



Unplugging From The Man, Part II

*Submitted by Sherry Ackerman on
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One of the things that we need to do in order to Unplug is change our thinking. This is huge: much bigger than most people realize. Most people, in fact, have no real idea what they are thinking. They are on remote control, auto-pilot, creatures of habituated behavior that hasn't been examined in decades. Like Pavlov's dogs, they are fully conditioned robots.

Unplugging begins in the head. We have to mentally Unplug before we can physically Unplug. I'm talking about making conscious decisions to change deeply entrenched patterns of behavior. Let's look at a couple of examples:

Every time that people run out of an item, they automatically assume that "they need another one" and put it on the shopping list. The same is true of things that get broken, lost or worn-out. The meme is that everything has to be replaced: always, forever. This is simply not true. We already have enough "stuff" in our garages, attics, cellars and storage sheds to patch-in for anything that really needs to be replaced. The first question, though, is: "do we really even need this item?" Chances are, we don't. Chances are, we already own a dozen other items that can do the same task. Next step: use one of those.

If, however, the answer is that we really do need the item, the next question becomes, "do we have anything with which to 'make do' in place of this item?" My Grandmother, a feisty Vermonter (Bethel-Gilead), was the Master of Making-Do. I thought of her the other day

when I needed a small embroidery hoop. Mine had gone missing and was nowhere to be found--and I certainly wasn't about to buy another one. How could I 'make do'? What would my Grandmother have done? After a bit of thrashing around, I seized upon the idea of using the ring from a lid of a wide-mouth canning jar and a rubber band. 'Worked just fine!

But to pull this off, we have to stop the automatic impulse to "go get it" and, instead, cultivate an impulse to "create it". We have to replace buying with making. After a person switches to this type of thinking, it is not only liberating--it is downright fun! We are the artists of our own lives--lives that truly belong to us, not to The Man. Freedom! The most raw and potent form of secession.

While we are talking about changing our minds, we should look at how we view people. Do we discontinue using our snow-plow guy (even though he's given us 20 years of good, loyal service?) because some new guy will do it "cheaper"? Or, do we let our experienced teachers get laid off and be replaced by inexperienced rookies, because they are "cheaper"? And, do we evict our tenant with whom we have an informal rent-control agreement in order to get a new tenant who can "pay more"? These kinds of things happen every day of the week. People are not widgets! Let me say that again: people are not widgets! There is more to our "business" relationships than business. There is humanness. We are human beings first; landlords, tax payers and property owners second.

Do you remember where your

Grandfather worked? Everybody in the shop knew each other--and each other's children. They cared about each other's families. They were community. If someone fell into hard times, they passed the hat. If a neighbor couldn't pay the rent, solutions were found by which s/he could remain in their home and work it out. The guy who plowed the snow was part of the family--he got a big box of cookies for the Holidays and a rag-doll for his child. Sure, people watched their pennies. But, that wasn't all that they watched. They knew that they needed each other and that their community was only as strong as their weakest member.

This is going to require a big shift in the head. Contemporary Americans feel justified in getting "the cheapest"--no matter what the actual cost of the so-called "bargain" is. We have to start looking at the big picture again. Enlightened self-interest needs to replace simply self-interest.

The Man isn't going to help us change our minds. He's doing just fine by keeping us Plugged In. We're going to have to do this on our own. It's going to require some mindfulness training. Noble Simplicity!

Author's Note: This blogpost was the second in a series of articles about Unplugging from the Man. Stay tuned for more suggestions and ideas about achieving personal freedom.