**Beyond Quantity: Quality**

In this post, I’m going to do something new. I’m going to propose an argument contrary to what think is the main stream. I encourage your comments and challenges to this idea below and hope to provoke a thoughtful discussion.

**My Opinion**

Quality far surpasses Quantity in value and application in the modern world.

**Quantity and Quality**

Let’s revisit 7th grade science class when these terms were probably first brought up in your life.

Quantity describes a characteristic that can be measured. Moreover, quantity is a summary, symbol, or generalization given and easily compared.

Quality is the perception of an attribute. It is inherently subjective and therefor understood differently by different people.

My basis for the argument that Quality far surpasses Quantity lies in the principle that focusing on quantity limits the mind’s creativity, restricts open free thought, and pulls away from our evolutionary strengths as humans. Striving for quality engages the mind to think from new perspectives, new thoughts flourish, and we in fact continue to engage our evolutionary strengths.

**But Everything is Quantified**

We live in an amazing time of computers, the internet, and global connectivity. The Information has heralded new industries such as Big Data, Quantified Self, and The Internet of Things. The global population plugged into the network of computers is staggering and what we’re seeing more and more is that we’ve moved beyond a family computer to having multiple forms of connection, some worn 24 hours per day feeding numbers into vast databases. Our society is obsessed with numbers! To name a few, let’s go down a list:

* Social media: Number of followers, retweets, YouTube views, Facebook Friends, Instagram Hearts.
* Health: How much do you weigh? Count your calories in and calories out. How does your BMI stack up? What’s your fastest mile?
* Wealth: What is your Salary? How much is saved for retirement? What’s your company revenue? How much equity did you get in that signing bonus? What price did you sell the stock at? What do you pay in rent?

From reading these questions, do you any make you feel nervous? Are you boxed in? Do you want to embellish? Why? Is it because quantifying things inevitably leads to an objective comparison taken out of context? What’s the old saying? “No one likes to feel like a number”.

**Why do we Compare?**

Both Quantity and Quality are forms of comparison. From an evolutionary standpoint, comparison helped us survive. We evolved a highly advanced pattern recognition and decision making brain that so far we believe is fairly unique in nature. On the prairie, we had to qualitative judgments to compare possible outcomes to sustain life long enough to pass on our genes: Lions are bad. Funny berries make me sick. Finding shelter is better than exposure. Being with other humans is safer than alone. In this time, our lives were much more on the fringe of survival, so we got to be really good comparers with these brains and it rooted very complex sets of experiences into the highest quality of life we could muster. Our brains are meant to find shortcuts to conserve energy. Not surprising when you consider that your brain uses 20% of your energy but only takes up 3% of your mass. Making a shortcut to take a set of stimulus and give it a summary is part of our brain’s resource saving techniques and meant we didn’t have to find as many calories as if it were running non-stop all the time. It is in our human nature to qualify our surroundings and it expresses the creative side of our brain that evolved over human pre-history. I want to clarify, both quantifying and qualifying are paths to create these shortcuts, but the impact of doing one is vastly different than the other.

**So where did this change?**

Anthropologists believe the invention of numbers and writing emerged shortly after the invention of agriculture. With a surplus of food, early humans had free time to specialize in skills and develop goods and services that could be traded with other groups. For this, quantifying harvests, livestock, and values was necessary. This saw the birth of Quantity. A major difference here is that quantity is a simplification of quality. It allows for a quick assessment between separate groups of things being compared. Quantity is cold, objective, and emotionless. Put yourself in the sandals of a Mesopotamian farmer that just traded 10 of your bushels of barley for 6 of your neighbors goats. How would you judge this trade? Well if the going rate was 2 bushels of barley for 1 goat, you may feel like you got a good deal from a quantity perspective. But quantity masks the context of quality. What if the six goats you got were sick or injured? What if you got goats only of one gender and therefore could not breed them to make more goats? The context of the problem changes the quality assessment you have and quantity blinds you to making a fair judgment.

**Surpass Quantity, Go for Quality**

A major point I want to get across here is, not all numbers are created equal. Your salary is as good of an indicator of your overall wealth as your waistline is an indicator of our overall health. Numbers can be misleading, poorly calculated, taken out of context, and misinterpreted. It’s up to you to judge the quality of the values that come into your life. More is not always better, less is not always more.

I discuss in other posts the positive quality changes I have experienced in my life so I will spare you any how-to’s or book recommendations. Instead I challenge you to take a qualitative lens upon your life by asking yourself a few questions. Take time thinking over these, they are meant to provoke creative qualitative thoughts:

* What characteristics comprise a memory that you hold where you were truly happy?
* Describe your overall health without the use of numbers.
* What is something you have always wanted to do? Why have you not done it?
* What is something you do that you feel is of a high quality?

When you start to make the paradigm shift from quantity to quality, it is a snowball affect. You will find yourself not completing a workout based on sets, but on the strength you feel in the movements. Yoga is a great exercise for this as you transition from going from one position to the next to pushing your posture and flexibility to the utmost of your ability. Cycling with a heart rate monitor changes miles in the saddle to pushing your extremes of fitness. Executing on work changes from fulfilling metrics to surpassing your personal goals. Even a trip to the grocery store will spawn questions of the quality of the food you buy, not just the quantity of calories in them.

**Not to Throw the Baby out With the Bathwater**

I’ve done some bashing on quantity… that’s not to say I don’t think it has it’s place. Myopically judging solely based on numbers limits your brain to single track thinking and doesn’t strengthen the mesh of neurons used to tie complex ideas together. Looking at numbers subjectively, judging their origins and constantly adding new lenses to your methods of thinking will keep you engaged in the most advanced part of the human experience.

**Notes- disregard.**

Even in well

researched academic studies backed up with statistical data, we still must ask ourselves “what

is the quality?” I’ll give an example. *The China Study*is a very long book with one of the most

impressive

NOT ALL NUMBERS ARE CREATED EQUAL! What is the HIGHEST QUALITY Measurement?

**Quote**

**A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds**, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do. He may as well concern himself with his shadow on the wall. Speak what you think now in hard words, and to-morrow speak what to-morrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict every thing you said to-day. — 'Ah, so you shall be sure to be misunderstood.' — Is it so bad, then, to be misunderstood? Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton, and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood.

[Ralph Waldo Emerson](http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Ralph_Waldo_Emerson)

[*Self Reliance*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-Reliance) (1841).

Ways that Quantity is Emphasized:

* Number of Facebook/Twitter/Instagram followers you have
* Number of likes, comments, affirmations.
* Tinder as a way to connect with high quantity but low quality
* Weight, blood pressure, fitbit, calories eaten, calories burned
* Revenue

Striving beyond quantity to get to quality.

“It’s a numbers game” = Quantity is more important than Quality

Quantity is the language of comparison, quality is the language of interpretation.

Why do we compare? From a survival basis, it is an evolutionary trait to simplify thinking to categories. This is a left-brain activity for converting a large group to a symbol or a quantity or a characteristic.

Examples:

* Us vs Them
* Republican & Democrat
* My company, it’s competitors
* Male and female

This simplifies our thinking and saves time and energy. When you consider that the brain burns 20% of our calories despite being 3% of our mass, optimizations make sense for a hominid roaming the prairies and trying to eat, communicate, and survive long enough to pass on their genes. Today, is very different. We are no longer scraping for survival. Based on obesity rates, developed countries have more food than they need. And, our societies, infrastructures, and systems have become vastly more complex. Try to have any expert explain to you in black and white terms even the basics of their industry and you’ll get hit with either a dramatic oversimplification (elevator pitch) or the statement “Well… that depends.” And that brings me to a very important point: Context is Key in Quality

Examples of where Quality fails on Quantity:

* The myth that all calories are created equal. You can control your weight by simply measuring Calories In & Calories Out.
* Salary indicates wealth. Especially true in areas where displays of materialism are meant to demonstrate social status.
* People with more friends are more socially fulfilled.
* Even in science and statistics, numbers are commonly taken out of context or the basis of the methods are not high quality. The China Study is a great example of a book that reached mass appeal summarizing and popularizing findings that animal protein caused a higher incidence in cancer. In fact, the quantities were tabulated by a person with a bias toward a vegan agenda. And

It is our gift as humans to have a vastly complex and evolved frontal lobe that can take disparate points of knowledge and tie them together. To turn off the brain’s power saving optimizations of quantification, we exercise what makes us uniquely human and progress our evolution as sentient beings.