



As I approach the end of another calendar year, I reflect on what has passed, what I have learned, and what life presents me in the new year ahead. I have always thought that my birthday is a far more important time for reflection as it is, in fact, the start of a new year. However, as this year comes to a close I find great solace in the words of Sun Tzu from “The Art of War”. In my humble opinion, it is one of the most profound statements written.

“Know thy enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles, you will never be defeated.”

First, we will all find ourselves in a hundred battles of many shapes, sizes, and forms. They call it “life”. It might be work, family, or the daily internal struggles we may face in a world telling us we’re not good enough, smart enough, or just ... enough.

However, the reality is that you must know the enemy in any battle. The skill is to know when to push forward against the enemy and when to retreat. The greatest challenge, however, is to acknowledge where the true enemy is.

I would suggest that, more often than not, the enemy is within.

We all have what Stephen Covey once called “response-ability” - the ability to respond. But those responses are often counter-productive. We become defensive. Or afraid. Or threatened. Our self-image rears its head in our preconceived notions and expectations. Our internal programming bubbles to the surface. Worse yet, if you’ve been raised in North America, you were probably socialized to believe that harder work is just what strong, tough people do - or that you should take a stance and defend it with all your might.

Pushing does not always get us closer to vanquishing the enemy. It rarely does. The enemy may not be a force to work against. Knowing thy enemy may require an understanding of what lies within. It may feel almost against the grain to slow down, step back, or let go, but it may be the one thing we need to do in the moment.

Let it percolate, as I always say.

That’s not saying that we shouldn’t forge ahead. There are lessons that can be learned when we are doing so. Sometimes, we have to just grind it out. However, sometimes, the fastest and most effective way forward is to stop. In my experience, most life events and challenges seem to have an organic life span - often unrelated to my self-imposed or perceived resolution timeline. Build your ability to respond by pausing, reflecting, and learning - whether you’re seeking results grounded in life, love, or the pursuit of happiness.

Take the time to know yourself. Be present in the moment. Let go. Breathe. Look within. Most importantly, let that knowledge lead you to all that is beautiful and fulfilling in 2024.

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