

Upon Reflection...

Learn to Unlearn

Michele Savaunah Zirkle, MA, PhD

1304 Forsyth Lane

Galena, Ohio 43021

Tel: (614) 270-8436

E-mail: zirksquirks@gmail.com

As a life coach the most common question I am asked by clients involves how to navigate life's journey as if a detailed map is necessary to travel to the correct destination. However, a predetermined path assures a set destination no more than an impromptu, obscure route. Why? Unknown scenarios unfold continually in an ever-changing universe, and for us to anticipate every outcome and attempt to predict the future precludes the element of surprise and divine inspiration that evolves with each decision, each interaction. Learning requires unlearning.

If Christopher Columbus continued to believe, like most people in the 15th century, that the world was flat, he would never have ventured out and discovered that the world was indeed spherical. Had Galileo held the popular belief of his time that the sun and planets revolved around the Earth, he would never have stated that the sun was the center of the solar system. Had Homer Hickam believed he was only a simple country boy from the West Virginia mining town of Coalwood, he wouldn't have launched the first missile from American soil.

Growth in any area requires not just increasing one's knowledge, but an open-mindedness to experience the flourishing, creative energy of the newness that life presents in each breath of child-like wonder. Growth is limited by old beliefs, so I encourage my clients to explore the path, alert for positive interactions and opportunities they may find they had never considered. This approach to life has allowed me to embark on a career path involving my passion of writing and life-coaching and includes me recording podcasts and public speaking that I would never have experienced had I failed to follow my heart.

This was surprising to me, given that I previously had panic attacks when speaking informally to a few of my teacher peers. I expanded my perception by releasing the old beliefs of not being a charismatic orator and envisioned and practiced speaking with eloquence and passion. This opened the creative sluices and broke the chains of the paradigm I'd created about myself and my abilities.

New insights require releasing beliefs and knowledge of everything we think we know about ourselves and others. Embracing the unknown requires space—space in our minds to fertilize fresh experience — experience that leads to knowledge.

The wisest people I know readily admit they know nothing. They've learned that to process new information on life's journey requires an expanded perception. Wisdom is knowing what type of shoes to wear for the terrain we are walking, not simply owning an impressive array of stilettos when a hiking boot is needed.

Wisdom is gained one step at a time, and we can only explore the trails of insight when we allow the path to unfold before us rather than forge straight ahead with a single destination in mind. For example, the new job we have our sight on often glitters in the distance; but as we approach, the office fantasy crumbles, and we may feel we need to divert to another opportunity that inspires us. If we continue a job just for monetary gain or a power title, we reject the insights and joy the passion-filled career move would provide.

In other words, knowledge is gained when perception is limitless — when the known is accepted as a possibility rather than a fixed constant. What we believe we know one moment can become unknown the next when we gain a wider perception.

Absolutes are antagonists in this drama of life. Take for example, the famous dress color controversy that hit the internet recently in which millions of people described a white and gold blue dress as being black and blue. The same dress, different pairs of eyes, different perceptions — colors of truth to the individual observer.

What seems an impossible high jump to one athlete may be a surmountable goal for another, even though both athletes are equally capable. In other words, our beliefs are the first step in manifesting reality. By limiting ourselves to what we “Know,” we constrict our experience to that of past events and ingrained patterns of belief. We continue to confirm what we already believe to be true to the exclusion of all other possibilities.

Emptying our heads of preexisting ideas of what we believe to be facts is necessary to permit our brains to breathe — to allow new information to flow into our awareness and infuse our cells with inspiration for an interesting, scenic journey. The man who lifts a car off his child who is pinned beneath it, doesn't stop and talk himself out of lifting the massive vehicle off his loved one. In an instant he forgets how much weight he should be able to lift and accomplishes the seemingly impossible.

May you, too, forget what you know and thrive by doing so. May you always have upon your feet the best shoes in which to enjoy the journey. And may your view be a panoramic one as your ever-expanding perception culminates with the knowledge inside you — whether innate or learned — through experience, our greatest teacher of wisdom.

Enjoy learning to unlearn everything you've learned about yourself and your environment so you can experience the freshness of life around you and the essence of who you are — no titles or labels --- just a curious being experiencing and assimilating the unknown into the known every day.

Author Note

This vignette gives the reader an opportunity for creative reflection of the pathways to learning and becoming as an individual. The author is solely responsible for the contents of this vignette. The contents do not necessarily reflect the position of the organizations and communities that she serves. The author has no financial conflicts of interest.