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Ideas & Opinions - Tom Durkin: The eff it doctrine

Tom Durkin | Columnist

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Have you tried and tried and tried until you finally hit the wall and just said, “I give up”?

And then – and this is something you cannot fake – once you’ve truly given up, surrendered, admitted defeat, decided it’s just not worth it, really let it go ... either the wall fell down all by itself, or a door opened on something entirely different and better.

Didn’t happen for you? Maybe you weren’t looking.

Success doesn’t always come in the way we imagine.

Counterintuitive

It’s called the power of release. To get what you want, you must let go of wanting it.

It's like a Chinese finger puzzle. Put your index fingers in the woven bamboo tube. The more you try to pull your fingers out, the tighter the puzzle locks down on your fingers.

The only way to free your fingers from the trap is to give up on pulling. As counterintuitive as it seems, you must push your fingers together to loosen the trap.

“The more we pursue something, the more elusive it can become. Release your attachment to it, and it turns up for free at your front door,” according to Dr. Christine Bradstreet, author of “Change Your Mind, Change Your Life.”

Not always.

Sometimes, what shows up at your door is something completely unexpected and pretty damn cool.

Sometimes, that door is locked, bolted, barred and welded shut. Then as Hall & Oates advise, give it up because, “The strong give up and move on, but the weak give up and stay.”

And sometimes, it turns out you didn't know what you really wanted.

Explicit

In layman's terms, the power of release can best be expressed in words that can't be printed in a newspaper, but “eff it,” I think you'll get it.

Actor Anthony Hopkins tells of a desperately low time in his life when he asked a Jesuit priest for spiritual guidance at an AA meeting, “What is the fastest, most powerful prayer in the world?”

“Eff it,” said the priest. “It’s the prayer of release and surrender. It’s in God’s hands.”

“I felt the whole weight of the world going off my shoulders,” Hopkins said.

Neither Hopkins nor I believe in God, but the principle remains the same.

Recently, I said eff it to something I had been working on for years. Things were going in a direction that wasn’t working for me. I was making myself crazy over what other people were doing and saying.

It was an awful, emotional decision to make. I had to slam the door on an opportunity I had worked long and hard for, but I know from experience what a nervous breakdown looks like. And my blood pressure readings predicted a stroke or heart attack in my near future.

Here’s the power of eff it: My dangerously high blood pressure immediately dropped back to normal. And by closing the front door, a surprise back door opened. The opportunity is still there. It just doesn’t look the way I thought it would – and opportunity is no guarantee of success.

But for right now, it’s an example of the power of release. Sometimes, to get what you want, you just have to say, ‘Eff it!’ and walk away.

Counterpoint

Other times you must say, “Just do it,” because there are some things in life you can’t walk away from. Like being who you are.

I tried to quit writing. I really did. I said eff it to Hollywood and moved up here to build houses.

The universe was having none of it. Construction didn't work out. I thought I wanted to be a screenwriter, but it turned out what I really wanted was to be a writer. Any kind of writer, apparently.

Since Hollywood, I have written in almost every genre there is – journalism, marketing & advertising, business, social justice advocacy, politics, broadcast news, video and documentary scripts, poetry, white papers, press releases, ghostwriting, legal and legislative analysis, stage plays, social media memes, ultra-high-tech editing, and stuff I've even forgotten that I wrote.

No pornography though. Or hack writing. You can't pay me enough to sell out – and you don't have to pay me at all if I believe in it enough. Nobody pays me to write this column, for instance, but occasionally, somebody buys me a drink.

What success looks like

In 1969, I dropped acid, gave up a National Science Foundation grant and plans to get a Ph.D. in psychology from U.C. Berkeley. I decided to become a writer.

Absolutely nobody thought that was a good idea. I think some people probably still think that.

It's not like I had a choice really. Writing is not what I do. It's who I am. Been writing since I was eight years old. People ask me what I'm going to do when I retire. Silly question. As if I could afford to retire.

Even if I had it to do over again, eff it. I'd do it again.

It's never been about money or fame. It's about the fact that you read this all the way to the end.

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