

Please Step Away from the Machine

Like many people, I have always wished I could do extraordinary things to separate myself from an otherwise ordinary life. To dance like Baryshnikov or hit a tennis ball like Federer, now *that* would be something truly special. But I know that these gifts are bestowed on but a fortunate few, and that no amount of hard work could make up for what I innately lack. There are other skills, however, that are theoretically within my grasp but I seem to be no closer to realizing them than dancing at the Bolshoi or playing on centre court in the U.S. Open.

I have always admired those people who have been labelled “handy.” You know who you are: you seem to understand how water and electricity flow through a house and how to make “simple” repairs when things go sideways. You can build stuff that doesn’t come with instructions from IKEA. When you *do* occasionally go to Home Depot for advice, you actually understand what the guy is telling you. Alas, I have always been, and will likely always be, totally lost when it comes to home repair. I have failed every fix-it tutorial since Bulb Replacement 101. I have assisted others with odd jobs and have watched and listened attentively. But it would never sink in; any attempt to fly solo would invariably end in a crash landing and a very big bill to fix the additional damage I’ve caused. When I think of how much money I have spent over the years hiring other people to repair, replace and refurbish items in our home that “handy” types would have done on their own, I want to weep (and I have).

But before you offer around the Kleenex, wait...it gets worse. For as inept as I am as a handyman, my aptitude sinks to new depths when trying to manage electronics. My Blackberry is supposed to be a “smart phone,” but in my hands it might just as well be tin cans with a really long string. I’ve never managed to get it to do much more than make phone calls and compose an e-mail or two. I’m told that one of the neat features of smart phones is the ability to sync it with the appointment calendar on my work computer so that I can carry an up-to-date calendar everywhere I go, making the scheduling of new appointments a breeze. In theory, this would be very helpful as I could finally render my bloated paper Daytimer obsolete. Unfortunately, my computer and my Blackberry are not on speaking terms, so my phone calendar is completely blank. But it does work well as a paperweight, keeping my Daytimer propped open at precisely the correct date.

I’m a genius at the Blackberry when compared to my knowledge of our PVR (I have no idea what that stands for). I understand what it’s *supposed* to do, I just can’t for the life of me *do* it. Thankfully I have teenage boys who take pity on me and record the TV shows I want to record, and then play them for me later. They see my incapacity for what it is (permanent and incurable), so it’s easier for them to do it for me than to attempt, for the umpteenth time, to teach me how to use the thing.

However, my level of technological ineptitude falls furthest with the PC (personal computer: I knew that). It’s like I possess an internal electrostatic charge that disables computers soon after I begin typing. We have had internet “issues” in our home for years; battalions of service technicians have descended on us over that time, each one claiming to have successfully resolved our problem, only for the system to crash seconds after the van has pulled out of the driveway. Eventually no one from our long-suffering service provider could help us, so a few weeks ago we switched providers. Over the subsequent twenty-four hour period following installation, the internet connection failed three times.

Kind, well-meaning people will, from time to time, attempt to help me become more comfortable with computers. They explain how to deal with common problems as they arise. They show me tools at my disposal to help make my life easier. For the first ten minutes or so, I’m with them. It seems so logical! I can do this! But then things gradually become fuzzy and disjointed, and they soon realize by the glazed look in my eyes that I’m hopelessly lost.

I don’t know why I cannot learn the language of technology. I am like the tourist who pulls out his foreign language dictionary at every turn and only manages to insult the locals with an unfortunate misspoken phrase. Yes, I can limp along, doing what absolutely needs to be done, but whenever I attempt to take a purposeful stride forward, I bang my knee on the corner of the work station and collapse in the chair.

The only good that has come from the realization that I have a techno-disability is that, like my acceptance that I possess more thumbs than fingers when it comes to home repair, I know when to delegate to those with real skills and talent. I am very fortunate to have Federers and Baryshnikovs working with me; they routinely come in to save me from myself and never make me feel inadequate for doing so.

No amount of hard work or training can make up for what I innately lack. I should avoid handling drills and table saws; my world is a safer place for it. I must likewise learn to accept my bewilderment with technology and step away from machines when they make strange sounds. There will always be someone with extraordinary skill who can take over and make things right. Thank goodness for that.

David



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possibilities unleash your imagination

Opening closed doors

One evening recently I found myself at home alone and decided it was the perfect opportunity to do a little photo editing – a time consuming and lonely activity best left for these long stretches of alone time. So I setup my laptop on the kitchen table and turned on the iPod that is proudly perched on the Bose dock on our kitchen counter. A few minutes later it dawned on me that I was listening to a country music playlist. On purpose!

The odd thing about this is that country music has been on my “don’t like” list for most of my life. I have always claimed (still do) that I have a wide range of musical interests – rock, classical, folk, big band, jazz, show-tunes - almost anything. But not country. I must admit, I have more than once answered the question “what music do you like?” with “well, everything but country.”

And now, as the playlist moves from Keith Urban to Taylor Swift, I have to wonder – “what happened?” Somewhere along the way I let country music in.

I believe that the music we like has a lot to do with the context in which we hear it and the memories we associate with it. It starts with the music of our youth which continues to hold some magic power over of us for the rest of lives. We cling to the songs we first

danced to, the artists that made us think and question the lives ahead of us, and the music that played the soundtrack to our transition from child to adult. Other genres get woven into our lives along the way. My music teacher and drama coach, a very influential person in my teen years, liked jazz and classical. So, I quickly found some common ground and gained an appreciation that would last a lifetime. I was a disc-jockey through my school

years, and learned to like the songs that made people the happiest (and dance the most), and so I did **not** join the “I hate disco” gang, but instead embraced it with open arms. Nothing filled the dance floor quite like the latest chart-topping disco song and nothing made me happier than a crowded dance floor of people having a great time.



Rodeo in Colorado July 2010

Partners

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possibilities



unleash your imagination

Opening closed doors (cont'd)

Country music however, was never a part of my life. Living in southern Ontario, far away from the cattle ranches and rodeos, made it easy to avoid, and putting it in the category of things I didn't like somehow seemed cool. All that has obviously changed.

About fifteen years ago we became friends with a couple from California who just happen to love country music. Along with another family we formed the kind of bond that lasts a lifetime. We have traveled together, celebrated life events together, and watched our children grow up together - often with country music in the background. And, while it took some time for me to give up the idea that liking country music might denigrate my status as a fan of rock and roll, it gradually dawned on me - I like this music! A lot!

So many country songs now have meaning to me. They are attached to memories that make me smile. Memories of laughing together with our friends, or joining all my girls as they sang in unison while dancing around the kitchen in pyjamas, or the excitement of seeing the artist in concert. (Yes, I have seen a number of country artists in concert). These songs now have context. The soundtrack of my life has widened to accommodate the widening of my circle of friends. I have gradually let go of the idea that my dislike for something can actually define me, and perhaps have

begun to understand that when it comes to music, and so much of life in fact, there is no good or bad, there's just different. When we block something out of our lives - even something as trivial as a type of music - we don't realize how much of the world we are blocking out with it. Discovering new and exciting worlds can actually be as simple as opening one's mind to something new. (Or in this case, having it pried open through circumstances).

I wonder as I think about this - what else am I shutting out? Music, it would seem, is a pretty unimportant example of this bigger idea. As we grow older, we become increasingly resistant to change - we become rigid and tied to an ever narrowing set of ideas. And yet, when it comes to people that I know and admire, the people I most want to be with are those most willing to accept and consider a new possibility. They are the most likely to say "I'll try that," and more importantly do it with an open heart, and a smile on their face. Luckily for me, that happens to perfectly describe some of the people that are most important in my life, including my spouse and our three girls - all of whom love the country playlist on our iPod.

I might have been slow to go along, but somewhere along the way I opened my mind to the idea that perhaps something I didn't like, I could like. I opened a door, and in came country music. And my life is decidedly better because I did.

Bill

"We keep moving forward, opening new doors, and doing new things, because we're curious and curiosity keeps leading us down new paths."

Walt Disney

"The child who desires education will be bettered by it; the child who dislikes it disgraced."

John Ruskin

Great Minds, Great Thoughts

"Loving people live in a loving world. Hostile people live in a hostile world. Same world."

Wayne Dyer

"People are very open-minded about new things - as long as they're exactly like the old ones."

Charles Kettering

Women in the Workplace

In deciding what I should write about this time around for our humble publication I made the mistake of asking the office for possible topics I might consider tackling. And wouldn't you guess it, the first suggestion was "Talk about working in an office full of women!" Now to be fair I should make it clear that Bill and David are in fact *not* women, they just happen to be out of the office quite frequently. And, even on the occasions when one or both of them happen to be in, we are invariably grossly outnumbered.

I'm not ashamed to admit that my first inclination was to avoid going anywhere near this topic. Just the thought of missing the mark even slightly had my palms sweaty, my breath short, and a deep chill running through my very core. I've heard the tales. How would I begin to redeem myself to an office full of women scorned? I'm not even sure it would be possible.

Now, as you well know, women are themselves sneakier than they might first appear. They might never admit it, but I'm sure they derive a private pleasure from their cunning.

And once again I was caught in those crafty crosshairs. I soon came to realize (well, slowly might be a little more accurate) that I'd been trapped. You see, if I avoid the topic entirely, then I've deemed it not noteworthy enough for mention. On the other hand, if I tackle the topic and miss the mark I can't even imagine what my office life would become. Well played ladies, very well played. As I've been left with no choice, here it goes:

I derive no greater pleasure than to arrive at work each and every day to the warm and smiling faces that invariably greet me. And if in my day I can make even one of those smiles slightly larger, then that has surely been a day to remember and relish. I am truly a privileged soul to work with such wonderful women.

I hope you don't consider this a copout, or cowardly, but it's all I am brave enough to muster I'm afraid.

Nick

Terry Fox Run 2010: 30 Year Anniversary

Sunday September 19, 2010

I had never heard of Terry Fox until last year, in grade 4, when I did a biography on him. I thought he and what he did were fascinating. He is truly Canada's # 1 Hero. I first thought he was a girl but then I found out he was a boy. He ran across Canada to teach Canadians about cancer and to raise money for cancer research. This year I decided I wanted to join his legacy and ran the 5km. I want to thank Bell Financial for sponsoring me; overall my team raised over \$400.

Daniel Fragomeni, Age 9



Daniel and his parents.