

How to Harvest Possibilities: Learning From the Greatest

A metaphorical lesson from Willie Mays.

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Willie Mays was my childhood hero. I followed his stats religiously, imitated his style of running, and chased down fly balls with his famous patented basket catch. I realize now, many years later, that his uniqueness was a lesson in harvesting possibilities. Willie is a systemic embodiment of a "liminal" master in perpetual motion. He never repeated his skills in the same manner, but rather adapted them in different situations.



The Catch / Willie Mays
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Watching Willie was like experiencing a holographic improvisation. There was a holistic essence about him that was more than the sum of choices which he utilized. He kept evolving by learning and unlearning by using a peripheral vision that allowed him to see simultaneously the larger intertwined contexts. So too, his teammates' capabilities, the ever-changing moments to resolve inevitable paradoxes of what and who was on first base, (apologies to Abbott and Costello from my hometown of Paterson, N.J.) as well as the attributes of his pitchers and the opposing batters.

All this was miraculously exemplified during the 1954 World Series at the unusual, nearly rectangular-shaped, Polo Grounds Stadium which once adorned the Upper East Side of Manhattan. Vic Wertz of the opposing Cleveland team hit what could have been the game-winning towering drive to that spacious center field. Mays, who was playing very shallow, like a samurai warrior contemplating how to use all his senses, turned at the crack of the bat. Head down, he ran to 425 feet beyond home plate, timing his seemingly impossible

behind-the-shoulder catch. Willie immediately twirled around off balance throwing the ball with amazing accuracy, distance, and the usual flare of losing his cap. He stopped the runners (one of whom was the famous Larry Doby also from my hometown of Paterson, NJ) from scoring.

What's the takeaway? We can benefit when we learn from each other in our quest for self-fulfillment. Stories and metaphors such as above prime our subconscious, that collective reservoir of all that was ever said, good, bad, or witnessed. Carl Jung felt that resolving the ever-present conflicts, contradictions, or paradoxes arising from that process can be a segue to finding the meaning of self.

Based on my experience of working as a systemic psychotherapist for the past 40 years, a participant-observer with thousands of situations to draw from, Willie Mays demonstrated the benefits of having a peripheral vision and that ultimately, we cannot make needed differences alone. Willie knew that it takes two to know one and many to know many for his team to form a harmonious outcome.

The wisdom from this holistic opportunity is to understand how we are connected rather than just recognizing our connections. It is about getting in the sometimes-messy interactions that lie in between our relationships and for that matter within all the parts and institutions that need nurturing. Attempting solutions that try to improve the parts without seeing how the whole team is interdependent only brings fragmentation and pain. However, the availability of seeing things in context and the opportunity to improvise at those moments of transition, as Willie Mays exemplified is a good metaphor for us to experience the connecting patterns and evolve within our complex world.

Here are some inductions to harvest possibilities from the long-gone soil of the Polo Grounds and beyond:

- Have a lens that can “zoom-in-and-out” to see the variations of the playing field with a wider perspective, as Willie did while tending to his role in the spacious outfield of the Polo Grounds. In what ways can you reimagine conflicts in your life?
- Create a safe supportive context to communicate with warmth and kindness remembering that it is a team effort where we are each needed to play in

nature's world series. How would it feel to have your relationships be like a win-win volley?

- Share your poetic expression to mutually learn from others even if it causes you to lose your hat. If you were truly heard what you would like to say?
- Delve into your family legacy and pay heed to Willie Mays and all the others who have utilized their peripheral vision to pursue and celebrate different possibilities. Imagine that you are one of several improvisational performers and the prompt that you all receive is to pause and together explore ways to make positive differences in your lives. How and what would you begin to discuss with the others?

Final word

As you seek different caring possibilities, use all your senses to create a wider lens, do not minimize past concerns, resolve them in the present. It is here that we mitigate pain, find relationships, replenish our souls, and develop the wisdom of interdependency.