Trying to Find my Stride Part One

April 7th, 2019

I believe that in order to get past those annoying anxieties from my past that have resurfaced, I first have to become better at recognizing them. This situation in which I've found myself seems to be a perfect storm that all came together in a quick timeframe. Looking at the definition and meaning of what a "perfect storm" is, it's present when a number of negative or unpredictable factors come together to form the overall storm. If I take stock of everything, I didn't even understand how many factors were coming together until they were piling up. From my point of view, this is what I can see:

- I'm extremely critical of myself
- I spent many years of my life being obese, which doesn't breed self-confidence
- Being older than most college students while in school
- Taking a long time to finally find those careers of interest
- Those careers being very tough to get into
- Taking much longer than most people to attempt starting a relationship

I can't put my finger on the exact reason, but I've always been self-critical. This is something that no one really knows about me. I'm the type of person where if asked to describe my strengths and weaknesses, I would probably spend a few minutes on the former, and ten minutes on the latter. For both men and women, it's extremely easy to look at society, look at what we are supposed to be and should strive to be. Along with that, a lack of self-confidence to begin with can only heighten that tendency to focus on the negatives.

My family and close friends that have known me for many years know what I used to look like. For many years, I kept putting on weight without realizing just how bad I was letting it get. I was at my worst in high school, with a face covered in acne and tipping the scales at 240 lbs at my worst. For the record, I'm only 5'8" so that weight was not on a tall or athletic frame. I was fortunate that I was never bullied for my weight, but I felt that decreasing self-esteem nonetheless. During these years, I pretty much avoided talking to girls at all times, and stayed within the comfort of my small circle of friends and was considerably less social back then.

From the period after high school graduation to my college graduation, there were a lot more than the standard four years. It's always been a big struggle for me to figure out what I want to do with my life. It is one of the biggest and most important decisions of a person's life, and I've often felt the weight of said decision. Some people know from the time that they're a child what they want to do with their life. I was never one of them. While I had the most fun I've ever had in school at Bradley University, there was a ticking clock in the background that I could always hear. There was pressure (self-induced) to get things figured out sooner rather than later.

Figuring out careers and jobs of interest was certainly not easy. To top it off, naturally those careers I found that greatly interest me are either extremely tough to get into/competitive, or have incredibly long and thorough hiring processes. So when you have a lot of friends that are younger and are further along in the process than I am, it suddenly becomes easier to imagine that ticking clock. It's tough to handle when you apply to a job, take a few initial tests and pass them, after filling out a very lengthy application, get placed into an eligibility pool, and don't hear anything from them close to one year later. And by the way, that's really commonplace for that line of work.

A longtime lack of self-esteem can easily lead to being in a position where you've never been in a relationship with someone. This is another area where I can feel a self-induced pressure at times. If I were to tell someone that I still haven't asked out a girl yet, at this point in my life, they would probably look at me like I told them I believe the Earth is flat (I don't believe that for the record). While I was building up my confidence to its highest point in college, I became friends with a lot of girls. Most of my classes were 75-80% girls, which is a different dynamic that I had never experienced before. Eventually, I got to the point where I felt comfortable enough to let one know how I felt about her. This was a friendship where we spoke pretty regularly, and had a few classes together.

It was an entirely new feeling to put myself in a place where I knew there was a chance of humiliation. Before doing so, I had gone through many different outcomes and scenarios in order to try and prepare myself. Nothing ended up happening, and from that point, we spoke less frequently. I reached out a few more times in subsequent months just to say hello, wish her a happy birthday, or something else very minor. She never once replied with a single word, which ultimately led me to the conclusion that I overvalued that friendship and that

we apparently won't be speaking at all moving forward. It's hard not to feel like I got disrespected in the end, and now I can notice all of the red flags that I was too naive to see earlier.

The second time I made an attempt was a little over a year ago. It was another friend I made in college where we had some classes together. I decided to take a shot and let her know about my feelings, and ultimately, again was told in so many words that I didn't measure up. Also, for the second time, I watched the friendship suffer after this point. Thankfully, it didn't end up like that first instance. However, some (not nearly as many) of those same red flags became pretty clear once again. The positive is that I've been better about spotting them the second time. I feel that there still is some semblance of friendship here, but it does feel like another friendship where I may have thought it was stronger than it really was. Both of these instances have had much larger negative impacts on me than I would've expected. Hindsight being as powerful as it is, I wish I could take back both times I let these feelings become known.

Every individual has their own way in which they look at friendships and what they mean for them. One character trait that I know is a strength as well as a weakness is how I see friendships. When I consider someone to be a friend, that is something that I don't take lightly. I'm sure I've had friends that are surprised when and how they've heard from me in the past. If I consider you to be a friend, that means that I'll go to bat for you however I can and I'll be a fiercely loyal friend. The weakness of this trait comes in where it can sometimes result in getting burned by a friendship. Of the many friendships I made recently (especially in college), a select number of them have lessened or dissolved completely. Occasionally, I make the realization that this person might not have the same respect for me that I have for them. Or, I wake up and realize that just about 100% of the communication is initiated on my end, which isn't really much of a friendship. On these occasions, I know I can feel a little more hurt or disappointed than I should.

All of these factors came to a head to form the "perfect storm" for which I've been dealing with for a while now. I lot of these factors and negatives are ones where I am at fault, while a few are out of my hands. It's all led to this place in my life where I'm trying to figure out what shape my life will have from here on out. I know how lucky I am that I've never suffered from bullying, abuse, depression, or any other serious issues that plague so many people. For those reasons alone, putting all of this out there feels a little selfish. However, like I

said, I believe that I need to be truly honest about these demons before I can really turn things around. There is no easy way to say it. It feels crappy having a mindset where you become comfortable second guessing your decisions and allowing that anxiety to build, while old insecurities come out from a dusty closet.

It is a lot to take in each and every day. Feeling fatigued and worn down becomes easy when I am not at all where I thought I would be at this stage in my life. Just on its own, the process of looking for/applying to new jobs or careers eats away at me when up to this point, I'm catching very few breaks. It doesn't feel like I'm getting much of anything back compared to the time and work I'm putting into the process. But, I hold onto the belief that this all will make me a tougher, better person when all is said and done.