

Don't Be A Self-Absorbed Superstar

Written by T.K. Coleman.

The more you learn, grow, and achieve, the harder it can become for you to be easily impressed. After you've been repeatedly exposed to radical possibilities and mind-bending concepts, you stop saying "wow, that's amazing" every time you're introduced to a successful person, insightful book, or cool new project. Why? Because you've "been there, done that."

The danger of the "been there, done that" mindset, however, is that you risk slipping into a state where you lose the ability to be provoked, challenged, or fired up by anything other than the sound of your own success story.

In order to be our best selves, we need to be challenged by outsiders. By "outsiders", I mean people who are capable of taking us outside of our usual habits of thought.

Outsiders can be authors who write about topics we don't normally contemplate, artists whose works supply us with new and strange metaphors, competitors who are doing a better job than us at one or two things, and so on.

Outsiders are good for us because they keep us from sinking into a form of existential solipsism where we think, speak, and act as if our dreams, goals, insights, and achievements are the only ones that exist. Without outsiders, we become stale and self-intoxicated shadows of our much more superior selves.

I once heard Laurence Fishburne give an interview where he was asked about the key to staying fresh as an actor. His advice was "never lose your ability to be inspired by other people's work."

I write a lot about the importance of us taking ourselves seriously as creative forces. I talk a lot about the value of celebrating your own beauty and refusing to be starstruck by the brilliance of others. I maintain my view on the significance of those two things. To them I add, however, the following two insights:

- 1) Fight for your ability to stay aware of what's going on in the world of innovation ideas. Just as your body is incapable of nourishing itself without ingesting foods that are supplied by the outside world, your creative spirit can't nourish itself without periodically engaging ideas that are supplied by other creators.

- 2) You cannot afford to feel threatened by the existence of people who have something to teach you. You cannot afford to build your reputation around the idea that no one ever

makes you laugh, think, or work harder other than the person on the other side of the mirror. Never feel ashamed of having heroes or positive influences who helped shape your path. Never pretend that your philosophies and practices are these completely original creations that spontaneously emerged within the vacuum of your individual soul.

“Never lose your ability to be inspired by other people’s work.” The inspiring nature of your own work depends on it.