

Journey of a Wounded Healer

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22. Fearlessness

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Most of my progress in the past several weeks in regaining the use of my limbs I attribute to a kind of fearlessness. My arm and leg already do not work as I wish. What could I do to make the situation any worse, barring a fall that injures my strong side? That is not likely to happen unless I am in a hurry, something it has been drilled into me not to do. I am, in fact, in no rush at all. I have the rest of my life to get better.

I learned this fearless, nothing-to-lose attitude many years ago when I bought my first commercially produced desktop computer, a 1993 Gateway 2000. It arrived with what the phone technician determined was a faulty motherboard. The company offered me two options: repackage the computer and ship it back to them for a replacement at no cost to me, or have them expedite a new motherboard to me with instructions and phone support on how to replace the circuit board myself. I was eager to use the new machine for which I had saved up for a long while, so I opted for the motherboard replacement. If I was unable to exchange new for old, I could still return the computer to them for a full replacement.

I saw this as a wonderful learning opportunity. The computer already did not work. How could I break it or make it work any less efficiently? If the repair was beyond me, I would learn that I ought to leave the insides of computers for the experts to fiddle with. The company would still replace it for me. How could I lose?

I further decided to forego the detailed, yet confusing, instructions shipped along with the new motherboard and made my own schematic drawing and notes on how to put back together everything I took apart. Gateway 2000 was not replacing the processor nor anything else plugged into the motherboard, which was, essentially, the rest of the computer. So, I had to reattach the old processor, hard drive, floppy drive, sound card, and all the ribbon cables back into the new motherboard.

Wanting to figure this new technology out, I was not in a hurry. While it took me an entire afternoon to effect the exchange, when I powered the computer up, it worked just fine. With periodic replacements and upgrades, and three new operating systems, I kept that computer running well enough to suit my needs for the next twelve years. I now make laptop and desktop computers for myself and friends from discarded machines and an array of parts I find in the trash room of my apartment building. I had confidence, another manifestation of fearlessness, because I couldn't break what wasn't working. It helped, too, that I didn't know enough to realize that much of what I was attempting was impossible.

This attitude has remained with me ever since and translated across countless situations, including recovery from my recent stroke. I am happy to consider every bit of well-intentioned advice sent my way, but I must figure out its application, if any, to my own life for myself. I have the confidence of those with nothing to lose for whom circumstances can only improve. This outlook has proved a life-saver to me. I pray for guidance and then get down to the task at hand, trusting that I will be able to accomplish what I have set my mind to. This disposition has never let me down when it counted most.