Ask the Old Guy

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Right now, I’m listening to Stevie Wonder’s *Overjoyed* and choosing insight over depression. Stevie Wonder always moves me to self-reflection and deep emotions. I listened to him as a child go on about the life and world changing capabilities of loving and being well loved; I was given some very different messages from the mass media and my family of origin.

While he spoke of love, I was told all day in multiple ways that I would never know love; that people like me never know love. This is one hell of a message to begin internalizing at 8, 10 or 12.

The message was clear — there is something fundamentally wrong with you which makes it ok to bully and humiliate you; there is no reason to ever believe or hope you will know or experience true love. How do you bounce back from that programming in particular when it comes from loved ones — those who say they love you?

My parents never discussed what love for me could look like. It was expected that I would “just know” and understand that “love is a feeling”. It was clear that love or being in love meant that I would have to put up with all sorts of things that are ridiculous.

We learn nothing about love from people who know nothing about love.

Whenever there is the pain of “not good enough” or “fundamentally flawed” you have the recipe for disconnection and addiction. As a person who has spent most of his life being disconnected in an effort to save his life, I’m very familiar with addiction.

Many years ago, I joined a support group known as Reevaluation Counseling. During my time in the group, we constantly discussed patterns and addictions.

Addictions keep us separate from one another and drive isolationist tendencies. Our dark side wants connection (safety, routine and predictability) and varying degrees of separation.

On one hand, there is a need to separate from the larger culture where few of us feel safe and our humanity celebrated. On the other, the need for predictability and community moves us into the world of “cruising” which has its own culture and ways of dealing with the
world.

Nowhere in any of these worlds is there any mention of togetherness or the kind of love that Stevie mentions. Where is our *Ribbon in the Sky*, our *Overjoyed*, our *As*?

Until we can have and claim these types of relationships, we will always be left longing and in a state that primes us to be used and pimped.
Men Refusing Domination

Every day all around me and in multiple formats, the world reminds me that I’m flawed and not a “real man”. Men who Resist Domination are often seen as weak, pussies, someone to trifle with. We are seen as less of a threat to the world. For not upholding toxic and typical masculinity, we pay the price with disrespect and multiple requests to be an asshole.

As men, we are often seduced into showing the ubiquitous “it” that we are in control of not only ourselves but several real and imagined minions. I have had family members and loved ones look at me as if I’ve grown a second head when, instead of dominating, I’ve chosen connection and collaboration.

Most of the men I know see nothing wrong with dominating children and men deemed lesser by society. As a child, I vividly recall being taunted and shamed for not being athletic. In particular for not playing football. A sport I did and do find ridiculous.

When gentle, kind boys are raised in patriarchal families they are often depressed, lonely and have the propensity to act out later in life. Those of us who have no interest in domination are often at the mercy of those who see no other way to interact.

When I first saw the *Wizard of Oz* as a young child I wept for the confused little girl and the possibility of her never returning home.

While my family teased me and constantly brought up that in being moved (emotionally vulnerable and expressive) there was something wrong with me (I was breaking the boy code even before I knew what is was), no one had the decency or wherewithal to address the connection that maybe I felt I would never get “home”. This continues to haunt me at fifty.

So much of my existence as a sensitive, brilliant, unwilling to dominate black male has been about trying to build a home. Even in high school, I found myself shuffled between my divorced parents’ home and my loving grandmother’s home, never feeling safe to call any one spot my home or as they say true north.

Men who refuse to dominate often attract folks who can do nothing but. I often ask people why there is the need to make sure everyone becomes their minion and naturally does their bidding? No one
can answer this intelligently.

I can answer why I hate domination and refuse to participate. Nobody wins and someone always feels crushed.
The Number One Way to Resolve Every Conflict

“Don’t wish things were easier. Wish you were better. Don’t Ask for Less Problems; Ask for More Skills.” — Jim Rohn.

When I turned 25, I assumed all of my problems would be resolved and that my life would become easy and predictable. When I shared this misguided and foolhardy belief with my mother, her response was simple “Why’d you think that?”

She quickly reminded me that life doesn’t necessarily get easy and you don’t one day wake up with answers to everything. Instead, you learn and make decisions and hopefully get some damn sense at some point in your fool head.

Almost 25 years later, I can say that she was correct. The problems, challenges and such never stop; they are attacked by a smarter more insightful “me”. Since that talk so much change has occurred that it is just mind-boggling.

One thing that hasn’t changed is the reality that problems never stop and if you truly want a great life, it is imperative that you learn to solve interesting problems in interesting ways. Conflicts, confusion, flat out lies, trickery and deception will continue to plague you as long as you are alive and human.

My recipe for dealing with any and all conflict is simple. When conflict or misunderstanding or any tomfoolery shows up, it is time for one or both of the involved parties to make a commitment to either gain more skills or set a more defined boundary.

Tracing back all of my confrontations and conflicts, it is obvious to me that once I set a boundary or gained a new skill, things cleared up.

When I began teaching 11 years ago, I had no idea how to teach a class (lack of skill) or set clear-cut boundaries (determine with my young people what would or would not be tolerated). As I focused on becoming a stellar instructor and cultivating exceptional skill in the classroom things began to change.

Although it continues to be a challenge for me, I continue to set boundaries while developing additional teaching skills.
My boundaries are often tested when it comes to decision making and having to consider another person’s welfare. No matter the type of conflict or its size, the way to correct the misunderstanding and move through it is simple — gather more skill or set a clear boundary (stated in your out loud voice). Most of the time the conflict will require that you do some of both.

Whenever I come up against some ghastly foe, it usually requires a greater skill set than I currently possess and a moment or two to look inward and unearth a dormant skill that previously had no reason to reveal itself. In my personal life, I reach for additional skills and or boundaries when trouble is afoot.

Last Summer, my 9-year-old grandson stayed with us. The Summer before he only stayed a weekend and I mistakenly thought there was no need for boundaries or additional skills. I was mistaken and the weekend was a disaster.

When he returned for a second visit, I was prepared. I figured out that the only way this arrangement was going to work and a 9-year-old would have no way of upending my home was to set some clear boundaries and expectations. Developing and then implementing this new knowledge was simple and not always easy.

For one, there needed to be some major buy in from my husband, his other grandfather, who is an adult with his own ways of thinking about children, guidance and how to set clearly defined expectations and boundaries.

Suffice to say, we all had an interesting Summer and I learned a great deal about what it takes to prevent and resolve conflict and what is required if lasting change is the goal.

What I didn’t know at twenty, twenty-five or even thirty was that I will never have everything figured out and no matter how much I think I know or understand, there is more to know. Conflicts and personal drama are our greatest teachers if we allow them to be. It is difficult to remember this when you are in the throes of angst and anxiety.

As I stated in my great life transitions book, *Strong Stuff*: when you’re up to your ass in alligators, it’s hard to remember your main objective is to drain the swamp. I always find this quote hysterical and true. Conflicts and drama are life’s little reminders — set a boundary here; pick up or hone an existing skill.
Most of us, myself included, don’t like conflict. For a while, I think I rather enjoyed it and relished a proper bout of intellectual sparring with a worthy opponent. Particularly in the course of my long-term commitments. Somewhere I began avoiding conflict and thinking that I did not want to be in a position wherein I could be hurt or belittled.

Wishing for more skills means that I can focus on what I can do to make things right and disagreements needn’t be a blood bath.

More skills always lead to less problems. For instance, I was terrified of driving our company van. How did I rid myself of this fear? I took it home and drove it back using two different routes and now it is no longer a problem. However, when mofos criticize my driving I can easily offer them an alternative route that does not include them being in my car.

Resolving conflict is rarely easy. It is always simple: stop doing this; start doing that. It is never easy because as long as you are dealing with people there will be conflict and various ways that things are seen and subsequently dealt with.

Two people can be in the same situation in the same room and yet have totally different life experiences which leads to vastly different interpretations. For example, I am often amused by my black friends who have a completely different understanding of time and what being late really looks like.

Today I discovered that some people, no matter the amount of discussion, begging, pleading and cajoling, will never give you any amount of “act right”.

Boundaries are nice and wonderful as long as there is an understanding of them and an agreement of repercussions.

When you are in a position to deliver circumstances then things work out a certain way. When you are not in the position to deliver any long-term repercussions then how do you create change?

As I’ve gotten older, I’ve mistakenly made the mistake of assuming that everyone has the same level of maturity, devotion and commitment. My determination to turn this around means that I must learn a new skill — become better and wiser no matter what.

Many times, life will provide you with multiple opportunities to grow and become wiser and smarter. As a person who is committed to change and growth it is always a challenge to figure out how
and when to take on chances to develop my life and life skills coping mechanism. Every life lesson that has come my way has been mixed with a great challenge or difficulty.

Typically, something challenges me, I get mad and then I create change.
Do What You Love and the Money Might Follow

Many years ago, I read a book entitled *Do What You Love and the Money Will Follow*. Young and optimistic, I was in search of anything written that would explain my desire to create and affirm that it was the right life decision for me. I found proof that I was right in both my vocation and that the world and my parents were wrong.

Twenty years later, I’m having to do what I hate the most and find most disturbing. I have to rethink my assumptions and realize that I might be wrong.

It’s not that there is no money to be made or financial gain for those of us in the arts. It’s simply that we must be smarter about our craft and self-care while we wait for our “big break”.

For years I struggled in poverty and self-righteous indignation about the commitment that I had to my craft and spent an inordinate amount of time judging the commitment of others.

*Not willing to stay up all night and work through your sickness until we get our lines down? Well, clearly you are not serious. Unwilling to cancel a long standing well planned out and long overdue vacation? Then by all means get out of the business you dilettante.*

I got seduced by the “struggle” and mired in the creative ghetto in ways that harmed me and my relationships with others.

As a young artist the dream was to be discovered. To be plucked from my mundane life and offered the keys to the kingdom. This philosophy kept me broke and twirling in artistic ghettos. Lamenting and bitching with folks who believed that to be an artist is to be broke, miserable and relegated to a life of obscurity and artistic integrity.

With this type of being stuck that supported me in my nonsense, it was easy to buy into all of the financial and sociological shenanigans that told me that I had no choice but to be a broke ass. What a crock of shit.

Being a broke artist won’t allow you to do anything other than some serious navel gazing and self-centered understanding of what you don’t have or what you need. You can’t create anything of any substance if you are whining about your life and sweating about your
unpaid bills and all of the resources that you are unable to exploit.

I wish someone had said “Screw all that poor-and-proud suffering-for-your-art bullshit, this is how you take care of yourself and devote your energy to being creative”.

I’ve learned to pick myself and not wait. I’ve also learned that if I’m waiting to be picked then I can also be “not picked”.

Luckily, I met and married a man who understood the need to have both and during the past six years, I have taken his philosophy to heart. Don’t put yourself in a position to be pimped by not having your own money. Don’t put yourself in the position of being beholden to anyone because you have no food, nowhere to live or no “fill in the blank”.

My wonderful husband taught me the difference between being a broke-yet-prolific artist and being an artist who is self-sustaining and prolific. Via his wisdom and daily existence, he exhibits a life devoted to change and ongoing artistic output.

I’ve learned to adjust my time management and focus on what matters to me and what I love. As a result, I am able to work, pay my bills and write.

Because most of us don’t understand money, its power or creativity, we are often given advice from people who are in no position to offer suggestions or insight.

Years ago, my parents could not believe that I was singing and dancing and being paid for it. Earning a living, paying bills and having strangers respond to my gifts. As a result of growing up in poverty, my parents felt that it was impossible for me to become economically self-sufficient as an artist.

It is hard in this country to be a prolific artist and be financially solvent. Our country is not designed to support those of us who answer the siren’s call and take on artistic expression.

As a result, we are often at odds with our love for our work. We often find ourselves gravitating between wanted to create and needing to support our lives via a day job. Most day jobs are not looking for creative, innovative persons. Most day jobs want people to come in, do their job and collect a paycheck.

Unfortunately, so many of us get squashed early and often and most unrelentingly in the world of work. I, however, have been lucky enough to score a gig that makes sure that this part of my life is fed
and nourished. In the past month or two my day job has allowed me to see not one, not two, but three live performances.

As an artist, it is important that we find ways to use our creativity on the clock.
Brene Brown in all her fierce wisdom reminds us that men are socialized to not “appear weak”. This set up demands that men have all the answers all the time and be willing to share this knowledge with the world, just to make sure that everyone in earshot knows the proper course of action.

Many times, I’ve been in the company of men who are total and innate bullshit artists; happily spewing their nonsense and offering it up as “common sense”, general knowledge and gospel truth.

I am super clear that so much of our daily lives are spent trying to make sure that no none knows that we don’t have all the answers. In a culture that thrives on “expert advice” and know-it-alls who get the term “Dr” slapped on their names, it can be difficult and counter-intuitive to share anything about what our struggles and feelings of inadequacy contain.

Yet, when put into a situation where we have to confront our feelings around not knowing it all, we often huff and puff our way through an answer.

My personal favorite takes place during professional gatherings where business owners, CEOs and all types of professional industry leaders gather to “handle” a situation or brainstorm a multi-step problem-solving technique that will answer every problem known to man.

When things are brought up that people have not prepared themselves to answer or if it feels like an attack (which it will if you have been conditioned to know it all) then all hell breaks loose.

Broken hell is not the problem and can lead to wonderful solutions if handled properly. Proper handling entails an admission of lack of clarity and the very powerful tool that says “I neglected to consider the following...”.
Let’s Stop Calling Men Stupid

Seven years ago, I began a new life. What began as a job offer quickly morphed into a life-changing and highly productive daily event. As a person dedicating several hours per week to helping others improve and redirect their lives, it became clear early and often what many of the women in the space thought of me and men in general.

As men in “soft” (read traditionally female jobs) occupations we are often looked at with pity (clearly we have limited and pointless skills) and suspicion. Many of us grow up with the patriarchal dominator model of living and coexisting with others.

Whether it’s the bully on the playground or the insanity that is our home life, we learn that the only way to interact and be in relationship with people is via domination and one-upsmanship which provides no productive and life affirming ways for any of us.

We are all taught and schooled in ways to intimidate, victimize and upset.

Interestingly enough, I am not a part of that limited conversation and many people refer to me as passive, nonaggressive and other not so nice terms and yet when I speak in a direct manner, questioning why certain behavior is allowed, folks still get mad.

It always amazes me that people feel the need to be a bad ass which usually means a bully or at the very least a person who cannot or will not hear the opinions and most importantly the experiences of others.

Recently, in a moment of guts and bravery at work, I pointed out what prevented us from moving forward. Instead of listening, I was shown the flawed thinking I had regarding the situation.

Nothing makes us feel less heard than someone jumping in with a solution or defensiveness and blame disguised as good ol’ fashioned “explanations”. I almost burst out laughing but decided against it knowing that it would not help.

It pisses me the fuck off (especially when I hear this from folks who should know better) when men get dismissed as problematic, short-sighted and sex-crazed. Which often leads to folks believing that if men would change, go away or let women run things, the
world would be better.

I remember twenty-five years ago when my critical consciousness was born. I despised and was disgusted by my gender. That foolishness didn’t last long and instead was replaced by my love for and awe of the male form and things that are male.

I began reading great work by superb male writers James Baldwin and Essex Hemphill and started to design the life, purpose and voice that I wanted to have. While not always perfect, it did provide me with multiple opportunities to look inward and figure out how I wanted to show up and be in the world.

Men are not the problem. I repeat: men are not the problem! It is our behavior and our devotion to patriarchy that is the problem.
Ask the Old Guy Speaks to His Twenty-Something Self

About twenty years ago, I took a huge risk, grew a set of larger-than-normal nuts and decided that I would write and perform characters.

Each character in my opinion was bright, witty, interesting and had something to say. Each character was also a personality that would have never been given the opportunity to share their story if it hadn’t been for me creating them.

What the powers that be tried to convince me of was the “fact” that although the concept was interesting and entertaining, I was basically wasting my time because no one would cast me as someone ninety. The big joke: I wasn’t looking to be cast as a 90-year old, I was looking to tell the story of a 90-year old.

It is always amusing to hear the opinions of the powers that be who know nothing and fear everything.

While trying to put you in a box that spells “success” for them and then naturally allows them to say that they discovered you, they often overlook our (artists committed to struggle and personal development) reasons for doing what it is that we are doing.

My desire to push boundaries to challenge and change has very little to do with whether or not “they” see me a certain way or if “they” won’t hire me. My mantra during my performing days was simple: learn to write, perform improv and do stand-up comedy and you will always work.

For some reason, this all flooded back to me on Friday on my way home. I recalled the boldness and richness of calling my own shots and not waiting for someone to say “yee that’s a great idea”.

Instead of waiting for “permission” to experiment and reach for greatness, I moved on what I thought was best. Many times I’ve been forced to rely on my gut and not what I could see or the current reality. What if I could redirect that same energy?

People are now telling me that all of my prospective ships have sailed. That all of my “unfulfilled” opportunities are nothing more than dreams deferred.

I am being told to seek employment that doesn’t fulfill or uplift
me and wait for the slow deliberate suicide that is retirement and old age.

To that concept I say “Fuck that noise!”

What if the rest of my days are the best of my days? My best years are ahead of me for so many dizzying and obvious reasons that it boggles the mind.

For one, I no longer have to spend time seducing men like some second-rate Carmen Jones.

This also means the days of fucking up my life and relishing the welcome distractions and pivotal time-wasting that was amateur detective work are also behind me. There is no wasted time spent reading men’s signs and interpreting their every move with my team of experts.

I no longer have the need to romanticize a life of poverty while trying to save the world, when I’ve yet to figure out how to save myself.

I now focus my energy on taking a serious look at finances and the time, money and energy needed to make my life and the lives of those around me work.
Often times, we find ourselves in the most ridiculous positions. We get very confused and overstep boundaries and cause grief, heartache and confusion. How many friendships could be spectacular but get derailed because we don’t keep it in our pants?

Even if there is no sex or fooling around, the ways in which we choose to interact can still be highly steeped in the possibility of a fuck or relationship.

Is it odd to have friends we would fuck if given the chance? Is it possible to interact with the goal of only developing a fine relationship?

Many times, we have no idea how to interact nor how to create relationships that go beyond the physical and into the realm of greatness. It is possible to have friendships that don’t start nor are built on the possibility that something might happen.

Nothing is more embarrassing and sobering than finding out that what you thought was a fun, new, exciting relationship is simply someone waiting to “pounce”. I’ve had this experience more than once and each time there was not a way to salvage the union. It was almost as if there was no way to interact nor any reason to once it was discovered that there would be no dating or sex.

This is hurtful and troubling on many levels. It has the propensity to make one feel cheap and used. What if we could be honest about what we really wanted or decided that we would get to know a person before allowing feelings and desires to develop?

We are culturally schooled that feelings run the show and that we should all welcome the chance to be “swept away” with emotions and of course its close relative, lust. While this is fascinating in books and movies, it can provide much havoc in our personal lives simply because of the fantasy element.

It has taken me damn near two decades to realize that every attraction and interest between myself and other gay men is not a reason to indulge sexually or even emotionally.

With this knowledge, I know that I can be around young men as a mentor without fear of being perceived as a lech. I can also hold seri-
ous conversations with people who can use my intellect and hard-
earned experience and knowledge.

When have you had the experience of being around a man and
not given into the culture’s belief that is time to score?
How to Recreate Your Family and Guarantee a Sense of Belonging

When children are born, they are looking in the faces of all these strange people with one question in mind “Do I belong here?” What we are seeking from birth onward is the question “Am I worthy of connection?” As a culture, we refuse to see it and recognize it as normal, healthy and human.

As a child of divorce, I will always have a sense of loss and not belonging. I suspect that children of divorce grow up with the understanding that things can and often do change without warning and usher in the expectation that things simply have to be “dealt with”.

Growing up with parents who married super young, I never felt at home in my own home. Many people feel that the home in which they were raised is true North — a place to venture from and discover the world. I can always recognize those who were connected and welcomed with reckless abandon once they entered the world and those of us who had to fight to get and or keep a place of connection in our homes and families.

Home for me has always been an ongoing process. An event that never seems complete or adequate. During my younger years, I dreamt that home was all over the map. I believed that home was an intellectual space and way of being.

As an extremely smart and precocious child (I was reading at a college level in the fourth grade), I often sought out places that emphasised mind development.

Living in a home filled with depression and homophobia, it was clear that the places for boys were places where you could play sports and inflict pain. Taking my education into my own hands, I sought out places that focused on the intellect.

At fourteen, I discovered an incredible prep school that was expensive as hell and miles away from my limited Detroit neighborhood. My only problem: parents who failed to see that this financial challenge would pay off in the near future. When the person writing the checks doesn’t see the value of what’s being offered or worse, doesn’t understand what’s being offered, then steers you away from a life changing opportunity, the home loss is reinstated.
During my younger years, I did manage to create a home space that I still can return to at fifty. My grandparents’ home was home to me. Between the smell of bleach and camel cigarettes given off by my grandfather and my grandmothers’ fried chicken, my grandparents’ house was my home. A place that I felt seen and wanted.

My paternal grandparents were always excited to see me and forever willing to welcome me with a good, hot meal and a genuine question about I was learning in school.

Being seen is the true definition of home. Home is not where the heart is, home is where you are seen. Many of us grow up being seen for the wrong reasons.

I recently read a quote from somebody that says everyone is looked at. What we all want is to be seen. Here’s the difference: most of us are looked at and critiqued — told what is wrong with us. Anyone can tell you what’s wrong with themselves and you.

As a sensitive, smart child who hated sports, I was constantly provided with an ongoing diatribe of what was wrong with me, what I should desire and how I should act and present myself to the world.

Everyone looked (to be able to critique and “help”). Few saw me (loved me with no suggestions that I would be loved more or better if certain things were changed about me).

My concept of home has always been skewed. We are taught, myself included, that home is with people who look like you, have your same name and multiple shared historic tidbits.

Does home come at the cost of your personal and emotional health? For several years, I struggled with claiming space in my immediate family.

As an out gay men, I was given the option — hold on to yourself (create a home situation on your own) or join us (we will allow you a space in our home as long as you have no needs or firm boundaries).

Home should never be a place where you feel threatened or have to negotiate emotional safety.

When I think of my early childhood and home life, I don’t have warm fuzzy feelings that anything was possible. I recall a home that couldn’t handle a male child who was arts centered and my sister who was a math whiz.

Healthy and happy doesn’t mean conflict free or without an occa-
sional hiccup. It does mean that differences are negotiated and view-
points shared without fear of shaming and humiliation.

How do we create a happy, healthy home life?
What Fifty Years of Compassionate Impatience Can Get You

In this country, three factions can get away with telling the truth—mentally insane, small children and old folks. If you live long enough, you will get to spend some time in each category. Currently, I live and play behind door #3.

As I age, I find no reason to agree to bullshit I find annoying, pointless and just plain stupid. Just recently, I was privy to a situation that hit all three previous mentioned points.

In an effort to prepare my phone for my first trip to Europe, I stopped by my carriers store. Watching a group of twenty-somethings move as if they were going to a death march after moving through a vat of molasses was entertaining and annoying. I remarked to my husband that not one person moved with any purpose or urgency.

Don’t worry, T-Mobile will get a colorful letter in the next day or two. When I was younger, I didn’t want to make a fuss; maybe someone would get fired.

When I was a young person, I got fired repeatedly. At some point, I realized it was me and that I better get my shit together cause nobody was coming to help (read save) me. Even though I had this realization, I didn’t focus on getting a serious amount of skills.

I wasted a crapload of time trying to be right and outwit supervisors, companies and coworkers.

At fifty, I now recognize my anxiousness and my commitment to action is not arrogance (as people have referred to it) or something to do to pass the time. It is what I lovingly refer to as Compassionate Impatience.

Compassionate Impatience is not a hurry up and wait philosophy. Nor is it hand-wringing and praying that somebody somewhere will do something. It is a commitment to action and moving on things before we feel ready and not allowing fear to stop us.

It is not unplanned, hurried piss-poor decision making that results in pointless risks and unplanned for consequences. It is the bias towards action.

It is obtaining enough information to move on something and then moving. All the while knowing that things will not be perfect.
and will need to be adjusted along the way.

This new type of thinking and acting means we spend very little time thinking and committee making and more time actually getting shit done. We get it done instead of talking about getting it done.

I propose a new way of being. A way of being where mistakes and missteps are welcomed and encouraged. Mistakes can be corrected and improved upon.

No action and having done nothing doesn’t leave much room for feedback or an opportunity to improve your performance or decision making skills

*Compassionate Impatience* means we no longer wait for permission to go after that dream job.

*Compassionate Impatience* means we get mentally healthy (no matter what) so that we can become a great partner instead of looking for one.

*Compassionate Impatience* means we recognize the fragility of life and that none of us are immortal so we nurture our relationships and wisely and methodically handle our finances so that we are not a burden to others as we age.
Almost ten years ago, I made a personal vow to myself. My vow was all about committing to a life of artistic merit. My decision was to give myself fifty years to “make it” in the arts.

While my idea of having made it has changed considerably over the years, my desire to constantly create is what I’m planning to do for the next fifty years.

By giving myself fifty years to develop as an artist and produce work while continuing to evolve as a human and artist, the all or nothing desperation of “convince me that I’ve made the correct life choice” is no longer undergirding what and how I create. Instead, I am allowed to fall in love with doing the work and relishing the entire process.

Most artists spend years grappling with the mad scramble that is the need for approval and acceptance of peers and those that are farther along on the artistic expression line. We pray that someone will see our good and the things we can offer.

If there is a dedication to living for one thousand years and we’re looking at it in chunks of fifty-year intervals, then the rush to manically do as much as we can as quickly as we can is no longer the focus. Our focus now becomes on of health and longevity.

If you knew you would have eight or nine decades of living would you make the same lifestyle choices you are making now? My guess would be no.

All around me family and friends are aging and predictably taking on all the ailments that go along with it: heart issues, depression, prostate problems, sleeplessness. My take on this is simple and yet I have no idea if it is easy enough to apply repeatedly. I’ve been listening to a number of doctors who suggest a number of preventative measures. For example: coconut oil, desecrated liver, spinach smoothies.

My take on health is that if you have neglected one of the core issues (spirituality, strengthening mental acuities, diet and exercise) then something in your body will let you know.

The folks I know who live well handle the four biggies and don’t
wait for a diagnosis.

For example, in October, I am planning a serious overhaul: hot yoga twenty times, no sugar, caffeine, grains, white flour and plan to keep a food diary to see how my body responds. October (as the gateway for Fall Holidays) is wrought with all kinds of potential stressors.

The trick will be not taking on anything or any problem that does not lend itself to the end game of fifty years of happy, healthy, productive living.
Admit it. Whenever you see Wolverine in all his muscled glory you go weak in the knees. Don’t pretend you didn’t swoon when he woke up in 1974 rocking them abs and that ass and you didn’t shriek “SWEET CHRISTMAS”.

And naturally, there are the things that make him seem like an all around good guy who loves his kids and wife. Consider the life imitates art moment from the *The Greatest Showman* when he used his imagination to build his dreams and his young daughters’ hopes.

Yes, Jackman is all that and a bag of biscuits but nothing is as titillating as our 45-second affair.

What I lovingly refer to as my 45-second tryst was nothing more than a dream. In my dream, we are both superheroes with extraordinary abilities. Naturally, my gifts exceed his.

At some point before we hit Chinatown to save the world from some evil (I’m ordering dumplings and wonton soup which holds us up), Hugh enters my room naked. Of course, the world apocalypse and the dumplings can wait.

Oddly enough, we never have sex. We end up intertwined, both fully aroused, while I tell him of my undying love and admiration. He's flattered and aroused and yet no sex.

We agree that we should get back to work (although still intertwined) and he looks at me and says I’m great. It’s my one shot so I take it. “Kiss me”.

He laughs and does just that (a furtive peck like you’d offer a relative you haven’t seen since third grade and when you just want to get it over with). We both realize that neither of us wants this and the wontons and apocalypse really must get handled. At this point, I wake up.

Most of my insights and life answers come when I sleep. I am always aware of when I need additional self-care — I dream of small children needing protection.

When I am feeling less than or like a failure in my professional
day life, I dream of the guts it took for me to consistently get on NYC theater stages and fail my way into improvement and ongoing mastery. So naturally, as I attempt to get answers in every aspect of my life, my dreams become powerful, clear and solution oriented.

Could it be that like most long-term relationships, the sensuality had sneakily and unwittingly begun to leave my relationship?

All long-term relationships go through changes. The trick is to survive both the unrelenting changes and mind-numbing boredom (bill paying, house maintenance, failed ventures, psycho coworkers and annoying family members) that go with pledging to build a life with someone.

My dreams always point me in the right direction. Attempting to maul a movie star who is a stranger is not the right direction.

My obsession with superheroes didn’t begin with Hugh Jackman and the X-Men franchise. Hugh and the peeps just gave it a boost and a clear lust-filled focus.

But what if the lust is not for the man or the movie star but what they each represent in the world? Dedication, perseverance, commitment, responsibility to care for and support another.

All of these are wonderful qualities that anyone can develop and trust me it’s easier than trying to convince a straight superhero to join you on the dark side.
Sometimes, you get a visual of something and it won’t let you be. Two weeks ago, I watched a wonderful film, *The Leisure Seeker*, that deals with a long-term commitment, memory loss and growing older. There are so many things that no one bothers to mention regarding the aging process.

Hearing loss, vision battles, and lost keys are kid’s stuff. Incontinence, spotty memories of your children and major life accomplishments are an altogether different type of existence.

What drove me mad about this film was that it was full of sensuality which I’m not accustomed to seeing between old folks. People always confuse sensuality and intimacy with sex.

Sex can be “performed” with anyone or by yourself. If you’ve got the equipment, you can jump in the game with any willing accomplice. True intimacy takes time.

With intimacy, it is imperative that you truly listen to a person. Your listening is not to cajole, prove the other one wrong or offer an ongoing assessment of your partner’s thinking.

It amazes me how simple it is to listen to one another. In the initial dating stages, we can’t wait to hear and share our thinking. Every attempt is made to find common ground and confirm that our decision to couple is the right one.

Fast forward years down the road and most of us actively avoid listening with the justification that I already know what he will think and say. Mutual mind reading is now the common bond and the source of much conflict.

What this wonderful film provided for me was a bird’s eye view into what long-term commitment — complete with sensuality, really listening and constant emotional check-ins — can do towards creating something substantial.

During the course of this movie, the protagonists take a road trip from Boston to Florida to visit Hemingway’s house. The sojourn is a metaphor for their life together and all the things they’ve seen along the way and left behind as well.

It reminds me of folks who have enough history behind them to
actually have a look back.

For many years, I ran around like a crazy person trying to make everyone the “one”. Hungering for an old age that would include the oft-repeated and rarely interrogated phrase “we’ve been married sixty years”, I longed to get hitched for life in my twenties.

What no one will tell you about decades long setups is that nobody thinks “sixty years — my God that’s a long time!”

You strap on the headgear, get in the game and slug it out one day at a time. And you begin with one event, one birthday, one Christmas, one accomplishment at a time.

So then, how does sensuality and intimacy play into all of this? I know of no couple who allows for listening and sharing their dreams and goals on a consistent basis who doesn’t grow closer as a result. It is impossible to share your innermost thoughts with someone and not move forward in some type of unison or cohesive fashion. And that is what this film did repeatedly.

So how can we use this as a blueprint for living and aging well? We can find us some old timers, ask some questions and shut our face holes as they hold court and offer advice through personal stories, friendships, conflict resolution and options other than chocking the hell out of folks when they piss you the hell off.

Here’s my solution: you decide you want to get hitched. You take the blood test, fill out a license and have a geezer meeting.

The day you make this decision you go online and register for a meeting with an older couple (preferably a happy one — gays ya’ll might as well get in on this too) and tell them all your business and let them tell you how stupid you’re being about x, y and z or how you’re right on the money.

Or maybe, ya’ll are a total mismatch and should part ways while you wait for bachelor number three.

As I age and see more of life, I come back to the same conclusion: life is simple. Human beings fuck it up and make it very difficult, stressful and unbearable.

How do we get people to understand and long for the simplicity that is life and leave the drama the fuck alone?! Maybe anyone who is interested in the aging process as it pertains to love and relationships should be forced to watch this film and take copious notes.
How to Stop Torturing Yourself
For the Next Fifty Years

During the last fifteen years, I’ve chosen to confront and manage not only my wants but the wanting of those around me. At fifty, I still have a fair amount of wants and remain super clear as to how to manage them. I don’t want to become insane about them nor allow them to rule my life in ways that do harm to myself or others.

At fifty, I’m also beginning to see the connection between wanting and forgiveness. Forgiveness is giving up the wanting of things in the past. As someone whose been assaulted by partners, it is up to me to forgive myself for not walking away when the first bit of crazy showed up.

It is also important to avoid rehearsing or rewriting what happened. My “wanting” to protect the teenager and the twenty-something may never go away. This doesn’t mean I pretend it didn’t happen or obsess about it. It means my wanting can be transformed into self-care and compassion for others who place their dreams and well-being in the hands of those with no kind of “act right”.

We all wish things could be different and hope that they will be. Part of aging is knowing which wants to encourage and which ones to let go of.

Aging gives us the wisdom to know whether what we want is: A) Good for us; B) Something we should actively pursue; or C) Something that looks good to us but ain’t good for us.

This is a lesson and some knowledge that only emerges after you’ve spent some time chasing after and lusting after things that may or may not be in your best interest.
Recently, I walked in on my grandson doing the unthinkable: exercising and working on building a six-pack for his abs. He’s nine.

My mind immediately went to the place of exercise in our lives as we age and, of course, the ways black, male, aging bodies are seen. It seems to me that only certain bodies are allowed to be seen.

When people refer to men as having man boobs this can be the ultimate in shaming men who don’t have movie star bodies. I am guilty of this and only remove my shirt in front of people when I do hot yoga.

During my classes, I am often keenly focused until I start criticizing my body and my self-talk (“when did you get so fat? You will never look like you did ten years ago...”) moves into the negative, hurtful zone. My yoga practice then becomes difficult.

As an aging gay man, I am invited and expected to move into the “daddy” zone. This means I’m old but should have the body and sex drive of someone thirty years my junior.

Between the internet and your feelings, it is damn near impossible to feel anything but “less than”. Is there a difference between being healthy and bringing the hotness?

I know people who are thin and young and unhealthy and I know chunky folks who are fit as fiddles. I never looked like those guys in the videos and on TV. I never had a six-pack or rippling muscles (pythons).

As an older married guy, is turning heads all that important? We all want to feel attractive and desirable.

What constitutes attractiveness continues to change and depending on how you look or your body type, this may or may not be your year or decade.

When I was a boy, men with all types of body hair equaled sexy (Burt Reynolds centerfold in Playgirl). Fast forward to the 21st century, body waxing, shaving your pubes and all sorts of manscaping are the rage.

Since I have little to no body hair and am not hyper-masculine, as has been pointed out on more than one occasion, where in the hell
does this leave me?

At fifty (& fabulous), it is imperative to reinvent. When we speak of reinvention, the question remains from what to what.

This is where, as Jimmy Guterman states, you experiment and refine.

You make a plan based on the type of experience you’d like to have and trust that you can create something truly wonderful. We often underestimate what’s possible and choose discomfort and bitching as opposed to making changes.

Does society say our only choices are hot stud or a grandpa or couch potato with a dad bod?

Anyone who knows me knows that I always demand/create the 3rd door. For example, the year I turned forty, my obsession was to get into the best possible physical shape of my life. I began with plenty of hot yoga, drinking water and eating right. Within one month, my body completely transformed.

My transformation was so complete that I had friends asking me what pills I was taking and could they have a few. While I have dabbled in yoga and continue to gain and lose the same forty pounds, my commitment to being healthy remains.

Often times as we age, we make everyone and everything but our health a priority. After a number of years of self-neglect, the body revolts and sends us all types of signals that change is necessary. Too often we wait until a doctor starts discussing pills and or physical/sexual performance is affected before we get serious about our health.

Why wait until we are staring death in the face before we do anything? Start now and make the decision that a healthy body and not a dad or a hot body is what’s most important.
Who Else Wants to Hire a 30-Year-Old with Fifty Years of Experience?

In the book, *So Good They Can't Ignore You* the writer shares a term (that I love) called Career Capital. This means there are folks who have put in their time, earned their stripes and learned “a thang or two about a thang or two”.

When you hire an older guy like me or my contemporaries, you are getting a crap load of experience and know how. If what companies need are viable candidates with life experience and no need to be trained in soft skills, I suggest they look for older people.

During the last decade or so on my day jobs, I am often teased because of my lack of technology skills. I never tease my young counterparts about failing to communicate properly, an inability to focus and a flat-out refusal to plan long-term.

These are skills that can be learned and when combined with follow through, focused attention and well-honed people skills you have an awesome work candidate.

For the past seven years, I have worked with all kinds of employers hungry for new, dependable talent. Repeatedly, everyone has a horror story and very few solutions regarding “this” generation.

My solution is simple: hire an older person looking to reinvent themselves and share their skills.

Often, when it comes to anything that involves starting and maintaining relationships along with creating the impossible, they (those in charge) come to the elder peeps serving much Olivia Pope. Handle it!

No one will admit that the one thing that trumps technology know-how is people and life experience know-how. I might not know the ins and outs of Facebook and spend hours on it. However, I know how to turn a ship around when it involves getting off my ass and going to see people (gathering resources) that could have a significant impact on the bottom line and allow us to keep our jobs a bit longer.

I’ve proven this myself on multiple occasions. Here is a typical exchange I’ve had with my youngsters:

“Did you locate such-and-such person to take care of this issue?”

“I called and they never got back to me.”
“How many times did you reach out?"
“I called twice and sent an email.”

My peeps, myself included, would handle this differently. If it is something that I need and it will have a major impact on me or my livelihood, my ass would be up — keys in hand — heading over to the office of said individual.

There would be no need for a third failed attempt. I’m going in.
Thirty years ago, I was flat out dumb about the power of finances. I spent money with abandon and knew nothing about saving, long-term planning or the choices that could be created if one handled their finances.

Using a money blueprint that was passed down to me from my family, I constantly whined that my parents knew nothing about money and therefore could not teach me anything about this highly charged and intimidating subject.

My philosophy was “fuck it”. Somebody will come along and solve this problem for me or I will get this great job or opportunity and then magically I will have all the answers that I need.

With every job failure and career mishap, I would recall my familial logic. My dad’s advice: spend all you have that’s what it’s for; debt is the American way. My mom’s advice: you don’t need much; God will provide and (my personal favorite) it’s easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to get into the kingdom of heaven.

When you are a youngster and are totally dependent on those raising you, you are forced to buy into their nonsense for survival purposes. It’s impossible to ask caregivers why they are always crying broke and yet continue to shop, eat out and use credit.

At some point, you will make decisions that will change your financial life and give you the chance to have agency in your life and have some fun in the process.

Here is a short list of what I’ve been able to accomplish once I took more control of my finances and began the dance of middle age. Visit Greece for two weeks for a writer’s retreat and some serious yoga. Improve my credit score by 125 points which allowed me to purchase a home and stay out of credit card debt. Self-publish two books (a how to guide for thriving despite unemployment and a sci-fi collection).

Unexamined philosophies are at the root of all our financial woes. For starters, we make ridiculous moves with money because the results are not immediate.

Most of our money decisions (with the exceptions of utility bills)
don’t play out in real time. Many of our philosophies are based in short-term gains. Philosophies that stink cause us severe problems.

Change that philosophy and use the Jim Rohn method: correct the errors of the past then master a few key new disciplines.

This two-prong approach looks like this: pay off old debt, make amends to folks you’ve borrowed from, get that student loan debt out of default. All ways to correct errors of the past.

Second part — acquiring new disciplines. Don’t spend your whole paycheck. Pay yourself first; create a drop dead account that will keep you safe when the shit hits the fan; learn all you can on a continual basis; invest money in your own growth; stop spending money on things (cars, crap in your house, credit card debt) that will never appreciate in value and start spending it on experiences that will enrich you as a person and challenge your life philosophies.
The Simple Way to Move from Stuck to Being Fulfilled

As you age and try to put together your next steps, it becomes easy to feel disappointed, less than and begin comparing yourself to others.

In my personal life, I am now seeing friends, colleagues and ex-classmates surpass me in their career and social visibility. While the adult, grown up mind in me says of course this makes sense, they continued and you bought a house and got roped into a nine-to-five gig.

The immature, bratty part says loud and clear. It’s too late and OMG did I just waste half of my life chasing something that could have been? With all of the self-doubt in my head, I did have a major epiphany last week. I didn’t get roped into doing any of this.

Why did I choose door #2 instead of door #3? My miscalculations were based on emotions as opposed to experience. Whenever I have made a decision based on wanting to have a certain experience, it has worked out wonderfully. When I’ve made a decision solely based on emotion, things have gone South rather quickly.

For instance, my decision to move to both California and New York City were both experiences that I wanted to have. But if we look a bit closer, the NYC move had just enough emotion behind it so that not one but all of my decisions were emotionally based.

Many of the ways I created art and developed my artistry while in NYC was based on pure emotions. While living on the East Coast, much time was spent proving that it was ok for me to claim artistry and have a place at the table (emotional). And convincing my family (and my parents in particular) that I’d made the right choice (emotional).

I spent thirteen years chasing something that may have started out as mine but gradually and undeniable became someone else’s version of what I should be doing. It’s difficult to admit it now and yet it seems quite obvious.

Apparently, the 27-year-old version of me failed to develop the insight and character that would have saved me a shitload of money and allowed me to do some different kind of thinking.
When all of your action and planning is based on “I’ll show ‘em”, you will never have enough or be enough. When you are unaware of deep-seated emotional needs and feelings of personal inadequacies you end up mistreating yourself and using others.

What if I had been wise enough to say “Ok, I’m here now let’s plot a course that involves supporting myself and not doing all kinds of degrading shit to be accepted and in the room?”.
Fifty Ain’t Dead

As I mentioned earlier, this year I turned fifty. It seems that people think it is over. What would I do if I listened to people who say “go away, die”? While no one will say it directly, the culture will tell you that you are washed up and that you should simply let go and move on.

I am interested in moving but not moving on. It is not near ‘bout through. I have much left inside of me that I want share with the world. Every time I hear a mofo talk about retiring and getting a social security check, I cringe. What getting older does allow for is an updated and far more effective way of thinking.

I’m amazed that people allow their life experiences to run them. Yes, shit happens that is fucked up, disastrous and not much fun. This doesn’t mean stop dreaming and most definitely doesn’t mean stop doing and producing.

Folks don’t feel great if they are not giving something to the world. At fifty and beyond, you’ve seen enough foolishness to last a lifetime. Hopefully, you’ve learned from it and have no desire to repeat any of it.

Many times, the lessons we garnered at twenty, twenty-five and even thirty will yield incredible results if we look at them without shame, mockery or justification. We can take them on with the knowledge that yes something happened and we are more than our identities, pain or previous life experience.
My eyes no longer work. But with a new pair of glasses I can read and see street signs and apparently this is all you need to be able to function in the real world.

I used to dance all night multiple times a week and jump right up and go to work after a few hours of sleep. Now I rarely get through Jeopardy before the nodding off begins.

Things change and priorities shift. This year I turned fifty and no amount of my self-imposed incredulity will change that.

Turning fifty is not the problem. The most troubling part of aging is our society’s view of aging men.

Men, by retirement age, are supposed to have raised families, educated children and been breadwinners with no emotional needs of their own. While this might sound like a generalization, the men I know are affected by this set of beliefs no matter their age, race or sexual orientation.

Lately, I have been loudly and adamantly reminded that I am no longer young and should expect disrespect, dismissal of my knowledge and life experience and give up any of my unrealized dreams.

While some dreams are no longer possible (an Oscar before thirty), I am not simply one step closer to death. Nor should I wait for it to show up and whisk me away.

My plan is to reinvent and to combine my life experience with the beast that is Social Media.

Gary Vee says us old-timers can jump on the bandwagon, learn new skills and dominate any market we choose. My dreams of creating great, award-winning television and documentary films are not things that I have set aside because youth is no longer on my side. Currently, there are incredible TV shows and my time is now.

In addition, the amount of opportunity for myself and those who have lived life to construct stories (our own and others) in ways that titillate and engage audiences is unparalleled.

My plan is to write a great book on men and the aging process as
well as write for a great show (Pose & Black Lightning ya’ll listening?)

If you are male and at least fifty send me your stories and dreams. Let’s support one another in this powerful movement. Let’s be the one folks refer to when they lovingly state “Let’s ask the old guy how to handle this”.
How to Make a Sizzling Comeback

In a great TED talk recently a nerdy guy shared his spin on making a comeback. Apparently, at some point in our lives, most of us will not only need a comeback but will be nudged (gently or otherwise by life circumstances or the universe) into making one.

When this happens, we have a couple of choices: flail about in victim mode complete with a rousing chorus of “I don’t know what to do” or “why me?” Or we can dig in our heels, get clear about what we want our life to look like and then get to work creating that reality.

What was so telling about watching this talk was that I have done a fair amount of reinvention myself. Moving from Detroit to the South for College. Moving from Detroit to Japan and then NY in pursuit of my newest incarnation — lounge singer, actor and writer.

If everybody gets what you’re doing you are not pushing hard enough. If everyone is on board and sees what you see then you are not following your own mind and dreams. There must be haters and naysayers otherwise you’re wasting your time.

When Janet Jackson completed *Control* and allowed Papa Joe to have a listen, he hated it. A 50-year-old man shouldn’t enjoy listening to a 19-year-old’s version of pop and independence.

Once you’ve got some nudniks who are throwing shade from the sidelines, it’s time to create one of life’s little necessities — an army (small and powerful) that does get you and what you’re going after.

We must also exercise patience. We work our asses off while developing our crafts and skills and finding an audience interested in what you’re doing. Seth Godin in reference to The Beatles states that the Beatles didn’t invent teenagers they marketed to them and showed up to lead them.

This is something to keep in mind as I move forward and continue my diabolical plans for world domination. Who is waiting for what I have to offer?
Five Dumb Sex Beliefs that Keep Gay Men from Finding True Love (Bonus Essay)

CELIBACY IS UNREALISTIC

Gay men are taught that everything must be handled sexually. Celibacy is a wonderful way for gay men to handle emotional needs without sexual activity.

We are not encouraged to deal with our problems in ways that require silence, contemplation or self-reflection. We are supported in using one another and not figuring out productive ways to change our lives.

When I was a sexual twenty-something, I encountered many guys who were either unsure about their HIV status or lied about it. Most men are not vicious enough to outright lie about their status and their motives for wanting to have sex.

When I realized that I had been lied to and outright manipulated, it became a personal obsession to ensure that my health remained great. At twenty-four I decided to forgo sex for at least one year or until a great guy came along. Giving up “giving it up” made me productive.

I once read that men become successful in their forties because no time is wasted trying to get laid and being on the prowl. During my self-imposed celibacy, I finally began my career as a writer. I was able to redirect my life energy to writing, thinking and figuring out how to effectively self-actualize. It is time we all looked at and committed to doing this whole sex thing in a very different way.

LIMITING SEX/ATTRACTION TO ONE TYPE WILL MAKE ME HAPPY

One of the major things that keep us from finding and keeping true love is our addiction to and fascination with “types”.

Whether you’re black and only date white or white and only date black, you are limiting who you will love. I have met wonderful men of all races. I have also met a few hardcore assholes who would still
be assholes no matter their race.

As a black gay man, I thought it was my duty to love a black man. I was unaware of “types” and that I could be boxed into a flavor of the month. Spending the Summer in Boston changed my perspective.

Although it was the first time I had ventured outside my race for dating, companionship and sex, I found myself questioning what the big deal was and why I had waited so long. When the Summer ended, my beautiful, kind, thoughtful and wealthy suitor begged me to stay and continue our relationship in a more adult and complete manner.

Many men have obsessively tried to get into my pants. Few have tried with a Herculean effort to get into my mind. If what we are seeking is true love, it might be time to can the bullshit and question who we find attractive.

Andrew Gurza is a brilliant writer who writes extensively and insightfully about dating while disabled. In his great post *Feel the Fear and Do Me Anyway* he addresses dating and sex while managing a chronic illness.¹

We each point out the need to date, screw and build relationships beyond what is comfortable and familiar. When we fall in love or level-headedly decide to devote ourselves to loving another well, it is not with a set of genitalia or skin color. We must widen what we like and who we can love.

**PORN STAR SEX IS AVAILABLE TO EVERYONE**

While most of us have seen porn, it is rarely viewed with a critical eye and the understanding that it is a form of entertainment.

Repeated viewing makes you believe that every cock is huge, there is never a need to negotiate sexual interaction and most importantly this is the only thing that matters to men. No one will suggest that we refrain from viewing it until we are not driven by images created by people who don’t love or respect us.

My initial viewing of gay male porn at age nineteen was brought to me by my first gay male relationship. My terrorist enjoyed encouraging me to watch porn and then blatantly and cruelly denying me sex. Entwined with my initial relationship, porn taught me that sex was mechanical, always available and didn’t require much conversa-

Without true, non-sexual conversations there is not much chance of finding and keeping true love.

True love is not about the type or frequency of sex. True love is also not about mechanics, predictability or fantasy. It forces us to be uncomfortable and often requires that we straddle the unfamiliar with the possibility that everything could change at any moment.

When things change, we have to deal in the moment and not go into familiar roles and behavior.

Love demands that we think. In porn, no one is thinking they are doing. In porn everyone is a fuck beast and is a master at doing the deed. True love requires some errors.

A while ago, there was much discussion about bareback porn. Committing to truth and an understanding and proper view of fantasy (the substance abuse addictions in our communities are staggering) would eliminate the need for debate. People would understand that having unprotected sex is dangerous and can have lifelong effects.

We are led to believe that we can have or recreate what our personal fave porn performers get paid to do. We think this is possible without a crew, lights, directors, sexually enhancing drugs and twelve-hour shoots.

**GREAT SEX IS RISKY SEX**

Sex in public bathrooms and abandoned houses with strangers? We have all been schooled in the ridiculousness that for sex to be “hot”, good or worthwhile, it needs to include some life-altering risk. For too many of us, liberation means having the right to not give a fuck and do whatever with whomever we choose.

This is not grown up liberation. It is a stupid, petulant response to being told that we are not enough. It is our collective response to a large group of folks that hate us.

Risky kick-up-your-heels I-don’t-give-a-shit sex often lulls us into thinking that we are bad asses and all the bullying and familial shunning was wrong. What could be more liberating, we are seduced into believing, than screwing in the open where the “straights” might have to witness us having a good time?

Risky sex is enthralling because of what it can and can’t offer.
While it offers a chance to “perform” for people who are disgusted and obsessed with our sexual expression, it does not satisfy on the deepest level. It also does not provide an opportunity to fully see another human.

When we are tricking in a public place, the possibility of fresh dick and a belief that all fantasies may be fulfilled is overwhelming. We crave closeness and settle for a warm body who will offer orgasms without much personal or psychological work.

A constant search for risk leaves us unprepared for true love and the kind of joy that is based on cultivating relationships that lead to real risk (emotional connection).

While dallying in the world of constantly available and predictable risky sex, I longed for a real connection with another gay man.

When a practice is no longer working, one more body, cute smile or low self-esteem liaison will not deliver the desired outcome without exploitation.

When you are doing the deed with someone you don’t know and without exploration of anything other than the physical you are using another and being used as well. Can we change or challenge this notion?

WHAT SEX CAN AND CAN’T DO

Most gay men are taught that the only thing that matters is what is between our legs and what we do with it. Gay subculture is consumed with sexual activity and our personal attractiveness.

As a young queen, most of my interactions with other gay men were sex-based. Could I get you to fuck me? Would you be blown away by my sexual prowess? Would I be so phenomenal that you’d leave your current relationship and stalk me for a deeper commitment?

None of the gay men I knew attempted to dissuade this ridiculous and pointless notion.

When I meet gay men who are young and full of promise and possibility and obviously being hormone lead, I often draw attention to what their gifts are beyond the bedroom. Many of them, like my younger self, are not clear about the contributions they can make with their clothes on.

While we are perfecting sexual techniques and gathering sexual
body counts we are also quickly aging. Being a walking mattress at twenty-five or thirty is cute. Being one at fifty is a different story.

At twenty-three, I assumed that a grand roll in the hay equaled an opportunity to create a wonderful long-lasting “true love” type of relationship. When a roll took the place of some serious, hard down thinking and examination of beyond the sheet action, things began to shift and change drastically.

My one year of celibacy convinced me some twenty-three years ago to dig deeper and demand more of myself. In one year, I discovered what sex could do — make you feel physically good — and what it couldn’t do — cure loneliness, depression and crippling low self-esteem.

As an older person in the community, I still maintain that we are as confused about sex as ever.

Gay brothers, friends and ex-lovers please wake up. Please demand more from yourself and those that you say you care about. We can and must do better.

Sex is powerful and we are more powerful. We must examine all the lies fed to us by the heterosexual community and those that we have decided to create in our own communities.
Anthony Carter is a writer and cultural critic. Among his books are the mental health strategies found in *Unfettered Mind: The Importance of Black Male Mental Health*, *Strong Stuff: Tips On Surviving and Thriving Despite Being Unemployed*, a plea for social change regarding the fear and lust of the black male body in *Kiss Me Kill Me: Trayvon Martin, Black Male Bodies and White Supremacy* and a collection of Science Fiction Stories, *Rules of Reality*. He writes *Burn the Manual* — a column for the Good Men Project.

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