

The Driving Test

"Have you ever noticed that anybody driving slower than you is an idiot, and anyone going faster than you is a maniac?" - George Carlin

The Theory

If we are not vigilant, we may well find that it is not us that is in charge and directing our lives, our mood, our emotions, our actions and reactions, but our ego. It is our Identity and its underlying VPBS that should direct our life and the aspects that go with it, not our ego.

Whether getting out of bed on the wrong side or getting up late, the mood we are in at the start of the day often determines how we approach the rest of the day. That mood may be triggered by a number of factors. If it is a good, positive mood, all well and good, run with it. If not, we can change it, we just need to be aware of it and to do a reset, a recalibration. Each day is a fresh start, a new life, an opportunity for change and growth. It is up to you to either grasp that opportunity or to let it pass. By resetting and recalibrating each day we can make each day of our life one of enjoyment instead of drudgery and misery.

We can make the deliberate action of going out into the world with a positive mindset a habit. A mindset that will radiate out and affect all that we come into contact with. A mindset that demonstrates personal leadership - showing that we are in command of ourselves and our life and that we are a positive asset to whatever activity we are involved in. An asset that will lead to greater opportunities and open doors for us.

By going out into the world with a negative mindset it too can become a habit, one that radiates out and will affect all that we come into contact with. It will demonstrate that we are disorganised and not in control of ourselves and our lives and that we may well be a liability. It is likely to close down opportunity and doors as well as lead to bad decision making. It could also put our own life at risk as well as the lives of others if we have to get behind the wheel and drive anywhere. Such a mindset is likely to dampen our awareness, raise our frustration and anger levels as well as our speed, potentially becoming the cause of an accident.

The Practical

Time to do a quick check on how we fare in Ego v Identity. With pen and paper in hand, write down your answers to the following:

1. When you get in your car to go on a journey, who gets behind the wheel – your Identity or your Ego?
2. When you set out in your car, do you view the opportunity to drive as an enjoyable experience and privilege, a time to sit back and relax, taking your time to savour the experience, or as a chore that takes up valuable time between important things that you want to get over and done with as soon as possible so that you can get on with the more worthy things in life?
3. Do you view the ability and opportunity to drive as a privilege or a right?
4. Would you want to see unqualified drivers let loose on the roads?
5. When you witness bad driving on the road, how do you react?
6. Who is it that is reacting – your identity or your ego?
7. When you come across apparently pointless road restrictions, such as unnecessary speed limits, how do you react?
8. Who is it that is reacting – your identity or your ego?
9. If you were (or have been) caught for speeding, how would you (or did you) react?
10. Who is it that is reacting – your identity or your ego?
11. If you were responsible for an incident in which a child was injured, how would you react?
12. Who is it that is reacting – your identity or your ego?

I suspect that in most cases the honest answers to the questions above would put the ego in charge – except for the last question when it is most likely that our identity would shoulder the burden of blame and shame. Taking responsibility for the irresponsible actions of ego.

When we step into our car it is as if we step into our own little kingdom, settling down into the “throne” of our driving seat. A kingdom in which we try to impose our will and our rules onto the world. Where the ability to drive ourselves on the road is a right, our right – where other road users have no rights and are a nuisance, an obstacle whose sole purpose is to annoy us (our ego).

When we step into our cars we also seem to step into competition mode - the arena of ego. A competition of our ego against the world whether it be other drivers or the rules of the road. A competition where we prepare ourselves for battle, where (consciously or sub-consciously) we aim to become the winner and everyone else is a loser.



Who would you rather see driving on the road:

1. A competitive, emotional, self-centred driver who is out to beat other drivers, the system and rules of the road. Someone who has left themselves little time to complete their journey, whose anger flares at every stupid unnecessary rule and the perceived “errors” of others. Giving the “finger” (mentally or physically) in arrogant indignation at the lack of thought and consideration of other road users that disrespect their superiority (and their “kingdom”). Who see driving time as an annoying waste of time and want to get it over with as soon as possible. Someone who thinks that they have the right to endanger not only their own lives but also those of their passengers and other road users.
2. A responsible, rational, organised driver who has left plenty of time for the journey, and had set out to enjoy it. Whose values include that of excellence – to be the best they can at whatever they do and who exercise patience and calm in the face of adversity. Where they view the pinnacle of excellence in driving to be that of safety. Someone who sees other drivers as fellow travellers on a journey, who is humble enough to recognise their own limitations and is considerate and compassionate to other road users and whose primary consideration is safety. Someone who can set aside and rise above the crude, primitive and competitive urges of ego.

Which of the above would you rather **be** on the road?

Yes, there are bad drivers on the road – but it is not our position to judge. Such judgement belongs in the arena of the ego. Other road users may well be viewing us as one of those “bad” drivers. Driving on public roads is not and should not be a competition.

It is your identity that gained the privilege and qualification to drive on the road - not your ego. Your ego should not be allowed behind the wheel - it did not pass the driving test and is not qualified to drive.

- Would you want to see unqualified drivers let loose on the roads?
- Would the decision on purchasing your ideal car be down to your ego or (the practicalities of) your identity?
- Do you think drivers should be allowed on the roads driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs?
- Do you think drivers should be allowed on the roads driving under the influence of ego?
- Drugs and alcohol close down the rational, “thinking” part of our brain, and so does ego, so, how about those making key decisions that affect the lives of others – should we allow them to be operating under the influence of ego?

It is ego that exceeds the speed limit, that breaks the rules, that gets angry at other road users, that “flips them off”, that tail-gates. It is ego that puts our life at risk, the

lives of our passengers and the lives of other road users at risk. It is ego that sees driving as a right and a chore that has to be done between the “important” things in life. It is ego that wants a fancy car to show off. It is ego that thinks that we are an excellent driver – better than everyone else on the road. It is ego that raises our blood pressure and stress levels on the road. It is ego that cause accidents and kills people on the road.



It is identity that suffers at the hands of ego, and has to clean up the mess caused by ego.

By chastising ego for breaking the rules it may seem that I am contradicting myself in espousing leadership principle 11 (Rules, What Rules?). The important difference is that of intention and purpose and how we go about it. There are bad rules and there are outdated rules which are no longer applicable to the current times and circumstances. Such rules should be challenged with a clear purpose and intention for change through a solid VPBS based evidence. Challenging the rules simply because they do not suit our ego is not a valid excuse to break them.

Other Examples:

The example above of driving is just one aspect of life where ego can not only take over but also put our own life, and the lives of others at risk. We can apply the same principles and perspective to each area of our life – what we do, how we interact. To ask ourselves whether we are being a leader through Identity or a follower of ego. The simple test is to check to see if we have entered ourselves into a “competition”, one in which we are being led by ego, a competition that is essentially the practice of “ego-baiting”. Particularly a one-sided competition in which we are the only active participant and the “other side” is an unwitting, passive participant - unaware that you are competing against them, such as in the driving example above where we may be competing against other road users, or the rules of the road.

Relationships

The purpose of a relationship - whether it be with our partner, our friends, our family or our work colleagues is to collaborate and support each other through the trials and tribulations of life. They are based on mutual respect of what each provides to the relationship and to the shared purpose of the relationship.

When that relationship descends into an ego-based competition of “one-upmanship”, not only does the relationship suffer, but so too does the shared purpose. By projecting our ego onto others, it is ego that gets

reflected back. We have the power to break that cycle through the establishment and projection of identity instead of ego.

True competition (and sportsmanship) is actually a collaborative partnership between active (consenting) participants with the primary aim of each pushing the other in the pursuit of excellence, to explore the limits of their chosen field. It has a genuine externally focused purpose and not the internally focused intention of ego-gratification.

The work place is often seen as a “dog-eat-dog” competitive world of survival of the fittest. A place of ego-baiting and one-upmanship in a race to get up the ladder quicker and higher than one’s colleagues. Such an ego-centric situation all too often creating a stressful and toxic environment that is detrimental to the very organisation itself. Yet, if the people within such an environment focused on developing and living up to their VPBS, demonstrating leadership and support, they would most likely achieve their goals faster and more constructively whilst benefiting the organisation as a whole. By collaborating with and helping others, they will in turn help us - everyone wins.

Ego v Education

Curiosity and the realm of true learning is an ego free activity. To truly be able to lean and take on board new things we have to set aside our preconceptions and prejudices. If we think that we already know it all, we are going to block anything new and prejudge any new input. We have to get into “beginners” mind – *“to learn to drink from an empty cup”* in accordance with the Zen koan. Or as quoted in the opening section awakening Awareness: *“It is impossible to learn that which one thinks one already knows.”* (Epictetus), and *“In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities. In the expert’s mind there are few”* (Shunryu Suzuki).



Epiphany

One of my top values is that of “boundarylessness”, to look beyond, push the boundaries and test the limits of life. To be curious and to question “why?” and “What if?”. My driving has been no different. I started driving when there was both less traffic and less restrictions on the road. As the amount of traffic on the road has increased so have the number of restrictions and with them the levels of frustration. I used to enjoy driving in the early days and used to do a large number of miles,

but that has changed over the years. Even so, I still used to get annoyed by unnecessary speed limits and rarely stuck to them, even if it was just 1 or 2 miles over the limit - just so as not to “conform”.

We see driving as sexy and fun - until it all goes wrong. Accidents and their consequences shine a very different light on that “fun”. I am fortunate in that over nearly 50 years of driving I have only accumulated 9 points on my driving licence and not been involved in any serious accidents. I was proud of my track record and considered myself a good driver.

However, compiling this “Driving Test” proved to be a major wake-up call to myself and had a significant impact on my own driving, completely changing my approach to it. Recognising that each time I got into my car I was leaving behind the real values and identity that I was proud of, and substituting them for the shallowness of ego. Succumbing to anger and frustration at the traffic, the rules, the incompetence of other drivers, the time wasted.

It is amazing how simply stepping into a vehicle we can do a “Jekyll and Hyde” - throwing our identity, our VPBS out of the window and becoming this grotesque egotistical monster endangering the lives of others as well as ourself. It makes one stop and think - “In what other areas of my life do I do this?”

As noted in Mirrors & Projectors (p142) one of the differences between amateur and professional performance is that the amateur goes out to entertain themselves whilst the professional goes out to entertain the audience. To put it another way, the amateur operates from Ego, the professional operates from Identity. The amateur thinks everything is about them, the professional thinks about the purpose, what they are providing and the recipients of their focus and doing it to the best of their ability irrespective of environment or type and size of audience – whether 1, 100 or thousands.

Whether driving on the road or driving our life we have the chance to be reckless or responsible, amateur or professional, inhabiting our ego or our identity.

- In what areas of your life are you judgemental of others
- What gives you the right?
- In which relationships in your life do you frequently experience conflict?
- Is it due to a clash of wills (ego) or a clash of values?
- Do you take pleasure in ego-baiting - “winding up” other people?
- Ego closes us down and erects a barrier to the world outside. Do you have the freedom of an open mind or have you imprisoned yourself in the closed mind of ego?
- Do you get stressed?
- How much of that stress is down to the ego being in competition mode?