



Locked Into a Routine

One of the big advantages of being self-employed is that you can make your own decisions about how to use your time. You can arrange the parts of your day - working time, eating time, relaxing time, etc. - in the way that suits you best, as you don't have to follow a strict schedule imposed by a larger organization. (Of course, you also have to have the discipline to make sure you do get the work done, but that's a story for another time!)

An important part of most of my days is an exercise swim, and I am so glad to be self-employed. If I had to go to a company office every day, there is no way that I would be able to fit this into my daily routine.

I would most prefer to have an early morning swim to start off the day, but this is not possible. Fitness center pools here in Japan rarely open early in the morning, unlike those I used when I lived in Canada, which commonly open around six. So I have fallen into the habit of stopping work around eleven, jumping on my bicycle and heading to the fitness center. By the time my swim is done, I'm ready for a good lunch!

I said a moment ago that I was completely 'free' in how I use my time, but you know, even with that freedom I still find myself doing things in a 'routine' way. I head out the door at almost exactly the same time every morning, take the same route to the pool, park my bicycle in the same place, and head into the locker room. And even there, I follow a mindless routine, putting my bag into the same locker every morning ... #31.

Just yesterday though, as I followed this familiar drill, I bumped into a small snag: as I reached out to open locker #31, I realized that it was locked - somebody else had put their things into it. Now, as you know, all the lockers are exactly alike, so I just turned to the side, used another one, and continued with my normal swim routine.

But do you know, I have to confess that I felt a small burst of irritation at finding the locker in use! That's silly, because of course that locker is not 'mine'. I think though, the irritation came from the disruption of the smooth routine, and this points out to me something quite interesting.

Even though I am quite free to choose any of the lockers, or to arrive at the pool at a different time, or to put my bicycle in a different spot ... I don't do those things. Even with such freedom available to me, I still find myself following a 'rut' just as deep as a person who has no choice in these matters. And my rut is so deep that I was irritated by such a simple thing as finding that locker #31 was in use!

Are we humans so dependent on familiarity ... on stability, that even when we are free to alter our patterns continuously, we avoid doing so, but instead choose to stay with the familiar and safe? Or is it just that I am such a boring, unadventurous person? Perhaps I'd better not probe too deeply into this. I might not like to hear the answer to that question ...

I thought about these things when I approached the pool again this morning. The locker room was empty. Can you guess ... did I use locker #31 ... or did I choose another one?

I'm not going to tell you!

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