

dear residents

Spotlight, Starlight and Daylight

May 14, 2023

Dear Residents,

Happy Mother's Day. My mother passed in 2020 but continues to be a voice in my ear, especially when I am cooking (I can hear her very specific instructions on how to brown thinly sliced onions without burning them). I hope that you will have time to reflect on your own memories. In our parents' eyes, we never quite grew up and they remain our ever-present guides.



Family Photo in Karachi, Pakistan, all dressed up for Eid - 1963

We are nearing the end of the academic year and I am looking forward to graduation next week, following which I will take a short trip to Karachi to visit my sisters.

I came across an interesting book by James Williams, [Stand Out of Our Light](#). He is a former Google engineer who writes about the attention economy. He makes the point that in a sea of information, attention becomes the scarce commodity. Using a metaphor of 'light,' he suggests that there are three lights of attention pertaining to *doing*, *being* and *knowing*:

- The Spotlight - our immediate capacities for navigating awareness and action toward tasks. Enables us to do what *we want to do*.
- The Starlight - our broader capacities for navigating life “by the stars” of our higher goals and values. Enables us to be who *we want to be*.
- The Daylight - our fundamental capacities – such as reflection, metacognition, reason, and intelligence – that enable us to define our goals and values to begin with. Enables us to *want what we want to want*.

I imagine that all three play out in residency training and that our ‘lights’ get obscured by distraction. Our focus is constantly threatened by email, text messaging, pagers, and Epic chat. Many have now learned the value of the ‘do not disturb’ feature of the phone and computer. I stopped wearing a smart watch because of constant alerts. When you are first call, there is no choice, but at other times, it may be valuable to reduce the number of sources of distraction because once you lose focus on a task it takes several minutes to regain it.

Time to reflect on your longer-term goals is even harder to find given how hectic your schedules are and how pervasive technology is. I hope that the regular scheduled days off afford you the opportunity to unplug from the day-to-day and give you the cognitive space to think about who you want to be. Those of you who exercise with regularity or participate in mindfulness activities such as meditation or yoga, likely benefit from the quiet space you create. (The rest of us are doomscrolling, binge-watching, or experiencing FOMO 😊).

In an information-rich world, the wealth of information means a dearth of something else: a scarcity of whatever it is that information consumes. What information consumes is rather obvious: it consumes the attention of its recipients. Hence a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention and a need to allocate that attention efficiently among the overabundance of information sources that might consume it.

- Herbert A. Simon

Wishing you some distraction-free moments this week,

Dino Kazi