

## SPARK 098

(Matrix Code: **SPARK098.00** for [StartOver.xyz](http://StartOver.xyz) game.)

**DISTINCTION:** There are two kinds of learning: defensive and expansive.

**NOTES:** In school you were taught to learn by fitting new information into your existent understanding like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. This is what I call “defensive learning.” Defensive learning assumes that you already know the most important things there are to know. Anything new is an extra puzzle piece that must be fitted into the portion of the puzzle you have already assembled. If something does not fit into your current *knowledge continent* you tend to ignore the new thing as irrelevant. Your Box’s relevancy filters are so fast that many times you do not even recognize when you have decided to ignore something because it does not fit anywhere. If you ignore something before you realize you have ignored it then that thing becomes invisible to you. Defensive learning, although popular and widely used, is extremely linear: you can only learn about what you already know about. When you gain maturity and have a wish to access the unknown you may discover that your defensive attitude towards the unknown that at first seemed to protect you has now become your prison.

To step out of prison you can intentionally experiment with a nonlinear learning method that I call “expansive learning.” Expansive learning is what you did as a child *before* you went to school. Expansive learning assumes that you know almost nothing. New puzzle pieces are accepted on their own merit. You allow unrecognizable information to exist in you without demanding that it fit anywhere into your present field of understanding. Even in its stand-alone condition you permit yourself to use the new information. Expansive learning occurs in parallel by building understanding on many isolated construction sites simultaneously. Some pieces may not fit together for quite some time, perhaps never. If pieces of understanding do come together they may slide into place whole chunks at a time. This makes expansive learning nonlinear.

Expansive learning is quite useful when exploring in the fields of human relationship and love because in these fields much is not known. The problem with expansive learning is that if you are accustomed to defensive learning, expansive learning may feel disorderly. Expansive learning may give you the sensation that you are no longer standing on a solid foundation of logic and defensible reasons – that you are in less control of the learning process. This is exactly how expansive learning feels.

New discoveries do not come without reorientation – the wilder the disorientation, the more interesting the discovery. If you guard yourself against disassembly and disillusionment then you eliminate the chance of discovery. Conversely, the more accepting you are of being reoriented the more innovative your discoveries will be.

You can rely on the Box’s uncanny ability to establish new definitions for normal. Think how quickly you adopted new technologies like microwave ovens, fax, DVD, CD, mobile telephony, personal computers and internet into your daily life. The Box quickly adjusts what it calls normal to include new ways of thinking, feeling, acting and being. During continual expansive learning new normals do not last long. Soon

the next disorientation comes along and you again experience the uncertainty of being in new territory. An expansive learner can count on being periodically uncomfortable for the rest of his or her days. Expansive learning is comparable to being in *Space Pilot Training School* where becoming functional in groundlessness is part of your profession.

## **EXPERIMENTS:**

**SPARK098.01** To experiment with expansive learning simply move yourself into the unknown and start looking around, already knowing that you will not understand. The unknown is everything outside of your Box. The tricky part of this experiment is to find a way to bypass your Box's defenses so that you can actually enter the unknown. Here is one way to do that:

Bring pen and paper to a relatively "dangerous" person and read them the following:

1. Do you have a minute to coach me? (If they say yes, keep reading. If they say no, make an appointment to read this to them later.)
2. Please write down some experiences that you think could add a new dimension to my personal development and that would be useful for me to learn about.
3. Please write three specific ways for me to learn about these things.

Say little by way of further explanation. Do not talk to them while they write. When they are finished, do not read what they write because it is not important that you understand it just yet. This is a quick interaction that does not involve any discussion. Thank them and leave.

Do this same thing with two other "dangerous" people, meaning people who know your weaknesses, whose Box is significantly different from yours, whose Gremlin is bigger than yours, or who you regard as having authority.

Then sit with a friend and tell them your wish to experiment with expansive learning. Together read the three papers you collected. Make a plan for you this week to undertake at least two of the experiences suggested to you on the papers. Your experiments can be done solo, or with this friend, whichever serves best. Don't do anything that exposes you to unnecessary physical hazards – that is not the point.

For example, there may be suggestions to attend a technical symposium in a field far from your field of expertise, or to join a men's or women's group, or to be with and listen deeply to children, or to go horseback riding, or to sit for days on the streets of Calcutta, or to attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, or to give a public talk about new possibilities for relationship, or to invite your neighbors over for dinner, or to visit an old people's home or a crazy house and listen to people's stories, or to take cha-cha dance lessons with your partner, or to plant 1000 baby trees, or to speak at town meetings in favor of passing a resolution to end corporate personhood so that business leaders can no longer avoid responsibility by hiding behind the legal structure of a corporation, or to take a long term yoga or tai-chi class, or to organize an Intersection Conference that convenes diverse people for the purpose of having conversations that matter, etc. Don't worry. Just do them.

While doing your experiments keep the following ideas in mind. The immediate natural feeling response to entering the unknown is fear. As a child that fear was interpreted as curiosity and excitement. Try interpreting it the same way now as an adult. Feeling the fear of not knowing is a reliable indicator that you are in the unknown. Do not put the fear away or numb the fear. Welcoming your feelings will help you navigate effectively through unknown territories.

Change the rules and tell yourself, "It is okay to not know." Then, while not knowing, just see what you see and feel what you feel, without trying to fit it in anywhere. This means that you might not know what it is that you are experiencing at first, how it works, or how it all fits together, but it also makes even ordinary experiences remarkably fresh and invigorating. Hold a grape in your hand without giving it the name "grape" and instead you see this green or purple blob and think, "What is this amazing thing?" It is exciting to perceive things raw even if you do not know what they are. In time the new things that you notice become more and more familiar. Eventually they can establish completely new continents of understanding for you that vastly enrich the quality of your life and your relationships.

Expansive learning opens to and includes diversity and chaos. You may be quite surprised to find that you can relax and be effective without being in control or having your usual level of certainty. You may even find a sense of empowerment and experiential freedom when you no longer need to carry with you a solid rational platform of linear arguments on which to defend your actions or inactions. You may discover a refreshing excitement in uncertainty because the experience of not knowing signals that you have the chance to explore new possibilities.

After each of your experiments take time to write a journal entry or a few paragraphs about your experience. What happened? What did you notice? Agree at the outset that your writing does not have to make sense or be grammatically correct. In expansive learning the observations and communications tend to be less intellectual and more experiential. Instead of writing in ways that everybody is accustomed to reading, try using language as a bridge to communicate your original experience. Some people find themselves drawing more pictures, writing in free verse poetry, or using words as artistic forms. For extra credit, go back to one or more of your three original coaches and share with them about what you did.