

On Twyla Tharp
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Twyla Tharp is one of America's greatest dance choreographers, with a career spanning over forty years. In her book, *Twyla Tharp: The Creative Habit*, she poses and answers the question, When faced with stupidity, hostility, intransigence, laziness, or indifference in others, how do you respond?

Her answer: Stupidity: run, don't walk. Hostility: get nicer. Intransigence: push back. Laziness: see Stupidity. Indifference: move on.

Terse reply but I get the idea, and I know a better way to come at it. My way builds on Twyla's response to hostility, which, it seems to me is the strongest point she makes. Indeed, if somebody is hostile to you, that should be the occasion for you to be really, really nice to them; smile, ingratiate yourself, be super friendly. The more hostile they are, the nicer you get. Attend to them, serve them, defer to them, put yourself down, pitch yourself beneath them, entertain them, fawn over them, build them up, play the clown--do whatever you have to do to get them to like you and want to be around you.

Stupidity? No, no, no, that's not an occasion for run, don't walk, Twyla's got that wrong. Stupidity is a signal for you to get closer, and the more stupidity there is, the closer you should get. Closer and closer to the stupid people until your lives are intertwined. Drop other people; they don't matter. Your challenge in life is to enlighten and build up the self-esteem of stupid people. Part of that is to play dumb, show them how dumb you can be so they feel good about themselves in comparison to you. The dumber they get, the more urgency you should feel about your mission: you *must* smarten them up and make them realize how great they really are. Go places with them. Have long conversations with them. Tell them in detail about all your ideas and plans and activities, and if they don't get it, tell them again, and again, and again until they perceive every nuance of what you are saying. Make them the central audience in your life. What's this run, don't walk business?

Intransigence? Here again Twyla has a point, though it's best to go even further than she seems to be taking it. Not only should you push back, you should *center your entire life around pushing back!* Nothing should matter but wrestling around with intransigent people and coming out on top with them. That is your main arena in life. Pushing and pulling and jerking this way and that, every chance you get, put all your energy into it.

Laziness? Again, Twyla is 180 degrees off. Run? No! Make early-risers out of those lazy people. Motivate them. Inspire them. Blame yourself when they sit on their duffs. When they don't do something, reason with them, coax them, plead with them, give them another chance. Got a big project going? Take these people on as collaborators.

Indifference? Don't move on to people and situations where you are cared about, encouraged, and supported; that's a cop-out. Hang out with indifferent people. Turn indifference around. Make them care deeply, fervently, about you, and don't stop until you succeed at it.

What ties all of this together for me is the insight that if you aren't perfect--perfect!--turning around stupidity, hostility, intransigence, laziness and indifference, you deserve to be miserable and hate yourself. You should dwell incessantly on how people in these categories feel about you and what isn't working for you with them. And to deal with times when they stew you up you should stuff yourself with junk food until your stomach bloats, drink cheap wine until you are dopey and sick, channel surf until your eyes water and you are depressed, and read and re-read sport pages until its late enough at night that you can knock yourself out with an Ambien until morning when you can get right back at it, that's your lot in life. You can't be happy, you can't get on to anything else, absolutely not, until you make it 100% right with the people in your life who don't understand you, have no respect for you, work against you, give you nothing, don't care about you, dump on you when they get the chance, and who would break into a dance if you fell down a manhole. Twyla just doesn't get it. She knows about a

lot of things, but she has something to learn from me in this area,
that's for sure.