

Learning How to Give up Control

by Jack Pearpoint

My personal monster is control. I love it. But I know I have to 'give it up' in order to grow. I learn by experience. I need to create learning situations where I "give up control" and experience 'interdependence'. By taking myself 'to the edge' where I have to give up control in order to survive, I experience 'interdependence'.

From this 'extreme' process, I have discovered that real strength requires interdependence. For example, I wanted to go sky-diving, and I didn't have time to take all the courses. But, you can do "tandem sky-diving". But even in my tandem jumps, I had to give up control to a small plane, a pilot, another parachutist and a parachute. Then, after giving up that control, I enjoyed it. But first, I had to give up the control.

To bungy jump, I had to put my life in the hands of others – and their equipment. To go caving and Absailing, I had to put my life in the hands of others – skilled professionals and good equipment. When I gave up control, then I could enjoy it.

But there is an apparent contradiction in all this. In these examples, whether tandem (with a skilled partner) or even alone with your skill and equipment, these achievements are considered to be individual "accomplishments" – tests of strength and courage. But the truth is that none of us do it alone! We are all interdependent. And although there are elements of personal risk and courage in these "tests", if we really want to learn, if we really want to try NEW ideas and skills, we must learn to GIVE UP CONTROL, then we can regain it – a little.

Thus, to be courageous, we must take the biggest risk of all: we must count on our friends and colleagues, give up our "illusion of control". Then we can live and learn.

In addition to the “semi-controlled” training experiments in giving up control, life happens and reminds us face first how little we are really in charge. In July, Marsha and I were editing, walking, having a great rest from some amazing trips. Then ovarian cancer changed our plans. On Aug. 4, 1995, Marsha had successful major surgery, and we began the Chemo treatments that lasted till the year end. It altered our plans. We are NOT in control.

We are doing the only thing we can. We are doing everything possible to be healthy and to get on with our work. We are planning to be 85 years old together. We are doing really well, but we are not in control. We can only do the very best we can do: no more – no less!

We learned again about the meaning of interdependence. We got the best medical support, and spectacular network support, and we are doing our bit to “sweep out those cancer cells” and fill Marsha’s body with positive healing energy. We are editing, and doing workshops and come January, 1996, we are back on full schedule. We relearned that we cannot do it alone. We relearned that we are not alone. We relearned that we can only do our best every day. That is what we can do – and it is all we can do. So we have made a considered choice. It is very simple. We could spend the rest of our days “waiting to die”, or we can “choose to live.” We choose to live. And since we do not have the control switch, that is what we are doing. And now that we have genuinely given up the illusion of control, we can enjoy life. Join us!

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