

March 2008

If It's Not a Clear Yes, It's a No Learning to Trust Your Gut

Do you ever feel you don't have the passion to be your best at work, the time or willpower to take care of your health, or enough down time to relax and get away from it all?

If so, you're not alone. For many people, by the time they do all the things they have to do, should do, and want to do at work and at home, their schedules are overloaded and they've over committed themselves. This leaves them feeling overwhelmed, drained, or resentful, negatively impacting their health, well-being, and productivity.

However, it's not necessarily the amount of work or number of things on your schedule that's the issue. Think about a time in your life when there was something you really wanted and you went after it-- perhaps competing in something, applying for your ideal job, or going back to college to study a field you love. How did it feel to have a clear sense of "That's what I want"? Do you remember how excited you were to do what it took to achieve it even if you didn't know how or it seemed impossible (or crazy)?

One example in my life is when I decided to move to Colorado. I had taken several trips here for work and pleasure, and then on my fourth visit I felt it inside. I just knew this is where I wanted to live, although I didn't know how I was going to do it or what I would do when I got here.

When you're passionate and committed to a goal, purpose, or dream, you get a clear "yes" internally. You may describe it as a gut feeling or a sense of knowing. It's amazing how much energy, enthusiasm, and creativity you have to fulfill it (and sometimes how little sleep you need). You have clarity about what to do and when to do it because you prioritize the activities that support you and put other things aside.

But, if you're using your time, energy, and money on things that aren't a clear yes, you fill up your day and over commit these resources, which means you don't have the time and energy available for those activities and projects that *would* be a clear yes.

What gets in the way?

If you're not getting clear answers, it could involve one or more factors, such as:

- You may not be tuned in to your body. With today's fast-paced, gotta-get-it-done pressure, it's easy to ignore your body's physical needs for movement, rest, nourishment, sunshine, and fresh air. As a result, you experience more tension, discomfort, and even pain that prevents you from noticing more subtle internal clues.
- You may mentally check out and do things on autopilot, not even considering other options or choices to achieve the results you want. Then you find yourself swamped or in a rut wondering how you got into this mess.
- You could be overriding or ignoring your gut because of underlying thoughts or beliefs such as "I need to do this," "I should do this," "It's the right (or good) thing to do," "I don't have a choice," or "I'll disappoint this person." Without questioning whether these statements are really true, they interfere with your decisions and actions.
- You're out of practice. As a culture, we've relied so much on thinking, logic, and analysis (important skills, to be sure) that we forget to check in with our internal guidance and trust the response.

Whatever the reasons, the results are it's harder to make clear decisions quickly, you over commit, you're not true to yourself, or your health, performance, and fulfillment suffer. If you're like me, that's not how you want to live!

The good news? You can develop your ability to trust your gut.

You can start by practicing on small decisions with low risk (i.e. where's there not a big difference in the outcome) that just affect you. Instead of automatically or unconsciously saying yes, stop and ask yourself this question before you decide to do something:

"Do I get a clear yes to do this?"

Pause and tune into clues from your whole body, not just your head. Then, tell yourself,

"If it's not a clear yes, it's a no (at least for right now)."

Here are some examples to get you started. Do you get a clear yes to:

- * call this person?
- * volunteer for this activity?
- * go to this class?
- * read this book?
- * eat this for dinner?

Notice what you feel physically. There is a difference between a yes and a no in your body, although it can feel subtle at first. But, refer back to the memory of when you really wanted something and remember that feeling. By learning to recognize this feeling on lower risk situations, you'll become more aware of what a clear yes feels like in your body.

After practicing on relatively minor and safe decisions, you can focus on work tasks, social activities, and volunteer projects you're currently involved in. These can be trickier because they affect other people. Which ones am I getting a clear yes to do? Which ones do I want to say no? Where am I not sure?

It can be frustrating at first because you begin to notice where you unconsciously overrode your gut feeling, said yes anyway, and got yourself into difficult situations, but that frustration is your guide to changing. You'll become more willing to set boundaries and say no, which frees up the space and energy for those projects and activities that are a clear yes!

Live well!

Christine
MBA, Doctor of Naturopathy

© 2008 cg consulting