

InnerRESOURCES Counseling and Publications

A Promise To Point You In The Right Direction¹

(or To Not Intentionally Point You In The Wrong Direction)

Jeff Landau, Ph.D.

. . . the great writers, systems and religions simply point the way, show a direction, provide some tools, which may not, in fact, apply to a particular individual's struggle. That person may have to tangle with the system and in the end create their own path.

Joseph Campbell discussing Myth with Bill Moyers, PBS

Shanghai Noon

In Shanghai Noon, Jackie Chan, plays a loyal Imperial Guard to the Emperor of China (Chon Wang- John Wayne). He comes to 19th century America intent on saving Princess Pei Pei (Lucy Liu), who has been kidnapped from China's "Forbidden City". Innocent Jackie Chan finds himself in Nevada, mixed up in a train robbery with Roy O'Bannon (Owen Wilson), and wandering the Nevada desert, lost and needing directions to Carson City.

Jackie accidentally wanders into Owen buried up to his neck, buzzards and all, begging for help. It is in this context that Jackie asks for directions to Carson City, so that he can complete his mission of saving the Princes.

“Which way to Carson City?” says, Jackie.
Get me out of here first, cries Owen.
Looking over the vast desert expanse, Jackie Chan repeats, “Tell me how to get to Carson City.”
“Ok. You see that mountain range over there.”
“Yes.”
“Carson City is on the other side.”
“There. Now I told you so help me get out of here.”
Jackie then puts two chopsticks in Owen’s mouth, tells him to dig him self out and walks off.

It will be awhile, most of the movie, and many adventures later, including near death experiences and jail time, before Jackie discovers how far off course he is. And what it will now take to get to and save his Princess in Carson City. Owen had, of course, *intentionally pointed Jackie in the wrong direction*. Even though he was up to his neck in it.

Clinical Examples

Who's Directions Should I Follow? Should I Follow Your Directions?

Are You Lying?

Do You Know What You Are Talking About?

Therapy - Some Clinical Examples

Driving Directions

Jane -Makes Up Directions

When driving on the highway, her head would perk up, her nose would aim forward, as though looking for a scent, then there would be a pause and she would suddenly say "there" and point. And off they would go.

It wasn't long before they discovered that they were driving in the *wrong* direction and that they were unable to turn around for another 35 miles.

And that wasn't the only time that she went through this "alertness ritual" and pointed in the wrong direction, apparently unknowingly, no matter what the context.

This was actually part of a larger pattern. She had the ability to just 'make it up' on the spot.

It took her partner a while to catch on to this as a *cultural style* before he simply ignored incoming information or took responsibility for knowing where they were going or for asking additional questions.

"Homework" Directions

Couples, Why Should We Follow What You Say?

Couples in therapy often have relentlessly repetitive near violent, emotionally exhausting fights about the same topics. Yet they resist the following instruction, and it is a significant diagnostic when they do.

"I'd like to suggest that you consider changing your out of therapy conversation. Only talk about things that are positive and give you pleasure. And leave all conflict topics, 'hot' topics, for discussion here."

Subsequent meetings usually show that the suggestion is not followed, since the couple soon presents a hot topic fight they just had.

This fact allows the question,
Why didn't you "hold it" till you got here?
"Because we need to solve our problems on our own."
Or,
Who are you that we should follow your instruction, and only talk about our problems in your presence?
Or
This is our life.
Or,
The couple appears to repeatedly forget that the instruction was ever given.

Alcoholism

In another example, Larry refused to ever discuss major decisions with me before he made them. Especially with respect to his most debilitating problem, which was drinking.

"Why didn't you call me before you had the drink, like we talked about?"

I didn't think of it and it just happened.

Another was "would I wait for him", while he left therapy for a few weeks to try out a therapist he met in "the program", before he *possibly* returned to me.

"Why don't you come in and discuss your reasons before you make up your mind?"

"Because I don't have the money for both sessions and I've already made an appointment. *And, this is my life and I could have not showed up instead of calling and letting you know.*"

Who Follows Directions Anyway?²

Where Is This Address, Please?

It was a cold cloudy day. The wind was picking up. Cold drops of rain were beginning to fall. A delivery guy walking his bike and pushing against the wind approached me. He had a small piece of paper in his hand. He showed it to me and asked where the address was.

I pointed to the middle of the block and said, "Right there".

He looked, got on his bike and went in the opposite direction.

¹This article, exercises and questions were taken from portions of an unpublished manuscript, ©Jeff Landau, 2008, InnerRESOURCES 8 Ideas.

² From Poems From InnerRESOURCES 8 Ideas.

Exercises and Questions

Have you ever been given bad advice?

- Do you believe you were intentionally led in the wrong direction?
- Or that the person advising you meant well but just didn't know what they were talking about?

Have you ever intentionally pointed someone in the wrong direction?

- Do you know why you did so?

Would you consider yourself an agreeable and cooperative person?

- Or would you see yourself as being oppositional enjoying an argument and taking the opposite direction to what you've been advised?

Do you take your own advice? Have you ever pointed yourself in the wrong direction?

- Or do you sometimes think you are "getting in your own way", opposing yourself.
- Think about and write down one of the ways you've pointed yourself in the wrong direction against your own good advice.
- When did you notice that you were going in the wrong direction?
- How did you or how do you plan on getting back on track?

Do you sometimes let others "in on" your decision making?

- And perhaps, in some situations sit back and "let them drive your life", for awhile,
- Or do you make all of your decisions all on your own, perhaps spontaneously and at the moment?

Jeff Landau, Ph.D.
Contact
InnerRESOURCES Counseling and Publications
jefflandau@innerresources.org
212-288-3775

8 Ideas

