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DO THE
SEEMINGLY IMPOSSIBLE
Q & A with Gene Cernan

RAZING THE BAR
Lessons from India

THE GREAT STEFFANO
How Perception Affects Thinking

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Do What You Are Meant to Do

BY MITCH MATTHEWS

Celebrate! Innovation Magazine is published biannually by Des Moines Area Community College West Campus. For advertising or content inquiries, contact:

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COVER PHOTO:

Earthrise over the Moon's surface during the Apollo 17 mission. Courtesy NASA.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The Risk of Hello

East of Des Moines, in Pleasant Hill, rests Copper Creek Lake. Like many sculpted suburban lakes, it sits encircled by a paved trail, a playground, bricked-in restrooms, restaurants, condos, and a boat ramp—nothing remarkable. Lakes and trails like it dot suburbs across America. On the trails, families tote pink-faced children in wagons, sweaty men and women run by with determination, and bicyclists—the nice ones—yell “on your left” to prevent carnage. If a trail is to be tread, this is the scene.

A confession: I don't like the outdoors. Nearly all of my passions involve a computer. I hate bugs. The wind destroys my already impossible hair. In general, not my thing. Yet I find myself on this trail at least once a week battling mosquitoes and the shame that comes when people twice my age lap me. As they approach—walking, running, cycling—these older folks always do the same thing. They say hello.

I once read someone on Twitter say lowans feel obligated to say hello. Sure, we're nice, but, more important, if we don't say hello, someone might think us rude. (And it's true. When I lived in Kansas, no one ever said hello on the sidewalk, and I couldn't wait to move back home where people seemed nicer. Not all Kansans are rude, of course.) On the Copper Creek Trail, every now and then, someone older than I will not say hello, and I'll think, “Geez, that was rude.”

But it's different when those younger than I pass by on the trail. They won't say hello. They won't even make eye contact. And each time, I have that judgmental, crotchety thought: *What is wrong with young people today?* Naturally, that's the surefire sign I am getting old, yet it does make me wonder. What is the risk one takes in simply saying hello? Why do young people seem so reluctant to do so? Is it a generation raised to beware of stranger danger? Is it a lack of confidence? A failure of communication? Or simply a lack of manners? Having worked with enough college students, I'm not convinced it's the latter. Still, I wonder—what might failing to offer a simple hello prevent young people from accomplishing? Are they missing out on opportunities to find and fulfill their life's passions? What can the rest of us do to get them to simply say hello and take that chance?

It's people—young, old, and in-between—taking that very chance that Mitch Matthews explores in this issue. In fact, every article here comes down to taking chances. Each of our authors—famed astronaut, Gene Cernan (the last person to walk on the Moon . . . for now); traveler and writer, Sara Stibitz; man of many titles, Tony Paustian; and motivational speaker, Matthews—connects the importance of taking chances to achieve our goals. Each author takes perception, flips it, and turns it into reality. And if only one of our readers realizes how

important it is to take those chances—no matter how terrifying and awkward—I imagine all of the authors would be pleased by the results.

I've come to like Copper Creek Lake and Trail. I like checking in on the ducks and their ducklings as they waddle across the concrete. I like spying a glimpse of the resident cat and her kittens. I even like seeing the people doing yoga on paddleboards, though the mere thought of that blows my mind. But more than any of those, I like that people in Iowa still take the chance to say hello. And maybe, with a little prompting, some of the younger lowans will start taking their chances and saying hello as well.



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Local children near the cremation grounds selling flower tributes to be released into the river. Used with permission.



BY SARA STIBITZ

RAZING THE BAR

Lessons from India

When I was a kid, I desired to travel the world. Usually, my fantasies involved traveling alone and revolved around whatever country caught my eye. But it seemed like a pipe dream after I graduated college. With student loan debt, a long-term relationship, a sick mother, and a full-time job, there was no way I was going to fulfill that dream, so it stayed just that. I wasn't going anywhere anytime soon. It wasn't possible.



Riverbank shot of Varanasi. Looking down the river, you can see the smoke hanging in the air from the cremation grounds. Used with permission.

Between 2011 and 2012, everything changed, and in one way or another, I was released from all but one of those obligations. From the outside (and, at times, the inside), it looked like everything in my life had fallen apart.

One thing remained: my job. But who would I be if I let go of that? If I quit my job to travel, what would I do when I came back? How would I explain that awkward gap in my résumé? Every time my fantasy reemerged, those questions returned as well. Although I was closer than ever to making my dream come true, the old paradigm of my life had me looking at everything as if it were predetermined, as if there were no other options. I didn't know it at the time, but my old way of living had to be destroyed to make room for the new.

High on my list of places to visit was India, for many reasons, one of which includes a fascination with the rich pantheon of gods and goddesses. A simple Internet search for one Hindu goddess, Kali, will produce terrifying images of a woman with anywhere from four to fourteen arms, each holding such macabre visions as a bloody knife and the heads of men she has slain. She

Although I was closer than ever to making my dream come true, the old paradigm of my life had me looking at everything as if it were predetermined, as if there were no other options.

usually wears a necklace of skulls. Far from the typical image of the beautiful, serene, loving goddess, Kali is fierce. But what she ultimately represents is the flip side of creation: destruction.

I visited India this February and spent a month traveling through the country. One of my first stops was the holy city of Varanasi, a city thousands of years old on the banks of the Ganges filled with temples and shrines. The sound of worship rings throughout the city at all hours. At sunrise, temples up and down

the banks of the Ganges give thanks for another day. Bells, whistles, drums, sitars, and voices sound in prayer and discordant harmony. There's a host of other noises too: kids playing, dogs barking, monkeys screeching, cows lowing, and the ever-present noise of horns honking.

The cremation site of Varanasi processes bodies all day and all night—typically around 150 per day. Stacks of wood, stained dark by the soot floating through the air, sit in piles stories high, taking up about two city blocks.

The cremation happens in the open, while the men of the family look on; women are no longer allowed to congregate near the pyre during the burning. In the past, mourning wives and mothers have thrown themselves on the flames in pursuit of their loved ones. So the men stand around, watching as the smoke and fire take their dead into the world across the veil. When the fire consumes the body, the ashes are pushed down the bank toward the river, where they can drift back into the flow of life.

And right there on the banks, below the pyres, knee-deep, backs bent, men slowly sift pans back and forth in the blackened water. They pan for gold left behind from teeth and fillings. Out of the ashes of old life comes new life.

Destruction can be a scary concept to embrace. But there are other ways of looking at it: a clearing of the way, the closing of one chapter and opening of another. Just like fields must be razed to clear the way for new growth, life demands that we let go of what was before we create what will be. But the lesson in this is not just about destruction—it goes further. Out of nothing can come something new, something driven by resourcefulness and innovation.

Travel to any impoverished country, and it's easy to find examples of creation out of destruction, or innovation seemingly out of nothing. Take, for example, the guaguas (pronounced gwa gwas) of the Dominican Republic. The guagua network is an organic, informal system of getting around the country. Although there are formal buslines in the larger cities, services and resources are lacking further afield. In areas where public transportation is nonexistent or too expensive for the average person, guaguas provide a means of getting around and economic support for anyone who devises their own route. The driver hangs out the side of a usually ramshackle van, drumming up business. An informal method of transportation—born out of a lack of resources—became one of the main systems for traveling around the country.

Like Kali and the guaguas, in the end, I razed my entire life. I quit my job and left home. I gave myself an open-ended return date with room for change. Like any good middle-class Midwesterner, I fretted over what I would do when I returned. I had vague plans of returning to Iowa to start a mediation business, a continuation of my duties in my



Stacked wood for the cremation site. Used with permission.

previous job. Although it was a viable option, a voice in the back of my mind asked whether I was doing this because it was the right thing for me or if I was simply holding on to the last vestiges of my old life.

When I returned from South America, I tried to start the mediation business, betting on my rapport and relationships with attorneys around Des Moines. In previous mediations for the Iowa

Civil Rights Commission, I received compliments on my abilities, and I was one of the most frequently requested mediators. But I had one downfall: I had no law degree. Although I knew civil rights law and had been in the legal field for eight years by that time, it was an uphill battle. In a small legal market like Des Moines, I just didn't have the chops; attorneys preferred to work with other attorneys. It wasn't working, but I refused to admit it to myself. I kept striving.



A field of flowers in the heart of Pike National Forest – a picturesque place for stripping away the unnecessary.

During the course of my travels, I'd kept a blog so friends and family could follow along (and, selfishly, so I wouldn't have to retell stories over and over again). To my surprise, people who read the blog loved my writing, and I was getting paid opportunities to write. During a discussion about my quandary, a dear friend and mentor said, "Why are you trying to mediate? You like to write, you're good at it, and you're getting paid to do it." I paused. "But I've been telling everyone I'm a mediator," I finally replied. "It seems like I'd be going back on my word if I said that."

I started to wonder . . . am I a mediator or a writer? How does my identity change with each one? I didn't want to burn that last bridge. I didn't want to have to tell people I'd changed course then deal with any judgment, real or not. Stripping

away that least piece felt like letting go of the only thing left that felt safe.

I recently had the opportunity to experience this stripping away on a different level. By chance, I met a man with the distinctive name of Donny Dust at an airport, after both of us sat down at a table that was too awkward and narrow to avoid talking to one another. I learned he is a former Marine, who in his free time travels around the country training military and non-military people alike in wilderness and survival techniques such as orienteering, natural navigation, and emergency survival. I was intrigued and inspired. Weeks later, a friend and I took the plunge and journeyed to Colorado to undergo two days of natural navigation and survival training in Pike National Forest.



One of many doorways surrounding the cremation sites. Used with permission.

Travel to any impoverished country, and it's easy to find examples of creation out of destruction or innovation seemingly out of nothing.

Survival and wilderness training forces participants to learn what it takes to make it with little on hand. Although we thought we'd been sparse in our preparation, it became clear we had no idea what sparse meant when we

Sara Stibitz, a freelance writer and editor currently based in Los Angeles, has written for the *Harvard Business Review*, *Des Moines Register*, *Yogalowa*, *Spoilage Literary Magazine*, and other publications.



Sara Stibitz stands on the rooftop of a school for young priests. Used with permission.

looked at our guide's pack. If it were he alone venturing into the wilderness of Mount Herman, he'd carry just two tarps, a knife, and possibly a sleeping bag. Everything he carried in his pack was for us.

One of his first lessons was we were to always evaluate an area for shelter and resources. He used the acronym STOP—Stop, Think, Observe, and Plan. His philosophy: When you're in a situation where you have little on hand, you must constantly look around for the things you can use to survive. In other words, you're constantly seeking to use resources in innovative ways to support yourself.

Take, for example, the debris hut. The construction design depends on what's nearby and freely available. You find two trees with branches about the same height, low to the ground. Ideally, you'll

also find your crossbeam in the area—a fallen log will do. After that, alternating sticks form the walls of the shelter. Then it's just filling in the holes with whatever is close at hand—broken pine boughs, low-hanging branches with leaves on them, fallen leaves, and pine needles. The key? Look for the highest reward with the lowest effort.

In the end, my choice of career came down to one moment in the middle of a networking event. I was part of the Community Connect mentor program, and we were in session with 15 mentors and 30 mentees. These were the people who came to mind when I discussed changing tracks with my mentor; I didn't want to look inconsistent or explain the destruction of my plan. The bombastic presenter called on members of the audience at random, and each time he

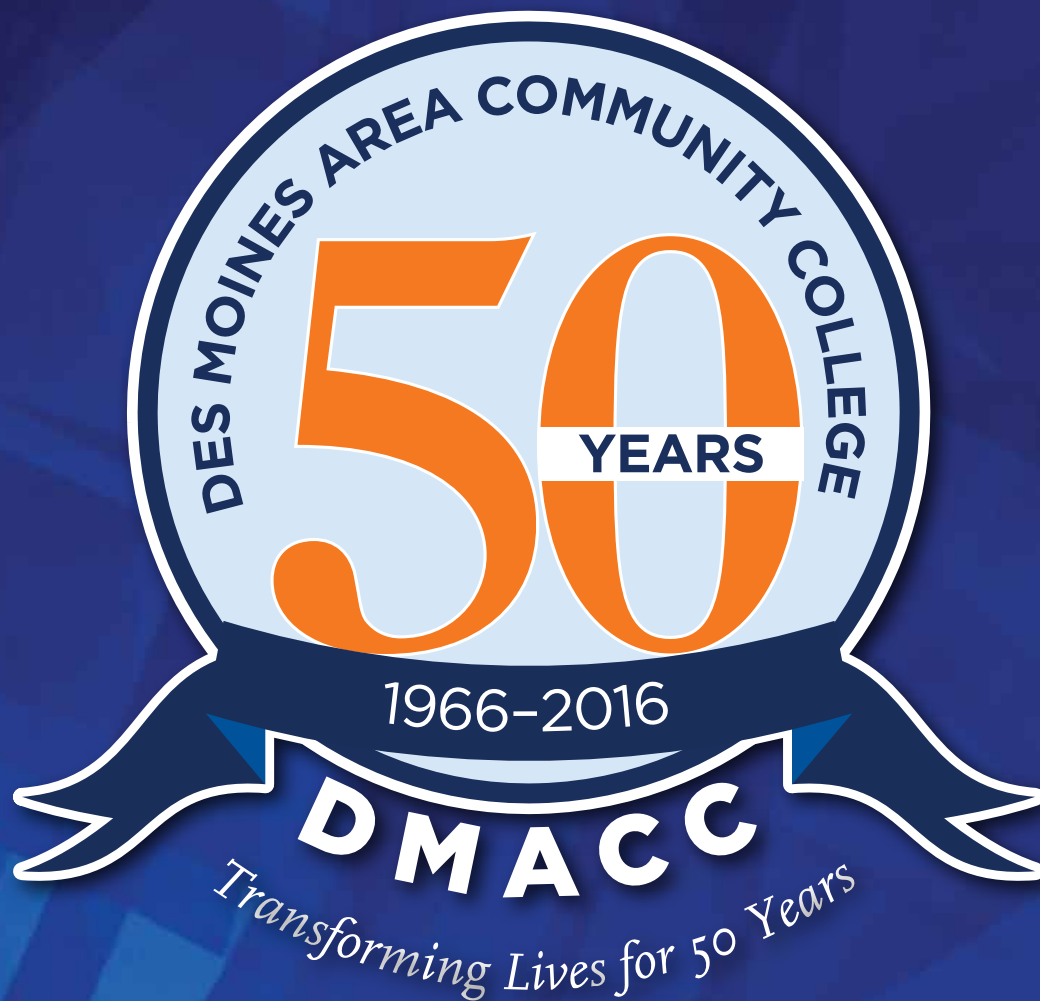
asked, "Where do you work?" Being the only person in the room who was self-employed, I wondered how I would form my response if he called on me. To my surprise, in dramatic fashion, he pointed at me and yelled, "What do you do?"

It was a moment of decision. The room was quiet, although nobody but me knew my internal struggle. My eyes got big, and I let the first response that came to me tumble out of my mouth: "I'm a writer."

Stripping yourself of everything that brings you comfort while destroying the familiar paradigm of your life forces you to become creative and resourceful. Sometimes, we look around and find that our lives are in shambles. Sometimes, before we can truly be free to dream, we need to give ourselves permission to dismantle the frameworks that keep us penned in. As Pablo Picasso said, "Every act of creation is first an act of destruction." It is only after we strip away *what is* that we can create *what will be*.

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THE GREAT STEFFANO

BY DR. ANTHONY PAUSTIAN

How Perception Affects Thinking

Before becoming an Army cavalry scout in the harsh climate of northern Alaska, as well as a husband and father, my son, Steffen, was an aspiring magician. He developed his craft as a young child and by high school mastered many of the skills necessary to amaze and entertain his audiences. I was frequently his audience, as he would test new tricks with me. He believed if a magic trick worked on me, it would work on others.



The “Great Steffano” during his high school years. Used with permission.

Frequently, and especially during the early years, I spotted the sleight of hand or figured out the basis for the trick. But by his late high school years, it became increasingly difficult. One trick, to this day, mystifies me—and makes me a bit angry, since I have yet to figure it out. My only explanation is something supernatural is going on.

Steffen, or “The Great Steffano” as he often referred to himself, would pull out a deck of cards, fan them out, and show me both sides of the cards to verify their authenticity. He had me pick a card, look at it, and place it somewhere back in the deck, which was shuffled again. He then pulled a clear plastic sandwich baggie from his pocket that contained a single playing card—the joker. I would verify it was the joker and that no other cards

were inside the baggie. Next, I’d put out my hand, and he would place the baggie on it with the joker face down. He would then instruct me to place my other hand on top of it.

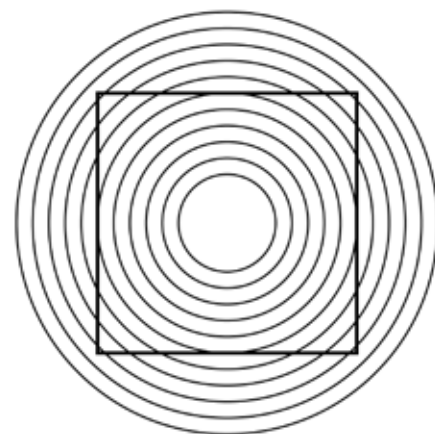
After 30 seconds or so of dramatic magic stuff (waving the deck over my hands, blowing on them, etc.), he asked me to tell him the initial card I had drawn from the deck. After I confirmed the card, he would ask me to remove my top hand and look at the card inside the baggie, which magically changed from the joker to my card.

To say I’ve had Steffen repeat this trick for me several times over the years would be an understatement. Each time, regardless of the card I draw, the result is the same. Despite how hard I

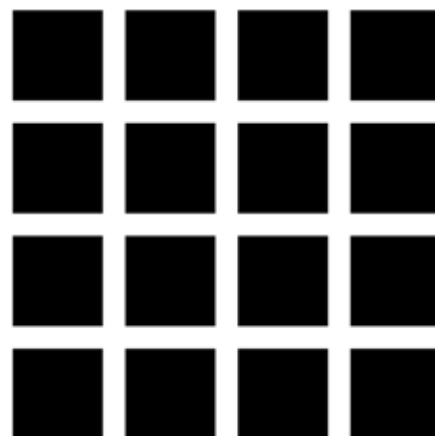
focus and pay attention to everything happening around me, I come no closer to figuring out the logical basis for it.

Obviously, there is some kind of misdirection: what the eyes see, the ears hear, and the hands touch . . . the mind delivers. In other words, what I *think* is occurring may not always line up with what is *actually* occurring, which is the basis of perception.

View the images below. In the first, a perfect square is placed over a series of concentric circles. In the second, black squares are arranged in a four-by-four grid and spaced the same distance apart.



What do you see?



What do you notice? Do the sides of the first square appear to be curved inward? When you look at the second image, do you see shadow-like images where the four corners of each box come together?



Ask "Why?" like a child. Used with permission.

Both of these images illustrate how what you see is not always reality. Our senses—in this case, our eyes—can play tricks on our minds, which is why it's essential to first try and look at something from as many perspectives as possible prior to passing any judgment. The initial view may be distorted and fail to provide the complete picture.

Have you ever dropped something small on the floor and then had a difficult time finding it? When this happens to me and I start to get frustrated, I remember this varying viewpoint principle and immediately drop to the floor to look across it horizontally—a new perspective that usually yields better success.

*Obviously, there
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the mind delivers.*

As human beings, it's easy for each of us to view something and come up with different takes on its intent or meaning. We all perceive ourselves and the world around us in ways that reflect our individual values, experience, knowledge, and personalities, based on how we select, organize, and interpret the stimuli.

I once heard a story about a professor who stood before his philosophy class to illustrate a point. When class began, he picked up a large, empty jar and proceeded to fill it with golf balls. He asked the students if the jar was full. They agreed it was. The professor next picked up a small box of pebbles, poured them into the jar, and shook the jar slightly until the pebbles filled the empty space between the golf balls. He again asked the students if the jar was full, to which they agreed. The professor proceeded to pick up a small box of sand and pour it into the jar, filling the space between the pebbles and golf balls. After asking the students if the jar was now totally full, they agreed with a unanimous "Yes." The professor then pulled out two cans of soda from under the table and poured them into the jar, filling the empty space between the sand, pebbles, and golf balls. The students just laughed.¹

Creative thinkers know there are many ways to view or perceive something; they become accustomed to stepping back from a problem prior to solving it to see it from as many perspectives as possible. More perspectives allow for more connections and greater opportunities to get creative.

Depending on factors such as age, knowledge, experience, and predisposition (developed as a result of that knowledge and experience), our perceptions shift throughout our lives. Much of this shift can be explained through three specific types of perceptual states: adolescent, experiential, and selective.

We all perceive ourselves and the world around us in ways that reflect our individual values, experience, knowledge, and personalities, based on how we select, organize, and interpret the stimuli around us.

Adolescent Perception

Shortly after his birth, I held my grandson, Emmett. As I looked into his little face while he slept, I thought about how absolutely beautiful he was with his tiny features and more hair than I've seen on my head in 15 years. It occurred to me that life couldn't be any more straightforward or simple. While looking into his face, I suddenly realized Emmett literally knew NOTHING, and it was only a matter of time until he started asking the most annoying question a child could ask: "Why?"

I imagined our conversation would go something like this:

"Grandpa, why is grass green?"

"Well, Emmett, the green color allows plants like grass to help us breathe."

"Why?"

"The green color is created by something called chlorophyll."

"Why?"

"Well, chlorophyll is used during photosynthesis."

"Why?"

"Photosynthesis allows plants to use sunlight to turn carbon dioxide and water into sugar, which plants need to live."

"Why?"

"Well, when you breathe, you breathe out carbon dioxide, which is poisonous to us, but the grass likes it."

"Why?"

"So we don't die."

Long pause.

"Grandpa, why is the sky blue?"

*"*sigh* Ask your parents."*

Although getting the third degree about random things can be frustrating (and if you're a parent, you know exactly what I'm talking about), answering questions and solving problems is exactly how children learn. They begin to understand the world by making connections and sticking things together in ways that make sense to them. This is why children are so creative. This is also why a child's perception can seem quite literal and as-is. They still don't know all the established and accepted facts and rules related to prior knowledge and experience.

For example, when Steffen was only seven, he and I were at Walmart. As we walked through the store, a new toy caught his eye, and as usual, he immediately had to have it. "Daddy," he said, "can I have this?"

Noticing the \$40-plus price tag, I knew it was beyond the budgetary constraints of a self-employed graduate student. "Steffen, Daddy just doesn't have the money right now."

"But Daddy," he said, "just go to the machine and get some!"

At that time, Steffen perceived an endless supply of cash could be extracted from ATMs everywhere. He had no concept of what it took to earn money and deposit it into a bank. His

perception of ATMs was based totally on what he saw—the actual withdrawal. He had no personal experience with depositing and earning, so his perception was the result of his limited experience.

Adolescent perception isn't just related to young children; it applies to anyone, young or old, who lacks the necessary information or knowledge to adequately perceive something in the manner intended. Learning should be, and is, a lifelong process.

In the 1988 movie *Big*, Tom Hanks plays a 12-year-old boy named Josh who makes a wish to be an adult. When he awakens the next morning, Josh has an adult body, but his mind is still that of a 12-year-old. He ultimately finds himself working for the development department of a toy manufacturer. Unlike the adults who work with him, he can't help but constantly ask "Why?" That question not only causes the company to realize great success, but it also causes the president of the company to show his appreciation of Josh while the other employees take notice (and some become very annoyed).

As we age, asking "Why?" is frequently discouraged. Over time, many of us stop asking it in an effort to conform and deal with the daily grind. Ironically, though, whenever we learn about a cool new product or great idea, this is exactly what the people behind those ideas are doing. Repeatedly asking "Why?" allows us to get to the core of a problem or situation. The result: true creativity.

I once knew a chiropractor who was not only a professor at the Palmer College of Chiropractic, he was a master at asking "Why?" He told me a story about a patient who complained of constant headaches. When the chiropractor asked "Why," he found the headaches were a symptom of a shifted spinal column, which was pinching some nerves.

When he asked "Why?" again, he found the shift in the spinal column was caused by an unconscious, natural →



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Getting to the root of the problem by repeatedly asking why. Used with permission.

adjustment in how the patient walked to compensate for having one leg slightly longer than the other. After being fitted for shoes with a built-in lift on the short side, his patient began to walk normally, and the headaches disappeared. Some would have simply handed him a bottle of ibuprofen, but that wouldn't have solved the problem.

Asking "Why?" at any age will help us gain greater insight and understanding. People might think us a little annoying, but the outcomes will frequently yield higher levels of creativity, better results, and an informed perception shaped by knowledge rather than feelings.

Experiential Perception

The knowledge we gain from learning continuously shapes and molds our perspectives, which creates a variety of predispositions. Some call this gaining wisdom. However, these predispositions

Our minds are so busy processing information bombarding us from so many sources like ringing smartphones, text messages, and email notifications. It's easy to mentally move ahead of the speaker, and we may not even realize we are doing so.

may alter our thinking in ways that narrow our scope or distort how we view things. Others might call this tunnel vision.

Take a moment to solve the following problem, which is typically solved by children in less than a few minutes:

6020 = 3	3305 = 1
8809 = 6	7777 = 0
1970 = 2	2321 = 0
7783 = 2	2022 = 1
3928 = 3	5588 = 4
9999 = 4	1111 = 0
1619 = 2	7175 = 0
7756 = 1	3333 = 0
5395 = 1	6666 = 4
5531 = 0	2253 = ?

Did you struggle with it? Did it create anxiety or stress? I'm sure many viewed it as a math problem, and when you saw that children can easily do it, you may have assumed it would be fairly simple to solve. But why?

Our education taught us that numbers and equal signs reference mathematics, and since adults are so much smarter than children, it must be easy to solve. Yet, the problem has nothing to do with mathematical equations, only shapes and counting. If you count the closed loops in each number, you arrive at the solution. In this case 0 = 1, 6 = 1, 8 = 2, 9 = 1, and all other numbers equal 0. Therefore, the answer for 2253 is zero.

As-is or literal thinking can lead to incorrect perceptions due to a lack of knowledge (adolescent perception), yet sometimes the culprit of distorted perception can be the facts and rules we learned throughout life. Or worse,



Gene Cernan speaks at ciWeek 5 in 2014 on the DMACC West Campus. Used with permission.

fragmented perception or incomplete information that results from asking weak questions followed by poor listening.

I was the oldest of three children, and according to my parents, I was also the most challenging to raise. (I like to think I taught my parents how to better raise my younger sister and brother.) In fact, my father frequently used the phrase, “You’re not listening! That went in one ear and out the other.” As human beings, it’s easy for us to listen to something and come up with different views as to its intent, meaning, or importance, which in turn leads to different levels of understanding. That’s why it’s important to ask good questions followed by active listening.

Let’s say my wife is in another room, and I ask her, “What time is it?” She may respond by saying, “It’s 6:00” or “It’s time for dinner” or “Ten minutes later than the last time you asked” or “The same time it is in there.” Although all are technically true, they don’t get to the same answer in the same manner. Perhaps a better question would have been, “What time does it show on the clock in front of you?” Or better yet, I could get up and check the time for myself.

Effective learning requires not only asking good and appropriate questions, but also actively listening to the answers. Hearing is not listening, and research indicates that most people retain as little as 25 percent of what they

hear.² Active listening demands intense mental effort to maintain focus while observing and concentrating on the details of what’s being said.

Our minds are so busy processing information bombarding us from so many sources like ringing smartphones, text messages, and email notifications. It’s easy to mentally move ahead of the speaker, and we may not even realize we are doing so. When you’re introduced to someone new, how well do you remember what she said, or even her name? Through active listening, a greater degree of awareness, empathy, and clarity will emerge to enhance perceptual understanding.



A video still from Chabris & Simons gorilla experiment testing selective attention.

I recently talked with Eugene Cernan, Gemini and Apollo astronaut and the last person to walk on the Moon. During our conversation, he said something that stuck with me. “Today, people’s lives are too complicated. They spend so much time dealing with so much stuff they have a hard time appreciating the common aspects of daily life. If going to the Moon taught me anything, it was learning how to appreciate the simple and mundane that we pay little attention to and take for granted.”

Combine daily clutter with poor listening habits, and it becomes easy to miss the simpler things in life, things that could, and maybe should, provide some of our most important experiences.

*Over time, many of us
stop asking [why] in
an effort to conform
and deal with the
daily grind.*

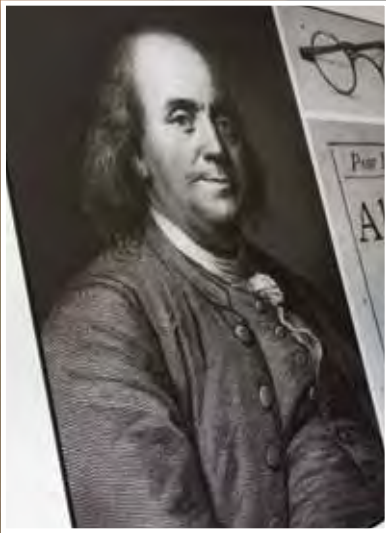
Selective Perception

In 1999, Christopher Chabris and Daniel Simons performed an experiment to test selective attention. They created a video where two teams of students, one in white shirts and one in black shirts,

passed a ball between members of their own team within one large group. Participants who watched the video were asked to count how many times the students in white shirts passed the ball amongst themselves.

Midway through the video, a person in a black gorilla suit walked through the group of students, stood in the middle, pounded its chest, then exited. Study participants were asked, “Did you see the gorilla?” More than half the time, they didn’t see the gorilla at all. Study participants were so focused on counting passes between people wearing white shirts that they mentally lost focus on anyone in black.³ ➔

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To test the theory again, Chabris and Simons repeated the study about ten years later. During this test, however, while teams passed the basketball and the gorilla came onto the scene, the curtain in the background changed color, and one of the black-shirted team members walked off the stage. Most people, especially those who had seen the experiment before and were looking for the gorilla, didn't see either the curtain change or the team member exit.⁴

Selective perception can impact our ability to observe something occurring directly in front of us. With so many things happening around us at once, our minds are only able to handle so much information, especially if we are focusing

on something specific. Numerous studies test events and corresponding memories—such as studies related to what trial witnesses think and believe they see compared to what other evidence suggests . . . or what airline pilots see looking out the window versus what their instruments tell them. These studies frequently show that what people think they see doesn't always align with what actually occurs.

With the countless demands for our attention through personal technology, 24-hour news outlets, social media, strategic advertising placements, and more, we tend to pick and choose what we believe is worthy of our attention. As a result, selective perception affects our views and beliefs.

Many years ago, I visited the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, where I came upon a painting that was nothing more than a plain white canvas. Fittingly, it was entitled, "White." I laughed as I thought about the absurdity of this piece. Thoughts like "They actually hung this here?" and "Anyone can do that!" filled my head as I stood and stared at it . . . and continued to stare at it. My emotions shifted from laughter to surprise to irritation and back to laughter.

Over the years, I've discussed this piece with many people—often jokingly, but also inquiring as to why and how someone could get away with calling it art. The conversations often shifted to the definition of art and its ultimate purpose. Despite all the great works

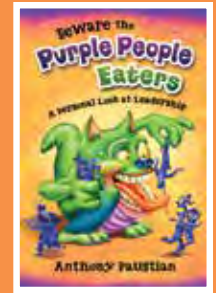
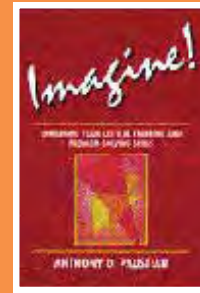
Perhaps that simple white canvas was created so anyone could fill it with imagination, without predetermined limitations.

on display that day at MoMA, I can't remember a single one of them other than this painting. Despite its simplicity, it caused me to think at length about what the artist was trying to do or say. Perhaps that simple white canvas was created so anyone could fill it with imagination, without predetermined limitations. Perhaps it was a metaphor to represent the emptiness that exists in all of us. Perhaps it is nothing more than an ode to simplicity and minimizing the clutter that surrounds us. Or perhaps it is something entirely different.

I will never know the artist's intent, but I do know how it affected me. When I start feeling overwhelmed with too many things occurring around me, it serves as a personal metaphor to help me mentally regroup and begin again with a clean white canvas, so to speak—a canvas without the clutter, allowing me to select what I will perceive from it.

Ironically, what began as the subject of a personal joke I now see as the most creative piece of all—perception-free, without limitations or constraints, opening the endless imaginations of those privileged to see it, without the selective perceptions or predispositions attached to it.

Although I know my son wasn't doing anything supernatural with his trick, and regardless of how hard I tried to find the key to the secret, I'm no closer to figuring it out. I realize I'm only seeing that which The Great Steffano wants me to see, or, and probably more likely, I'm just not seeing the gorilla pounding its chest in the middle of it all.



Dr. Anthony Paustian is the Provost for Des Moines Area Community College in West Des Moines and the author of *Imagine* and *Beware the Purple People Eaters*.

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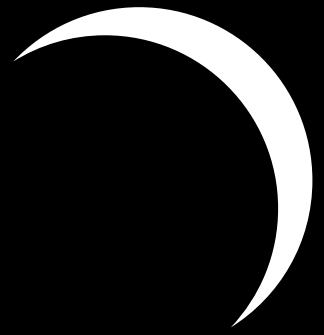


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Cernan on the Moon in his "John Wayne" pose. Courtesy NASA.



BY GENE CERNAN

DO THE SEEMINGLY IMPOSSIBLE

Q & A with Gene Cernan

Looking back on your education and experiences, who influenced and inspired you most?

GC: I realized fate plays a major role in our lives, my life particularly. During and after World War II, I watched those unsung heroes make flying machines do the seemingly impossible in movies and news reels, so flying off an aircraft carrier became my dream. Sometimes, it seemed impossible for an average

kid from Chicago raised by parents who never had a chance to attend college. But I held on to that dream. My dad had a dream for me to get the education he never received. I ended up going to Purdue through naval ROTC. I graduated in 1956 with an engineering degree in one hand and orders to Pensacola for

naval aviator flight training in the other. My dad told me one thing I've never forgotten: Go out there and do your best.



Cernan preparing for his Apollo 17 mission. Courtesy NASA.

Whom do you most admire and why?

GC: I admire my dad. I can't imagine what he could have done if given the opportunity to get an education. My grandparents were immigrants from Eastern Europe. When I was in the Navy flying off carriers and after I entered the space program, he sent me the most heartwarming letters. I realized, perhaps too late, he's the man I do indeed admire most.

If you could have dinner with any three people in history, who would they be and why?

GC: I had dinner with a couple presidents—Bush 41 and Ronald Reagan—and I got to know my Hollywood hero, John Wayne. I liked having dinner with them because of what they believed in. They were and are the kind of people who tell you what they sincerely believe, not what you want to hear.

A guy I met recently is Gary Sinise. I respect him, and I'd like to get to know him better. I've been a longtime friend of Aaron Hill. That guy accomplished as much or more than anybody. Another is astronaut Tom Stafford; I've flown twice with him, and I respect him.

Neil Armstrong and I didn't know each other well at Purdue, but I got to know him better after joining the space program. We spent a lot of time together after Apollo, and I wish everyone in the country could have shared dinner with him. Not so much because he was the first man who walked on the Moon . . . a lot of people could have done that. But nobody could have handled it with a greater dignity than Neil Armstrong. He was a guy I respected and admired, and I sincerely called him a friend.

What innovations impacted your life most and why?

GC: When a president—JFK—challenged this country to do what most thought impossible, Alan Shepard had only experienced a total of sixteen minutes in space, and John Glenn had just orbited the earth. The Soviets owned space. The country was in turmoil at the beginning of an unpopular war. We didn't know what going to the Moon would require because the technology didn't exist, especially at the computer level. The situation gave birth, in my mind, to the digital age, which blows me away.

What, if anything, could NASA have done to better prepare you for your responsibilities in space?

GC: In May 1961, President Kennedy said we are going to go to the Moon before the end of the decade. We had to build that bridge, called the Gemini Program, to find out how. We made mistakes. We had the brightest engineers in the



Cernan driving the Lunar Rover on the Moon's surface. Courtesy NASA.

world, including astronauts with engineering backgrounds, tackling the biggest job: trying to figure out how a human being in a spacecraft in zero gravity could travel around the world at 18,000 miles an hour. We had to figure out how a man in a high-pressure suit and a backpack could exit a spacecraft and fly with two hand-holds, a handle bar, and a foot bar to stand on.

That suit and backpack gave me tremendous difficulty. At first, I overpowered my space suit; every time I twisted a valve, the valve would twist and push me back. If we could have had some way of simulating zero gravity longer than about 25 seconds, we might have discovered we needed something to tie us to the spacecraft.

Another major mistake we made was the Apollo 1 fire where we

The Shuttle, in retrospect, was probably the finest flying machine we designed, built and flew.

were pressed for time. We used 100 percent oxygen because we could make the spacecraft lighter. You could snap your fingers in that environment, create a little heat or smoke, and you were gone. That's what happened.

After the fire, we found a better way of doing it. We pressurized with nitrogen and oxygen and reduced explosiveness, but at the time, we were concerned with cost and schedules. Although we lost three

colleagues and almost the entire space program, the fire allowed us time to create a better, more capable, and safer spacecraft, one that would indeed take us to the Moon.

Should NASA have discarded the Apollo-Saturn family of technologies to pursue the development of the Space Shuttle?

GC: Three flyable Saturn 5s (now sitting in museums) could have furthered moon exploration. They certainly wouldn't have allowed us to go to Mars. We weren't ready for that, but in another decade, we might have been. It's hard to second-guess what NASA was trying to do when they terminated Apollo with Apollo 17. We knew it would be the last flight, and it was probably a good idea. I think budgets, politics, and science all played roles. We were launching to the Moon every 60 ➔

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Cernan inside the Lunar Module after an EVA (extra-vehicular activity) on the Moon's surface. Notice the moon dust covering his suit. Courtesy NASA.

I started walking up those steps. I looked down at my last footprints, and I knew I wasn't gonna come this way again . . . somebody would, but it wouldn't be me.

for what you did. I'm an engineer, a doctor, a teacher, a scientist because of Apollo." We need to rejuvenate that and give the younger generations something to hang their heads on through space exploration.

NASA today is turning over much of its core technological research and development to commercial companies and private industries. How do you feel about this transition? Do you support the privatization of space travel?

GC: Yes. I just don't want to see us go down the same road of the past. I want us to make use of what we have learned and accomplished in space. I don't want another Apollo 1 accident. I don't want to see those things happen again. We are losing people.

As far as money is concerned, I think NASA found another way to spend what it has. It's good for NASA to encourage some of these private-sector space businesses and help with technology, but if companies want to earn a buck, they should put some of their money into it, and some do.

I believe the private sector often does things a bit better, more economically, and as safely as the federal government, but space is different. The risk of what we are doing and where we are going is so unknown. Look at what was ➤

days when we started. In retrospect, we needed to digest what we accomplished and think about it—scientifically, technologically, and operationally. It seemed logical to go into Skylab with some of that Apollo hardware. The mood then was we had been to the Moon with this bajillion-dollar budget to get the job done, so how could we make a spacecraft that could be reused?

The Shuttle, in retrospect, was probably the finest flying machine we designed, built, and flew. Again, we made mistakes because of cost and schedules, but the flying machine performed almost flawlessly. Without the shuttle era, we never would have built a space station, although we did it at the expense of space exploration. Looking back, we could have stretched things out, spent our money differently, and continued with

the exploration program.

Some things went by the wayside such as a program called Constellation, which could have taken us back to the Moon, helped us exploit resources on the Moon, and helped us learn to live up there, so we could learn to survive and work on Mars. The sad part is some of the hardware built for Constellation would have allowed us our own space station. And the Shuttle was canceled with at least half of its lifetime left. It's hard to second guess; I'm an exploration guy.

From an educational and inspirational point of view, the space program is failing, which means there's nothing to stimulate the passion of young kids in this country. I have had fifty- and sixty-year-old people say, "Gene, thank you



uncovered during Gemini and Apollo. We need high-end technical oversight that goes with the money we put into that part of the business.

Should NASA engage in a large-scale effort to plan and execute a manned mission to Mars?

GC: Yes, because that's the next frontier. We also need to go back to the Moon. There are commercial and economic resources we can exploit on the Moon. We need to learn what it will take to stay on developing habitats for six months at a time. I am 100 percent in favor of going to Mars, but I am not 100 percent in favor of these one-way volunteer trips. If we're smart enough to go there, we are smart enough to get home. These trips will take 18 or so months. We can shorten that. With the development of new propulsion technology, we can come and go when we want instead of coasting into Mars and being at the mercy of location and gravity.

Tell us about the new movie relating to your career and book, *The Last Man on the Moon*.

GC: I didn't want *The Last Man on the Moon* to be a space book, and

I didn't want it to be technical. It's me talking to you. I take readers everywhere I have been; I take them on a spacewalk. I share my thoughts and feelings as best I can.

The movie is not a Hollywood movie like *Apollo 13*. It's a documentary. It's about me, but it could be about any

young kid who ended up where I did. I also bring families into it. What did the wives go through? Martha, the wife of Roger Chaffee—friend of mine from Purdue and a neighbor in Houston—tells you how she felt when her husband burned in the Apollo 1 fire. My former wife and my current wife talk about how it felt when I went to the Moon. When I heard, "If you think going to the Moon is hard, try staying home," it hit me hard.

The movie is about this young kid who could have been from any city in the country, who had a dream, who was inspired by those who went before him. For me, it was those icons of aviation during World War II, the greatest generation, who inspired me to want to fly. From that point on, fate played a tremendous role in my life. I don't know who controls fate. Why did I get selected for the space program? Why did I get to command ➔



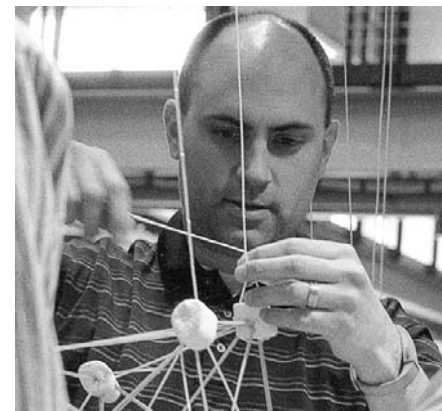
Cernan during his troublesome Gemini 9 EVA (extra-vehicular activity) outside the capsule. Courtesy NASA.



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Cernan working near the Lunar Rover on the Moon's surface. Courtesy NASA.

a mission to the Moon? And why am I not buried in Arlington instead of one of those guys there in my place?

How did it feel to walk and work on the Moon?

GC: That's a difficult one. When I first stepped on the Moon, the true first steps were made long before. Not just by Neil, but by everyone who preceded me there. I had to prove to myself I could take this mission and crew successfully to the Moon. Did I worry about getting off three days later? It never crossed my mind.

The thing I remember most is going up the ladder. I started walking up those steps. I looked down at my last footprints, and I knew I wasn't gonna come this way again . . . somebody would, but it wouldn't be me. I looked back at the Earth, at its overpowering beauty. I wanted to

stop the clock. What did it mean that we were there? Not just Apollo 17 . . . what did it mean as a generation?

I've always said leaving Earth's orbit or going somewhere like the Moon isn't just a technological space program; it's a philosophical and spiritual program. I was looking at the Earth, standing on the ladder of the lunar module, and I wanted to reach out and grab the Earth, put it into my pocket, and bring it home.

I concluded long before this—maybe even on Apollo 10—that Earth, a small part of this universe I was privileged to see, has too much purpose and is too beautiful to have happened by accident. I sat on God's front porch for three days of my life.

It has been 45 years since the Apollo 13 crisis. Do you believe Ron Howard's movie was an accurate depiction?

GC: Ron Howard interviewed those of us who had been to the Moon. I talked to Tom Hanks too. They wanted to get it right, and I think Howard told me specifically he did not want this movie to go "Hollywood." I think it was accurate for the most part.

What advice do you have for those in younger generations who want careers in the manned space program?

GC: There is so much to learn from the unlimited frontier of space. Forty-two years ago, I walked on the Moon. Today, we can't even put an American in space using American hardware. That is unacceptable to me, and it should be unacceptable to every American. We have kids excited and interested and thirsting to be inspired, dreaming of making the impossible happen, just like I did. I give them my dad's advice: go out and do your best.



During 20 years as a Naval Aviator, including 13 years with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), Captain Eugene A. Cernan left his mark on history with three historic missions in space as the Pilot of Gemini 9, the Lunar Module Pilot of Apollo 10, and the Commander of Apollo 17. After flying to the Moon not once, but twice, he also holds the distinction of being the second American to walk in space and the last man to have left his footprints on the lunar surface.

Along with his numerous military honors, Captain Cernan received the NASA Distinguished Service Medal, the FAI International Gold Medal for Space, induction into the U.S. Space Hall of Fame, and enshrinement into the National Aviation Hall of Fame, Naval Aviation's Hall of Honor and the International Aerospace Hall of Fame. Captain Cernan was awarded NASA's first Ambassador of Exploration Award, the Federal Aviation Administration's prestigious Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award, and the 2007 Lindbergh Spirit Award (presented every five years). In December 2007, The National Aeronautic Association presented Captain Cernan with one of the most prestigious aviation trophies in the world, the Wright Brothers Memorial Trophy, in Washington, DC. In April 2008, Captain Cernan was honored by receiving the 2008 Rotary National Award for Space Achievement, and in the Fall of 2008, he received the Federation Aeronautique Internationale (FAI) Gold Air Medal, one of the most coveted international awards.

Captain Cernan authored the 1999 book, *The Last Man on The Moon*.

I want to be one of the guys who had an impossible dream and went where no man has gone before, some guy who dreamed the impossible dream and lived it.

If you've got a good career in the military or science or engineering or so forth, stick with it.

In the last couple of months, NASA went looking for 10 new astronauts, and they had an overwhelming group of young people apply. There's a thirst; there's a desire. This younger generation, in their twenties and thirties, want to be part of something, want to make something happen.

What do you do for fun today?

GC: What do I do for fun? I'm trying to spend more time doing what I want to do, like spending more time at my little ranch in Texas. I'm trying to spend more time with my grandkids who are growing up so fast I can't keep up. I'm 81 years old, and all of a sudden, I can't plan 20 years ahead. I'm going somewhere

and doing something all the time. I owe future generations something; if I have something to give, I need to give it back.

What would people be most surprised to know about you?

GC: A good friend of mine said, "Gene, people don't look at you the way you look at yourself." I thought about that, and he's right. I'm proud I went to the Moon, and I want my grandkids to be proud too. My name is in history books, which is well and good, but I did that yesterday. It's what I do today and tomorrow that counts. I put my pants on one leg at a time, just like everyone else.

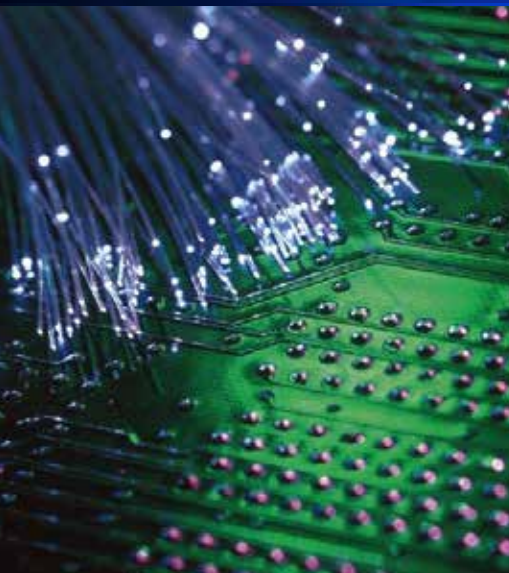
What do you hope your legacy will be?

GC: Man, the song called "The Impossible Dream" is my mantra.

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I want people to dream big, and I want them to do the work they were put on the planet to do. Some will dismiss that as nothing more than rainbows and butterflies. But I've seen amazing things happen when people are willing to get clear, work hard, and ask boldly. ➔

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J.T. (black shirt) and Cliff (red shirt) at O'Hare Airport. Used with permission.

A while back, I traveled to speak at a college conference for business and entrepreneurial students in Rochester, New York. While waiting for my connecting flight at Chicago O'Hare, I sat at a table with other travelers. I observed that two young people at the table might be college students heading to the same conference. (The clues were obvious. One read a book about interviewing; the other, a book about picking the right MBA program.)

It turned out they were impressive students from Miami University, and we were indeed headed to the same conference. We chatted about sports, MBA programs, and delayed flights. Compelled by my freakish, almost annoying passion for helping others, it didn't take long before I asked about the kind of work they'd love to do. It was obvious they'd thought a lot about things related to their careers, but I don't know if anyone ever asked them that question.

I suspect they thought about work they should do based on their majors. Maybe they explored work they could do based on markets and economics. But I don't know if they gave themselves permission to think about something they would love to do.

I suspect they thought about work they *should* do based on their majors. Maybe they explored work they *could* do based on markets and economics. But I don't know if they gave themselves permission to think about something they would *love* to do. Within a minute or two, Cliff—a tall, humble, confident, and quiet college junior—said he had always been interested in commercial real estate. Although he was soft-spoken, his eyes lit up as he talked about what drew him to the idea. I felt honored to hear about it.

I took it a step further: "Where would you love to live?" He named off a few areas with Atlanta at the top of his list. I said, "Wow. So, you'd love to at least try commercial real estate, and you're thinking you'd love to try it in Atlanta."

Quiet but confident, he said, "Yes."

I asked, "Who could you ask for help on this?"



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He replied, “I’m not sure. I don’t think I know anyone with those connections.”

“I understand,” I sympathized, “But you’ll never know if you don’t ask around. What if we just started asking people about it? The conference will host students from all over the east side of the country. Maybe there’s someone who might know somebody. And do you think any of your friends might have connections there?”

He pondered, “I’m not sure, but I could ask. I guess I’ve just never asked. I’ll start asking around when I get back to campus.”

Then I was hit with a bold idea. “Why wait? Let’s try an experiment here.” I cringed a little as I heard the words escape my mouth.

Surprised, he agreed. “OK.”

I turned to a pleasant businesswoman sitting at our table. As I glanced her way, she looked up from her laptop. I asked for her permission to interrupt, and she agreed.

“My new friend, Clifford, thinks his dream job involves commercial real estate in Atlanta. Do you happen to know anyone in Atlanta?” I admit I was hoping she knew someone in that area, but a huge grin crossed her face. I realized she might have something more.

“I can do better than that!” She answered. “I have a friend IN Atlanta who is IN commercial real estate. I’m betting he would be open to talking with you!” With that, she handed Cliff her business card and said, “Seriously. If you follow up with me, I will help you connect with him.”

My heart was racing. I’m guessing Cliff’s was too. The experiment worked! Moments later, the plane started loading, and our small group boarded with goofy smiles on our faces.

An Update

As fate would have it, I later spoke at Miami University where Cliff was finishing his senior year. While I was there, he and I reconnected. Despite

touching base once at the conference and once via email, I’d never heard the rest of Cliff’s story. I was anxious for an update. As we chatted over greasy appetizers at a pizza place near campus, Cliff explained not only had he connected with our fellow traveler’s Atlanta contact, he scored an internship! Clifford spent the entire summer living and working in Atlanta in commercial real estate! How amazing is that?

From that experience, Clifford learned he loved certain aspects of the business and didn’t like others. His internship and time in Atlanta helped him further clarify his dream! I was blown away by, elated for, and proud of Cliff. He’d gotten clear, taken some risks, worked hard, *and* asked boldly. The results: a great opportunity and a unique learning experience.

Life Lessons

What I learned from Cliff’s story was there’s so much power in not only getting clear on goals, but also in verbalizing them. You never know who might help you out. In Clifford’s case, he thought about getting a job, but he never gave himself permission to dream about the work or the city he might love. Just as important, he never shared those dreams with anyone. Once he did, amazing things happened.

I’ll be the last one to say this rapid turnaround *a/ways* happens. It doesn’t. And your parents’ advice still stands: Be careful when talking to strangers! Still, sometimes cool things happen when you get clear and ask. This isn’t just true for college seniors. I’ve seen this story play out time and time again with guests on my podcast. In all situations—airports, podcasts, and otherwise—my goal is to inspire and equip people to dream bigger, think better, and do more.

My favorite thing that comes from helping others is the stories of real people, like Cliff, who gave themselves permission to dream big. When I



Sara Haines on the set of *Good Morning America* with *Sesame Street*'s Snuffleupagus. Getty Images. Used with permission.

interviewed *Good Morning America*'s Sara Haines, she shared a time when she got clear on a big dream, then gave herself permission to ask.

In her early twenties, Sara worked as a page for NBC. She had taken initiative and started to do backstage interviews with guests. She'd enlisted her co-workers' help, and they posted the interviews on NBC's website. The videos received a fair amount of traction, and Sara enjoyed the process. It solidified her

dream of being on-air talent. Because a number of people helped her, she thought everyone around her knew her dream, but she was wrong.

When an opportunity arose for her to boldly ask to shoot a segment for the *Today* show, she initially thought it was dumb. Yet, she noted, "In hindsight, it was very safe for me to call the idea dumb." Her job at the time was to give tours, order limos, and provide lunch. Asking felt like a risk, and by labeling it

"dumb," it made it easier for her to not take that risk. After a push from a friend, she approached an executive producer she knew well and asked for the opportunity. But when she asked for the opportunity, his response floored her.

He said, "You want to be on air? I had no idea."

At that point, she realized—although it was obvious to her—many people around her didn't know about her goals and dreams.

I'll be the last one to say this rapid turnaround always happens. It doesn't. And your parents' advice still stands: Be careful when talking to strangers! Still, sometimes cool things happen when you get clear and ask.

To me, she said, "I had done all of those video interviews and special projects, but I had never spelled it out or gotten specific. So, he didn't know." She continued, "You can't assume people know. He didn't know before I asked. But that was one moment that really changed things for me."

Her breakthrough moment came because she'd gotten clear and asked. What happened next? She got the special assignment that started her on the trajectory to win a spot on the fourth hour of the *Today* show. She is now a correspondent and regular contributor for *Good Morning America*.

Sara got clear. Sara worked hard. And—in that moment—Sara asked. Boldly.

How About You

Cliff and Sara's stories are inspiring and fun, but I won't say all you have to do is get clear on your big dreams and ask a few people for everything to fall into place. I won't offer late-night infomercial promises. But I can say there is a lot of courage, hard work and follow-up behind both. A key part of their success (and that of so many others) involved giving themselves permission to:

1. Get clear on their goals
2. Work, experiment, and learn
3. Ask bravely and boldly

Maybe your goal isn't scoring a dream job. Maybe you want to make an impact or help a group of people. That's fantastic! Get clear and ask. Maybe someone could help you get connected



In presentations delivered to corporations, nonprofits, and universities, Mitch Matthews combines powerful stories and implementable strategies with a stand-up comedy-style delivery to give the audience a once-in-a-lifetime experience. You can find him online at MitchMatthews.com and on his popular DREAM. THINK. DO. podcast at MitchMatthews.com/iTunes.

and make it happen. Or maybe you want to take your business to the next level. For you, it might be about clarifying some of those bigger goals, then making bold asks of people you respect and admire. Maybe it's a personal goal. You'd love to take a trip or have an adventure. What if you gave yourself permission to get clear and ask? You never know. Maybe, just maybe, that person sitting right next to you could help make it happen. Why not give yourself permission?

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