

What Mice Know That We Don't

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Just as the physical body as an organism will strive toward health and wholeness, so too the subconscious will strive toward health and wholeness. Being in what appears to be the exact same situation over and over again in our life, whether it is with a romantic partner, a boss, a job, our friends, our family, or in any other area of life may feel like some kind of cruel joke.

But in reality, it is your subconscious' way of trying to heal. Almost like a mouse in a maze, our subconscious recreates the same situations for us over and over again. And like the mouse, when we make the “wrong” choice (the choice that does not offer the way out), we usually have to go back to the beginning and start over again, looking for a new path to get out. Unfortunately, *unlike* the mouse, who will seek new ways of dealing with the maze until it finds the “correct” path through, humans tend to take the exact same route, over and over again. In fact, it almost seems that the more times we get stuck, the more determinedly we repeat that route. It's as if we have decided that if we just do this route ENOUGH times, it will eventually lead us out of the maze.

There is a saying that repeating the same behavior and expecting a different outcome, is the definition of insanity.

And yet that is what most of us do.

Why? Why does it so often seem (at least from the outside) that we don't have the sense God gave a mouse?

Well, there are a lot of reasons for that.

First, and often most importantly, we have been trained that mistakes are BAD. We have decided that to make a mistake is a terrible thing, and often one that we shouldn't admit to, even if we ourselves know we made one. So in order to not have made a mistake, we keep repeating the patterns. As if to say, "See? This really DOES work. It is the RIGHT thing to have done. I just need to do it some more, and you'll see that I've really been right all along."

Nature, however, makes no such value judgements. The mouse goes down the first run, and hits a dead end. Instead of judging that as "good" or "bad," the mouse simply records that as INFORMATION.

And this is a hugely important thing. There is an enormous difference between having an experience and judging it as being "good" or "bad" and then attaching a lot of emotions to that judgement; versus simply having an experience, and noting it as information.

And this is the sense that a mouse has over most of us humans.

So as you take a look at your own life, and notice the things that seem to be patterns, notice if you can see the judgements you placed on you being "right" and it was really the other person, event, or situation that was "wrong." That kind of thinking allows you to be "right." And it also keeps you stuck repeating the same pattern over and over again.

Allowing yourself to see your experiences as just that, experiences, as information, and not as proof of right or wrong, or even evidence of what kind of person you are suddenly frees you from the "trap" of repeating the same pattern in the maze over and over again. And holding these experiences as information, you can now make *choices*, instead of simply repeating compulsive *patterns*, and with new choices you can get new information. Now, again, like the mouse in the maze, you may not get out of the maze of your repeated life situations on the very next try. But on that next try, you might get out. Or, you will get more information, from which you can make a new choice, and perhaps find the new way out the next time. And so on, until you have learned what you need to know to get out of the pattern, and never be stuck (at least in that particular maze) again.

Because notice here, that whether you repeat the same way of handling a situation over and over again, and fail each time, or whether you try new ways of handling the situation each time, and fail for a while, there is going to be some experience of "mistakes." But what we can see watching the mouse in the maze, and in looking at our own life, is that if it hasn't worked, it isn't going to work now. But if you keep trying new things, eventually, you WILL get out. Which is not the case with doing the same thing over and over. It does not matter how many times the mouse takes the same route through the maze. If that route ends in a dead end, that mouse is never going to get out of the maze taking that route.

So what are other reasons that we keep taking the same route through the maze over and over again?

Well, another one is that we do not know what another option would look like. We may have grown up in a family or situation that taught us, figuratively speaking, how to walk in a straight line. We got lots of training in straight line walking, and we are perhaps the very best straight line walkers that we have ever met. So we get into the maze, into the repeating patterns in our lives, and we walk that straight line. And BAM. We hit the wall at the first turn. Because we don't know about turning, we only know about straight lines. Now, this doesn't mean there is anything wrong with walking straight lines. It just means that that is one skill, one "tool" if you will, for dealing with life.

Now if you ask a carpenter if she or he would be happy or able to accomplish everything they wanted to build in their life with just one tool in their tool box, you would probably get a resounding "NO!" In fact, just walking through a hardware store can boggle and excite the fantasy of any would-be builder with all of the possibilities presented by all of the tools available in the store to buy. Often, tools we have never even dreamed of can inspire us to whole new levels of competence or creativity in the work we do.

And yet, when it comes to the "tools" of dealing with life, it seems to be a dominant belief in our society that we all get all the tools we need from our families. And this is not to put down the tools that we do get from our families. They often teach us in exactly precise detail how to deal with what comes up *in our family*. But what happens then is that we go out into the world, and meet someone from a different family, who has different tools to deal with *their own* family. And the two of us stand there blinking at each other, absolutely convinced that if we just keep using our tool, eventually it will work to make the other person do what we want them to do. And they are doing exactly the same thing to us with their tool.

So I'm getting kind of hypothetical here. Let me get more concrete for a minute. Let's say the tool that I got from my family (which happens to be the case) is verbosity: Being highly verbal. I learned that within my family I could best get my needs met, get the things I wanted, by being verbal. I can talk just about anyone under the table. So that's my tool. I go out into the world and meet someone that I want to get close to, and I use my tool to get them to meet my needs. I talk.

But as is often the case, this other person has grown up with the tool of self-containment. He has learned that he best got his needs met, and got the things he wanted, if he kept his own counsel, was self-sufficient, and didn't talk a lot. And now he's standing in front of a woman who is bombarding him with words. This is very weird to him, since he knows talking didn't work in his family, so he immediately sees my "tool" my talking, as an ineffective tool. So he demonstrates his tool for me. He is quiet. He gets more reserved, more withdrawn, showing me the tool that "really" works well, as he's experienced it.

Well, I see him standing there all silent and withdrawn, and I get that his tool (because I assume talking is the only really useful tool) doesn't work. So I use my tool MORE on him. I talk more. And more. And he withdraws more and more.

Now, I'm sure none of you have ever been in this situation. But I imagine you can see how this went for me. Eventually, he and I are completely polarized, and think the other person is a nut, with no tools to make a relationship work.

Let's go back to thinking about that mouse in the maze. Or that person with the straight line walking skill, that hits her first turn in the maze. We can see that, figuratively speaking, she needs a new skill to continue progressing.

When we apply that to the verbal and quiet people in the horn lock, it can be seen that they, too, need a new skill. And what that usually looks like is disengaging from the battle, and recognizing your "opponent" as having some skills that you do not have. Even if you don't "value" them, because you have other skills, the first step is to value what they DO have. And then you can choose to *add* that tool to your tool belt. So if I have someone in my life who is very quiet and self contained, I can learn how that tool could work in my life to help me. And likewise, this person could learn how talking could work in their life, for them. Then, when we start to lock horns again on some issue, I can recognize the other person's "tool", or point of view, and use it when it serves me. So like the straight walker in the maze, I can *turn* on occasion, when the situation demands it.

I would like to suggest that everyone here go to your closest hardware store and stand in the tool aisle. Check out the tools. Ask yourself some questions. Questions like "what if all my family gave me was a great hammer. Would that mean I couldn't use a wrench?" or "If all these tools were free, would I only want one of them?" and very importantly "If I could have all these tools, and didn't know how to use them, would it be admitting failure, would it make me wrong, to find someone who knew how to use some of the tools I didn't, and get them to teach me about them?"

And this last question is very important, because this is what counseling and therapy are, in their purest forms. We don't hesitate to read a manual when we get a new appliance, or go to school to learn to type. But somehow we have created it in our culture that to go to someone outside of our family to get a new tool, or to learn to use one we aren't very good with, is some kind of weakness.

But at it's basis, what we're really talking about is gathering information. The mouse in the maze is gathering information. And the mouse will eventually get through the maze, and never be trapped in it again.

So the next time you find yourself in the same situation again, and again, and again. Chances are, you're being like the person with the straight walking skill. You've hit a turn in the road, and it's time to gather some new information.

Or, not. The only real question is: do you want to hit the wall some more times, or would you like to learn a way out now?