my answer—no. I don’t love my children equally (balanced); I love them uniquely (centered). There’s no scorekeeping, debits-equaling-credits,

calendar-management stuff going on—I am simply centered in my approach that I will be the father each of my children needs me to be. By making that decision, I love them the way *they need me* to love them, not the way I think I *should* love them.

That’s centeredness. And that’s one of my converted “used-to-thinks.”

How big is your collection of U2Ts? If you’re like me, aren’t you amazed at how much less you “know” as you get older? I am. And I realize that *all* of my converted U2Ts are gifts that came along with experience, with newfound wisdom, with more trips around the sun, etc. I can’t wait to add another converted U2T today. How about you?

Questions, Insights, Implications

1. What does the distinction between “balance” and “centeredness” mean to you?
2. What are your most profound “used-to-thinks”—and what was involved in your process of discovering them?
3. What might happen if you were willing to

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reconsider something that you absolutely believe is true—even for a moment?

Again, reflect on these questions, and allow yourself to be wrong and to be open to new perspectives. By doing so, you'll likely find new insights in the most unexpected places.