

Bubbling Over ... by design

A simple lesson with corollary applications

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In a room in my house, I have a small fountain.

By decree of my Interior Designer, it resides in the Feng Shui money corner – a rather important corner to me.

For quite awhile, I had noticed that this fountain that used to be so noisy and free-flowing had become less and less so. Finally, as it slowed to a trickle I resigned myself to having to replace either the pump or the entire fountain.

And so I disconnected the pump electrical cord and took the fountain out to the back yard.

As I poured the water out, the stones in the fountain followed, falling out onto the driveway. It crossed my mind, as they tumbled out, "Now, why are there stones in this fountain? It's a nice porcelain fountain with no real need for stones. Sure, they're pretty, but..."

Laying the empty fountain down, I lifted the covering structure and there, sure enough, was the pump. It is a small, submersible pump still very securely connected to the fountain's tubing which was itself also still very securely in place and sealed.

I noticed instantly, too, that the basin in which the pump sat was covered with a thick, viscous residue that extended to the intake slot of the pump. That's a nice way of saying it was slimy.

Really, there wasn't that much but it was more than sufficient to choke things up.

I hosed off the residue and cleaned out the basin and the intake slot, and then washed off the entire fountain and put it back together again.

Looking down at the pile of pretty stones, I decided that, whatever the reason for putting the stones in this pretty container, the stones no longer fit in to the purpose of the fountain. I saved them in a separate container for another use at

another time.

I replaced the fountain on its pedestal in the corner of the room, filled it with fresh water, plugged it in, turned it on and ... the fun, frolicking, bubbly sound of flow and possibility returned to my room.

And then I realized that for me, this was a metaphorical exercise. I had allowed something valuable to me, something that should be free-flowing, to become clogged by simple day-to-day wear coupled with inattention. And then, without a great deal of thought, I gravitated to a mindset that the entire thing was ruined and had to be replaced or thrown out.

But by 'taking the cover off' and looking at exactly how the thing works and what might be the cause of the disruption in flow, I was able to identify the problem and, importantly, the 'source' of the problem (i.e. accumulation of dust and foreign materials over an extended period of time). The latter is important since it provides a framework for keeping the flow clear in the future; the former allowed me to instantly fix the disruption.

And the entire exercise becomes a prototype for application to other areas of my life – inside the house and out, those things and events “real”, and those existing in thought.

There is even broader applicability in the realm of groups and organizations.

At the heart of my experience with the fountain was a simple awareness that something better was available to me than the constricted flow of my once-flourishing fountain. This was my starting point.

For a long while it was an observable fact that the water flow was diminishing, all the while the observer thinking the pump was dying, all the while assuming the flow would continue to abate until it finally stopped altogether. And, all the while, it was on the observer's list of things to do/fix.

With the awareness that there was something better, there arrived the idea that it was time to address this 'something' that clearly was not working as it once did. This was the idea of action.

Disconnecting the 'thing' from power, dumping what was too long in the container to be clear and fresh, and taking the cover off to get a really good look at the inner-workings, the fundamental problem became readily apparent – as did the solution.

The underlying design was simple and efficient. But the execution (pumping) had

become compromised through being allowed to operate quite on its own without oversight and/or attention to process – including simple maintenance. The effect was cumulative and the result was that the engine worked harder and harder for an ever-diminishing production.

Applying a powerful, focused, directed stream of the stuff the fountain was designed to pump to the pump and to the basin rendered them clear of the blockage. Knowing the origins of the impediment provides a schema to evaluate, identify, and fix like problems going forward. And the pump returned to production operating a full capacity.

And what of the stones? They were decorative mainly. I seem to recall that they also had something of a specious purpose in providing ballast and water reduction ('shortage' thinking?).

Ultimately, they were not crucial to the operation of the fountain, appearances aside. They were not included in the 'revitalized' flow.

Resplendent in the sunlight in an old baseball hat, they don't appear to be disappointed with this new role. It's not a postponement for them. It's just who and what they are.