



Communications Digest

*Telling stories of how small businesses succeed and give back to our community.
Let me tell your story!*

Welcome Mid-March!

Although February brought blustery cold and wind, we are now enjoying radiant sunshine and some welcome milder temperatures. Do we dare think that spring is truly here? On that thought, I'm grateful to pen another issue of "Communications Digest."

In last month's issue, I discussed the hazards of excessive complaining, from a Buddhist influenced perspective. And in "Word Nerd's Corner," I visited etymologist Bryan Garner's discussion of how to use "objectionable" correctly (and in current politics and world affairs, there are many potential applications for that word!).

In this month's issue, I return to the field of entrepreneurial wellness, visiting first some observations on entrepreneurship from marketer Seth Godin and then applying insights on self-compassion from psychologist Kristin Neff. And in "Word Nerd's Corner," never one to "do things by halves," I report from Bryan Garner how we can correctly use the term "half."

I hope you enjoy the beauty of our blue and sunny skies!

Sincerely,
Elizabeth

Article One: On the Emotional Challenges of Entrepreneurship: In Memoriam: Raj Manek, Sr. (1943-1996)

The entrepreneurial journey, especially in the early years of a business, can be fraught with emotional challenges. At last week's 22nd annual Raj Manek Memorial Banquet, I spoke with several junior entrepreneurs for whom the recent downturn in the local economy has not only slowed financial growth but also and more crucially, shaken their confidence. In more than one case, spouses of these colleagues expressed impatience with the rocky path of entrepreneurship that we tread.

When facing entrepreneurial uncertainty (and those family members who may not appreciate our careers), some of us often wish we could reach for a "Dummies Guide," with "the quick steps, the guaranteed method, the way to turn this process into a job" (Seth Godin).

Yet better companionship for navigating uncertainties and better support that helps us simultaneously to gain entrepreneurial wellness both come from mentorship. Nearly 40 years after businessman and U of S professor Raj Manek Sr. moved to Saskatoon, more than 300 years' worth of mentorly relationships have been fostered in the program that bears his name. Proteges and mentors continue to participate in seminars and events like those he envisioned. Many of today's mentors "pay forward" the support that Raj once gave to them.

Entrepreneurship, as Seth Godin stresses, is a "choice." You don't have to be "born" an entrepreneur, since entrepreneurs can also be "made:" "You might not *want* to act like one," Godin writes in his blog (Jan 16, 2018), but if you can model behaviour, you *can* act like one."

Whether we are born with or model the entrepreneurial mindset, I've found that we live the entrepreneurial journey more sustainably and healthily (for ourselves, for our mentors and for those we love) if we take care of our emotional lives proactively. By this I mean that we do not wait for crises to come. Taking this kind of care allows us to manage our fears of being outdone by competitors or undermined by economic uncertainty, so that we can find an emotional equilibrium. We need what Buddhist philosophy refers to as an "open heart-open mind" attitude, from which health, well-being and even joy will come. When we achieve this, prospects and clients are drawn to our energy and so to what services or products that we sell.

I have centred some of my previous blog postings and articles around the concept of empathy. My first ebook (2015) addressed adversity, arguing that we can care for ourselves and for others by finding empathy for our own struggles (a self-directed

empathy) as well as for others’.

More recently, in videos posted on YouTube, the American psychologist Kristin Neff has drawn a distinction between the ways that we perceive struggle or suffering—by empathy, sympathy and self-compassion. How she defines those terms differs from previous writers in the field and improves upon my understanding. The concepts are applicable to entrepreneurship and to any field.

Since suffering comes from our *fears* of uncertainty and our resistance to pain along our entrepreneurial journeys, Neff’s insights can fortify us, preventing us from “psyching ourselves out” or being “psyched out” by market instability or by family or friends who fundamentally do not understand what we are doing.

Neff suggests that **empathy** is best understood as a process that determines how we perceive the information that another person is suffering. We become aware of that other person’s feelings, but do not necessarily care about them or address them—in fact, some “con artists” even exploit their empathic awareness of others to gain from others’ vulnerabilities. Neff says that the most accurate metaphor for empathy is a mirror, as empathy mirrors another’s perspective, but provides nothing more.

By contrast, with **sympathy** we become aware of what another person is feeling and care for them or would like to help, out of pity or another emotionally distant perspective that does not include compassion.

By further contrast, she says that **self-compassion** is richer than both empathy and sympathy, because it includes feeling the interconnectedness of common humanity with another and offering that other person understanding and comfort, with the emotionally near awareness that “there but for the grace of God go I.”

A useful metaphor for self-compassion, Neff says, is the image of a loving mother holding and caring for her crying child, so that when we soothe ourselves or others, we continue the care that a good parent or caregiver once gave to us. (And stressful reactions in the brain, such as the production of cortisol, drop; the healthier hormone, oxytocin, rises.)

As entrepreneurs, we may find many days, weeks or months at a time when caring for ourselves demands large amounts of self-compassion. Our prospects and even our loved ones may not offer us compassion. Further, we often (ourselves) confuse self-criticism with healthy self-motivation, when self-criticism only causes depression that undermines both our confidence and our self-motivation.

Self-criticism among high achievers (and most entrepreneurs are those) is rooted in our fears of failure because, as Neff says, we often “beat ourselves up” over the mistakes that we make. Fears of failure also cause us to revert to defensive behaviours like

procrastination, which we then blame for our problems, instead of acknowledging our underlying vulnerability.

Self-compassion, by contrast, concerns itself with suffering and aims actively to alleviate suffering. We can experience this by literally holding ourselves (i.e. wrapping our arms around ourselves, or placing our hands over our hearts) when we feel struck by life's pain and suffering. Other strategies include mindfulness and meditation.

So why do I value Neff's work and cite it here, when talking about entrepreneurial wellness? First, Neff focuses more on the lived processes of suffering and self-compassion than on academic theory. Her "theoretical" research on self-compassion is centred on how to intervene on human suffering. She identifies the contemporary "epidemic of narcissism" amongst Millennials and Gen Zers as a cultural liability for generations that need to learn what compassion for others and for themselves really involves. These individuals need to learn self-compassion before they can truly succeed as future potential entrepreneurs or otherwise contribute to the world we share.

Whether you were born an entrepreneur or daily model that role (as Godin suggests), entrepreneurship is a choice. We shed the protective cloak of economic comfort and vocational certainty (insofar as they continue to exist, in the current reality of our economy) to strive for something greater—an opportunity for self-fulfillment and realization not available to us in conventional "day jobs." Seth Godin has said in interviews that his "day job" would have been the "prison" of working as a bank teller, a threat he felt keenly when he received 900 rejection letters from publishers in one year and spent eight years of living "close to bankruptcy," before his first book succeeded. Godin lives self-compassion and through his daring and subversive writing unexpectedly offers compassion to others, as well.

If we agree that entrepreneurship forces us to live closer to the edge, it also provides a crucible in which to create the tools of self-compassion—tools that exceed the limits of empathy and sympathy. With self-compassion (as I discussed in earlier issues of this newsletter and in my blog), we can shed self-criticism and alleviate our own suffering by accepting ourselves and seeking interconnectedness with others, from whom we are not isolated but with whom we exist in community.

Close to home, the late Raj Manek Sr. may never have used the term "self-compassion." But we can be sure that he practiced it, in order to offer compassion as he did to up-and-coming entrepreneurs: his office door was always open—as was his heart and mind—to advise entrepreneurs who were struggling or suffering.

Those entrepreneurs now counsel me. And so the journey continues.

Where are you on your entrepreneurial journey? Have you applied the insights of self-

compassion as you travel? Please share through the “contact” page of my website (www.elizabethshih.com). I'd be delighted to hear from you.

[READ MORE](#)

WORD NERD'S CORNER

WORD NERD'S CORNER:



The case of "half":

The word "half" creates several grammatical challenges, as American etymologist Bryan Garner recently explained, in one of his blog postings:

(1) When used with the preposition “of”:

In its first use, the term “half” often does not need to take the preposition “of,” and should be omitted whenever possible. For example, Bryan Garner cites the following: “Nearly half of [should read ‘half’] the people in Cuba receive economic help from family and friends in the United States” (“Family Pulls Painting from Auction,” *Fresno Bee*, 28 Nov. 1997, C2).

The better form of “half” appears here: “Everyone else can still write off only *half* the cost of that cinnamon roll” (Nancy Gibbs, “A Conspiracy of Celebration,” *Time*, 11 August, 1997, 26).

Garner notes that in publications since 1900, the collocation “half of the” has outnumbered “half the” by a “2-to-1 ratio.” But the shorter form remains more idiomatic.

However, when followed by a pronoun, half requires the “of”: “Half of them are available.”

(2) Concerning number:

Although we usually say “half of it is --,” in some cases, we should be saying “half of them are.” When the noun or pronoun following “half of” is singular, then “half” should be treated as singular. But when the noun or pronoun is plural, then “half” is treated as plural.

(3) In the case of the idiom: “half a dozen” and “a half dozen”:

For this noun phrase, either “half a dozen” or “a half dozen” is correct. But two variants

should be avoided: “a half a dozen,” and “half of a dozen.”

When this phrase is used as an adjective, it becomes a “phrasal adjective” that needs hyphenation (e.g. “a half-dozen winters seemed compressed into one.”)

(4) In the phrase: “two halves”:

The phrase “two halves” is frequently redundant. For example, “Peel your own or buy peeled fresh squash cut into two halves [should read ‘halves’].” Donna Lee, “Eating Lean and Liking It,” (Providence J.-Bull., 5 March, 1997, G1).

As usual, Garner has not explained uses of “half” by halves! *Do you have language bugbears to share? Questions of word use and abuse? Please share them with me on the "contact" page of my website (www.elizabethshih.com). I'd be delighted to extend this conversation.*

STAY IN TOUCH



[Follow us on Twitter](#)



[Become a Facebook fan](#)



[Subscribe to my blog](#)



[Contact us](#)