GETTING TO KNOW YOURSELF
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It seems these days that so many of us are fighting our own lifestyles...you know, having enough time to do what we want, feeling good about what we do, and enjoying our friendships. Added to that is feeling like we are doing well in school. Currently, students feel more stress, more anxiety, more depression, and worry more (mostly about the future) than previous generations.

It’s true, there are simply more things to stress out about, more pressure, more emotional instability. This is a very complicated, and sometimes unforgiving, world. No one wants to become a victim of their own lifestyle, but lots of people feel that changing their circumstances is too difficult, or they end up blaming others for their own problems. All change starts with individual change, so whatever problems you are facing...you are the solution. It sounds so easy. It’s not. Change takes time and attention and discipline... that is, even if you are highly interested in changing some of the circumstances under which you live day-to-day. Denial is an issue here. Many of us would like to claim 1) “I am not at fault for my own problems” (right, it’s always someone else’s fault), 2) “There’s nothing I can do to change” (sure, give up before even trying), 3) “I don’t have any problems” (either you are divine or delusional), or 4) “It’s too hard to change” (well, then enjoy being a victim). Whatever the case, so often we end up victims, and perhaps it’s because we don’t know ourselves well enough to feel like we can take control of our lives, or at least begin to do so. If you are not in control of your life, someone else is.

So, if you think all this is just silly, you can stop reading. You are not ready. Really. Everyone can improve his or her life, even if you don’t have some annoying or debilitating problems.

If you are still reading, here’s what we suggest. First, you are not special—everyone needs to continue growing (and everyone has problems and insecurities...no exceptions). Second, realize that change is not easy (despite what they tell you on television or in magazines), and it takes time, attention, and organization. Third, you are capable of making changes (everyone is). Last, learn to take your time.

Remember, all change starts with individual change, and the best way to start changing is to get to know the territory—yourself. You will get nowhere if you do not start understanding who you are, why you do the things you do, and how you can change. Seriously, stop looking for external factors to change around you; instead, start changing internally. And this is a problem because most everyone is so occupied (mostly by technology), they have not even given themselves the time to really get to know who they are, what they think, and how they can have some control over their lives.
So, it seems reasonable to talk about time first. Do you control time, or does it control you? Are you always rushing around? Often late? Are you always thinking you don’t have enough time to do the things you want to do? Always apologizing to friends for not showing up on time?

Maybe controlling your relationship with time would allow you to get to know yourself better. Maybe not always being distracted by technology (and the “obligations” to each other technology) would offer some time to think about yourself…make some good decisions about life and how you organize your daily activities.

Being reflective is not a particularly popular endeavor these days. Our lives are characterized by constant activity, and “being busy all the time” may make us think we are productive and important. And many us have been taught that if we are not busy all the time, we are wasting our days…and maybe our lives. Being busy all the time does not mean much…only that you are not controlling your time. While there are busy times in all our lives, most of us on campus could easily control time enough to have some self-directed time, time we can use to just be by ourselves, think about all the events and people in our lives, or just not think about much at all. We all need a rest from 21st Century life.

So, if you are one of those who seems to get carried away by her or his daily lifestyle, obligations, and activities, it might be good to work on a plan the includes some personal time (and this time might best be unplugged, if you really want the time to be useful). We understand that it is difficult for some of us to be alone, so maybe it’s best for those folks to make a plan to spend just a few minutes alone each day…and then build up to a longer time as it becomes more natural. (If you are not used to spending time by yourself, you don’t know yourself very well.) You don’t have to create a list of things you want to think about, but it’s not a bad idea. What’s bothering you these days? School, future, friendships, parents, romance…. So, pick something to think about, and don’t get discouraged if your thoughts are negative at first (this happens sometimes). Once you get a little more used to time on your own, this reflective time will become wildly productive, so much so that you may well look forward to it. Spending some time alone each day, or at least a few times a week, keeps us balanced and steady, helps us make good decisions, and prevents us from being a victim of time or our lifestyles. Don’t be discouraged if this time does not go just as you plan. Be patient with yourself. Getting to know yourself and how to be alone, maybe for the first time, might take a little more time than you expected.
Resources

How to be Alone (5 minutes)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k7X7sZzSXYs

How to be by Yourself (4 minutes)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7t8rRzbFXRc
(Sort of goofy guide to being yourself)

How to be Yourself (3 minutes)
http://www.karmatube.org/videos.php?id=3342
(A more spiritual approach to the topic…really cool)

How to be Yourself (5 minutes)
http://igniteshow.com/videos/how-be-yourself
(Intellectual approach to authenticity, sincerity, social network complications)

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Written by Devon Sweeney and Eric Pappas
Contact: stemlibrary@jmu.edu

Artwork and Design by Kat McDearis