

## THE SLIPPERY SLOPE

by Tom Champoux, co-founder and president

Reflection and experience both tell me the same thing: we make better decisions when we are focused, have a good energy level and feel in balance. The opposite is also true: the more we are scattered, have low energy and are out of balance, the more clear thinking eludes us. This is fertile ground for a reactive decision based on a short-term solution where consequences are costly or painful. The question becomes, how do we attain the former and avoid the latter?

I am sure there are a lot of variables but the one that most intrigues me – and the one I spend the most time helping clients understand – is confusing “who I am” with “what I do.”

If my self-worth gets wrapped into what I am doing, the ability to see what others see is greatly diminished. Defensiveness, rationalization and justification filter the truth. Armed with my own “truth,” I will be vulnerable to “creating” data to support what I want to believe is true - objectivity is lost.

Even if my intent is sincere and I am searching for the truth, I am not likely to find it. Why? Because I am not after the truth. I am after **being right** because if I am right, then I am okay. That is the slippery slope that leads to the breakdown of trust and respect, which in turn makes healthy personal or professional relationships very difficult.

Let’s examine the dynamics of the slippery slope. If my self-worth gets linked to what I do and another individual does not like what I do, it inevitably is interpreted as he/she “doesn’t like me.” He/she “doesn’t like me” moves quickly to “I am not okay.” How strongly will people resist feeling “not okay?” Very strongly...I will defend and justify what I am doing with my interpretation of the “truth” so I can be okay. I want to look in the mirror and be happy with the person I see there. I will blame others and accuse them of the very thing I am guilty of – not being objective. Once on the slippery slope, I sincerely doubt you can get off by yourself. How do you find the truth when you already know the “truth?”

So, how does one avoid the slippery slope? By exercising constant vigilance in separating “who I am” from “what I do.” If I can keep these two things separate, I can maintain balance, sustain clear thinking and stay away from the “I am not okay” feelings. Even if you don’t like what I am doing, I am still okay as a human being...you just don’t like what I am doing. I can hear information that is uncomfortable and adjust because the goal is not protecting myself but accomplishing the goal. I can stay off the slippery slope of “I’m right.”

### **3 Helpful Hints to Avoid the Slope**

- 1: When you feel yourself getting defensive; immediately **pause**, take a **deep breath**, then **ask a question**.
- 2: Purposefully form a relationship with a truth-teller – someone who will **tell you what you need to hear in a way that you can hear it**...then invite them to tell you the truth.
- 3: When you sense resistance rising in yourself, quickly ask yourself **“What if this is true?”**

These 3 hints will get you the data and information you need to stay focused, make good decisions and not waste energy on proving you are right. “I need some time to think about this” or “I want to sleep on it” will get you the space to let emotions dissipate and let the pathway to the truth emerge...and you will avoid the slippery slope and enjoy healthy relationships personally and professionally.