

### *Paying attention to what matters.*

Sit back for a second and think about one thing: What did you do today - until now? Go through every step.

Done?

Do it again. You forgot something unless you have already dissected stuff like "being on the phone/laptop etc." into all the content you saw.

The reason for this reflection: The now following words should not be about me. They should only target you.

So now you have a pretty, pretty good picture about what matters to you.

If you dislike this harsh and cruel conclusion because you say something like "this is not true" and "this is not representative" and "this is not the stuff which really matters to me" and "what really matters to me are my values (whatever they are) and my friends, the environment, my family, my children, my parents dadada", you are plain wrong. I'm sorry.

Let's just imagine you dislike me even more for this, once again, very harsh and very cruel conclusion and you didn't shut me up by closing this writing or switching the tab. What you are saying is the following: That's right, for now I focused my attention to the topics and contents I consumed today, but those aren't representing the things which really matter to me". I hear you. I totally understand what you mean. So let's play for a second with this thought. Is there a question, which arises from this statement? Maybe there is: What are the things, which really matter to me? How can I define the things which really matter to me? Or let's start a step earlier: Is it important what really matters to me?

#### 1) Is it important what really matters to us?

My gut feeling tells me: Yes! To be honest, I never thought about that question, because its answer was so blatantly obvious to me. Maybe you feel the same. But why? My first thought is about the idea that things we really care about are important attributes to what *constitutes us* as an individual. If you have strong family values you will do everything for the good of your family. On the other hand you will respect this trait in other human beings e.g. by appreciation or by allowing a bigger margin of acceptable mistakes (or at least inconveniences). Another one: Imagine you are an entrepreneur and you highly respect work ethics. Probably you will be pleased by working with somebody who brings the same values to the table. There are numerous examples but you can see where I'm going with this. These values do not only matter to me personally but they have an effect to the outside world and in particular to my (direct) environment. So as long as I am interested in what my environment looks and feels like, we could say it is important what matters to me. This leads us to our next question: How can I define the things, which really matter to me?

#### 2) How can we define the things which really matter to us?

In the examples above it's fairly obvious: The (intrinsic) values (thus the stuff which really matters to us) come to light by acting according to them. But is it really that easy? Imagine somebody kills someone. Is killing something that really matters to the killer? The answer is difficult, but would look somehow like this: For some people it is, for some people it is not.

For the people to whom killing really matters it is maybe an act out of joy or out of reasons of sacrifice. There are a lot of cases of serial killers, where joy was at least part of their motivation. I won't go into the discussion of "Is it really joy for a serial killer to kill somebody or not", even though it has an interesting flair to it, especially in fictional literature<sup>1</sup>. There are

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<sup>1</sup> See the writings like e.g. Macbeth, Perfume: The Story of Murderer, Kafka on the Shore.

also a lot of cases of human sacrifices; mostly supposed to gain the benevolence of different kind of gods<sup>2</sup>. In both these cases killing is something that considerably constitutes them as an individual.

For the people to whom killing as such isn't an act out of joy or sacrifice it is maybe an act out of need. A father who kills the person who is trying to kill his daughter acts out of need. He wants to protect his daughter, no matter what. Is this something that really matters to the father? And, if so, is the kill something that constitutes the father as an individual? We can probably negate both those questions. At least it is something completely different than serial killers and sacrificing cultures. However, if we focus on the important idea behind that we will see the following: We could say that the actions of a person (let's say under usual circumstances) are a pretty good indicator of that persons values and thus a pretty good indicator of what really matters to that person.

Having said this, another interesting question about the definition of what really matters to us ensues: If our actions define what really matters to us, will thinking do so, too?

### 3) If our actions define what really matters to us... will thinking do so, too?

Now it gets quite difficult. And very philosophical. But luckily enough we already have your answer to this question, don't we? If you're statements from the beginning like "this is not representative" etc. still stands, the straightforward answer has to be: Yes! Our thinking also (next to our actions) defines what really matters to us. So this question is answered and we can leave it here.

But maybe...

To answer an unclear question or to solve a dilemma it sometimes helps to change the perspective. So, let's try that:

I think we agree on the "action defines what really matters to us" part of the argument. What happens when we think about the process, which leads to taking an action?

### 4) What happens when we think about the process, which leads to taking an action?

I propose a simple three-step process *TPAA*

Thinking → → Action

I admit that this is a strongly simplified pattern of taking action, but it may help us to make things a little bit more clear. If we look at the *TPAA*, we will see immediately, that *Thinking* becomes the first step of taking an *Action*. If we now jump back to our question if thinking also defines what really matters to us, we will have to say something like "Yes it does, at least indirectly, because it is the first step of taking (an) action". And this is the point, where things start to get interesting: It is not a question of *either-or*. It is a question of *if-then*. Without *Thinking* an *Action* is impossible<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> see e.g. the *Flower Wars* of the Aztecs culture.

<sup>3</sup> Well... You might think of reflexes now. Fair enough. Let's put aside the question if reflexes are defining actions of what really matters to us, and let's think of the nature of reflexes: a reflex is an instantaneous movement in response to a stimulus. In most cases you won't be able to stop that action from happening (as long as the stimulus appears). In this writing it's about the cases and situations in which you are able to decide what and what not to do (In this sense it also appears that obsessive-compulsive disorders and tic disorders shouldn't play a role in this considerations).

So thinking alone does not help us really much, as long as it just stays thinking per se. Only when thinking gets to be the igniter (of an action<sup>4</sup>) it will be able to define what really matters to us.

Maybe something about the TPAA caught your eye. There is a missing link. What if I tell you that this link is a superpower every human being possesses. What if I tell you that this link is able to make you rich? What if I tell you that this link is all it takes to get everything you ever wanted?

Curious?

The answer: It's exactly what made you detect the missing of the link in the first place:

Thinking → *Paying Attention* → Action

If you go back to the first two words of this writing you will see that I already told you. But, ironically enough, it kind of perished while being in the headline, didn't it?<sup>5</sup>

*Paying attention* is the decision maker. Without this decision maker we would just be thinking and never start acting<sup>6</sup>. And, in fact, we're using this decision maker every day, every minute, every second. Sometimes it feels easy (sometimes we won't even recognize the act of using it at all), sometimes it feels hard. But no matter what<sup>7</sup>, it is there. Right now. There are even numerous terms for both sides of the spectrum (feels easy, feels hard). Procrastination is one of these terms; discipline is another.

When you started reading these pages you may or may not have been agreeing with me. You may have thought that your actions from earlier this day did not define what matters to you.

But if you think about it now, after reading, maybe you will change your mind. Even if you change your mind in the slightest way possible and use this momentum to be more conscious about the stuff you do (in other words: your actions), then these words have the right to exist<sup>8</sup> and did their job.

Maybe they even matter.

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<sup>4</sup> The *Action* in itself doesn't have to be directly translated into the thing which really matters to you. E.g. you are working an office job. Does this office job really matter to you? Maybe it does, maybe it doesn't. But the things which really matter to you may be hidden from the outsider perspective: What really matters to you could be your hobby X. You wouldn't be able to pay for your hobby X, if you didn't have this job. Then the Action "having office job" is just a tool to enable what really matters to you – your hobby X.

<sup>5</sup> This is one of the cases where you can see that *framing* is immensely important. If you said to someone "Paying Attention is freakin' awesome and is equivalent to a superpower" without any pretext or let's say without preceding investment on behalf of the listener, the listener would maybe think about it for one second and probably dismiss this information as a platitude or as information without any bearings. You could even say, funnily enough, he wouldn't pay much attention.

<sup>6</sup> In some ways comparable to Jean Buridan's (c.1301 – c. 1359/62) *Buridan's ass*.

<sup>7</sup> Pun not intended.

<sup>8</sup> I was really tempted to show my Francophile side, but I could resist.