



TRIBES YOU DON'T WANT TO BELONG TO

Jon Morrow

Sometimes, you don't get to choose the tribes that you belong to. They choose you, and there's nothing you can do about it.

I'm a member of one of those tribes. It's called the Tribe of the Disabled.

Some of us were born into the tribe. Others were brought into it by an accident or mistake. But regardless of how we arrived, no one wants to be a member.

Some people take it hard. They feel like they've been kidnapped from another tribe, the Tribe of Normal People. They feel like everything they were and everything they knew was taken away.

Eventually though, most of us realize that the Tribe of Normal People doesn't actually exist. There's no bond between the nondisabled. There are no leaders among them. There are no rules. It doesn't exist.

But the Tribe of the Disabled does exist. It's a common link between all of us, and we know it, even without saying anything.

We have rules, like, "Don't stare" or "Be encouraging." It's strange, but we also tend to stay away from each other, as if being around one another could remind us that we are a member of the tribe. We prefer to forget.

Still, we have common leaders, people that inspire us. Christopher Reeve was one of those leaders. He inspired us with his audacity, his activism, and his compassion. We were so sad when he left us, but that's the way this tribe is. Our leaders don't last long.

It's an unusual tribe, I know. For the longest time, I didn't want to be a part of it. I believed that accepting my membership would weaken me, like I would be accepting my own death. So many of us die, after all. It's the most common way out of the tribe.

But you know what? I was wrong.

This tribe isn't about death. It's about courage.

It takes courage to look at yourself and accept your imperfections. It takes courage to love yourself anyway. It takes courage to go beyond merely trying to survive your life and start trying to actually enjoy it.

How could you complain about being in a tribe like that? It's wonderful.

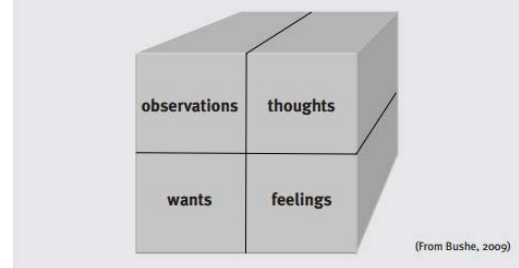
Would I still like to be cured of my disease? Would I trade a healthy body for my membership in the Tribe? Sure I would.

But do I regret being a part of it? No way!

When you learn to accept yourself, you also learn to accept the tribes you belong to. They don't have to be rich or clever or even desirable. The fact is, it's your tribe.

And sometimes, that's all that matters.

Figure 1: The Experience Cube



TRIBES: AS ESSENTIAL AS BREATHING

Ellen Di Resta

Tribes are the social equivalent to breathing. Their existence is like an involuntary process that creates social order. Where we live, what we do for work, and our hobbies are defined by association with Tribes that represent certain activities and attitudes. Our value is determined by how we compare to others in the tribe, or by how large a tribe we can create.

When asked to name the essential elements for survival, people usually mention things that they actively seek out like food, water, and shelter. But the involuntary processes, like breathing are actually more important, as anyone who has almost drowned could tell you. That's probably why they evolved to be involuntary processes.

What's interesting is that even though breathing is an involuntary process, it can be consciously controlled. Focusing on your breath is a fundamental element in many yoga and meditation practices that ultimately enhance physical and mental wellbeing.

Many people are trying to define the elements of a tribe. I think this is a lot like trying to define breathing. This is a difficult task because the value of the elements that make up a tribe will change based on the real and perceived situations the members encounter.

My observation is that successful people have learned to define their own place in the social order. Like controlling their breath, they have learned to transcend this involuntary process and utilize the tribe to create their desired experience within it.

But how do they do that? What is the first step? After posing that question to the larger group, it seems that there is usually a trigger event. A success or tragedy that causes people to stop and focus on what is truly important to them. But this can't be the only answer, as some people emerge from a traumatic event better off than before it, and others do not. And how does this affect our interaction with our tribes? The closest I've seen to an answer lies in a case study I read about connecting to your own personal tribe; the one that lives inside of you.

To paraphrase and add my own interpretation, the idea is that in your own heart and head you are the leader, and you must look to yourself to lead. Once you can do that, interactions with other tribes will take care of themselves. This is just like voluntarily taking control of your breathing. Ideally we won't need a traumatic event to trigger this action, and we can use this energy to achieve goals far greater than if we left the leadership to someone else.