

2 Two Big Questions about You

We all need help now and then with dialing into ourselves. A special kind of listening is a big help.

Max T. Russell

From time to time we all wonder, from a business point of view: Who am I at this point in life and what should I be doing? Those two questions can be amazingly difficult to answer. They're really about identity and desire.

I've spent most of my life interviewing people and writing up their stories for a variety of purposes. Sometimes people tell me, "Oh, I have a boring story." I tell them to let me decide. And, of course, I always prove them wrong, which is a pleasant surprise to them.

Keeping track of our identity and desire is crucial to our effectiveness as leaders and business people. One woman asked me to help her zero in on an entrepreneurial idea brewing in her head. She said everyone who'd heard the idea was impressed. I gave her two minutes to impress me and then interrupted:

"Robin, you're not making sense."

"I know," she said. "That's why I wanted to talk to you."

It turned out that something unresolved was blocking her thinking. I asked her to continue explaining what she wanted to do and why. With her permission, I occasionally interrupted to probe for more information.

Within another few minutes, we got to the bottom of it. Robin had lost a baby girl 41 years earlier. She thought she'd dealt with all the pain in her life, but now she was in tears, describing how her mother took the stillborn child immediately and arranged for cremation.

It's easy to feel so sure about who we are and what we want that we slam the door on discovering the truth about ourselves. Robin was blown away by how one conversation could uncover such an important part of her life.

You can make similar discoveries. Find someone you trust, and ask them to listen to your plans. Give that person permission to interrupt when they see a flaw or gap in

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your reasoning. You'll start to hear what you sound like to others – and where your thinking is incomplete. That's one of the most important tips about identity and desire. You're not always an authority on who you are and what you want. Welcome the interruptions – and the new perspectives.

You can use the same technique to help others sort out their ideas. It's a matter of listening deeply and interrupting judiciously. Listen for places where you can ask such questions as: Why? What do you mean? Are you sure? Can you tell me more?

What happened to Robin's business idea? She dropped it and started writing a book about the pain that defined her in ways she hadn't realized. The discovery process led her to launch a healing outreach to other suffering parents. That, it turns out, is what Robin really, truly wants to do.

You may not unearth anything as dramatic as Robin did. But we all have unconscious obstacles that can be teased out with a little help. Once you've dealt with the fundamentals of identity and desire, you'll be better able to speak as clear as a bell about your outreach, organization, and future plans. **S**



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