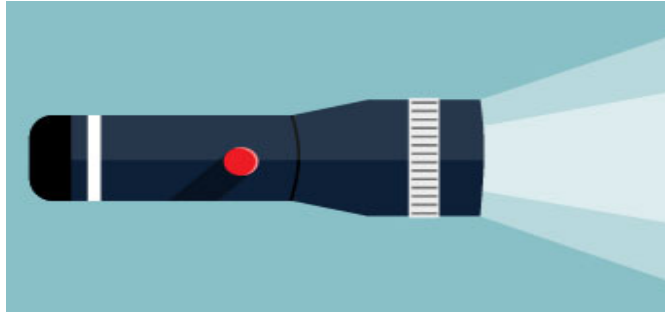


Feeling Our Way in the Dark

BY KAREN ELMHIRST



This past weekend, the kids and I experienced the Tactile Dome at the Exploratorium in San Francisco. Friends had told us of this journey through complete darkness that one can take inside a small geodesic dome within the larger museum.

The walls of the dome are covered with interesting and varied materials (rubber, faux fur, etc) that provide a range of textures, along with such things as chains, a shoe, keys, etc.

Soon into our experience, I began to recognize my stress levels rising, as the passageway became narrower and narrower and I was on my hands and knees, feeling the opening against my shoulders, climbing up, then sliding down. I've never been in such darkness. I could not see anything, not my hand in front of my face, not the passageway, not the entrance. Nothing! All that I was left with was my sense of touch, and the occasional direction given from my son and daughter who were up ahead.

The first time through, I did not stop to feel the interesting textures on the walls, or take my time sinking into this brand new experience. I was on a mission, and that mission was to survive! After what felt like an hour, but was really about 10 minutes, we emerged into the light. I felt grateful and elated that I made it through the fear and sense of panic. I also felt the desire to go on the journey again, this time ready to focus more on the experience of it all, and less on my goal of just getting through. Each of the next three times became easier and more enjoyable. I felt less hurried and more present.

When clients in coaching try something really new, they sometimes experience their own version of the Tactile Dome, feeling their way in unknown territory, focused mainly on just getting through. Then, with each passing effort in that new direction, they become more comfortable and can start to notice the landscape around them and their own feelings and thoughts along the way. With each successful passage, they grow their

confidence and their comfort until that very new mindset or behavior becomes part of their expanded repertoire – available for when they need it.

I can't say I'm eager to go back to the Tactile Dome in the near future. However, I'm confident that I'll be feeling my way through unknown territory again really soon. How about you? Where do YOU want a breakthrough?