

You Don't Have to Talk About Everything

TK Coleman calls it, "The lost art of processing." I don't know if it's been lost, or if it's always been rare and the internet makes its absence more apparent. Whatever the case, keeping your shit to yourself until you've worked through it is an unsung skill.

Transparency, failure-porn, mentors, community, and other ways to let it all hang out are uncritically praised. An open culture is vastly superior to a closed one, and the trend favoring openness is a good thing society-wide. But that doesn't mean it's a universal virtue on the individual level.

In fact, giving it five minutes, not giving up your power for attention, and learning to process your experiences and emotions in solitude may be a more important individual skill. Real openness is better after you've done some inner work to sort through the mess.

You don't always need immediate and public likes and support for every struggle.

You don't always need a community with whom to share your innermost feelings.

You don't always need a mentor or coach or guide.

All of the above are valuable, but their value is severely diminished unless and until you do the hard, quiet, thankless, individual work between you and your feelings.

It's easy to see how valuable personal processing is when you're required to do some before you take your struggles to the world. At Praxis, our advisors do regular office hours, workshops, and sessions with participants on anything from improving websites, projects, pitches, or interviews to personal challenges and struggles of motivation. When we added, "Send an email detailing the 1-3 specific things you want to cover" as a requirement for booking office hours, their value skyrocketed. Just a little bit of pre-work before seeking external assistance goes a long way.

The share-it-with-someone knee-jerk reaction to hardship is often counter-productive. It acts as a release valve, letting us blow off just enough steam and get just enough encouragement to forget the struggle and move on. Meanwhile, the underlying system failure remains.

If your tendency is to bottle everything up inside and struggle with shame, this post isn't for you. Find someone you trust and get it out. But if you find yourself immediately looking for a place to share every trial and triumph, learn to process first. It pays dividends. It's not a bad thing to have layers to yourself deeper than what can be found on the internet.