

**Stepping Sideways** is a deck of cards designed to help us break out of mental habits and physical routines - habits and routines which may be invisible to us and which may reinforce our isolation and stuck-ness. We use the cards when we want to manifest new outcomes in our urban environments.

The phrases on the cards point to actions, attitudes or perspectives that we should be able to adopt immediately and incorporate into our day without extensive pre-planning. We draw a single card from the shuffled pack. The card is trusted for the entire day, even if its appropriateness is quite unclear...

The strategies on these cards are not based on peer-reviewed social science. They make no claim to effecting any one particular new outcome. They are intuitively-authored aphorisms. They are open to interpretation. They disrupt rather than prescribe.

**Stepping Sideways** is indebted to and modeled on "Oblique Strategies" - a deck of printed cards in a black container box created by musicians Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt. Each card offers a phrase or cryptic remark intended to help artists break creative blocks by encouraging lateral thinking.  
(Source - Wikipedia)

**Stepping Sideways** is available as a free PDF download and as a virtual random-draw card deck at [steppingsideways.com](http://steppingsideways.com). Feedback and proposals for additional cards are always welcome.

# STEPPING SIDEWAYS



We may be inclined to dismiss an idea when it is both simple and confronting. Smiling at people can be confronting.

**We might ask:**

Will my smile be genuine at first? Does it matter?  
What if people don't understand and react negatively?  
What if people DO understand and react negatively?

**We might also ask:**

What if we create a whole new set of experiences by changing our expression?  
What if we set in motion a whole new set of interactions by changing our expression?

## SMILE AT PEOPLE.

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Since the early 1990s, crime has declined in North America, and current crime rates are approximately the same as those of the 1960s. (Source - Wikipedia).

Remember back in the good old days when you could ask someone you don't know for a quick hand, or you could walk alone at night? The good old days are today.

## TRUST A STRANGER.

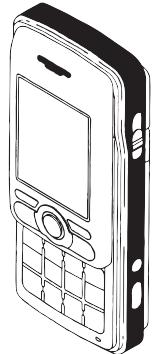
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When children decide a park bench is a pirate ship, it becomes one. Imagine a public space in a new way today. Act in accordance with your imagination. (Advanced: invite others aboard.)

## PLAY.

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Virtual community is gratifying, mediated and ephemeral. Geographic community is messy, demanding, and rewarding. Today while you are out in the world, turn your phone off until you reach your destination. Not an option? Then use it only for essential calls and texts - not media. What do you see? What do you hear? What do you smell? What do you feel?

## TURN OFF, TUNE OUT, DROP IN.

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It is good to have institutions that work. It is also good to know your neighbours, to walk aimlessly through city streets, to have a 10 minute conversation with a stranger on a corner bench while you eat your lunch.

Today do something perfectly ordinary that you never, ever do.

## RE - CONQUER THE ORDINARY.

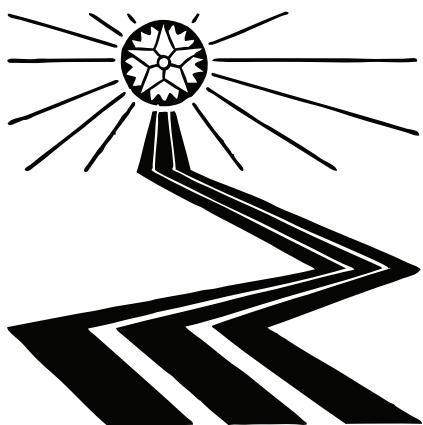
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Everyone is really good at something. Telling someone they're really good at something is both incredibly intimate and socially acceptable - even for casual acquaintances.

## ACKNOWLEDGE SOMEONE'S GIFT

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The most boring distance from point A to point B is a straight line. Take a different set of stairs, a different route home. Instead of the supermarket, shop at the butcher and the greengrocer. Walk the two blocks in between them.

## INCONVENIENCE YOURSELF.

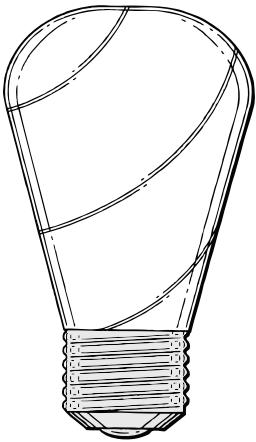
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A polite lineup at the post office can be beautiful. So can a joshing scrum by the espresso pick-up counter, or a parking lot full of people waiting for the fire alarm to be turned off. Why endure disorder when you could relish it? When you hit an unexpected twist in the road, remember that dictionary definitions of "diversion" include "recreation" and "amusement".

## MAKE FRIENDS WITH DISORDER.

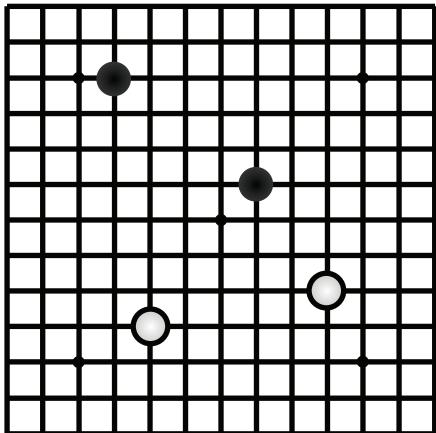
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Most people are happy to tell you about their ideas. Listen with the intensity you usually reserve for talking. Find out why their idea matters to them.

## FIND A BRIGHT IDEA.

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A traffic island could fit two chairs, a card table and a board game. An apartment lobby could become a temporary art gallery. Your office cubicle could change from "no-fly zone" to "open house"

## REPURPOSE A SPACE.

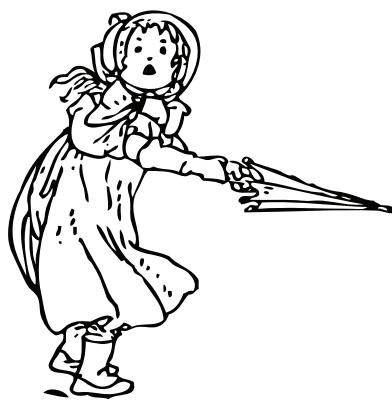
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Do you know two people with similar gifts or interests? Put them together and see what they co-create.

## INTRODUCE.

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To get new results we must do new things. That means being a beginner, feeling awkward. Prepare for that feeling. Welcome that feeling. When you are the worst dancer at the flash mob or the worst knitter in the cafe, remember the word "amateur" comes from the Latin "one who does it for love". Including love of self.

## BE PREPARED TO BE UNPREPARED.

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When we spend on convenience, we give away our creativity along with our money. You may be surprised how interesting your world becomes when you have to scramble.

## GET THROUGH TODAY ON \$5.00 OR LESS.

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Closed systems and entrenched routines are predictable, leaving little to chance. This is helpful if you're operating a bus service, less so if you're hoping for a pleasant surprise. There are fertile fields of coincidence out there, just past your comfort zone. Walk those fields. Plant seeds.

## CULTIVATE COINCIDENCE.

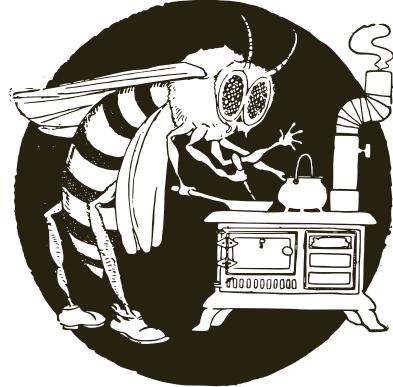
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Pretend you don't live in the neighbourhood. Ask a stranger where the best coffee is. The best pub. The best curry. Take their advice at least once, even if you know better.

## BE A TOURIST.

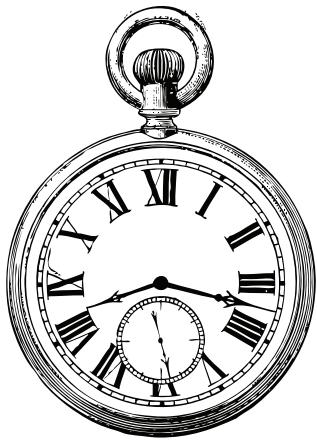
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The text can wait. The email can wait. The status update can wait. The comment thread can wait. The phone call can wait. The link can wait. The world in front of you at this very instant will never be the same again.

## BE WARY OF BUSYNESS.

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A finite resource becomes more valuable as it becomes scarcer. Your time here is always becoming scarcer. It belongs to you alone. Have you lent out more of it than feels comfortable? Are you getting enough in return? Today act as if time is finite.

## THE TIME IS NOW. THE TIME IS YOURS.

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with the intensity we usually reserve for grudges.

## GOOD DAYS ARE WORTH TREASURING...

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The answer is not  
on this card.

## LOOK UP!

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It can be refreshing to throw everything out and start over. It can also be worth asking whether simple tweaks to existing structures could yield radically different results. What if your regular board game cafe date with a friend becomes a public event open to whoever wants to show up? (Bonus: If no-one shows up, it's still your regular board game cafe date with a friend!) Today make a slight change to a routine you enjoy.

## BUILD ON WHAT EXISTS.

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In Sweden they call Wednesday "Little Saturday" and do something social but with an earlier finish time. Could your neighbourhood use a Little Saturday Social Club?

## INVITE. HOST. REPEAT.

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In the next 5 minutes make up a holiday. Celebrate it fully until you go to sleep tonight. National Turnip Appreciation Day, anyone? National Disco Day...?

## CELEBRATE.

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Well, can you? What about three questions?

## CAN YOU HAVE A CONVERSATION WITH SOMEONE AND ONLY ASK THEM QUESTIONS?

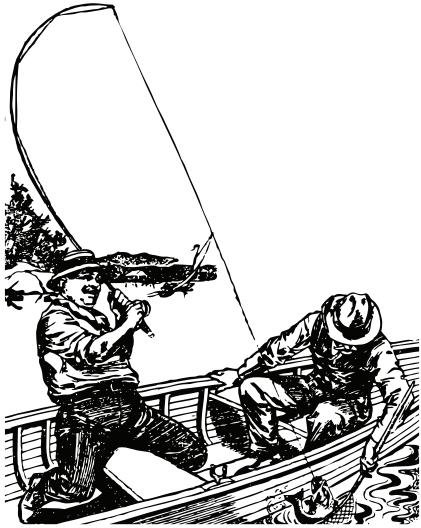
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It's natural and a-ok to use these words. And you may get radically different results if you give them the day off.

## HOW LONG CAN YOU BE IN CONVERSATION WITH SOMEONE WITHOUT SAYING "I", "ME" OR "MY"?

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Everyone has at least one. With the right invitation, most people are happy to tell.

### GO FISHING FOR INTERESTING STORIES.

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Bonus - give them another toonie so they can do this with someone else.

### GIVE SOMEONE A TOONIE FOR A COFFEE, SIT WITH THEM AND ASK THEM WHAT THEY CARE ABOUT.

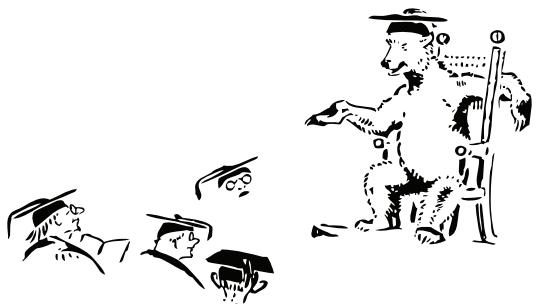
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You will know when you've found it.

### TODAY'S TREASURE HUNT STARTS NOW.

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There are formal and informal opportunities everywhere.

### WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU TAUGHT SOMETHING?

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They mean very different things. Bonus - How many times can you say "You're welcome." in a day?

**TODAY SAY "YOU'RE WELCOME."  
INSTEAD OF "NO PROBLEM..".**

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Bonus - leave a physical gift for a stranger, with a 'free' sign on it.

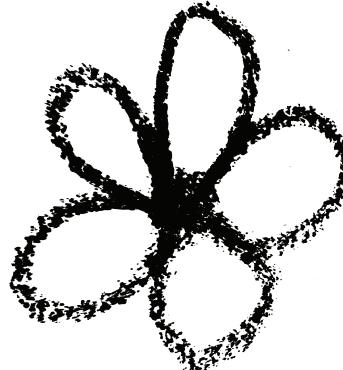
**LEAVE A PHYSICAL GIFT TODAY  
FOR SOMEONE YOU WANT TO  
THANK.**

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**OFFER HELP.  
ASK FOR HELP.**

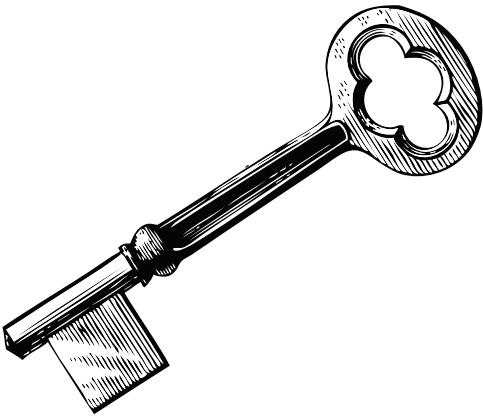
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The city is your canvas. - Sidewalk drawings? Treasure hunt directions? Pithy reflections? There's a world of possibility in that chunk of calcite... Carry at least two pieces so others can join in.

**BUY CHALK.**

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Who's always rah-rah-ing for a block party or a fundraiser? Picture them in your mind for 30 seconds. That is all. BONUS: Get to know them over the next month. (It will be easy.)

## IDENTIFY THE KEY HOLDER IN YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD.

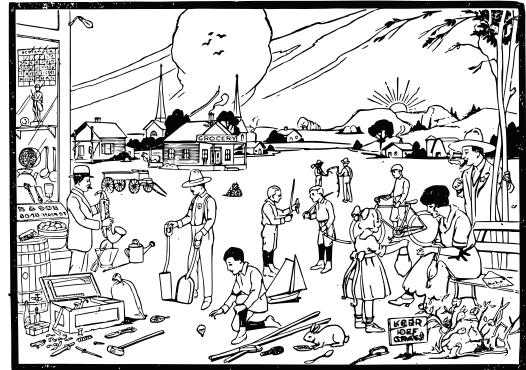
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Music is everywhere: Supermarkets, passing cars, cafes, parks, buskers, loud ear buds. If you start, it gives others permission.

## DANCE!

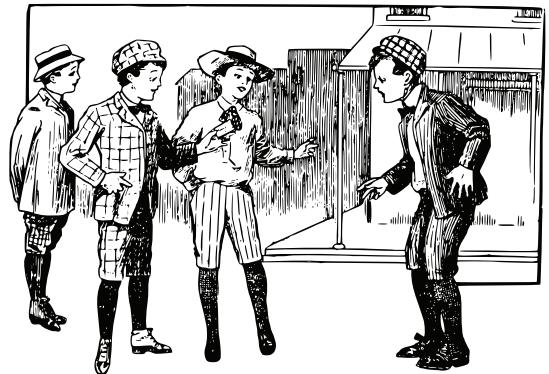
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What can you do? Lend a book? Share a meal? Say hi?

## A GOOD NEIGHBOUR DOES GOOD.

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THE NEXT TIME YOU THINK A KIND THOUGHT ABOUT SOMEONE, MUSTER THE COURAGE TO TELL THEM.

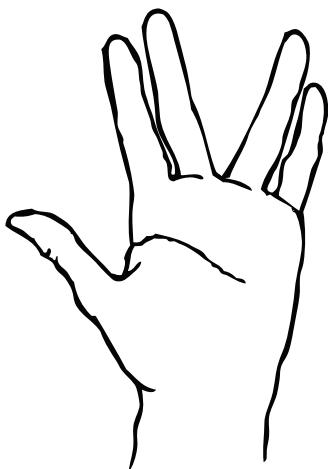
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Think of a nearby activity or place that creates apprehension. Go there and see what you find.

## DO SOMETHING TODAY THAT SCARES THE HELL OUT OF YOU.

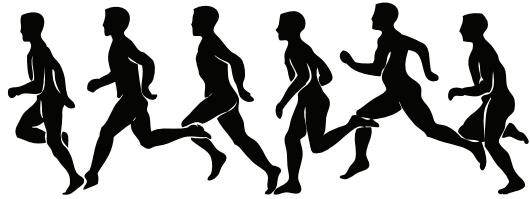
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Create an individually-worded salutation for each person you greet today.

## INVENT-A-HI.

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We all have stories about not fitting in with certain places or certain people. Because of different politics, different interests, different ages, different backgrounds, different values. Today go somewhere you think you would not belong. Hang out. Listen for the similarities.

## RUN TOWARDS DIFFERENCE.

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Find a public space, sit and watch what happens over an hour. You will be surprised, saddened, amused. Maybe even approached.

## PEOPLE WATCH.

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"I'd like to be more connected to this group / team / event but it doesn't seem to be clicking. How did you get to be one of the gang?"

## COME CLEAN.

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Don't fear being a joiner. You will maintain your individuality, your agency, your swing.

## CONNECTION IS A POLYRHYTHM OF HEARTBEATS - PEOPLE ARE IN SYNC, NOT IN LOCKSTEP.

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Everyone has something they can contribute. Spend the rest of today thinking about what you have that they want. If you come up blank, try this: On the way home spend \$15 on a sharing carton of hot coffee. Offer to top up strangers' travel mugs as you commute.

## YOU HAVE SOMETHING THEY WANT.

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When you hear a greeting or an invitation are you wary of an agenda - political, religious, economic, romantic? Notice what that wariness feels like in your mind and body today. When we avoid nuisance, we also avoid nuance.

Can you honour your boundaries while fairly assessing each interaction? Bonus - if it's safe, listen to a pitch all the way through to the end, even if you are quite certain you are uninterested. Practice saying 'thanks but no thanks' AFTER hearing a person out. It's less comfortable at first, but quickly begins to feel more comfortable than shutting someone down off the top.

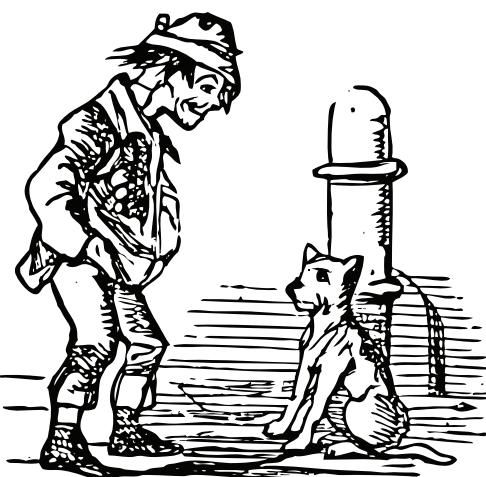
## NOTICE YOUR DEFENCES.

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Making a stranger laugh is like  
**EMOTIONAL ACUPUNCTURE**  
except you're receiving the  
treatment too.

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People who give out supermarket samples. People who canvas for charities. People who ask for spare change. What would happen if you said hi?

PEOPLE WHO EXPERIENCE REJECTION ALL DAY MIGHT WELCOME CONVERSATION.

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Say hi to the next person who locks eyes with you. (It's easier if you don't care whether they respond.)

FEARLESS  
CURIOSITY.

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