

WHY “SELF” MIGHT NOT BE THE THING THAT NEEDS “HELP”

INFLUENCE ECOLOGY VS CONSPIRACY ECOLOGY AND HOW TO ACCELERATE GETTING THINGS DONE, WORKING LESS AND MAKING MORE.

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Personal growth – aka self-improvement – is a multi-billion-dollar industry, however, according to MarketResearch.com, self-improvement programs are less popular today than you may think. Consumers looking for more practical programs and a return on their invested time/money have found that self-oriented and highly subjective programs and philosophies have overpromised and underdelivered.

M2 readers are ambitious business professionals working on some lofty financial and professional aims while challenged with trying to live a more balanced life. The juggling act grows more stressful daily as technology speeds up our need to perform. The self-help industry promise to make things faster and easier by simply changing your attitude or “believing you can do it” is more found incomplete. Don’t get me wrong – I love the high from a motivational moment or rally – who doesn’t want a quick fix to the everyday objective problems of life? But all-too-often, when the high fades, we find our “self” staring at our “self” in the mirror knowing we are about to face the sabre-toothed tiger of the market – one more day.

Maybe the “self” isn’t what needs the “help.”

It’s important to grow and improve our “self” but perhaps it’s missing part of the solution. Ironically, I spent over a decade teaching personal growth to thousands with many satisfying results. However, from personal/professional experience, we also continued to suffer when thinking that doing more work on our “self” - being more inspired, positive, motivated, aware, self-expressed, think/dream bigger, manifest etc. - would somehow be the access to results.

Over the last 8 years of studying Transactional Competence™, I’ve learned that to consistently achieve our aims/aspirations, create happiness and experience real satisfaction, our “environment” and its influence on us matters. We need to build and maintain “Influence Ecologies” and recognise and move away from “Conspiracy Ecologies.”

ENVIRONMENT

Let’s make the phenomenon “environment” real. Stop for a minute.

Think about today. Look around. What objects are in your environment? What technology, browsers and social-media notifications took your attention? Who’ve you interacted with? What’ve you accomplished? How distracted have you been?

Think about last week – are you satisfied? How productive were you? How much of your plan did you accomplish that moved

you towards your aims for work, career, money, health, family, education, sociality, etc? How did your environment influence this positively/negatively?

Think about the people you encountered; objects you used and were surrounded by; technology that you interfaced with; the environment of your mind-body - thoughts, feelings, emotions, reactions, physiology, neurons, nutrition, sleep, etc...what happened in that organism you are and what did you do to ensure it was fit to meet your aims? How did that environment of your mind-body influence you?

Bring your awareness to your whole environment and the consequence of it over the last week (positive/negative) – external (people/things/objects) and internal (mind-body-brain-spirit). Think about how it influenced you and the thinking/acting/reacting/responding that you did in the attempt to meet your needs/wants.

When you bring all of that to mind, it’s hard to escape the fact that we’re in a constant dynamic ever-evolving processual relational co-constitutive consequential exchange with our environment. These constant environmental exchanges are influencing you and we’re influencing it. We call it an Influence Ecology because the entire ecology of people and things are in a dynamic relationship with us all the time. To be human is to be always in exchange with an ecology. We can’t exist any other way. Our ability to meet our aims or not, live a good life or not, depends on it! But if we only focus and work on our “self”, we’re missing a much bigger picture.

To accelerate our ability to get things done, work less and make more, we need to first and foremost consider the environment we’re in, not just the “self” that we often think is the reason why we achieve things in life. We need to confront environment, because we’re all in one, always.

I’ll distinguish between your internal and external environment – we’ll get to Influence and Conspiracy Ecology later. Think of our internal environment as everything happening in our mind-body and our external environment as the people/things/conversations surrounding us. I’ll focus on external environment, as having a healthy mind-body is common sense for most ambitious business professionals and if it’s not being tended to then this focus on external environment may reveal why.

Our environment is an ecology either influencing or conspiring with, against or for us to meet our aims or not. A question we might want to ask more often is - how IS the environment influencing us?

AN INFLUENCE ECOLOGY

We’re organisms within the environments we live and work, continually influenced by it, and in turn influencing it. This is the meaning of ecology.

An Influence Ecology harnesses the power of environment. Our “social ecologies” - people (social), conversations (narratives), things (physical) - have an enormous influence on us achieving results; some forward our ambitions and others are limiting.

Human beings are social animals - we succeed or fail depending on the social ecologies we are in. Our ability to get specific things done and coordinate action is determined mostly by the environment we’re in and almost impossible in one that does not support it.

For example, if we had the talent to compete in the Olympics, we’d first need to deal with being unfit (mentally/physically) to perform at that level. We’d need to surround ourselves with Olympians and qualified coaches and immerse ourselves in that Olympic “environment” to have the best opportunity to develop the fitness – habits, practices and ethics – required to have a shot at being an Olympian.

Achieving aims/aspirations is correlated to our access to specialised and valuable help in specific social ecologies – an Influence Ecology.

A CONSPIRACY ECOLOGY

It’s common to observe social ecologies in collusion, conspiring against members of the group. They get seduced to become co-conspirators in a game of getting each other to do things they are not committed to. It’s not just peer pressure, it’s environmental.

For example, something that saddens me in our culture, is not drinking alcohol and mates trying to coerce us to “just have one drink.” The environment conspires to have us drink and blow the commitment to not drinking, impacting health goals. Individuals in the group don’t intend the negative consequence on their friend’s life, but unwittingly they’re a conspiracy ecology, keeping the other at their level. It’s common human behaviour and if we’re not aware, we’ll find ourselves struggling to meet important aims in life because our environment is conspiring against us. These conspiracy ecologies are counter to the ambitions most of us express, yet sometimes we continue participating in them to our demise.

A conspiracy ecology is any environment and social construct that supports the bad habits and actions we take that keep us from our aims.

An influence ecology is any environment and social construct that supports and demands of us the self-discipline, willpower, and practices that give us the greatest opportunities for taking the action we know we must if we are going to reach our aims/aspirations in life.

Consider the environments you’re in while attempting to keep your commitments and meet your aims/aspirations – are they Influence Ecologies or Conspiracy Ecologies?

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING INFLUENCE ECOLOGIES

We first need to understand and accept that we’re organisms in environments. We’re always in exchange – in transactions – with people/objects. We’re merely an aspect of the environments we’re in, not some kind of overlord over them. Humans often tend to behave in ways that demonstrate a complete naivety to this. We project our energy/intentions onto things, others and whole environments as if we can “cause” them to behave how we want. You may have just scoffed or chuckled at how absurd that may sound, and that you don’t do that. But think of when we thank the “parking gods” after we “cause” a carpark, or that if someone “aligns their thoughts” with an object – like money – they will attract or

“manifest” it into their lives, or if you “think more positively” good things happen, as if our mental energy - the neurochemicals in our brain while in a positive mindset - will influence physical objects or even people to act in ways to our benefit. We are just not that all-mighty and powerful!

Once we accept this organism/environment relationship, then building and maintaining influence ecologies requires being willing to recognise and move away from conspiracy ecologies and a commitment to thinking accurately about the environments you place yourself in that influence you to move towards your aims/aspirations.

Here are some of the primary ingredients for building and maintaining influence ecologies:

1. Know your aims: articulate our aims in the most important areas of life. Health, work (mental/physical activities we’re occupied with), career (marketplace identity), money (economic exchange), relationships (family, friends, intimate), sociality (how we function among others in society), education (specialised knowledge), ethics (condition of our character or codes of conduct that guide us), spirituality/self-actualisation, the environment (mother earth), aesthetics, politics and legacy. Knowing our aims gives us a greater ability to know what environments we need to influence us and ones we should avoid.
2. A Valuable Career - build a surplus of help: To meet our highest aims and aspirations, we need a lot of help, not just “self-help”. You build reciprocal help by offering valuable help. This requires a valuable career, how we are known for the specific help and value we offer others – our marketplace identity. It’s not just our occupation, title, qualifications, or experience in some field, but also what others think about the value we are to them. We must be known by a specific group of people (an ecology) for consistently delivering valuable help. Building up reciprocity within our social ecologies is one aspect of building influence ecologies; again, you build reciprocal help by offering valuable help. You may want to find out how the marketplace views your help – is it valuable or not? Specialised or general? It’s the others with whom you need help from that decide this.
3. Transactional Competence™ - Understand human exchange and influence: We’re “transacting” every moment to live a happy and satisfying life. Transactions are series

of exchanges we must enter into with others to get our needs and wants met. Think of these transactions not like a bank transaction or cold calculated approach to just getting what YOU want, but more like the many series of reciprocal exchanges we need to get ourselves into to meet our aims. Transactional Competence™ produces the effectiveness, efficiency and quality of these exchanges. It’s our ability to build and maintain an environment that does the heavy lifting for us and influences us and others to meet our aims faster than if we were trying to do it by ourselves. To build an influence ecology, we must develop a high level of competency at having these exchanges lead to the influence and compliance of many people. We need to have people accept our invitations, offers and requests if we are to build and maintain an influence ecology, and have the authority and power to decline others so we are not caught in a conspiracy ecology.

Ambitious business professionals I work with are focused on building their influence ecologies purposefully and strategically to help influence them and those they need help from to meet their aims in all areas of life. They try to have their environment do the majority of the heavy lifting for them as opposed to it being all about the “self” trying to force things to happen, or overlord their environment to “make” results happen. If we build an environment that influences us, then we are not relying so much on ourselves to achieve our aims.

We live in social constructs, and as such, must co-exist with others. Our survival, and certainly our comfort, depend on our ability to effectively coexist with other people in many different situations throughout our daily lives. We live in a dynamic, fast-paced, and ever-changing world. The challenges we face require a kind of understanding, competence and willingness to act that is exceptional and, in many ways, counter to what is promoted in our popular culture. We cannot expect to reach our greatest aims in life unless we accept certain facts about the world in which we live and learn how to navigate within it. One fact we must recognise is that our ability to enjoy comfort in our post-modern age requires that we are able to transact effectively in it and have influence ecologies to help us thrive - we cannot survive on our own.

In the next article we will be exploring how to accelerate a human transaction at the speed of which technology is evolving.

Drew Knowles has over 20 years experience in the field of human performance and behaviour. His current company www.InfluenceEcology.com is the leading business education in Transactional Competence™, teaching the fundamentals of human exchange and influence to ambitious business professionals all over the world. Prior to this he coached many CEOs and Execs of some of NZs largest companies on dealing with stress and their mental performance, writing a 3-year series of M2 articles on this topic. For previous articles go to www.drewknowles.com