



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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Find Your Personal Porcupine

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"I am going to America to catch sight of a wild porcupine and to give some lectures," announced Dr. Sigmund Freud to his colleagues in 1909. He was enjoying a cigar with his friends when he made this declaration.

The 53-year-old neurologist had developed a technique called psychoanalysis, in which patients reveal their free associations (unrestricted thoughts) to their psychoanalyst. Purportedly, patients transferred their early problematic feelings to their physicians, ridding themselves of them.

Freud had been given the honor of being invited to deliver a series of lectures at Clark University, in Worcester, Mass. These scholarly talks were to observe the university's 20th anniversary of becoming the second graduate school in the United States. This was a big deal: While Clark had a sparkling reputation, Freud was still an unknown.

Later, Freud would extol his experience:

In Europe I felt as though I were despised; but over there I found myself received by the foremost men as an equal. As I stepped onto the platform at Worcester to deliver my Five Lectures upon Psychoanalysis it seemed like the realization of some incredible day-dream: psychoanalysis was no longer a product of delusion, it had become a valuable part of reality.

Why then, if speaking in the United States was such a HUGE opportunity, would Freud have prefaced his announcement to his associates by saying he was going to see *some wild porcupines*?

Freud explained his rationale this way:

Whenever you have some large objective in mind, it's always good to identify a secondary, less demanding goal on which to focus your attentions in order to detract from the anxiety associated with the search for the true grail.

Thereafter, reported one of his disciples, "The phrase, 'to find one's porcupine,' became a recognized saying in our circle."

HOW DO ATHLETES EMPLOY FREUD'S TECHNIQUE?

Olympic athletes, who spend most of their lives training for these quadrennial games, sometimes adopt Freud's technique of identifying a secondary, less demanding goal on which to focus their attention. Hence, the crippling anxiety associated with the BIG GOAL is reduced.

Snowboarder Sage Kotsenburg is one of them. His event is slopestyle, where the athlete has to elegantly manage several obstacles and then pull off three awesome jumps that will dazzle the judges.

Rather than succumb to Olympic pressure, Kotsenburg adopted a secondary goal: "To make snowboarding look cool and get kids stoked on it."

Hence, two-and-a-half minutes before he pushed off the mountain for his second run, Kotsenburg decided to experiment with a trick he had never tried before. Or even considered. But his intuition told him the trick he later called "The Japan Grab" would work.

Leading snowboarder Shaun White had pulled out of the slopestyle event to save himself for halfpipe competition, saying this:

After much deliberation with my team, I have made the decision to focus solely on trying to bring home the third straight gold medal in halfpipe for Team USA.

Unfortunately, White failed to medal in the halfpipe event. Or any other.

Competitors who had focused so vigorously on landing the "required" tricks were shocked to see 20-year-old Kotsenburg walk away with gold by adhering to his goal of "staying super-stoked."

One of his teammates said this:

He made it. He landed this awesome new trick. And he won the gold. But it wasn't the medal that made it cool. It was that he tried something because ... he wanted to try something. All your life, there will be things you don't think you can do. But you won't know, not really, not unless you go for your 1620 with a Japan Grab when the feeling is right.

HOW ABOUT YOU?

What have YOU been yearning to do?

And how can identifying your own porcupine help you achieve it?

Please note: Writing quarterly articles for *The Stepping Stone* is one of my personal porcupines. ●



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