

Andy Grove of Intel 'Absorbs' Reality



by Donald Van de Mark



One top-flight executive who has exquisite reality recognition and thus survival skills has raised listening to a high art. His name is Andy Grove. Back in 2001, I interviewed Grove, then the CEO of Intel Corporation. He is a legend in the annals of technology and business. Grove discovered the impurity in silicon (sodium) and thus helped launch the whole computer age. He also co-founded Intel, the dominant manufacturer of computer chips and microprocessors. And he is known to be as tough as he is brilliant.

Well, he certainly was *testy* the day I interviewed him. I could see him grilling his press person as they approached the conference room in which my camera crew and I were setting up. When he reluctantly sat down, he barked that he didn't have much time. I tried to make some friendly small talk. Grove would have none of it. I explained that we were there to learn how he thought, to find out what his philosophical paradigm was. "What makes you think I have one?!" he snapped. Not until the fourth or fifth question did he relax his guard, finally convinced that we weren't wasting his time.

Grove is a person keenly aware of risk and opportunity. He told us that when he was a boy, he and his mother assumed gentile identities and hid from the Nazis. As a college student he escaped Hungary just ahead of the advancing Soviet Red Army. On the central subject of prescience, or recognizing reality before others, Grove stressed observation, listening, and gathering of information, what he called the "absorption" of data.

"You have to immerse yourself like a sponge into the environment and make yourself available to be influenced by people who want to influence you, who *have* to influence you... so each of these decisions properly has to be preceded by a period of absorption. 'Listening,' if you wish."

Note that Grove stresses that there are people in your path who have information for you, people to whom you might not typically listen -- people who are in a position to see what you cannot see, and "*have*" to communicate with you. This need stems from their sense that their knowledge is important, telling, or helpful. You may find it disturbing simply because it doesn't fit within the premises upon which you are making your choices. These individuals may be far down the organizational ladder, they may be naturally reticent, they may be persons you rarely listen to, they may be children... but what they have to say may help you tremendously in your business, relationships or even your health.

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The Role of Reality and Choice in Your Destiny



by Donald Van de Mark

The best people I've ever interviewed such as Andy Grove, Bill Bradley and Steve Case, all believe in three fundamental truths about everyone's life:

1. Everything is changing, always (which is why you must look at every day with fresh eyes)
2. Reality *always* intrudes
3. Every person can have a profound effect on his/her own destiny.

It's a belief in what poets call the symmetry of our actions, that the chickens *do* come



home to roost, that what goes around *does* come around, that Karma is real, that there is *always* a day of reckoning. Or as the great retired preacher R. Maurice Boyd of The City Church of New York puts it, "*Life is moral!*" It's exciting that tomorrow will be different from today. It's comforting that the mean and vicious often get their comeuppance and the loving get their reward.

It's also sobering to know that each of us is not only the protagonist but to a large extent, the author of our own stories. You have much more control than you may believe, though only if you start by being alert and responsive to reality and if you recognize how brutal life can be. Wild animals are aware of this.

Wisdom of the Wild

The psychologist, Abraham Maslow, writes that the healthiest people "live more in the real world of nature." As someone who profoundly respects all living creatures, particularly free ones, I have found that the ablest among us are as alert and aware as wild animals. Self-sustaining creatures are acutely aware because for them, awareness is *survival*. To be alive is to be alert.

I live next to a wildlife preserve in the mountains of Sonoma California. Even my little tabby cat is *always* alert. My frequent absences as well as the presence of rattle snakes, a food-stealing fox, raccoons, coyotes and even the odd cougar, means that her life depends on instantaneously registering and calibrating every noise and scent.

Most of us in industrialized societies are only lulled into semi-consciousness by our climate controlled interiors, daily routines and lazy, categorized thinking. I submit to you that to thrive in our hyper-competitive yet sensory-deprived world, you need to be as freshly and as acutely aware as a wild animal.

A last thought regarding reality recognition – one way to judge how well you see reality is how well you are living. Proof is not in the pudding, it's usually in the outcome of your choices. It is a trait that virtually all high-achievers develop. Once developed, it can help you be strong and true. But recognize this reality -- it can also make you strong and cruel. It's your choice. In the wilds of the city as well as the forest there are both prey and predators.

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