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Back Flop

Fr. Randy Roche

Loyola Marymount University

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Back Flop

I once tried to do a dive off a platform into a swimming pool: jumping forward but then falling backwards into the water. When done correctly, it is called a reverse dive. I did it incorrectly, and landed on my back with a resounding splash. The only injury was to my pride. I had thought and thought about the dive, and imagined my body making the appropriate movements. But more than thought is required for making the right moves, whether diving or driving, or making any decision.

A diver, a tennis player, or a used-car buyer who does not take into account his or her lack of experience when considering a new challenge will make far more mistakes than a person who has learned to pay attention to information not only from thinking, but also from our other interior senses. Our bodies and our spirits "know" as much as our minds. Most of us would not try to race a bicycle down a steep rocky hillside without any previous experience, because intelligence has to be joined to bodily knowledge of balance, timing, and judgment together with the spiritual sense that distinguishes between exciting challenge and unsuitable jeopardy. We are whole persons, not just embodied minds.

Our bodies and our spirits have in-built sensors that warn us of dangers so that we can consider carefully what we are about to do. But we can choose to turn down the sensitivity level, the "notification volume." The first time we approach a window in a tall building, or stand on a sidewalk when a huge bus comes by, we might be quite aware of possible danger. If we become accustomed to the exact distance we need for safety, and we lower the intensity level of our bodily sensor, our internal warning will only be conspicuous to us when danger is quite proximate. Before I made my back flop, I knew that I was forcing the dive rather than waiting until I had gone through the necessary learning process of consultation with those who had succeeded in such dives, and doing the specific bodily exercises that are required as preparation. I had "turned off" my internal warning system, and literally flopped as a consequence.

In a similar way, we might have a pronounced sensitivity to not saying anything hurtful about another person. But we have control over the level at which our internal alarm will warn us of wrong-doing. We can turn our awareness down so low that it becomes possible to tear down the reputation of others with whom we might have a difference of belief or opinion with hardly any perception of warning in our hearts. We can "justify" destructive behavior by using reasoning that does not take into account the movements of our hearts where our warning system operates. Would we disconnect the alarms of a bank where we have stored our most important documents?

Turning off our internal God-given alarm-system is like choosing to no longer protect the most valuable thing we have, our integrity.

We do not want to be governed by fear, so that we never take risks in an attempt to avoid all mistakes. But we have within us an excellent set of sensors that, if we take them into consideration as we make decisions, we will make fewer of the kind of mistakes that can cause harm to others or to ourselves. When we attend not only to our thoughts, but to the difference between peace and disquiet, between better and less good, we often make decisions that satisfy us at a deeper level than when we only think our way to a decision.

Back flops are neither a necessary nor a helpful way to learn anything.