

No pain (or effort), no gain

A first-time gym trip
overwhelms one student.

Ah, the signs of spring. The air is warming, the robins have returned to shrilly chortle outside my window at 4 a.m. and local stores have begun to display (gasp) bathing suits. Having seen this year's crop of summer attire — none composed of more than 12

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spandex molecules — I made a momentous decision: to navigate the Mag Quad and start going to the Benson University Center gym, to become a virtual sack of muscle before venturing to the pool to stay smothered in towels out of fear of UV rays — but that's another column.

I was feeling rather confident as I boldly strode through the door. All winter I had been watching the "Radioactive Stealth Bulletproof Buns of Plutonium" video series. The key word in that sentence is "watched," not "did."

Descending the stairs hadn't left me too winded, so that boosted my ego even more. The friendly attendant at the desk took down my name, ID number, blood type, and next of kin, sensing that the largest weight I had lifted lately was a well-frozen Klondike bar.

She also cheerfully informed me that the management is not responsible should my tendons all snap faster than Indiana Jones' whip. Plus, she reminded me that if I fail to re-rack the weights my first born child will be seized by the aforementioned management.

I had already decided against joining the treadmill psychos and stationary bike maniacs who were encased behind the Plexiglas like a sadistic fourth grader's science project on food deprivation. Not only did they give the appearance that the last meal they had eaten was during the Carter administration, these people were attacking their workouts with such vigor that I do believe they were under the impression that their pedaling and running powers the entire Western Hemisphere.

Wandering further down the hall, I happened upon the aerobics class. "Aerobics" is a Greek word, composed of the two roots "aero," meaning "to jump," and "bics," meaning "repeatedly on a plastic step until your legs have the sinewy appearance of worms in a bait bucket." I do believe that Hell is composed of nothing more than techno music and large plastic steps with the Devil hopping around merrily in a spandex outfit, claiming your soul will be freed if you can do his routine.

That's the clincher: No one can do those routines. The U.S. Olympic Decathlon Team would collapse on their steps from cardiac arrest after fifteen consecutive seconds of "grapevines," "K-steps," "tetrahedrons" or any of the other moves.

So, after my monumental decision to avoid sweating I decided to follow the smell of testosterone to the weight room. As I got closer, I heard noises reminiscent of wildebeests with very serious intestinal problems. Despite those sounds, I sauntered through the door, shocked that I knew how to saunter, practiced sauntering in front of the mirror and then looked around me.

Wow! Great men. By "great" I am not so much judging their characters, but rather acknowledging that they were considerably larger than the state of Wisconsin. These guys had arms the size of Volkswagens. The last time I saw that many ripples I was scooping Rocky Road out of a vat at Baskin Robbins.

This was an important anatomy lesson, something I didn't learn in Health and Exercise Science 101 (Course Description: Learn why everything you come in contact with is unhealthy and will eventually kill you). See, there are two types of muscle tissue: that on the bodies of the fitness center regulars, tissue that looks like finely toned pythons writhing beneath their skin, and my muscle tissue, which resembles a Zip-Loc bag full of cottage cheese. I took a few deep breaths, flexed, stretched and poised myself in menacing stances. I bared my teeth and was dismayed to observe that my incisors are bigger than my biceps.

I glanced at my watch. I decided it was just too late to start a workout. If I rushed, the next thing I knew, I would have pulled a ligament or something, and the management would not have any sympathy.

I plan on returning though, maybe after Easter. But not this coming one, of course.

EQ cultivation improves all experiences

A gratitude journal is one way to achieve focus in life.

I commend Joanna Iwata, the director of the Benson University Center, for her Feb. 12 column titled "Balance of EQ and IQ is essential for life success." She reiterated beautifully what some of our ministers and positive role models (and Oprah) have attempted to communicate: that book smarts are good, but insufficient for getting by in the world. Her column appealed not only to the intellect — her methodology

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and analysis were careful and lucid — but to the emotional as well. Who would not benefit from a look at the gooey inside of ourselves?

She began by quoting author Daniel Goleman's assertion that self awareness, managing emotions, motivating oneself, recognizing emotions in others and handling relationships are the "key components of how we ought to measure our success interpersonally both inside and outside of the classroom, at work and in our relationships." I ask you college-aged peers, aren't these five things some of the most difficult factors with which to contend?

Not to mention the fact that we must deal with them

on only a couple hours of sleep and a mind so jammed with rote memorization that there is hardly airspace for such "touchy-feely" introspect.

Those who Iwata questioned talked of "cultivating EQ" to become more emotionally centered and self aware, and of the importance of finding a "balance" between emotional and intellectual capacities.

No one, however, really proposed how to nurture these senses. We know that it is possible to improve the IQ through brain exercises, but can we improve EQ through emotional exercises? Actually, in a sense, we can — and what is better, we can in a short time each day, even on very little sleep and free time.

The crux of the simple regime lies in contemplating something I noted on a church marquee the other day: "How to turn curses into blessings."

About a year ago, talk began to circulate about something called a "gratitude journal." Sounds cheesy? Well, maybe on the surface, but it is something that can change your entire outlook on life, self, emotions, motivations, other people and even relationships. Voila! A way to cover all of Goleman's EQ components on 10 minutes a day!

I have always prayed, but in the midst of a particularly difficult time last year I recognized that my nightly prayer satisfied a particular ritual, but did not last during the trials of the following day because I had mentioned my thanks and then slept the effect away.

This past August, I decided for no particular reason — the trials had pretty much ended with the coming of summer break — to add to my nightly routine time to write in a gratitude journal.

Okay, notice that I haven't really detailed what one is yet? Well, that is because they are personal and can be

formatted however you are most inclined. Except for one rule: To make a gratitude journal work, you must write down at least three things each day for which you are thankful.

In the seven months that I have kept my journal, my outlook on every one of Goleman's EQ points has improved drastically. I have always been (at least on the surface) optimistic, but now I am so in tune with my sense of self and all the good in the world, that I am rarely distracted or less than gratified by life.

I have proven true the idea that all of Iwata's interviewees express: that IQ and EQ should balance for optimum daily functioning.

Since I began to focus my final thoughts for the day on positives and blessings, I find that I go through each following day much more conscientiously and steadily.

Proof positive? My grades are better than they have ever been and I am not working any harder, which is definitely a reason to be thankful!

Think of it: 10 minutes an evening and you could clear your mind and get your EQ so well in focus that your IQ could (appear, anyway) to improve. Mind you, a gratitude journal is not a way to gloss over a massive problem; it is a way, rather, to see that regardless of difficulty, there is good to be found in yourself and others.

Trust me, it has worked wonders; my life is seriously on track. And for that, I am ultimately grateful.

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Spring Break could create dangerous situations

Students need to take safety precautions while enjoying their vacation.

Spring Break is traditionally a time for college students to get away and get live. Unfortunately, for the unaware, naive young adult, Spring Break can turn into a nightmare.

Because Street Sense 101 is not a viable option, a few safety tips before

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departure can prove to be pretty valuable. If you think about personal safety as a common-sense thing, it becomes a lot more clear.

Ask yourself questions like, "Do I really want to walk back to the hotel alone just because I want to stay at the club longer than my buddies, or do I want to leave when they do, and not have to deal with any potential unwanted attention?"

The answer to this question seems

simple, but might not be after a few drinks. Freedom to make one's own independent decisions is a nice thing, but judgement plays a strong role. Freedom means many things to different people. All of us expect the freedom of personal safety, the right to enjoy a life free from crime. Unfortunately, violent crime is becoming more prevalent in our society.

No one is free from the danger of crime, on or off campus. But with a few proactive steps the imminent danger of the environment can be minimized to a threat, so here are some tips:

Be alert: Your safety depends mostly upon your own attitude and actions. Use common sense and do not place yourself in a location or situation where you could become a victim. Walk with confidence — body language speaks very loudly.

Use the buddy system: It works if used properly. It means staying with your buddies. Make an agreement before the evening starts. Impaired judgement is not a good thing. Never leave your drink or accept an open one from someone you don't know or trust. Rohypnol ("Roofies") is tasteless, odorless and colorless, and can be easily obtained in other countries. If you feel you were drugged, call the police immediately. Drugging is extremely dangerous. Your safety is in your hands — take that seriously.

Trust your instincts: If something or someone makes you feel uneasy, get out or away from it.

Never hitchhike: It's not worth the risk. Stick to well-lighted, well-traveled areas: That shortcut might be quicker, but it's not smarter, especially on unfamiliar turf.

Don't flash your valuables: It tempts fate. Leave expensive jewelry at home, get traveler's checks and put your cash in unusual, separate places in case you're robbed. Leave purses and backpacks either in the room, in the trunk or somewhere it can be secure; these items are big targets. If you do take valuables, leave them in the hotel safety deposit box, including excess cash.

Know that in foreign countries, cultures are different: Don't drink the

water or the ice unless you know it has been filtered, and don't eat raw food, like oysters or fish. Also, people in some Spanish countries see direct eye contact as flirtatious.

Be wary of public transportation: A lot of crimes like pick-pocketing can happen. If someone bumps into you or distracts you, be aware that you could be the target. Taxis are your safest bet, but discuss prices before entering the cab (and it's usually negotiable in other countries).

If you're followed: Abruptly switch directions or cross the street — go to a public place and ask for help.

If someone harrasses you: Don't be embarrassed, just say — loudly — "Leave me alone."

Don't open your hotel door without verification: This is very risky. Simply ask, "Who is it?" and if you don't know the person, verify with the front desk.

Don't invite strangers into your room.

Close the door securely: Whenever you're in your room, use all the locking devices provided, and ensure that sliding glass doors, windows and any connecting doors are locked.

There you have it. Now go have some fun and a SAFE BREAK '98.

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