

The Two Monks and a Woman

The story of the Two Monks and a Woman is a very well known Zen story. There are many versions of it, but the origin is not clear.

A senior monk and a junior monk were travelling together. At one point, they came to a river with a strong current. As the monks were preparing to cross the river, they saw a young and beautiful woman also attempting to cross. The young woman asked if they could help her.

The senior monk carried the woman on his shoulder, forded the river and set her down on the other bank. The junior monk seemed upset, but said nothing.

They both continued walking. Some time later the senior monk noticed that his junior was particularly quiet and enquired "Is something the matter, you seem very upset?"

The junior monk replied, "As monks, we are not permitted any contact with women, certainly not physical contact. How could you then carry that woman on your shoulders?"

The senior monk replied, "I left the woman a long time ago at the bank of the river, however, you seem to be still carrying her."

A simple story but what can we take from it?

The older monk, his mind free, saw the situation, responded to it, and continued to live in the present after setting the woman down. How often do we respond in the moment without 'the weight of the baggage of our past on our shoulders'? How often are we open to possibilities without being restricted by what has happened in the past? Do we put disproportionate weight on old information rather than the new?

The younger monk was bound by ideas, held on to them for hours, and, in doing so, missed the experiences of the next part of the journey. How often do we ponder on things and in doing so miss out on living life to the full? How often is our decision making slowed down by 'experience' interfering with an appropriate response to the immediate situation?

How self aware are we of the way that our thinking, which can be changed, affects the way we act?

Food for thought?

These tips are largely drawn from our experience in executive coaching, running leadership development programmes and presenting a range of workshops for improving personal and team performance in organisations. Our clients include Vodafone, The Open University, the NHS, BAE Systems, Atkins, GM, ABB, Polo Ralph Lauren and CASS Business School. If you would like to know more as to how we can help you make your goals, please see our [website](http://www.iridiumconsulting.co.uk) www.iridiumconsulting.co.uk now or contact me on 07881 636538.

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