



Communications Digest

Because Good Writing Should Grow on Trees!

Welcome Mid-October!

With Thanksgiving now past (and the beauty of fall leaves now shed from our trees), I'm pleased to send you another issue of "Communications Digest."

In last month's issue, I shared some of the insights of Arlene Dickinson and Jesse Brown on the fallacy of work/life balance.

Thank you to those of you who responded positively to that article.

Deanna Litz of GroYourBiz recommended Ryan Holiday's slim book on applying stoicism to entrepreneurial challenges. His book provided the material for this month's main article.

Enjoy the beauty of late autumn and best wishes for the year now in-progress.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth

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Article One: Want an “operating system for the difficulties” and obstacles of life? Ryan Holiday on what we can learn from stoicism, 2000 years after it was first penned . . .

In his 2014 book, *The Obstacle is the Way* (Penguin), Ryan Holiday suggests that great achievers of history (from John D. Rockefeller to Amelia Earhart to Steve Jobs) have turned adversity or obstacles into possibilities, and in the face of impossible situations, triumphed. They did so by adopting the stoic philosophy of Marcus Aurelius, the great Roman Emperor who penned these lines: “Our actions may be impeded . . . but there can be no impeding our intentions or dispositions. Because we can accommodate and adapt. The mind adapts and converts to its own purposes the obstacle to our acting The impediment to action advances action. What stands in the way becomes the way.”

While I have an enduring interest in psychoanalysis and so in the process of human emotion, I enjoyed reading Holiday, because he illustrates the limitless applications of stoicism, recognizing that we all face obstacles, whether it be “decaying institutions, rising unemployment, skyrocketing costs of education, and technological disruption” (e.g. the advent of Artificial Intelligence). As individuals, we tend to respond to these challenges with “fear, frustration, confusion, helplessness, depression and anger.” We complain and do nothing, except to build these obstacles up in our minds. We allow others to push our buttons and we overreact to slight irritations. This is fertile, if painful, ground for all entrepreneurs.

Holiday also says that countless books have been devoted to teaching how to achieve success, but none about how to think about obstacles, “how to treat and triumph over them, and so we are stuck” (2).

He suggests that our attitude toward our problems; the way that we break them down and make them opportunities; and then how we maintain an inner will to handle defeat and difficulty are the three interconnected disciplines we need to attend to: “Perception, Action and the Will” (9). He observes that adopting a stoic process for these disciplines is a “simple process, but . . . never easy.”

If we adopt such a process, we will find how to create new opportunities when the “door is shut.”

On “Perception,” Holiday writes that human beings need to move away from our tendency to overreact to risks and barriers, by trying to “control emotions and keep an even keel,” to “see the good in a situation,” to “steady our nerves,” not to borrow “what disturbs or limits others.” He emphasizes the importance of “revert[ing] to the present moment,” and “focus[ing] on what can be controlled” (18). When we adapt these ways of perceiving our reality, we refuse the kind of emotional reaction that is overreaction. “We decide what story to tell ourselves. Or whether we will tell one at all” (23). Holiday’s insights are compatible with Buddhism and its meditative practices.

On “Action,” Holiday says that we tend to forget that in life, “it doesn’t matter what happens to you or where you came from. It matters what you do with what happens and what you’ve been given” (68), so applying yourself with creativity and energy is far better than feeling sorry for

ourselves, fantasizing about easy solutions and the like. Feeling emotion, he acknowledges, is necessary, but after venting, he urges us, “get back to work. Because each obstacle we overcome makes us stronger for the next one” (69). Psychoanalysts often refer to this as the need to “keep fighting.” In practical terms, taking action involves energy, persistence, a deliberate process, resilience, pragmatism, vision, craftiness and an eye for opportunity (70). Holiday argues that right action that is honest, unselfish and creative will turn obstacles into opportunities. When we experience and then shed the emotional upset, there are new vistas where we can do our work.

On “Will,” he writes that it is our internal power that we need to keep unaffected by the outside world. He describes it as being closer to “surrender” than to strength. It involves “humility, resilience, and flexibility” in the face of the most challenging obstacles when others show only bluster and ambition. Holiday cites the “Serenity Prayer” and observes that will involves preparing for more difficult times, accepting what we cannot change, managing our expectations, learning “to love our fate and what happens to us,” protecting an inner self to which we can retreat, submitting to a “larger cause,” and “remind[ing] ourselves of our own mortality” (133).

It’s the nature of human existence that obstacles will always emerge. We as entrepreneurs and creatives need to recognize that. We improve “in spite of them, because of them” (173). By consciously moderating our perception, action and will in response to adversity, we lose our fear of it and can see it with cheerful optimism.

Holiday writes that many of today’s obstacles have arisen from “having too much: rapid technological disruption, junk food, traditions that tell us the way we’re supposed to live our lives. We’re soft, entitled and scared of conflict” (8). He argues that abundance can become its own obstacle (e.g. such as how the economic “boom” of Saskatoon became a challenge to manage before it ended).

Holiday also criticizes those who think stoic philosophy is the domain of “sheltered academics,” when it should be “an operating system for the difficulties and hardships of life” (184). In this sense, he especially invites entrepreneurs to adopt his arguments, hands-on, and not to hide behind theory. Remember, he concludes: “It’s simple. It’s just not easy.”

Do you find Holiday’s adaptation and application of stoicism to our daily lives compelling? Can you reclaim perception, action and will for less reactive use as an entrepreneur or creative? Please share your experience with me on my website at www.elizabethshih.com I’d be delighted to extend this conversation.

WORD NERD’S CORNER: *The case of "segue," with Bryan Garner . . .*



In his blog posting on October 2nd, American etymologist Bryan Garner discussed the noun, "segue."

A "segue" means a "seamless transition. The word can also be used as an intransitive verb that means "to transition smoothly." (Garner adds that in music only "segue" can be used as a transitive verb, but that appears more in specialist usage.) Both uses often misspell the term as "segway."

Here is an example for each of the common uses of the term:

(1) As a noun: "[Barack Obama] applauded the work of junior Joe Pearson . . . who works under lead biodiesel researcher Professor Ihab Farag. It was a good *segway* [read: segue] to Obama's own proposal that would reduce the amount of carbon in fuel . . ." (*Union Leader* [Manchester, N.H.], April 21, 2007, A2.

(2) As an intransitive verb: "The teacher said, "I will now segway [read "segue"] into the second part of the lecture."

Do you have questions about word use and misuse? Please share them with me on the "contact" page of my website (elizabethshih.com). I'd be delighted to extend this conversation.

SHOP NEWS

Special thanks to designer Kat Bens for working long hours on the digital volume of my second ebook, *Keep Going: Five Creatives Build Resilience*. The ebook will be launched in mid-November, so it's coming in time for Christmas! In the introduction and the subsequent articles, I discuss different theories of what constitutes "resilience," and how the term might apply to our lives. Kat works wonders with digital design!

And special thanks for the same project to Ashleigh Mattern, Steve Cavan, Christine Fiddler, Kevin Crickett and Kayla Kreuger for allowing me to tell their stories.

More news in next month's newsletter on how and where to get your digital or hard copy!

I am delighted to work on communications projects for the Neural Health Project, which continues to meet regularly at the U of S. "Project B," which investigates an Integrative medical approach to treating depression, and culminates from many months of careful dialogue, research and planning.

Congratulations especially to study leaders, Drs. Anne Leis, Dee Dee Maltman, Hector Caruncho, Lisa Kalynchuk and Vicki Holmes. And thanks also go to project coordinator, Wendy Verity and administrator Kathy Evans, for their fine work.

In early November, I'll be pleased to facilitate two classes, on blog and media release preparation for the Praxis School of Entrepreneurship. Many thanks to CEO Monica Kreuger for inviting me to give those talks and to facilitate discussion with newbie entrepreneurs.

And thanks this month also go to Jillian Bell (Marketing Director, SaskBooks), for hosting and organizing an afternoon's "Publishing Seminar" for writers. It was great to hear from experts in the trenches about the challenges and pleasures of publishing writing, both fiction and non-fiction, on the Prairies and in Canada, at large.

And finally, my usual nod goes to fellow women of the Freelancers' Roundtable Group: Ashleigh Mattern, Katherine Duncombe, Julie Barnes, Leanne Bellamy, Katee Pederson and Amy Rederburg.

Our last meeting allowed us to share some "must read" titles and discuss changes to the local publishing scene.



ABOUT US

Since 2011, Elizabeth Shih Communications has chronicled the stories of B2B marketing and communications on the Prairies and across Canada.

Do you need help telling your entrepreneurial stories?

Please contact me through my website, via the CASL-compliant email form, on the right-hand side of each page (www.elizabethshih.com).

After I have received your permission, I'll be pleased to discuss projects with you!

I write stories of how small and medium-sized businesses succeed while also giving back to the community. Those stories take the form of enewsletters, ebook articles, blog postings, and more. I also write and edit applications to business awards (such as ABEX, SABEX and others).

Please visit my website for more information (www.elizabethshih.com).

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