



## Reflections on Wisdom

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Believe nothing, no matter where you read it, or who said it, no matter if I have said it, unless it agrees with your own reason and your own common sense. (Buddha)

At Memoirs, the idea of life wisdom - where it comes from, how to preserve it and how to transmit it - is at the heart of every production we do. The process of how we accumulate and define wisdom, however, is a question that is increasingly interesting to me as I meet more and more fascinating, inspiring and wise men and women. The stories and wisdom I hear are the result of both deliberate reflections and accidental insights. Wisdom can be taught but is often most relevant when it is derived from experience and then passed on to others. At Memoirs, we consciously ask our clients to "track" their wisdom in a section called Lessons Learned where we ask how we can actively articulate what we consider to be important and worth sharing; in other words, one's own wisdom. Each of us has it, and everyone wants more.

### A Definition of Wisdom

There are multiple ways of defining wisdom. Certain dictionary sources seem to agree on three general

definitions: the ability to discern what is good or true; one's common sense and judgment; and the sum of learning and knowledge. The etymology of the word comes from the roots of "vision" (wis-) and "judgment" (-dom). So if wisdom is both capacity and content, then the wise among us have the right knowledge, and also the ability to deliver it in a way where its impact can be most felt. Our challenge: how to develop such a skill in our day-to-day lives!

### How to Gain Wisdom

If we think of wisdom as the kind of insight that helps navigate life through good judgment and knowledge, then following our "wisdom" assumes that there's a best way of doing things. Gaining wisdom is not like following a recipe. But for those who want to actively pursue the development of some enlightenment in our daily lives, here are a few hints on how to gain more wisdom in your life.

- Identify a source or sources of wisdom that you find trustworthy. You could ask people who you consider to be wise how they've learned what they've learned or how - they gained wisdom in their lives from the various experiences that changed them. Listen well - step one in being wiser is letting yourself really hear what others have to say.
- Be conscious that everything you experience is an opportunity for change and for developing wisdom. Ask yourself actively from your various experiences what did you learn from this moment that you will use again in the future in another situation. Developing judgment leads to behaviors that over time turn into wisdom.
- Take the time to reflect about your actions both present and past. What have these situations taught you, or could they have, if you had let them? Identify patterns you might be experiencing - it could be a



Lesson Learned (something we love capturing and recording for our clients).

- Look for your internal sources of wisdom. Ask yourself why you do the things you do more consistently: is it because you were taught certain patterns or rituals that you now find yourself respecting automatically? Do they come from readings or from people whose thinking and habits you emulate? You may begin to notice that a higher truth or a value-oriented path is guiding you into right thinking and right behavior.
- Start a journal and record your progress. Reflection on what you have learnt gives you perspective and ultimately, more wisdom throughout your lifetime. And this is the single easiest way of preserving your wisdom so that it may be likewise shared with others in the future who will experience endless satisfaction from rereading your words in your own hand.

### Developing Our Wisest Selves

Part of gathering wisdom is being attentive and learning actively from others. Someone whose work I have found inspiring is Eduard Ezeanu, a communications coach with an attitude-based approach who counsels and writes about developing better people skills. He has written about wisdom as a quality that people can and should develop. Some of his approach to wisdom follows:

**Wisdom is something you can acquire relatively early in life**, provided you follow the right track, you do the right things.

**Quality of experience instead of quantity.** It's not how much experience you have that makes you wise, it's which kind of experience you have. Which is why plenty of older people are in fact not wise.

**If your life is repetitive and shallow, chances are you'll never be wise.** But if you live a rich life, with various and powerful experiences, the kind that truly shape a person's personality, then you acquire wisdom fast.

**One of the most important lessons you can learn**

**is that age is not wisdom.** Wisdom is something which derives from the quality of your life, your thinking and your environment. And the best thing is that you can consciously shape all of these, so you can consciously make yourself a wiser person.

### Experiencing Wisdom From the Source

Wisdom manifests itself in myriad ways. It is important for us to learn and listen about others' wisdom in order to nurture our own. At Memoirs, we are privileged to experience the wisdom of others as they recount their life stories and reflect on their values and beliefs.

Sitting down with a second-generation entrepreneur of a 90-year old family business, we were struck by his strong sense of self, developed over decades. He has been noted by others for his visionary qualities, often likened to Bill Gates or Henry Ford, the consummate entrepreneur type. One example was particularly compelling: when he took a 3,500-employee multinational business and changed direction dramatically when faced with a major economic change. He stated that one of his Lessons Learned was the following: "When running a business, you never look back. If you do, all you get is a kink in your neck". The company has outlived many competitors who stayed with the old ways and have failed as a result, and has become number one in its industry.

In a similar theme, a woman with a successful business shared with her children and grandchildren her own wise words. "Don't dwell on mistakes. We all make them. Say, 'I goofed. Now what can I do to move forward?' It's a waste of energy to dwell on 'I should have, I could have but I didn't.' There's no point in going there. Just LEARN from your mistakes and move on."

It can also happen that in sharing our wisdom that our own insight deepens. Another woman with whom we were working told a story about her six-year-old granddaughter. When she began to have a dramatic meltdown, she said to her grandmother, "I try so hard but I am only a little kid". She then told her grandmother about a problem with a girl at school who had made her mad. The grandmother wisely replied that people cannot



make you mad, it's your choice to be mad at them or not. She stopped crying and said, "Oh Granny, I know that", immediately calming down. Later, Granny visited her school and saw a large banner on her classroom wall saying "I am responsible for me" and she understood why her granddaughter accepted this "wisdom" so readily. But she then asked, if a child can understand one's own role in how we behave, then why do adults so often forget it?

### **On Being Wise**

Confucius said there are three ways to become wise: by reflection, which is noblest; by imitation, which is easiest; or by experience, which is the bitterest. And while it is true that sometimes it is not pleasant to "learn from our mistakes", there is no denying that some of the most successful people have become so because they have developed wisdom, through trial and error, that has shown them the right path to take. And whether you acquire your wisdom by careful consideration, by learning from others or by making mistakes, know that once won, it is always yours. And wisdom is only wisdom if others can benefit from it; so don't hesitate to share it with others!

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