



## Shifting Gears

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### **It's not about retirement - there's a lot left to discover!**

Recently I had the occasion to put 1000 miles on my car in ten days. This solo experience, a simple trip traveled mostly on the Florida Turnpike and Interstate, provided time for reflection, insight, and wondering. Part of what made this trip fun and interesting was an opportunity to get to “know” my new, used two-seater ragtop. With nearly 4,500 pounds of curb weight (the car not me) and a 12 cylinder, fuel-injected “thoroughbred” under the hood, my ultimate tanning machine wants to go!

Its instrument cluster consists of the usual speedometer and tachometer, plus a fuel consumption gauge that instantaneously adjusts to accelerator pressure, hills and other variables. As I locked into cruise control at 85 MPH, the tachometer showed only 2400 RPMs and cruising in overdrive seemed effortless. I watched the fuel consumption gauge go up as I ascended a Florida “hill” and then down as I descended another or just happened to stretch my leg against the

accelerator (“just stretching, officer”). I thought about the next chapter in my life and

career and reflected on the learnings from previous opportunities in “shifting gears.”

Life has a tendency to encourage “cruise control” or “overdrive” usage, but the real learning comes from those times when the RPMs and fuel consumption go up and the fuel efficiency goes down. You may even need to downshift to get around that corner or start up that new hill or - heaven forbid - stop, look at a map and adjust your strategy. (Isn't it amazing the conversations an Introvert can have with himself while driving a car – although this isn't just any car!)

This type of reflection should not just be happening at retirement – that major transition that all of us approach at some point in life. I have been practicing for it throughout my life and I hear signs of the need for “shifting gears” in many sidebar conversations. Statements such as, “Well, my life is very comfortable right now, I don't have time for (fill in the blank), I would really have to rev-up my engine... or ...that would be a lot of work.” When you hear yourself or a friend utter those or similar words, it's time to take a look in the mirror. Say “Hmm... Is that so... Isn't that interesting... Sounds as if you might be wondering about the benefits of shifting gears... So what's

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attached to that... What's your understanding of what just happened as you looked into your mirror?"

Conscious awareness precedes being and becoming. Spending too much time in cruise control, overdrive, or only in comfortable spaces will negatively impact our conscious awareness, our learning, and our being and becoming. To be consciously aware in the midst of learning, as a friend would say, "is HUGE"! It can also be scary, unsettling, and tension producing. What is most unsettling for many is that education seems to be more process than product (most of us prefer the reverse). The message is simple but the learning takes time! That learning can create a disquieted feeling deep within us, which takes time and energy to resolve. But that sort of dissatisfaction may actually be a sign that real learning is occurring.

An observation gleaned from teaching here at The Pankey Institute and from the facilitation of small study groups is that a shared awareness of one's learning is powerful. When you know someone is aware of your learning, the moment is enhanced. Furthermore, when that other person is learning along with you, the impact is exponential! The facilitator must openly participate in and acknowledge his or her own learning to enhance the learning moments for everyone.

Two examples of this come to mind: the first is in the dental office, when the patient experiences you as genuinely curious about discovering something together. The second occurs when a facilitator is in the "discovery" mode and not the "right answer" mode, and can acknowledge new learning in the moment while in the presence of the "student" (in fact they are both students, really). All who would seek to be and remain effective and affective facilitators need to place themselves in unfamiliar experiential learning situations to once again become sensitized to the process of new discovery. That in turn opens them up to new awareness while facilitating another person's discovery.

If we are aware of our "gauges" in those moments when we shift gears, our energy and RPMs will go up, patterns of speech and fuel consumption will increase and we will feel hungry before noon. We will get better at listening for content and feelings in the moment, as well as at staying in the "affective domain" with others.

In a way, it is similar to the "Comfort Zone Model," which is not about staying comfortable. The real lesson from that model is that staying at the border between the "learning zone" and "panic zone" is where the best opportunities for learning occur.

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Don't let yourself get too comfortable! I can think of many opportunities we all have for "shifting gears" to enhance and sensitize ourselves to new learning. See you on the "development road"/journey! Peace and blessings to you all.

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