

The Power Of Authentic Feeling

I'd like you to take a look at a current conflict in your life. Maybe it's with your Boss. Co-worker. *What pain in the asses. Why do I gotta tip-toe around this person?* Your client, perhaps. If you're an actor, maybe it's a fellow cast member. Or that director. *Damn that director. Wife. It's her fault. Girlfriend. Son. Daughter. They don't understand me. They never have!* What kind of pain is the obstacle creating in you right now? Is it a minor, nagging pain, or the kind of pain that keeps your brain turning in its hamster cage till three in the morning? What is it? A memory? An upcoming confrontation? *I'm sick of holding back around this dude. He needs to know how I feel.* Self-doubt? Pissed off at The Man above? *Why God? Why? Why give me these gifts and don't let me really use them? Man, I feel like Salieri pondering Mozart's murder in "Amadeus." Mozart, that cackling bastard.* Addiction. *Why can't I stop like everyone else?*

Now here's a real curve ball: if you've been able to identify one your main pain points (or at least have come close to it), can you recognize your own personal struggles as assets in order to recognize the "pain points" in other people, whether that's your wife, husband, children, clients, your characters if you're a writer, or the

heart of the jury? Here's another question for you: can you access the power of your vulnerability-- can you get "real" with your conflict-- and turn your vulnerability into credibility with everyone you encounter? With an untrained mind, those questions should feel outlandish to you in relation to the *real conflict* going on in your life... Because when you're in the grip of pain it's almost impossible to see that pain is anything but a pain in the ass! Not a gift. A gift? Are you kidding? You've probably heard it said from many well intentioned people that your pain is your opportunity for growth... and yes, those people are absolutely right. But my guess is 99% percent of those well-intentioned people you want to punch in the nose didn't know how to turn that pain into an opportunity to really help you along the way, God bless them. They mean well, they really do. But meanwhile, you're still dog paddling in your pain.

Being authentic is an incredibly powerful and often overlooked skill. In the arena of litigation, being authentic in a way that motivates and moves people (the jury) to action is, of course, the ultimate goal of authenticity. In fact, your "win," whether in the courtroom or with your daily interactions with people, are absolutely contingent upon being authentic. The consistency that I've discovered with most lawyers that I've had the opportunity to work with is that they don't seem to realize that being authentic in a way that gives them instant credibility is indeed a skill often overlooked. I equate this to some of my early experiences of theater training while attending The Juilliard School, where I painfully learned how much work there was involved in being "truthful" in a scene. My naïve brain asked, "How difficult could

being truthful be?” What appears as natural on stage, however, takes an enormous amount of work and concentration, so that it appears seamless to the audience. Acting is the art of unlearning what we’ve learned so that our greater selves, our greater truth, can emerge. This is no different than the work necessary to hit the right emotional targets in *The Winning Story*.

The Fear Of Emotion

I recently got back from working with a law firm in Florida for an intensive pre-trial, and once again, was quite honestly baffled observing how much people involved in the case were unable to express the genuine emotion of the case. If *moving* the jury to action is a priority in the trial, wouldn’t communicating the emotion of the case be the most essential item to work on in pre-trial?

Why is there fear attached to feeling emotionally in front of other people? World renowned trial attorney Gerry Spence captures the fearful state brilliantly, "In the courtroom the pain of fear is exacerbated, for we cannot scream. We cannot strike out. We cannot run." Spence offers his imaginary address to a jury:

“Ladies and gentlemen of the jury [, I might begin,] I'm often afraid when I start a trial. What am I afraid of? I'm afraid that I may not do my job correctly. Will I ask the right questions? Will I be able to say the right things? Will I forget something? Will I be believed? What will happen to my client if I fail? And I'm afraid.”

If I had to guess why there's so much fear and discomfort attached to revealing genuine emotion in front of others, it's because we don't properly know how to access our emotions in order to not be overwhelmed by them. So for most litigators, it's easier just to shy away, or downplay the emotions. That may be acceptable if you're a machine operator, but that's a pretty bleak prospect if you're a lawyer.

Vulnerability Assessment

How much do you recognize vulnerability as a strength rather than a weakness? On a scale of 1-5 how would you measure your ability to be vulnerable?

- 1) No freakin' way. In my world, if I let down my guard, I'm dead.
- 2) Maybe a little more—but vulnerability still spells “weakness” in my mind.
- 3) I see how vulnerability could be strong for some people, and maybe in myself, but I wouldn't know how to turn vulnerability into a source of strength in my own life.
- 4) I see how vulnerability is a source of strength in my life. I know how to utilize the tools of vulnerability. I just don't always use those tools.
- 5) My vulnerability makes me feel powerful. I am able to leverage my vulnerability in a completely authentic way in my life. My vulnerability allows me to connect with people, personally and professionally, on a heart level. I never feel like I'm ever “someone else.” I am deeply grateful to live in my vulnerability.

The answer to “living within vulnerability” begins and ends, with the role of the Obstacle: the area of your life that you feel is holding you back. There’s an incredible power lurking behind the obstacle, if we’re able to develop the tools to recognize and use its power.

This is lesson one, day one of the acting class. Perhaps the *most* important lesson. In fact, it’s so important that it carries its own title:

How to Use the Obstacle to Your Advantage

This approach is intended to get you, the lawyer (storyteller), to see the value in the obstacle, and to use it to magnify “the scene” (your opening, closing, or cross examination) to help deliver your peak performance to your audience, the jury. When you can see the value in the obstacle, you are giving permission to your emotions to funnel through in a moving and manageable way. In other words, we become masters of our emotions rather than slaves to them when we recognize how important the obstacle is. When we become masters of our emotions, we have the ability to surprise ourselves in the story we’ve rehearsed, and still be able to use our emotions creatively, strategically and authentically, not unlike a painter working with paint, or a composer selecting the perfect pairing of musical notes to communicate his feeling and vision of the world.

An essential lesson in the theater professional actors learn is that the obstacle is the opportunity... For the obstacle becomes the foundation for the richest character

and the most powerful play. Go back to the plays and the movies you love—the great ones that have moved you and inspired you, challenged you, and possibly kept you awake at night. It’s fair to say that my wife and I grew somewhat obsessed with the HBO series, “Breaking Bad.” If the “hero” Walter White in “Breaking Bad” didn’t have cancer, he’d simply be a power driven thug with no opportunity for redemption. But the cancer, the pain, the angel of death looming over his head forces Walter White to overcome insurmountable odds, and even though what he’s doing is illegal and by all standards deplorable... why are we cheering him on? The obstacle is the lifeblood of any great story. In life, though, most of us have a tendency to run away from the difficulties, the stop-gaps on our path to success. We see pain instead of value. We don’t see ourselves in a great story. Great stories might belong to other people. Not us.

Sound familiar?

People Who Have Overcome Their Obstacles... and Triumphed

Recognizing the value in the obstacle is half the battle. Where the rubber meets the road is when you’re able to *demonstrate* the value of the obstacle in your delivery and performance... when you’re not afraid to show your fear, in or outside the courtroom. Maintaining a state of strong vulnerability, or what I call “armored nakedness” requires conditioning. One of the biggest lessons I’ve learned from the stage boils down to this: what I consider a road-block is actually the KEY to achieving lasting success in life. But in order to keep this idea from being just an

idea, I've got to feel it deep in my bones, in the fiber of my entire being. I've got to believe it more than just intellectually. The greatest ideas are the ones that go from the head to the heart simultaneously. They are the ones that stick. So in discovering the value of the obstacle, it's critical to be able to see it working for other people.

Michael Jordan, inarguably one of the world's greatest all-time basketball players (if not the greatest basketball player of all time) didn't make his high school basketball team. Hard to imagine. *Jordan*. That could have been the deal breaker for him. He could have thrown in the towel, said, "Screw them, man. I'm better than all of them." And walked away. That could have been one of his life's greatest regrets. Instead, he made a different choice. He chose a different path. He spent an entire summer, every single day, every single moment, perfecting his game, working on his jump shots, free throws, you name it. He swallowed his pride. He faced the music. He tried out for the team again. He made it. The rest, as they say, is history.

From Thomas Edison to Bill Gates to the team at NASA, the obstacles are the opportunities for incredible growth, inspiration, discovery, and change.

The following is a passage from the great theater instructor Milton Kateselas from his book (I highly recommend reading): "Dreams Into Action."

"From industrialist to artist, at the heart of every success story lies a person trying to solve problems. Tough ones. Real ones. Not personal problems, but creative problems connected to their work. They use their talents to solve these problems for the betterment of the world. W Edwards Deming had a problem:

how to bring Japan, an essentially toy manufacturing nation, into the broad, competitive market following World War II. Solution: a whole system for industrial management, including new relationships between management, labor, and consumer that turned Japan into the industrialist force it is today.

Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque had a problem: They were trying to break the rules of perspective in art that impressionism had upheld. Solution; cubism, a whole new movement in art history that opened the door to modernism in painting.

Maya Angelou had a problem: African Americans and the conditions that led to their oppression were not fully understood. Solution: personal, passionate poetry that conveys, without blame, the pain and joy of being an African American, and so gets us all to understand more.

Frank Lloyd Wright had a problem: He perceived that architecture was desecrating landscapes for the sake of new buildings. Solution: building's such as Falling water that utilize landscape, weaving nature's design into the design of man.

What makes an industrialist, artist, poet, architect, or person in any field great is the clarity with which he or she sees a problem in society, and the talent and passion exerted to resolve it.”

Every single one of the men and women who have contributed to the development of this life and our world have faced a crossroad, the road between choice and change. Each of us has, or will, come to the crossroad where fear and love

cross. That crossroad in our life is where rich drama resides. We may not recognize it as such, but this crossroad is where Academy Award quality drama resides.

The true power of a story is an inside job. When we're able to use, and trust, the conflict in the story we're telling, and the conflict inside ourselves, another story, a greater story can emerge if we're willing to listen to it. To use the pain. To embrace the conflict.

Embracing the conflict is the road to powerful authentic feeling.

Working With The Obstacle, Your Greatest Allie In The Courtroom

Once you've seen and felt the value of the obstacle, then begins the true creative process towards making the change in your demeanor and delivery.

The work in **Lessons From The Stage** is about dropping the mask and getting to the truth of who you already are. And it's also about looking at things around us differently. Everything has a mask disguised as something else. Everything. Especially what you perceive as a pain.

What obstacles are preventing you from taking center stage in your life? Rather than looking at the obstacle as a defect, a mistake, an embarrassment, a source of shame, my hope for you is that you will learn to use the obstacle, and see it, as a gift in disguise. You will grow enormously more effective in the courtroom and be able to reach your client more rapidly. Learn from, listen and collaborate with your obstacle. Here's how. Go ahead and answer these questions to the best of your ability. Spend some time reflecting upon them. Dig in.

Questions

- What are the areas of your life do you feel are holding you back?
- What are the obstacles in your life you need to resolve in order for your life to run more smoothly and effectively?
- What are the obstacles in “the outside world beyond the courtroom” that need solving?
- What would you like to change in your life?
- What would you say is your greatest obstacle?
- On a scale of 1-5, are you able to see anything useful about your obstacle?
- Are you able to see or recognize any lessons that this obstacle can reveal in your life?
- If this obstacle were the key to achieving a major life change, how could it possibly serve you?
- On a scale of 1-5, are you now able to, or are willing to see, this obstacle as a gift in your life?