

DIRECTION

Survive first and then thrive for we aspire through desire but succeed through actions, our desires are the stimulus for action but our actions are the architects of our success.

I am more likely to get to where I want to go when I am constantly headed in the right direction.

“I take a set of complex variables that has been called the problem and replace it with another set of complex variables that is now called the solution, in this manner it is clear to me that throughout my life I am always resolving complex variables, sometimes we already have the right answers we are just asking the wrong questions”.

- Toye Oyelese

Where I am coming from is always relevant but never as important as where I am going. No matter how good or bad things may be I always ask myself the question “ where do I go from here?”

I know that in order to get the result I want it is essential for me to perform the actions that are consistent with that result. It would be frustrating if I was trying to go up north but kept taking steps that took me down south but however the lack of success in reaching my destination would be both expected and anticipated. It has always surprised me how many people I have mentored who were doing exactly that.

When I came to Canada I realized very quickly that I had to survive first before I could thrive so that became my mantra and the direction I chose. **It is the duty and responsibility of anything that wants to exist to make every effort to survive and then thrive.** It is also important that once it starts to thrive it does not forget how to survive.

Growing up in a third world country required me to be vigilant about my survival and never take anything for granted. Even now I am constantly aware of my surroundings and options to the extent that when I am at a social function the first thing I take notice of is how many exits the hall has before I even notice the guests.

Most dictionaries define survival as the state of continuing to live or exist, in spite of difficult circumstances. To survive I need to have the ability to identify my needs and develop an appropriate decision to action interval. What I mean is that I am able to identify the essential thing or action required, make a decision quickly and act accordingly. The desired outcome with survival is an opportunity to continue to exist and then thrive.

The same dictionaries define thrive as to grow or develop well, to prosper, and to flourish. To thrive I must have the ability to identify and achieve my wants and the desired outcome is “self actualization” i.e. the realization or fulfillment of my talents and potentialities.

I can survive without thriving but I cannot thrive without surviving. Developing a balance between my surviving and thriving mindset was key to my optimal function. Thriving is the reward of surviving and can only occur after my survival goals have been met. The more successful and affluent the society is the more the people within it focus on thriving and less on surviving.

In a “secure” society the individual is concerned about the best thing that could happen to them and what they can do to enhance this. If this goal is not achieved there is a sense of disappointment and sadness. If it is achieved there is a sense of anxiety or concern about trying to maintain it. In a less “secure” society the individual is concerned about the worst thing that could happen to them and what they can do to prevent it. If this goal is achieved there is a sense of elation and hope.

Surviving and thriving both require tactics however the person trying to survive is constantly aware of the need for these tactics and while the person thriving often forgets them.

Survival mode: Plan for the worst

Thrive mode: Plan for the best

Survive & Thrive mode: Plan for the worst and hope for the best

Survival mode: What are my needs?

Thrive mode: What are my wants?

Survive & Thrive mode: What is the balance between my needs & wants?

When my direction is unclear despite my best efforts I simplify it by remembering to survive first and then thrive. I often despair that because in North America the focus is on thriving there will be a whole generation that have no idea how to survive and will invariably no longer thrive. But then again I am no expert on sociology so I may be wrong.

A lot of energy is often spent trying to understand what has happened to us, how we feel about it and how it affects our behaviour and the decisions that we make. Though all of these things are relevant they are energy consuming and don't always answer the most important survival question "**where do we go from here**". Feelings are relevant, desire is relevant but it is the action that we perform as a result of our feelings or desires that produce results. The importance of feelings and desire relates to how they make us act.

When I arrived in Canada it became clear fairly quickly that I may have underestimated the obstacles. I had come at a time when medical school positions were being cut and some Canadian graduates had to do their internship in the USA. This was before the information highway (internet), so there was very little information available on how to get back into the medical system and even fewer people willing to give me the time of day.

I started work as a security guard two or three days after arriving in Toronto. It was October and winter was coming fast. I had to catch four different buses to get to work and I had never been so cold. To

make matters worse I was relatively socially isolated and I only knew one family in Toronto. I tried to work every shift I could find. Sometimes on weekend when I could not get an extra shift I would find the longest route the buses and trains could take and stay on just to pass the time so I could be around other people. Loneliness is standing amongst thousands of people and nobody knows you are there and if you died nobody knows you are gone.

I lost my job as a security guard because I refused to fold personal flyers for the boss, I looked for work for three weeks and could not find anything. I even went from Scarborough where I lived to downtown Toronto (a two hour journey by bus and train) to interview for a job as a dishwasher and did not get it. I came home and cried. I was eating once a day and a few dollars from being on the streets.

I realized that I was alone and would have to figure out things for myself. I started having audible conversations with myself out of necessity as I did not have anyone to talk to and I was forgetting the sound of my own voice. I thought that only crazy people talked out loud to themselves, I was surprised at how comforting and reassuring talking to myself out loud was. I started to realize that my most important relationship was the one I had with myself.

I decided to view every experience as a lesson and so make a conscious effort to discover the lesson in every experience. I was intuitively changing my direction and aligning it with what I wanted. I talked to myself out loud (mostly in third person) and encouraged myself. I chose to see the up side of every situation. I started to visualize where I wanted to be and permitted myself to believe in the certainty of it even though everything else around me indicated otherwise.

When I encountered situations that I had no idea what the solutions might be I adopted the attitude that every complex situation is made up of multiple simple blocks and so I would find a way to uncover the simplest notion while maintaining a keen sense of the complexity. I soon discovered that every system no matter how

small, large, simple or complex had an underlying set of rules that governed them, knowing and understanding these rules was key to understanding these systems.

I realized that frustration used up a lot of my energy and only arose when I was trying to control things beyond my control, to counteract this I would create a sense of control by focusing my attention on aspects that I actually could control (even if it was just my breathing) and then build things up from there. I started to define things properly, rather than obstacles they were challenges, rather than failure it was finding ways to succeed and so on.

My new theories were soon put to test. I started work in a chemical factory in Toronto and initially I simply worked on the production line performing mundane tasks like putting caps on bottles. I had been working there for approximately two months when the compounder (the fellow who did all the mixing) quit one afternoon leaving the company in a jam. I was asked if I could read chemical formulas and although I did not have a clue what I was doing initially, I was a quick learner and was soon doing all the mixing of soaps, lotions, oven cleaners and so on.

I passed my initial medical examination and I now needed to find an internship/residency position, I wrote to every program I could find and most of them did not even bother to reply me. Using my new method of problem solving I wondered if the Canadian Armed Forces might have a program for training physicians. I went to the recruiting office on Sheppard and Yonge in Toronto to ask, this was in 1988 .

I discovered that they had a medical officer training program (MOTP) that trained military officers in civilian schools. For two years of residency I would have to give the military three years of active service. The military would pay for the residency but the “catch twenty two” was that I had to find the residency position myself. Once again I wrote to all the programs I knew and now I had a few polite replies but nobody had anything to offer for the year.

Shortly after I had been turned down by these medical internship programs, I came home from my factory job and noticed that my answering machine light was blinking. I realized that someone had left me a message. It was a program in Saskatoon looking for an immediate replacement because the program starts in a month.

When I look back I now realize that it started with setting the direction using my imagination, refusing to take no for an answer and an unbending will but the X factor was luck. Focusing on the areas where I had control increased my chances of being lucky. I had to survive before I could thrive.

When I use the term survival I am referring to the ability to perceive and respond to threats and danger.

Setting direction involves **aligning**:

1) **Thoughts**: I form a realistic mental image of the results that I want and use my imagination to develop this image until it is tangible enough that I could literally touch it, I can see it clearly and know precisely what it is anytime I think about it.

2) **Words**: I say things in a manner that is consistent with the results that I want. I put it out there, express what I want to take place. Rather than say I don't want to fail, I say I want to succeed, rather than say I am afraid, I say I want to be more confident.

3) **Deeds**: I perform actions intentionally and consciously consistent with the results that I want. As the saying goes "if I talk the talk I must walk the walk".

It is easy for me to focus on things that are not going the way that I want, though these things are relevant they are only important if they would help me understand how to get to where I want to go. So what I do is focus most or all of my energy in the direction that I want to go irrespective of the factors that have made it almost impossible for me to get there. I focus on the solutions and not the

problems, I spend most of my time focusing on getting the results that I want and less time reviewing the results that I did not want.

It is important for me to be aware of my needs (what I must have and cannot do or survive without) and my wants (what I want or desire to thrive) and know the difference between these two things. **To survive and then thrive I should always do what I have to even if it is not always what I want to while I strive to get what I want.** Just because I don't get it right away is not a reason to give up and sometimes the same process has to be repeated many times in many different ways before I get the results that I want.

Some self help books have sold the idea that I have a right to what I want and that I am entitled to it. Although this is an ideology that is very appealing, in reality change happens with or without my permission or consideration. I believe that it is my duty to try and get the results that I want and not simply expect it to happen.

The concepts that are explained within this book would further illustrate what I think direction is and how to successfully align vision, words and deeds. At some point during my difficult years I realized that I had to survive before I could then thrive. I would often say to myself **“if I wake up in a burning building does it matter how I got there?”** Although how I got there is relevant but if I want to survive it is only important if it will show me the way out, otherwise what was most important to my survival was, “where do I go from there?” This became my mantra and my compass and no matter the roadblocks, I seemed able to find my way back to the path I wanted.

All the things that have happened to me (especially those that have impacted me with unwanted results) are the burning building, how this makes me feel is me wondering how I got there and all of these are only important if they would assist me in getting out of the building, otherwise the only important question is “where do I go from here?” In other words what is my desired direction.

This approach is survival based and helps me to conserve energy and optimize resources by keeping focus on the desired direction thereby maximizing the opportunity to obtain the results that I want.

I was reminded how effective this method could be in a crisis situation when I mentored someone who was under a lot of stress from an ongoing investigation resulting from a misunderstanding. This person was very distraught crying and feeling very powerless. We discussed the analogy of the **“burning building”** and through this the person was able to self identify that even though feelings were relevant the most important decision was where to go from here.

We then reviewed the rules of functional adaptation and the person was able to properly identify the system but it became obvious that there was an information deficit about the rules of the system. This information deficit inhibited the ability to fully understand and identify the choices.

By the time the fifteen minute visit was over this person felt very empowered and confident adapting to the changes being encountered. A follow-up visit the next week confirmed that the results from the initial encounter were sustained.

Sometimes without meaning to, people spend a lot of time focusing on all the things that were not going their way and not enough time on the things that were going well. The “burning building” analogy was very helpful in refocusing on what was important.

Feelings are always relevant but like I have said before, it is what we do (our actions) with or without these feelings that will provide the results that that we want. “Being stuck” is an adaptation to change but not a functional one because although it helps us survive, it keeps us from thriving. Letting go is a functional adaptation because it allows us to develop a new relationship with change thereby improving our chances of getting the results that we want.

Points to remember:

Survive first and then thrive

Make sure that your thoughts, words and actions are always in the direction of the results that you want.