

Recently, I was reading a sermon a friend of mine gave during a summer lay service. It says in part “it’s amazing to realize that every species on the planet right now is going to be shaped primarily by its interaction with humans. It was never that way before. For three billion years, life evolved in a certain way; all of this evolution took place in the wilds. But now, it is the decisions of humans that are going to determine the way this planet functions and looks for hundreds of millions of years in the future... We are the planetary dynamic at this large-scale level. So can we wake up to this fact and then reinvent ourselves at the level of knowledge and wisdom that’s required?”

Once again, I was struck by the notion that how we behave in this world matters. And I was struck by the notion of *needing to know* that it matters, if we are to do anything other than simply roll the dice. Admittedly, there are things in the world, in the environment, in our lives we can’t change or fix. Perhaps the best we can do is to seek some amount of balance.

So how do we do that? How do we get there? The answer is one person at a time, because human behavior, writ large, is made up of all of us as individuals. So the human species gains an increased sense of balance one person at a time. And bunches of “one’s” affect the whole.

I don’t think anyone can argue against the likely positive impact of having increased balance in our lives. Unfortunately, many, if not most of us, would say our lives are out of balance; too much work and not enough play, too many bills and not enough money, too much to do and not enough time. Being out of balance is a common occurrence, especially in this day and age.

It seems to me, it would be a good idea to take an audit of your life now and again. Take a moment, better yet, take several moments, step back and take an objective look at your life. What’s working, what’s not? What do you have too much of, what do you have too little of? Now, this is not the same question as “are you happy”?

These questions, and ones like them, are designed to simply generate data. The interpretation and meaning derived from the data comes later. This process is akin to a periodic assessment of an investment portfolio. One looks not only at a particular investment but at all the investments taken together. Then, and only then, can one determine if the balance is achieving your objectives.

When we think about balance in our lives, our tendency is to look external to ourselves; we look at and think about time, money, work. I suspect most of us do not consider the possibility that our lives may be out of balance because we as personalities are out of balance and our important relationships that feed us are out of balance.

Today, I want to suggest a particular kind of audit of our lives and of our relationships. I'm hopeful that this type of audit will generate important data that may have been invisible before. I'm hopeful such an audit will be as valuable to you as it has been to me over the years, as I've tried to be intentional about achieving and maintaining some semblance of balance in my life.

The concept of the "Four C's" was first introduced to me by a team of professors and business consultants at the Whittimore School of Business. They suggested that in order to maximize the potential of having a productive, healthy, happy career *and life*, one needs four different types of relationships in their life. They named the four types of relationships: Clarifiers, Confronters, Comforters and Celebrators.

They said we should all have people in our lives who help us to clarify. These people help us to clarify our thoughts, clarify problems or issues in our lives. They help us to think more clearly; they help us figure things out. They help us to elucidate our thoughts, feelings and perceptions.

Perhaps these are people that simply listen well and allow us to hear ourselves think. Perhaps these are people who ask good questions, probing questions that require a deeper level of analysis. Perhaps they point out the complexities of an issue or our own contradictions.

These people help us to see ourselves from a different vantage point, get out of our heads and engage our fuller selves. Perhaps they merely refuse to hide the expressions on their faces when they listen to us talk, or rant, as the case may be.

Confronters are a different kind of relationship altogether. These are relationships that challenge us, push us and ask us to grow. These are relationships that hold us accountable *for and to* our own best interests. These relationships call us to stand up, take a stand, to be counted.

Confronters, in UU language, "speak the truth in love". They let us know when we've veered off course. They tell us when our hair-cut looks bad, when our outfit makes us look too fat or too skinny or we are over or under dressed.

These people refuse to allow us to delude ourselves. They call us to account for when we do things that are in violation of our principles, commitments and obligations. We can count on and trust these people to tell it like it is! They are not just nay-sayers; they are too important for that. These are people whose judgment, knowledge and wisdom we trust.

Comforters are fairly self explanatory. These are the people whose shoulder we seek to cry on. These are the people we go to when we are in pain and need someone to tell us, "now, now, things will be ok". These are the adult version of a "mother's lap", or kissing of a "boo-boo". And they too are important in our lives, I do not mean to belittle this type of relationship.

Comforters are sympathetic listeners; they are compassionate. They know us well and can share our pain and angst. They care about us and want nothing but the best for us. They may take our side and defend us. They take us in and provide “shelter from the storm.”

Celebrators are the people you invite to your birthday party. These are the people who cheer for you, pat you on the back and tell you you’ve done a good job, and mean it! These are the people who are happy because you are happy. They want to celebrate your achievements, they want you to do well, they care. They are your supporters. They have your best interests at heart. These are the people who offer a toast to you, who honor you and value you, for who you are, as you are.

These four types of relationships serve different purposes in our lives. They feed us in different ways, rather like a balanced, nutritious diet. We need all four types of relationships to help keep us healthy and pointed in the right direction.

There are caveats and warnings our “Four C’s” inventors tell us about. They first ask that we assess our lives to see if we have one or more persons in each of the categories. If not, we’re told to pay attention to the fact and know that we are missing an important element in our lives. Hint, hint, you might want to make it a priority to find someone (or some ones) to play that role in your life.

They ask us to note the names of those in each box. Are there none, one, two or many. In other words, they’re asking us to look at the balance both within and across the boxes. Too few may be as much a red flag as too many. If the only box with names in it is Celebrator, then there’s a message there. Likewise, if you only have comforters, clarifiers or confronters, your life is likely to be out of balance.

Another important warning sign is if the same name is in most or all of the boxes. This warning is especially important when there is only one name in each of the boxes and it’s the same name. In our culture, it is not at all unusual for us to rely on our best friend or our partner to fill all these separate roles in our lives. A: they probably aren’t good at doing all of these different tasks, and B: more importantly, what happens to you, when that one person dies or moves away? We run the risk of having our entire support system collapse or disappear with them.

I don’t know if the “Four C’s” authors mentioned this in their presentation or if I’m making it up myself. But I wonder not only about the roles others play in our lives, but the roles we play in other people’s lives. It seems it could be a valuable exercise to assess the roles we play in our significant relationships. Are we always the comforter or confronter in our relationships? Are we always the one helping others to clarify the questions and issues in their lives? Are we always on the look-out for an opportunity to celebrate?

Perhaps we might gain some perspective on the nature of our own personalities if we find that we tend to be one-arm hangers. Do we fit the stereotypic roles assigned to men or women, mothers or fathers, elder children or the youngest? Do we like what we see? Does it fit our own self image of who we are? How does it make us feel?

I believe there is value in taking a Sabbath day every now and again. There is value in taking time to be quiet and self-reflective. There is value in taking stock of our lives every now and again. We just might learn something about ourselves that allows us to live a healthier, happier, more productive existence.

And let us not forget that we matter and how we behave matters. It matters how we are in the world, who we are in the world. It matters for our own lives and it matters in the lives of those we encounter. And it matters to human behavior writ large. The human species gains an increased sense of balance one person at a time. And bunches of “one’s” affect the whole. Let us each commit to being one of the one’s.

Amen