

Choosing a New Path vs. Solving a Problem--Part One

by Dennis Hooper, copyright © 2009, published in the *Houston Home Journal* on July 4, 2009

The purpose of this article is to raise your awareness. Perhaps you will see your current situation in a fresh way. Maybe you'll be encouraged that improvement is definitely possible.

As I read Andy Stanley's latest book, *The Principle of the Path*, I marked many passages. My intent is to apply the book's concepts to what you may be facing in your life right now.

The principle of the path is this: **Direction determines your destination.** Contrary to popular myth, it's not your intentions, your goals, your dreams, your beliefs, your intellect, your education, your goodness, or anything other than the actions you take. "In every arena of life, we are moving in a specific direction toward a specific destination." Often, however, we cannot accurately predict that destination in advance.

"No one disputes the validity of this principle as it relates to planes, trains, and automobiles." Can you imagine climbing aboard a plane bound for New York, expecting it to arrive in California? Of course not! Yet "the principle of the path governs all aspects of life, including dating, marriage, child-raising, career, finances, health--you name it. You and I will win or lose in life by the paths we choose."

The sentence in the book that stimulated me to write this article is this: "Recognizing the distinction between a *solution* and a *path* is the first step in understanding the principle of the path." I work with people who seek solutions to problems all the time. But nobody ever says to me, "Hey, Dennis, I'm having some difficulty here. Will you help me consider alternate paths that I might pursue?"

So, I suggest you pause and consider some less-than-desirable situations you face. Some other consultant might say to you, "Don't think of this as a problem; think of it as an opportunity." Andy Stanley would say, however, "to get from where you don't want to be to where you do want to be requires two things: time and a change of direction. There isn't a quick fix."

Perhaps you want improvement, but you're not quite sure what you should do. Maybe you are working on a transition in your organization. Maybe you feel you are at a plateau in your professional growth. Perhaps the influence that you think you should have on others isn't happening.

Many leaders seek solutions. They often define the problem as being outside themselves. They insist that if someone else would change, the situation would improve. Yet the situation persists.

Several weeks ago, I wrote "But Why Do I Always Have to Change First?" It's a response I hear often from leaders I support. They think, "Hey, I'm okay. The problem is out there, not with me." Those who are able to improve the situation, however, realize they've been following a path that has led them here.

"Deep in our hearts, we all believe that we are too smart to make decisions that will adversely affect our lives. We are convinced that we are too careful, too shrewd, too experienced."

"To find the path that will take you where you want to go, you must break the cycle of self-deception. It's hard to tell yourself the truth. Sometimes truth is so painful you would rather run than embrace it. Telling yourself the truth will free you to move from where you are to where you want and need to be."

"Your decision-making environments are not emotionally neutral. In the emotion of the moment, you are easily swayed by conventional wisdom, the herd mentality, or even your own patterns of behavior, patterns that are so familiar you just trek that way out of habit. These are the paths of least resistance."

"Every big decision you make will have an emotional component to it. Self-deception is easy when emotions run high. Emotionally charged decision-making environments make it almost impossible to gain the perspective we need to choose paths that take us where we want to go." Oh, my!

Please join me next week to further explore this concept of choosing a different path rather than seeking a solution to a problem. (Look on my website or contact me to see a copy of the "Why Do I Always Have to Change First?" article. That article contains very valuable perspective for any leader!)

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