

Choose Autonomy

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"A primary function of art and thought is to liberate the individual from the tyranny of his culture in the environmental sense and to permit him to stand beyond it in an autonomy of perception and judgment."
Beverly Sills

Who's Pulling Your Strings Anyway?

Laura Novakowski

In 1977, Dr. Wayne Dyer wrote a best seller that I think merits a second glance - *Pulling Your Own Strings*. This book directly address a capacity that we all possess, but spend very little time developing to a productive and healthy level. That capacity is autonomy. Autonomy is defined as "self-governing or self-directing." Very basic, and yet, a very empowering concept.

The economy, industry and other people all seem to be pulling our strings these days. These string pullers are affecting how we make decisions. They influence how we do our job or profession. We have become so "victimized" that we are limiting our opportunities instead of liberating our potential. Dr. Dyer shared in this dynamic read numerous ideas and techniques to overcome "victim" mentality and take charge of our lives.

In reality, we all pull our own strings. We've become so busy allowing others to control our lives that we've come to believe that we are out of control. Let's take a closer look at some string pulling activities that might be showing up in our lives and see if we can't take control back.

String Puller #1: *The habit of blaming and complaining about what happened in the past.* It's over, done, fini! We can't undo decisions made by others, even the roles that we played in the past in those decisions. However, we can reflect and learn. We can move forward with the knowing that we possess new knowledge of how not to do something and directing our next decision to something more positive and productive.

String Puller #2: *The habit of being overwhelmed by fear.* When we realize that most fear is nothing more than False Evidence Appearing Real (F.E.A.R.), we can start taking control of our own destiny. Financial guru, Suze Orman often talks about taking immediate action to monitor and control your financial success. As we become more self-directed, we liberate feels of being overwhelmed and allow space for creativity and entrepreneurship.

String Puller #3: *The habit of being less than accountable leads to loss of self respect and integrity.* When we fail to look at the roles we have played in personal and professional effectiveness and productivity, we ignore the fact that we might have be a contributing factor to the demise of a relationship, a project or a company. Even when we are not directly responsible, often times our failure to engage, participate, and yes, even lead, results in even more catastrophic events.

As you can see, we all can look else where for those many string pullers. I'm suggesting we develop our autonomy. After all, *we are all pulling our own strings, anyway!*



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*Know, Choose & Create
Autonomy in Today's World
Leanne Hoagland Smith*

*"We live in a society that
extols mobility, autonomy
and freedom."
Steven Mintz*

Autonomy is one of those words that people hear, but probably truly do not understand. Many think of autonomy as associated with governments and that is actually half-right. The Latin origins of this word mean self and law. For this word is truly about governing oneself first before governing others.

To have autonomy suggests that there exists certain laws or in the case of individuals, values, that regulate the self. Depending upon the individual's spirituality, these values can be easily found within certain religious documents or even etched into buildings that have withstood the test of time.

However, autonomy extends beyond these values or laws. The recent economic debacle along with stories of individuals thriving by deceiving others only reaffirms that few people understand the underlying three most basic elements intertwined within this concept of autonomy. Much like the strands of DNA, these elements provide the building blocks for sustainable autonomy.

Element #1

"*Know yourself*" to quote Socrates is the first element. When you know the why of the decisions you make, you can make better decisions. Better decision making leads to improved autonomy where you truly accept responsibility for your success and failures. Of course, there exists numerous challenges about knowing yourself from first being truly honest with yourself and then finding the best "know yourself" tools. Sometimes, you may even require external help from a friend, mentor or even an executive coach.

Element #2

The power to choose who you want to be is the second element. Your awareness about whom you are allows you to determine if this is who you want to be. You have the choice to choose the person that you want to be. This choice is 100% yours. Now if you choose to blame others, then you have made the choice to be the victim of life. On the other hand, you can choose to embrace being the Victor and always moving forward, closer to your dreams and goals.

Element #3

The third element is action by creating the person you have chosen to become. Just choosing to be a Victor is only one step. You must take decisive action to become an autonomous individual who knows what behaviors are necessary to demonstrate being a self-governing individual.

Human beings have incredible opportunities each and every day to showcase their own autonomy and through that autonomy turn their dreams and goals into reality. The only question is:

Are you up to this task?



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Breaking the Filter of the Past

Steve Sisselman

Don Miguel Ruiz wrote in his book “The Four Agreements” about the amount of information that is fed to us as we develop from birth to adult causing a sense of domestication. Our reality is almost a dream in which we are living, breathing, and viewing the world around us with a filter and seeing things in a way that our family taught us. This filter that we wear from our early development can be heavy and cause us to not see clearly the reality that is our world causing confusion, sadness, feelings of failure, and a sense of not being able to accomplish. To truly break through this filter and view our lives with clarity we must become **autonomous**.

Breaking through years of domestication does not happen overnight and takes a real dedication to start viewing life through your own eyes minus the filter that has been placed upon you since birth. This certainly does not mean that everything we have been taught as children and young adults is unworthy of attention because there are many things we have learned that are essential to our being. However, **autonomy** requires us to pick and choose those things which suit our true being and not those things which cause us to act against our personal truths.

It is this **autonomy** that can lead all of us to become the leaders that we all have the potential to become. The power of a leader is being able to be accomplishing goals that have meaning to either themselves or the organization in which they are employed. Leadership within an organization can be a challenge as we are not only knocking off the filters of our own lives but also helping to knock off the filters of the other people whom we are leading. The best leaders are those whom can inspire the people around them to become **autonomous** and be able to accomplish important goals with the same level of desire. It is not enough to go through the motions on a daily basis, but be truly rewarded by the level of accomplishment we achieve by not seeing the world as others require us to but to see the world as it really is.

Embracing the **autonomy** of ourselves allows us to cut through the filters placed upon us and can be the biggest obstacle standing in the way of our success. Once we can devote ourselves to being **autonomous** we can start to see other obstacles with greater clarity and develop solutions that work. I encourage you this month to look at your goals and see how many of them have the obstacle of a filter in place, work to clear the fog as Don Miguel Ruiz says, and see the world how it really is. You might be surprised at all the beautiful things that start to come your way.

*Question for the month: How many goals do you have that becoming more **autonomous** will help you accomplish them faster?*



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Autonomy is a Matter of Choice

Judy Rienzi

“The idea that men are created free & equal is both true and misleading; men are created different; they lose their individual autonomy in seeking to become like each other”
David Reisman

Throughout life, we are confronted with many choices. As infants, we choose to let go of our parent’s hands and take our first step towards independence. Rebellious teenagers are always doing the opposite of what they “should” do. Is it rebellion, or the need to preserve their individual autonomy? As young adults, we make one of our most important decisions, our future career. The key word in all of these scenarios is choice. We have the ability to choose what we want for ourselves.

Let’s take health, for example. Beginning a new health practice, such as exercise, dieting, smoking cessation, etc, is not easy or enjoyable for most. Motivation usually falls short after a period of time. In the cases above, the rebellious teenager and young adult identified with the value of the choices they made. The value placed on their decisions motivated them to continue. It is important to identify with the value of the health practice you’ve chosen. People’s behaviors are also more likely to change when they are engaged in the decision making process. “Having a sense of personal autonomy, or self determination, means that a person feels that their behavior is self chosen and not imposed by external power”. (Edward Deci, *Why We Do What We Do: The Dynamics of Personal Autonomy*. 1995) If there is no sense of autonomy, self motivation will not last.

A feeling of being “controlled” has an effect on a person’s psychological need for autonomy resulting in a lack of well-being. Think of the rebellious teenager. Have you ever tried to force another person’s behavior? What was the outcome? Providing an atmosphere that is supportive, allows for choice, and avoiding criticism gets results and increases self management.

Autonomy is a reflection of who we are. It is about “making your own informed decisions and choosing to act according to your values and beliefs”; “the feeling deep inside that your actions are your own choice”. (www.emotionalcompetency.com/motivation.htm).

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A Raisin in the Sun

Connie Pheiff



No, I am not referring to the play, but the **autonomy** in a j.o.b. that provides an employee with the discretion and independence to schedule their work and determine how it is to be done. When an employee is given higher levels of **autonomy** on the job, it has been documented in employee reviews that there is an increase in job satisfaction and a higher motivation to perform. Traditional organizational structures are those “raisins in the sun”; standing still and shriveling away since only the higher levels of management are given autonomy. However, organization structures that are flatter have resulted in increased **autonomy** at all levels. I say this with caution because there are pros and cons to both.

Pros: Research has indicated that when employees are given greater levels of autonomy, personality traits have a positive impact on job performance. Employees are able to contribute personal attributes to the job.

Cons: Too much autonomy can lead to employee dissatisfaction. People are human and have different needs. There are those employees that require direction from a manager and are uncomfortable with autonomy. And if the employee is not properly equipped with the tools and skills to perform the job, they will easily become stressed and ultimately poor performance. Managers can also feel their job is at stake when employees have the same or more responsibilities than they have.

Bureaucratic organizations have little autonomy; organic organizations rely on autonomy, empowerment and forward-thinking participation for the organization to succeed. Autonomy can create a culture of trust and can also create disparity between all levels of the organization.

Autonomy is a positive attribute for all levels of the organization. But there needs to be a balance, too much autonomy can have organizational drawbacks, care should be taken when executing autonomy in business.

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A DOUBLE EDGED SWORD

David Sorin

The Merriam Webster

Dictionary defines autonomy as :

- (1) the quality or state of being self-governing ; especially : the right of self-government*
- (2) self-directing freedom and especially moral independence; and*
- (3) a self-governing state.*

Autonomy is a double edged sword for both leaders and followers. Danger lurks in what is normally thought of as a positive trait. So, it is imperative to be aware of being careful what we wish for and what we grant to others under the cloak of "autonomy."

A vast majority of business leaders desire a high level of autonomy. They look to take responsibility for a strategy and the tactics employed to effectuate it. In most cases, this is a positive occurrence. But we must remember that every trait, even the most positive, can become negative when present in too great a concentration. All traits exist on a scale. For ease of discussion, they can each be assigned a number of one to ten. A person who measures a two in autonomy has the trait, but to a much lesser degree than one who measures a ten. And neither is either a good or a bad score.

The person who scores a two may desire autonomy but lacks other traits, such as confidence, creativity or critical thinking ability that might enable her or him to assert autonomy. She or he may need more feedback or input from others than the average person. Such a person would not be a strong leader in a "command and control" type environment, but might still flourish as a leader, even being low on the "autonomy" scale, in a "consensus environment."

Those who score high on autonomy are good folks to handle projects in many types of environments. When an organization is stretched thin at the top, those leaders strong on autonomy can achieve without requiring too many additional resources from the organization. But, how will they function as part of a team? They may not succeed if they are not inclusive, if they don't communicate, if they don't establish common purpose and goals. They may become the "cowboy" or "The Lone Ranger", held in disdain in an organization where teamwork counts. In many circumstances they may act outside of the culture of the organization, and even if they get good results, they may fail.

Remember the old adage "It is easier to seek forgiveness than permission." That comes from those exerting autonomy in a somewhat extreme fashion. That may save the day every once in a while and make a person a hero for the moment. But a steady diet of that attitude can wear on an organization and lead to an erosion of values and policies and procedures. It moves the lines in the sand so much, nobody remembers where they were.

The conclusion that I arrive at from this is that the level of autonomy an individual is willing to assert must closely match the level of autonomy the organization is willing to grant. If a leader doesn't understand the organizational needs and culture, many traps await her or him. Company politics can sink those who want all of the control and all of the glory or those who want no autonomy and hence no responsibility.

BusinessDictionary.com defines autonomy slightly differently, as the "Degree or level of [freedom](#) and [discretion](#) allowed to an [employee](#) over his or her [job](#). As a general [rule](#), [jobs](#) with high degree of autonomy engender a sense of [responsibility](#) and greater [job satisfaction](#) in the employee(s). Not every employee, however, prefers a job with high degree of responsibility."

What about followers? For them autonomy is a dangerous concept, one rife with both opportunity and danger. Leaders doing their job well are looking for

leadership traits in their team of followers. Those wishing to move up and become leaders themselves need to show that they can take on responsibility and follow through on tasks and actions. They need to show they can think critically, even strategically. And so, autonomy is a good thing.

But, they cannot upstage their boss. They cannot appear to be taking individual credit, even where due, if they are part of a team. Leaders are discovered or developed by their managers, not self-proclaimed.

So, like leaders, followers require political savvy and an understanding of their organizational culture. They also need to develop a relationship of trust with their manager, so they can be mentored rather than viewed as a threat or a competitor.

Communication is critical to all. When asking for the autonomy to “take a project and run with it”, be careful. Know what that means to your boss and to the organization. Understand the results expected and the impact on your team of peers and your direct reports. Make autonomy a positive trait, not one that will lead to your dismissal.



“Autonomy is being able to undertake activities without seeking permission from a controlling body.”

On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your autonomy? _____

Take a minute and consider how your autonomy is working for you?

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