

James Flaherty Coaching

Below is a transcript of a coaching conversation between James Flaherty and a student in the Professional Coaching Course. Steve is a pseudonym.

James Flaherty: So how's your day going?

Steve: It's a great day.

JF: What makes it a great day for you?

S: I love meeting new people and being in an environment where I'm challenged to look at myself more closely and that kind of thing.

JF: OK, so what did you bring?

S: I want full emotional and creative expression through physical activity.

JF: (Laughing) Full? What does that mean, full?

S: To get to a place where I feel alive and satisfied, or expressed or fully um...used.

JF: This is a long list: used, expressed, creative, satisfied. So why do you want so much?

S: Why do I want so much? Well, because I think I've missed some opportunities. I haven't fully engaged in my life in a way that I would like to. And I haven't therefore, contributed in the way that I want to.

JF: So you feel like you missed some things? You missed some opportunities and you have some regret about it.

S: Yeah, nothing really comes to mind to back it up.

JF: I thought I was just repeating back what you said. Wasn't that one of the things you said: missed opportunities?

S: Sure, that's one thing that I said. I would like to continue to take full advantage of my life. I'd like to...

JF: Listen to your language: "I want to take advantage of my life."

S: I want to live my life to it's fullest.

JF: (Cracking up laughing.) Why these adjectives? Like *all, full*, what all that about? (Pause) This works better if you talk out loud.

S: Instead of thinking?

JF: Yeah

S: I don't know.

JF: Really?

S: It's colorful. It's decorative. It's fluffy. It's dramatic.

JF: So what is it that you are carrying around that's thwarting you or slowing you down, holding you back?

S: From living my life the way I want to live it?

JF: That whole list: creative, expressive, joyful, all that. What is it that you are carrying around moment to moment that's blocking that?

S: Fear.

JF: Of?

S: Fear of letting myself really be known. Fear of falling. Fear of being judged, of being rejected, of not being loved, of...

JF: That's a long list of fears, too.

S: You want one? Instead of five?

JF: (Laughing) Well what is it then?

S: I don't know.

JF: Two lines of defense. Line number 1 is to say everything, because one of those might be right. And then the second line—ahhh I disavow all of it. So I am asking you as the person who is living your life. And you talk about it as if you're not sure what you are afraid of. Which might be the case, but when you start to list, that Steve to me is now like a list of what everybody's afraid of. Being found out, being seen, not being seen, falling, being held too tight. But what is it for you?

S: So on a moment to moment basis, I'm aware of feeling afraid of letting other people down, or not somehow satisfying others. And them...

JF: Killing you.

S: Killing me? Sure. And if not that, taking away love or attention or approval.

JF: Right

JF: Are you really afraid of that? So when you are doing your day-to-day job and living with your wife, you're afraid that people are going to do that?

S: I think it is not examined as much as it could be. Because I don't feel that way specifically with my wife. At work, no.

JF: Yeah. So I don't think there's anything. I think you just have a habit. Unless there is some unseen something that you haven't told us about yet.

S: I have a habit of seeing myself in this way or...

JF: Yeah.

S: I haven't moved my self-awareness up to who I am?

JF: Sometimes we think there is something I have to realize or a fear I have to get over, in order to express myself. And, Steve, I am not expressing myself, there must be some fear there. Well, what fear? Well it must be fear of—this sounds like a logical one, and then we tell that to ourselves and we tell that to our friends and they go, “Oh yeah, that sounds like the fear that would stop us.” It sounds like it is an arguing back from the situation, rather than what's actually happening.

S: Can I offer a few more of my thoughts before?

JF: You can offer all you want.

S: All right. There are some things that I want to be sure we get in the pool.

JF: Oh there's more stuff that you want. Tell me...

S: Um—We've gone through the four days without me talking about any physical activity, and I don't have any, so I'd like to have something as a part of the result of this.

JF: OK

S: I also was really surprised at how much I talked about that I am an artist in my introduction and I do some art, but I don't—it's not a part of my daily life to be an artist. Intimacy with my wife is an area that I'd like to be more revealed with her. I'd like to allow her to be closer to me.

JF: Is she interested in that?

S: Yes.

JF: OK

S: In other words I have some ideas about this, that it can happen through physical activity. I have some ideas, and I'll keep talking, and I'm sure I'll come away with something that'll be good.

JF: (Chuckling).

S: Here's one of my ways of operating. I have regret so if, like in my introduction if I didn't say such and such I was regretful about that. So even though I have regret about things I don't prepare a lot of the time, so I keep this habit going. So in order to not be regretful that I've forgotten to say something that I want to say, I'd love to have—well, whatever. Here's what I wrote as part of my thing. What is a plan of development for myself, I'd like to have more sex, and I'd like to...

JF: With your wife?

S: Yes. And she's ready for that. It's me that's holding it up.

JF: She did call me last night and said, can you do something with this guy—he's kinda cute but you know he's a little, reserved...

S: I love martial arts and I started to get into aikido but I just didn't stick with it. Dancing, I really don't—it's not a language that I am comfortable with, so as far as a new practice or physical exercise or whatever, that would be fabulous, I think for me.

JF: OK. Anything else you'd like me to do?

S: Anything else I'd like you to do?

JF: Yeah—I'm getting a list.

S: Well thanks for asking, let me just...oh death is a great one.

JF: Sure, why not, throw that in.

S: Lay it on me now.

JF: Just in case I didn't know anything to say.

S: Oh also I am really really busy, and I don't have time for anything else, and I don't know how the hell I'm gonna read all these books. So now you know whatever that I prepared.

JF: So tomorrow call Mary in our office and ask her to send you the Completion List. It's 15 pages of questions about things you need to complete in your life. So everything up until now that you have ever done, you can be complete about.

S: OK, I will call her tomorrow.

JF: Because my feel in all of this, in what you said, is regret and the fear of regret. So preparing kind of, but not preparing enough, and then regretting it, then feeling bad about that. There's a—what? Incredible amount of mileage that you're getting from regretting.

So a main recommendation, Steve, is to stop imagining that you're going to have an insight and from that insight you're life is going to be...that. Now, you're probably like me and you're going to have to hear that 10,000 times because there isn't a—cause that's how you do things. You're waiting for an insight, and/or you're waiting because you're doing everything correctly, for life to turn out. It ought to, because you are a good person, and you are doing good work, and you have integrity, and you tell the truth, and how come it doesn't feel the way you expect it to feel given what you are putting out? So a self-observation is to please start to notice when you don't do something that you want to do. Like, say, going home and making love with your wife tonight. And you want to do that, you might want to leave early and you want to, then if you don't. Notice what happened there. My surmise is that you're afraid of regretting something if you do it. Like tomorrow, you'll regret something about it. This is one of those ones that doesn't work as a thought experiment. It only works in the moment. So see when you are planning on doing something and you don't do it, if fear of regret is stopping you. And then explore what fear of regret is. It's a total mental phenomenon. Cause we're not afraid of some things here, we're afraid of something that is potentially here. What are you making of this?

S: I going to have to listen to my tape and read my notes. I don't know. Afraid—it's not that I'm afraid of something...

JF: Yeah, fear of regret. So regret is just a cop out, right?

S: Because there's activity and there's no activity.

JF: Yeah. So being afraid

S: It doesn't mean anything, really, by itself. It doesn't exist.

JF: Right. It's a cop out. So being afraid of the lion that's outside your tent is way different than being afraid of regret. But in our body/mind it seems the same, so that's what I mean. So the practice I recommend that you take on is take Tango lessons with your wife.

S: Great. I won't like it. I mean I am excited now—but it will freak me out.

JF: You don't know what it will be like, Mr. Smarty Pants.

S: All right.

JF: You're so sure you're gonna know what everything is like. You do NOT know.

S: Alright.

JF: Do you see how that spoils life? I know I am gonna hate but...you don't know! It'll be different every second. Every song will be different. Every week will be different. By the way, Tango lessons are no fun until you get the outfit. (Laughter). Until she gets the outfit. And you have to eat the right food beforehand. That will give you a chance to get into your body, and also that is where the freedom to move will be. Trying to figure it out will keep leading you to lose energy.

So you get to have a never ending list that is for however long, a year or so. What I am expecting to get, or what I am getting, Steve, what experience, Steve, you are expecting to have or what feedback you're expecting to get from others, or what regard from others. So start writing all of it down capturing as much as you can of it.

S: What I am expecting to get.

JF: Yep. It includes everything, from experience to things to compliments to looks to whatever. And then as you start to get going with that, ask yourself in what way am I manipulating myself and manipulating others to get this? So two weeks of just listing what I want, what I am expecting. And then the second two weeks is: how am I manipulating myself and others to get it?

The third thing, after you have done each of those for two weeks, is: what price do I pay for living like that? In what way does it affect my being refreshed, being alive, being spontaneous, being free? Because, of course, that's the trap of it. You want all those things. So, I don't know you, but somebody would want all those things. So they would try to get themselves to act in ways that those experiences would happen and try to manipulate other people to get the experiences, which stops the experiences from happening. Because none of those things happens from manipulation. Those things happen from release. Joy and creativity and energy is all here. There is nothing we have to do to get it. We just have to stop doing what we are doing to keep it out.

So death. So death is why you are listing all those things. Because they are all kind of the antithesis of dead. All of those—alive, energetic—are the opposite.

S: The list of my expectations.

JF: Yeah, the list that we started with.

S: The things I listed.

JF: Yeah, all are the opposite of death. So let me just leave you with one troubling question for your journaling, which is: in what way do I act as if I am already dead? Because you do. I think you do. There is a certain way—you have both sides of course. There's the stuff that you want, but there's also how much the flame is turned down. Is that too nasty of a question for you?

S: No

JF: So, do you have any questions about any of that?

S: Not right now. If I do later, can I ask?

JF: No, this is it man. Now or never (laughs). So what was this like for you?

S: I'm glad to go away with things that don't make a lot of sense to me.

JF: What is it that doesn't make sense?

S: I just don't know what's going to become of it.

JF: Right.

S: And...

JF: But you know what happens from Tango lessons: more sex

S: Good.

JF: That's what Tango lessons are for.

S: (Laughter)

JF: And completing things from the past frees up a whole bunch of energy. And the exercise about expectations will let you catch on to how you are manipulating yourself and others to assure in fact that you don't get those things.

S: And the piece of regret is definitely going to be insightful.

JF: So is that more sensible to you? Obviously we don't know how it is going turn out. That's the whole point of doing it, but you see the point of it?

S: Yes.

JF: So anything else?

S: No. I am thrilled to be here and be in this process.

JF: We're thrilled that you are here too, Steve. You're so fun!