

Beware of Philosophical Fomo

Are you really going to just stand there and take that?

Have you ever found yourself in an unproductive discussion that you really wanted to escape, but you were afraid it would be close-minded of you to leave? Have you ever forced yourself to explain your behavior or beliefs to someone when you really felt like it was none of their business because you were afraid it would have been intellectually dishonest to ignore them? If you answered “yes” to either of those questions, then you may have been a victim of “philosophical fomo.”

I define “Philosophical Fomo” as a condition in which a person finds it difficult to terminate an unproductive discussion because of a fear of missing out on the mere possibility that something good will come out of it if they hang in there for more time.

Beware this sinister enemy. It’s the cause of much unnecessary misery in the world.

Deep down inside, many people have bought into the notion that they are being dishonest or dogmatic if they don’t entertain every single contrary opinion regardless of context.

Contrary to popular belief, critical thinking isn’t about placing equal value on all opportunities to engage in debate. Yes, some conversations truly are a waste of time. And while it’s possible that you’ll sometimes make the mistake of giving up on a conversation too soon, it’s also possible that you’ll make the mistake of staying in a conversation for too long. There’s going to be a risk involved either way. So instead of basing your choice on the fear of missing out, base your choice on a passion for maximizing opportunity.

Use the same logic you’re already using for everything else

When you go out for lunch at a restaurant, you use standards to determine what you order. If you’re vegetarian, you cross meat off your list. If you’re allergic to garlic, you cross garlic off your list. If you hate BBQ, you cross BBQ off your list. If you need to keep your carbs low, you cross the sodas and starches from your list. You don’t just walk into a restaurant and say “give me whatever you got because something good might come out of it.” Instead, you order with a purpose in mind.

In this very scenario, it’s quite possible that something cool and life-changing could happen if you abandoned your usual standards. However, you already know that’s not a good enough reason to abandon your standards. Even though you know anything is possible, you also understand that everything isn’t purposeful.

Positive outcomes can come from any direction, but that doesn’t mean you should treat all

directions as if they're equally likely to produce positive outcomes. This is the exact kind of logic that you use to buy groceries, drive to work, and a thousand other things. You don't start with the mere possibility of something good happening. You start with a set of parameters determined by your goals, needs, and values. And then you proceed to evaluate the possibilities based on that criteria. Now take that same logic and apply it to conversations.

Most people can easily grasp the fact that some ideas are better than others, but they have a difficult time believing that some conversations are better than others. I've seen people completely victimize themselves by voluntarily remaining in the presence of someone who was insulting them or irritating them solely because they believed it was "only fair" to hear the other party out. That kind of assumption is a fatal tool in the hands of a manipulator who enjoys pushing buttons and pulling triggers.

If I were the kind of person who got my thrills by roping people into toxic or time-wasting discussions, then my ideal conversational partner would be the kind of person who believes things like "Well, everybody deserves to be fully heard."

If you're open to creating more freedom in your life, please consider the following proposal: **everyone does not deserve your time, energy, and attention.**

Think about how absurd this kind of thinking sounds when you apply it to almost anything else. Does everyone deserve a little money from you? Does everyone deserve a little physical affection from you? Does everyone deserve an opportunity to car pool with you? Does everyone deserve a little portion of room and board from your place of living? Of course not. When it comes to any other kind of scenario, we would be very judicious about who we shared our resources with. Why treat conversations any different?

Don't run from the truth, but make sure you look for evidence before you assume someone is leading you to truth

In case you're tempted to believe I'm advocating a position that says you should always avoid conversations that aren't pleasant, then let me be clear: *If a conversation is truly challenging you to be more truthful, then you owe it to yourself to stick with it and learn from the challenge. Being irritated with people who challenge you isn't an excuse for being irrational.*

However, if you're going to stick with a challenging conversation, at least look around for some evidence that the conversation is actually constructive. Sticking with a challenge isn't necessarily the same thing as sticking with the truth. If someone were to repeatedly stomp on my toe because they believed it was good for me, that would be very challenging for me to deal with. But that doesn't mean I'm going to stand there and put up with it unless I get some darn good evidence that such a challenge is worth my time. It's one thing to be weak

and timid in the face of a healthy confrontation. It's another thing to get wrapped up in your ego's need to prove how smart and tough you are.

If you truly care about being rational, then you won't turn your brain off when it's time to evaluate the quality of conversations you find yourself in. If you truly care about being open-minded, then you'll be open-minded to the idea that some conversations are holding you back from more important things. If you feel the need to stay involved in an unpleasant conversation because you have reason to believe that a greater good is at stake, then keep at it. But if you can see that a conversation is going nowhere, don't be held hostage by irrational definitions of being open-minded

One of the biggest keys to personal freedom is learning how to guard your heart and mind from energy vampires. Many people simply don't give themselves permission to establish healthy boundaries. Don't be one of those people. Maybe it's true that everyone deserves their day in court, but it's also true that you're not required to be a juror for every single case.