

The Solution is in the Problem

In my last article, I discussed the healing power of support groups. Many people contacted me about the article grateful that I covered the topic. I also discussed how the problems of life are actually opportunities. Given the positive feedback I received, I feel it would be worthwhile to expand on the concept of turning problems into opportunities.

One of my favorite authors and mentors is the late R. Buckminster Fuller (He was affectionately referred to as Bucky). Bucky was an inventor, author, scientist, and philosopher. He wrote extensively about human nature and specifically the role mankind plays in the universe. We have all heard it said that problems contain opportunities. Well Bucky took this concept as the explanation for mankind's function in the cosmos.

The story of Bucky begins with a tragic problem, the fatal illness of his beloved four year old daughter. The tragic, yet pivotal events of this story serve to illustrate how anyone can turn their life around for the better. In 1926, Bucky's daughter, Alexandra, was sick with meningitis, a fatal illness at the time. Prior to a University of Michigan football game, she asked Bucky to bring her home a college football flag from the game he was to attend. During this period of his life, Bucky was a heavy drinker. He got drunk before the game and forgot to get Alexandra the emblem he promised her. When he arrived at home after the game, she was dying. He picked her up in his arms and she asked him, "Daddy, did you bring home my emblem flag?" Bucky lied to her and said he indeed had brought home the flag. She died in his arms that evening. Now that is a problem, lying to your beloved dying child.

Ashamed and in emotional agony he stumbled to Lake Michigan prepared to commit suicide. He waded into the freezing water and just as he was going to let the current take him under he underwent a radical spiritual conversion experience. A moment of grace came over him and he realized it was not his life to take. His life did not belong to him and he had no right to take it. Bucky understood in that fateful moment that his life was God's. In that instant Bucky wrote he became an employee of the universe. He realized the point of his existence was to help solve the problems of his fellow man. Over the next fifty years Bucky received forty-seven honorary degrees, held twenty-eight patents, he was Time magazine's Man of the Year in 1964, and was the author of twenty-nine books.

Bucky came to the conclusion that the mistake he made with his daughter was his lesson. During his conversion experience he felt as if the universe was telling him not to waste his lesson. Without the mistake, he would not have discovered his purpose as an employee of the universe. He wrote we walk right foot, left foot. We don't walk right foot, wrong foot. Mankind moves from problems to solutions and solutions to new problems. The point is not to make life's problems wrong. They are not good or bad, they are just meant to be solved. And guess what your reward is for solving a problem? A new, bigger problem. According to Bucky, that is the point. Essentially, as human beings we earn the right to be in the universe because of our function to help one another solve problems.

Typically, most people don't think about problems in this way. Problems are to be avoided and hopefully never encountered. Bucky's take on this was the opposite. You have a problem for a reason. That is why you have the problem. You have a problem to help others with that problem solve it and in doing so, you are relieved of the burden of the problem. The idea is to shift your frame of reference of how you think about problems. When you help another with a problem you are focused on the solution. If you don't help another, you won't see any solution, only your problem. The moment you think of how to serve another human being, you take your mind off the problem and move into how to solve it. You see, it isn't about your problems, but how to help others solve theirs. Bucky wrote, "Your significance will remain forever obscure to you, but you may assume you are fulfilling your life's purpose by converting all of your experience to the highest advantage of others." So what is your problem? Your solution is helping someone else solve the problem. Remember, it is not your life. Practice being an employee of the universe. Convert you experience to the highest advantage of others and see what happens.

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