



RODERICK LOGAN
COACHING & CONSULTING

Rowing Backward Into the Future

By Dr. Roderick Logan, DPT^h, DAAETS



The Concept

The concept of rowing backward into the future is a powerful metaphor that challenges our conventional understanding of progress and personal growth. While Western culture predominantly emphasizes forward-facing movement – whether in transportation, business, or life planning – there's profound wisdom in occasionally adopting a different perspective.

Consider a rower on a boat: they sit facing the path they've already traveled while moving forward. This position allows them to see where they've been, learn from their journey, and maintain a clear view of their wake. Yet they continue to progress, guided by experience rather than speculation about what lies ahead.

This metaphor becomes particularly relevant when considering how humans develop wisdom and resilience. We don't grow stronger by anxiously fixating on future uncertainties; instead, we build capability by reflecting on our experiences, understanding our history, and learning from successes and failures. Like the rower, we move forward most effectively by maintaining a clear view of where we've been.

The practice of “rowing backward into the future” isn't about living in the past – it's about harnessing the power of experience and reflection to navigate life's journey more skillfully. It suggests that our best guide to tomorrow often lies in our understanding of yesterday.

Core Observations on Life's Flow

As I row backwards into life's unfolding journey, I've discovered these fundamental truths:

1. **Life flows like a river:** Each moment carries us into uncharted territory, yet the currents of our past choices and experiences shape our direction.
2. **Perceived setbacks are temporary:** What we see as failure in the moment often reveals itself as a necessary turn in life's meandering course, leading us precisely where we need to go.
3. **Greater forces shape us:** While we don't control life's powerful currents, these forces mold and transform us into who we're meant to become.
4. **Understanding our role:** True wisdom lies not in attempting to master life's flow, but in learning to navigate it skillfully with the tools and strength we've been given.

This journey has taught me to embrace uncertainty while staying grounded in experience. Rather than fighting against life's current, I've learned to trust the path while remaining mindful of the lessons each bend in the river provides.

Change Perspective, Change Perception

One of life's most profound lessons came from an unexpected source – my driving instructor. “When you want to drive straight,” he said, “don't look at the road right in front of the car. Lift your eyes and focus far down the road.” This simple advice carries a deeper wisdom about perspective and direction.

Just as a driver needs to look ahead to maintain a straight course, we need reference points to navigate life's journey. But in rowing backward into the future, these reference points come from our past experiences, our heritage, and the divine guidance that has brought us this far. By lifting our eyes to recall God's faithfulness in our journey, we find clarity for the path ahead.

This parallel between driving and life's journey reminds us that perspective shapes direction. We often veer off course when we focus too narrowly on immediate circumstances. But when we maintain a broader view that encompasses our history of grace, provision, and purpose, we find ourselves moving with greater stability and confidence.

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Navigation – A Life of Movement

Life's journey demands perpetual motion – it's about maintaining momentum while staying attuned to the rhythm of existence. Like a skilled rower, we must develop a cadence that balances effort with flow, purpose with adaptability. Each stroke represents a conscious choice to move forward, even when the waters become choppy or the current seems to push against us.

The paradox of life's movement lies in its dual nature: we must be active participants and willing vessels. While we provide the energy and intention through our strokes, we must also remain receptive to the water's natural flow, understanding that sometimes the river's course may lead us to unexpected destinations that prove more enriching than our planned route.

Faith, in this context, becomes both an anchor and a sail. It provides stability in turbulent waters while catching the winds of divine guidance. It grows stronger not through passive waiting, but through the dynamic interplay of effort and surrender – the sacred dance of rowing and releasing, striving and trusting, moving and being moved.

Connecting the Dots

“You can't connect the dots looking forward, you can only connect them looking backwards.” So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something: your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever. Because believing that the dots will connect down the road will give you the confidence to follow your heart, even when it leads you off the well-worn path (Steve Jobs).

Personal Reflections – A Deeper Perspective

In embracing the concept of rowing backward into the future, I've discovered a profound truth about personal growth and wisdom. Rather than anxiously straining to peer into an unknowable tomorrow, I've learned to draw strength and insight from the wake of my experiences. This isn't about dwelling in the past; it's about learning from it actively and intentionally.

Each stroke of my oars represents a conscious choice to move forward while maintaining a clear view of where I've been. This perspective has transformed my relationship with uncertainty. Instead of generating anxiety about what lies ahead, I find confidence in the accumulated wisdom of my journey, both its triumphs and challenges.

This approach has given me three invaluable gifts:

1. A deeper appreciation for life's lessons, seeing each experience as a teacher rather than just an event
 2. Greater resilience in facing uncertainty, knowing that previous challenges have equipped me with valuable skills
 3. Enhanced clarity about my path, as understanding where I've been helps illuminate where I'm meant to go.
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Most importantly, this perspective has taught me that wisdom isn't found in trying to predict tomorrow, but in deeply understanding and learning from yesterday. The future may be unknown, but it's shaped by the insights and understanding we bring to it from our past experiences.

Like a skilled rower, I've learned to trust the rhythm of life's flow while maintaining my course through the steady application of learned wisdom. This balance of trust and intentional action has become the cornerstone of my philosophy and daily practice.



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Odds Make It Even

Consider the paradox of rowing backward into the future. At first glance, it might seem counterintuitive – even odd. Yet “this apparent oddity contains profound wisdom”. Like a rower on water, we move forward while facing what's behind us, our view filled with the wake of our experiences rather than the unknowable horizon ahead.

This perspective isn't just different; it's liberating. When we accept that accurate foresight is impossible – that only God holds tomorrow in His hands – we free ourselves from the exhausting effort of trying to predict what cannot be predicted. Instead, we can focus on understanding the rich tapestry of experiences that have shaped us.

The beauty of this approach lies in its honesty. We can see, study, and learn from our past – it's tangible and real. Our history becomes a compass, not a chain, guiding our movement into uncharted waters. Each stroke forward is informed by the wisdom we've gathered, each decision enriched by lessons learned.

Being odd in this way – choosing to face our past while moving forward – isn't just acceptable; it's advantageous. It allows us to navigate life's waters with the confidence that comes from understanding our journey thus far, while trusting in divine guidance for the path ahead.

Tikkun Olam

Tikkun Olam, which means repairing the world in Hebrew, perfectly aligns with the metaphor of rowing backward into the future. It represents not just relocation or movement, but active participation in the world's ongoing restoration and renewal. This ancient Jewish principle calls us co-creators in healing and improving our world.

When Yeshua described his disciples as "salt and light," he wasn't speaking of passive elements, but of active agents of preservation and illumination. Salt preserves, prevents decay, and enhances flavor. Light dispels darkness and enables growth. These metaphors speak to our role as participants in the divine work of restoration.

While many seek to build bridges to escape or transcend their current reality, there is profound wisdom in choosing to navigate the waters below. Like skilled rowers, we engage directly with the currents of life, participating in the work of restoration and renewal in our immediate environment. This isn't about escaping the world's challenges, but about engaging with them meaningfully.

By rowing backward into the future while practicing Tikkun Olam, we bring together the wisdom of our past with active participation in healing our present world. Each stroke becomes an act of restoration, each movement an opportunity to repair and improve the world around us.

Curiosity Finds Its Answers In Yesterday

The power of curiosity lies not just in asking questions about what lies ahead, but in deeply examining the path we've already traveled. As Richard Feynman wisely noted, having unanswered questions is more valuable than having unquestionable answers. This perspective shaped my early years, when my mother's attempts to quiet my endless questions only drove my curiosity deeper within.

Through life's journey, particularly in navigating trauma and building resilience, I've discovered that

curiosity about our past experiences offers profound insights. Each question about our history, each examination of our previous choices and their consequences, illuminates the path forward. Like a skilled archaeologist, we uncover layers of wisdom in the sediment of our experiences.

The beauty of backward-facing curiosity is that it deals with tangible reality rather than speculation. While we can't question what hasn't happened, we can endlessly explore and learn

from what has. This exploration isn't about dwelling in the past – mining it for the gems of wisdom that will guide our future steps.

Most importantly, I've learned that the answers to our most profound

questions often lie not in anxious speculation about tomorrow, but in thoughtful reflection on yesterday. Our past experiences, triumphs, and challenges contain the seeds of understanding that bloom into future wisdom.

In Search of Security: A New Perspective

As I row backward into the future, I've come to understand that true security isn't found in predicting tomorrow but in understanding today through the lens of yesterday. This perspective shapes not just how I move through life but also how I process uncertainty and change.

The human inclination to seek security through future-gazing is deeply rooted in our survival instincts. Yet this approach often leads to the “forecasting fallacy” – the mistaken belief that we can create security by predicting and controlling future outcomes. This pursuit not only increases anxiety but also disconnects us from the present moment and the wisdom we've already gained.

When we find ourselves grasping for security, we must ask more profound questions: What lies at the root of our fear? Are we responding to genuine threats or reacting to shadows cast by our imagination? The answer often reveals that our anxiety stems not

from actual danger, but from our attachment to specific outcomes.

Rowing backward offers an alternative approach to security. Instead of straining to peer through the fog of tomorrow, we can draw confidence from our accumulated experiences. This isn't about predicting the future—it's about trusting in our proven capacity to navigate whatever comes our way. Each past challenge we've overcome becomes evidence of our resilience, and each lesson learned becomes a tool for future navigation.

The paradox is that proper security emerges not from controlling the unknowable future, but from deeply understanding our journey thus far. By facing our past while moving forward, we connect with our source of wisdom while remaining open to the surprises tomorrow may bring. This orientation allows us to get our authentic selves to each moment, grounded in experience rather than speculation.

When anxiety about the future arises—as it inevitably will—the practice is not to turn our heads and strain for a glimpse of what's ahead but to deepen our connection with the known, the learned, and the proven. This is how “we build real security: not through prediction but through presence and perspective”.

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Analysis of Rowing Backward Into the Future

A Personal Philosophy

Rowing backward into the future represents a unique philosophical perspective on life's journey. This approach challenges the conventional Western notion of facing forward toward the future, suggesting that wisdom comes from maintaining a clear view of our past experiences while moving into the unknown.



The Core Philosophy

The central thesis posits that genuine growth and development stem from understanding and learning from our past rather than anxiously attempting to predict or control the future. As the text directly states, "I can't predict the future, but I can learn from the past. So I go backwards into the future" (Logan, 2009).

Key Theoretical Components

The philosophy rests on several fundamental observations:

1

Progressive Movement: "Each stroke I take is taking me somewhere I have never been," suggesting continuous progress despite facing backward.

2

Surrender of Control: The acknowledgment that one "did not create the river's flow" but is shaped by it demonstrates a humble approach to life's journey.

3

Focus on Learning: The emphasis on "learning where I came from, how I got here, and on whose shoulders I now stand" highlights the educational value of historical perspective.

Psychological and Spiritual Implications

This approach reduces anxiety about the future by redirecting focus to learned experiences and wisdom. The philosophy integrates psychological and spiritual elements, as evidenced by the reference to “surrendering the future to the One who holds it” while maintaining active engagement with one’s personal development.

Connection to Established Thought

The philosophy resonates with Steve Jobs' observation that “You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards,” suggesting that this approach has practical applications in both personal and professional contexts.

Practical Applications

Rowing backward into the future promotes:

- Active learning from past experiences rather than passive remembrance
- Reduced anxiety about future uncertainties
- Enhanced focus on personal growth and development
- Integration of spiritual awareness with practical living

Conclusion

This philosophy offers a practical framework for personal development and life navigation. Reorienting one’s perspective to face the past while moving forward provides a unique approach to managing life's uncertainties while maximizing learning and growth opportunities.

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Email: roderick@rodericklogan.com

For more information: www.rodericklogan.com