

## What to Do When You Don't Know What to Do?

Transcript of Charles Eisenstein's Interview

<https://charleseisenstein.org/video/what-to-do-when-you-dont-know-what-to-do/>

There are two things you can do in the space between stories when you don't know what to do. One thing is to do nothing. The other thing is to do something. Try something out, make mistakes and find out what doesn't work. The danger is, out of urgency or fear, to keep doing what you had been doing in the old story, knowing maybe on some level that it's not going to work, but feeling afraid to not do anything. So in that case it's a lot better to just not do anything at all. And then you can give yourself permission to act from a different spirit, from a different animating force that isn't fear, that isn't the panic of "I have to be doing something, I don't know what to do, let me just do what I used to do, that feels a little safer."

But instead act from a spirit of play and exploration. It's kind of like to follow what makes you feel alive. Yeah, I would say really to act from a spirit of play and exploration, and "Yeah, let's try this, maybe it won't work, but I'm not afraid to try." Especially not afraid to do things that seem illogical, irrational, naïve, irresponsible, impractical. Probably there are or could be parental voices, societal voices, economic pressures or your own internal voices that say, "Going around New Zealand, making a film about these kind of things, like that's not going to get you anywhere. That's irrational, impractical, unrealistic."

Like especially when you just starting on something audacious, there are probably these voices and economic pressures that back it up, I mean what's practical is to work for The Machine. What's practical is to contribute to the technological and cultural program of domination. And if you contribute well to that, you cut down lots of worsts. If you develop new fracking techniques, then you are going to make a lot of money. That's practical.

But to step into something that is not involved in the extraction of products from nature or the extraction of services from the social matrix of relationships, then you are not going to be financially rewarded in general or the path to financial reward is going to be very mysterious, very dark. You are not going to know how your gifts are going to come back to you.

So most of the things, not all, but most of the things that are most needed today are not nearly as financially rewarding as the things that are just perpetuating the status quo. So it requires a bit of naïveté, a bit of impracticality to step into them.

Yes, the fear of making mistakes is certainly part of what dissuades us from doing what is really necessary. Also economic pressures, you know it's not just some psychological thing. I mean so many people want to leave their carriers to do something meaningful, to do something beautiful to them. And it's not their imagination that they will no longer get a salary when they step into that. I mean sometimes, you know you make that choice and then some other opportunity that does pay you salary comes up. That happens sometimes. Some people have amazing inventions that do really help the world and that people buy and they make lot of money from it. I'm not saying that never happens, but in general usually there is a step of courage required, whatever that step is for you, and it's different for everybody.

But whatever that next step into the new story is, it's going to come with a little bit of uncertainty. It's going to require courage. We have to see that, even if we are looking at the people we blame for the problems. Maybe, I don't know, oil company executives, bankers, or politicians and we think "If I were that person I would do better, I would make different choices, I wouldn't continue that policy or whatever."

But that believe “if I were you, I would do better than you are doing”, that means that you don’t understand what it’s like to be that person. You don’t understand the totality of influences converging on that person. There are biographical influences, their childhood, their education, their acculturation, and the pressures that surround them. If you understood all of that, you’d realize that it takes just as much courage for them to make the next step into service to a more beautiful world as it does for you to take your next step. We are all in this together.

And when we let go of the judgementality that says, “I would do better than you”, then it opens up curiosity. What is it like to be you? How can I change that totality of circumstances? How can I change the story that you are living in? And that allows us to be much more effective than we are in an oppositional frame that says, “You are bad and I’m going to stop you.” Like sometimes that works, especially if when you have more force at your disposal than they do and you can stop them. But normally speaking, those with the most force at their disposal are those in charge and you are not going to stop them with more force. You are not going to outgun the military industrial complex. We have to rely on a change of heart. We have to rely on their story breaking down, not working for them.

So how do we do that? How do we create conditions for a change of heart? How do we disrupt the system and disrupt the story that they are living in? How do we accelerate perhaps or facilitate their stepping out of that story. The breakdown of the story, how do we do that? What is the story built of at the most basic level? These are the kind of questions we have to ask.

So I’m not suggesting that everybody just do nothing and withdrawal from the world. That is not always the right advice. It’s especially the right advice when you feel trapped in your patterns of doing and you see perverse results from those patterns of doing. So for example if someone is like a repeat dieter and they keep going on diets and losing weight and gaining it back again and losing weight and gaining it back again, and getting fatter and fatter after each round, instead of saying, “You should go on another diet and try harder this time”, you might say, “Stop dieting, like maybe if you stop trying to control your eating and you really trust yourself, maybe you should not do anything.” Whatever you are doing that is not working and it’s obvious that it’s not working, but you are afraid to stop doing it, then that’s the time to not do anything, because we need a period of unlearning, of deprogramming.

But then when you’ve done that a bit, when there is a little distance between you and your old habits, you are going to feel the desire to act. You are going to feel something calling you, calling on your care, calling on your love. And you might not know what to do, but you still operate according to your best understanding and then you make mistakes and you find, “Oh, you know, that still was actually just a different version of the way I used to do things.” And you fall back again into the sense of surrender, futility, “I don’t know what to do again.”

Those attempts to meet the needs around you in a different way, eventually call upon a new understanding to come to you. But it needs that empty space in order to come to you. It needs that surrender, it needs that giving up. Which doesn’t mean... It’s subtle because I’m not even offering surrender as a formula. Because then you end up with fake surrender, if you are trying to surrender. It’s a really natural process of giving up, often out of exhaustion, out of burnout, like that’s a good thing, “I just can’t do it anymore.” Well, it could be because what you’ve been doing is not what you are supposed to be doing. So it’s good that you can’t do it anymore.

What you actually need to be doing or what the next step is for you, could be something that in your old story was inconceivable, where it would have seem a waste of time. It might be leaving politics to become a musician. You know, I know a guy who did that. He was in politics and now he is a musician and he says it’s not that he gave up trying to change the world. I mean, he did in a way, but it’s that

he is much more effective now at changing the world than he was as a politician, where everything he did was pretty much constrained by the system. Politicians play a certain role in the drama and if they deviate to far from that role they get ejected. So they either allow themselves to be ejected or they make compromises. They play along with the game and maybe try to change things a little tiny bit, deviate a little bit from what's expected and there is a certain range where they are allowed to do that, but really mostly what they are is placeholders or functionaries.

So that might be an example of like a totally different life path that seems insane almost from the old perspective. So that's why some kind of descent into an empty space, a dark space, a liminal space is usually necessary to really change your life path. But it could just happen to you. Sounds something like, "Ok, now what I need to do is going to the space between stories." This is a process much bigger than we are. It happens often through an illness, through a divorce, through a bankruptcy, through like something that looks from the other side as a catastrophe, but then only when you've gone through it is revealed as the greatest gift you could have received.