

Mr. Mediocrity or der innere Sauhund

I'd like to introduce you to another of my subpersonalities. I call him Mr. Mediocrity because that's the name he was given when we were first formally introduced. Some German speakers call him "der innere Sauhund," literally, "the inner pig-dog."

As a college student I chose to accept a challenging summer job opportunity selling books door-to-door. The terms were a bit shocking when I first heard them, but they were the recipe for success. Working 80 hours a week (it was pitched as "like having two forty-hour-a-week jobs," even one of which was pretty hard to get at the time), you could earn more than at any other summer job. "Could" is a critical word here, because the pay was strictly commission, i.e. our profit was the difference between the retail price and the wholesale price, minus our expenses. If you didn't sell any books, you'd end up losing money. Selling works — at least partly — on the law of averages. The statistics presented to us were as follows. If you knock on 30 doors a day, you will be able to make 10 sales presentations and three people will buy. If you do that six days a week for 10 weeks you could earn \$3000. This was in the 1970s, when that sum was worth much more than today and the most you could earn at most summer jobs was a few hundred dollars.

At sales school in Nashville, Tennessee, we got to know the product (junior and senior dictionaries with homework aids) and practiced presenting it until we could do so in our sleep. We learned sales techniques such as identifying needs and overcoming objections. We learned how to scope out the territory (i.e. find the homes of potential buyers, mainly families with children) and deal with dogs. But most of all we learned to motivate ourselves. That's where Mr. Mediocrity comes in. In spite of our commitment to doing this job and our desire to succeed at it, Mr. Mediocrity — the sales managers warned us — would try to talk us out of it. They described him as a little impish creature standing on our left shoulders, just tall enough to whisper into our ears. With breath-taking skill he could weaken our determination by saying things like: "You shouldn't have to work so hard." "In such beautiful weather you deserve to be lying on a beach somewhere like all of your classmates are." or "They won't buy anyway so why don't you just skip this street and go and take a break. No one will ever know the difference."

Even though you probably have never done any door-to-door selling — and not that I'm advocating either that or working 80-hours a week — I'm willing to bet that you know Mr. Mediocrity. Perhaps he pipes up when you are trying to watch what you eat and says, "have a chocolate; it won't hurt...you've been working so hard." Or when you are trying to get started on a project and he says "don't you think you should have a cup of coffee?...you don't really need to start right now." You may call him by another name — he has something of the devil — but you probably recognize the inner conflict he creates. It is similar to driving a car with one foot on the gas and the other on the brakes.

He speaks to your sense of entitlement and plays on your sense of (un)fairness, trying very hard to make you feel so sorry for yourself that you lose sight of your intention. Sometimes it can be hard to tell who is in charge inside our heads. One sure sign of Mr. Mediocrity having gotten his way is when you say "I couldn't

stop myself.” Advertising has taken over Mr. Mediocrity’s job, seductively telling us that we deserve something or other (junk food, a cigarette, a drink) that we don’t in fact need or really want.

I am not suggesting that indulging yourself is bad. What I want you to avoid is self-sabotage. You need to be clear about whether your objective is coming from the center of yourself or from a subpersonality, for example, from your inner slave-driver, who says you “should” take on tasks and responsibilities that you don’t really want to and is never satisfied, or from Mr Mediocrity who says you shouldn’t have to do any work and thus interferes with your productivity. The expression “der innere Sauhund” is always used with “überwinden” — to overcome or surmount. Der innere Sauhund and Mr. Mediocrity are threats to your resolve, getting you off track and sometimes preventing you from reaching your goal at all.

So how do we get Mr. Mediocrity to be a positive contributor to our orchestra? At its core, every subpersonality represents a positive quality. I think that Mr. Mediocrity wants us to remember to relax, enjoy and regenerate — activities essential to our health and quality of life. In fact, I think it would be a good idea to rename him more positively, perhaps as Mr. Indulgence. The problem is his timing. Just as we don’t want our inner child to “play a solo” when we are making a business presentation, we don’t want Mr. Mediocrity to take the lead when we are tackling a challenge. If we give him his due, he’s more willing to stay quietly in the background. If we chronically deny ourselves down-time, he is more likely to try to get our attention in less and less constructive ways.

This month, why not make a conscious effort to reward yourself (ask Mr. Indulgence for suggestions on what would be nice) after you have accomplished a task you’ve been avoiding. Enjoy both activities wholeheartedly!