

LEARNING TO LOSE CONTROL

Part 1 – Implementing Personal Change

As a fully paid up member of Control Freaks Unlimited I had a bit of a shock recently. I had to spend a lengthy time in hospital and found out that I couldn't call the shots anymore, not even with decisions about my own health and survival!

Not a great situation to be in: my distinct lack of knowledge about the complex medical condition and associated complications meant that I was quite clearly not in control – and reluctantly I passed the baton to the better qualified medics.

But I did not surrender completely – as soon as I was partially *compos mentis* (with thanks here to copious doses of morphine and tramadol) I started making lists for loved ones to deal with. Oh, the usual stuff anyone would need for a long stay in an NHS hospital: portable radio; headphones; Evian water (500 ml bottles size only); my two current reading books – one novel and one non-fiction; mobile phone charger; spare pair of reading glasses (in case the first pair goes missing).

Another list had specific instructions: Suspend my gym membership; tell friends and colleagues the news and politely ward off visitors; start the car to see if the battery is working; empty the fridge of everything approaching their 'best before' date; pay all bills on time (don't want to incur Visa credit card interest for the first time in 40 years!); dig out my Private Healthcare policy; and so on. All normal Control Freak activities.

As recovery set in, I gladly offered my opinions and advice to the nurses and doctors and a dynamic partnership was formed! Lots of deep and meaningful discussions on the efficacy of this drug or that feed. At least it gave me the impression I had some control in whatever treatment I was signing up for. Not sure what the medics thought of it but they seemed to play along for my sake.

Then the unexpected setback – once more under intensive care and wired up to an array of beeping monitors and strangely coloured drips. At this low point I had ran out of energy to make more lists and when asked by loved ones if I needed anything the answer this time was 'no not really'.

So imagine my surprise when the very next day, my son and heir pitched up with three books he had chosen for me to read and sachets of miso soup to mix with hot water for a tasty snack. I took the proffered items with a mixture of genuine thanks and curiosity. I wondered - had I actually asked for these previously in a deeper drug-induced state and momentarily forgotten?

But no, these were gifts he had picked out for me and as I looked through the titles of the books – short stories by Raymond Carver, The Barrytown trilogy by Roddy Doyle, David Mamet’s play Glengarry Glen Ross – I had an inkling of the treats I had in store. And so the next phase of recovery was well and truly underway.

The following day as I was sipping miso soup from a plastic cup and smiling to myself at the antics of Jimmy Rabbitt Snr. in The Van. I had a revelation! The people who know me best know what I like and therefore have the capacity to delight and surprise me. So no more lists from me! And from this point on I left the choices of things entirely up to others. This generated a rich seam of generous gifts (mainly novels and plays) which I hungrily consumed and without exception fully enjoyed.

So, what did I learn from that episode? You don’t need to be in charge all the time and if you surrender control to those you love and trust, see what happens. When you allow others to choose for you it means that you humbly learn how they really see you - and that can be incredibly insightful and rewarding.

So I have decided to suspend my membership to Control Freaks Unlimited for a while, at least I will as soon as I can be bothered to contact them.....

Dennis Preston

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*** Look out for Learning to Lose Control – Part 2; A Client lets go of the Reins – coming soon**