



Hosted by Tom Henschel

Two Paths to Flow

A worried leader seeks help finding balance between going with the flow and giving himself a larger voice.

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Losing his touch

Patricio came to me with a worry. He'd been holding this worry in the back of his mind for a long time, but a recent incident pushed it forward.

I had originally met Patricio when he was on the leadership team at a company where I facilitated a series of learning sessions. He was a short-term CFO, parachuting into different companies every three to five years. The first time I showed up at this company, he was still in his first ninety days. He and I connected over being the new kids.

I observed him as he got to know his colleagues. He seemed a friendly straight shooter, smart and fair-minded, whose people skills were strong.

When he reached out to me now, I was curious to hear the worry that was on his mind.

He said, "I've been on a series of interviews lately and I'm worried I'm losing my touch."

"Your touch? What is your touch?"

"I've always approached interviews with the attitude that I was there to be of service to them.

They've got an agenda, things they want to know. I show up with the aim of helping them get through their agenda."

"And it worked for you?"

His go-to move

"Oh, yeah, connecting with people is where I find my flow. I've always been that way. I was the boy who would walk into a room, sense what was going on and shift on a dime. Connecting with people where they're at has always been my go-to move."

"But not now?" I asked.

"Well, I'm not sure. A couple opportunities disappeared recently. I thought I was going to go farther. Look, who knows, maybe that's just the natural up and down of things. But I'm wondering, am I lousing up my own flow? Maybe I am."

"In what way?" I asked.

Being a nice guy is my differentiator.

"Well, I gotta start by telling you why this has been on my mind in the first place. I'm a nice guy. That's the feedback I get. I'm a nice guy. I don't know if you remember, but I'm an 'S' on the DiSC. I'm the guy who wants everyone to get along. So I'm a really nice guy, and I'll be honest, Tom, I think being a nice guy is a differentiator for me. Most CFOs aren't as people-oriented as I am. But that's the real me."

"I can see how you'd stand out," I said.

"So when things are flowing, when I'm connected with people, it's plain as day to me that this person wants to skip the chat. Or that person wants to dig into my history. No sweat. I'm there, flowing along.

"But the question I've been mulling over for a long time is whether all this being of service, all this following their lead, am I putting my light under a bushel? Am I sliding from being a nice guy to being a doormat?"

Being a doormat?

He gave a rueful smile, saying "I remember the first time I noticed it. I was interviewing with this woman. Nice woman. She'd scheduled us for an hour and it was five minutes 'til when she asked what questions I had for her. I remember this calculation that flashed through my brain, faster than a finger snap. Yes, I have questions, no, you don't

I took care of her but erased myself.

have time, so I'm going to be a nice guy and respect your calendar. I told her, nope, I didn't have any questions. But I did. And instead of asking them, I turned Mr. Timekeeper. I took good care of her calendar but completely silenced myself. That incident was the seed of all this. Which brings me to this recent interview."

"What happened?" I asked.

"I was interviewing at this company run by two brothers. Before they'd meet me, they wanted me to meet their dad. He's the founder, but he's been mostly retired a while. So I'm going to talk with the dad for an hour before I meet anyone else. They're treating it like it's just something casual, but I'm thinking this is one way they're taking a look at me. And that's fine with me. So I show up with my 'be of service' antennae out, and this guy just wants to talk. I mean, he started with hello, then talked for a solid twenty minutes. That's a long time! I tried bringing it back to an interview, but he wasn't having it."

I shook my head. "People like that are tough."

"But I was arguing in my head, do I just become completely passive and let him ramble on, like I'm his audience? Is that the way to connect with this guy? By disengaging? Or do I try to connect with him by speaking up and letting him know a little about me? Or maybe the whole thing is an elaborate test!"

"What'd you do?"

"I decided the only way to find any flow with this guy would be to go with him. If he wants to talk, connect by listening. Shut up and listen. So I did. And it flowed better. Not great, but better."

Wondering, I offered, "So the worry you have is whether, sometimes, by being a nice guy and connecting with people, you might be hiding the real Patricio?"

"Yes," he answered, "I'm hoping you can answer that."

Measuring success

I said, "I've got an idea. I don't know if it's an answer, but it might help you stay in your flow. Can I start by asking you a question?"

"Sure," he said.

"You've been worrying whether you're showing up fully during these interviews, right?"

He said, "Right."

"Here's my question. How would you ever, ever, ever know if you 'showed up fully'? How would you measure it?"

"If I get asked back for the next round of interviews."

How are you measuring success?

"So you've only shown up fully when you're passed to the next gatepost. That's how you measure success, right?"

"Right," he said.

"I recognize that thinking." I said, "Patricio, I want to tell you about this idea of mine by telling you a story. Can I?"

"You bet!"

This is the story I told him.

Back when I was an actor, there were a group of eight of us who would get together once a month. As working actors, we experienced the wild ups and downs of our business, but we persevered, supporting our families by working in Hollywood. The eight of us came together to learn from each other and help each other when we could.

One day I was talking about exactly what Patricio was talking about: raising my batting average, except I was counting auditions, not interviews. As I wondered how I could get better, a woman sitting next to me, a wonderful actress named Linda Carlson, interrupted me. She asked, "Tom, how do you know if an audition is a success?"

Just like Patricio, I said, "If I get the job!"

What's in your control?

She reached out, put her hand over mine and said, "But you can't control that. There are a million reasons you might not get that job and not one of them is in your control. So by your measure, winning or losing is totally in their hands. That's a horrible, helpless feeling."

I asked, "But what's the alternative?"

She answered, “Be present. The choice to be present in that room is the only thing I can actually control. So I’m going to go into that room and be present with a vengeance. If the person reading the scene with me is a bag of bricks, I am going to stay present and not let it distract me. They could all be looking at pictures of other actresses and I would stay present. That’s how I measure success. Was I present?”

I looked at Patricio and concluded, “Linda’s idea was that you find flow when you’re present with yourself first. That mindfulness deepens the connections you make with others.”

**Be present
with yourself
first, then
connect with
others**

He said, “In that version, there are no expectations. There’s no next interview. No getting the job. It’s just being in the present. In my version, I’m being of service to get the quid pro quo. It’s full of expectations. Mine is future focused.”

I watched him think.

He said, “It’s as if there are two different doors. They both lead to flow. One is my way. Find flow by focusing on others. Connect with people, read the room and let it flow. The other is your way. Find flow by focusing on yourself. Notice everything that’s going on and flow with the trust that I’ll know what to do next. I like the sound of that.”

I ended my story to Patricio by telling him that I had gone into my very next audition with the sole intention of being present. And I got the gig. I remember feeling like I’d cracked a code. Changing how I measured success to something I could control allowed me to flow in a new way. My batting average rose for several years after that.

Patricio had a similar experience. At his next interview, he focused on being present and got passed to the next stage. He felt he’d added an arrow to his quiver that would help him target [The Look & Sound of Leadership](#).



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Core Concepts

- Focusing on connecting with others is one path to find flow
- An attitude of service can help create connections with people
- Being of service does not mean losing yourself
- Investigate how you measure success in your exchanges with people
- A second path to flow is choosing to be present and mindful

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