

## PERSONAL AGENCY

Agency is the feeling you have of being in the driver's seat (or atop the hamster wheel) when it comes to taking action. Here's a slightly more formal description from Stanford University professor, Albert Bandura:

***Agency refers to the human capability to influence one's functioning and the course of events by one's actions.***

When you have a strong sense of personal agency you believe you can take action to influence your own functioning and wellbeing *and* the outcome of events, which sounds like an entirely good thing. Although it seems that the stronger our sense of personal agency is, the better off we are, that isn't necessarily the case.

In fact, moment-to-moment our sense of agency is largely illusory. The degree of agency we sense we have *is not an infallible reproduction of objective reality*.<sup>\*</sup> And personal agency is situation-dependent. So it's actually much more important to develop a *reliable* sense of personal agency than it is to develop a *strong* sense.

***Degree of Control:*** Some things are within our control and some things are not. And the degree of control we have in other areas may vary considerably. Determining how much control we have in a given situation can help us develop a reliable sense of personal agency by prompting us to take ***appropriate action*** that is likely to be effective instead of beating our head against a wall trying to affect things we have no control over.

***Level of Personal Agency:*** There are different ways to identify what we're doing, from low-level (*what*) identifications that focus on specifics to high-level (*why*) identifications that focus on the intentions or consequences of our actions. The more we tend to identify with *what* we're doing rather than *why* we're doing it, the weaker our sense of agency will be.

That's another reason why it's so important to identify what we really want and align our actions in that direction.

In addition, routinely identifying with *what* we're doing makes us more susceptible to distraction and impulsive or unplanned behavior based on cues and pressures in the immediate situation. If we're aware of *why* we're doing something, we're more likely to maintain our focus and less likely to succumb to situation pressure.

A reliable sense of personal agency is the Holy Grail of mastering the art and science of change. **Farther to Go!** is focused on helping you answer the question:

***What do I need to know, pay attention to, and practice in order to develop a reliable sense of personal agency.***

<sup>\*</sup>*What Is the Sense of Agency and Why Does It Matter? James W. Moore, Frontiers in Psychology*