

## Development by Association

Do you remember when your parents told you to be careful who you hang out with? They knew that the development of your habits and attitudes is affected by the friends and associates you spend time with. In fact many of the core beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions you have about life and yourself were formed in your childhood years. Early on you fell into certain roles in your family and your group of friends without even knowing it. Your roles were influenced by a number of things including your natural traits and personality, birth order, and your environment. Regardless of how you became who you are, you have lived out a set of roles, attitudes, and patterns of behavior, most often without much thought or awareness on your part.

We all develop certain strategies for success in life, again without conscious thought, based on our predispositions and on what gets rewarded in our particular environment. Most of us carry these strategies forward along with our internalized beliefs, assumptions, and habits. Sometimes these strategies work pretty well and sometimes they are self defeating. What worked well to survive or succeed at an earlier time in life may not work well at all at a later time and in a different context. We may be operating from assumptions that were valid at one time or maybe were never valid but simply based on the limits of childhood perspective, but either way they are no longer valid. This results in frustration, failures, and repetition of themes and patterns without a clue as to what is going on and what to do about it.

Our blind spots are, of course, difficult if not impossible to see on our own. It doesn't matter how intensely we look into the rearview mirror of our car, we will still not see the blind spots. What is needed is another mirror that gives a different perspective or a passenger willing to look where we cannot see and give us feedback. Without that we are bound to make bad decisions and sometimes we crash. We may, for example, be surprised by a bias we thought we had under control or didn't know was there but it comes out in an ugly way, as is occasionally demonstrated by someone who we think really should know better.

**So what are we to do?** Barbara Streisand made popular a song that said "people who need people are the luckiest people in the world". This is not about dependency, rather awareness of our inter-dependency and inter-connectedness. We need other people to help us develop the best of who we are and communities of people to grow and build upon one another's strengths. Association with people who are willing to give us feedback, encouragement, support, and accountability is a powerful mechanism for development in ways we cannot get in isolation. Through association we can see the world from different perspectives, see ourselves in new ways, and learn things we would never otherwise learn.



Development by association is important for all of us, but especially critical for young and emerging leaders. The world is too complex and changing too fast to be able to keep up with everything. This creates stress and stress brings out both our strengths and weaknesses. With low awareness of our blind spots, we are prone to operating from our own assumptions, judgments, and default responses. With that comes the potential for errors, misunderstandings, and damaging conflicts. Regular association with people who bring different experiences and multiple perspectives and a desire to help each other grow is a great way to bring about personal development as well as innovative and emergent ideas and solutions. There are many opportunities to create relationships that enhance our growth, from friendships, social clubs, religious groups, mastermind groups, professional associations, and leadership programs that emphasize community. Be intentional about your associations, remembering that your well-being and your future are at stake.

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