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LISTEN TO YOUR GASTRO- INTESTINAL SYSTEM*

*GUT

I know it in the pit of my stomach.

It's a gut decision.

My stomach is in knots.

I finally found the guts to go for it.

We certainly have a lot of phrases linking the gut to deliberation and decision-making...which is funny because we like to think of decision-making as a purely rational process.

But is it, really? And should it be?

The best decisions – including the best career decisions – are made when the gut and the brain work together, with the gut in charge of navigation and the brain in charge of execution.

And I don't just mean gut in the figurative sense. Our bodies give us important and useful information all of the time. Often, we don't notice this information or, worse, we disregard it because we live in an age where rationality is king. We worship logic. We operate from the neck up.

We are sooooo disconnected from our bodies.

Our disconnect from our bodies is the reason we get sick before we notice that something is wrong. My back going out was my body putting on the emergency brake. It was screaming at me to pay attention. This only happened because I consistently disregarded all of the caution lights along the way.

After reading the previous section, you may think of some of your health issues as your body's way of giving you a smack upside the head.

But wouldn't it be better if you learned to notice a gentle tap on the shoulder, instead? Before it gets to that point?

You can.

At any given moment your body is trying to tell you something.

You can choose to ignore it or you can tap into that wisdom. If that sounds a little too woowoo hippy dippy for you, think of it as biological feedback. Same thing, different language.

My coaching mentor, Martha Beck, has a simple exercise that she uses to help people tap into the wisdom of their bodies. She calls it the "body compass". Basically, she'll ask you to recall an unpleasant memory, hold it in your mind, and then notice the sensations you feel in your body, right from your feet to the top of your head. Then she'll ask you to do the same for a positive memory.

My positive memory sensation is a warm tingly feeling on my skin. My negative memory sensation feels like a suffocating tightening in my throat. For this reason, I call it the "boa constrictor".

Your own body compass sensations may or may not have anything to do with your actual gut, but for many people the negative sensation feels like an upset stomach. For others it's a tension in the shoulders, or a clenching of the jaw, or a tightening in the chest, or, like me, a choking feeling.

Try it yourself. Recall a negative experience. Hold it in your mind. Do a body scan from your toes to the top of your head. What physical sensations do you notice?

When I recall a negative memory and focus on it, I notice the body sensation(s)

Now, do the same for a positive memory.

When I recall a positive memory and focus on it, I notice the body sensation(s)

Martha calls this tool *body compass* and not simply *body scan* because you're supposed to use your body sensations to help you navigate the decisions in your life. You should head toward more of the things that make you feel good (warm and tingly, in my case), and away from the things that make you feel bad (boa constrictor, in my case).

A TAP ON THE SHOULDER

For me, that fleeting boa constrictor sensation was something I felt when I forced myself to do something I didn't really want to do – like fake enthusiasm at a research conference, or hang out with people I didn't actually like, or try to do work I hated.

The boa constrictor was like a gentle tap on the shoulder from my body. I should have paid attention. When I didn't, I got a big ol' smack upside the head when my back went out.

I have a friend who noticed an interesting tap on the shoulder once she started paying attention to what her body had to say about her job. Her manager had asked her to cross an ethical boundary with some contracts and she *literally* got a bad taste in her mouth. *Literally*. She Googled it and it turns out THAT'S A THING. Now you know where the saying comes from.

What's your "tap on the shoulder" body sensation? Hint: It's the negative body sensation you wrote down in this section.

My “tap on the shoulder” body sensation is:

Here’s what that “tap on the shoulder” sensation is saying to you:
Ummm...this might not be the best idea. May I recommend that you reconsider this course of action?

What’s your “smack upside the head” body sensation? Hint: It’s the persistent illness/injury health stuff you wrote down in section 8.

My “smack upside the head” body sensation is

Here’s what your “smack upside the head” sensation is saying to you:
I tried to tell you, but you never listen. Can we please fix this problem now?! Otherwise shit is gonna get ugly from now on.

Don't wait until shit gets ugly.

The body compass and all of this talk about listening to your gut boils down to this:

Notice what you hate. Notice what you love. Stop doing shit you hate. Start doing stuff you love. Your body will tell you the difference. Every time.

Pay attention.

Course correct as necessary.

Repeat.