

## Driving the Carriage: The Gift of Psychological Functions

By Didi Firman

*Sally is walking down the street to a job interview, for a job that meets every one of her “ideal models” for work. Except one. Sally is afraid of heights and the office is on the 25<sup>th</sup> floor. Sally has done therapy and other forms of work to deal with this fear. She fully understands the subpersonality that carries anxiety and particularly places it on heights. She has dug deeply into her family of origin trauma to find many aspects of the why to this fear. Three blocks away she has the thought that she has tried to banish: “What if the elevator falls?” Dismissing that cognitively, she follows with an image of looking out the window at her interview and throwing up. And then she feels nauseous. She immediately feels terrified. She has a strong impulse to turn around and go home. Thinking; imagination; sensation; emotion; impulse/desire, on a fast track to losing this job. Intuition kicks in, for a second, with a reassurance and a tiny pull on the Higher Self that has moved her this far. But is it enough?*

This process of cycling through the psychological functions, quickly and without the control of the internal unifying center (I), and the capacity to disidentify, is basically a day to day operation for most of us. Sometimes it is big things, sometimes little, but those functions do their thing and We (the I/HS) may or may not be paying attention. On a good day, the same thing happens but to positive ends.

*Sally wakes up after her successful interview and stretches. From her near-sleep she knows meditation is calling her. Her impulse pulls her out of bed and to the cushion, where she senses her very grounded body on the cushion. A little later, she thinks about getting ready for her new job and imagines herself at her desk with a smile on her face. Happily, she stops, breathes and chooses to go to the kitchen for breakfast. Intuition, impulse, sensation, thinking, imagination, feeling, CHOICE.*

Assagioli's [Psychological Laws Pertaining to Will Training](#) tells us the whole story, Any psychological function will reinforce others along its same pathways. It is our job, personally and as helping professionals to use that towards the highest callings of Self. Easy to say, harder to do. Breaking it down, we return to “I” whose functions are awareness and will. We notice and we choose. When any function starts to take us down a slippery slope, we know that the whole team of horses will follow, unless we take the reins and steer our wagon towards the desired goal.

How? Get Purpose clear first, so we see where we are going (stage 1). And make sure it is well chosen, in line with the Higher Self. Every “should” we have wants to slip in under the guise of Purpose. With purpose in sight, it's essential to know how our own personal psychological functions work (stage 2). Cris Pelizzatti and Bill Burr offered a much more in-depth view of this subject, along with their incredible interactive [STAR map](#) in September's issue. Go back and check it out. And use the map for yourself and with client to help in this stage. Also use Assagioli's “practices” in the above link (Psych laws)! By assessing our own, subpersonality infused, easily triggered functions

and noting those that are best allies to Call of Self, we become aware and have access to will (stage 3). We would do well, also, to attend to sequencing. How does the “kick in” of one function move us to another function? Is there any pattern that we can see? (exercise below for this one!) Creating strategies for situations that are likely to get us hooked, and even situations in which we are already sliding down the slippery slope sets us in an orientation towards using those psych functions to our advantage, not being dragged by them, unconsciously, towards outcomes that are not purposeful (stage 4).

*Sally’s intuition is a strong ally, but needs more activation and Sally needs to understand how it speaks to her. Sally’s thinking is clear, but a scared sub can grab it. Her body responds to cues given by other functions, etc. Sally knew all this in our first scenario, so when she realized (disidentified) that she was starting to slip (first cue from intuition), she remembered (thinking) her strategy. Breathe, Pause, Reset. Sensation is responsive and also impactful, for Sally. It will follow another function’s lead, but will also help to soothe other functions. Using affirmations, well-rehearsed, she used her thinking and imagination function to state important goals, learned knowledge (elevators rarely fall), and to imagine best outcome scenarios. Feelings (easily hooked) start to follow suit and impulse is carried forward by the aligned will. Intuition is Sally’s “still, small voice”, but it becomes easier to hear with every passing experience.*

Stage 1: Define Purpose, clear and unfettered by subs.

Stage 2: Engage in ongoing self-work on understanding our psychological functions and especially noting which ones do what in the system that is our being.

Stage 3: Get clear on what psych functions are best allies (and that may change from situation to situation).

Stage 4: Choose strategies, based on this knowledge so that you can stop the slide before it happens or climb back up and RESET, if you start to slip.

And then do that again, whenever and as often as you need to.

These functions are the gift of our rich inheritance as human beings. They also carry our trauma and are suffused in cultural and circumstantial experience. We, however, are not. We are a center of contentless awareness and will. We drive the carriage.

*Good morning/Bad morning: an exercise in psych function sequencing*

Visit the memory of a really good morning. Just the first 10 minutes, from waking to whatever comes next.

Remember this “example” of a good morning as clearly as you can and notice how the psychological functions worked: what they did and in what sequence. (Imagination will fill in for what you don’t remember!)

Write it down very simply, using psych function language.

I stretched in my bed, held in sensation.

I thought about my day and remembered that my granddaughter was coming over.

I had an immediate image of us playing.  
I felt happy.  
I wanted to get out of bed to be ready for her.  
I was reminded (by my intuition) that I take a moment before getting up to tune into purpose and quality, and so I did.  
We had a great day.  
(sensation, thinking, imagination, emotion, impulse/desire, intuition)

Now do the same thing for a “bad” morning.  
I woke up thinking about my to-do list.  
My back hurt.  
I began to feel anxious.  
I heard my call to orient towards purpose (and ignored it)  
I saw my computer in my mind’s eye.  
I wanted both to jump up and get to work (subpersonality #1 in control) and I wanted to hide under the blankets (subpersonality #2)  
Subpersonality # 1 won and I was at the computer within 10 minutes.  
It was not a great day.  
(thinking, sensation, feeling, intuition (unheeded), imagination, impulse/desire)

The great thing about noticing sequencing, is that we are also noticing where we can break the chain of sequencing. What functions help ground us? Connect us to Call? Soothe our subpersonalities? Where can we intervene in a sequence to change the momentum?

Have fun with this gift that is yours, and like your stable full of horses, feed them well, help them heal, love them and guide them. They, in turn, will carry you wherever you are going.