

Designing Your Life (IAP-Spring 2009)
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Lecture/Discussion 4: Excuses

Principle: Excuses

Excuses are lines you feed yourself to feel better about not keeping your promises to yourself or others. They are what keep you “where you are” instead of at a 9/10.

Example: You are overweight. You justify this with the excuses that “I’m too busy to fit exercise into my schedule” or “The gym is always too crowded” or “I’m feeling a bit under the weather today.”

When you have a reason why you can’t do something you say you are committed to, typically it is an excuse. What we do is really a choice.

Test: You say that you want to do X, and can’t because of Y and Z. If I give you 1 million dollars, would you do X? If yes, then you were probably using an excuse.

Why do we use excuses?

They get you off the hook. Excuses take the blame off of your shoulders for why you didn’t do what you said you would. Excuses shield you from the truth.

Integrity Equation

We live our lives according to the following equations:

[I said I’d do X] + [I actually did X] = “I’m a good person”

[I said I’d do X] + [I actually did Y] = “I’m a bad person”

[I said I’d do X] + [I actually did Y] + [make an excuse or feel bad] = “I’m still a good person.” You are not in integrity, as you were in the first equation, but you feel off the hook because you either feel bad or have an excuse.

Rarely do we admit to having followed the second equation. Instead, we follow the third equation by adding in something to “make things right.” This way, we can be off the hook for what we did, and for acting without integrity. To find places where you are out of integrity, then, look for excuses and feeling bad.

We don’t want to do X because of perceived discomfort. If our reluctance comes from perception of the unknown, the “what if”: fear. If our reluctance comes from known discomfort: avoidance. We have two voices in our head that correspond to these two reluctances: the chicken is the voice of fear, while the brat is the voice of aversion. The chicken and the brat feed us excuses.

We claim that we wished things were XYZ. But we really don’t. We are invested in believing that we want things to be different, because that makes us a good person. Striving for the forces of good against the forces of evil. But really, we are invested in things staying the same. We don’t want change. We would rather believe excuses and hide behind them instead of actually changing. Because if we really wanted to change, we would. Have you ever had something that you really wanted and just made happen, come hell or high water. Are you really bringing that intention to everything in your life?

Excuses are a distraction. Instead of creating how you want things to be, you are spending your time justifying how they are. The sick thing about excuses is when we start to believe them; then we have made ourselves powerless to change.

Example: "I was late for the meeting because it's hard for me to get up in the morning." You believe it, and so that makes it even harder to get up out of bed the next time.

Sometimes we get hurt doing something, and so we generate a set of excuses and theories that keeps us safe from here on out. We don't even enjoy being the brat. It's not even fun. This is ridiculous

Class Participation

Participant #1: I said I'd go the gym, but then a friend called me to go out to dinner. I figured that I had had a hard week, so I should go.

Lauren: I could have gone before the dinner, made the dinner later, etc.

Participant #2: I said I wouldn't overeat on the cruise I went on last week, and I didn't. I felt bad after every single dinner. My brat was saying that my dad paid so much money that I should get our money's worth of food, my sister was eating all she wanted...

Lauren: First off, these are YOUR promises. You choose them. If you're on the cruise and realize that you want to eat the food, then you can change your promise. Design. Second, when you realize that a promise didn't work one day, then to keep on with the same promise and expecting things to be different is crazy. You need to tweek or redesign the promise. Third, you should tell your parents about your promise, and then they can support you. People typically don't keep promises made in a vacuum.

Participant #3: I said I'd buy a vacuum cleaner, but I spent 4 hours researching it. This is overwhelming. How can I deal with this?

Lauren: You need to design how much time you are spending. Decide how much time you WANT to spend researching something, and then give yourself a consequence of \$1 per minute over. You have a wacky relationship with what you need to put into a purchase. Design it. It doesn't have to be perfect.

Participant #4: I set get-out-of-bed times for myself during the week, but on the weekend I didn't make a promise. I set my alarm clock for 7:15, because that's when I wanted to get up. But then in the morning, I snoozed until 2.

Lauren: That is crazy. You voted hundreds of times to sleep in. Design and execute. Either decide to get up at 2, or design to get up at 7:15. Honor what you want.

Homework

1. Continue making and keeping promises, reporting in every Sunday. Report on whether you kept or did not keep your promises. Suggested format:
 - a. Describe the promise
 - b. Write for each promise "KEPT" or "NOT KEPT"
 - c. Describe the consequence
 - d. Write if you paid the consequence or not. IF no, by when will you pay it?

- e. What are your stats on keeping the promise (e.g. I kept 5/7 days).
 - f. What did you notice about yourself? Where did you stop yourself? Where were you a chicken or brat, and where were you great? You can include this for any promise, but ALWAYS do this for every promise that was NOT KEPT.
2. Go back to your 18 areas of life, and for the ones that were below an 8:
- 1. Find the excuses in there. For each one,
 - a. Explain why it is an excuse
 - b. identify the chicken or the brat. What are you using that excuse for? Why keep it around?
 - c. Describe what being in integrity would mean to you in that part of your life.