

The Tip #11

Judge your success by the degree to which you are enjoying peace, connection, health and love.



Photo by Guilherme Stecanella

The Tip #11

“The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it” Michelangelo

The Tale #11 Sometimes, it helps to compare down for perspective.

We don't always have to compare up – in fact sometimes, it is important to compare down. For most leaders, it would be crazy to try to negotiate a salary based on what a few leaders in the most elite schools are getting. For so many people, always comparing up can have its consequences – particularly with overuse of social media.

If you were living in the UK right now and were earning £156,000 pounds you would be considerably better off than most, particularly given the average salary is 31,000 pounds. That's what Declan Rice from West Ham United FC earned a few years ago – £156,000 pounds! However, he probably compares himself to David De Gea who was paid £1,950,000 pounds per season.

And in the US, where the average salary is \$56,000p.a. we have Le Bron James who recently signed a US\$97,000,000 deal with the Los Angeles Lakers! The minimum NBA salary (i.e. the least amount of money a player can be paid) ranges from \$838,464 to \$2,393,887. (Leave aside for the moment the dark side of the arguments for meritocracy).

When I think of social comparison theory, I wonder whether we are hard-wired to compare up. A new home, car, or experience is always built on the idea of moving up by comparing up. However, looking down not only makes us realise where we have come from and appreciate our lot in life, but reminds us that our own position in life is not as impoverished / bad / hard, as we imagine. Survey after survey always reveals that people in the top pay brackets believe they are in the middle or somehow deserving of more as they continually compare up.

Social comparison theory was first proposed in 1954 by psychologist Leon Festinger and suggested that people have an innate drive to evaluate themselves, often in comparison to others. We have 'upward' social comparison and 'downward' social comparison. We compare ourselves UP in so many of life's domains - our looks, our abilities and skills and our wealth to name a few.

There are good aspects to making comparisons rooted in our DNA. *At its root, the impulse is connected to the instant judgments we make of other people—a key element of the brain's social- cognition network that can be traced to the evolutionary need to protect oneself and assess threats. (Psychology Today 2017 The Comparison Trap)*

Thankfully, the mind has a way of ensuring a semblance of balance when comparing. Whilst I enjoy cycling, there is no way I am going to compare myself to Tour de France winner, Richie Porte or any rider in any team. I am, however, far more likely to compare myself to cyclists around my age group. And it is recognised that the comparisons we feel most acutely relate to domains we value, such as appearance, relationships, wealth, professional achievement, or goals even more specifically.

‘The more similar we are to another person in some way we think is important, the more we tend to compare ourselves to that person. That means we're more likely to compare ourselves to a colleague at our level than we are to the CEO, just like we're more likely to compare ourselves to a runner in our weekly running group than we are to Usain Bolt.’ Jordon Harbinger.com

The mental health of those prone to negative comparison can be massively compromised and social media has turbocharged this substantially. Social media has amplified significantly the

negative image we have of ourselves and our positions in life making many feel less worthy or 'successful'. Social media plays the highlights reel - an intentional default design making many feel discouraged and inferior. People's triumphs used to be heard about sporadically whereas now, social media delivers these triumphs to us endlessly. The ready accessibility of it all juxtaposes our lives more frequently. Sadly, the child's and teenager's brains are far more likely to be impacted by these comparisons. As Psychology Today notes:

"Social rewards are basically activation of dopamine within the brain when we feel we're getting attention or positive feedback from peers. It can also come from comparing yourself to others, especially highly valued others, and seeing that you agree with them, they agree with you, or that you're similar to them. It activates parts of the brain not unlike the way a drug does, which may be why adolescents become truly addicted to social media."

The good news is that as we age, we are more likely to compare ourselves to the measures of our own achievements. Comparing ourselves to others reduces over time and has far less sway on us.

Psychology Today suggests:

1. Seek Connection, Not Comparison
2. Look Up, Just a Little - you're better off comparing yourself to someone a rung or two above you than to someone at the very top of the ladder.
3. Count Your Blessings
4. Compare Yourself to...Yourself
5. Pursue Upward-Joy - ***"Instead of generating envy, which is a form of hostility, explore what you admire and appreciate about other people and cultivate joy for their success," Ravi Chandra (psychiatrist) says. "It can be a catalyst for personal growth."***

Are you comparing up too often and feeling disillusioned? Are you feeling disenchanted for reasons you may not know? Or perhaps you feel you need to seek more connection? Coaching & Mentoring (Moaching) can help. Call +61 410 586 700 **Be and Become**.