



# Purposeful Wanderings

A Monthly Newsletter for Clients and Friends of **The Road Not Taken**

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## Self-Reflection: A How-to Guide for “Tough Guys”

*“The veil that clouds your eyes will be lifted by the hands that wove it.”  
– Kahlil Gibran in The Prophet*

At the heart of my coaching and writing is a simple premise: You create a new tomorrow by changing the **thinking** that created today. To do that, you need to *get to know* what today’s thinking **is**! And to do *that*, you need a way to *observe* your thinking ... which many see as being difficult, awkward, counterintuitive, nonsensical, even dumb.

This past month, I had a rather tough conversation with a client who fought the idea of quiet reflection needed to get to know his thinking. Perhaps inadvertently, he’d hit upon the most common obstacle to this discovery – how the *unconscious* mind “told” him to avoid new learning. Although the message was just part of the unconscious’s role of keeping him safe, evolution didn’t count on thoughts as being perceived as threats. (To the unconscious, well-worn falsehoods are ‘safer’ than complex or incomplete truths.) This is why life doesn’t change all that much for so many; they stop right here ... unconsciously, of course. But despite his fight, he wanted more.

So, *at his request*, I created a simple how-to guide to quiet reflection, aimed to help resistant “tough guys” forge a path. I’ve edited the version I sent him (for language), but I don’t think it reduces the desired impact. I “get” that he’s not alone. And I “get” that only a small fraction of people who entertain big changes in their lives actually **do** the suggested exercises. But the reason the exercises are there is simple: *they work!*

### ***A Guide to Getting to Know Your Thinking***

Pick a time each day when you can be [relatively] free from external distraction. Set a timer for 20 minutes, so you won’t be “thinking” about time.

**Instructions:** ***Show up ... shut up ... sit still ... listen.*** That’s it ... no more, no less.

... What follows is a guide to what you’re likely to experience ... a bit of perspective to help light your path:

It won’t end up being quiet. Your head will be filled with thoughts. You will “hear” them ... as “voices in your head.” The first, perhaps: “I don’t want to do this; it’s dumb.” That’s a thought ... just the first one. Shut up. Keep listening.

They’re your (unconscious) thoughts. They’ve become so habituated that you don’t even notice. Except that you *unconsciously* believe them, so you just “do as they say” (mess with stupid people, get excited about trash on TV, get angry with people who don’t know any better, pretend you know everything, even censor quiet reflection).

Your job here is to listen ***FOR*** them, not listen ***TO*** them. They speak, you listen. No judgment. No response. If you notice you’re angry, that’s just a *thought*, too ... a thought that you’re angry; it’s *not* a call to arms. Let thoughts pass, like clouds in a summer sky. Then notice the *next* thought (or cloud). Each step, you’re learning something.

Sometimes this works. You hear a thought, you get to know it, and it’s a good “show.” Other times, you get *lost* in a single thought instead, and just follow it until you realize you aren’t *watching* your thoughts at all anymore; you’re just being pissed off at whoever those thoughts told you that you needed to choke.

Repeat each day ... until the timer goes off. Resist judging, changing, fixing, comparing. Just notice; then let it go.

If you feel so moved, write down what you notice about your thoughts. Over a period time, you might *label* some of the recurring ones ... like the judge thought (you @#&\* do this wrong every time), the saboteur thought (who the @#&\* do you think you are to be successful), the child thought (I don’t wanna @#&\* do it, get somebody else to do it), the victim thought (why does this @#&\* keep happening to me?), the possibility thought (hey, I can do any @#&\* thing I want to do, and it’s completely up to me, and I’m good).

They're all just thoughts. But now you **recognize** them – *consciously*, perhaps for the first time. Conscious awareness changes everything – even though you “thought” you always were consciously aware. So, just as you learn to recognize the voice of a loved one in a crowded, noisy room (with practice, listening), you learn to distinguish voices of your inner truth from voices of your habituated stories. That allows you to choose – to no longer give your power to thoughts that hold you back in life. You can start choosing to hear your possibility thoughts instead.

You might listen to that possibility thought a bit, the one that says **you** have the power to make **your** life how **you** want it to be. That thought. That's the thought of the real you, and it's underneath all the nonsense thoughts that occupy your mind all the time. One day you decide to *follow* the thought of the real you. By the way, the other thoughts will always be there, yammering; but by coming to *recognize* them, you can choose the ones you *ignore*.

As you continue to do this, (every @#&\* day, man), you realize you have **become** the power within you. At that point, nobody can ever mess with you again, ever. You are free, you trust yourself, and you hold all the power. The funny thing is how your power came from your own **awareness**, not from control, force, anger, or excitement.

By now, your awareness recognizes your inner truth – like why you're here, your greatest potential, what brings you joy, where you find meaning, what really matters to you, and *why* it matters. As you listen, you experience your life becoming your own. You're living authentically; you trust yourself; the world's nonsense blows by like a soft breeze; you no longer unconsciously *absorb* their nonsense just because they're spouting it. They still spout it, but because you *recognize* it, you realize you don't have to bite every @#&\* air molecule of their nonsense; you *ignore* it instead. Because you're no longer one of them. Because you decided to be **you** instead.

So ... one day, you just wake up realizing that you're happy, for no [apparent] @#&\* reason. And you may even draw no connection whatsoever between how great you feel and the fact that you've been doing this practice ... or even that it was Brad who “made you @#&\* do it.” So what? You're happy, and you're being you.

Life is good. So ... whoever you are, be a good one. Game on. And, oh yes, keep noticing.

**Life lessons from nature:** Nature “listens” too. In fact, nature never *stops* listening. One by-product of nature's creative process is “feedback” – a constant flow of information (somewhat like our incessant flow of unconscious thoughts, except more constructive) that tells the process how it's doing ... so it can make continual mid-course corrections – based on *real-time information from within the process*. In that sense, it's somewhat like our growing awareness – which allows us to make new choices based on newly recognized information. The combination of “creative process as purpose” and the availability of feedback help create nature's majesty as well as her mystery.

### **Openings to New Possibility -- *The Shop at The Road Not Taken*:**

- *The Road Not Taken Community*, a no-cost subscription that offers you connection, interaction, challenge, and learning. Articles, newsletters, blogs. I welcome dialogue; it's an example of how we may all learn together.
- My books: available [here](#).
  - **“A Field Guide to Life: Navigating the Challenges of Our Lives and Times.”** Explore common struggles that hold you back from a life you love. When you discover their true causes, you can create true solutions.
  - **“Living Authentically ... in a World That Would Rather You Didn't.”** Its *premise* is simple: in the midst of a world that has lost its way, you need never lose your own. Get to know, then honor, your unique truth.
  - **Purposeful Wanderings**, 19 years of *The Road Not Taken* newsletters available [here](#) as a single pdf file.
- **Personalized Life Coaching:** If you're one of the few with the courage to leave conventional thinking behind so you can live instead with authenticity and freedom, I'll help you gain clarity and perspective – about yourself, others, life, work and the world – that allow you to do just that, every day. Trade the *way it is* for the *way it could be*. [Contact me](#) for a conversation that *will* change your perspective and may just change your life.

**Book of the month: *The Big Leap*, by Gay Hendricks.** And his newer work, ***The Joy of Genius***. Both, separately or together, great exposés of how we sabotage ourselves, even, (or especially), when things are going well, because we become unconsciously trapped by old stories, lessons and assumptions. By believing them, we limit possibility in life. But through a regular practice of self-reflection (as I would say), you open to your own genius, and evolve into living from your own innate potential instead of the old stories. And if you're on Cape Cod, you'll find this book at the Market Street Bookshop in Mashpee Commons; 508-539-6985.