

## Personal Development

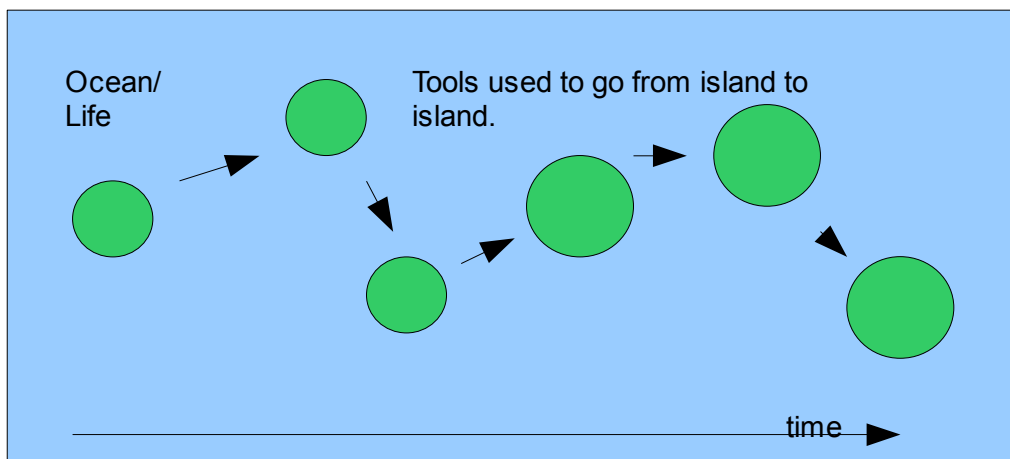
Stepping Stones in form of islands

Volker Ballueder works as a Business Development Manager in London and also works as a free lance consultant and coach for personal development. cb consulting ([www.cb-consulting.co.uk](http://www.cb-consulting.co.uk)) and his blog (<http://ballueder.wordpress.com>) covers topics of self development. He writes about a theory of “stepping stones” in forms of islands – a combination of techniques from coaching with and influence of NLP and Buddhism.

About 10 years ago Volker was introduced to a theory of “*direction*” by a good friend and mentor, “Volker, if you like to cross a lake with a ship and you don't have any wind, then you need to paddle. However, it does not matter in a lake where the wind is blowing from because you would eventually end up on the other side of the lake”.

From a coaching point of view one's goal is the other side of the lake, and one eventually gets there by having the right means and tools. The following theory looks at stepping stones without a defined goal, and how personal development can be viewed as islands and how it might help yourself to master your life.

In 2003 the theory was explained as “*I feel life is like I am going from one island to another, crossing the ocean. You do not know where life leads to but the part of life where you feel that you get a better status, in regards to personal development, possibly money or career, they are like islands for me. Some are bigger than others, and therefore I stay there longer.*”



Today this picture becomes much clearer. Every time one goes from an island to the next one ends up having better and more tools, and the distance between the islands gets smaller. So, the islands stand for development points in life, “*spheres*” or stages of development. One does not think how big the ocean (life) could be and how long the path might be. From a coaching point of view the islands are like stepping stones to a goal without having a goal in place. The only goal there could be is “*mastering life*” or ultimately death.

Volker wrote about this theory in his blog (<http://ballueder.wordpress.com>, 6 March 2008):

*“ [...] You start on one shore, going into the water, life, and struggle to reach a piece of land - an island. Now, after you reached the first island, you can get a breath of fresh air, relax and have reached some kind of "higher" level. However, you would not be happy with the first island, because you aim to be at the other shoreline.*

*So as years go by you go from island to island reaching a higher level in your life. More experience, more confidence, more fresh air if you like, and you just enjoy reaching them. But then you have to go back into the water to reach a new level. Some people like the island they achieved and stay, but I am a person that needs to move on and find a new island.*

*Now, one point to make is that NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming), TA (Transactional Analysis) and other techniques, meditation, Buddhism and career/personal development give you new tools in order to reach new islands quicker or easier.*

*For example I used that I am almost at the level that I jump from island to island using some jet skis. However, my aim is to get airlifted, have a yacht or fly. The higher I get on the level ladder, the better the tool, the quicker the way to the next level. It is almost like a race where you chose or learn to use different tools and the speed gets quicker as you move along.*

*The other point is that each level is giving you great satisfaction. Happiness. And, you do not know how long/wide the ocean is (N.B. nothing is linear). Is it just from Calais to Dover with a few islands or are there more islands, e.g. we are going from NY to London, or even further. This ocean might never end until you either get insane or you reached a level of the magician (you remember the story from Bandler and Grinder in Frogs to Princes about the islands ).*

*So, whatever you decide to do, be patient, collect tools on the islands, go into the water to reach the next. Never give up, the sky is the limit.*

*Currently, I reached a new island. I know what I want, how to get there but the water is still deep and dangerous. But I am up for it. Let me breath for another few weeks, then I will be out there again to reach the next island!”*

Not long after this post Volker noticed he was falling into the water again. But more on a personal level than on a career level. Whilst nothing was wrong in his marriage or anything tangible, Volker noticed that he was at unease. Could there was a parallel ocean. Was that possible?

Volker was contemplating that there was more than one path, one personal development path, or ocean, and one for career and work. If that was so, how could that fit together. The “work Volker” was safe on an island and the “personal Volker” was in the water? Split personality?

From a coaching perspective one sets different goals in life. One is for personal development

which to some extent is influenced by work. Also, one has career goals. For both of these and probably about 10-20 other personal life goals, e.g. family, children, one sets goals and all of these have to be fitted into the model of the islands.

Further in his blog Volker wrote about meeting a Buddhist friend in London. His friend suggested (<http://ballueder.wordpress.com>, 22 March 2008),

*“Volker, I think you should stay on the island where you feel happy and let other people come to your island too. Develop yourself from input from others, build bridges and network. That would increase your personal development and you increase the cross-fertilization with others.*

*I like that idea. Why do I always have to go back into the water? Always striving to find something new. I should settle down and relax. The idea of sitting there and looking inside myself and **enhancing performance from within**<sup>1</sup> - that appeals to me. I will start working on that soon.”*

His friend pointed out two things which were already known to Volker but helped him to put his theory into perspective:

- Who was *“the thinker”* to assume that s/he was the only person in that ocean. And, how could one differentiate between personal and work life? The development does not only come from within but from input through other people as well.
- Why should one always go out and find something new if there is so much to explore at the very position one is in?

Although people use networks (bridges) to connect to others in personal life and on a professional level, building bridges to others might have been neglected in the theory. If one can become the knowledgeable person, the person people connect to, one has developed oneself – personally as well as professionally. One becomes that person that does not run away and goes into the water, but one stays and fights for one's position.

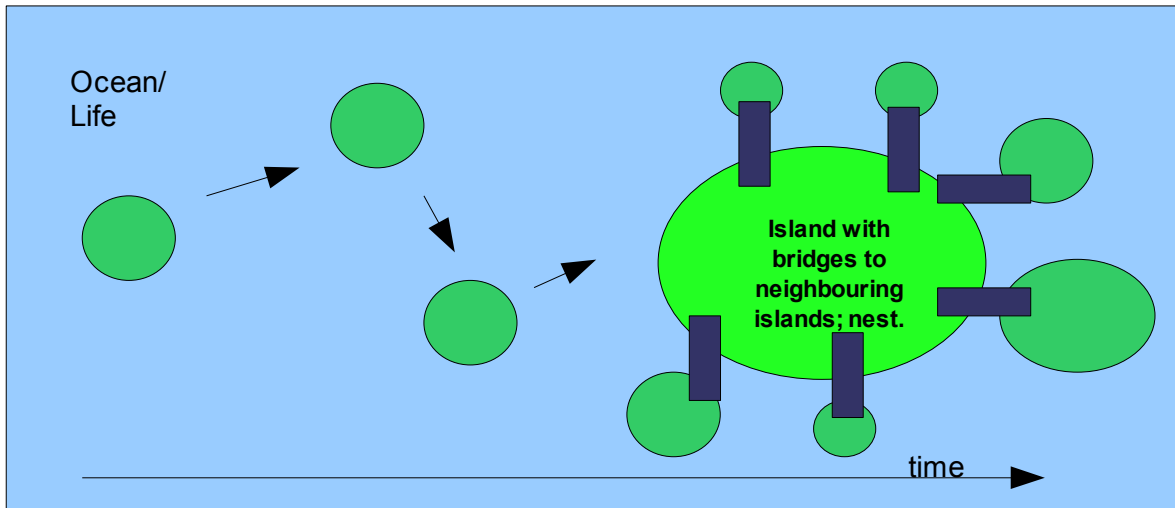
Other thoughts on having bridges are, that an island could be isolated without bridges but with a bridge you have the possibility of an exit and entry. That means one can settle down on a safe place in the water, build bridges where needed and develop oneself on the island with the means that are available there. It is a very appealing and important way of looking at this path. Because there has never been anyone in life saying *“you have to have a career”* or *“you need to develop yourself”*. Often, those motivations are coming from others and not from within. The simpler we live, the more happy we are – a Buddhist theme? Why should one constantly strive, once one reached the island of happiness?

For self-development one should strive for *“my island”*, the one where one feels comfortable on,

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<sup>1</sup> “enhancing performance from within” is the main phrase that summarises the work of cb consulting, [www.cb-consulting.co.uk](http://www.cb-consulting.co.uk)

where one can settle down and build her/his “nest”. Once one has reached that island, one should focus on developing from within and connecting to others. Instead of using the tools one developed to go from one island to another, use them to build devices that takes us off the island and back again. Let us never forget to view things in a holistic way, the bird's eye view of things and its surrounding islands.



That means if one decides to accept the island theory as a stepping stone coaching model in life, one needs to accept that one day they will land on a stone that is big and safe enough for themselves. A stone where one can settle and develop rather than having the feeling of moving “*away from*” to develop somewhere else. According to Buddhism, we are more than we appear to be, all of the world's strength and power rests inside us.

Sure, one would not be stopped to go back into the water if one feels the urge after a few years and take on a bigger island and the challenge of getting there. However, one should not forget that the water around the “nest” can be very tough and one might end up being pushed back to where one came from. This is not a bad thing at all, because one has to go outside the comfort zone to learn and experience new things. But, no one knows whether a bigger island is really a better island?!

Therefore a good, long lasting network with bridges in combination with a strong core of self development will be a safe place to stay. Ever thought of building the network that big that the island becomes the ocean? Or, no one says that the inhabitants of the islands you build the bridges to are staying there either!

It is about patience of settling down and developing from within, to stop chasing an island one might never find.